

Disinformation as a Tool for Recruitment by Terrorist Groups in Nigeria

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Abstract

Terrorist organizations in Nigeria, such as Boko Haram and ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province), have increasingly utilized disinformation as a strategic tool to manipulate public opinion and recruit members. This study examines the mechanisms, channels, and effects of disinformation campaigns, analyzing their impact on radicalization and recruitment. Using a qualitative approach, this research explores case studies, social media propaganda, and counter-narratives to assess the effectiveness of terrorist recruitment through disinformation. The findings highlight the urgent need for counterstrategies that involve media literacy, governmental intervention, and community resilience programs. The paper argues that disinformation plays a significant role in the recruitment strategies of terrorist groups in Nigeria, such as Boko Haram and ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province). These groups use false narratives, propaganda, and social media manipulation to radicalize and recruit individuals, particularly in vulnerable communities. The paper concludes that disinformation is a critical tool used by terrorist groups in Nigeria to manipulate narratives, radicalize individuals, and recruit members. Boko Haram, ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province), and other extremist factions leverage fake news, conspiracy theories, and misinformation to exploit vulnerable populations.

Keywords

Disinformation,
Recruitment,
Terrorist, Too and
Nigeria



I. Introduction

Disinformation has become a critical tool for terrorist organizations in Nigeria, including Boko Haram, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and other insurgent groups operating in the country. These groups leverage false information to manipulate public perception, radicalize individuals, and recruit new members. Their tactics involve spreading propaganda, fabricating narratives, and exploiting existing societal grievances to advance their extremist ideologies (Adigwe et al., 2024). The ability of these groups to effectively use disinformation has been amplified by the rise of social media and encrypted messaging platforms, making it easier to reach and influence vulnerable populations.

Onyejelem et al., (2025) observed that one of the primary ways in which disinformation is used in recruitment is through ideological manipulation. Terrorist groups craft narratives that frame their cause as a divine mission or a justified struggle against oppression. By distorting religious teachings, they convince potential recruits that joining their movement is a moral obligation. In many cases, they falsely claim that mainstream religious leaders have been corrupted by the government or foreign influences, positioning

themselves as the true defenders of faith. This manipulation is particularly effective in regions where religious identity plays a significant role in daily life.

Adams and Abubakar (2023) remark that economic hardship and political instability further create an environment where disinformation thrives. Many young people in Nigeria face unemployment, poverty, and a lack of opportunities, making them susceptible to terrorist recruitment. Extremist groups spread misinformation about the benefits of joining their ranks, often promising financial incentives, protection, and social status. In some cases, they falsely portray themselves as a form of governance, offering an alternative to a government that is often perceived as corrupt or ineffective. By doing so, they create the illusion that joining their movement will lead to a better quality of life, even though the reality is often one of violence and hardship (Adams & Abubakar, 2023).

Another method used by terrorist groups is the dissemination of false information about the Nigerian government and security forces. These groups frequently fabricate stories about human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, and religious persecution to sow distrust among the population. By portraying the government as an enemy of the people, they aim to alienate communities from state institutions and create an environment where radicalization can take place more easily (Aondover et al., 2025). For instance, they may exaggerate or completely fabricate reports of military operations resulting in civilian casualties, using doctored images or videos to make their claims more believable. Such tactics help them gain sympathy and support, especially in areas where tensions between the government and local communities already exist.

Similarly, Vitalis et al., (2025) observed that social media and digital platforms have become crucial battlegrounds for disinformation. Terrorist groups use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, and WhatsApp to spread propaganda and reach a global audience. They create fake accounts and pages to distribute extremist content, including videos, speeches, and testimonials from alleged former government soldiers or citizens who claim to have suffered under state oppression. The use of encrypted messaging apps allows them to communicate with potential recruits securely, making it difficult for security agencies to track and counter their activities. Social media algorithms, which prioritize engagement, often amplify their messages, further increasing their reach.

Additionally, terrorist groups exploit local conflicts and grievances to recruit new members. Nigeria has experienced various intercommunal conflicts, including farmer-herder clashes, ethnic tensions, and religious disputes. Extremist groups manipulate these conflicts by spreading false narratives that blame one group for the suffering of another (Olaniran, 2022). For example, they may falsely claim that a particular ethnic or religious community is being targeted for extermination by the government, inciting fear and anger that leads to radicalization. By doing so, they position themselves as the only group willing to defend and protect those who feel marginalized.

It is in this context that Airaoje et al., (2023) submit that countering terrorist disinformation requires a multi-faceted approach. Strengthening digital literacy and fact-checking initiatives can help communities recognize and reject false narratives. Governments, civil society organizations, and media houses must work together to debunk extremist propaganda and provide accurate information to the public. Social media companies must also take responsibility by identifying and removing extremist content while ensuring their platforms are not used to spread harmful ideologies. Additionally, community engagement

programs that provide alternative narratives and economic opportunities can help reduce the appeal of terrorist recruitment efforts.

According to Ogbondah and Agbese (2018) disinformation is a powerful weapon in the hands of terrorist groups in Nigeria. Thus, by manipulating religious, economic, and political realities, they are able to attract new members and sustain their operations. For instance, Boko Haram's leader, Abubakar Shekau, often misrepresented Islamic teachings, claiming that Western education (Boko) is forbidden (Haram). This messaging convinced many young people that rejecting formal education was an act of religious devotion. Thousands of young people abandoned schooling and joined the group, believing it was a divine mission. Terrorist groups spread false narratives about government actions to instill distrust and gain sympathizers. For example, in 2020, Boko Haram spread a fabricated story that Nigerian security forces were deliberately targeting Muslim communities under the guise of counterterrorism operations. This disinformation fueled anti-government sentiments, pushing more individuals to support or join the insurgents.

Many terrorist recruits are lured through lies about better economic opportunities and social benefits. In this context, ISWAP spread false messages that joining their group would provide stable incomes, food, and housing. Disillusioned youths from impoverished areas were deceived into joining, only to find themselves trapped in violent extremism. Terrorist groups produce fake testimonies of supposed defectors or victims, portraying the government as weak and their cause as righteous. In 2018, Boko Haram released a video featuring young fighters claiming they had been "rescued" from the oppression of Nigerian forces and given a better life within the terrorist ranks. Such disinformation persuaded more recruits to view Boko Haram as a liberating force rather than a terrorist organization. Terrorist groups in Nigeria strategically use disinformation to manipulate perceptions, foster distrust, and recruit individuals. Countering this requires media literacy programs, proactive government communication, and digital interventions to curb the spread of fake news.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The paper employed Social Influence Theory. The Social Influence Theory provides a suitable framework for understanding how disinformation is used as a tool for recruitment by terrorist groups in Nigeria. This theory examines how individuals are influenced by social interactions, persuasive communication, and misinformation, leading to changes in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. It suggests that people are more likely to adopt certain ideas or behaviors when they are exposed to consistent, authoritative, or emotionally compelling messages from influential sources within their social environment. In the context of terrorist recruitment, disinformation serves as a powerful mechanism for exerting social influence, shaping perceptions, and radicalizing individuals (Msughter et al., 2023).

Terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP exploit various forms of social influence, particularly normative and informational influence, to manipulate and recruit individuals. Normative social influence refers to the pressure individuals feel to conform to group norms to gain acceptance or avoid rejection. In conflict-prone regions of Nigeria, where communities experience political and economic marginalization, extremist groups use disinformation to create a false sense of belonging and purpose. They craft narratives that portray their organization as a community of righteous individuals fighting against oppression (Goldsmith & Goldsmith, 2011). Through propaganda videos, online forums, and local preachers, they reinforce the idea that joining their cause is a moral or religious obligation, making individuals feel compelled to conform to this perceived duty.

Informational social influence, on the other hand, occurs when individuals rely on information from others to make decisions, particularly in situations of uncertainty or crisis. Many potential recruits, especially young people, lack access to reliable information sources due to poor education, weak media literacy, and limited government communication efforts. Terrorist groups take advantage of this gap by spreading misinformation that distorts reality. They may exaggerate government corruption, fabricate stories about military atrocities, or falsely claim that their movement is divinely sanctioned. By repeatedly exposing individuals to these falsehoods, they shape their perceptions and convince them that the terrorist group is the only legitimate force offering justice and protection (Pérez & Mugny, 2018).

The role of authority figures in social influence further strengthens the impact of disinformation in terrorist recruitment. Extremist groups often use charismatic leaders who present themselves as spiritual guides or revolutionary figures. These individuals disseminate misinformation through speeches, social media, and clandestine networks, making their followers more susceptible to radicalization. The Social Influence Theory explains that people are more likely to accept and act upon information when it comes from perceived authority figures, even if that information is false. This is particularly effective in communities where religious and traditional leaders hold significant sway over societal beliefs and behaviors.

Another critical aspect of the Social Influence Theory in the context of terrorist recruitment is the role of group dynamics. Disinformation does not operate in isolation but is reinforced within extremist networks. When an individual is introduced to a terrorist group, they become part of an echo chamber where only the group's ideology and misinformation are accepted. This controlled environment strengthens cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias, where individuals seek out and believe information that aligns with their preexisting views. The constant reinforcement of extremist narratives makes it increasingly difficult for recruits to challenge or escape the group's ideology.

Furthermore, the theory highlights how emotional appeal is used to strengthen disinformation's effectiveness in recruitment. Terrorist groups craft stories that evoke fear, anger, or a sense of injustice to make their messages more persuasive. They depict graphic images of alleged government crimes, fabricate stories about the suffering of a particular religious or ethnic group, and use testimonials from so-called "victims" to provoke emotional responses. Research in social influence suggests that when people experience strong emotions, they are more likely to accept information uncritically, making them more vulnerable to extremist narratives (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

Therefore, applying the Social Influence Theory to counterterrorism efforts requires addressing the mechanisms through which disinformation spreads and influences individuals. Media literacy programs can help communities recognize and question false narratives. Providing alternative sources of authority, such as credible religious leaders or community influencers, can counteract the influence of extremist figures. Moreover, breaking the isolation of at-risk individuals through community engagement programs and reintegration efforts can reduce their susceptibility to radical ideologies (Peng et al., 2017).

The Social Influence Theory provides a comprehensive explanation of how disinformation serves as a recruitment tool for terrorist groups in Nigeria. By leveraging normative and informational social influence, authority figures, group dynamics, and emotional appeals, extremist organizations manipulate individuals into joining their cause. Understanding these psychological and social processes is crucial for developing effective counter-disinformation strategies that disrupt terrorist recruitment efforts and promote social resilience against extremist propaganda.

III. Result and Discussion

3.1 Misinformation about Government and Security Forces

Misinformation regarding the Nigerian government and security forces is a significant challenge that influences public perception, weakens trust in institutions, and exacerbates insecurity. This issue is fueled by various actors, including terrorist groups, political entities, social media influencers, and even foreign interests (Aondover et al., 2022). The spread of misinformation can distort reality, create panic, and manipulate vulnerable populations into believing false narratives, ultimately affecting national security, governance, and counterterrorism efforts.

Omede and Alebiosu (2020) are of the view that misinformation about security forces typically revolves around accusations of human rights violations, corruption, inefficiency, and collusion with criminal or terrorist groups. One of the most common false narratives is that the Nigerian military deliberately targets civilians in counterinsurgency operations. This type of misinformation is often propagated by insurgent groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) to delegitimize the military's efforts and discourage local communities from cooperating with security agencies. There have been several cases where fabricated reports, exaggerated casualty figures, and manipulated images were circulated to portray the government as the aggressor rather than the protector of civilians.

Another prevalent form of misinformation is the claim that the government secretly supports or funds terrorist groups for political or economic gains. This conspiracy theory has been widely shared on social media and even promoted by some political figures to undermine opponents. These narratives often surface after major attacks or military failures, with claims that certain high-ranking officials are complicit in allowing terrorism to thrive (Aondover et al., 2024). While there are legitimate concerns about corruption and inefficiencies in the security sector, such misinformation can have severe consequences, including eroding public trust, fueling resentment, and discouraging communities from reporting terrorist activities (Mohammed, 2019).

False information about military operations is also commonly used to create panic and distrust. There have been numerous instances where reports of alleged military atrocities turned out to be fabricated or highly exaggerated. For example, in 2015, reports emerged claiming that the Nigerian Air Force had bombed a civilian settlement, killing thousands of people. Subsequent investigations revealed that these claims were grossly exaggerated, with evidence pointing to Boko Haram's involvement in the attack rather than the militaries. Such incidents highlight how misinformation can be weaponized to weaken security efforts and incite unrest.

Social media has played a crucial role in the rapid dissemination of misinformation about the government and security forces. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter have become breeding grounds for false narratives, often amplified by users who fail to verify the authenticity of the information they share. One major example was during the COVID-19 pandemic, when misinformation spread that the Nigerian military was using lockdown measures as a pretext to attack certain ethnic or religious groups. These false claims led to widespread fear and resistance against government-imposed restrictions, making it harder to implement public health measures (Usman & Owubokiri, 2023).

Another common form of misinformation involves the portrayal of military strength and capability. False reports have suggested that large numbers of Nigerian soldiers have defected, abandoned their posts, or refused to fight due to poor conditions. While there have

been isolated cases of desertion, as with any military force engaged in prolonged conflict, misinformation exaggerates these events to undermine public confidence in the security apparatus (Aondover et al., 2022). In some cases, manipulated videos and images have been used to depict Nigerian soldiers surrendering to terrorist groups when, in reality, the footage originated from entirely different conflicts or was digitally altered.

The impact of misinformation about government and security forces is far-reaching. It undermines counterterrorism efforts by discouraging local communities from cooperating with authorities, leading to a lack of intelligence sharing that is crucial for effective military operations. Additionally, it weakens public trust in government institutions, making it easier for opposition groups and extremists to exploit grievances and recruit new members. The spread of misinformation also affects international relations, as false reports of human rights abuses can damage Nigeria's reputation and lead to diplomatic or economic consequences, including the suspension of military aid from foreign partners.

There have been notable case studies demonstrating the dangers of misinformation. One such case was the 2015 Baga massacre, where initial reports claimed that the Nigerian military had killed over 2,000 civilians in Borno State. Investigations later revealed that Boko Haram was responsible for the killings, but by then, the damage had already been done. The misinformation had spread widely, leading to national and international condemnation of the Nigerian military, despite the fact that they were not the perpetrators. Another case occurred in 2021 when rumors circulated that the military was forcing civilians to falsely surrender as Boko Haram defectors. This narrative led to widespread anger among communities affected by insurgent violence, making it harder for the government to implement reintegration programs for genuine defectors (Ogunlana, 2019).

Misinformation about government and security forces is spread through multiple channels, including social media virality, manipulated images and videos, fake testimonies, and anonymous websites dedicated to anti-government propaganda. Some actors deliberately edit images from other conflict zones and present them as evidence of Nigerian military abuses. Others create false testimonies, paying individuals to claim they were victims of government persecution. These tactics are often used by terrorist groups to sow discord and discredit counterinsurgency operations.

To combat misinformation, a multi-faceted approach is required. Strengthening media literacy is essential in ensuring that citizens are equipped with the skills to verify sources and fact-check information before sharing it. Educational programs should be introduced at all levels to teach people how to identify fake news and avoid falling victim to propaganda. Government transparency and proactive communication are also crucial. Security agencies must release timely and credible information to counteract false narratives before they gain traction. Regular press briefings, social media engagement, and partnerships with reputable journalists can help bridge the information gap and prevent misinformation from spreading.

Social media regulation and fact-checking mechanisms must also be enhanced. Tech companies should work closely with the Nigerian government to detect and remove false content that could incite violence or undermine national security. Fact-checking organizations should be supported to provide independent verification of major news stories, particularly those related to security matters. Additionally, encouraging responsible journalism is key to countering misinformation. Investigative journalists should be given the resources and protection necessary to conduct in-depth reporting that exposes false claims and provides accurate accounts of events (Garba & Msaughter, 2023a).

Community engagement is another critical strategy in addressing misinformation. Traditional and religious leaders play influential roles in shaping public opinion, particularly in rural areas where access to reliable news sources may be limited. By engaging with these

leaders and equipping them with factual information, they can help dispel myths and prevent misinformation from taking root. Similarly, whistleblower protections should be strengthened to encourage individuals to report false claims without fear of retaliation.

Garba and Msughter (2023b) maintained that misinformation about the Nigerian government and security forces remains a serious challenge with far-reaching implications for national security and governance. The deliberate spread of false narratives undermines trust, weakens counterterrorism efforts, and fuels conflict. Addressing this issue requires a multi-pronged approach that includes media literacy, government transparency, fact-checking, responsible journalism, social media regulation, and community engagement. By taking these steps, Nigeria can mitigate the harmful effects of misinformation and strengthen its institutions against the threats posed by false narratives.

3.2 Social Media and Digital Propaganda

Social media and digital propaganda have become powerful tools for shaping public opinion, spreading misinformation, and influencing political and security narratives. The rapid expansion of digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, and Telegram has transformed the way people consume and share information. While these platforms have enhanced global communication, they have also been weaponized for disinformation campaigns, recruitment by extremist groups, and the manipulation of public perception. In Nigeria, social media has played a crucial role in both positive and negative ways, influencing political discourse, security narratives, and even contributing to civil unrest (Hile et al., 2023).

Digital propaganda refers to the deliberate dissemination of misleading, biased, or false information through online channels to achieve a specific agenda. This type of propaganda is often used by political actors, terrorist organizations, and foreign influencers to manipulate public sentiment, incite violence, or delegitimize authorities. In Nigeria, digital propaganda has been used by various groups, including insurgent organizations such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), political parties during election cycles, and even foreign entities seeking to destabilize the country's governance and security (Mohammed, 2021).

Social media has made the spread of propaganda faster and more effective than traditional forms of media. With millions of Nigerians having access to smartphones and the internet, misinformation spreads rapidly, often without verification. The nature of social media algorithms exacerbates this issue by prioritizing content that garners the most engagement, regardless of its accuracy. Misinformation and propaganda often appear in the form of fake news articles, manipulated images and videos, deepfake technology, and conspiracy theories that exploit existing social, political, and ethnic tensions (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022).

One of the most significant ways in which social media has been weaponized is through the recruitment and radicalization of individuals by terrorist organizations. Extremist groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP use encrypted messaging apps like Telegram and WhatsApp to distribute propaganda, share extremist ideologies, and recruit new members. These groups often exploit grievances such as economic hardship, political marginalization, and religious conflicts to lure individuals into their ranks. Propaganda videos showcasing battlefield victories, supposed government failures, and testimonials from fighters claiming to have found purpose and security within the group are widely circulated to convince vulnerable individuals to join.

Digital propaganda is also used to delegitimize the government and security forces. False narratives portraying the military as corrupt, oppressive, or complicit in violence are

commonly spread online. In some cases, images and videos from conflicts in other countries are misrepresented as evidence of Nigerian military atrocities. This type of propaganda weakens trust in government institutions, discourages citizens from cooperating with security agencies, and fosters anti-government sentiments (Msughter et al., 2023). During political crises, opposing factions often spread misinformation to undermine their rivals, further deepening divisions within the country.

A common tactic of digital propaganda is the creation of bot networks and coordinated disinformation campaigns. These networks consist of automated social media accounts programmed to amplify certain narratives, attack political opponents, or promote specific ideologies. In Nigeria, both campaigns have been used during election periods to spread misinformation about candidates, discredit political opponents, and create the illusion of mass public support for particular movements. Foreign actors have also been implicated in using social media to manipulate Nigerian politics, often by stoking ethnic and religious tensions through targeted misinformation campaigns.

The role of social media influencers in spreading digital propaganda cannot be ignored. Influencers with large followings often share unverified information, either intentionally or unintentionally, contributing to the spread of misinformation. Some influencers are paid to promote certain narratives, whether political, social, or security-related. Others, driven by personal biases or sensationalism, share controversial content without verifying its authenticity. The viral nature of social media means that once misinformation is spread, it is difficult to retract, even after it has been debunked (Owens-Ibie & Aondover, 2025).

Social media manipulation also plays a role in protests and civil movements. While digital platforms have been instrumental in mobilizing protests against injustice, they have also been used to spread false information that escalates tensions. During the End SARS protests in Nigeria, for instance, social media played a crucial role in organizing demonstrations against police brutality. However, it also became a battleground for misinformation, with exaggerated casualty figures, fake reports of military defections, and doctored videos being circulated to intensify public outrage. While some reports were accurate, others were designed to provoke violence and unrest.

The economic impact of digital propaganda is also significant. Misinformation and fake news can create economic instability by influencing investor confidence, disrupting business activities, and causing panic among consumers. False reports about government policies, exchange rates, or economic crises can trigger market reactions that affect both local and international businesses. In some cases, rumors about banking system failures or fuel shortages have led to mass panic withdrawals and artificial scarcity, exacerbating economic challenges. Addressing the issue of social media and digital propaganda requires a multi-faceted approach. Media literacy is crucial in equipping individuals with the ability to critically assess information before sharing it. Public awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate citizens on how to identify fake news, recognize propaganda tactics, and verify sources. Schools and universities should integrate media literacy programs into their curricula to build a more informed society (Malefakis, 2019).

Government transparency and proactive communication are also essential in countering misinformation. Security agencies and government bodies should provide timely, factual, and easily accessible information to counter false narratives before they gain traction. Establishing official digital platforms where verified updates are shared can help reduce the influence of propaganda. Collaborating with credible fact-checking organizations can also play a vital role in debunking false information and holding those who spread misinformation accountable. Social media regulation is another necessary step, but it must be approached

with caution to avoid infringing on freedom of speech (Usman et al., 2022). Governments can work with tech companies to develop policies that curb the spread of false information while ensuring that regulations are not used to suppress legitimate dissent. Encouraging social media platforms to improve content moderation, flag false information, and suspend accounts that repeatedly spread misinformation can help limit the reach of digital propaganda.

Community engagement is also critical in addressing digital propaganda. Local and religious leaders, who often hold significant influence, should be involved in debunking false narratives and promoting social cohesion. Community-driven fact-checking initiatives can also help in identifying and addressing misinformation at the grassroots level. Encouraging citizens to report false information and providing avenues for verifying news through official sources can reduce the spread of misinformation. social media and digital propaganda have become major tools for shaping narratives, influencing political and security developments, and spreading misinformation. While these platforms offer valuable opportunities for communication and activism, they have also been exploited by terrorist groups, political actors, and foreign entities to manipulate public perception (Nnam et al., 2019). The consequences of digital propaganda include increased radicalization, weakened trust in government institutions, political instability, economic disruption, and social unrest. Combating this issue requires a combination of media literacy, government transparency, social media regulation, fact-checking initiatives, and community engagement. By implementing these measures, Nigeria can mitigate the negative impacts of digital propaganda and promote a more informed and resilient society.

3.3 Countering Terrorist Disinformation

Terrorist disinformation is a deliberate strategy used by extremist groups to spread false narratives, manipulate public perception, recruit new members, and undermine government efforts to combat insurgency. In Nigeria, terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have effectively leveraged disinformation to fuel their ideologies, weaken trust in state institutions, and create fear and confusion among civilians. These groups use various methods, including social media propaganda, fabricated reports of military atrocities, manipulated videos and images, and conspiracy theories that paint them as protectors rather than aggressors. Countering terrorist disinformation requires a multi-pronged approach involving government agencies, media organizations, civil society, technology companies, and local communities.

Vitalis et al., (2024) state that a major aspect of countering terrorist disinformation is enhancing government transparency and communication. When the government fails to provide timely and credible information, misinformation and terrorist narratives gain traction. Security agencies and government officials must proactively release accurate reports on military operations, civilian safety, and counterterrorism successes. Press briefings, real-time updates on official platforms, and collaboration with journalists can help ensure that the public has access to verified information before false narratives spread. Additionally, government communication must be clear, consistent, and culturally sensitive to reach diverse audiences effectively.

Media literacy and public education play a crucial role in reducing the spread of terrorist disinformation. Many individuals unknowingly share false information, believing it to be true, especially when it aligns with their biases or fears. Education programs should teach people how to identify fake news, fact-check sources, and critically analyze information before sharing it. Schools, universities, and religious institutions can incorporate media literacy training into their curricula to equip citizens with the skills needed to resist propaganda. Public awareness campaigns through television, radio, and social media can

further reinforce the importance of verifying information before dissemination (Mustapha, 2024).

Social media regulation and technological interventions are also critical in countering terrorist disinformation. Extremist groups rely heavily on digital platforms to spread propaganda, recruit members, and coordinate attacks. Technology companies must work with governments to detect and remove terrorist content, disrupt online radicalization efforts, and shut down accounts linked to extremist networks. Artificial intelligence and machine learning can be used to track and flag disinformation campaigns in real-time, preventing them from gaining widespread influence. Social media platforms should implement stricter policies on misinformation while ensuring that these measures do not infringe on legitimate freedom of speech.

Fact-checking organizations play an essential role in debunking terrorist disinformation. Independent fact-checking groups can investigate claims, verify reports, and expose falsehoods used by terrorist groups to manipulate public perception. Governments and media outlets should support fact-checking initiatives by sharing verified information and ensuring that corrections to misinformation reach as many people as possible (Vitalis et al., 2025). Establishing dedicated online portals where citizens can verify security-related news can also help curb the spread of false narratives.

Community engagement is another vital strategy in countering terrorist disinformation. Many people trust information from local sources, such as religious and traditional leaders, more than official government statements. Engaging these leaders in countering false narratives can help prevent radicalization and misinformation from taking root in vulnerable communities. Grassroots organizations, youth groups, and civil society organizations should be involved in educating communities about the dangers of terrorist propaganda and the importance of verifying information. Encouraging community-driven initiatives, such as neighborhood fact-checking groups, can strengthen local resilience against extremist disinformation.

Rehabilitation and counter-radicalization programs are necessary to counteract the long-term effects of terrorist disinformation. Many individuals who join terrorist groups do so under the influence of propaganda that promises economic stability, religious fulfillment, or revenge against perceived injustices. Reintegration programs that offer psychological counseling, vocational training, and ideological reorientation can help rehabilitate former extremists and prevent them from spreading propaganda upon reintegration into society. Counter-narrative campaigns that showcase testimonies from former militants who regret their involvement can also serve as powerful tools to dissuade others from joining extremist groups.

Strengthening international cooperation is crucial in the fight against terrorist disinformation. Extremist groups operate across borders, using international networks to spread propaganda and fund their operations. Nigeria should collaborate with neighboring countries, regional organizations such as the African Union, and global institutions like the United Nations to share intelligence, develop joint counter-disinformation strategies, and enhance cybersecurity measures. International partnerships can also help track the flow of extremist funding, disrupt online terrorist networks, and coordinate efforts to counter radical ideologies at a global level (Yar'Adua & Msughter, 2023).

The role of investigative journalism in exposing terrorist disinformation cannot be overstated. Journalists who specialize in security and conflict reporting play a crucial role in uncovering the truth behind extremist narratives. However, investigative journalism in conflict zones comes with risks, including threats to reporters' safety. Governments and media organizations should provide adequate protection and support for journalists covering

terrorism-related issues to ensure that accurate reporting is not suppressed by intimidation or violence. Journalistic integrity must be upheld to avoid inadvertently amplifying terrorist propaganda through sensationalized reporting.

Psychological and behavioral research is essential in understanding how terrorist disinformation affects individuals and communities. By studying the psychological tactics used in extremist propaganda, counterterrorism experts can develop more effective counter-narratives that resonate with vulnerable populations. Messaging that directly counters terrorist ideologies should be tailored to the cultural, religious, and socioeconomic contexts of at-risk individuals. Behavioral research can also inform the design of digital interventions that disrupt radicalization pathways before individuals fully adopt extremist beliefs.

In this contestation, countering terrorist disinformation requires a holistic and coordinated approach that involves government transparency, media literacy, social media regulation, fact-checking, community engagement, rehabilitation programs, international cooperation, investigative journalism, and psychological research. The battle against extremist propaganda is not just about removing false content but also about building societal resilience against manipulation and ensuring that accurate, credible information prevails. By implementing these strategies, Nigeria can effectively combat terrorist disinformation and strengthen national security efforts.

IV. Conclusion

The rise of digital communication has provided terrorist groups with new opportunities to spread their narratives and recruit individuals. In Nigeria, groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP exploit disinformation to deceive, radicalize, and mobilize recruits. This paper explores how these organizations use falsehoods, manipulated content, and conspiracy theories to attract followers, particularly in vulnerable communities. Disinformation remains a critical recruitment tool for terrorist groups in Nigeria. Addressing this challenge requires a multi-pronged approach that integrates media education, policy regulation, and community engagement. Future research should explore the evolving tactics of extremist groups and the effectiveness of counter-disinformation strategies.

Disinformation has emerged as a critical tool used by terrorist groups to recruit members, radicalize individuals, and sustain their operations. In Nigeria, groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) exploit misinformation, propaganda, and manipulated narratives to attract new recruits. This paper explores how these groups leverage disinformation to influence vulnerable populations and examines the implications for national security and counterterrorism efforts. Disinformation is a powerful tool that terrorist groups in Nigeria use to recruit members and sustain their operations. Addressing this challenge requires a multi-faceted approach, including digital literacy, proactive government communication, technological interventions, and community-based solutions. Combating terrorist propaganda effectively will not only disrupt recruitment efforts but also contribute to long-term peace and security in Nigeria.

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