Communication Freedom and Film Regulation in the Digital Era

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Abstract

Communication freedom and film regulation in the digital era is fundamental in any journalistic engagement. Within this context, this study investigates communication freedom and film regulation in the digital era in Nigeria. A population of 300 respondents was considered while the theoretical postulation of Social Media Research Theory and Two-Step Flow Theory serve as framework in the study. The convergence of these theories helped in understanding the role of media regulators in coming out with the template that will help strike a balance between communication freedom and regulation in the digital space. The study was premised on the prevailing discourse that communication freedom and film in the digital age is a herculean task. The study was explicated using the following objective: the need for information and communication policy document that regulate information and film in Nigeria; and the various ways of regulating online news sources and blogs so that viewers can have valuable content which can benefit the audience. The study adopted cross-sectional design of survey in collecting the data. The findings of the study revealed that there are infractions of fake news, misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, propaganda among other harmful contents in the digital media. The study found that there are teething problems such as lack of a workable regulatory policy as well as the uncollaborative efforts of relevant stakeholders in providing a single document that will help the communication and film sectors strike a balance between regulation and press freedom. The study concludes that fake news, misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda are some of the infractions of the digital space. There are snags associated with online news sources and content of film consumption with regards to regulation and press freedom. The study recommends that there is a need for information and communication policy document that can regulate information and film in Nigeria.

Keywords: Communication freedom; Film regulation; Digital era

Introduction

Communication can only be said to be effective when the communicator understands the audience. There are acquired skills in communication and that is why it is imperative for every communicator to either be a borne communicator or acquire skills for effective communication. Communication in the military era is not the same as communication in the civilian dispensation hence the audience and their exposure during the military dispensation cannot be comparatively same as the audience we see in this current era. The gift of communication as well as the knowledge of communication is two attributes a good communicator must have [1].

Communication freedom and film regulation is so paramount, especially with the current trends as regards digitalization. The advents of AI, ChatGPT, AI bots, OpenAI, Artificial intelligence are tools programmed to do human activities. Even though, there are widespread criticism on AI, with accompanied fears that the technology will fully take over human space, there is the

need for research and use of these technologies and how to be domesticated for African environment, especially in the media sector. The need for Africans to meet up this intermittent and exponential digitalization is a big issue in Africa and Nigeria as a whole. Different scholars in the communication industry had noted how technology has been used against us by western countries and there have been calls on how these new technologies could be adopted for our contents and developments of every sector of our country. Using AI to leverage on language, and the importance of giving AI the African narrative cannot be overemphasized.

Within this contextual context, this research study focuses on the need for new information and communication policy, which other communication scholars have advocated for. This policy is urgently needed as guide for all forms of communication be it old media, new media, and digital media. The last effective information and communication policy can be dated to the military era during the former Ibrahim Babanginda's regime. As Nigeria moved from military era to democratic dispensations from 1999 to date has not taken the need for a new policy document seriously. A new communication and information policy will focus on truthful information from government parastatals, the activities of the government as well as getting the public informed about government policies and workings. A country of almost two hundred two people deserves to know the workings of the government and not propaganda constantly used by heads of ministry of information and communication. Unfortunately, the ministry of information and communication as failed to give the people accurate information coupled with government's obvious failures to deliver their mandate and promises to the people.

Film regulation in the digital era is critical and it is important to note that Hollywood has gotten significant attention due to its improved storyline, plot, characterization, settings, costumes, sound. These has led to expand viewership and ultimately greater returns and increased box office. Digitalization with the introduction of new media has made Hollywood movies available on our mobile phones, tablets, computer flash and other cell phones depending on the capability of these cell phones and other devices. It is worthy to identify that phones psychologists working in social and life science labs states that films leave the audience with particular experience, and these experiences leaves the audience with lasting effects. Films that do not promote Nigeria's culture values are seen leaving our audience choked with westernization and champion of vices, it is out of this menace which has eaten deeply into our societal fabric that a new information and communication policy will provide a guide on film regulation that will guide film producers and investors; so that at the end of it all, we have digitalization that focuses on human and our country growth in general.

Hate speech bill, social media bill, fines to new stations, twitter ban/judgment, code of practice for platforms and internet intermediaries were all government stringent ways of ensuring that information and communication is not as free as the citizen expected. Several NGOs also spring up to fight against what is called the gagging of the press. The government having seen that their methods of communicating to the audience is not working and the ministers of information and communication since democracy has not fully understand the operating environment,

hence communication becomes more and more difficult. The coming of the new media and social media made it worse for these ministers over the years and over time.

Concerning privacy and surveillance, there is mass biometric registration which includes registration for voters' card. The citizens have become so enlightened with the use of new media and social media. The new media and social media through various contents and films have opened the eyes of the citizens to the happenings around the world and raise the consciousness of the people on how an average Nigerians should live. This militated to Nigerians rushing to get registered for their PVCs to vote out people whom they fee do not represent their interest. The Nigeria Data Protection Bureau (NDPB) was established by the Federal Government in February 2022 and it is now the supervisory and regulatory authority for data protection in Nigeria, a function previously undertaken by the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA). Sadly, there is no data protection law that protects her citizens but a bill exists.

Problem statement

The era where there is unfiltered and unhindered access to information via the digitalization of new media as well as social media apps has made communication and film regulation to be a herculean task. Different news sources as finds itself into the media space forcing itself on consumers who do not have the access or means to verify the true source of information which is channeled to billions of people per day.

This unregulated access has however given rise to fake news, propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation. For films production however, it is obvious that Nigerian films have increased tremendous attention at the global stage as well as increased box office for producers. Film producers are also leveraging on the digital era to expand their viewership and dominate the market forces. Films that have gained ground and increased viewership between 2022 and 2023 are *Shante Town, Ijakumo: The Born -again stripper, Jagun-Jagun, Omo Ghetto, King of Boys, Elesin Oba* etc. However, despite the positivity derived in this aspect, there is the growing concern of regulation both in communication and film regulation without hampering on the fundamental right of communication freedom both in the media and film.

Objectives of the study

The study examines communication freedom and film regulation in the digital era, with the following objectives:

1.   To examine the need for information and communication policy document that regulates information and communication as well as regulation in Nigeria.

2.   To regulate various online new sources and blogs so that the viewers can have valuable content which will benefit the audience?

Operational definition of key terms

Communication freedom: This is the ability for Nigerians to communicate freely to the public in a way of holding government accountable to them without fear of intimidation or persecution.

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Film regulation: This is a call for a directive by the authorities that films should be checked before they are released to the market. The era of digitalization as given people several avenues as bloggers and content creators to churn out vices hence there is need for guidance through regulation of films.

Digital era: This is the advanced and sophisticated age that things happen at a skyrocketed way. It is the current a reality of our time in which billions of information is out for the people through advanced technologies.

Literature Review

History of information and communication policy

The first communication policy was in 1987 during the General Babangida regime. The late Minister Tony Momoh who served diligently as the minister of information and culture from September 1986 until 1990 came out with a working policy which includes all aspects of information and communication. In his speech during Nigeria's 60th anniversary Tony Momoh states that democracy is a way you chose to grow the polity and it has to do with freedom (Business Day, February 2021).

In our traditional society, freedom is earned, not donated. Even in developed countries, freedom is given as a function of growth. In other words, it can be noted that democracy, which is freedom, is the luxury of development, and when there is development, there is good governance. That is so in our societies". Putting this context to play, Nigerian runs a democratic dispensation and as such the freedom it deserves should permeate all sectors in the country, communication and information inclusive.

The Freedom of Information Bill (FoI) which was passed by 7thNational Assembly, and assented to by the former President of Nigeria, Goodluck Ebele Jonathanin 2011, improves Nigeria's integrity in the comity of nations [2]. According to Business Hallmark [3], going back to history, it is recalled that Prof Momoh established APCON law in 1988. Further, it stated that advertising, public relations and the media are areas of communication, which are not necessarily verbal but written, and communication which is written is covered by laws. Positing further, the paper argued that when you have laws that are not understood, there is a problem, and when you have professions like law, medicine, media that are bodies providing requisite knowledge that qualifies and defines membership, the code of conducts guides the operations. That code of conduct will tell you what to do and if you breach the code, you will be dealt with by a disciplinary arm established for that purpose [3].

Communication freedom and digital media in Nigeria

Communication represents an essential and very important human need as well as a basic human right. The right to communication should be considered in the framework of the freedom of expression and the pluralist democracy. Communication represents an essential and very important human need as well as a basic human right. The right to communication should be considered in the framework of the

freedom of expression and the pluralist democracy. According to Fulya [4], communication is the fundamental human-to-human interaction which is necessary in establishing commonality across races of the world. Further, the scholar argues that, in a democratic and pluralistic setting, communication should be seen as an unrestrained activity that equals to the freedom of expression as enshrined in the UN Charter and in democracies across the world. Fulya sees communication as pivotal to meeting the basic human rights of expression and fostering interpersonal relationship in a multilingual society.

Montiel [5] observed that the fulfillment of human needs through interpersonal or organizational interactions vis-a-viscommunication freedom that fosters the growth of socio-cultural norms, value systems and political participationis viewed from the perspective of conceptualizing communication as a right. On the other hand, Fulya [6] conceptualizes freedom as the unalienable right of citizens to communicate between one another in diversified cultures and democracies in the world. According to the scholar, the libertarian model of the media has clear-defined roles they play in societal communication Additionally, he argues that the people's right to checkmate the excesses of the ruling class, is embedded in the Universal Charter empowering freedom of expression. The scholar, however, contends that this role of the media and individuals was geared toward a leeway the vociferation of voices on matters of governance. These arguments corroborate Hindman's (1997) position that the media, through the cooperation of the people, operate as an intermediary between the government and the people by ensuring checks and balances.

Conversely, a group of media pundits, marketers and communicators have used multiple, mixed-up terms to describe media landscape in recent years which are old media, mass media, traditional media, new media, digital media, social media, social networking, and citizen journalism [7]. The old media, which comprises of radio, television, newspapers; the new media and the social media. The social media which is described as a form of communication that uses technology to connect people for example Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram and so on while the new media is the use of technology for content creation which includes blogs, podcasts and video blogs. Reaching the audience is very important, and the digital era has given the citizens the utmost right to communicate their fears, hopes, aspirations, wants and needs to the public and to government.

Interestingly, Penn [8] states that the new media has its characteristics by its digital-first nature and its low physical cost both in production and distribution; mobile apps, video, blogs, eBooks, email and podcasts, smart device apps, video games, interactive content. It is, therefore, important to discuss Nigeria's Internet access, privacy and surveillance, as well as freedom of expression in the digital era. Consequently, Isaac [9] maintains that Nigeria accounts for 29 per cent of Internet usage on the Africa continent and 82 per cent of all telecom subscribers. According to the scholar, Nigeria's Communication Commission broadband penetration increased from 40.88 per cent in December 2021 to 45.55 per cent in October 2022, current rate of 47.01 per cent as of July 2023. The scholar further explains that this has facilitated over 89.73 million subscriptions across 3G, 4G, and 5G networks.

The NCC eyes 50 per cent broadband penetration by the end of the year 2023 [9]. With these figures, there is indication that Nigerians are having wider broadband penetration, even though when compared to other countries.

Similarly, in United States, New Consumer research by Leichtman Research Group, INC. (LRG) (2022) found that, 90 per cent of U.S. households get an Internet service at home compared to 84% in 2017 and 74 per cent in 2007. Broadband accounts for 99 per cent of households with an internet service at home, and 89 per cent of all households gets a broadband Internet service- an increase from 82 per cent in 2017, and 53 per cent in 2007, and 53 per cent in 2007. This study also found that 90 per cent of households use a laptop or desktop computer at home, an increase from 85 per cent in 2017. Those that use laptop or desktop computers at home, account for 96 per cent Internet penetration, whereas those that do not use laptop or desktop computers at home constitute 58 per cent.

Nonetheless, Hugo et al [10] states that by signing the FoI bill into law, the President has more than anyone else, empowered the citizens to participate in the governance of their own affairs. In this direction, the scholar submits that the people can now legitimately seek public information, corroborate their facts and make useful suggestions towards achieving greater good for the majority. In this contestation, it can be noted that; with access to information, citizens can fight corruption and confront the few who misappropriate public resources. Observably, there is no gainsaying that social media has played a huge role in democratic participation in Nigeria. With the help of social media, access to information, civic engagement and political engineering among citizens are made easy. From 2015, past Presidents have used the social media as a political tool to garner followership especially on Facebook, Twitter and, Instagram. However, it is worrisome that the same government that leveraged on the dynamism of social media for its campaigns, is now frowning at the platforms, and arresting people dissenting voices. This has overtime, led to apprehension in some quarters over the use of social media as people see the move of the government as an attempt to deny them of their rights to free expression.

More so, Premium Times [11], one Mr. Aminu Adamu, a student of the Federal University, Dutse, Jigawa State, was arrested on the orders of the former First Lady of Nigeria, Mrs. Aisha Buhari, for allegedly defaming her. Premium Times further reported that Mr. Adamu, 24, was alleged to have published a defamatory statement on his X (Twitter) handle against Mrs. Buhari. In the allegedly offending tweet, Mr. Adamu, who is a final year student studying Environmental Management, posted a rotund picture of the first lady with a caption in Hausa saying, "Mama is feeding fat on poor people's money" [12]. Considering the consequential infractions of hate speech and tendencies of defamation through character assassination that are prevalent in today's digital media space, due to their porous nature, there comes the dilemma of striking a balance between communication freedom and regulation.

Film regulation in the digital era

The Nigerian Copyright Act and the National Film and Video Censor Board (NFVCB) Act No 85 of 1993 primarily regulate the production and distribution of film in Nigeria. Also, the Nigerian Copyright Act grants those who express their ideas and exclusive legal rights upon completion of original work [13]. According to NFVCB [13], despite the fact that the NFVCB power covers the films distributed and exhibited in Nigeria, the NFVCB does not seem to follow its guidelines in obscenity. The scholar further argues that it is mind bugging to know that section 33of the NFVCB Act imposes a penalty of a fine or imprisonment for up to a year for exhibiting a film without a censorship.

Any blasphemous and obscene contents are checked by the body; however, the use of new media and social media has made regulation of these vices difficult [13]. Most recently, the two Nigerian films Shante Town, Ijakumo: The Born -again stripper, are movies which underlying messages are suppressed and immorality could be what an average viewers will see. Also, it is observed that the cable and satellite television shows children movies that are embedded with the western cultures which is detrimental to the kids. An example is the Disney Junior which is on various codes in Nigeria, and some of the contents in the children movies negate our values as a country. Similarly, homosexuality which is becoming rampant in Nigeria are being introduced by the western world, and these western communities are not stopping at the adults, they are also forcing their way through to the children. It is therefore important for the information and communication policy document to regulate these various children' channels so that we do not destroy the next generation.

Problem confronting ministers of information and communication for proper efficiency

It was Matthew Kumor who states that politicians campaign in poetry and deliver in prose, which has made information management sticky for the managers. Despite regular town hall meetings held by the various government administrations in order to get accurate information from people at the grass root, Nigerians still wonder why the needs of the people cannot still be met; as a result, the citizens see social media as a tool to vent their frustrations, and call out their leaders [14]. This, they do by engaging on meaningful discussions and demanding for quality leadership, while government on the other hand, sees these critical voices as a direct attack on the establishment. This thinking of the government, perhaps, led to the ban on Twitter by the previous government, sanctioning of perceived erring media stations and subsequent creation of the controversial social media bill, which has recently resurfaced at the floor of the Nigerian Senate.

Another challenge confronting the government is the lack of understanding that there will be people who will not buy into the ideas of the government no matter how a government tries. Therefore, government should understand that no matter the class of the people, approach to communication of government policies matters. To achieve this, the National Orientation Agency should first of all give classic orientation to the ministers and federal government institutions on proper collaboration with the ministry of information so that their achievements will be properly communicated. This will make it easy for every minister

to perform his or her duties to the people and reduce hate. Agency needs to orientate the government in order to avoid cognitive dissonance. NTA, FRCN, and other channels need to be equipped to serve the digital era. Are these media organizations doing proper training of media staff to manage digital equipment? How prepared are the equipment and staff to understand the psychology of Nigerians to know that Nigerians are desperately yearning for a better life.

Unfortunately, communication amounts to nothing without performance. A situation whereby the government speaks arrogantly to the bodies that are particularly ensuring better welfare for Nigerians have not yielded any result, rather more and more people are drawn to the social media. The content to tell the people, the context and the expectations of the people is central. A good minister of information and communication should be part of the decision -making process and the best way to be part of the heart of decision making is to leverage and accurately use the social media. The people are real, with various aspirations and desires they want from the government. There is a single connection and that is to take the messages of the people to the government. The minister can have robust discussions with the President and other ministers on how to meet the yearnings of the people.

Another challenge confronting the minister of information and communication is the fact that some of these ministers over the time do not even know the mindset of the people and the minister have to make up on what they thought is the mindset of the President and that is why there is no synergy in information dissemination. With these major points discussed, experts in journalism, media and digital media have advocated for the need to have a creative economy. The numbers of television stations, radio stations, and the volumes of newspapers have not solved the problem of the people. Different experts have been invited in all fields, first class and eloquent speakers have been invited to dissect Nigerian's issues both historically and presently yet the problems, and frustrations are really clouding up and the masses are almost pushed to the limits.

There is also herculean task as a minister of information, especially in the aspect of facts and figures right from all the various ministries. Presently from twenty-eight ministries that used to be obtainable in the former administration to thirty- four ministries, this is why most of the former ministers do not want to come out to engage the people because they have no idea of what is going on in other ministries. The media stations in broadcasting, print and even online need to work harmoniously, this is what is seen in the western world. Content, dissemination and feedback are key in the digital era.

The information and communication policy obtainable at that time did the needful; for the very first time the country experienced a ministry and a minister that is at work. Several hallmark developments were witnessed such as become obsolete because some of the provisions in that particular document were overruled by emerging situations. From 1999 to date, there is no single information and communication policy despite the advent of modernization and digitalization. In today's world, communication is run through digitalization with developed countries integrating these modern technologies into every aspect of their lives be it education, medical, recreational, social, and it is part of their daily lives.

However, this digitalization seems easy because of the development in science and technology as their most basic aspect of food and shelter is not an issue in their countries. Even though these western countries still battle with the scourge of fake news, there is relevant development being felt by the people. The scourge of fake news, misinformation, disinformation and mal information on social media about government's needs is on the rise in Nigeria and it is obviously disturbing that successive ministers of information and communication have constantly dwell on propaganda as a way of informing the public.

Social media which is seen to be an integral part of communication in this modern period has without doubt, enhance social relations and improve connectivity. It had been useful in all aspect of human life be it education, information and update, awareness, helps in building bridges, improve mental health (Simpilearn, 2021). In order for Nigerians to liberate themselves after the regular threshold given to the government to the needful as promised, they rely on social media apps and other media technologies to get information as well as watch films for leisure. The influx of various android phones in the markets and the accessibility as made people to be citizen journalists. People now use their phones to create their contents and inform the public; both locally and internationally about the happenings in their country and Nigerian youths are leveraging on this.

Unfortunately, with people being citizen journalists, the battle to get accurate and truthful information become delusional by the minister of information and National orientation to disseminate timely, accurate and reliable information about government policies and programs. Sadly, Nigerians are experiencing hardship, no decent meal on the table and the situation keeps getting critical by the day. What then is the best way to achieve National orientation for patriotism, unity and co-existence. What is the best way to partner with local and foreign media and public relation practitioners for greater result?

Information management is part of communication and in Nigeria context, from 1999 to date, it is not a necessity that the minister of information should be a scholar or need to get a degree before being appointed as a minister but the minister should be open to learning and have the spirit to listen and rub minds with relevant stakeholders in the sector. In 1999, several efforts have been made to come out with a policy under the then President Olusegun Obasanjo regime. A committee was set up by late Prof Alfred Opubor (The first Prof of Mass Communication in Nigeria). A highly respected scholar, some members were part of the committee to come out with a comprehensive, relevant, timely and an acceptable communication policy or information policy in Nigeria. That policy was beautifully drafted with all issues that needs to be addressed in the sector but unfortunately there is no implementation of the policy document up till this moment.

The immediate past minister of information Prof Lai Mohammed invited stake holders and had a meeting with the plan to revive the lost copy but still that did not happen. The policy had therefore become obsolete due to time effects as every valid document

becomes useful within the span of five months. Information within the context of communication is said to be defined as "uncertainty reduction".

Theoretical framework

This study was anchored on Social Media Research Theory and Two-Step Flow Theory. Social Media Research Theory focuses on the role of social relationships in transmitting information, channeling personal or media influence, and enabling attitudinal or behavioral change [15]. The two-step flow of communication hypothesis, the theory of weak ties, and the theory of diffusion of innovations are three major theoretical approaches that integrate network concepts in understanding the flow of mediated information and its effects. Going by the theory, it has been a point of discourse how technology had been used against journalists in different parts of the world.

In maintain social relationships, information that should stir up attitudinal or behavioral change is very crucial for a fragile state like Nigeria. Communication and Information policy requires a good strategy and bringing on board several experts that will understand the dynamics of the social media by first understanding the Nigerian audience. Experts in the communication industry and upcoming researchers of the social media have emphasized the need for data journalism. This push will lead to the drive for socio-economic system and this is where funding plays a major part. The information and communication policy will map out strategies for constant research and control so that new technologies can be domesticated for our own use. The technology becomes the enabler here; while content is the driver. This will ensure information credibility even as we collaboratively sue for freedom.

The Two Step Flow Theory was propounded by Paul Lazar feld during the 1940 US presidential election in 1940. The theory states that information flows from opinion leaders to opinion followers. It was discovered during election campaign that many people had little exposure to the mass media; such people obtained their information second hand from people regarded as opinion leaders. The opinion Leaders got their information from the media and also shaped it as they passed it down. The theory's hypothesis states that access to media information by the audience is through second source which is being modified by the opinion leaders. In other words, the theory posits that, there is a two-way traffic to information flow, which is in contrast with the magic bullet theory which states that mass media information is one-way traffic. Lazar field was the first to introduce the difference between 'administrative research' and 'critical research' in regards to the media.

Critical research according to him, criticizes the media institutions themselves for the perspective by which they serve dominant social groups. Critical research favour inter-perspective and inductive methods of inquiry [16]. He published a book called: The People's Choice, from the study he conducted in 1944. His research revealed information about the psychological and social processes that influence voting decisions. His study also uncovered an influence process that he called "opinion leadership." He concluded that there is a two-step flow of information from the mass media to persons who serve as opinion leaders, which is passed on to the general public. He called this communication process the "two-step flow of communication. Lazars Feld argued that influencers actually moderated messages and acted as filters for mass media message dissemination.

According to Lazars Feld states that media audiences are affected both by the actual information that is distributed as news as well as influencers' interpretation of the news. Therefore, this theory helps in understanding the current study by unpacking levels of information by providing room for diverse opinion expression which is consistent with the characteristics of the digital media. The theory is relevant to this study in the sense that the two-step flow of information enables communication freedom while also leaving room for regulation problems because of the dynamic nature of the digital media. Additionally, media freedom and safety both in communication and film requires psychological, emotional, physical, and social impact. There is the need for capacity building as a government body who wants to regulate bodies/ministries. Proper research, ethical building and role interpretation are all essentials for proper regulation of information and film.

Research methodology

The study uses cross sectional survey research design. This design was adopted in order to achieve the objectives of the study. According to Osuala (2005), research is conceived as the process of arriving at dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data.

Measures

The need for information and communication policy document that regulate information and film in Nigeria: This was measured on five-point Liker scale of (1=Never and 4=Often). The items used in measuring this construct were adapted from [17] to suit the current study. Statements measured are, "The advent of new media and social media has made communication freedom and film regulation a herculean task". "The various online news sources make communication regulation difficult" "Film producers are leveraging on digitalization to infuse negative contents on audience". "The theory of persuasion and good governance as well as press freedom should involve deliberations with experts in communication and film". "Fake news, misinformation, mal information, and disinformation became enhanced as a result of lack of regulation ""Digitalization has helped to propel Nigerian films to international stage with increase in box office as well as attention locally and internationally".

Effective Regulatory Policies which coordinate the mainstream media as well as digital communication for effective regulation and effective outcome: Effective regulatory policies construct was measured on five-point Liker scale, where 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree. Items used in measuring this construct were adapted from, to suit the current study. Items measured include, "A new information and communication policy will hinder communication freedom and film regulation in the world of digitalization", "There is the need to consult expert on workable information and communication policy", "Lack of understanding

of the audience of the digital era will make regulation difficult as this will be seen as gagging of the press as well as hampering the citizens' rights to their various contents of film consumption", "Nigeria as a country pose as a serious problem against having a workable information and communication policy", "An effective communicator understands the audience. There is the need for collaborative efforts so that we can have a single document that helps in all sector of information and communication".

Findings

The study investigates communication freedom and film regulation in the digital era. The data collected on the constructs (The need for information and communication policy document that regulate information and film in Nigeria and Effective Regulatory Policies which coordinate the mainstream media as well as digital communication for effective regulation and effective outcome), were analysed descriptively, using mean and standard deviations. Mean is the average of the given numbers and is calculated by dividing the sum of given numbers by the total number of numbers. Mean = Sum of all the observations/ Total number of observations (https://byjus.com/maths/mean/) (**Table 1**).

Almost three in ten (29.3%) of the respondents are veteran journalists, two in ten (26.7%) represents citizen journalists, practicing journalists (26.3%), while journalists in the academic came last with (17.7%). On the other hand, almost five in ten (49.0%) of the respondents have 1-5years length of experience.

This was followed by those with 6-11years length of experience (25.7%); and those with 12years and above length of experience gulped (25.3%). These variations in the results showed a fair representation of the respondents' occupation and length of experience, even though they were purposively selected based on their expertise. The result, however, implied that veteran journalists and respondents with 1-5years length of experience constituted the majority in this study.

Descriptive analyses

Table 2 presents the need for information and communication policy document that regulate information and film in Nigeria. Generally, respondents often believed that there is need for information and communication policy document that can regulate information and film in Nigeria (M=3.25, SD=0.96). Specifically, respondents believed that the advent of new media and social media have often made communication freedom and film regulation a herculean task (M=3.42, SD=.987); the various online news sources make communication regulation difficult (M=3.42, SD=.973); and film producers are leveraging on digitalization to infuse negative contents on audience (M=3.23, SD=.895). This high level of agreement among respondents showed that there are infractions of fake news and other harmful contents in the digital media. It, therefore, implied that there is need for information and communication policy document that can regulate information and film in Nigeria.

Table 3 shows various ways of regulating online news sources and blogs so that viewers can have valuable content which can benefit the audience. On the aggregate, respondents agreed that regulating the various online news sources and blog can have valuable content which can benefit the audience (M=3.59, SD=1.16). Separately, the respondents agreed that lack of understanding of the audience of the digital era will make regulation difficult as this will be seen as gagging of the press as well as hampering the citizens' rights to their various contents of film consumption (M=3.79, SD=1.21); there is the need for collaborative efforts so that there will be a single document that will help in all sectors of information and communication (M=3.69, SD=1.19); and Nigeria as a country poses a serious problem against having a workable information and communication policy (M=3.65, SD=1.27). This high level of

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Profile.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Occupation		
Veteran Journalist	88	29.3
Practicing Journalist	79	26.3
Journalists in the Academic	53	17.7
Citizen Journalist	80	26.7
Total	**300**	**100.0**
Length of Experience in Years		
1-5years	147	49.0
6-11years	77	25.7
12years and Above	76	25.3
Total	**300**	**100.0**

Table 2: The need for information and communication policy document.

Need for Policy Document	Level of Agreement*(%)					
	1	2	3	4	M	SD
The advent of new media and social media has made communication freedom and film regulation a herculean task.	10.3	5.3	16.0	68.3	3.42	.987
The various online news sources make communication regulation difficult.	9.3	7.0	16.0	67.7	3.42	973
Film producers are leveraging on digitalization to infuse negative contents on audience.	5.7	14.0	31.7	48.7	3.23	.895
The theory of persuasion and good governance as well as press freedom should involve deliberations with experts in communication and film.	7.7	14.0	33.7	44.7	3.15	.934
Fake news, misinformation, malinformation, and disinformation became enhanced as a result of lack of regulation.	11.0	14.0	31.7	43.3	3.07	1.06
Digitalization has helped to propel Nigerian films to international stage with increase in box office as well as attention locally and internationally.	5.7	14.7	32.3	47.3	3.21	.897
Total					**3.25**	**0.96**
*1=Never (1-20), 2=Rarely (21-40), 3=Sometimes (41-60), 4=Often (61-80)						

Table 3: Regulate various online news sources and blogs.

Regulate Online News Sources	Level of Agreement*(%)					M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
A new information and communication policy will hinder communication freedom and film regulation in the world of digitalization.	10.0	13.0	16.3	50.7	10.0	3.38	1.14
There is the need to consult expert on workable information and communication policy.	7.3	13.7	8.3	67.0	3.7	3.46	1.02
Lack of understanding of the audience of the digital era will make regulation difficult as this will be seen as gaggling of the press as well as hampering the citizens' rights to their various contents of film consumption.	4.0	16.0	13.3	30.0	36.7	3.79	1.21
Nigeria as a country poses as a serious problem against having a workable information and communication policy.	6.0	18.0	13.3	30.0	32.7	3.65	1.27
An effective communicator understands the audience. There is the need for collaborative efforts so that we can have a single document that helps in all sectors of information and communication.	4.0	16.0	18.7	30.0	31.3	3.69	1.19
Total						3.59	1.16
*1=Strongly Disagree (1-20%), 2=Disagree (21-40%), 3=Neutral (41-60%), 4=Agree (61-80%), 5=Strongly Agree (81-100%)							

agreement among respondents indicated that there are teething problems associated with online news sources and content of film consumption with regards to regulation and ensuring press freedom. The result, however, implied that a collaborative effort aimed at having a single document will help regulating various sectors of information and communication in Nigeria.

Discussions

This study discusses communication freedom and film regulation in Nigeria using descriptive statistics. It was established on the grounds that digital era poses existential threat to regulation and communication freedom in Nigeria. The findings of the study reveal that there are infractions of fake news, misinformation, disinformation, mal information, propaganda among other harmful contents in the digital media. This finding corroborates Simpilearn's [16] assertion that misuse of information is some of the threats faced by social media users as there is lack of accurate and truthful information that can guide the public.

Furthermore, the study found that there are foundational problems such as lack of a workable regulatory policy as well as the uncollaborative efforts of relevant stakeholders in providing a single document that will help the information and communication sectors strike a balance between regulation and press freedom. This finding is in line with Pate's position that lack of skill and thrive in propaganda as a tool for government's communication

methods is a problem confronting the country's information and communication arm which is saddled with the responsibility of feeding the public with the right information necessary for the country's growth and development. The study also found that the youths are desperately yearning for entertainment as a form of distraction from all the challenges confronting the public. Film producers as a result of this repudiation, hinge on contents which can be harmful to the youths and children who are the leaders of tomorrow.

Conclusion

The study unpacks the nuisances of communication freedom and film regulation in the digital era in Nigeria, which was borne out of contending arguments of the dilemma of the need to balance communication freedom with regulation in the Nigerian digital media environment. The study concludes that fake news, misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda are some of the infractions of the digital space. There are teething problems associated with online news sources and content of film consumption with regards to regulation and ensuring press freedom. The study recommends that there is need for information and communication policy document that can regulate information and film in Nigeria. The study further recommends that there is need for a collaborative effort aimed at having a single document will help regulating various sectors of information and communication in Nigeria.

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