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Effect of strategic communications on the fight against terrorism in the north east of Nigeria

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Abstract

The impact of strategic communication in executing counterinsurgency operations against terrorism cannot be over emphasised. This basically drives the non kinetic approach that slows us radicalisation of young adults, counters the narratives used by terror cells to gain sympathy from the locals and endangers the ability of terror cells to stablish Forwarding Operation Base in the ungoverned spaces in the northeast. This study examines the effect of strategic communications on the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria. Strategic communications is measured with counter narratives and communication channels. The study adopts survey research design. The population covers the Adamawa State (4,248,436), Bauchi State (6,537,314), Borno State (5,860,183), Gombe State (3,256,962), Taraba State (3,066,834) and Yobe State (3,294,137) whose aggregated population is 26,263,866. The study employed scientific sampling technique determination designed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) that recommends a sample size of 384 for a population above one (1) million. It randomly selects expert based on their expertise on the phenomenon being studied. The study utilized primary data with the aid of questionnaires developed in five point likert scale. It utilized multiple regression analysis as the technique of data analysis. The study concludes that counter narratives are designed to counter the issues raised by terrorist organizations to justify their actions. The study also concludes that the use of Radio and TV to deliver counter narrative messages improves the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria. The channel of communication determines whether the information will reach the right people and the right time. Also, it determines the level of seriousness that one will attach to the message. The use of community leaders and other members of society with influence like celebrities are recommended, because they have the power to influence many people. The study recommends the development of a strategic communication team that is part of the Counter Violent Extremism program. The study also recommends the expansion of communication channel infrastructure to many parts of the country with the aim of reaching the most vulnerable populations that are targeted for radicalization.

Keywords: Communication Channels; Counter Narratives; North East; Strategic Communications; Terrorism.

1. Introduction

The alarming spread of terror cell groups both in magnetizing adult youths and establishing Forwarding Operation Bases (FOB) is of grave concern to most countries particularly in developing Nations. Aftermath of the September 11, 2001, twin towers attack in the United States has drawn the attention of the world to the deployment of strategic communications in the fight against terrorism (Tulga, 2020). Radicalization into terrorism has steadily become the primary focus of many governments around the world. The expanding reach and destructive consequences of terrorism are among the major challenges to peace faced in today's world (Dieye, 2017).

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Report by Green and Proctor (2016) on the new comprehensive strategy for the fight against terrorism, revealed that despite many efforts to extinguish the flames of violence, new and powerful extremist movements have taken root. In their report to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Green and Proctor (2016) further noted that terrorist groups around the world have used technology, the media, religious, schools and mosques, and word of mouth to sell their twisted ideologies, justify their violence, and convince too many recruits that glory can be found in the mass murder of innocent civilians.

Terrorist groups radicalize and recruit individuals through online propaganda, social media platforms, networking sites and traditional media. Since the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), concerted efforts have been undertaken to identify good practices in using strategic communications to prevent the appeal of terrorism. The Eight Review of the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy stressed the importance of the role of the media, civil society, religious actors, the business community and educational institutions in those efforts to enhance dialogue and broaden understanding, in promoting pluralism, respect for diversity, tolerance and coexistence, and in fostering an environment which is not conducive to incitement of terrorism, as well as in countering terrorist narratives. This further reaffirms the need for Member States to engage local communities and non-governmental actors in developing tailored strategies to counter terrorism narratives (United Nations General Assembly, 2023).

The Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism has identified strategic communications, the internet and social media as one of seven priority areas. The plan calls on Member States to develop and implement national communications strategies that are tailored to local settings, gender sensitive and based on international human rights standards.

Communication among human beings is literally as old as humanity, but hypothesizing about strategic communication is rather new. Paul (2011) argued that strategic communication should not be limited to formal messages, yet actions of the communicator convey meaning hence should, be part of strategic communication. The argument put forward by Paul (2011) would therefore require that when looking at the impact of strategic communications, it is imperative to look at both the verbal and the nonverbal aspects of the process of communication.

In Nigeria, the various acts of violence experienced after independence took a new dimension in 2009 with the emergence of terrorist activities in the Northern part of the country. This act of domestic terrorism which is attributed to an Islamic sect popularly called "Boko Haram" has drawn the attention of Nigerian government and the International Community towards curbing the menace of terrorism. Boko Haram which translates into "western education is forbidden" had intent to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria and cleanse the country of any and all Western influence (Uzochukwu, 2014). In an effort to concretize Islamic state in Nigeria, Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for series of bombing, massacres, shooting, abduction and kidnapping in different parts of the country. Notable among these is the car bomb blast on Workers day in Abuja which claimed the lives of 19 people at the bus station. Also, there was the abduction and kidnapping of over 250 Chibok school girls on 15 April 2014.

Strategic communications play a vital role in the fight against terrorist groups, strategic communications are at the heart of any successful, long-term counterterrorism campaign (Paul, 2011). Strategic communication is an important asset when fighting against terrorism, whereas its objective is to give emphasis to internal communication models that function within given organizations and institutions. Internet is one of the main communication frameworks used by violent extremist groups nowadays. Social media networks, such as YouTube for example, are among the most used communication forms used to recruit youngsters and other persons to join the conflict zones in the Middle East (Mimoza, 2021).

The value of strategic communications in the fight against terrorism appears to be widely accepted. In some governments, it is explicitly recognised as a preferred approach: both the US and the UK, for example, have invested in institutions devoted to counter-terrorism strategic communications. Academics have long recognised that terrorism is not simply violence but communication (Bolt, 2012) and research has increasingly focused not only on how terrorists communicate but also on what works in response.

Moreover, counter terrorism strategic communications needs to pay attention to all forms of communication used directly and indirectly by terrorists. Furthermore, it is not simply a question of recognising that terrorist attacks and terrorist propaganda are in different forms of communication: terrorists have many things to say to many different groups of people: 'Mistakenly, terrorist acts are widely assumed, at best, to be a "one message fits all" form of address'. Terrorists communicate using a wide variety of mediums including video games, poetry, songs, murals, oral narratives and more (Awosusi & Ogbuleke, 2019).

Thus, the use of traditional or mass media (radio, TV, print journalism) has long been acknowledged as playing a crucial part in providing information and messaging that can shape popular views. Over the years, these tools of communication have been used to both incite violence as well as carry messages that help prevent violent conflict, and promote peace and reconciliation. Technological innovations have created new opportunities and outlets for communication.

The rising of insecurity have inclined the Nigerian government (military) to involved in internal security operations, primarily because of several security threats across the country, such as Boko Haram insurgency in the North east, Cattle rustling and armed bandits in the North west, secessionist agitation and armed robbery in the South east and militancy and oil bunkering in the south-south, that have overwhelm the Police and other security agencies (Awosusi & Ogbuleke, 2019). On numerous occasions the military would issue half-truths or untruths that were easily punctured by the militants or simply detected by the public. The repeated claims of Shekau's death, for instance, were effectively countered by the insurgents with simple releases of their leader's video and audio recordings to prove that he was still alive and unharmed in many occasions before he was finally killed by the military. Each successful rebuttal of such claims erodes the credibility of the Army and enhances that of the jihadists (Abubakar, 2017).

Therefore, the use of strategic communication by government to protect its interests and citizens becomes a key weapon of defence, thus requiring that a nation evolves her strategic communications framework to enhance the security and resilience of her citizens. The overarching objective of Nigeria's strategic communications is to provide the framework for organization, processing and dissemination of information to influence the citizens and change their behaviour positively towards securing unity, cohesion and development.

In recent years, numerous articles such as Ogbuleke and Erameh (2020); Bélanger et al. (2020); Carthy and Sarma (2021); Mohamed (2021); Jimoh and Seidu (2021) in the literature related to terrorism have been published, discussing its relation with social media- mass media. These studies contained various opinions, despite numerous articles and opinions, still, there is no common idea written on how to employ strategic communications in the fight against terrorism, specifically focusing on the North east of Nigeria. Unfortunately, there is a gap in the literature.

There have been various studies on the subject of Nigeria's on combating terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria, employing strategic communications against Boko Haram, among them; studies by Nwabueze and Ebeze (2013); Abubakar (2017); Ogbuleke and Erameh (2020); Jimoh and Seidu (2021); that have been carried. However, of these studies none has focused on how strategic communication is helping the fight against terrorism in the North east of Nigeria.

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of strategic communications on the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria. The specific objectives are to;

Assess the effect of counter narratives on the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria.

Investigate the effect of communication channels on the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria.

1.1. Statement of the Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are stated in the null form to guide this study;

- **H₀₁:** Counter narratives have no significant effect on the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria.
- **H₀₂:** Communication channels have no significant effect on the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria.

This study specifically focused on the North East of Nigeria between 2011 and 2022. It covers the North East region of Nigeria which is presently the theatre of terrorism and this region covers Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Yobe, and Taraba States. Strategic communications is measured with constructs such as counter narratives and communication channels.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Strategic Communications

Strategic communication is a systematic series of sustained and coherent activities, conducted across the strategic, operational and tactical levels; that enable the understanding of target audiences, identify effective conduits, and

develop and promote ideas and opinions through those conduits to promote and sustain particular forms of behavior (Tatham, 2010).

According to Laity (2010), strategic communication requires the proper use of information by way of unifying result-oriented actions and synchronization between relevant institutions; socio-cultural structure, history and customs of the target audience as well as technologic factors should be taken into account in the use and transfer of information. It does not mean producing policies and making decisions followed by declaring these decisions taken or activities performed and legitimization thereof before the public.

2.2. Counter Narratives

Counter narratives are actions to directly deconstruct, discredit and demystify violent extremist messages. The application of strategic communication approaches in the fight against terrorism facilitates the formulation of narratives that target key issues that power the messages from radical groups. It is important for strategic communications to counter the ideology underlying extremism. This entails challenging assumptions, beliefs, and meanings; targeting contradictions; and highlighting political differences (Trethewey et al., 2009). Counter narratives refer to the messages that provide a positive alternative to extremist propaganda, with the ultimate aim of deconstructing extremist views within a population (Silverman et al., 2016).

2.3. Communication Channels

The selection of the right channel of communication depends on the objective of the communication process, targeted audience and the relative comparison of all the available channels of communication. A medium of communication that resonates with the targeted audience increases the chances of a successful communication. Communication is important in the fight against terrorism and averting violent extremists from accomplishing their intentions. Effective communication can reduce terrorists' probabilities of mounting successful maneuvers, creating threats that instill fear and mayhem in people's lives, and undermining the legitimacy of the societies that they attack (Fischhoff, 2011).

The effective management of strategic communication approaches handling both internal and external communication channels should be preceded by understanding messages, objectives, and the utilization of networks to create or learn new knowledge.

2.4. Fight against Terrorism

The Nigeria's Terrorism Prevention Act 2011, as Amended in 2013, (Part 1, Sections 1 & 2, Pg. 4) defines a terrorist, as a person who knowingly does, attempts or threatens to do an act preparatory to or in furtherance of an act of terrorism; commits to do anything that is reasonably necessary to promote an act of terrorism; or assists or facilitates the activities of persons engaged in an act of terrorism commits an offence under this Act.

The fight against terrorism, also known as counter-terrorism and anti-terrorism, incorporates the practice, military tactics, techniques, and strategy that government, military, law enforcement, business, and intelligence agencies use to combat or prevent terrorism. The fight against terrorism is a government's plan to use the instruments of national power to neutralize terrorists, their organizations, and their networks in order to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and to coerce the government or its citizens to react in accordance with the terrorists' goals (Stigall et al., 2019).

2.5. Empirical Review

2.5.1. Counter Narratives and the Fight against Terrorism

Schouten (2016) analyzed the United States' policies and strategic communications in the post- September 11, 2001 war against Islamic fundamentalists to determine if U.S. strategic communication policies have been effective in countering Islamic extremism. From the findings, it is evident that U.S. strategic communications have failed in countering radicalization and moderating the minds of Muslim populations overseas or among Diaspora populations in Western countries. Marginalization and poor assimilation strategies; awkward distribution of competencies between the Central Intelligence Agency, the Pentagon, and the State Department; a lack of global perspective; and failure to learn from past military operations are some of the factors that have contributed to the problem.

Abubakar (2017) did a comparative study of the use of strategic communications by both the Nigerian Armed Forces and the jihadi group. It also assessed their impact on the media coverage of their activities. The jihadists deployed both their communications skills and their infamies to put their insurgency onto the global scene. The Army employed a

range of tools, some effective, some less to counter them. The media's obsession with jihadi stories gave the insurgents an edge, but the Army managed to disrupt most of their strategies. Extraneous factors do influence strategic communications campaigns, but honesty or the perception of it is a necessary condition for their long-term efficacy.

Ogbuleke and Erameh (2020) interrogated the place of leadership and strategic communication in the actualization of overall national security in Nigeria. These tools of communication have been used to both incite violence as well as carry messages that help prevent violent conflict, and promote peace and reconciliation and Nigerian military is not exceptional. The study revealed that the Army was more successful in using this approach when Boko Haram's use of violence was at its peak. The support the security services received from the media might have come from the need to address this for lasting solution in the nearest future.

Bélanger et al. (2020) tested whether counter-narratives are effective to reduce people's support and willingness to join Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Participants (American Muslims) were randomly assigned to a factorial experimental design varying the source (United States Government, Imam, ISIS defector), and the content (social, political, and religious) of the counter-narrative while comparing these groups to a control message. Results showed an overall small positive effect of counter-narratives, but also evidence for greater support for ISIS in individuals at greater risk of radicalization. Results also showed that the content was more important than the source.

Carthy and Sarma (2021) conducted a study on countering terrorist narratives, assessing the efficacy and mechanisms of change in counter narrative strategies. Returning autonomy to the target by having them actively counter terrorist rhetoric themselves was found to be more effective than offering generic counter-narratives. Notwithstanding the challenges and limitations associated with measuring violent radicalization-related constructs, the findings of the experiment demonstrate the extent to which individuals vary in their susceptibility to violent, terrorist narratives, as well as attempts to counter them.

Mohamed (2021) conducted a study on the use of counter narratives as prevention and countering violent extremism communications-based measure using Muslim-American undergraduate students in Universities and Colleges in California as the case study. The sample constituted 20 participants, comprised of four focus groups with 5 student respondents each. The study findings showed that the participants had little knowledge of terror organizations, appreciated the dangers of radicalization, and saw the necessity of counter narratives in countering radicalization. The findings demonstrated use of counter narratives could be effective in combating radicalization and sensitizing young people against violent extremism involvement.

2.5.2. Communication Channels and the Fight against Terrorism

Güler (2012) examined the role and place of strategic communication in countering terrorism. The purpose of the study is to define strategic communication in light of studies and practices that are conducted at the international level, as well as to analyze fundamentals as to how this concept can be applied in countering terrorism. The study found that strategic communication, which requires understanding and perceiving the target audience, will produce favorable effects on the target audience by ensuring the effective harmonization of military and civil components.

Nwabueze and Ebeze (2013) examined the critical role of the mass media in combating the upsurge of crime which has led to a state of insecurity in the country, especially in the North, South Eastern and South Southern parts of the country. The study adopted qualitative approach in appraising the correlation between the mass media and the insecurity in Nigeria with emphasis on practical measures relevant in this direction.

Ferguson (2016) explored how the media and communication strategies can be utilized to counter terrorism. The key findings from the study include the fact that media projects that are connected to a political agenda are likely to have less impact, there is evidence that radio and television drama that touch on issues of identity and tolerance have a positive effect on public attitude and behaviour, and media assistance can help the domestic media respond well to violent extremist narratives. The findings of the study implied that the effectiveness of any channel of communication depends on the targeted audience and the message.

Naman (2019) determined the impact of strategic communications in preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism by National Counter Terrorism Center in Pumwani area within Nairobi County in Kenya. The target population comprised of five youth groups with a total membership of 250 youths that have continuously been living in Pumwani area within Nairobi County since 2016. The data was collected using questionnaires which comprised of both open and closed ended questions. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 24 and presented in the form of tables, frequencies and percentages. The results of the study indicated that there is a significant correlation between countering

violent extremism and both audience targeting. The results from the study showed that there is no significant relationship between countering violent extremism and counter narratives. This is an indication that counter narratives has no significant impact on countering violent extremism. It was found that there is a significant relationship between countering violent extremism and choice of communication channels.

Muhammad and Cornelius (2020) examined the Pakistan military's strategic use of social media in encouraging and sustaining public support for the ongoing war against terrorism in Pakistan. Its findings indicate that the military used significantly different types of strategic frames in response to a fast-changing, evolving security situation in the country. Framing was used strategically to facilitate public–military and people-to-people engagements. Motivational frames were the most dominant forms of communication used to generate dialogue between the military and the public in the war against terrorism and to enhance public participation in it.

Jimoh and Seidu (2021) examined the nexus between communication and national security in the 21st century in response to the security challenges in Nigeria. Beyond the establishment of their relationship, the paper discussed some specific ICT adoptable systems to meet the security needs of the country such as global positioning system technology, intelligent monitoring and control system, social media, virtual emergency operations centre, data mining and database tracking system, intrusion detection system, uniform security management system and one push emergency button system.

2.6. Theoretical Framework

2.6.1. Relational Human Theory

The relational human theory was developed by Ruesch and Bateson (1951). The beginning of Bateson's communication theory dates to 1951. The relational communication body of knowledge is the most promising theory to advance the effective practice of strategic communication. The theory proposes an intricate framework for the practice of strategic communication. The theory prioritizes building and maintaining mutually beneficial connections with key stakeholders and the public. The stakeholders involved in the network of relationship influence each other and facilitate communication.

Bateson developed two seminal propositions that serve as the foundation for relational human theory. The first proposition is the dual nature of messages. Every communicative exchange has two messages, a report message and a command message. The report message contains the substance or content of the communication, while the command message describes the relationship. These two elements are also known as the content message and the relationship message. Bateson's second proposition is that relationships can be characterized by complementarity or symmetry. In a complementary relationship, if one participant is dominant, the other is submissive. In symmetry, dominance is met by dominance; submissiveness elicits submissiveness. Equally useful for understanding relational communication is the relational dialectics theory.

Archetti et al. (2014) identified the failure to create and manage mutually beneficial relationships as one of the limitations of strategic communication approaches used in counter terrorism programs. It is imperative to note that the channel of communication selected should be familiar to the target audience to ensure the message reaches the right people at the right time (Philips & Dyke, 2012). Philips and Dyke (2012) recommended a relationship management approach because of the fact that it makes it easy to understand and target key players in the process of communication. The channel of communication selected varies depending on the target audience.

3. Methodology

The study employed survey research design. The population of this study covers the Adamawa State (4,248,436), Bauchi State (6,537,314), Borno State (5,860,183), Gombe State (3,256,962), Taraba State (3,066,834) and Yobe State (3,294,137) whose aggregated population is 26,263,866 (National Population Commission, 2016). The study utilized primary data, the primary data were extracted with the aid of questionnaires. The questionnaires were developed in five point likert scale.

The study employed scientific sampling technique determination designed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) that recommends a sample size of 384 for a population above one (1) million. It randomly selects expert based on their expertise on the phenomenon being studied. The respondents were purposefully selected to fill the questionnaires. The respondents approached were those who had, at one point or another, been involved in the media coverage, response management, or government communication of terrorist and counter- terrorist activities. A mix of correspondents,

editors, government spokespersons, conflict response coordinators in the civil society space, Department of Defence Information, defence correspondents, editors, government communicators were given the questionnaires to fill.

Table 1 Sample Size Distribution

Study Sample	Number of Respondents Selected
Traditional Leaders and Youth Leaders in Borno State (especially Gwoza and Bama local government areas).	35
Traditional Leaders and Youth Leaders in Adamawa State (especially Michika and Mubi local government areas).	35
Traditional Leaders and Youth Leaders in Bauchi State (especially Darazo and Dambam local government areas).	35
Traditional Leaders and Youth Leaders in Gombe State (especially Nafada and Funakaye local government areas).	35
Traditional Leaders and Youth Leaders in Taraba State (especially Gassol and Karim Lamido local government areas).	35
Traditional Leaders and Youth Leaders in Yobe State (especially Damaturu and Gujba local government areas).	35
Department of Defence Information	20
Defence correspondents of Major Newspaper in Nigeria	20
Government Communicators	20
Civil Society Groups	20
Repentant Terrorists	35
Indigenes of these six (6) States	59
Total	384

Source: Researcher’s Compilation, 2023.

The study employed multiple regression technique of data analysis to test the statistical significance of the independent variables on the dependent variables.

The functional representation of the model for the study is given below

$$FAT = f(CNA, COC) \dots\dots\dots(i)$$

The multiple regression model is stated below:

$$FAT = \beta_0 + \beta_1CNA + \beta_2COC + \mu \dots\dots\dots(ii)$$

Where;

FAT = Fight against Terrorism

CNA = Counter Narratives

COC = Communication Channels

β_0 = is the constant or coefficient of intercept.

β_1, β_2 = the corresponding coefficients for the respective dependent variables.

μ = stochastic error term

4. Data Analysis and Results

Table 2 Model Summary

Model Summary ^b										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	0.909 ^a	0.826	0.825	0.37887	0.826	902.774	2	381	0.000	0.020
a. Predictors: (Constant), COC, CAN										
b. Dependent Variable: FAT										

Source: SPSS Version 23 Output, 2023.

The Coefficient of Determination (R^2) of 0.826 indicates that about 82 per cent of the likelihood of the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria, can be explained by strategic communications which comprises of counter narratives and communication channels. The remaining 18 per cent is attributed to other independent variables not captured in the regression model. The F-Statistic of 902.774 and its corresponding P-value of 0.000 indicates that model is fit and the independent variable is properly selected and used.

Table 3 ANOVA

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	259.179	2	129.590	902.774	0.000 ^b
	Residual	54.691	381	0.144		
	Total	313.871	383			
a. Dependent Variable: fat						
b. Predictors: (Constant), coc, can						
Source: SPSS Version 23 Output, 2023.						

The results of ANOVA test on Table 3 which reveals that counter narratives and communication channels have significant effect on the fight against terrorism in the North east of Nigeria. This decision is arrived at because the p value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance.

Table 4 Multiple Regression Analysis

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.305	0.057		22.731	0.000
	CAN	0.276	0.038	0.350	7.306	0.000
	COC	0.674	0.055	0.582	12.163	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: FAT						

Source: SPSS Version 23 Output, 2023.

H₀₁: Counter narratives have no significant effect on the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria.

Table 4 above showed the multiple regression results of the model, the model revealed that counter narratives has a significant positive effect on the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria. Counter narratives has a positive coefficient value of 0.276, this indicates that the fight against terrorism will increase by 0.276 for every one unit increase in counter narratives, if other factors remain fixed. The coefficient value is positive while the significant value is less than 0.05. Therefore, increase in counter narratives will lead to improvement in the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria.

H₀₂: Communication channels have no significant effect on the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria.

The multiple regressions also revealed that communication channels have a significant effect on the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria. From table 4, it can be deduced that communication channels have coefficient value of 0.674 with significant value of 0.000. The coefficient is positive and the significant value is less than 0.05. This indicates that an increase in communication channels by one unit will lead to 0.674 improvements in the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria, if other factors remain fixed. Therefore, increase in the channels of communication will lead to improvement in the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria.

5. Discussion of Findings

This study examines the effect of strategic communications on the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria. Two hypotheses were formulated in line with the objectives of the study. Based on the result, the study found that counter narratives and communication channels have positive significant effect on the fight against terrorism in the north East of Nigeria. Counter narratives are tools that are used to water down the impact of misinformation that are used by terrorists to justify their actions. Effective counter narratives help discredit the messages from terrorist groups.

Also, the utilization of popular communion channels like radio and television increases the chances of reaching many people making it easy to achieve the objective of formulating counter narratives. The selection of the right communication channels is paramount because it has a direct effect on the success of the entire communication process. Ferguson (2016) acknowledges that the media and communication industry can be powerful tool for both terrorists and governments. The government can rely on the intricate network of media and communication channels to reach many people to deliver important counter narratives and assure the citizens of security. The use of radio is likely to have a bigger impact because it has the capacity to reach people in remote areas as opposed to social media that are limited to areas that have access to the internet. These findings are similar to the study of Guler (2012); Ferguson (2016); Abubakar (2017); Naman (2019); Muhammed and Cornelius (2020); Ogbuleke and Eramah (2020); Belanger et al. (2020); Mohamed (2021). But contradict the study of Schouten (2016).

6. Conclusions

The study concludes that counter narratives are designed to counter the issues raised by terrorist organizations to justify their actions. The choice of an effective counter narrative message can improve the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria. The study also concludes that the use of Radio and TV to deliver counter narrative messages improves the fight against terrorism in the North East of Nigeria. The channel of communication determines whether the information will reach the right people and the right time. Also, it determines the level of seriousness that one will attach to the message.

The use of community leaders and other members of society with influence like celebrities are recommended, because they have the power to influence many people.

Recommendations

The study recommends the development of a strategic communication team that is part of the Counter Violent Extremism program. The team should be tasked with analysing messages from terrorist organizations to identify their social, psychological and theological roots. In response the team is expected to formulate counter messages that are customized to all the target audiences. The study also recommends the expansion of communication channel infrastructure to many parts of the country with the aim of reaching the most vulnerable populations that are targeted for radicalization. A good infrastructure sets the foundation of the development of effective communication infrastructure, which improves the overall quality of communication channels. The channel of communication selected to deliver countering violent extremism messages should depend on the target audience.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that No conflict of interest.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Effect of strategic communications on the fight against terrorism							
S/N	Items	SA	A	NE	D	SD	Total
	Counter Narratives (Independent Variable; Proxy for Strategic Communications)						
CNA1	I have received a text informing me on how to deal with violence.	21 (6%)	15 (4%)	5 (1%)	165 (43%)	178 (46%)	384 (100%)
CNA2	I have come across information warning people not to join a violent group.	23 (6%)	33 (9%)	8 (2%)	166 (43%)	154 (40%)	384 (100%)
CNA3	The Information about violent groups is clear and precise.	31 (8%)	32 (8%)	7 (2%)	163 (43%)	151 (39%)	384 (100%)
CNA4	The information on counter terrorism has helped me change my behaviour.	37 (10%)	15 (4%)	8 (2%)	178 (46%)	146 (38%)	384 (100%)
CNA5	Religious leaders are best to communicate about violence.	56 (15%)	67 (17%)	6 (2%)	111 (29%)	144 (37%)	384 (100%)
CNA6	Government Security agencies are the right people to help in countering violent behaviour.	30 (8%)	73 (19%)	5 (1%)	161 (42%)	115 (30%)	384 (100%)

CNA7	Counter narrative messages from government reduces support for terrorism.	16 (4%)	26 (7%)	14 (4%)	170 (44%)	158 (41%)	384 (100%)
	Communication Channels (Independent Variable; Proxy for Strategic Communications)	SA	A	NE	D	SD	Total
COC1	Radios and televisions are the best platform to use to listen to Government.	168 (44%)	148 (39%)	5 (1%)	37 (10%)	26 (6%)	384 (100%)
COC2	Facebook is the best communication channel Relate with Government.	5 (1%)	5 (1%)	8 (3%)	182 (47%)	184 (48%)	384 (100%)
COC3	Twitter is the best communication channel in countering violent extremism.	8 (2%)	11 (3%)	4 (1%)	173 (45%)	188 (49%)	384 (100%)
COC4	Billboard is the best communication channel in countering violent extremism.	5 (1%)	5 (1%)	5 (1%)	184 (48%)	185 (49%)	384 (100%)
COC5	Mobile text message (SMS) is the best communication channel in countering violent extremism.	10 (3%)	9 (2%)	6 (1%)	185 (48%)	174 (46%)	384 (100%)
COC6	Email is the best communication channel in countering violent extremism.	5 (1%)	5 (1%)	5 (1%)	191 (50%)	178 (47%)	384 (100%)
COC7	The fight against terrorism programmes in Nigeria is conducted and aired in local languages and target youth appropriately.	24 (6%)	15 (4%)	6 (2%)	173 (45%)	166 (43%)	384 (100%)
	Fight against Terrorism (Dependent Variable)	SA	A	NE	D	SD	Total
FAT1	Airing how to counter violent extremism in local languages is the best way of fighting against terrorism.	168 (44%)	155 (40%)	5 (1%)	33 (9%)	23 (6%)	384 (100%)
FAT2	The use of the internet for the recruitment of terrorist purposes is a rapidly growing phenomenon.	11 (3%)	42 (11%)	9 (2%)	161 (42%)	161 (42%)	384 (100%)
FAT3	Arms proliferation slows down the fight against terrorism in the North East, Nigeria.	176 (46%)	168 (44%)	4 (1%)	22 (5%)	14 (4%)	384 (100%)
FAT4	The State has the obligation and primary responsibility to prevent and fight against terrorism.	187 (49%)	165 (43%)	6 (2%)	14 (3%)	12 (3%)	384 (100%)
FAT5	Relationship between security agencies and the public will decide counter-terrorism success.	188 (49%)	156 (41%)	4 (1%)	13 (3%)	23 (6%)	384 (100%)
FAT6	Porous borders are counterproductive to the fight against terrorism in the North East, Nigeria.	22 (6%)	11 (3%)	12 (3%)	188 (49%)	151 (39%)	384 (100%)
FAT7	Military combats will eradicate acts of terrorism.	21 (5%)	33 (9%)	6 (2%)	177 (46%)	147 (38%)	384 (100%)

SA= Strongly Agree (5); A= Agree (4); NE= Neutral (3); D= Disagree (2); SD= Strongly Disagree (1); Source: Field Survey, 2023.