Nigerian Journalists' view on 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 journalists' view of 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. The convergence of these theories helps in understanding the role of media regulators in coming out with the template that 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 adopts cross-sectional design of survey in collecting the data. Findings reveal that there are instances of fake news, misinformation, disinformation and propaganda among other contents in films presented to the public. The films that are not reflective of the Nigerian situation and that tends to present negative views that need to be checked. The study also found out that the advent of new media and social media has made communication freedom and film regulation a herculean task. Film producers are leveraging on digitization to infuse negative contents in the audience. The study therefore recommends a review of film regulation in Nigeria in a manner that does not promote the abuse of freedom.

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 making it imperative for every communicator to either be a natural communicator or on who acquires skills for effective communication. Communication in the military era is not the same as communication in the civilian dispensation hence the audience during the military dispensation is not comparatively the same as the audience we see in this current era. The gift of communication as well as the knowledge of communication are two attributes a good communicator must have (Nileaku, 2023).

Communication freedom and film regulation are paramount especially with the current trends in digitalisation. The advents of Artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, AI bots, OpenAI, are tools programmed to do human activities. Although, there are widespread criticisms on AI, with accompanied fears that the technology will take over human workspace, there is the need for research, use of these technologies and domesticate them for the African environment, especially in the media sector. The need for Africans to meet this intermittent and exponential digitalisation is a big issue in Africa and Nigeria. Different scholars in the communication industry have noted how technology has been used against them by Western countries and there have been calls about how these new technologies could be adopted for indigenous content and developments of every sector of the country. Using AI to leverage on language, and the importance of giving AI the African narrative cannot be overemphasised.

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

Film regulation in the digital era is critical and Nollywood has obtained significant attention due to its improved storyline, plot, characterisation, settings, costumes, and sound. These have led to expanded viewership and ultimately greater returns and increased box office ratings. Digitization with the introduction of new media, has made Nollywood movies available on mobile phones, tablets, computer flash drives and other gadgets depending on the capabilities.

Phones psychologists working in social and life science labs state that films leave the audience with particular experience, and these experiences leave the audience with lasting effects. Films that do not promote Nigeria's cultural values leave the audience choked with Western values and vices. This menace has eaten deeply into our societal fabric that a new information and communication policy will provide a guide for film regulation for film producers and investors; so that at the end of it all, digitization focuses on human and national growth in general.

The hate speech bill, social media bill, fines to new stations, Twitter ban/judgement, code of practice for platforms and Internet intermediaries were all government stringent ways of ensuring that information and communication are not as free as the citizen expected. Several NGOs also sprang up to fight against what is called the gagging of the press. The government having seen that its methods of communicating with the audience was not working and that the ministers of information and communication since democracy have not fully understood the operating environment. This makes communication more difficult. The coming of the new media and social media made it worse for these ministers 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 the social media. These media through various contents have opened the eyes of the citizens to the happenings around the world and raise the consciousness of the people on how the average Nigerian should live. This encouraged Nigerians to get registered for their PVCs to vote out people whom they feel do not represent their interests. 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 the citizens.

The period where there is unfiltered and unhindered access to information through the digitization of new media as well as social media apps has made communication and film regulation a herculean task. Different news sources as found in the media space force themselves on consumers who do not have the access or means to verify the true sources of information channeled to billions of people daily.

This unregulated access has however given rise to fake news, propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation. For film production however, it is obvious that Nigerian films have gained tremendous attention at the global stage as well as increased box office ranking for producers. Film producers are also leveraging the digital era to expand their viewership and dominate the markets. Films that have gained grounds 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 therefrom, there is the growing concern about regulation both in communication and film regulation without hampering on the fundamental communication rights and freedom both in the media and film.

The objectives of the study are to examine the infractions of fake news, misinformation, disinformation and propaganda among other contents in the digital media as well as in films churned out to the public. The study tries to find out that films that are not reflective of the Nigerian situation and that tends to cause violence in the country needs to be checked. Problems such as lack of a workable regulatory policy as well as the non-collaborative efforts of relevant stakeholders in providing a single document for the communication and film sectors to strike a balance between regulation and press freedom.

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

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According to Fulya (2015), communication is the fundamental human-to-human interaction which is necessary in establishing commonality across races of the world. Furthermore, 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 (2012) observes that the fulfilment of human needs through interpersonal or organisational interactions vis-a-vis communication freedom that fosters the growth of socio-cultural norms, value systems, and political participation is viewed from the perspective of conceptualising communication as a right.

On the other hand, Fulya (2015) conceptualises freedom as the unalienable right of citizens to communicate with one another in diversified cultures and democracies in the world. Accordingly, the libertarian model of the media has clearly-defined roles they play in societal communication. Additionally, the people's right to checkmate the excesses of the ruling class, is embedded in the Universal Charter empowering freedom of expression. However, this role of the media and individuals is geared towards the expression 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.

Today, many terms describe the media landscape: old media, mass media, traditional media, new media, digital media, social media, social networking, citizen journalism (Penn, 2021). The old media are radio, television, newspapers. The social media are a form of communication that uses technology to connect people for example Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and so on while the new media use technologies for content creation such as blogs, podcasts, and video blogs. Reaching the audience is very important, and the digital era has given the citizens the seamless right to communicate their fears, hopes, aspirations, wants, and needs with others and the government.

Interestingly, Penn (2021) states that the new media exemplify their characteristics by their digital-first nature and their low physical cost both in production and distribution. They come as mobile apps, video, blogs, eBooks, email and podcasts, smart device apps, video games, interactive content. Nigeria's Internet access, privacy and surveillance, as well as freedom of expression in the digital era are important discussion topics. Consequently, Isaac (2023) 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 broadband penetration increased from 40.88 per cent in December 2021 to 45.55 per cent in October 2022, the current rate was 47.01 per cent as of July (Okonjo, 2024). 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 (Isaac, 2023). With these figures, there is indication that Nigerians are having wider broadband penetration 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, 53 per cent in 2007, and 53

per cent in 2007. Also, 90 per cent of households use a laptops or desktop computers at home, an increase from 85 per cent in 2017. These account for 96 per cent Internet penetration, whereas those who do not use laptop or desktop computers at home constitute 58 per cent.

Nonetheless, Hugo *et al.* (2011) states that by signing the FoI Bill into law, Nigeria empowered the citizens to participate in the governance of their own affairs. In this direction, people can now legitimately seek public information, corroborate facts and make useful suggestions towards achieving greater good for the majority. With access to information, citizens can fight corruption and confront those who misappropriate public resources.

Additionally, the social media have 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 the dynamism of social media for its campaigns, is frowning at the platforms, and arresting people with dissenting voices. This has overtime, led to apprehension in some quarter's 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.

Premium Times (2022, November 20), reported that 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. 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, then 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" (*Premium Times*, 2022). 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 is 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 Censors 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 (NFVCB, 2017). According to NFVCB (2017), despite the fact that its powers cover the films distributed and exhibited in Nigeria, it does not seem to follow its guidelines on obscenity. Section 33 of the NFVCB Act imposes a penalty of a fine or imprisonment for up to a year for exhibiting a film without an approval.

Any blasphemous and obscene contents are checked by the body; however, the use of new media and social media has made regulation of these practices difficult (NFVCB, 2017). Most recently, the two Nigerian films: *Shante Town, Ijakumo: The Born-again stripper,* are movies with underlying messages of immorality Unwholesome for viewing.

Also, cable and satellite television shows broadcast children movies that are embedded with the Western cultures detrimental to the kids. An example is the Disney Junior which is on various channels in Nigeria with contents for children that negate national values. Similarly, homosexuality is similarly depicted in film content for children. It is therefore

important for the information and communication policy document to regulate these various children' channels to protect young persons.

Problem Confronting Information and Communication Administration

It was Matthew Kumor who stated that politicians campaign in poetry and deliver in prose, which has made information management sticky for managers. Despite regular town hall meetings held by various administrations in order to get accurate information from people at the grassroots Nigerians still wonder why the needs of the people cannot be met. As a result, the citizens see the social media as a tool to vent their frustrations, and call out their leaders (Ojo, 2023). This, they do by engaging in meaningful discussions and demanding 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 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 the ideas of the government no matter how a government tries. Therefore, government should understand that no matter the class of the people, the approach to communication of government policies matters. To achieve this, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should orientation to government institutions on proper collaboration with the ministry of information so that their policies will be properly communicated. This will make it easy for ministers to perform their duties and reduce resistance. The Agency needs to orientate in order to avoid cognitive dissonance. The Nigerian Television Authourity (NTA), Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), and other channels need to be equipped to serve in the digital era. Are these media organisations doing proper training of media staff to manage the digital machinery? How prepared are the staff to understand the psychology of Nigerians who 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 people are drawn to the social media. The message for the people, the context and the expectations of the people are central. A good Minister of Information and Communications should be part of the decision-making process and the best way to achieve that 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 others ministers on how to meet the yearnings of the people.

Another challenge is the fact that some of these ministers over the time do not know the mindset of the people and the have to make up on what they think 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 the need to have the creative economy. The number of television and radio stations, and the numerous newspapers have not solved the problem of the people. Different experts have been invited in all fields, first class and eloquent speakers have dissected Nigerian's issues both historically

and contemporaneously yet the problems, and frustrations are mounting and the masses are almost pushed to the limits.

There is also herculean task for the Minister of Information, especially in the aspect of synthesizing facts and figures right from all the various ministries. Presently from twenty-eight to thirty- four and then to forty-eight, the ministers do not have ideas 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 crucial 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 who was at work. Several hallmark developments were witnessed but have become obsolete because some of the provisions in that particular document were overtaken by emerging situations. From 1999 to date, there is no single information and communication policy despite modernisation and digitalisation. In today's world, communication is run through digitalisation with developed countries integrating these modern technologies into every aspect of their lives be it educational, medical, recreational, social.

However, digitalisation seems easy because of the development in science and technology as the basic aspects of food and shelter are not an issue in those countries. These western countries still battle with the scourge of fake news, though relevant development is being felt by the people. The scourge of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation on social media about government's needs is on the rise in Nigeria and it is obviously disturbing causing successive ministers of information and communication to dwell on propaganda as a way of informing the public.

Social media which are seen to be an integral part of communication in this modern period have without doubt, enhanced social relations and improved connectivity. They have been useful in all aspects of human life: education, information, awareness, building bridges, improving mental health (Simpilearn, 2021).

In order for Nigerians to liberate themselves after the regular threshold given to the government to do 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 have turned some people into citizen journalists. People now use their phones to create contents and inform the public; both locally and internationally about the happenings in their country and Nigerian youths are leveraging this.

Unfortunately, with people being citizen journalists, the battle to get accurate and truthful information about government policies and programmes becomes difficult by the Minister of Information and National Orientation disseminated and timely. Sadly, Nigerians are experiencing hardship, less decent meals on the table and the situation keeps getting worse 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 relations practitioners for greater result?

Information management is part of communication and in the Nigerian context, from 1999 till today, it is not a necessity that the Minister of Information should be a scholar or need to get a degree before being appointed 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 were made to formulate a policy under the then President Olusegun Obasanjo regime. A committee was set up by the late Prof Alfred Opubor (The first Prof of Mass Communication in Nigeria and 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 needed to be addressed in the sector but unfortunately there was no implementation of the policy document up till this moment (Pate, 2023).

The immediate past Minister of Information, Prof Lai Mohammed invited stakeholders for a meeting with the plan to revive the lost copy but that did not happen. The policy had therefore become obsolete due to time lapse. 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 the 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 behavioural change (Liu *et al.,* 2017). 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 reflects how technology had been used against journalists in different parts of the world.

In maintaining social relationships, information that should stir up attitudinal or behavioural change is crucial for a fragile Nigeria. Communication and Information Policy requires a good strategy and bringing on board several experts who 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 emphasised the need for data journalism. This push leads to the drive for a 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 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 initiated by Paul Lazarsfeld during the 1940 US presidential election. The theory states that information flows from opinion leaders to opinion followers. It was discovered during election campaigns, 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 a second source which is being modified by opinion leaders. In other words, the theory holds 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. Lazarsfield was the first to introduce the difference between 'administrative research' and 'critical research' regarding the media.

Critical research criticises the media institutions for the perspective by which they serve dominant social groups. Critical research favours inter-perspective and inductive methods of inquiry (Straubhaar, *et al.*, 2009). Their research revealed information about the psychological and social processes that influence voting decisions. It also uncovered an influence process that he called "opinion leadership." They 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. Lazarsfeld argued that influencers actually moderated messages and acted as filters for mass media message dissemination.

According to Lazarsfeld, 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 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 require psychological, emotional, physical, and social resources. There is the need for capacity building as a government body that wants to regulate bodies/ministries. Proper research, ethical building, and role interpretation are essential for proper regulation of information and film.

Research methodology
The study employs the pragmatic approach of research design which belives in mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods, and research designs. of 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 (Pandey & Pandey, 2015).

The need for information and communication policy document that regulate information and film in Nigeria: This was measured on five-point Likert scale of (1=Never and 4=Often). The items used in measuring this construct were adapted from Ofem (2022) to suit the current study. Statements measured were, "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 digitization to infuse negative contents in 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, and disinformation became enhanced as a result of lack of regulation" "Digitization has helped to propel Nigerian films to international stage with increase in box office rating as well as attention locally and internationally".

Effective Regulatory Policies coordinate the mainstream media as well as digital communication for effective regulation and effective outcome: Effective regulatory policies construct was measured on five-point Likert scale, where 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree. Items used in measuring this construct were adapted from Ofem (2022), to suit the current study. Items measured included, "A new information and communication policy will hinder communication freedom and film regulation in the world of digitization", "There is the need to consult experts on workable information and communication policy," "Lack of understanding of the audience in the digital era will make regulation difficult as this will be seen as gagging the press as well as hampering the citizens' rights to various contents of film consumed," "Nigeria as a country poses as a serious problem against having a workable information and communication policy," "An effective communicator understand

audience. There is the need for collaborative efforts so that we can produce a single document that helps in all sectors of information and communication."

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Profile

Level of Practice	Frequency	Percentage
Veteran Journalists		
Practicing Journalists	79	29.3
Journalists in the Academia	88	26.3
Citizen Journalists	53	17.7
Total	80	26.7
	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

Almost three in ten (29.3%) of the respondents were veteran journalists, two in ten (26.7%) represented citizen journalists, practicing journalists (26.3%), while journalists in the academia came last with (17.7%). On the other hand, almost five in ten (49.0%) of the respondents had 1-5years length of experience. This was followed by those with 6-11years length of experience (25.7%); and those with 12 years and above length of experience took (25.3%). These variations in the results showed a fair representation of the respondents' occupation and length of experience, though they were purposively selected based on their expertise. The result, however, implies 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 regulates information and film in Nigeria. Generally, respondents believed often that there was need for information and communication policy document to regulate information and film in Nigeria (M=3.25, SD=0.96). Specifically, respondents believed that the advent of new media and social

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 digitation to infuse negative contents in the 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, and disinformation became enhanced as a result of lack of regulation.	11.0	14.0	31.7	43.3	3.07	1.06
Digitization has helped to propel Nigerian films to international stage with increase in box office rating 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)

media has 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 digitization to infuse negative contents in the audience (M=3.23, SD=.895). This high level of agreement among respondents shows that there were infractions of fake news and other harmful contents in the digital media. It therefore implies that there was need for information and communication policy document to regulate information and film in Nigeria.

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 digitization.	10.0	13.0	16.3	50.7	10.0	3.38	1.14
There is the need to consult experts 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 the press as well as hampering the citizens' rights to 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 to produce 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%)

Table 3 shows various ways of regulating online news sources and blogs so that the audience can have valuable content which can benefit them. On the aggregate, respondents agreed that regulating the various online news sources and blogs 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 in the digital era will make regulation difficult as this will be seen as gagging the press as well as hampering the citizens' rights to various contents of film consumed (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 agreement among respondents indicates that there are teething problems associated with online news sources and content of film regarding regulation and ensuring press freedom. The result, however, implies that a collaborative effort aimed at having a single document will help in regulating various sectors of information and communication in Nigeria.

Discussion

This study discusses communication freedom and film regulation in the digital era in Nigeria using descriptive statistics. It was established on the grounds that the digital era poses existential threat to film regulation and communication freedom in Nigeria. The study reveals that there are infractions of fake news, misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda as well as some films in the digital media and these harmful contents can be damaging to the youths who are largely the most users of the digital media messages. Social Media Research Theory and the Two-Step Flow Theory which the research hinged on Theory focuses on the role of social relationships in transmitting information, channeling personal or media influence, and enabling attitudinal or behavioural change (Liu *et al.,* 2017). Hence, the call for the review of regulation of information and consumption of film contents. 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.

It also emphasizes that film producers use the digital media to produce low quality films that can pose a threat to the unity of the country as well as vices to the country. For instance, some Nigerian films are said to be producing movies that are judged to re-enforce negative stereotypes, hatred, discrimination, phobia instead of downplaying them. Balsie (2024) stated that Nollywood banned from producing money rituals, smoking scenes in films. The CEO of Nigeria's National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB), Shaibu Huseeini stated the Federal government has approved the prohibition of money rituals and glamorizing vices in Nollywood films. Unfortunately, the movie industry is known for the trademark and the digital media space is used as platforms for such social imageries.

Simpilearn's (2023) observation that misuse of information is a threat 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 (2023) position that lack of skill and thriving in propaganda were tools for government's communication methods but the problem confronting the country's information and communication arms saddled with the responsibility of feeding the public with the right information necessary for the country's growth and development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study unpacks the nuances 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 were some of the infractions of the digital space. There are teething problems associated with online news sources and content of films consumed regarding regulation and ensuring press freedom. The study recommends that there is need for a review of information and communication policy to regulate information and film in Nigeria.

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