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Enhancing the Communication Strategies of NEPC for Non-Oil Products Export in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This study assessed the communication strategies of the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) in promoting non-oil exports in South-South Nigeria. The research evaluated the effectiveness of NEPC's outreach methods, identify challenges, and propose improvements to enhance export competitiveness. Adopting a mixed-method approach, the study combined quantitative surveys (95 respondents across four states) with qualitative interviews, analyzing data through Excel and AI-enabled thematic tools. Findings revealed that seminars (85% adoption) and online ads (78%) were the most utilized strategies, while the NEPC website (65%) and billboards (60%) underperformed. Key benefits included capacity-building (75% praised seminars) and gender inclusivity (70% female exporter support), but challenges like high costs (80% for online ads), poor digital accessibility (70% website difficulty), and political interference (70%) hindered effectiveness. Root causes included funding gaps (85%), administrative inefficiencies (78%), and inadequate infrastructure (72%). The study recommends: (1) digital transformation via mobile platforms, (2) decentralized seminars for rural outreach, (3) public-private partnerships for cost-sharing, and (4) a semi-autonomous governance model to reduce political influence. By aligning with global best practices (e.g., Indonesia's WhatsApp-based updates), NEPC can improve stakeholder engagement and non-oil export growth. This research contributes to literature on strategic communication in export promotion, offering actionable insights for policymakers to diversify Nigeria's economy.

KEYWORDS: Communication, Strategies, Export, Promotion, Non-oil Products, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is the most common way of moving data starting with one point then onto the next through a medium, which could be paper, radio, tv, web, with the goal of illuminating the receiver with desired information and thus getting a reaction [1]. While strategy is a step-like approach spread out by an individual, government, organization or council to accomplish set goals or objectives [2]. Furthermore, communication strategy is the plan of arranging how to share data. It is the decision taking in gathering most valuable goals of communication, and acknowledgment of a specific brand and its methodology with regards to the target audience [1]. The standards of the communications strategy are to guarantee smooth viability for the communications officer inside an organization to give top notch communication and commitment administrations for key undertakings and drives, and the conveyance of the general information to within an organization and to the audience it is meant for. In the beginning, communication was restricted to paper/pen and gatherings. However, current innovation has changed the entire idea. Thus, individuals' and organizations' desire to put forth attempts in understanding how they share data, led to new communication methodologies enshrined in technology.

[2]Declares that fast developing innovation has changed how organizations communication and engage with their communities. These progressions bring the two open doors; dangers and new technological know-how apparatuses, which permit instant and intuitive communication including levels profound within organizational design. Howbeit, communication strategies must follow standing laws of the organization as well as the laws of the nations within which it operates. The organization's communications strategy likewise should be designed to convey the organizations' activities in a way which is straightforward, educating, comprehensive, delegated, responsive, conscious, and deliberate, hence, accountable. The focus of this

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strategy is that communication is both a governance activity and community engagement tool contributing to overall participation of the target audience in response to the directives of the intended information [2].

While organizations presently conveys a wide scope of inward and outside communication exercises, the main communication strategy is the organizations' role in dealing with the establishments' techniques for imparting successfully, proactively and reliably designed information. This is to guarantee that whatever is finished and conveyed, impacts the public's view of organization on the promoted subject. The organization has a legal commitment to disperse data to the general society and guaranteeing there is a powerful method with which to give the message delivered to the particular audience. Furthermore, industry patterns as a communication strategy tries to bridle a more arranged and quantifiable methodology. This strategy frames goals and activities that are important across the organization and is not the sole liability of the communications office but a coordinated organization's preparation, consolidating programs for business targets and client support tasks, which will likewise characterize the communications cycle and help in accomplishing its' laid out objectives and goals [2]. Another strategy embraced by organizations in conveying organizational approaches is resourcing. This is accomplished by furnishing the communications' unit with required present day communication tools (Information communication technology devices) and abilities (programming, human relations, and needs evaluation) in promoting and distributing the desired information to guarantee the public/target population get the right information [2].

[3]An export is worldwide exchange of a product created in one country that is sold into another nation or a service available in one country but sold to another country. The merchant of such merchandise or the specialist co-op is an exporter; the purchaser is the importer. Services and products that feature in international trade include financial, accounting and other professional services, minerals, plants and animals, tourism, education as well as intellectual property rights. [4] Defined promotion as the course of communication among organizations and clients to make uplifting perspectives about items and administrations that lead to their approval during the time spent purchasing on the lookout. It is a super durable course of communication between the organization and existing and potential clients. Promotion is also mostly characterized as a course of mass communication with clients to increase sales of products or services, and also create awareness. Promotion covers all instruments of the communicating message sent to the existing and potential clients.

[5]Export promotion is utilized by numerous nations and regions to advance the labor and products from other organizations abroad. This is really great for the exchange balance and for the general economy. Export promotion can likewise have motivating force programs intended to bring more organizations into exporting. Governments do this by providing assistance in the marketing and product identification and development, by arranging payment guaranty schemes, pre-shipment and post-shipment financing, trade visits, training, trade fairs, and foreign representation. From the year 2020, global deals turned out to be substantially more troublesome. Business travels became strenuous and significant trade missions dwindled. [6]The people who could, moved from offline to online, yet in business-to-business, where individual connections matter, most organizations could not expand on existing contacts. Right now is an ideal opportunity to zero-in again on developing worldwide ideals, for instance; during the pandemic, most organization moved their meetings from physical contact to virtual meetings, and by finding new circulation channels and dealing with the current ones better. As contenders are restarting their endeavors to cope with the challenge – export promoting organizations are supposed to reinforce their communication methodologies in elevating export in order to not lag behind.

In a bid to come out of this difficulties the Nigerian Export Promotion Council, established be "Nigerian Export Promotion Council Decree No. 26 of 1976", presently an Act, have been embracing series of projects in pushing the country ahead. This they have done by offering and conducting, registration for exporters, providing market information, export trainings and seminars, matching Nigerian exporters with potential buyers, advisory and coaching services, administration of export incentives and support in trade promotion services as well as support for women in exports. Furthermore, with the diversification plan of the country which is moving from an oil-based export, the Council is saddled with the responsibility of advancing non-oil produce and making same accessible in the country to potential clients abroad. Hence, the study is based on analyzing the Communication Strategies of Nigerian Export Promotion Council in the Promotion of Non-Oil

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Products using the Study of the South-South Region of Nigeria as study.

Statement of the Problem

The South-South region of Nigeria contains six states (AkwaIbom, Bayelsa, Edo, Cross River, Delta, and Rivers) and is decisively situated where the Y tail of the waterway Niger joins the Atlantic Ocean through the Gulf of Guinea. However a generally little stretch of land, the South-South of the nation gives the monetary pillar of the economy is oil. Notwithstanding oil and gas, the region similarly offers other distinct advantages, with potential colossal speculation, amazing open doors in the travel industry and agriculture [7]. Notwithstanding, throughout 20 years oil investigation and exportation has been the focal point of the public authority of Nigeria inside the region and with little accentuation on other accessible mineral assets accessible in the region, which could help its export items and profit past oil. The disregard has additionally made NEXIM Bank to sort out an Exporter Enlightenment Forum for the South-South Geopolitical Zone, to empower the bank highlight the partners in India the zone, the non-oil assets that are suitable export items whenever created. Furthermore, taking into account the unpredictability in the worldwide crude oil market, the South-South region ought to try to investigate other undiscovered assets, for example, solid minerals, which are spread across the region in commercial quantity, as well as, enhance phenomenal development in the service sector in the long term, among other sectors to make a very much broadened economy that would be versatile following worldwide monetary shocks [8].

The South-South region of Nigeria, being wealthy in oil and gas assets regardless, unfamiliar direct venture (Foreign Direct Investment - FDI) in the South-South has been at a low ebb, because of reasons, which monetary experts said, were related with uncertainty, absence of good corporate administration and nonexistence of information driven economy. Among 2013 and first quarter of 2020, the region which once got tremendous lump of Nigeria's (FDI) inflows during the 1970s, scarcely got $474,133,792 million out of the $92,284,945,105.59 inflow. Improvement and monetary specialists as detailed by [9]in "The Guardian Newspaper" that the decrease in FDI was fundamentally a direct result of hostility, ocean robbery, grabbing, local area aggression, unfortunate framework and political flimsiness, due reliance on oil-investigation that has kept on deterring global oil organizations from making long haul venture responsibilities. Examiners additionally fault the South-South inability to get wise ventures inside the period, as states couldn't get FDI in immense mineral assets like silica, tar sand, dirt, limestone, rock, quartz, marble and gold salt, tin, basalt, quartzite, kaolin, sand and feldspar [9]. This failure to diversify the South-South economy can also be as a result of poor orientation of the populace on the various opportunities available to them in aforementioned non-oil products as well as the potential in agribusiness, light manufacturing and tourism, which could greatly foster peace and improved development.

Generally, the problems identified in this study are; poor sensitization, lack of effective media coverage of the works of the NEPC, inadequate incentives to non-oil exporters, and lack of international collaboration with local manufacturers especially due to insecurity in the region. Thus, it is the intent of this study to analyze the role of communication strategy of the Nigerian Export Promotion Council in the promotion of non-oil products in South-South region of Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to assess the communication strategy of the Nigerian Export Promotion Council in the promotion of non-oil products in South –South region of Nigeria.

The study's objectives were to:

i. Identify the communication strategies adopted by the Nigerian Export Promotion Council in the promotion of non-oil products in South –South region of Nigeria.
ii. Identify the benefits of the communication strategies adopted by the Nigerian Export Promotion Council in the promotion of non-oil products in South –South region of Nigeria.
iii. Analyse the challenges of the communication strategies adopted by the Nigerian Export Promotion Council in the promotion of non-oil products in South –South region of Nigeria.
iv. Identify causes of the challenges associated with the communication strategies adopted by the Nigerian Export Promotion Council in the promotion of non-oil products in South –South region of Nigeria.
v. Identify better communication strategies that can be adopted by the

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Nigerian Export Promotion Council in the promotion of non-oil products in South –South region of Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study's research questions are as follows:

i. What are the communication strategies adopted by the Nigerian Export Promotion Council in the promotion of non-oil products in South –South region of Nigeria?
ii. What are the benefits of the communication strategies adopted by the Nigerian Export Promotion Council in the promotion of non-oil products in South – South region of Nigeria?
iii. What are the challenges of the communication strategies adopted by the Nigerian Export Promotion Council in the promotion of non-oil products in South – South region of Nigeria?
iv. What are the causes of the challenges associated with the communication strategies adopted by the Nigerian Export Promotion Council in the promotion of non-oil products in South –South region of Nigeria?
v. What better communication strategies can be adopted by the Nigerian Export Promotion Council in the promotion of non-oil products in South –South region of Nigeria?

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is premised on the geographical and content scope of research. The geographical scope of this study comprised six states (AkwaIbom, Bayelsa, Edo, Cross River, Delta, and Rivers) of the south-south region of Nigeria, however, the study shall limit its research to the region offices of the Nigerian Export Promotion Council in the capital of four states (AkwaIbom, Cross River, Edo, and Rivers). The content scope of this work was based on the opinion of the employees at the Nigerian Export Promotion Council and non-oil exporter in the selected states on the communication strategies adopted in the promotion of non-oil products in the region in a bid to ascertain the way forward. Furthermore, extant literatures on similar topic shall be reviewed to correlate the findings of this work with best practices on the promotion of non – oil export products.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examined the scholarly foundations of strategic communication and export promotion, with particular reference to the Nigerian Export Promotion Council's (NEPC) role in fostering non-oil exports in the South–South region. By integrating conceptual debates, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings, it situates the present study within existing research and identifies a critical gap concerning NEPC's communication strategies.

Over the past three decades, strategic communication has evolved from a subsidiary marketing function into a core organizational discipline essential for achieving policy and development objectives [10]. In parallel, export promotion has become a key policy instrument for economies seeking to diversify beyond primary commodities [5]. This chapter synthesizes the literature on how communication frameworks are deployed to stimulate non-oil exports, particularly in contexts marked by infrastructural and institutional challenges such as Nigeria's South–South region.

Theoretical Framework

This study is founded in four interrelated economic theories that illuminate the relationship between communication, investment, and trade performance:

- **Unbalanced Growth Theory**[11] Advocates for targeted investment in strategically significant sectors—such as cocoa or cassava processing in Cross River—to generate spillover effects. Effective communication can signal these priority sectors to investors and international buyers.
- **Absolute Advantage Theory**[12][13]Posits that countries should specialize in goods they can produce most efficiently. By conveying information on Nigeria's high-quality cashew output or hibiscus flowers, NEPC can guide exporters towards their comparative strengths.
- **Comparative Advantage Theory**[13]Refines this by suggesting that all countries stand to gain from trade, even if they hold no absolute advantage. Communication strategies thus need to emphasize niche market

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opportunities—such as specialty sesame seeds—to exploit relative efficiencies.

- **Marshall–Lerner Condition** examines how exchange-rate movements affect trade balances. If communication channels are weak—e.g., NEPC's website is difficult to navigate—exporters may fail to adapt pricing and contracts in response to currency fluctuations [14], thereby diminishing competitiveness.

Conceptual Review

Strategic Communication

Strategic communication is defined as the purposeful use of communication by organizations to fulfil their mission and objectives [15]. It extends beyond public relations and marketing to encompass stakeholder engagement, reputation management, and digital branding [16]. Three central tenets emerge in the literature:

1. **Integration**: [15] Argues that strategic communication integrates multiple disciplines—marketing, public relations, technical writing—to deliver coherent messaging. For export promotion, this means aligning market research, policy advocacy, and training materials under a unified brand identity.
2. **Audience Segmentation and Media Selection**: Effective communication requires understanding diverse stakeholder needs [17]. For NEPC, stakeholders range from rural SMEs to multinational buyers, each requiring tailored channels—from radio broadcasts to LinkedIn updates.
3. **Digital Engagement**: The proliferation of online platforms has transformed how agencies interact with exporters. Social media, mobile apps, and e-registration portals offer real-time, cost-effective channels [18]. Yet digital divides persist, particularly in under-resourced regions, necessitating hybrid approaches.

Export Promotion

[19]Export promotion denotes government-led efforts to encourage domestic firms to enter and compete in foreign markets. Common instruments include financial incentives, trade fairs, technical assistance, and market intelligence dissemination [20]. [5]Emphasize that such policies are most effective when they are comprehensive—combining grants with training and networking opportunities. In Nigeria, export promotion is vital for reducing oil dependency; however, policy fragmentation and bureaucratic hurdles often dilute impact [21].

Non-Oil Exports and GDP

Diversification into non-oil exports—including agriculture, solid minerals, and services—carries significant macroeconomic benefits. [22]Demonstrates that agricultural exports alone contributed over 10% to Nigeria's GDP between 2005 and 2010, yet lagging infrastructure and regulatory inconsistencies impelled stagnation thereafter. [21] Further highlight that ports in Rivers State and Cross River State suffer from congestion and power unreliability, undermining exporters' competitiveness. These structural deficits underscore the importance of targeted communication strategies that address localized barriers.

NEPC's Role

[23]Since its establishment in 1976, NEPC has functioned as Nigeria's apex export-promotion agency. Its mandate encompasses:

- **Market Access Negotiations**: Facilitating bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area.
- **Capacity-Building Programs**: Initiatives like SheTrades and the Exporter Development Programme aim to equip SMEs and women entrepreneurs with technical know-how [24].
- **DigitalPlatforms**: The Nigerian Exporters E-Registration Portal (NEEP) enables online application for incentives and access to market data.

Despite these innovations, NEPC faces recurring funding gaps, political interference, and staff capacity issues, which impair its outreach effectiveness [9]. In the South–South region, political patronage often skews resource allocation towards select urban centers, leaving rural exporters marginalized.

Empirical Review

A body of empirical research corroborates the theoretical linkages between export promotion, communication efficacy, and economic outcomes: [25] finds a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.68$, $p < .01$) between non-oil export volumes and Nigerian GDP, suggesting that incremental improvements in export facilitation yield macroeconomic gains. [14]Reports that exchange-rate volatility negatively impacts export earnings by an average of 12% annually, highlighting the need for timely market intelligence—a function that strategic communication can fulfil. [26]Demonstrated through time-series analysis that long-term currency

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instability erodes exporters' confidence, resulting in contracted export portfolios. Again, communication on hedging strategies and incentive cycles could mitigate such risks. Indonesia's trade ministry leverages WhatsApp groups to circulate daily market updates, price trends, and policy advisories, achieving over 90% engagement among registered exporters [24]. In South Africa, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange's Export Partnership Programme—backed by both government and private stakeholders—provides a model for co-funding targeted trade missions and capacity-building events [27].

These studies underscore that while macroeconomic policies establish the enabling environment, micro-level communication channels determine exporters' ability to navigate dynamic markets.

Summary and Research Gap

The reviewed literature establishes that strategic communication and export promotion are mutually reinforcing. NEPC's initiatives—seminars, online tools, and incentive programmes—embody best-practice principles, yet implementation challenges persist. Key barriers include under-resourced digital infrastructure in the South–South region, bureaucratic delays in information dissemination [28], and political interference that distorts outreach efforts [5]. Despite extensive macroeconomic and sectorial analyses, there is scant research on how NEPC's specific communication strategies perform in different regional contexts. No study to date has systematically assessed stakeholder perceptions of NEPC's seminars, online advertisements, billboards, and digital portals within the South–South states. Addressing this gap is critical for tailoring policy interventions that reflect localized needs and constraints.

This chapter has established a comprehensive theoretical and empirical foundation for examining NEPC's communication strategies in promoting non-oil exports. Strategic communication theory highlights the importance of integration, audience segmentation, and digital engagement. Economic theories of trade—absolute and comparative advantage, unbalanced growth, and the Marshall–Lerner Condition—provide a lens to understand how targeted outreach can stimulate sectorial expansion. Empirical studies from Nigeria and international comparators demonstrate the tangible impacts of communication-driven export promotion. However, the literature reveals a clear gap in evaluating NEPC's region-specific communication efficacy. The present study seeks to fill this void by investigating how NEPC's outreach methods are perceived by exporters and stakeholders in the South–South region, identifying challenges, and proposing evidence-based improvements. By doing so, it contributes both to academic discourse on strategic communication and to practical policy design aimed at enhancing Nigeria's non-oil export performance.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a mixed-method case study design, combining qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaires) approaches to assess NEPC's communication strategies in Nigeria's South-South region [29] and [30]. It adopts a non-experimental, flexible case study design to explore NEPC's impact without hypothesis testing. Integrates primary (surveys, interviews) and secondary data (reports, journals) [31]. Population the targets NEPC staff and registered exporters across four South-South states (AkwaIbom, Edo, Cross River, and Rivers) as the accessible population, employing a homogeneous-purposive sampling for a representative subset (138 respondents) calculated via Z-test (95% confidence level, 5% margin of error) [31]. Data collection involved Primary: Structured questionnaires (26 items) and semi-structured interviews (6 questions) [32]. Secondary: Government reports, journals, and literature on non-oil exports [33]. Questionnaires/interviews administered in-person with prior consent; pre-test conducted separately [34]. Validity and Reliability was ensured through expert reviews, pilot testing, and alignment with research objectives [32].

Data analysis includes quantitative - Frequency, mean, and standard deviation analyzed using Excel, and Qualitative - AI-enabled thematic analysis for interview data [34].

IV. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative data collected during the study. Using Excel and AI-enabled thematic tools, the data were processed, coded, and

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summarized through tables, charts, and quotations to provide meaningful insights and enhance understanding of the research findings.

This section presents the results for the number of questionnaires used for the study. This helps determine if the study had generated good enough quantitative data.

In the Table below is the results of Questionnaire Distribution and Return Rate across the selected states presented using frequency and percentage. Out of 138 questionnaires distributed, 95 were returned, representing a 69% response rate. Rivers State and Edo recorded the highest returns with (30 responses each), next to AkwaIbom with (20 responses) while Cross River had the lowest with (15 responses).

Questionnaires Distributed and Retrieved

S/N	Item	Questionnaires Distributed	Questionnaires Returned
1	AkwaIbom	34	20
2	Edo	34	30
3	Cross River	34	15
4	Rivers State	36	30
	Total (Frequency/%)	**138 / 100%**	**95 / 69%**

Demographic Results

Demographic results refer to the statistical data that describe the characteristics of a population sample, such as age, gender, occupation, and other relevant social identifiers. In research, analyzing demographic data helps to understand the background of respondents and ensures that the findings are drawn from a diverse and representative group.

The Table below on the respondents' profile showed that 48 respondents (51%) were NEPC staff, while 47 (49%) were non-oil exporters. In terms of gender, 50 respondents (53%) were male and 45 (47%) were female. The age distribution reveals that 28 respondents (29%) were between 20–30 years, 42 (44%) were within 31–40 years, and 25 (26%) fell within the 41–50 years age group, indicating a diverse yet balanced demographic representation.

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S/N	Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Respondent Category	NEPC Staff	48	51%
		Non-Oil Exporter	47	49%
2	Gender	Male	50	53%
		Female	45	47%
3	Age Group	20 – 30 years	28	29%
		31 – 40 years	42	44%
		41 – 50 years	25	26%
	Total		**95**	**100%**

Respondents' Areas of Specialty

The Table below shows the following results; the data reveals that within NEPC staff, the highest representation is from Product Development (10 respondents, 20.8%), followed by Market Access (8, 16.7%), and Export Development and Incentives (7, 14.6%). Trade Information (6, 12.5%) and Policy and Strategy (5, 10.4%) also feature significantly, while Corporate Services, State Offices Coordination, and Office of the CEO each have 4 respondents (8.3%). This distribution suggests a broad institutional involvement in various export support functions.

The Table below further shows the following results; among non-oil exporters, Cocoa Beans are the most commonly exported product (10 respondents, 21.3%), followed by Sesame Seeds (8, 17%) and Cashew Nuts (7, 14.9%). Ginger (6, 12.8%) and Hibiscus Flowers (5, 10.6%) also appear prominently. Less represented are Urea/Fertilizer (4, 8.5%), Leather Goods (3, 6.4%), and Aluminum Ingots (2, 4.3%). This shows Nigeria's growing interest in agricultural exports and limited presence in manufactured export products.

Department	Frequency	Percentage (%)
NEPC Staff		
Product Development	10	20.80%
Market Access	8	16.70%
Export Development and Incentives	7	14.60%
Trade Information	6	12.50%
Policy and Strategy	5	10.40%
Corporate Services	4	8.30%
State Offices Coordination	4	8.30%
Office of the CEO	4	8.30%
Total	**48**	**100%**
Non-Oil Exporters		
Cocoa Beans	10	21.30%
Sesame Seeds	8	17.00%
Cashew Nuts	7	14.90%
Ginger	6	12.80%
Hibiscus Flowers	5	10.60%
Urea/Fertilizer	4	8.50%
Leather Goods	3	6.40%
Aluminum Ingots	2	4.30%
Total	**47**	**100%**

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Psychographic Analysis

This section investigates the Nigerian Export Promotion Council's (NEPC) communication strategies for promoting non-oil exports in South-South Nigeria. It addresses four key research questions: the strategies adopted (online ads, billboards, seminars), their benefits (encouraging exporters, providing market information), challenges (high costs, poor accessibility), and underlying causes (funding issues, administrative weaknesses). Responses are recorded as yes/no for each sub-question.

Communication Strategies Adopted by NEPC

The Table below presents the communication strategies adopted by the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) in promoting non-oil products across the South–South region. The findings reveal that the most utilized strategy is seminars and programmes, acknowledged by 81 respondents (85%), while 14 respondents (15%) did not acknowledge this strategy.

The Table below reveals the perceived benefits of NEPC's communication strategies. For online advertisements, 68 respondents (72%) believe they encourage exporters, while 27 respondents (28%) disagreed. Similarly, 65 respondents (68%) feel that online ads promote choice products, while 30 (32%) did not. For the NEPC website, 52 respondents (55%) affirmed it provides access to incentives, while 43 (45%) disagreed, and 48 respondents (50%) said it informs about new market opportunities, with an equal 47 respondents (50%) disagreeing. As for billboards, 59 respondents (62%) said they announce seminars and programmes, while 36 respondents (38%) did not agree. Also, 55 respondents (58%) feel billboards encourage product improvement, while 40 respondents (42%) disagreed – this had the least representation on the list because NEPC has resorted mostly to online advertising. For seminars, 67 respondents (70%) agreed they promote female exporters, while 28 respondents (30%) disagreed.

S/N	Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Online Advertisement	74 (78%)	21 (22%)
2	Official NEPC Website	62 (65%)	33 (35%)
3	Billboards	57 (60%)	38 (40%)
4	Seminars and Programmes	81 (85%)	14 (15%)

Benefits of Communication Strategies

For online advertisement, 74 respondents (78%) affirmed its use, 21 respondents (22%) did not. The official NEPC website was recognized by 62 respondents (65%), with 33 respondents (35%) indicating otherwise. Lastly, billboards were cited by 57 respondents (60%), while 38 respondents (40%) did not. These figures indicate that while NEPC's communication strategies are largely recognized, a consistent minority of respondents either did not perceive these methods or possibly had no exposure to them. This points to a need for improved outreach and integration across all communication platforms to ensure broader stakeholder engagement. Moreso, the findings infers that seminars and online advertisements are the most utilized strategies, while billboards and the NEPC website face lower adoption rates.

Furthermore, 71 respondents (75%) affirmed that seminars teach technological advancements, with 24 respondents (25%) indicating otherwise. In summary, while the majority of respondents acknowledge the positive impacts of these communication strategies, a significant minority either disagrees or does not have a clear view on some of the benefits. This indicates room for improvement in strategy effectiveness and outreach. Howbeit, the result indicates seminars are highly effective for training and inclusivity, while the NEPC website's utility is limited.

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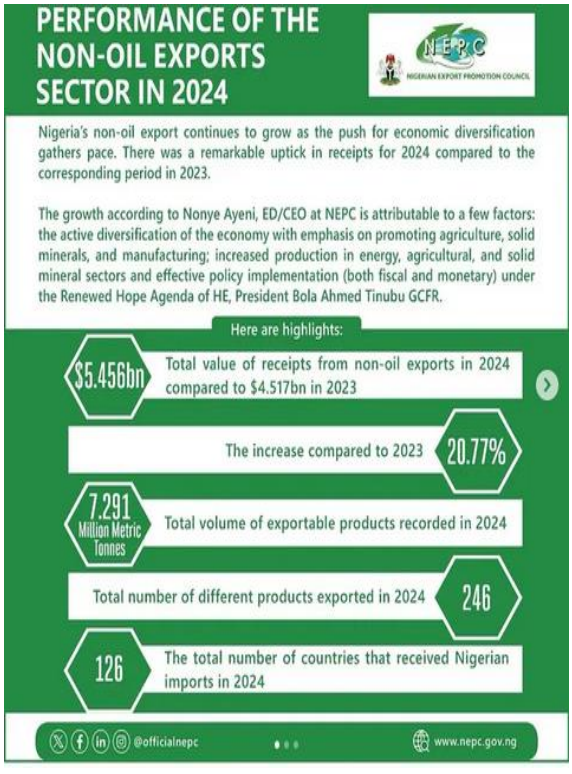
S/N	Benefit	Yes (Frequency/%)	No (Frequency/%)
1	Online advertisement encourage exporters	68 (72%)	27 (28%)
2	Online advertisement promote choice products	65 (68%)	30 (32%)
3	NEPC website provides access to incentives	52 (55%)	43 (45%)
4	NEPC website informs about new market opportunities	48 (50%)	47 (50%)
5	Billboards announce seminars/programmes	59 (62%)	36 (38%)
6	Billboards encourage product improvement	55 (58%)	40 (42%)
7	Seminars promote female exporters	67 (70%)	28 (30%)
7	Seminars teach technological advancements	71 (75%)	24 (25%)



Samples of Online Publication of NEPC to encourage Non-Oil Product Exporters

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Challenges of Communication Strategies

The Table below identifies the challenges associated with NEPC's communication strategies. Online advertisements are seen as expensive by 76 respondents (80%), with 19 (20%) disagreeing. Additionally, 62 respondents (65%) pointed out that online ads lack visibility among local manufacturers, while 33 (35%) disagreed. For the NEPC website, 67 respondents (70%) found it difficult to operate, with 28 (30%) disagreeing. As for registration requirements, 71 respondents (75%) indicated they are strenuous, while 24 (25%) did not find them burdensome. The challenge of insufficient billboards for outreach was acknowledged by 65 respondents (68%), with 30 (32%) not agreeing. Furthermore, 57 respondents (60%) believed that billboards lack durability, while 38 (40%) disagreed.

In terms of seminars, 68 respondents (72%) indicated that there are limited participant slots, while 27 (28%) did not share this view. Finally, 62 respondents (65%) felt that seminars are poorly announced, with 33 (35%) disagreeing. Overall, the findings indicate that while NEPC's communication strategies are perceived to have several benefits, there are notable challenges, particularly regarding costs, accessibility, and reach. These challenges suggest the need for more strategic planning and resource allocation to enhance the effectiveness and outreach of NEPC's communication efforts.

S/N	Challenge	Yes (Frequency/%)	No (Frequency/%)
1	Online advertisement are expensive	76 (80%)	19 (20%)
2	Online advertisement lack visibility among local manufacturers	62 (65%)	33 (35%)
3	NEPC website is difficult to operate	67 (70%)	28 (30%)
4	Registration requirements are strenuous	71 (75%)	24 (25%)
5	Insufficient billboards for outreach	65 (68%)	30 (32%)
6	Billboards lack durability	57 (60%)	38 (40%)
7	Seminars have limited participant slots	68 (72%)	27 (28%)
8	Seminars are poorly announced	62 (65%)	33 (35%)

Table below presents the causes behind the communication challenges faced by the NEPC. Funding constraints are seen as a major cause by 81 respondents (85%), with only 14 (15%) not agreeing. Similarly, poor administration was identified by 74 respondents (78%) as a contributing factor, while 21 (22%) disagreed. The lack of political will was cited by 66 respondents (70%), with 29 (30%) not agreeing. Insufficient manpower was recognized by 62 respondents (65%), with 33 (35%) not perceiving it as a challenge. Inadequate facilities were cited by 68 respondents (72%), with 27 (28%) disagreeing.Lastly, untrained personnel were pointed out by 57 respondents (60%), with 38 (40%) not agreeing. The findings suggest that the primary causes of communication challenges are financial limitations and administrative inefficiencies, while issues like manpower and facilities also play significant roles. These results emphasize the need for strategic improvements in resources, training, and political support to enhance NEPC's communication strategies.

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S/N	Cause	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Funding constraints	85%	15%
2	Poor administration	78%	22%
3	Lack of political will	70%	30%
4	Insufficient manpower	65%	35%
5	Inadequate facilities	72%	28%
6	Untrained personnel	60%	40%

Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview was used alongside the questionnaire to gather additional qualitative data from respondents on the fifth research question. Open-ended questions allowed participants to provide detailed insights and personal perspectives on the communication strategies employed by the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC), enriching the findings from the quantitative survey.

1. Views on NEPC's Communication of New Export Deals

The views on NEPC's communication of new export deals reflect a mixed effectiveness, with both positive and negative aspects noted. A significant 65% of respondents acknowledged the NEPC's efforts through seminars and online advertisements, as seen in Table on Communication Strategies Adopted by NEPC. These initiatives were appreciated for their outreach and engagement. However, 50% of respondents found the updates on the NEPC website to be unreliable, as shown in Table on Benefits of Communication Strategies. This indicates a-disconnect in providing timely and accurate information. Additionally, the negative side was highlighted by 65% of respondents who indicated poor seminar publicity, as noted in Table 6, which hindered effective engagement from exporters. These findings align with [28] research, which discussed bureaucratic delays in the dissemination of information, showing that NEPC's communication strategies, although beneficial, require improvements to ensure more reliable and timely updates.

2. Impact of NEPC's Efficiency on International Trade

The efficiency of NEPC plays a crucial role in Nigeria's competitiveness in international trade, but there are significant limitations. A substantial 70% of respondents cited poor website usability as a major obstacle as shown in Table on Challenges of Communication Strategies, and 85% pointed to funding gaps (see the Table on Causes of Communication Challenges), which slow down the access exporters have to global markets. These inefficiencies reflect the challenges Nigerian exporters face when trying to compete on the international stage. For example, Nigeria's non-oil exports lag behind Ghana's agro-exports, according to the [35], largely due to weak promotion and inefficient systems in place. To improve this, respondents suggested streamlining processes, including reducing registration hurdles, as shown in Table on Challenges of Communication Strategies, to create a more competitive environment for Nigerian exporters.

3. Best-Performing NEPC Measure (If Effective)

Seminars have emerged as the best-performing NEPC measure when it comes to effectiveness, with 75% of respondents praising these events for their focus on technological training (see the Table on Benefits of Communication Strategies). The seminars are seen as particularly effective because they are interactive, gender-inclusive, and practical. A notable 70% of respondents highlighted that these seminars also support female exporters, making them an important tool for empowering marginalized groups. This finding supports [6] research, which identified capacity-building as a

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key driver for trade development, suggesting that NEPC's seminar programs provide significant value in building the capacity of exporters.

4. Suggestions for Improvement (If Ineffective)

Despite the success of some initiatives, several systemic reforms are necessary to enhance NEPC's overall effectiveness. A critical issue is funding, with 85% of respondents indicating underinvestment as a significant challenge (Table on Causes of Communication Challenges). Technological upgrades were also suggested, with 70% of respondents citing difficulty in using the NEPC website (Table on Challenges of Communication Strategies). There is also a need for decentralization, as evidenced by lower participation from regions like Cross River (Table on Questionnaires Distributed and Returned), which had the lowest response rate. This suggests the need for more state-level seminars and outreach. These points echo the NEPC's 2019 call for more inclusive outreach programs, which could be supported by a more robust digital presence and increased funding for local initiatives.

5. Political Influence on NEPC's Performance

Political interference appears to be a major barrier to the NEPC's performance. A large 70% of respondents indicated that a lack of political will is a challenge (Table on Causes of Communication Challenges), with some even noting preferential treatment given to certain exporters. This practice distorts resource allocation, such as the concentration of billboards in urban hubs like Rivers, while rural areas remain underrepresented. The effect of this political interference is consistent with [9] findings, which noted that political meddling has led to investor distrust in the South-South region. These issues hinder the NEPC's ability to foster a fair and balanced trade environment.

6. Better Communication Strategies

To improve communication strategies, a combination of digital and grassroots integration was proposed. Respondents suggested replacing the cumbersome NEPC website with a more user-friendly mobile app, as 70% of them found the current website difficult to navigate (Table on Challenges of Communication Strategies). Additionally, 65% of respondents noted that online advertisements were not reaching many SMEs, suggesting a need for local radio outreach. Public-private partnerships with agro-firms were also seen as a viable way to target specific campaigns to exporters. This proposal is supported by international examples, such as Indonesia's trade ministry, which uses WhatsApp to keep exporters updated [24].

7. Should NEPC Be Privatized?

The question of whether NEPC should be privatized received a cautious "yes" from respondents. While 78% blamed poor administration for inefficiencies (Table on Causes of Communication Challenges), suggesting that privatization could improve efficiency, there are concerns about excluding smallholder exporters. With 49% of exporters being SMEs (Table on Respondents' Profile), there is a risk that privatization could marginalize these groups. A middle ground approach, such as a semi-autonomous model with government oversight, was proposed, similar to South Africa's Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), which balances efficiency with inclusivity.

In conclusion, the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews which was corroborated by the findings within the questionnaire, reveals that while NEPC's strengths, particularly its seminars, are clear, they are undermined by issues related to funding, political interference, and the need for greater digital and state-level engagement. There is a pressing need to address these bottlenecks to enhance communication strategies and improve export performance in the South-South region. Digitalization and decentralization are key to improving accessibility, while privatization should be approached with caution to avoid excluding SMEs. It is recommended that pilot projects focused on technology-driven solutions be launched in regions like AkwaIbom and Rivers, where response rates were high (Table on Questionnaires Distributed and Returned), to test the effectiveness of these reforms before a nationwide rollout.

Discussions

- The Research evaluates NEPC's mixed-performance communication strategies for non-oil exports, combining survey data and thematic analysis [24] and [28]. It identifies effective elements (seminars, digital tools) versus systemic constraints (funding gaps, political interference) and presented as follows:
- **Communication Strategies**: Event-driven model dominates (85% seminars, 78% online ads, 60% billboards) but shows regional

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disparities (Tables on Respondents' Profile, Respondents' Areas of Specialty, and Communication Strategies Adopted by NEPC). [24]Demonstrates superior alternatives like Indonesia's WhatsApp updates, suggesting mobile-first solutions for SME engagement.

- **Benefits**: Seminars prove most effective (75% approval for capacity-building), aligning with [6] findings on training value. Digital divide evident as 72% find ads useful versus only 50% website satisfaction (Table on Benefits of Communication Strategies).
- **Challenges**: Implementation barriers mirror Nigeria's agro-export lag behind Ghana [35], and they include; Cost inefficiencies (80% high ad costs), Technical limitations (70% website usability issues) and Logistical gaps (65% poor seminar publicity) (Table on Challenges of Communication Strategies).
- **Root Causes**: NEPC's 2019 institutional review corroborates findings of the study that the following are causes of the prevailing challenges; Chronic underfunding (85%) and Political distortion of resource allocation [9]. Thus, the model structured[27] was proposed as governance alternative (Table on Causes of Communication Challenges).
- **Proposed Improvements**: The results presented a Four-tier reform framework including; (1) Digital transition (mobile apps replacing website), (2) Grassroots integration (local radio for SMEs), (3) Decentralized delivery (state-level seminars) and (4) PPP financing (agro-processor partnerships) – (Semi- structured interview)

Therefore, the synthesis of the results confirms [6] and [24] best practices on non-oil export communication strategies, which are, (1) Retain seminar strengths (2) Accelerate digital transformation, (3) Insulate from political interference, and (4) Pilot testing in high-engagement states (AkwaIbom/Rivers) recommended before scaling

Summary of Findings

Study assessed NEPC's communication strategies for non-oil exports in South-South Nigeria through mixed methods (95 surveys + interviews). Dominant strategies determined includes seminars (85%), online ads (78%), but faced cost (80%) and digital access (70%) challenges. Benefits included exporter training (75%) and female inclusivity (70%), while Key constraints are funding gaps (85%), political interference (70%).

V. CONCLUSION

Thus, the study concludes that NEPC's seminar (85%) and digital (78%) strategies show promise but limited by funding (85%), bureaucracy (78%) and politics (70%). Hence, requires digital transformation, decentralized outreach, and governance reforms. This aligns with global models (Indonesia's agile systems) while addressing Nigeria-specific institutional gaps and provides blueprint for enhancing South-South export competitiveness.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- Digital shift: Replace website with mobile apps (WhatsApp) per [24];
- Local outreach: Expand radio campaigns for SME inclusion (65% gap);
- Alternative funding: Agro-firm partnerships;
- Governance reform: Semi-autonomous model [27]; and
- Phased rollout: Pilot in AkwaIbom/Rivers first.

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