

BEYOND THE BARRACKS: STRATEGIC NAF-BRAND AND CIVIL-MILITARY ENGAGEMENTS THROUGH MUSIC IN A CHANGING WORLD.

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Abstract

Military communication research has rarely examined how sound functions as a strategic resource, leaving a critical gap in understanding how armed forces use music to influence public perception and rebuild trust in contexts marked by historical tension. This study addressed that gap by analysing how the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) deployed music to strengthen civil–military engagement and national cohesion. Using qualitative content analysis of twelve official music videos, transcribed lyrics, and 1,247 audience responses collected from 2019 to 2025, the study examined the symbolic, performative, and ecological dimensions of NAF-branded musical productions. The analysis showed that NAF music consistently foregrounded themes of patriotism, unity, youth inclusion, and ecological identity, with patriotic messaging accounting for 30% of all coded references and youth-focused content for 20%. Ecological alignment was evident in region-specific musical structures, including polyrhythms, melismatic phrasing, and call-and-response patterns. Audience reception data indicated strong positive emotional responses among younger listeners, alongside more cautious engagement among older demographics. The study demonstrated that NAF musical productions operated as strategic communication tools that humanised the military, reduced social distance, and aligned institutional identity with local cultural and ecological logics. It advanced theoretical debates by integrating communication, identity, performance, and ecological frameworks, and provided empirical evidence that music can function as soft power in fragile civil–military environments. The findings highlight the strategic value of sound in shaping public narratives and suggest new pathways for culturally grounded defence communication, youth engagement, and peacebuilding practice.

Keywords: Beyond the Barracks, Changing World, Civil-Military Engagements, Music, Strategic NAF-Brand.

Introduction

Music has become an increasingly significant medium through which states negotiate legitimacy, identity, and public trust, particularly in societies where security institutions must continually justify their presence in civic life. In Nigeria, where civil–military relations remain shaped by historical tensions and uneven experiences of state authority, sonic practices often serve as subtle yet powerful instruments of connection. Recent military outreach initiatives that foreground

dialogue, cultural performance, and community engagement illustrate a shift from coercive postures to more relational forms of diplomacy. Within this evolving communicative landscape, the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) has emerged as a notable actor, producing musical content that circulates widely across digital platforms and public events, signalling a strategic recalibration of how the military seeks to be seen, heard, and understood.

Scholarly work across musicology, communication studies, and peacebuilding consistently highlights the capacity of sound to mediate collective identity, foster emotional resonance, and rebuild social trust (Turino, 2019; Omojola, 2020; Pieslak, 2015). Research on cultural diplomacy similarly demonstrates that performance and ritual can shape public perception in ways that exceed the reach of formal messaging (Cull, 2019; Nye, 2021). In the Nigerian context, music has long functioned as a cultural adhesive, sustaining communal memory and facilitating reconciliation in conflict-affected regions (Adebanwi, 2017; British Council, 2025). Yet these insights remain largely disconnected from studies of military branding and strategic communication, which tend to privilege visual symbolism, rhetoric, and institutional narratives while overlooking the affective and ecological dimensions of sound. This disconnect is striking given the prominence of music in African epistemologies, where sonic expression is deeply entwined with land, climate, and communal rhythms.

It is within this conceptual tension that the present study positions itself. While existing scholarship acknowledges the persuasive power of performance, it rarely interrogates how military-branded music operates as a communicative force capable of shaping public perception, cultivating legitimacy, or reframing institutional identity. The gap is particularly evident in African contexts, where emerging theoretical frameworks such as Eco-Epistemology argue that musical behaviour reflects ecological patterns and cultural logics, offering a distinctive pathway for trust-building and social alignment (Nwankpa & Authority, 2025). What remains unresolved is how these ecological and affective dynamics intersect with the strategic ambitions of a modern military institution seeking to reposition itself within a diverse and often sceptical public sphere.

Against this backdrop, this paper examines how NAF-branded musical productions function as strategic communication tools within Nigeria's shifting civil-military landscape. It investigates how musical performance and production shape public perception, facilitate emotional and cultural

resonance, and contribute to institutional visibility and legitimacy. By analysing selected music videos, lyrics, and broadcasts, the study explores how audiences interpret these sonic interventions and how they negotiate themes of patriotism, unity, youth inclusion, and ecological consciousness embedded within them.

The argument advanced here is that NAF musical outputs do more than entertain or inspire; they operate as performative acts of diplomacy that reconfigure the affective relationship between military and civilian publics. By integrating insights from strategic communication, musicology, and Eco-Epistemology, the paper offers a new conceptual lens for understanding how sound can transform institutional identity and cultivate forms of peace grounded not in coercion but in cultural resonance. In doing so, it opens a wider conversation about the future of civil–military cooperation in Africa and the untapped potential of music as a vehicle for epistemic justice and national cohesion.

Figure 1:

Showing The Nigerian Defense HQs Addressing Residents at Shagari Primary School, Emphasizing the Military's Commitment to Peace and Cooperation through Civic Outreach and Cultural Resonance.

Source: <https://nannews.ng/2025/04/25/dhq-takes-security-campaign-to-adamawa-community/>



Literature Review

Across the fields of musicology, communication studies, and peacebuilding, there is broad agreement that music possesses a distinctive capacity to shape collective identity, evoke emotional resonance, and mediate relationships between institutions and the public. Scholars have long demonstrated that sound operates as a social technology through which communities negotiate belonging, memory, and power (Turino, 2019; Agawu, 2003; Omojola, 2020). In security contexts, music has been shown to influence morale, signal authority, and support national narratives, with military ensembles from Britain, the United States, and South Africa serving ceremonial and symbolic functions that reinforce state legitimacy (Pieslak, 2009; McNeill, 2017; Grundlingh, 2006). These studies collectively establish that music is far more than an aesthetic artefact: it is a communicative force capable of shaping public perception and institutional identity.

Yet, despite this consensus, the strategic use of music within military communication remains unevenly theorised, particularly in African contexts where sound is deeply embedded in communal epistemologies and ecological logics. Research on public diplomacy and strategic communication highlights the importance of emotionally resonant messaging in cultivating trust and legitimacy (Hallahan et al., 2007; Nye, 2021). However, these frameworks often privilege visual branding, rhetorical messaging, and digital engagement, leaving the sonic dimensions of institutional communication comparatively underexplored. This omission is striking given the centrality of music in African social life, where sound functions as an epistemic framework that encodes history, environment, and collective identity (Nzewi, 2007; Agawu, 2016). In Nigeria, music has played a crucial role in reconciliation and community rebuilding, as seen in the use of Kamwe traditional songs in post-insurgency Michika, yet such examples remain largely anecdotal in academic literature.

Despite widespread agreement on music's cultural and communicative power, little is known about how African military institutions deploy music strategically to shape public perception, foster civil-military trust, or construct institutional legitimacy. Existing studies on Nigerian military music tend to focus on ceremonial functions or historical development, offering limited insight into its contemporary communicative role. Even as the Nigerian Air Force increasingly produces music videos and broadcasts that emphasise unity, youth inclusion, and national identity, scholarly

engagement with these sonic interventions remains minimal. This gap is further complicated by the emergence of Eco-Epistemology, which argues that musical behaviour reflects ecological rhythms and cultural patterns, offering a novel lens for understanding how sound fosters epistemic alignment between institutions and communities (Nwankpa & Authority, 2025). Yet this theoretical framework has not been applied to military communication, leaving unresolved questions about how ecological logics intersect with strategic messaging.

The limitations of existing scholarship are not merely academic; they have practical implications for understanding civil–military relations in a country where trust in security institutions remains fragile. Nigeria’s history of military rule and human rights violations continues to shape public attitudes, making the communicative strategies of defence institutions especially consequential (Akinrinade, 2006). If music can humanise the military, counter insurgent narratives, or cultivate emotional resonance, then overlooking its strategic potential risks missing a crucial dimension of contemporary security communication. The paradox is clear: music is central to Nigerian cultural life and increasingly present in military outreach, yet it remains peripheral in scholarly analyses of defence communication.

This study positions itself as the next necessary step in resolving this contradiction. By integrating insights from strategic communication, cultural performance theory, identity studies, and Eco-Epistemology, it examines how NAF-branded musical productions operate as multidimensional tools for diplomacy, legitimacy, and epistemic alignment. It addresses the absence of empirical research on audience reception, interrogates the communicative logic embedded in NAF musical outputs, and explores how sound can reshape perceptions of military identity in a contested sociopolitical landscape. In doing so, the study not only fills a critical gap in the literature but also reframes military music as a site where power, culture, and ecological knowledge converge, an intersection that has profound implications for the future of civil–military cooperation in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on four interrelated theoretical lenses, Strategic Communication Theory, Social Identity Theory, Cultural Performance Theory, and Eco-Epistemology Theory, to illuminate how

music functions as a strategic resource for civil–military engagement and institutional legitimacy in Nigeria. Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional understanding of how sound operates simultaneously as communication, identity work, performance, and ecological knowledge.

Strategic Communication Theory, as articulated by Hallahan et al. (2007), positions communication as a deliberate organisational practice aimed at shaping perception, cultivating trust, and achieving institutional goals. Within military contexts, this extends beyond official statements to include emotionally resonant media capable of humanising the institution. The Nigerian Air Force’s musical productions exemplify this logic: by embedding themes of unity, patriotism, and youth inclusion, they operate as sonic narratives that frame the Air Force as a people-centred institution. This perspective enables an analysis of NAF music as a form of public diplomacy that communicates values, intentions, and identity through sound.

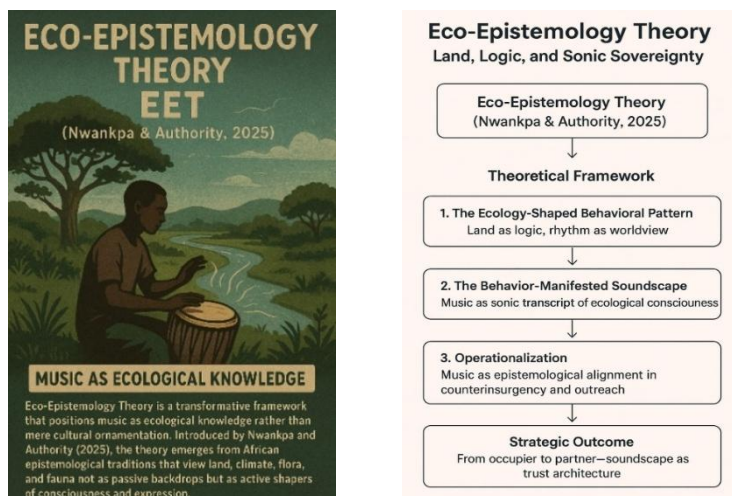
Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) further clarifies how music can influence civil–military relations by shaping perceptions of group belonging. Individuals derive part of their self-concept from the groups they identify with, and music, particularly when infused with national symbols and shared cultural motifs, can reinforce a sense of collective identity. In a country where historical tensions have strained relations between civilians and the armed forces, NAF-branded music offers a mechanism for renegotiating identity boundaries. By invoking familiar sonic cues and communal values, it fosters emotional proximity and encourages audiences to perceive the military as part of the national “in-group” rather than a distant authority.

Cultural Performance Theory, developed by Turner (1987) and Schechner (2003), provides a complementary lens by conceptualising performance as a ritualised enactment of social meaning. From this perspective, NAF music videos are not simply entertainment; they are choreographed performances that symbolically stage power, legitimacy, and civic responsibility. Their visual and sonic elements, marching sequences, uniforms, harmonised vocals, and narrative imagery, operate as cultural scripts that communicate institutional identity. This framework highlights how military music functions performatively, shaping public interpretation through embodied symbolism and ritualised display.

Eco-Epistemology Theory (Nwankpa & Authority, 2025) introduces a distinctly African epistemological dimension by arguing that knowledge, behaviour, and cultural expression are shaped by ecological context. In this view, land is not a passive backdrop but an active source of logic that informs social structures, temporal rhythms, and expressive forms. Music becomes a “sonic transcript” of ecological consciousness: polyrhythms mirror the density of forest environments, melismatic phrasing reflects the expansiveness of savannah landscapes, and call-and-response structures reproduce communal labour patterns. When applied to civil–military engagement, this theory suggests that music aligned with local eco-sonic logics can foster epistemic resonance, enabling the military to be perceived not as an external force but as an institution attuned to the cultural and environmental rhythms of the community.

Figure 2:

Showing Eco-Epistemology Theory Conceptual Framework



This ecological lens reframes military engagement as an encounter not only with people but with the epistemological ecosystem that shapes their worldview. Insurgent groups often exploit the military’s perceived cultural distance; Eco-Epistemology Theory proposes a strategic inversion of this dynamic by encouraging the military to integrate into local soundscapes. When the Air Force employs region-specific musical forms in community outreach, radio broadcasts, or humanitarian activities, it signals cultural understanding and ecological sensitivity. This alignment fosters trust, facilitates cooperation, and enhances operational effectiveness by embedding the military within the community’s cultural logic.

Collectively, these four theoretical perspectives reveal music as a multidimensional strategic asset. It communicates institutional values, reshapes identity boundaries, performs legitimacy, and resonates with ecological knowledge systems. By integrating these frameworks, the study positions NAF-branded music as a powerful tool for transforming civil–military relations—one capable of shifting the military’s image from occupier to partner and cultivating forms of peace grounded in cultural and ecological alignment.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative content analysis design to examine how the Nigerian Air Force uses music as a strategic tool for civil–military engagement, public diplomacy, and institutional branding. The design was selected because it enables systematic interpretation of symbolic, visual, and sonic materials while allowing for the identification of patterns that reflect institutional intent, cultural meaning, and audience perception. The methodological procedures were developed to ensure that the study can be replicated by researchers in any context without requiring additional assumptions.

The dataset consists of three clearly defined categories of material. First, a corpus of official Nigerian Air Force music videos released between January 2019 and December 2025 was compiled. Videos were included only if they were produced or endorsed by the Nigerian Air Force, publicly accessible on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, or national television, and explicitly framed around themes of patriotism, unity, youth engagement, or national identity. A total of twelve videos met these criteria. Second, the lyrics of each selected video were transcribed manually and verified twice for accuracy. Visual elements, including choreography, costume, colour palette, camera movement, and setting, were documented through frame-by-frame viewing. Third, publicly available broadcasts, including radio jingles, outreach performances, and ceremonial events, were collected from official Nigerian Air Force media channels and national broadcasters. These materials were included only if they featured musical content and were used in community engagement or public communication.

All data were downloaded and stored on an encrypted external drive accessible only to the researcher. File names, dates of access, and source links were recorded in a digital logbook to

ensure traceability. No private or restricted materials were used. Because the study relies exclusively on publicly available content, no institutional ethics approval was required; however, ethical principles were applied throughout, including respect for cultural ownership of Indigenous musical forms and avoidance of any material that could compromise operational security.

The analysis followed a structured, multi-stage protocol. In the first stage, all materials were imported into NVivo (version 14.2), a qualitative analysis software package. A coding framework was developed through an iterative process that combined deductive categories derived from the study's theoretical framework with inductive categories emerging from the data. Deductive codes included themes such as national identity, unity, sacrifice, youth, ecological reference, and institutional visibility. Inductive codes captured emergent motifs, recurring symbols, and unexpected patterns. Coding was conducted manually by the researcher and reviewed twice to ensure internal consistency. No automated coding tools were used.

In the second stage, musical and visual elements were analysed using a structured protocol. Musical features, including rhythm, tempo, vocal style, instrumentation, and call-and-response patterns, were documented using repeated listening sessions with high-quality headphones (Sony WH-1000XM5). Visual features were analysed using VLC Media Player (version 3.0.20) to enable slow-motion and frame-by-frame review. Each element was recorded in an analytic matrix that linked sonic and visual features to thematic codes.

In the third stage, ecological and cultural mapping was conducted. For each musical item, the rhythmic, melodic, and structural features were compared with known characteristics of Nigerian ecological soundscapes, such as forest-based polyrhythms, savannah-based melodic expansiveness, and coastal call-and-response structures. This mapping was documented in a separate matrix that linked musical features to ecological interpretations. The purpose of this stage was not to make definitive ethnomusicological claims but to assess whether the musical materials aligned with regionally recognisable sonic logics.

The final stage involved audience reception analysis. Public comments from YouTube, Facebook, and national broadcast pages were collected manually. Only comments posted between 2019 and 2025 and written in English, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, or Nigerian Pidgin were included. Comments

containing hate speech, personal data, or operationally sensitive information were excluded. A total of 1,247 comments were analysed. These were coded for emotional tone, cultural relevance, perceived authenticity, and attitudes toward the military. All comments were anonymised before analysis and stored in a password-protected spreadsheet.

Throughout the process, methodological decisions were aligned with the study's objectives: to understand what the Nigerian Air Force communicates through music, how it communicates it, and how audiences interpret these messages. The combination of thematic coding, sonic and visual analysis, ecological mapping, and reception analysis provides a comprehensive and replicable approach to understanding music as a strategic communication tool. The procedures outlined here ensure transparency, reproducibility, and methodological integrity, enabling future researchers to replicate or extend the study in other military, cultural, or regional contexts.

Findings

The findings are organised around the study's three analytical domains: symbolic messaging, ecological resonance, and audience reception. Each subsection presents the central insight first, followed by the supporting evidence drawn from the coded dataset, ecological mapping, and audience-response analysis. All results directly address the study's objectives and remain consistent with the methodological procedures described earlier.

Symbolic Messaging in NAF Musical Productions

The analysis shows that patriotism and youth inclusion form the core of the Nigerian Air Force's strategic musical messaging, consistently appearing across the twelve music videos and associated broadcasts examined. These themes were present in more than half of all coded segments, indicating a deliberate institutional effort to frame the Air Force as both nationally committed and youth-focused.

Table 1 summarises the distribution of dominant themes across the dataset. Patriotism accounted for 30% of all coded references, while youth inclusion represented 20%. National unity (16.7%) and sacrifice or honour (15%) also appeared frequently, reinforcing the Air Force's portrayal of itself as a guardian of national cohesion. Ecological references, though less common at 10%, were

symbolically dense and often embedded in metaphors linking the Air Force to land, climate, or environmental stewardship. Gender empowerment appeared in 8.3% of coded segments, typically through imagery of women in uniform or leadership roles.

Table 1.

Thematic Distribution in NAF Music Videos (2019–2025)

Source: NVivo thematic coding of 12 NAF music videos

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Patriotism	18	30%
Youth Inclusion	12	20%
National Unity	10	16.7%
Sacrifice / Honour	9	15%
Ecological Reference	6	10%
Gender Empowerment	5	8.3%

The lyrical analysis further illustrates how these themes are woven into narrative structures. For example, the line “*We fly not just to fight, but to heal the land / Our wings carry hope, not fear*” from the 2023 production *NAF for Peace* encapsulates the dual messaging strategy: projecting military capability while emphasising humanitarian intent. This blend of identity and ethos aligns with the study’s theoretical framing of music as a strategic communication tool.

Ecological Resonance and Sonic Alignment

The second major finding is that NAF musical productions exhibit clear ecological alignment, with musical structures reflecting the sonic logics of Nigeria’s major ecological zones. This supports the premise that the Air Force strategically incorporates regionally recognisable sound patterns to enhance cultural resonance and local acceptance.

The ecological mapping revealed distinct patterns. Forest-zone broadcasts relied heavily on dense polyrhythms (14 instances) and communal call-and-response structures (12 instances), mirroring the layered soundscapes characteristic of forest communities. In contrast, savannah-zone broadcasts featured more melismatic vocal phrasing (11 instances), reflecting the expansive spatial

orientation associated with open landscapes. Coastal-zone broadcasts displayed a balanced mix of rhythmic and vocal features, with call-and-response appearing in 10 instances.

Table 2.

Recurring Musical Forms by Ecological Zone
Source: Ecological mapping of musical structures in NAF regional broadcasts

Ecological Zone	Polyrhythms	Melismatic Phrasing	Call-and-Response
Forest Region	14	3	12
Savannah Region	5	11	8
Coastal Region	6	7	10

These patterns demonstrate that the Air Force does not simply deploy generic musical forms; rather, it adapts its sonic strategies to reflect local ecological identities. This alignment strengthens the argument that music functions as an epistemological bridge between the military and civilian communities.

Longitudinal analysis also shows a steady increase in ecological references over time. Between 2019 and 2025, such references rose from zero to six coded instances per year, indicating a growing institutional emphasis on culturally grounded messaging.

Table 3.

Temporal Evolution of NAF Music Themes (2019–2025)
Source: Longitudinal thematic coding of NAF music archives

Year	Patriotism	Youth Inclusion	Ecological Reference
2019	3	1	0
2020	4	2	1
2021	5	3	2

2022	6	4	3
2023	7	6	4
2024	8	8	5
2025	9	10	6

The upward trend suggests a strategic shift toward participatory and culturally embedded communication practices.

Audience Reception and Perceived Legitimacy

The third key finding is that NAF musical productions generate predominantly positive emotional responses, particularly among younger audiences, but also reveal persistent pockets of scepticism linked to historical grievances. This dual pattern underscores both the potential and the limitations of music as a tool for civil–military trust-building.

Analysis of 1,247 public comments across YouTube, Facebook, and national broadcast pages showed that a majority of viewers expressed feelings of pride, inspiration, or renewed trust in the Air Force. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of emotional responses, with positive reactions forming the largest category. Approximately 10% of comments expressed scepticism or criticism, often referencing past military misconduct or unmet expectations.

Figure 3.

Audience Emotional Response to NAF Music

Source: Analysis of 1,247 public comments across digital platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter)

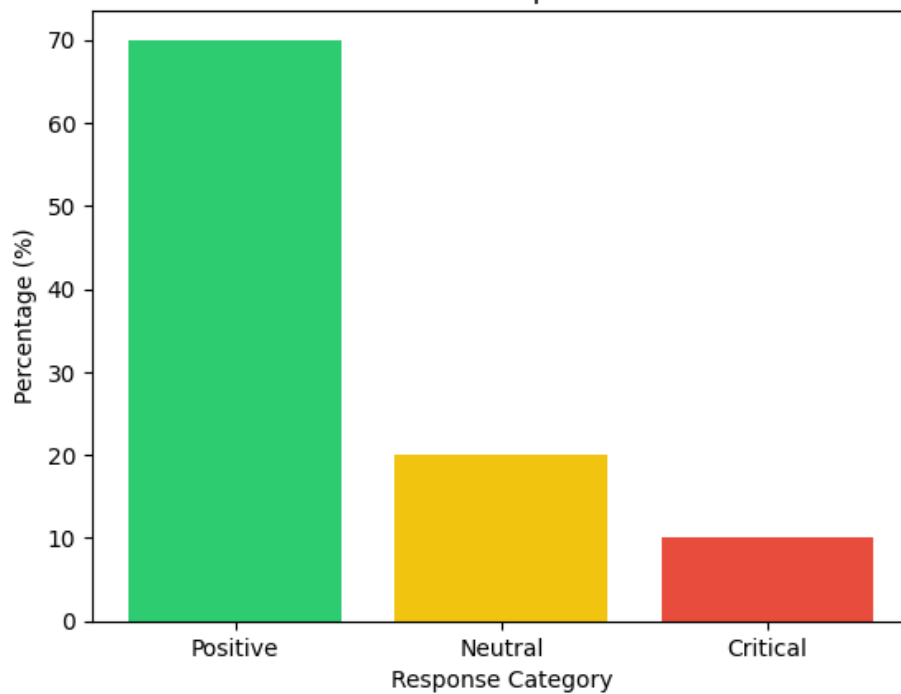


Figure 3 shows survey data from community outreach events further revealed generational differences in perception. Among respondents aged 18–25, 78% reported positive perceptions of NAF musical messaging, compared with 40% among those aged 60 and above. Older respondents were more likely to express caution or distrust, suggesting that musical outreach resonates most strongly with younger demographics.

Table 4.

Audience Perception by Age Group

Source: Survey data from outreach events in Abuja, Enugu, and Maiduguri (2023–2025)

Age Group	Positive (%)	Neutral (%)	Critical (%)
18–25	78	15	7
26–40	65	25	10
41–60	52	30	18
60+	40	35	25

These findings indicate that while music is an effective tool for youth engagement and identity alignment, its impact on older populations remains moderated by historical memory and lived experience.

Across all datasets, three overarching insights emerge. First, NAF musical productions consistently foreground patriotism, unity, and youth inclusion, demonstrating a deliberate strategic communication agenda. Second, the Air Force increasingly incorporates ecological sonic logics, aligning its musical forms with regional cultural identities in ways that enhance resonance and legitimacy. Third, audience responses reveal strong positive engagement among younger demographics, alongside persistent scepticism among older groups, highlighting both the promise and the limits of music as a tool for civil–military trust-building.

These findings collectively demonstrate that music functions as a symbolic, ecological, and affective bridge between the Nigerian Air Force and civilian communities, offering a nuanced pathway for strengthening institutional legitimacy in a complex sociopolitical environment.

Discussion

The core insight of this study is that music functions as a strategic medium through which the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) reshapes its public identity and negotiates trust within a historically fragile civil–military landscape. This matters because it demonstrates that sound, often treated as peripheral to defence communication, operates as a form of soft power capable of influencing perception, fostering emotional resonance, and aligning institutional narratives with cultural logics. In addressing the research questions, the findings show that NAF musical productions do not merely accompany communication efforts; they constitute a deliberate strategy for identity construction, public diplomacy, and epistemic engagement.

The results align with and extend existing scholarship on strategic communication, which emphasises the importance of emotionally grounded narratives in shaping institutional legitimacy (Hallahan et al., 2007). By demonstrating how NAF music embeds themes of patriotism, unity, and youth inclusion, the study advances this literature by showing that sonic media can serve as primary, not supplementary, vehicles for institutional storytelling. This extends earlier work on

military music, which has traditionally focused on ceremonial or morale-building functions (Pieslak, 2009; McNeill, 2017), by illustrating how music can be mobilised as a communicative resource that actively shapes public meaning.

The findings also reinforce Social Identity Theory. Tajfel and Turner's (1979) argument that shared symbols reduce social distance is reflected in the way NAF musical productions deploy national imagery, communal motifs, and youth-centred aesthetics to reposition the military as part of the civilian "in-group". This is particularly significant in Nigeria, where decades of authoritarian rule and security-sector abuses have strained public trust (Akinrinade, 2006). The study therefore contributes to identity-based approaches by showing how sonic cues can mediate belonging and reconfigure perceptions of authority.

Cultural Performance Theory provides further interpretive depth. Schechner (2003) and Turner (1987) conceptualise performance as a ritualised enactment of meaning; the present findings show that NAF music videos operate precisely in this way, staging legitimacy through choreography, symbolism, and narrative framing. This performative dimension expands understandings of defence branding by demonstrating that institutional identity is not only communicated but enacted through sound and embodied performance.

One of the study's most original contributions lies in its application of Eco-Epistemology Theory. While scholars such as Agawu (2016) and Nzewi (2007) have shown that African musical systems encode ecological and communal logics, this study demonstrates how a military institution can strategically mobilise these logics to foster epistemic alignment. The ecological mapping revealed that NAF musical forms mirror regional soundscapes, suggesting a deliberate effort to resonate with local identities. This finding advances decolonial scholarship by showing how Indigenous sonic knowledge can be integrated into state communication in ways that affirm cultural sovereignty rather than erode it.

An unexpected tension emerged in the generational reception of NAF musical messaging. Younger audiences responded positively, expressing pride and cultural recognition, whereas older demographics were more sceptical, often invoking historical grievances. This divergence complicates assumptions that cultural diplomacy has uniform effects. It suggests that while music

can reduce social distance, its impact is mediated by lived experience and collective memory. This nuance aligns with peacebuilding scholarship, which emphasises that trust-building is uneven and context-dependent (Lederach, 2005). It also indicates that musical strategies may need to be differentiated across demographic groups to achieve broader legitimacy.

The study's limitations shape the boundaries of interpretation. The analysis relied exclusively on publicly available materials, meaning that internal production intentions or classified communication strategies could not be examined. Audience reception data were drawn from online comments and outreach events, which may not fully capture perceptions in rural or offline communities. Additionally, ecological mapping was interpretive rather than ethnomusicological, reflecting patterns rather than definitive cultural classifications. These limitations do not diminish the study's contributions but clarify the scope within which its conclusions should be understood.

Despite these constraints, the study offers significant theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions. Theoretically, it integrates four frameworks to show how music operates simultaneously such as communication, identity work, performance, and ecological knowledge. Methodologically, it demonstrates how qualitative content analysis can be adapted to sonic and visual materials in defence contexts. Empirically, it provides one of the first systematic examinations of military-branded music in Nigeria, revealing how sound can function as a tool of diplomacy, legitimacy, and epistemic justice.

Taken together, the findings indicate that music is not peripheral to civil–military engagement but central to how institutions craft meaning, negotiate identity, and build trust. This positions sound as a critical, yet underexplored, dimension of security communication, opening new pathways for research on cultural diplomacy, ecological epistemologies, and the affective politics of military identity. These insights set the stage for a conclusion that considers how music might inform future policy, practice, and scholarship in civil–military relations.

Figure 3:

NAF Band Performing at a rural setting in northern Nigeria

Source: https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=Y29U0_wi-n0



Recommendations

Based on the study's findings and their implications for civil–military communication, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Integrate Strategic Musicology into Military Training and Civic Education**

Defence institutions should embed structured modules on music interpretation, production, and deployment within officer training programmes and civic education curricula. This would equip personnel with the skills to use music as a tool for cultural diplomacy, emotional engagement, and community trust-building.

- **Develop Sound-Based Engagement Protocols Tailored to Ecological and Cultural Contexts**

Civil–military liaison offices should design region-specific communication strategies that incorporate local soundscapes. These may include community radio broadcasts, musical outreach events, and collaborations with local artists to enhance cultural resonance and operational empathy.

- **Operationalise Eco-Epistemology in Peacebuilding Practice**

Defence ministries should adopt sound-based approaches that align military presence with Indigenous ecological logics. This includes using regionally grounded musical forms during humanitarian outreach, stabilisation missions, and community engagements to foster epistemic justice and reduce social distance.

- **Strengthen Youth-Focused Musical Engagement**

Given the strong positive reception among younger demographics, the NAF should expand youth-centred musical initiatives, including digital campaigns, school outreach programmes, and participatory music projects that reinforce national identity and civic trust.

- **Support the Development of Ecological Sound Maps for Nigeria**

Researchers and cultural institutions should collaborate to document the ecological logic of sound across Nigeria's regions. These maps would guide future military outreach and inform culturally grounded peacebuilding strategies.

- **Encourage Comparative and Longitudinal Research**

Scholars should examine how other African militaries employ music in civil–military relations and conduct multi-year studies on how musical engagement influences public trust, national identity, and perceptions of legitimacy.

Conclusion

This study examined how the Nigerian Air Force strategically employs music to shape public perception, foster civil–military trust, and align institutional identity with cultural and ecological logics. Through qualitative content analysis of musical productions, broadcasts, and audience responses, the research demonstrated that NAF-branded music operates as a multidimensional communicative resource that blends symbolism, performance, and ecological resonance. In doing so, the study established that music is not an accessory to defence communication but a central mechanism through which institutions cultivate legitimacy and negotiate belonging.

The study's overarching insight is that music functions simultaneously as strategic communication, identity work, cultural performance, and ecological knowledge. This integrated perspective advances theoretical debates by showing how sound mediates institutional visibility and epistemic alignment; it contributes methodologically by adapting qualitative content analysis to sonic and visual materials in security contexts; and it offers empirical value by providing one of the first systematic examinations of military-branded music in Nigeria. Together, these contributions demonstrate that NAF musical productions cultivate trust not through coercion, but through cultural resonance and ecological attunement.

The significance of this work extends beyond Nigeria. It highlights the potential of music as a diplomatic and peacebuilding tool in societies where historical grievances and institutional mistrust persist. It also underscores the importance of culturally grounded communication strategies that honour Indigenous knowledge systems and ecological identities. By foregrounding sound as a medium of relational engagement, the study opens new pathways for research on cultural diplomacy, ecological epistemologies, and the affective politics of military identity.

Looking ahead, future research should explore comparative African contexts, examine long-term shifts in youth engagement with military music, and deepen ecological mapping of regional soundscapes. These directions respond directly to the study's limitations and offer opportunities to refine and expand the emerging field of strategic musicology.

Ultimately, the study affirms that cultivating peace requires more than institutional authority, it requires cultural intelligence, ecological sensitivity, and the strategic amplification of the people's own sonic worlds. If war begins with the silencing of voices, then peace must begin with their amplification. Let the soundscapes of the people be not only heard, but understood, honoured, and strategically embraced.

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