

**ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES OF THE ARMED
FORCES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION ON INSURGENCY IN
THE NORTH-EAST NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) use public relations strategies to manage information about insurgency in the North-East. With insurgency posing a major security challenge, effective communication by the military has become crucial in shaping public perception, building trust, and countering misinformation. The study focuses on the period from 2015, when Operation HADIN KAI was launched in Borno and Yobe States. It is anchored on Relative Deprivation Theory, the Relationship Management Theory, and the Public Relations Transfer Model. A survey research design was used and a sample size of 200 respondents was selected for administration of the questionnaire instrument 195 questionnaires were administered and fully returned, while in-depth interviews were conducted with officers in the military's public relations departments. The findings show that the AFN actively engages in media relations through press releases, television and radio briefings, and other traditional forms of communication. While these efforts have had a positive impact, gaps remain. The military's engagement with youths via social media is limited, and community-level outreach has not been consistent. Respondents noted that these gaps affect the effectiveness of information sharing and trust-building, especially in rural areas. Challenges identified include poor internet access, low local trust, and insufficient non-kinetic strategies. The study recommends strengthening of digital communication, improving of community engagement, and training of officers in modern public relations practices.

Keywords: *Public relations, insurgency, Armed Forces of Nigeria, information management, community engagement*

INTRODUCTION

The media serve as both a societal mirror and change agent, a role well-documented by researchers (Edafejirhaye & Alao, 2019; Aliede, 2016). Through information

dissemination, perception shaping, and dialogue fostering, media platforms possess the power to either escalate or reduce conflicts. Public relations has become a vital part of national security efforts, especially in regions affected by conflict and instability. Its relevance in governance, business, and especially military communication continues to grow. In the context of Nigeria's North-East, where the Boko Haram insurgency has persisted for over a decade, public relations provides a non-kinetic tool for shaping public opinion and managing the flow of information during military operations.

Information is not just power. In conflict zones, it can determine the direction of public loyalty, resistance, or support. The Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN), in response to the persistent security threats in the region, have incorporated public relations strategies into their broader counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts. These efforts are necessary because insurgency, unlike traditional warfare, is fought not just with weapons but also through narratives and public perception. According to Aliede (2016), the insurgency led by Boko Haram has caused more destruction than Nigeria's civil war, destabilising communities and damaging trust in state institutions. In such contexts, strategic communication is not optional—it is essential.

Insurgents understand this as well. They employ communication to spread fear, control narratives, and win sympathisers. Their use of social and traditional media to push propaganda demonstrates that counterinsurgency is also a battle for information. As Boluwatife (2015) explains, insurgents use violent acts as a form of message delivery—shock tactics meant to control and manipulate public perception.

The Nigerian Armed Forces have adopted several strategies to push back against this information warfare. Through press releases, community outreach, crisis communication, and social media, the military seeks to tell its side of the story, gain public trust, and support its operations. But while there are signs of progress, the extent of this success remains unclear, especially in rural and conflict-heavy regions of Borno and Yobe States, where access to media and trust in military institutions remain low.

Winning public trust requires more than announcements. It involves continuous engagement, listening to community concerns, and presenting consistent, truthful updates that can withstand scrutiny. While traditional media engagement remains central to the military's efforts, it has become necessary to explore how these strategies are actually perceived and how they influence attitudes toward insurgency in the region. More so, the Armed Forces need to examine how challenges such as poor internet access, low local trust, and the absence of tailored youth engagement strategies affect the success of their communication efforts.

According to Shodunke (2021), effective public relations is not merely reactive; it is strategic. It involves message planning, audience analysis, and credibility-building—all of which are needed in Nigeria's complex sociopolitical landscape. Yet, the literature also suggests that non-kinetic strategies, including communication and public engagement, have received less attention compared to the deployment of force in Nigeria's COIN operations (Ajetunmobi, 2015). The gap in this area has raised questions about whether the full potential of public relations is being utilised.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The insurgency in Nigeria's North-East has created a complex security and information landscape that challenges traditional military approaches. While the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) have employed various public relations strategies to manage information regarding insurgency operations, the effectiveness of these approaches remains largely

unexamined from both military and civilian perspectives. This creates several interconnected problems that this study seeks to address.

First, there appears to be a significant gap between the military's communication efforts and public perception in insurgency-affected areas. Despite the AFN's investment in public relations activities, preliminary observations suggest that many communities in the North-East remain skeptical of military messaging, potentially limiting the effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations that rely on civilian cooperation. This disconnect may result from inappropriate communication channels, message framing that does not resonate with local realities, or a failure to address community-specific concerns.

Second, the digital information environment has transformed how insurgency-related information circulates, yet the military's adaptation to this reality appears inconsistent. Boko Haram and its splinter groups have demonstrated proficiency in leveraging digital platforms to spread propaganda, recruit supporters, and counter government narratives. The AFN's response to this digital information warfare has not been systematically documented or evaluated, creating uncertainty about whether current public relations strategies effectively counter insurgent messaging in both online and offline spaces.

Third, the effectiveness of public relations as a non-kinetic component of counterinsurgency strategy requires critical assessment. While military operations in the North-East have incorporated public relations activities, there is limited empirical evidence regarding how these efforts contribute to broader counterinsurgency goals such as intelligence gathering, community cooperation, and reduction in insurgent influence. Understanding this relationship is essential for determining appropriate resource allocation and strategic emphasis within military planning.

Fourth, the challenges that impede effective public relations implementation by the AFN in conflict settings remain insufficiently documented. Potential barriers may include organisational constraints, resource limitations, coordination issues between military branches, or difficulties in reaching diverse audiences across the conflict zone. Without identifying these specific challenges, developing practical recommendations for improvement becomes problematic.

Finally, there is a knowledge gap regarding how civilians in insurgency-affected areas perceive, interpret, and respond to military communications. Most existing research focuses on the military's communication outputs rather than audience reception and impact, creating an incomplete picture of public relations effectiveness in this context.

This study therefore aims to address these problems by conducting a comprehensive assessment of the public relations strategies employed by the AFN in managing insurgency-related information in North-East Nigeria. By examining both the strategic design and practical implementation of these approaches, evaluating their effects on public perception, and identifying challenges to effective communication, this research will contribute to improving military-civilian communication in conflict zones and enhancing the non-kinetic dimensions of Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guide the study:

1. What are the public relations strategies of the AFN in the management of information on insurgency in North-East Nigeria?
2. How are public relations strategies applied by the AFN in the management of information on insurgency in North-East Nigeria?

3. What are the effects of the AFN public relations strategies in information management on the people of North-East Nigeria toward insurgency in the region?
4. What are the challenges faced by the AFN in deploying public relations strategies in the management of information on insurgency in North-East Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Military public relations in counter-insurgency operations has evolved from simple propaganda to sophisticated strategic communication efforts. According to Emman-Owums (2018), effective military public relations in insurgency contexts serves three critical functions: managing public perception, countering enemy propaganda, and facilitating intelligence gathering through civilian cooperation. These functions become especially important in asymmetric warfare where the line between combatants and civilians blurs.

Musa and Ibrahim (2018) examined the Nigerian military's information management during the height of the Boko Haram insurgency (2013-2017) and found significant gaps between military claims and media reporting. Their study highlighted that inconsistent messaging created opportunities for insurgents to control the narrative in affected communities. Okoro and Odoemelam (2021) further demonstrated that when military communications lacked transparency about civilian casualties or operational setbacks, public skepticism increased, undermining counter-insurgency efforts.

The evolution of military public relations globally has seen a shift toward what Galula (2006) termed the "population-centric approach" to counter-insurgency. This approach recognises that winning public support is as important as defeating insurgents militarily. Adamu and Ocheni (2022) noted that this shift has been slow in Nigeria, with military communication still heavily focused on operational successes rather than addressing civilian concerns.

Research by Ikeji and Agba (2022) on military-civilian relations in North-East Nigeria revealed that communities often perceive military communications as detached from local realities. Their study found that when military messaging acknowledged civilian hardships and provided practical security information, community cooperation improved significantly.

The digital landscape has transformed how insurgents and counter-insurgents communicate. Nwakpu and Ogbodo (2019) documented how Boko Haram leveraged social media platforms to spread propaganda, recruit members, and instill fear. Their analysis showed that insurgents often outpaced security forces in digital messaging, creating an information vacuum that undermined military efforts. Agbedo and Okoye (2020) examined social media use by the Nigerian military and found limited engagement, delayed responses to misinformation, and reluctance to adopt platform-specific communication strategies. In contrast, Okoli and Ugwu (2021) observed that when the military employed targeted digital campaigns in specific locations, public perception measurably improved.

According to Mbah and Nwangwu (2019), digital platforms offer unique opportunities for real-time information sharing and community feedback that traditional communications cannot match. However, Bappah (2020) noted that the effectiveness of digital communication in Nigeria's North-East is constrained by poor internet penetration, limited digital literacy, and electricity challenges.

Research by Okeke and Odoh (2022) demonstrated that even with these constraints, WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages managed by community members have become influential information channels during crises. The authors argued that military public

relations strategies that fail to engage with these informal networks miss crucial opportunities to shape local narratives.

Trust building represents perhaps the most critical element of military public relations in insurgency-affected regions. According to Akanbi and Shehu (2021), communities that trust security forces are more likely to report suspicious activities, resist insurgent influence, and support counter-insurgency operations.

Eteng (2018) conducted a comparative study of military-community relations in different parts of Nigeria's North-East and found that areas where the military invested in community engagement reported higher levels of trust in security forces and greater resistance to insurgent messaging. Similarly, Usman and Mohammed (2021) documented how targeted community outreach programs in Yobe State positively influenced public perception of the military.

The integration of civilian affairs units within military structures represents a growing recognition of community engagement's importance. Eze and Ajibade (2023) examined the

Nigerian Army's Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) activities and found that medical outreach, infrastructure rehabilitation, and educational support improved public perception when accompanied by consistent communication about these efforts.

Research by Oyewole (2020) highlighted that trust building is not merely about benevolent activities but requires transparency, especially regarding civilian protection. His study found that communities valued honesty about security challenges over reassuring but unrealistic promises of complete safety.

According to Oluwadare (2022), effective community engagement also requires cultural sensitivity and linguistic adaptation. Her research in Borno State showed that military messages translated into local languages and delivered through respected community figures achieved greater resonance than general messages broadcast through mass media alone.

Military public relations in insurgency contexts faces several unique challenges. Abimiku and Labaran (2019) identified organisational culture as a significant barrier, noting that the military's hierarchical structure often impedes adaptive and responsive communication. Their study found that public relations officers frequently lack the authority to provide timely information without multiple levels of approval.

Falola and Heaton (2022) examined resource constraints in Nigeria's security communications and found that public relations departments often receive inadequate funding and staffing compared to kinetic operations. This imbalance reflects an institutional undervaluation of non-kinetic approaches to counter-insurgency.

Coordination challenges between different security agencies also undermine effective communication. According to Udeagha and Nyenke (2021), conflicting statements from the Army, Air Force, and other security agencies during joint operations created public confusion and eroded credibility. They argued that unified communication requires not just coordinated messaging but integrated planning.

Research by Iwokwagh and Obagwu (2020) highlighted that Nigeria's complex media landscape poses additional challenges, with diverse audiences requiring different communication approaches. Their study found that communities with limited literacy or media access often rely on informal networks for security information, making traditional

press releases ineffective for reaching these groups. Omoera and Ogbeide (2020) identified contradictions between official military narratives and lived experiences as perhaps the most significant challenge to effective public relations. When military communications claimed security improvements that did not match community

experiences, trust eroded significantly, making subsequent messages less credible regardless of their content.

Recent empirical studies provide important insights into military public relations effectiveness in Nigeria's insurgency context. Badiru and Achi (2021) conducted surveys in Borno State and found that while 62% of respondents regularly received military communications, only 41% considered these messages credible. Their research identified perceived honesty about security challenges as the strongest predictor of message credibility.

Abubakar and Zango (2020) examined the relationship between communication channels and message effectiveness. Their study found that radio broadcasts reached the widest audience (72% of respondents), but community-based communication through local leaders achieved higher trust ratings (68% compared to 47% for radio). This highlights the importance of channel selection in military messaging.

Research by Nduka and Obi (2022) analyzed 200 military press releases over a two-year period and found that 76% focused on operational successes, while only 12% addressed civilian concerns such as humanitarian access or protection strategies. They argue that this imbalance creates a disconnect between military messaging and community information needs.

Kwaru and Mustafa (2021) conducted focus groups with community leaders in six local government areas affected by insurgency. Their findings revealed that communities valued regular security updates but wanted more actionable information about safe movement, returning to abandoned homes, and identifying legitimate security personnel.

A longitudinal study by Yusha'u and Isa (2023) tracked public perception of military communications over three years and found that consistency of messaging significantly impacted credibility. When military communications maintained consistent framing regardless of operational outcomes, trust levels remained more stable than when framing shifted in response to changing circumstances. These empirical studies collectively suggest that effective military public relations in insurgency contexts requires multi-channel approaches, locally relevant content, consistent messaging, and attention to community information needs beyond operational updates.

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Empirical studies in the area of public relations and military communication have provided insight into both successes and shortcomings in Nigeria's conflict zones. Iyadi and Okolie (2017) studied public relations practices during crisis situations and found that the Nigerian military largely adopts a media-centric approach, with minimal two-way communication. This approach, while effective in pushing out information, falls short in building relationships and understanding audience needs.

Another study by Odele (2017) examined public relations functions in armed conflict, focusing on how image repair strategies are deployed. The research found that the Armed Forces use apology and justification as main strategies, especially when faced with public outrage over civilian casualties. However, these strategies were not always well received, especially in communities that had experienced repeated security breaches.

Aliede (2016) conducted a broader analysis of insurgency and national unity, arguing that public relations must move beyond damage control to become a strategic function integrated into all aspects of military planning. His work highlights the gap between public expectations and the current delivery of military communication.

In their work on crisis communication, Shodunke (2021) emphasised the need for better coordination between field commanders and public relations officers. The study

revealed that conflicting reports about the same event often emerged from different branches of the Armed Forces, reducing credibility and fueling misinformation.

Furthermore, a study by Ajetunmobi (2015) focused on media operations during counter-insurgency campaigns. He observed that while the military had improved in issuing timely updates, it still lagged in responding to misinformation on digital platforms. This delay allows insurgent propaganda to spread widely before any clarification is issued.

Overall, these studies underscore a recurring theme: the structure for effective public relations exists, but the practice is hindered by poor coordination, limited adaptation to digital tools, and a weak feedback loop with affected communities. Future strategies should consider these gaps and adopt a more proactive, inclusive, and responsive communication model.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative Deprivation Theory, first developed by Samuel Stouffer in the 1940s and later expanded by Ted Robert Gurr (1970) in his seminal work "Why Men Rebel," provides an essential framework for understanding insurgency movements. This theory explains that social unrest and rebellion emerge not necessarily from absolute poverty or hardship, but from perceived disparities between what people believe they deserve and what they actually receive (Gurr, 1970). In the context of Nigeria's North-East, this theory helps explain the initial appeal of Boko Haram to disenfranchised youth who perceive themselves as victims of economic marginalisation, educational neglect, and political exclusion.

According to Onuoha (2014), the theory illuminates how socioeconomic disparities in Northern Nigeria created conditions where extremist ideologies could flourish. Zenn and Pearson (2018) further note that when communities perceive themselves as systematically deprived relative to other regions, this creates fertile ground for recruitment into violent organisations that promise to address these grievances. The Armed Forces of Nigeria must therefore consider these underlying perceptions of deprivation when crafting public relations messages that aim to counter insurgent narratives.

This theory is particularly relevant to this study as it helps military communicators understand the audience's psychological context and develop messages that acknowledge legitimate grievances while redirecting communities toward non-violent solutions. As argued by Agbiboa (2013), effective counterinsurgency communication must address the perceived injustices that drive support for violent groups.

Relationship Management Theory

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) pioneered Relationship Management Theory, which posits that public relations should focus on building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics, rather than simply disseminating information. This perspective shifts public relations from a communication-focused activity to a relationship-centered one, measuring success through relationship quality indicators such as trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality.

In military-civilian relationships within conflict zones, Hon and Grunig's (1999) dimensions of trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction become critical metrics for measuring public relations effectiveness. The theory suggests that military public relations efforts should not merely inform the public but actively build trusting relationships with communities affected by insurgency.

Chukwu (2020) applied this theory to Nigeria's security context and found that relationship quality indicators strongly predict the willingness of communities to share intelligence with security forces. This finding is critical, as intelligence gathering relies heavily on civilian cooperation. Similarly, Ndolo and Onwuchekwa (2019) established that the military's relationship with host communities significantly impacts operational success in counterinsurgency efforts. For this study, Relationship Management Theory provides a framework for evaluating the AFN's public relations strategies beyond message dissemination, focusing instead on how these strategies build trust and cultivate relationships with key stakeholders in the North-East.

Public Relations Transfer Model

The Public Relations Transfer Model, developed by Dozier and Grunig (1995), describes how organisations evolve their public relations practices through four stages: press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical communication. This model helps assess the maturity of an organisation's public relations practices and provides a roadmap for advancement.

According to Grunig (2009), organisations facing complex challenges like insurgency benefit most from two-way symmetrical communication, which emphasizes dialogue, mutual understanding, and collaborative problem-solving. In contrast, press agency or public information models, which focus only on information dissemination, prove insufficient in conflict environments where trust has been eroded.

Osakwe (2018) applied this model to Nigeria's security sector and found that most military communication remains at the public information stage, prioritizing one-way information dissemination rather than dialogue. Adedayo and Ogbonna (2022) similarly observed that the Nigerian Armed Forces rarely reach the two-way symmetrical level in their communication efforts, limiting their ability to build genuine trust with affected communities.

For this study, the Public Relations Transfer Model offers a diagnostic tool to evaluate the current state of AFN's public relations practices and identify pathways toward more effective community engagement in the North-East.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This study adopted a mixed-method research design combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to better understand how the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) use public relations strategies to manage information on insurgency in the North-East. The use of both methods helped ensure a more comprehensive picture by blending numerical data with in-depth perspectives from experienced personnel.

The population for this study included residents and stakeholders in six local government areas within Borno and Yobe States. Specifically, these were Maiduguri, Mobbar, and Gwoza in Borno State, and Gujba, Nguru, and Damaturu in Yobe State. These areas were selected due to their high exposure to insurgency and the presence of significant military counterinsurgency efforts. Participants included local government officials, members of traditional institutions, internally displaced persons (IDPs), media personnel, and public relations officers within the Armed Forces. The total population across these areas was 1,946,200 people based on updated city population data.

The study used multi-stage sampling to identify and select respondents. First, the states were divided into senatorial districts, and one local government area was chosen from each district. Cluster and simple random sampling techniques were then used to identify a total of 200 participants. Out of this number, 195 respondents completed

structured questionnaire, while five senior military public relations officers were selected for interviews using snowball sampling. These officers included high-ranking officials from Defence Headquarters and the Operation HADIN KAI unit.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research instruments, 20 respondents were chosen for a pilot test of items on questionnaire and the feedback was used to refine the tools. Items on the questionnaire focused on perceptions, experiences, and awareness of the AFN's public relations strategies. Interview questions aimed at gathering detailed insights into strategy development and challenges were developed. Data collected were analysed using SPSS for quantitative data and thematic analysis for interview responses.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The analysis presents key findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data collected. A total of 195 respondents completed structured questionnaires, and five public relations officers were interviewed. The results offer insights into the strategies deployed by the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN), how they are perceived, and what challenges exist in their implementation.

Table 1: Public Relations Strategies Used by the Armed Forces

PR Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Press Briefings	65	33.3%
Media Interviews	42	21.5%
Social Media Engagement	30	15.4%
Community Outreach Programmes	38	19.5%
Special Events (e.g., parades)	20	10.3%
Total	195	100%

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

The Table 1 above shows that press briefings and media interviews were the most commonly used strategies, with social media and community outreach underutilised despite their potential for engagement.

Table 2: Effectiveness of AFN Public Relations Strategies

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very Effective	30	15.4%
Effective	60	30.8%
Neither/Nor	40	20.5%
Ineffective	45	23.1%
Very Ineffective	20	10.3%
Total	195	100%

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

From Table 2, only 46.2% rated the strategies as effective or very effective. This points to the need for improvement in how these strategies are executed and received by the public.

Table 3: Sources of Information about Military Operations

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	45	23.1%
Television	55	28.2%
Social Media	35	17.9%
Community Leaders	28	14.4%
Friends/Relatives	32	16.4%
Total	195	100%

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

Data from Table 3 show that television remains the most trusted source, followed by radio and social media. The relatively low dependence on social media reflects the limited internet access in rural communities and limited engagement by the AFN in that space.

Table 4: Challenges Faced by the AFN in PR Strategy Deployment

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Limited Internet Access	52	26.7%
Low Public Trust	45	23.1%
Inadequate Personnel/Training	38	19.5%
Lack of Funding	30	15.4%
Cultural and Language Barriers	30	15.4%
Total	195	100%

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

Table 4 reveals that the major challenges to PR strategy implementation include limited internet access and a significant trust gap between the public and the military.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews with five military public relations officers revealed that while there is awareness of the importance of proactive communication, operational demands and bureaucratic delays often hinder real-time engagement. Officers reported that social media platforms are underutilised due to command protocols and limited training. One officer noted, "We have Facebook and Twitter pages, but they are mostly for official statements. There's no time or structure for feedback or interaction."

Another officer pointed out that cultural sensitivities and language diversity in the North-East make communication more complex, requiring tailored messages. They also highlighted that community outreach is often informal and lacks follow-up. As one respondent put it, "We engage during crises, but consistent dialogue is missing."

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analysis reveals a reliance on conventional media like press briefings and television, with limited use of interactive platforms such as social media or community outreach. This suggests that while the AFN recognises the need for information management, their methods remain largely one-directional. This falls short of what is needed in a conflict setting, where feedback and trust are crucial.

The fact that only 46.2% of respondents found the PR strategies effective shows that there's a gap between strategy intent and public perception. Given that insurgents also use propaganda and social media platforms to sway opinion, the military's slow adaptation to digital tools puts them at a disadvantage.

Low public trust, especially in areas affected by past human rights abuses or misinformation, is a major issue. If people do not believe the message or the messenger, communication fails. Trust must be rebuilt through transparency, accountability, and engagement—not just formal announcements.

From the qualitative data, it is clear that structural challenges—limited staffing, poor internet infrastructure, and lack of consistent strategy—hinder the full potential of PR in counterinsurgency. Community-specific messaging, local language use, and engagement with traditional leaders could help close this gap.

These findings align with earlier research by Iyadi and Okolie (2017), who identified the media-centric approach of the Nigerian military as insufficient for relationship building. Similarly, Shodunke's (2021) emphasis on better coordination between field commanders and public relations officers is validated by the reports of conflicting narratives identified in this study.

The limited effectiveness of current strategies (46.2%) reflects Aliede's (2016) argument that public relations must move beyond damage control to become an integrated strategic function. The challenges of low trust and limited digital engagement corroborate Ajetunmobi's (2015) observations about the military's slow response to misinformation on digital platforms.

The study also confirms that communication barriers, including cultural sensitivities and language diversity, complicate the military's messaging efforts in the North-East. This reinforces the need for community-specific approaches that Odele (2017) advocated in his study of image repair strategies during armed conflict.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that while the Armed Forces of Nigeria have implemented several public relations strategies to manage information during insurgency, there are significant challenges that limit their impact. Traditional media remains the primary channel of communication, but in a rapidly changing media environment, this is no longer sufficient. The findings show that most people do not find current strategies highly effective, and there is a trust deficit that affects how messages are received. The military's approach is still largely top-down, reactive, and not adapted to the diverse media consumption habits of different audience groups—especially the youth.

Interviews with public relations officers confirmed these challenges and highlighted a lack of digital engagement, cultural adaptability, and strategic consistency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings above, the study made the following recommendations:

- (i) The AFN needs to invest in training of PR officers in modern communication, enhance the use of social media for engagement (not just announcements), and build community relationships beyond times of crisis. Communication in conflict settings must be continuous, inclusive, and credible.
- (ii) Public relations should support the military's mission not just by informing the public, but by rebuilding trust, gathering support, and challenging misinformation. For that to happen, it must be taken as seriously as any tactical operation on the field.

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