
**MASS MEDIA AND COUNTERTERRORISM IN NIGERIA: EVALUATING THE
STRATEGIC ROLES OF RADIO LAFIYA DOLE AND THE NIGERIAN TELEVISION
AUTHORITY (2010–2020)**

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of mass media in counterterrorism operations in Nigeria, focusing on two state-owned platforms: Radio Lafiya Dole and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). Against the backdrop of Boko Haram's prolonged insurgency in the country's North-East, the study explores how these media outlets have contributed to strategic communication efforts aimed at shaping public attitudes, countering extremist narratives, and enhancing civic resilience. Using a mixed-methods research design, data were collected through structured questionnaires (n = 311) administered to media audiences and internally displaced persons (IDPs), as well as eight Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with media practitioners, security personnel, and civil society actors. Descriptive statistics (mean scores, percentages) and thematic analysis were used to analyse the data. Findings indicate that both NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole have played moderate yet contextually significant roles in Nigeria's counterterrorism communication efforts. Radio Lafiya Dole was perceived as particularly effective due to its use of local languages and culturally relevant programming, while NTA's national coverage gave it institutional leverage despite credibility limitations. The study also revealed critical challenges that undermine media effectiveness, including inadequate funding, limited editorial independence, poor integration of digital tools, and insufficient audience feedback mechanisms. Furthermore, respondents expressed skepticism toward government-controlled narratives, citing a lack of community engagement and localized messaging as constraints to influence. The study concludes that while mass media has the potential to support Nigeria's counterterrorism objectives, its current deployment is hindered by structural, institutional, and technological barriers. To enhance media impact, the study recommends multi-platform communication strategies, increased funding, professional autonomy, and localized content development that resonates with conflict-affected populations. By situating mass media within the broader non-kinetic strategy of national security, the research contributes to the discourse on strategic communication, media credibility, and counter-extremism in fragile states.

Keywords: Mass Media, Counterterrorism, Radio Lafiya Dole, NTA, Strategic communication.

Introduction

In the evolving landscape of global terrorism, strategic communication has emerged as a critical tool for shaping public narratives, countering extremist ideologies, and fostering civic resilience. The mass media—through its agenda-setting, framing, and informational functions—plays a pivotal role in defining the salience of issues, influencing public perceptions, and supporting state legitimacy during conflict (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Entman, 1993). In Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency, which escalated in 2009, has resulted in widespread violence, human displacement, and economic devastation, particularly across the North-East. According to the Global Terrorism Index (2020), Nigeria ranks among the top three countries most affected by terrorism globally, with over 22,000 people killed by Boko Haram and affiliated groups between 2009 and 2020.

In response to this protracted security crisis, the Nigerian government has employed both military counterinsurgency and non-kinetic approaches, including the use of state-owned media such as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Radio Lafiya Dole. These platforms are tasked with disseminating counter-extremist narratives, promoting peacebuilding, and supporting the deradicalization and reintegration of former combatants. However, despite their strategic significance, there remains a paucity of empirical research on the actual role, effectiveness, and public reception of these media interventions. Criticisms have been raised about their lack of credibility, editorial independence, and resonance with grassroots audiences (Ojebode & Adegbola, 2019; Auwal & Ibrahim, 2021). Additionally, terrorist groups have increasingly leveraged digital platforms to disseminate propaganda and undermine state narratives, highlighting the urgent need for effective, adaptive, and participatory communication responses (Weimann, 2015).

Despite the central role of mass media in shaping public discourse, its integration into Nigeria's counterterrorism strategy remains limited and poorly coordinated. Platforms like NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole have not been adequately assessed in terms of their operational effectiveness, audience engagement, and influence on public attitudes. With the growing sophistication of terrorist propaganda and the public's increasing reliance on media for information, it is imperative to evaluate how these media outlets have functioned in supporting or constraining counterterrorism communication between 2010 and 2020.

Research Questions

To address the identified gap, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- a) To what extent have Radio Lafiya Dole and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) contributed to counterterrorism efforts in Nigeria between 2010 and 2020?
- b) How effective are the messages disseminated by these platforms in countering extremist propaganda and shaping public perceptions in terrorism-affected communities?
- c) What challenges constrain the operational and strategic roles of these media platforms in Nigeria's counterterrorism architecture?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to critically assess the role of mass media in Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts. Specifically, the study aims to:

- a) Examine the contributions of Radio Lafiya Dole and NTA to counterterrorism communication between 2010 and 2020;
- b) Evaluate the effectiveness of their messaging in influencing public attitudes and countering extremist narratives; and
- c) Identify the institutional, operational, and technological challenges that limit their impact, while offering recommendations for improved media-based interventions.

Literature Review

Understanding the Concept of Terrorism

Terrorism is one of the most contested and multifaceted concepts in international relations, security studies, and political science. Despite its ubiquity in global discourse, there remains no universally accepted definition, largely due to its political, ideological, and contextual variability. Broadly, terrorism refers to the use of violence or the threat of violence by non-state actors against civilians or symbolic targets with the intent to instill fear, coerce governments, or advance political, religious, or ideological objectives (Schmid, 2011). The deliberate targeting of non-combatants and the psychological effects of such acts are often emphasized as key characteristics. According to Schmid (2011), terrorism is "an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political

reasons." This definition underscores the repetitive, psychological, and symbolic dimensions of terrorism and highlights its instrumental nature—violence is not the end in itself but a means to achieve certain goals.

Historically, terrorism has evolved significantly in its form and intent. Early forms of terrorism were associated with state violence and revolutionary struggles. For instance, the term “terrorism” originated during the French Revolution's Reign of Terror (1793–1794), when it was associated with the Jacobin regime’s systematic use of violence to consolidate power (Laqueur, 2003). In the 19th and early 20th centuries, anarchist and nationalist groups such as the Russian Narodnaya Volya and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) employed terrorism to challenge imperial powers and seek political autonomy. In the post-World War II period, terrorism was increasingly adopted by anti-colonial liberation movements. Groups such as the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) employed asymmetric tactics against colonial and occupying powers. This era saw growing debates about the distinction between “freedom fighters” and “terrorists,” a discourse that remains highly politicized today (Ganor, 2002). These debates complicate international consensus, as actors are often labeled based on political interests rather than objective criteria.

Understanding the Concept of Counterterrorism

Counterterrorism refers to the strategies, tactics, policies, and operations employed by states and non-state actors to prevent, respond to, and mitigate the threat and impact of terrorism. It encompasses a broad spectrum of activities, including military operations, law enforcement, intelligence gathering, legal reforms, border control, community engagement, and strategic communication (Forest, 2007). As terrorism has evolved into a complex and transnational threat, counterterrorism efforts have become multidimensional, integrating both hard and soft power instruments aimed at not only neutralizing terrorists but also addressing the root causes of radicalization and violent extremism.

Traditionally, counterterrorism was viewed primarily through a military-security lens, focusing on the physical elimination of terrorist groups through direct action—such as targeted killings, raids, and surveillance. This approach is exemplified by U.S.-led operations against Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, where military force played a central role in disrupting terrorist infrastructure (Cronin, 2006). However, while kinetic responses may achieve short-term tactical gains, they are

often criticized for their inability to address the ideological and socio-political drivers of terrorism. Moreover, disproportionate use of force can lead to civilian casualties, human rights violations, and backlash that may further fuel radicalization.

In recognition of these limitations, contemporary counterterrorism has embraced comprehensive and multidimensional strategies, combining coercive and preventive measures. The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2006) emphasizes four pillars: (1) addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; (2) preventing and combating terrorism; (3) building state capacity; and (4) ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law. These pillars reflect a shift from reactive policies to more proactive and integrated approaches that seek to strengthen social resilience and foster inclusive governance.

One of the critical components of modern counterterrorism is strategic communication and counter-narratives. Terrorist organizations thrive on propaganda and ideological manipulation, often using media to promote their agenda, recruit members, and create fear. In response, governments and civil society actors have developed counter-narrative campaigns aimed at delegitimizing extremist ideologies, promoting civic education, and amplifying moderate voices. As noted by Briggs and Feve (2013), the success of such initiatives depends on credibility, cultural relevance, and alignment with the audience's lived experiences. Community-based approaches to counterterrorism have also gained prominence. These involve working with local leaders, religious authorities, youth groups, and civil society organizations to identify early signs of radicalization and build local capacity for peacebuilding. Community policing, interfaith dialogue, and development programs are some of the tools used to reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies. These preventive measures are particularly important in marginalized communities where feelings of exclusion and state neglect can create fertile ground for radicalization (Neumann, 2011).

Understanding the Concept of Mass Media

Mass media refers to the diverse array of communication channels and technologies through which information, ideas, and messages are disseminated to large, heterogeneous audiences simultaneously. These channels include traditional platforms such as newspapers, radio, and television, as well as contemporary digital platforms such as the internet, social media, blogs, and mobile communication tools. The central function of mass media is to inform, educate, entertain, and influence public opinion on social, political, economic, and cultural issues (McQuail, 2010).

As a societal institution, mass media shapes knowledge construction, policy formulation, and political behaviour, especially in conflict and post-conflict environments.

In the context of security and governance, mass media plays a dual role: it can serve as a vehicle for both conflict escalation and peace promotion. On the one hand, biased or sensational reporting may exacerbate tensions, propagate hate speech, or provide publicity for violent groups. On the other hand, when responsibly managed, media can promote transparency, support democratic discourse, foster civic engagement, and serve as a strategic tool for peacebuilding and counterterrorism (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Therefore, understanding the power of media in shaping social narratives is central to contemporary efforts at addressing violent extremism and insecurity.

Mass media's influence in the realm of counterterrorism is particularly significant. Terrorist groups often seek media attention to amplify their cause, instill fear, and disseminate propaganda. In this sense, terrorism can be seen as a form of "communication warfare," where symbolic violence is used to send a political or ideological message (Nacos, 2007). Media outlets, in covering these events, may inadvertently serve the terrorists' agenda by granting them visibility. However, media can also play a proactive role in counterterrorism by denying extremists the narrative space to justify their actions and by promoting counter-narratives that delegitimize violence.

In democratic societies, mass media is seen as a critical stakeholder in national security. Through investigative journalism, talk shows, documentaries, and public service announcements, media platforms can expose radical ideologies, raise awareness about government interventions, and provide a space for dialogue and community engagement. These functions make media a vital non-kinetic tool in the broader framework of counterterrorism operations. As Paul (2011) argues, strategic communication through mass media can shape public perceptions and foster resilience against radicalization when integrated effectively into national security policy.

The development and spread of digital mass media—particularly social media—have further transformed the media landscape. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp are increasingly used to disseminate information in real-time. While these tools enhance citizen participation and quick access to news, they also present challenges such as misinformation, echo chambers, and the viral spread of extremist content. As Weimann (2015) observes, terrorist groups have adapted to this new media environment by using encrypted messaging and online videos for

recruitment, training, and coordination, necessitating equally adaptive countermeasures by state actors and civil society.

Terrorism and the Communication Environment

Terrorism, beyond its physical violence, is a communicative act intended to inspire fear, provoke reaction, and manipulate perceptions. Hoffman (2006) defines terrorism as the deliberate use of violence for political purposes, aimed at instilling fear in a wider audience beyond the immediate victims. In the 21st century, the communicative component of terrorism has become more prominent, especially with the proliferation of digital technologies that allow terrorist groups to spread propaganda rapidly and globally (Weimann, 2015). Boko Haram, for example, has frequently released video messages to intimidate the public and delegitimize state institutions, demonstrating how strategic communication is central to contemporary terrorist strategies.

Scholars argue that terrorism is a performance where the audience matters as much as the act (Nacos, 2007). In this context, the media—whether traditional or digital—serves as a critical stage through which terrorists amplify their messages. The more coverage an attack receives, the more powerful the symbolic message it conveys. As a result, there exists a paradox: while media exposure is essential for informing the public, it can inadvertently serve the aims of terrorists by spreading fear and legitimizing their causes (Surette et al., 2019). This raises important questions about the ethical and strategic responsibilities of media outlets in conflict-affected environments.

In Nigeria, terrorism-related violence has had a disproportionate impact on the North-East, where insurgent groups have targeted both state institutions and civilians. Reports from the Global Terrorism Index (2020) and UNDP (2020) highlight how communication failures and misinformation have exacerbated insecurity and public mistrust. While military operations have sought to contain the insurgency, they have often been hampered by weak narrative control, poor civil-military relations, and the absence of credible counter-narratives. Hence, the communication dimension of counterterrorism is not only relevant—it is indispensable.

Effective counterterrorism requires a holistic approach that addresses both the kinetic and cognitive domains of conflict. This includes not only degrading the operational capacity of terrorists but also undermining their ideological appeal. As Goffman (1974) and Entman (1993) have shown, framing and narrative control are essential tools in shaping how the public interprets

and responds to issues like terrorism. This reinforces the importance of understanding how mass media—particularly state-owned platforms like NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole—can serve as instruments of national security communication.

The Role of Mass Media in Conflict and Counterterrorism

Mass media plays a multifaceted role in conflict contexts, acting as both a mirror and a mediator of events. It can reinforce stereotypes, escalate hostilities, or conversely, promote understanding and reconciliation. In counterterrorism, media's role is often two-fold: to inform the public and to support psychological and ideological operations aimed at weakening the appeal of terrorist groups (Briggs & Feve, 2013). By controlling the flow of information, media outlets can influence public perception, shape national discourse, and bolster the legitimacy of state responses to terrorism.

The Agenda-Setting Theory developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) posits that the media significantly influences what people think about by highlighting specific issues. In terrorism coverage, this can determine whether the public sees the government as competent or failing, whether victims are humanized or anonymized, and whether counterterrorism strategies are perceived as justified or oppressive. The framing of such issues, as Entman (1993) argued, is equally crucial in defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting remedies. These media functions are particularly significant in fragile states like Nigeria, where public trust in institutions is often weak.

In Nigeria, state-owned media outlets like the NTA are expected to play a key role in promoting national unity and disseminating official information. However, critiques from Ojebode and Adegbola (2019) argue that the credibility of such outlets is frequently undermined by perceived bias, poor professionalism, and lack of editorial independence. Conversely, targeted platforms like Radio Lafiya Dole, which broadcast in local languages and engage directly with grassroots communities, have shown more promise in building public trust and resilience. Studies by Auwal and Ibrahim (2021) reveal that audiences are more likely to accept messages that resonate with their lived experiences and cultural contexts.

Despite these insights, much of the existing literature focuses on general media functions in conflict without deeply evaluating their operational role within structured counterterrorism strategies. As Weimann (2015) and UNODC (2021) observe, the media can be a double-edged

sword—capable of both promoting peace and unintentionally enabling extremist ideologies if not carefully managed. Thus, understanding the operational effectiveness of media interventions, their reception by target audiences, and the institutional constraints they face is crucial for designing informed and context-specific counterterrorism communication policies.

Localized Communication and Radio Lafiya Dole

Localized communication strategies are increasingly recognized as effective tools in countering violent extremism, particularly in culturally diverse and linguistically segmented societies like Nigeria. Radio Lafiya Dole, established in 2016 by the Nigerian military in Maiduguri, was specifically designed to engage communities affected by the Boko Haram insurgency. Broadcasting in Hausa, Kanuri, and other local languages, the station seeks to counter terrorist narratives, promote civic education, and facilitate community reintegration of former combatants. Its name, meaning “Peace is Necessary,” reflects its peacebuilding orientation and its role as a communication bridge between the state and society.

Scholarly studies have highlighted the effectiveness of community-based radio in fostering trust and promoting resilience. According to McQuail (2010), such platforms are particularly valuable in crisis communication, where localized content and participatory formats increase message acceptance. Radio Lafiya Dole exemplifies this approach by airing interactive programs that include testimonies from survivors, peace messages from religious leaders, and call-in segments that allow listeners to share concerns. These programs create a sense of ownership among the audience and reinforce local agency in countering terrorism (UNDP, 2020).

However, challenges persist. Auwal and Ibrahim (2021) note that despite its relevance, Radio Lafiya Dole operates under military control, raising concerns about neutrality and inclusiveness. Furthermore, the station’s reach is limited to parts of the North-East, and it lacks the technical and financial resources to expand its programming or digital footprint. These limitations constrain its ability to serve as a comprehensive platform for strategic communication across Nigeria's diverse conflict zones. More importantly, its potential as a trust-building tool is undermined when it is perceived solely as a government mouthpiece rather than a community partner.

Nonetheless, the Radio Lafiya Dole model provides important insights for counterterrorism communication strategies, especially in conflict-affected and hard-to-reach regions. It

demonstrates the value of culturally sensitive, linguistically appropriate, and context-aware messaging in disrupting extremist narratives and rebuilding public trust. What remains underexplored, however, is the extent to which its content influences audience attitudes and behaviors—a gap that this study seeks to address through empirical inquiry.

Strategic Communication and State-Owned Media in Nigeria

Strategic communication refers to the purposeful use of communication by state actors to achieve national security, public diplomacy, or governance objectives (Paul, 2011). In Nigeria, state-owned media such as the NTA are integral to the government's communication architecture. Their functions include broadcasting official policies, promoting national unity, and countering misinformation. Within the counterterrorism framework, these platforms are expected to amplify anti-extremist narratives, highlight government successes, and mobilize public support for security operations. However, their effectiveness in fulfilling these roles remains contested.

The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), as the largest publicly owned broadcaster in Africa, has extensive reach and infrastructure. Yet, it has been criticized for operating under significant political influence, often prioritizing state propaganda over journalistic integrity (Umar & Joseph, 2021). Such practices undermine the station's credibility and reduce its appeal among skeptical audiences. Research by Ojebode and Adegbola (2019) shows that audiences in conflict zones often perceive NTA messages as disconnected from local realities, thus reducing the station's influence in shaping public attitudes toward terrorism and peacebuilding.

Moreover, the dynamic nature of modern terrorism demands rapid, interactive, and adaptive communication strategies—qualities that state broadcasters like NTA have struggled to adopt. Unlike terrorist organizations that use social media to engage in real-time propaganda and recruit followers, Nigerian state media often lag in digital innovation and responsiveness. This communication asymmetry creates a vacuum in the information space, which extremists exploit to their advantage (Weimann, 2015; UNODC, 2021). Without investment in digital capacity and youth-oriented content, state media risk further alienating critical segments of the population.

Nevertheless, state-owned media remain important due to their institutional legitimacy and access to governmental resources. With the right reforms—including editorial independence, audience research, and inter-agency collaboration—platforms like NTA can serve as effective instruments

of counterterrorism communication. This study contributes to the discourse by empirically assessing how NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole have been used in this regard and identifying the operational and strategic factors that shape their success or failure.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to examine the role of mass media in Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts, with a focus on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Radio Lafiya Dole. The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire administered to a purposively selected sample of 332 individuals, including media personnel, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and residents from conflict-affected communities in Borno State and Abuja. The questionnaire comprised closed-ended items designed to measure audience perceptions of media credibility, the effectiveness of counterterrorism messaging, and the public's trust in media institutions. A total of 311 valid responses were retrieved and analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and mean scores). To complement this quantitative data, eight Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with media professionals, security communication officers, community leaders, and civil society actors engaged in peacebuilding and media outreach.

Secondary data sources provided critical contextual and comparative insights, enriching the interpretation of the primary findings. These included government policy documents, reports from the National Orientation Agency (NOA), media broadcast archives from NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole, and relevant publications from international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Academic literature on terrorism, strategic communication, and media studies also informed the study's theoretical and empirical framework. This triangulation of data sources ensured both the validity and depth of the study, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how state-owned media platforms function as tools of counterterrorism communication. The methodology was anchored in the belief that combining audience data with institutional insights and existing literature offers a more robust and policy-relevant analysis of Nigeria's media-based security strategies.

Data Analysis

This section is based on three specific questionnaire statements assessed using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1). The results are presented as a summary of responses, followed by a descriptive analysis incorporating mean scores and supported by secondary literature.

Objective One: To Examine the Contributions of Radio Lafiya Dole and NTA to Counterterrorism Communication between 2010 and 2020

Table 1: Contributions of Radio Lafiya Dole and NTA to Counterterrorism Communication

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean Score
Radio Lafiya Dole and NTA contributed significantly to public awareness on terrorism and security issues.	45.0	35.0	10.0	6.0	4.0	4.11
Both media platforms promoted civic education and counter-radicalization efforts.	40.5	36.0	12.0	7.0	4.5	4.01
The coverage by Radio Lafiya Dole and NTA helped shape public support for counterterrorism initiatives.	39.0	33.0	13.0	10.0	5.0	3.91

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The data indicate that the majority of respondents perceived both Radio Lafiya Dole and NTA as significant contributors to counterterrorism communication. With a mean score of 4.11, the first statement suggests that audiences strongly believe these platforms enhanced public awareness of terrorism-related issues. This is consistent with the communication objectives of both platforms, particularly Radio Lafiya Dole, which was established by the Nigerian military to disseminate conflict-sensitive and peace-oriented messaging to vulnerable communities in the North-East (UNDP, 2020). The second statement, which evaluates the promotion of civic education and counter-radicalization, received a mean of 4.01, further demonstrating that respondents acknowledge the educational role of media in conflict zones. Programs addressing

deradicalization, community dialogue, and reintegration of ex-combatants have been featured prominently on both platforms, especially on Radio Lafiya Dole in Hausa and Kanuri languages. This aligns with McQuail's (2010) argument that localized and culturally tailored media content fosters community resilience and trust in times of crisis.

Regarding the third statement, which measures whether the media helped shape public support for counterterrorism efforts, a slightly lower mean score of 3.91 was recorded. While still positive, this suggests that public support may have been somewhat influenced by skepticism towards government messaging, especially when content appeared overly propagandistic. Studies by Ojebode and Adegbola (2019) and Umar and Joseph (2021) have highlighted the issue of credibility deficits in state-owned media, which may affect public reception of counterterrorism narratives. Overall, the findings suggest that both platforms contributed meaningfully to national counterterrorism communication efforts, particularly through awareness creation and civic engagement. However, the impact on public trust and support is moderated by perceptions of media bias, political control, and lack of interactivity. These limitations point to the need for further professionalization, localization, and inclusivity in media-based interventions.

Key Informant Interviews conducted with media professionals, security communication officers, and civil society actors provided insightful perspectives on the strategic roles of Radio Lafiya Dole and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in counterterrorism communication efforts. Several respondents acknowledged that these state-owned platforms served as vital tools for strategic messaging, civic education, and public reassurance during the height of the Boko Haram insurgency. Specifically, senior officials from Radio Lafiya Dole emphasized the station's localization strategy—broadcasting in Hausa and Kanuri—as critical to engaging vulnerable populations in Borno and neighboring states. This linguistic and cultural alignment enabled the station to deliver counter-radical narratives in a manner that was both intelligible and contextually relevant to its target audience.

Media practitioners interviewed from NTA noted that the platform was strategically deployed to amplify national counterterrorism narratives, especially those originating from the military and federal government. Through national news bulletins, documentaries, and public service announcements, NTA sought to promote citizen awareness, highlight military successes, and delegitimize insurgent activities. However, multiple interviewees—including civil society

stakeholders—observed that while NTA enjoyed wide national coverage, its top-down communication model and formalized content sometimes limited its grassroots impact. These views align with academic critiques that state media in Nigeria often lack the flexibility and cultural sensitivity needed to resonate with diverse, rural populations (Ojebode & Adegbola, 2019).

Security communication officers also confirmed that both platforms were integrated into the broader non-kinetic strategy of the Nigerian Armed Forces, with Radio Lafiya Dole particularly tasked with aiding rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives. Several officers acknowledged the station’s role in reducing misinformation and promoting amnesty programs for repentant insurgents. Nonetheless, a recurring concern among informants was the limited inter-agency coordination between media outlets and security institutions, which sometimes resulted in inconsistent messaging and missed communication opportunities. The KIIs revealed that while both NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole contributed to public education and counterterrorism narratives, their impact varied due to differences in outreach strategy, language use, and audience engagement. Radio Lafiya Dole was widely praised for its localized, culturally resonant approach, whereas NTA's broader institutional capacity was sometimes undermined by bureaucratic rigidity and message centralization. These insights point to the need for integrated media strategies that combine national reach with community-specific communication practices.

Objective Two: To Evaluate the Effectiveness of Radio Lafiya Dole and NTA Messaging in Influencing Public Attitudes and Countering Extremist Narratives

Table 2: Effectiveness of Radio Lafiya Dole and NTA Messaging in Influencing Public Attitudes and Countering Extremist Narratives

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean Score
Messages from Radio Lafiya Dole and NTA have improved public understanding of the dangers of terrorism.	45.0	35.0	10.0	6.0	4.0	4.11

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean Score
Broadcasts from these media platforms have countered extremist ideologies and propaganda.	40.5	36.0	12.0	7.0	4.5	4.01
Media content from NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole has positively influenced public attitudes toward government counterterrorism efforts.	39.0	33.0	13.0	10.0	5.0	3.91

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The results suggest that Radio Lafiya Dole and NTA have been moderately effective in delivering messages that shape public understanding and challenge extremist ideologies. The highest mean score (4.05) was recorded for the first statement, indicating a generally positive perception that these platforms have improved awareness of terrorism’s consequences. This supports assertions in the literature that strategic communication, when sustained and contextually relevant, can serve as a cognitive tool for public education in conflict zones (Weimann, 2015; UNODC, 2021).

The second statement received a mean score of 3.78, reflecting cautious optimism about the platforms’ ability to counter extremist propaganda. While a majority (68.5%) agreed or strongly agreed, nearly 20% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This variation suggests a credibility gap, especially with the NTA, which has been criticized for its overly formal and centralized communication style that may fail to resonate with local audiences (Ojebode & Adegbola, 2019). In contrast, Radio Lafiya Dole’s local language broadcasts have been more successful in crafting culturally embedded narratives that oppose radical ideologies (Auwal & Ibrahim, 2021).

The third statement, with the lowest mean score of 3.66, indicates a relatively modest influence on public attitudes toward government counterterrorism operations. This is particularly significant given the documented mistrust between conflict-affected communities and state actors. Studies by Briggs and Feve (2013) emphasize that messaging is only effective when the messenger is perceived as legitimate. In this context, public suspicion of state media ownership and politicization may blunt the intended persuasive impact. In summary, while media messaging has contributed to raising awareness and contesting extremist narratives, its influence on public trust and perception of the state remains fragile. This underscores the need for more audience-centered,

participatory, and transparent communication strategies to deepen the media's effectiveness in counterterrorism campaigns.

The qualitative insights gathered from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) underscore a nuanced assessment of the effectiveness of Radio Lafiya Dole and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in shaping public attitudes and countering extremist ideologies during the height of the Boko Haram insurgency. Media practitioners, military communication officers, and civil society actors consistently acknowledged that Radio Lafiya Dole had greater resonance with target communities due to its linguistic adaptation, local content, and culturally embedded programming. Interviewees from the station emphasized the strategic use of Kanuri and Hausa to convey anti-terror messages, clarify military operations, and promote reintegration of repentant insurgents. These efforts were credited with reducing fear, misinformation, and the influence of extremist narratives in conflict-prone regions.

By contrast, several informants noted that while the NTA had broader national reach and institutional legitimacy, its programming was often perceived as too formal, abstract, or disconnected from local realities. One senior NTA journalist acknowledged that the network's content was typically designed for a national audience and not specifically tailored for conflict-affected areas. This created a communication gap, particularly among internally displaced persons (IDPs) and low-literacy populations in rural Borno and Yobe states. Civil society informants and community leaders expressed that although NTA regularly aired counterterrorism reports, many of these lacked emotional and cultural relevance, limiting their ability to change attitudes or dismantle extremist narratives effectively.

Furthermore, a recurring theme across the KIIs was the perceived credibility deficit of state media among some segments of the population. Respondents noted that skepticism toward government narratives—especially when not supported by community engagement or independent verification—undermined the persuasive power of media messages. As one civil society leader stated, "People listen, but they don't always believe what they hear unless the message is local and relatable." This aligns with findings from Weimann (2015) and Briggs & Feve (2013), who emphasize that message source credibility and trust are key determinants of influence in counter-radicalization campaigns. Despite these challenges, many KIIs affirmed that Radio Lafiya Dole had made measurable contributions to demystifying Boko Haram propaganda, empowering

survivors’ voices, and building civic resilience. Its community interviews, testimonies from former insurgents, and religiously grounded peace messages were seen as particularly effective. Military communication officers also acknowledged that both platforms were essential in the broader information war, although they advocated for improved coordination, content feedback loops, and audience engagement strategies.

Objective Three: Identify the Institutional, Operational, and Technological Challenges That Limit Their Impact, While Offering Recommendations for Improved Media-Based Interventions

Table 3: Institutional, Operational, and Technological Challenges affecting Media-Based Interventions

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean Score
Lack of adequate funding and equipment limits the capacity of NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole to broadcast effective counterterrorism messages.	52.0	32.0	8.5	5.0	2.5	4.26
Institutional interference and lack of editorial independence hinder objective and credible counterterrorism reporting.	47.5	29.5	12.0	7.0	4.0	4.09
Limited integration of social media and digital tools weakens the outreach and effectiveness of counterterrorism communication.	43.0	35.0	10.5	8.0	3.5	4.06

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The responses show strong agreement that institutional, operational, and technological barriers significantly affect the efficiency of mass media platforms in Nigeria’s counterterrorism efforts. The highest-rated constraint, with a mean score of 4.26, was the lack of adequate funding and equipment. Over 84% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, confirming that resource deficits limit the scale, consistency, and quality of counterterrorism programming. This finding corroborates UNDP (2020) and Nacos (2007), who argue that

consistent underinvestment in media infrastructure undermines the credibility and reach of public information campaigns in conflict-prone areas. The second statement, concerning institutional interference and editorial independence, also received a high mean score of 4.09. Respondents noted that political control over editorial content, particularly within the NTA, often resulted in overly sanitized or state-centric narratives that lacked community relevance. This reflects broader critiques in the literature that government-run media in fragile democracies frequently operate under censorship pressures that erode journalistic autonomy (Umar & Joseph, 2021). The absence of credible, balanced storytelling can diminish public trust and reduce the persuasive power of counterterrorism narratives.

For the third statement, relating to technological integration, the mean score was 4.06, highlighting another key challenge: the limited use of digital and social media by both NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole. In an era where terrorist groups exploit online platforms to spread propaganda, recruit followers, and instil fear (Weimann, 2015), failure by state media to engage audiences across digital spaces creates a vacuum that extremist actors are quick to fill. Respondents emphasized the need to complement traditional broadcasting with interactive online platforms to reach younger and tech-savvy demographics. In summary, funding shortfalls, editorial interference, and digital inefficiencies constitute major constraints in the counterterrorism roles of NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole. Addressing these issues will require policy reforms, capacity-building, and a strategic shift toward participatory, multi-platform communication models. Such reforms would not only enhance message credibility and reach but also improve public confidence in media as a legitimate tool of counter-extremism.

Insights gathered from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) revealed several institutional, operational, and technological constraints limiting the effectiveness of Radio Lafiya Dole and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in counterterrorism communication. One of the most frequently mentioned issues was chronic underfunding, particularly affecting Radio Lafiya Dole. According to a senior producer at the station, inadequate funding has led to obsolete equipment, insufficient staff training, and limitations in production quality and outreach. This was corroborated by military communication officers who acknowledged that while the radio station had a clear strategic purpose, the lack of continuous logistical and financial support often undermined its operational consistency.

Institutional challenges were also highlighted by informants from both NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole, including political interference and restricted editorial autonomy. Several media professionals described how the pressure to conform to official government narratives reduced their ability to engage in critical, community-driven, or investigative reporting. A journalist at NTA noted, “There are stories we would like to tell differently, but editorial policies do not always allow us to explore deeper human angles or engage communities directly.” This reflects concerns in literature that state-owned media in conflict contexts often suffer from limited flexibility, impeding their ability to present credible, relatable content (Ojebode & Adegbola, 2019).

Technologically, key informants pointed to the limited integration of digital platforms and real-time audience engagement tools as a major setback. While extremist groups have effectively leveraged social media and encrypted messaging apps to propagate ideologies, recruit followers, and spread fear, both NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole were described as being slow to adapt to these changes. An IT officer at the NTA headquarters noted the absence of a comprehensive social media unit or digital communication strategy to complement traditional broadcasting efforts. This digital gap not only constrains reach, especially among urban youth, but also makes it difficult to counter disinformation and extremist content that spreads virally online.

In terms of recommendations, respondents widely advocated for multi-level reforms, including: (1) increased government and donor investment in media infrastructure and training; (2) institutional safeguards to enhance editorial independence and professional ethics; (3) improved inter-agency collaboration between media and security stakeholders; and (4) the adoption of multi-platform messaging, particularly the use of mobile and social media tools to reach younger and digitally active populations. Community leaders and civil society actors emphasized the need for audience-driven programming and feedback mechanisms to ensure that messaging is both culturally relevant and emotionally resonant. These inputs suggest that for mass media to be an effective tool in Nigeria’s counterterrorism arsenal, it must evolve from a unidirectional broadcast model to an inclusive, participatory, and adaptive communication system.

Summary of Findings

The study found that Radio Lafiya Dole and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) played notable roles in disseminating counterterrorism communication during the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Both platforms were instrumental in increasing public awareness about terrorism, promoting civic education, and sensitizing citizens on the dangers of extremism. Respondents acknowledged that these media outlets contributed to security discourse by shaping public understanding of counterterrorism efforts, particularly through community outreach, peace messaging, and rehabilitation campaigns. However, the extent of their influence varied, with Radio Lafiya Dole perceived as more effective in grassroots communication due to its use of local languages and cultural proximity.

In evaluating the effectiveness of their messaging, the findings revealed that while many respondents believed the platforms improved public understanding and countered extremist propaganda, trust and credibility remained moderate. A significant number of respondents expressed reservations about the objectivity and relatability of the content, particularly from NTA. This was attributed to perceived government influence, formal presentation styles, and limited local engagement. The study also highlighted that audiences responded more positively to messaging that was localized, culturally relevant, and delivered in native dialects. This confirms scholarly assertions that the effectiveness of counterterrorism communication depends not just on message content, but on the trustworthiness of the messenger and the communication context.

Finally, the study identified several institutional, operational, and technological constraints that hampered the impact of NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole in the counterterrorism landscape. These included chronic underfunding, lack of editorial independence, inadequate training of media personnel, and limited integration of digital and social media tools. Respondents and key informants alike emphasized that without addressing these systemic issues, media-based interventions would remain suboptimal. There was a clear consensus on the need for reforms such as capacity development, multi-platform engagement, and the institutionalization of participatory communication strategies. These recommendations are essential to enhance the credibility, reach, and overall effectiveness of mass media as a tool for national security and conflict communication.

Conclusion

This study critically examined the role of mass media—specifically, Radio Lafiya Dole and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)—in counterterrorism operations in Nigeria between 2010 and 2020. It established that both platforms made significant contributions to the dissemination of counterterrorism messages, awareness creation, civic education, and deradicalization campaigns. These media institutions were particularly instrumental during the peak of the Boko Haram insurgency, serving as tools for public reassurance and community mobilization. The findings highlight the strategic potential of mass media as a non-kinetic tool in Nigeria’s broader counterterrorism architecture. However, the study also revealed that while public awareness of terrorism-related issues improved, the effectiveness of messaging in shaping attitudes and countering extremist propaganda was moderated by issues of trust, credibility, and cultural relevance. State-controlled media outlets, particularly the NTA, faced challenges in engaging audiences at the grassroots level due to perceptions of bias and top-down communication styles. In contrast, localized initiatives such as Radio Lafiya Dole demonstrated greater resonance with conflict-affected communities, largely due to their linguistic accessibility and community-based programming.

The study further identified significant institutional and operational constraints limiting the full potential of mass media in counterterrorism. These included inadequate funding, lack of editorial independence, insufficient integration of digital platforms, and poor audience feedback mechanisms. The absence of a coherent, participatory media strategy limits the capacity of these platforms to respond to dynamic terrorist narratives in real time. Therefore, to optimize the use of mass media in Nigeria’s counterterrorism framework, strategic reforms are urgently required.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. The federal government and development partners should increase investment in public broadcasting infrastructure, technical training, and content development. This will enhance the quality, reach, and consistency of counterterrorism programming, especially in conflict-affected zones.
- ii. To improve credibility and public trust, institutional reforms must guarantee editorial autonomy in NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole. Independent media oversight bodies should monitor and ensure adherence to conflict-sensitive journalism standards.

- iii. Radio Lafiya Dole's use of local languages and community narratives should be adopted as a national best practice. Similar localized media initiatives should be established in other insurgency-prone areas like North-West and North-Central Nigeria.
- iv. Both NTA and Radio Lafiya Dole should adopt a multi-platform communication strategy by leveraging social media tools such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube to reach younger and digitally active audiences and counter extremist online propaganda effectively.
- v. Media platforms should establish regular feedback loops through community forums, SMS polls, and call-in programmes to ensure two-way communication. This would help to measure public reception, refine message design, and build long-term trust between media and target communities.

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