POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND THE ROLE OF TERRITORIAL COMMANDERS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR COHESION, GOVERNANCE AND FUTURE SUÇCESS

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Article Info

Abstract

This study analyzed political communication and the role of Nigerian territorial commanders: implications for cohesion, governance and future success. Agenda setting theory formed the anchor for this research. A qualitative research design with email interviews was used as the main data collection approach in analyzing the communicative roles of Nigeria's territorial commanders and their implications for governance and national cohesion. The population of concern was the territorial commanders of the Nigerian Armed Forces, public affairs officers, and a representative sample of civil society actors and policy analysts tracking civil-military relations totaling over 1,200 people from Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. Purposive sampling was employed to select a sample of 20 participants that including 10 territorial commanders, 5 media/public affairs officers, and 5 civil society actors. Participants responded to semi-structured interview questions were filled out and returned online through email to enable them to respond conveniently without losing the depth and adaptability required in qualitative research. Thematic analysis was used to examine the recurring patterns, meaning and contrasts in the responses. The research revealed that Nigeria's operational commanders utilize limited and strategic modes of communication, such as press conferences, social media discussions and local community talk in order to control public image, counter misinformation and augment security goals in addition to offsetting operation secrecy. The research found that strategic and controlled

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communication behavior by territorial commanders is essential in managing security narratives and public opinion, enhancing the ability of the military's ability to be secretive when interacting with diverse audiences. The research advised the Nigerian Defense Headquarters that it should provide assurance that territorial commanders embrace uniformity and open communication behaviors to construct public awareness and trust.

Introduction

Political communication is a powerful tool in influencing public opinion, increasing governance, and sustaining national unity. Political communication is defined as the interplay of messaging and information between political and public actors (McNair, 2018). Political communication operates at the intersection nexus of governance, legitimacy, and strategic influence. Militarization of political institutions has introduced new political communication fronts, mainly in nations experiencing internal war, security or regime crises under both democratic and autocratic rule. Non-traditional political agents, such as territorial commanders, army or paramilitary commanders commanding specific territories, have been given more importance in shaping popular narratives and perceptions of state power (Waisbord, 2023).

The intersection of political communication and security leadership has generated fierce intellectual debate at the global level. For example, scholars in the Latin American context, for example, scholars have described how regional national force commanders are becoming quasi-political agents in low-state-presence states (Lopez, 2020). In the Middle East region, the activities of military commanders in spreading government messages have been placed under the spotlight for their implications on civil freedoms and democratic consolidation (Kausch, 2022). These examples all refer to an international trend: political communication is reorganized whenever state institutions contract or incidentally grant powers to security actors to be dominant propagators of public information and policy messages, sometimes with deep implications for governance and unity.

In the African context, political communication remains positioned between centralized the state's centralized channels and decentralized, and sometimes informal, networks. In nations like Ethiopia, Sudan, and the Sahel, security commanders often fulfil political functions and leverage legacy and digital media to frame conflicts, justify interventions or claim territory (Gagliardone, 2019). These behaviors complicate the political landscape, as the message of commanders would facilitate or challenge official state messaging. The local actors and the African Union have come to appreciate the value of coordinated political communication systems that include the security sector in democratic openness and civilian oversight (AU Commission, 2022).

In Nigeria, territorial commanders ranging from state-ranking military officers to regional commanders of the police and paramilitary agency chiefs, such as the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), have become principal actors in political communication, particularly in the areas plagued by insecurity. From the insurgency-wracked North-East to the Niger Delta and the secessionist insurgencies-wracked South-Eastern regions, territorial commanders will most likely play the role of mediators between federal imperatives and ground realities. Their utterances, press conferences, and interpersonal behavior are likely to have political undertones, shaping societies' perceptions of the state's intentions and legitimacy of the governing institutions (Agbese, 2021). This resultant reality compels an empirical study of their role in the political communication landscape of Nigeria's potential communication landscape.

The current research is situated in the interface of three critical variables: territorial command structures and political communication, and governance outcomes. Political communication involves strategies, channels, and messages that are employed to transmit political authority and legitimacy. The performance of territorial commanders forms the moderating variable that affects the manner in which messages are received, practiced, or contested in territories. Effectiveness, transparency and resonance of communication practice influence governance and national unity. Media framing, public opinion, and institutional trust add depth to the framework, providing multidimensionality to understanding communication processes. Scholars have highlighted the double-edged role of security actors in communication as they can reinforce stability by bolstering state messages but undermine governance if they lead to distrust, regional inclination or counter national unity messages (Young, 2019). In Nigeria, the imprecision of territorial commanders mandates sometimes results in parallel structures, where people's loyalty will be more directed toward military commands than elected officers. This outcome is a derangement of democratic engagement, undermining trust in civilian rule and preventing the realization of national unity (Ibeanu & Mohammed, 2022).

At the heart of this research is an interest in the future of governance success in Nigeria. As the country grapples with increasing pressures from insecurity, political fragmentation, and ethnic fragmentation, gaining an understanding of territorial commanders' communicative role becomes urgently necessary. Whether or not they are integrated into strategic communication hierarchies would intensify Nigeria's governance crisis or improve state-to-state coordination. While increasing territory is captured by social media and decentralized messaging, commanders' communicative action no longer carries the limitations of formal press channels but now constructs real-time political narratives (Chiluwa & Samoilenko, 2021).

Hence, the current research endeavors to determine the degree to which territorial commanders fashion, alter or manipulate political communication in Nigeria and what this means for governance and national cohesion. It reflects on how people on the ground view them, how their message harmonizes with or conflicts with federal policy, and how these processes impact the larger pursuit of political stability. By presenting a context-sensitive analysis grounded on both global and local points of reference, the research seeks to add to the civil-military relations, strategic communication, and democratic governance literature on fragile and emerging democracies.

Political communication in contemporary Nigeria has taken multifaceted and sometimes contradictory forms, particularly as it intersects with security missions and territorial commanders' extra-legal political authority. These military and paramilitary commanders in Nigeria's restive regions are increasingly involved in spreading government positions, managing regional crisis, and engaging with locals in ways that transcend their constitutionally mandated security responsibilities. This blurring of roles has produced a blurred communicative space with subtle boundaries between civil rule and military authority. Although territorial commanders still influence political discourses and popular opinion, little research has been conducted in Nigeria and greater Sub-Saharan Africa that examines more traditional communication mechanisms, such as political elites, media organizations, and civil society groups (Ibeanu & Mohammed, 2022; Agbese, 2021). This suggests an important empirical lacuna concerning how security elites act as communicative actors and how their roles influence national cohesion, trust in governance, and democratic participation. Furthermore, previous studies that have touched on security communication in Nigeria have failed to sufficiently disaggregate the population or locate territorial commanders in context as separate or semi-autonomous political communicators, which is evidence of a methodological and population-specific lacuna.

Political communication theories, such as the agenda-setting and framing theories dominate the bulk of the literature. However, there is a theoretical unease of using these models on hybrid political actors, such as territorial commanders, who are both political informants and enforcers. This results in a conceptual gap regarding the manner in which communication scholars describe their roles are they state proxies, independent agents or mediators between the state and the ruled? Secondly, knowledge gaps exist regarding the practical effects of these communication activities on governance impacts, particularly, in fragile states such as Nigeria where the exercise of power is typically contested.

Empirical research linking the communicative actions of the territorial commanders to measurable governance indicators, such as citizen trust, policy compliance, or interethnic cohesion, is extremely minimal. The lack of regular communication procedures between territorial commanders and the federal government conveys policy misinterpretation, regional biases, and misinformation to the general population, but little effort has been made toward a thorough risk assessment of such implications through empirical, conceptual or strategic thinking. This research fills such voids by exploring the under-explored task of territorial commanders as communicators and their impact on political cohesion and governance in Nigeria's intricate security and political landscape.

This study explores the function of territorial commanders in political communication during governance in Nigeria's governance. It evaluates the effectiveness of commanders' communication strategy and public communication in national cohesion and governance. The research also ascertains how much territorial commanders' political communication impacts public trust in the government.

Governance and national cohesion

Governance can be defined as the ability of institutions, actors, and arrangements to effectively deal with public resources, ensure accountability, sustain law and order, and provide services that improve the welfare of society. Governance in Nigeria has a very intimate connection with legitimacy, equity, and stability, particularly in areas where insecurity, ethnic diversity, and distrust of political institutions are dominate (Young, 2019). Good governance in terms of the rule of law, responsiveness, inclusion, and transparency demands good communication between government agents and the public at large. Nevertheless, where informal power brokers, such as territorial commanders are central to decision-making, then the legitimacy of such power brokers and not necessarily the formal institutions can determine the outcome of governance (Agbese, 2021).

National cohesion, as a theoretical counterpart to governance, comprises the degree to which the people experience a sense of belonging to the state and share a unifying sense of belongingness above religion, ethnic and regional allegiance. In Nigeria, where historic grievances and present insecurity act against unity, national cohesion is tenuous. Good governance should not only bring material dividends but also generate symbolic inclusion and shared national citizenship. The research employs a multi-dimensional framework of governance and cohesion, targeting the public trust, group-to-group harmony, and policy compliance as its key indicators. Scholars assume that these results are, to a large extent, at the mercy of political communication framing and its author, particularly in crisis-society contexts (Chiluwa & Samoilenko, 2021).

Political Communication

Political communication is the intentional transfer of messages, symbols, and stories by political actors to influence public opinion, frame perceptions, and legitimize power. Political communication has hitherto been the domain of elected representatives, media practitioners and parties. But with growing insecurity and decentralization of the state, new actors, particularly military, and paramilitary commanders have entered the ranks of powerful communicators (McNair, 2018). These field commanders frequently participate in public

press briefings, citizen forums, and media interviews and influence public opinion regarding security operations and government policy. Their voices also possess symbolic power, especially, where the state or federal government appears distant or weak (Ibeanu & Mohammed, 2022).

Political message content, frequency, and framing of territorial commanders significantly influence citizens' perception of political events, especially, during times of crisis. Political communication theories, such as agenda-setting and framing theory argue that the credibility of a communicator and the context of the message determine its effectiveness (Waisbord, 2023). In Nigeria, the image of territorial commanders is predominantly rated higher than that of politicians in some areas, hence their communicative power becomes even more effective. Therefore, they are not only limited to information exchange in political communication, but also form impressions about governance, justice, and nationhood. This study analyzes the dynamics to determine the degree to which territorial commanders facilitate state image and effectiveness through their communication practices.

The Political Communication and Territorial Commander Framework

Theoretically, this research argues that political communication, in this case by territorial commanders, indirectly and directly impacts the government at the national level and solidarity. Whenever they take the airwaves with statements to the public, get featured on the media, or make statements on the conflict story, their communications hold the potential to construct or destroy the legitimacy of government institutions. For example, when their messaging is in accordance with federal policy, it has the power to strengthen public trust and cooperation. Conversely, when their rhetoric is politically skewed or divergent, they can undermine confidence and dismantle national identity (Gagliardone, 2019). Thus, the framework presumes that political communicators' mode, content, and purpose are instrumental determinants of governance consequences.

Further, the framework includes contextual factors, such as public trust, local insecurity, and state-community history that enable the interaction between political communication and governance. The same message will be interpreted in different ways based on the perceived legitimacy and socio-political context of the communicator. This makes this framework very effective in analyzing insidious ways in which communicative power is wielded, particularly in fragile states like Nigeria, beyond the conventional government actors. This study uses this model to determine whether the political role of territorial commanders' communication strengthens or complicates attempts at creating unified systems of governance that can provide stability and long-term national achievement (AU Commission, 2022).

Agenda setting theory

An appropriate theory for the current study is Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw's Agenda-Setting Theory of 1972. The theory explains that the media does not inform the public on what to think but informs them on what to think about by setting the salience of issues in the public agenda. Applied to Nigeria's political communication context and territorial commanders, the theory postulates that when commanders speak through public statements, press conference or symbolic acts to communicate political or security issues, they develop not only public opinion but also the image of national unity and government priorities. Scholars such as McCombs (2004) have emphasized that agenda-setting extends beyond mainstream media to include institutional agents such as political elites. Empirical research (Wanta & Hu, 1994) has found elite communicators have concerns reaffirmed through public concern, and this supports that territorial commanders, as communicators, are able to set perceptions of the legitimacy and cohesiveness of the state among the public. Irrespective of this, some have claimed that the theory may be able to simplify extremely complex media-

audience relations, especially in non-democracies or fragmented media societies (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). However, its application to this study is that it can account for how territorial commanders, as state representatives, shape political reality and national unity through strategic communication management.

Empirical Review

Chiluwa and Samoilenko (2021) conducted Discourse of Propaganda and War: Strategic Communication in Conflict research and raised the questions of how political agents utilize propaganda and strategic communication to shape public perception during conflict in different parts of the world, including Africa. Employing a qualitative discourse analysis approach, the research analyzed media words, speeches and stories produced by state and non-state producers. Among the findings was the discovery that country actors operating in conflict use emotive language and appeal to morals their attempts to seeking legitimacy or delegitimize competitors. Although, the study built a robust analysis of communication strategies, it is mainly concerned with governmental political actors and revolutionary movements and excludes state security officials, such as territorial commanders. This leaves a lacuna in understanding how formal uniformed actors who are not politicians or insurgents communicate in volatile environments. As opposed to the prevalent research that focuses on Nigeria's territorial commanders, the examined research establishes an elementary framework on which propaganda is based, but does not connect such communication to governance results or national unity, an expanse that this research attempts to bridge.

In the book Security Governance and Democratic Accountability in Nigeria: A Study of Civil-Military Engagement, Ibeanu and Mohammed (2022) evaluated the extent to which security forces interact with political institutions and civil society in security governance in Nigeria. Drawing on mixed methods involving elite interviews and policy content analysis, the study verified that Nigerian military commanders continually perform tasks outside their statutory mandate, such as political negotiation, public communication, and peace-making. The research demonstrated that despite these actors playing key gaps in governance, their political communication performances are fundamentally unregulated and occasionally incoherent, depending on changing public responses and regional trust discrepancies. One of the key faults in the study is observation of structural civil-military relations without regard for how communicative practices per se create public perception and cohesion. In contrast, the current study amplifies territorial commanders communicative agency and presents a more micro-perspective of political influence. However, the studies are bound together by a common interest in the informal deepening of the roles of security actors in governance.

Agbese (2021) considered the political and historical background to military intervention within Nigerian politics, that is, how the discourse of the military and military interventions have constructed public discourse since independence in the publication Military Influence in Nigeria's Democratic Process: The Historical Critique. The descriptive approach was used to analyze political documents, military radio broadcasts, and popular responses over decades. The study found that traces of militarized communication continue to exist even in the post-military period, particularly, in unstable areas where territorial commanders remain the de facto government mouthpieces. Although this book is full of history, it presents hardly any empirical evidence regarding current trends, and it does directly examine how such communication impacts governance metrics, such as public trust, policy adherence, or harmony. Compared to available scholarship, the scholarship under study addresses theoretical and historical foundations but has shortfalls in the practical observation of communication patterns in the contemporary security-oriented political climate. The analogy is for identifying

the necessity for a recent evidence-based scholarship on territorial commanders' political communication functions.

Gap Identification

Notwithstanding increasing scholarly attention to political communication and civil-military affairs, substantial knowledge remains on the particular communicative roles of Nigerian territorial commanders in the country's unstable security and political environment. The majority of available research has focused on either local insurgent groups or political elite actors, ignoring the complex role of these middle-rank military actors in brokering between the state and locals (Chiluwa & Samoilenko, 2021; Ibeanu & Mohammed, 2022). Empirically, there is limited information on how the public hears territorial commanders' political signals and symbolic actions, and their impact on governance, social cohesion, and obedience to future policy. Conceptually, there is limited theorization of the nexus between military and political communication in Nigerian scholarship, usually addressed as an architecture rather than a communicative or discursive construct. Methodologically, few studies have used mixed-method or triangulated approaches to investigate how such messages are framed, communicated, and understood across diverse regions and populations. Therefore, this research bridges a key knowledge gap and practice disjuncture by examining territorial commanders' agenda-setting and communicative capacities, and discussing these processes in relation to Nigeria's governance tendencies and national integration.

Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative approach through email interviews as the main data collection method to explore the communicative roles of territorial commanders in Nigeria, and their effects on governance and national unity. The target population included the territorial commanders of Nigerian armed forces, public affairs officers, and carefully chosen civil society actors and policy experts who track civil-military relations totaling over 1,200 individuals distributed over the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. These individuals play key roles play in setting security narratives, enabling local interpretation and interaction with military messaging in the public sphere. A purposive sampling method was employed to obtain a sample of 20 participants, which included 10 territorial commanders, 5 media/public affairs officers, and 5 civil society stakeholders. This sampling method ensured that only participants with direct relevance and knowledge about the topic were employed. Data were gathered via email and back semi-structured questionnaires that the participants completed at their own convenience but still contained the depth and flexibility required for qualitative research. Thematic analysis was used to examine the universal patterns, meanings and contrasts across responses. Email interviews were justified on the basis of availability, i.e., army personnel, along with geographical dispersion and documentary authenticity requirement. The method also helped maintain ethical compliance, confidentiality and permitted the participants to give thoughtful, reflective answers, which improved the quality of the information retrieved.

Data presentation and analysis

Themes were constructed theoretically after the research objectives. The following themes were constructed: territorial commanders as political communicators; political communication influence on government and people's perception; and political communication and national level cohesion. They were explained and discussed below as follows:

Territorial Commanders as Political Communicators

This topic addresses the extent to which territorial commanders in military commands practice political communication officially and unofficially and the influence of their messages in public on political discourse, security narratives, and public opinion. Interviewee "A" stated that "political communication strategies by territorial commanders in Nigeria have greatly evolved, especially with regard to increasing domestic disputes and security issues." While their primary role is to secure the territory, their value in interacting with the public through careful and strategic communication is increasingly acknowledged. Normally, communication is conveyed in the form of organized press conferences, official social media pages, and consultations with local stakeholders from the community stakeholders.

Interviewee "B" explained how "messages are framed to fit national defense and security discourses and respond to localized concerns, disinformation, and hostile propaganda. Strategic communication seeks to promote the success of military campaigns in building public confidence and deterring crime in the area of conflict. Such communications, which are centrally coordinated by Defense Headquarters, are regionalized and contextualized at a regional level to respond to regional realities and sensitivities to security." Interviewee "C" also continued to state that "clarity, consistency, and professionalism are typically highlighted to prevent escalations or misinterpretation. Military spokesmen and lower commanders are given public communications training to improve their skills at handling media contact and public relations professionally."

Interviewee "D" clarified that "operational secrecy is a high priority, guardedly against the public demands for openness. Thus, controlled narratives are thus released on trusted avenues of verification in order to maintain trust and uphold operational integrity. The capacity to react quickly against disinformation, particularly online, is also prioritized."

Interviewee "E" emphasized that "political communication has become an organic function of modern military command. In this context, territorial commanders contribute to not only concrete security but also public discourse and perception management, which are the usual characteristics of national stability."

Influence of Political Communication on Governance and Public Perception

This question discusses the impact of territorial commanders' communication strategies on their perception of governance effectiveness, responsibility, and trust in state institutions. Interviewee "A" attested that "the political communication of territorial commanders plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions of governance and institutional legitimacy. Commanders serve as de facto federal government representatives in most disadvantageous or conflict zones, and their communications are read as reflective of national will and authority."

Interviewee "B" clarified that "strategic and empathetic communication by the military leaders has been proven to increase public cooperation, especially in terms of intelligence sharing and local outreach. Positive media coverage of military victory or humanitarian intervention has been linked with greater community trust and cooperation. Such communications indirectly reinforce governance legitimacy and social resilience."

On the other hand, interviewee "C" provoked that "ill-considered or insensitive remarks have been seen to undermine public confidence and incite resentment. Cases of vagueness or condescending remarks have required interventions at the highest levels to restore trust in military leadership. Such cases illustrate the sensitivity of political language in brittle governance regimes."

Interviewee "D" stressed that "With the facilitation of real-time release of information, public affairs units within the military closely monitor the mood of the people and media reaction to commanders' messages.

Messages that focus on peace construction, infrastructural reconstruction of infrastructure, and civic collaboration place governmental institutions in good light and their quick response."

In essence, interviewee "E" further stated that "political communication by territorial commanders is a tactical as well as symbolic tool. It identifies citizen participation, authenticates state legitimacy and is crucial in the construction or dismantling of public trust in government processes."

Political Communication and National Cohesion

This is the problem of how territorial commander's messages enhance or disintegrate unity, stability, and peaceful coexistence among Nigeria's plural ethno-political and religious groups. Interviewee "A" had argued that "the communication strategies of territorial commanders can be used to promote national unity or enlarge societal cleavages." Since the messages are inclusive and representative of Nigeria's cultural diversity, the military is perceived as a unifying force that is determined to protect all citizens regardless of regional or ethnic affiliation.

Interviewee "B" testified that "recent efforts have involved the use of multilingual message formats, enabling commanders to communicate with audiences in dominant local languages. Such efforts enhance inclusivity and express respect for cultural identities, to civil-military relations, and a sense of belonging among marginalized groups' benefit."

But interviewee "C" admitted that "the perception of partisanship in the language of the military can erode trust as much as to promote perceptions of bias. Past examples of commanders' statements in election years have challenged the neutrality of the military and thus generated public distrust and lowered confidence in national harmony."

Interviewee "D" attested that "field reports from community outreach programs have shown that respectful and culturally sensitive communication by security forces is associated with higher acceptance and peaceful co-existence. The language and tone of official statements can affect attitudes in the community more than deployments per se."

Interviewee "E" answered "thus, political communication by territorial commanders is a potent tool that can promote unity if strategically used in conjunction with neutrality ideals, respect for cultures, and national integration. It is a weapon of soft power that is vital to fighting division in Nigeria's multicultural society."

Discussion of the Findings

The research found that Nigerian commanders in the territories use controlled and strategic forms of communication, such as press conferences, online engagement, and community discourse in an effort to address disinformation, public opinions, and address security demands without compromising operational confidentiality. The results of the research on strategic communication strategy of territorial commanders concur with Agbese (2021) who illustrated that Nigerian command security employs well-defined messaging and media interactions to control public debate and suppress insurgency propaganda, justifying the effectiveness of managed communications in complex security scenarios. This study discovery of how territory commanders strategically manage public opinion using managed messages confirms McCombs and Shaw (1972) agenda-setting theory that media and communicators do not tell people what to think but what to think about. It also demonstrates how commanders pre-select security narratives to shape public attention and discourse.

The research established that territorial commanders' political communication greatly influences public opinion and trust in government legitimacy because powerful messages promote community coordination and governance credibility, but weak communication threatens to destroy public trust. The discovery that territorial

commanders builds public trust and governance through communication is consistent with the findings of Chiluwa and Samoilenko (2021) regarding how information dissemination and official discourse shape the attitude of citizens toward institutional legitimacy, where communication plays an important role in bridging governance gaps and mobilizing public cooperation. The discovery that commanding officers' messages influence government legitimacy and public trust supports the agenda-setting role developed by Wanta and Ghanem (2007), which indicates that opinion leaders' repeated focus on certain topics can influence the audience attitude and belief, and thus provides how commanders' messages legitimating the government in the eyes of the public.

The research identified that when inclusive and culturally sensitive messages are utilized, communication by territorial commanders is at the core of fomenting national harmony, but turns unity upside down when partisan or inclined in nature and impacts societal trust and peaceful coexistence in a negative way. The role given to military communication in building or disintegrating national solidarity lends merit to the report by Ibeanu and Muhammad (2022) that inclusive, culturally oriented messaging by security organs promotes social cohesion and togetherness while partisan or selective communication widens the already existing cleavages and therefore affects societal trust as well as cohesion within Nigeria's multi-ethnic society. The discovery that biased or inclusive communication by local leaders influences national cohesion finds resonance with McCombs's (2004) extension of agenda-setting theory to framing effects, whereby not only does the salience of topics matter but also how issues are framed in terms of influencing public opinion and social cohesion, with a focus on the role of military discourse in bridging or widening social cleavages.

Conclusion

The study finds that territorial commanders deliberate and controlled communication practices are crucial to being capable enough of effectively managing public opinion and security narratives well, thereby making the military strong enough to keep operations under wraps and tackle diverse audiences.

The research establishes territorial commanders' political communication as the core factor in determining public trust and rooting governance legitimacy, hence a key instrument to increasing citizen cooperation and upholding institution credibility.

This study examines how territorial commanders communicate politically and their influence on national cohesion, while sensitive and open communication promotes cohesion while partisan or biased communication may propel differences in society.

This research contributes to knowledge by presenting a genuine and original insight into the political communication role of territorial commanders in Nigeria's intricate security and governance landscape. In contrast to previous studies that have largely touched on military operations or public relations, this study offers positive insights into territorial commanders' strategic communication behavior as key regulators of public opinion, the legitimacy of governance, and national integration. The integration of emerging political communication theory with operational milieus in the military context of analysis is a new interdisciplinary that fills the gaps between communication, political science, and security studies. Attention to commanders' communication as a variable and the absence of its exploration heighten scholarly writing on agenda-setting and framing processes within environments of weak democracy and authoritarianism and enrich theoretical insight into how military communication is related to state power.

This study advances theory by locating agenda-setting theory in a security and governance environment relevant to Nigeria as well as other multi-ethnic post-conflict nations. The empirical data from this study will test the

insights and sharpen the theory for application in real media beyond those largely characterized in mainstream media theory. Furthermore, the research provides methodological value through the application and validation of an email interview procedure for reaching older military personnel, a population frequently out of reach to traditional data collection tools. The new instrument design enhances the potential of future research by offering an accessible, viable qualitative research tool for sensitive institutional settings, thereby expanding the literature on political communication and security studies.

Recommendations

Following these observations, the following recommendations have been proposed.

1) The Nigerian Defense Headquarters can ensure that territorial commanders embrace stable and open communication programs to promote public comprehension and confidence.

2) The Nigerian Ministry of Defense and Military Public Affairs Departments should prioritize clear and humane communication when promoting public trust in governance and security procedures.

3) Through collaboration with social and cultural institutions, the Nigerian Army should provide territorial commanders with culturally responsive and inclusive communication to foster national unity and social cohesion.

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