

PATTERNS OF RESEARCH IN COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES IN NIGERIA (2015-2025)

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Abstract

The article analysis the patterns of research in communication and media studies in Nigeria, an area hardly explored, with focus on the sub-genres/topics, type of theories utilised and the methodological orientation employed. The study adopts mixed content analysis to examine twenty peer-reviewed articles, purposively selected from scholarly journals online. Political communication and digital media appear the most utilised sub-genres, with Uses and Gratification, and Framing as dominant theories, while a considerable number of the articles had no theoretical underpinnings. There appears to be a methodological balance between quantitative and qualitative methods with few studies adopting mixed methods, while survey and content analysis are the most utilised research techniques, with interview, coding sheet and questionnaire as the most utilised instruments of data collection. Purposive sampling features more than probability sampling with a balanced adoption of descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The utilisation of mixed methods research approach is encouraged to enrich scholarly discourse and inject rigour into the field, and for a broader understanding and stronger inferences. Research in Communication and Media should incorporate theories to provide for the integration and correlation of theoretical discourse with empirical findings about complex phenomena in real-life experiences.

Keywords: Content Analysis, Research Patterns, Communication, Media Studies.

Introduction

The field of communication and media studies in Nigeria has experienced significant transformation over the past decade, influenced by global shifts in information technology, local socio-political dynamics, and evolving cultural narratives (Okoye, 2020; Uche, 2018). As digital platforms such as social media and online news sites increasingly mediate public discourse, scholars in Nigeria have expanded their research focus to encompass these emerging phenomena, while continuing to engage with traditional media domains like broadcasting and print journalism (Eze, 2019). The unique socio-political environment of Nigeria, characterised by democratic consolidation,

periodic electoral upheavals, and a vibrant civil society, has further amplified the importance of communication research, particularly in areas such as political communication, media literacy, and development communication (Ojebuyi & Folarin, 2021).

However, despite the observable increase in scholarly output, there remains a noticeable gap in systematic studies that map and evaluate the trends, thematic focuses, methodological approaches, and theoretical frameworks adopted by Nigerian communication scholars. Most existing reviews are fragmented or thematic, lacking a holistic overview that captures the structural patterns shaping the discipline.

Meta-analyses of national research patterns, while common in more established academic traditions (Lauf, 2005; Waisbord, 2019), are still emerging in African scholarship and are essential for setting future research agendas and policy directions.

This study seeks to bridge this scholarly gap by conducting a content analysis of peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2025, focusing specifically on Nigerian-based communication and media research. Given the increasing emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches, methodological innovation, and theoretical pluralism in global communication studies (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), it is crucial to assess the extent to which Nigerian research aligns with or diverges from international academic standards.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing body of communication and media research in Nigeria, there remains a limited understanding of the overarching patterns, thematic emphases, methodological tendencies, and theoretical orientations that characterise the field. Scholarship in Nigerian media studies has tended to be fragmented, often focusing on topical issues without systematically interrogating the structures and trends that underpin the discipline (Ojebuyi & Folarin, 2021). Since the spread of digital technologies and the democratisation of information have introduced new research frontiers (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), there is only a few empirical studies on how Nigerian scholars engage with these transformations. Furthermore, according to Waisbord (2019), previous meta-analytical reviews, where they exist, have predominantly focused on Western contexts, therefore excluding African communication scholarship from the discourse, particularly Nigeria's, which is understudied and marginalised in global knowledge mapping.

This lack of a systematic analysis poses significant challenges. Agreeably, Krippendorff (2018) suggests that without a clear understanding of the dominant sub-genres, research topics, theoretical frameworks, and methodological choices prevalent in communication studies, it becomes difficult to evaluate the intellectual maturity and international competitiveness of the field. Additionally, as communication research globally shifts toward interdisciplinary methods and mixed-methods designs (Couldry & Hepp, 2017), within context, the Nigerian scholarship mirrors or deviates from these developments remains largely unveiled. The gap in knowledge distorts the ability of scholars, policymakers, and educators to make informed decisions about curriculum development, research funding, and other scholarly collaborations. It also hinders critical reflections on the adequacy of existing research to address the complexities of Nigeria's socio-economic, political, and technological realities.

Research Objectives

Overall, the key objective of this study is to critically analyse the patterns of research in communication and media studies in Nigeria from 2015 to 2025. The specific objectives are:

1. To identify the dominant sub-genres/topics in communication and media research in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025.
2. To explore the theories adopted in Communication and Media Research in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025.
3. To evaluate the research methodological framework adopted in communication and media research in Nigerian between 2015 and 2025.

Literature Review

Communication Research

According to Littlejohn & Foss (2019), communication research is the systematic investigation of processes, effects, and functions of communication across various contexts, including interpersonal, group, organisational, and mass-mediated interactions. As a result, this involves the application of empirical methods such as quantitative, qualitative, or mixed approaches to explore how the communication phenomena influence human behaviour, societal structures, and cultural expressions. Ojebuy & Folarin (2021) buttress this stating that within the Nigerian context, communication research is increasingly responding to socio-political transformations, the rise of digital media, and the demands for democratised access to information.

Media Studies

While this concept is generally perceived as closely related to communication research, media studies broadly investigate the content, history, and effects of various media, particularly the mass media and digital platforms (McQuail, 2010). This implies media studies examine both the production and consumption of media, encompassing areas such as film studies, broadcasting, journalism, advertising, and social media communication. According to Uche (2018), media studies in Nigeria have grown in response to the expanding media landscape and the need to interrogate the media's role in governance, development, education, and civic engagement.

Research Pattern

According to Waisbord (2019), research patterns refer to the recurring trends, practices, and orientations observable in a body of academic literature over a defined period. These patterns may pertain to preferred research topics, dominant

theoretical frameworks, frequently employed methodologies, or publication trends across time. Ultimately, understanding research patterns is crucial for evaluating the intellectual health of a field, while recognising its areas of strength and neglect, and forecasting future trajectories. This study adopts this operationalisation of research pattern.

The field of communication and media studies in Nigeria has witnessed remarkable expansion over the past few decades, mirroring global trends in media diversification and scholarly inquiry (Okigbo & Eribo, 2004). Nigerian researchers have increasingly examined a wide spectrum of sub-genres, including broadcasting, print journalism, public relations, advertising, development communication, and digital media (Ojebode, 2019). Their studies frequently address themes such as media and governance, political communication, media literacy, and development, underscoring the media's central role in national discourse. However, despite the growth in scholarly output, there remains a critical need for systematic evaluations of research patterns in the field, particularly in terms of thematic focus, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches (Asemah, 2011; Krippendorf, 2018). This literature review provides the necessary background for the present study by examining prior analyses of communication and media scholarship in Nigeria.

Analysing prevailing research designs, theoretical orientations, and dominant themes not only helps map the trajectory of the discipline but also exposes gaps and opportunities for future inquiry. This review, therefore, situates the current study within the broader scholarly conversation by drawing insights from previous content analyses and research audits in communication and media studies, both locally and globally.

Sub-genres and Topical Focus in Communication and Media Research in Nigeria.

Okoye (2020) and Uche (2018) state that early Nigerian communication research overwhelmingly concentrated on politically charged topics such as media and governance, election reporting, and the role of journalism in democracy. This thematic focus can be attributed to Nigeria's turbulent political history, characterised by military rule, political instability, and a contested democratic transition. Media were often seen as watchdogs of democracy and guardians of civil liberties, thereby making media-politics relations a dominant area of scholarly interest. Numerous studies analysed press freedom, media regulation, and media partisanship, reflecting the sociopolitical anxieties of the time. As such, Nigerian media scholarship in its early stages tended to be normative, emphasizing media's ideal roles rather than critically interrogating actual practices.

In more recent years, however, there has been a discernible shift in topical focus, with scholars paying increasing attention to issues such as digital literacy, online journalism, misinformation, and youth media engagement (Eze, 2019; Bala, 2022). The rise of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp have not only transformed communication practices but also expanded the thematic frontiers of Nigerian communication research. Scholars have begun to investigate how digital media reshape political participation, education, cultural identity, and social movements. Nevertheless, despite these expansions, there remains a need to assess whether this topical diversification is widespread across the research landscape or limited to isolated pockets of scholarship, a gap that this study addresses.

Theoretical Framework in Nigerian Communication and Media Research

Theoretical frameworks are crucial for anchoring research, offering explanatory lenses through which phenomena are interpreted. In global communication studies, there has been a concerted move toward theoretical innovation, interdisciplinarity, and the decolonisation of dominant Western paradigms (Waisbord, 2019). However, Nigerian communication and media research remains heavily reliant on classical Western theories such as the Agenda-Setting Theory, the Uses and Gratifications Theory, and the Media Dependency Theory (Ojebuyi & Folarin, 2021). While these theories have enduring analytical value, their predominant use raises concerns about theoretical stagnation and epistemic dependency, particularly in contexts with unique socio-cultural realities like Nigeria.

There is growing advocacy for the development and integration of indigenous theories that more accurately reflect African communication contexts (Tomaselli, 2015). Theoretical indigenisation would involve grounding research in African philosophical traditions, communication norms, and cultural practices. However, the practical uptake of this approach remains limited. Existing empirical evidence suggests that most Nigerian communication studies continue to default to Western-origin theories, possibly due to curricular legacies, limited exposure to alternative frameworks, and the influence of international publication standards. This study examines whether there has been any substantive shift toward greater theoretical diversity or whether conventional frameworks continue to dominate the field.

Methodological Orientations and Preferences in Communication and Media Research

Communication research globally has witnessed a diversification of methodologies, with increasing emphasis on qualitative methods, mixed-methods approaches, and critical-interpretive paradigms (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; McQuail, 2010). These trends reflect an acknowledgement of the complexity of communication phenomena, which often require nuanced, context-sensitive analytical approaches. Nevertheless, Nigerian communication research has historically favoured quantitative survey designs, largely due to their perceived objectivity, simplicity, and suitability for large sample studies (Akpoveta, 2022). Surveys remain the most commonly employed method, used to investigate media consumption patterns, political attitudes, and public opinion.

While surveys offer certain advantages, their overreliance limits methodological richness and risks oversimplifying complex social phenomena. Qualitative methods such as ethnography, in-depth interviews, and discourse analysis, though gradually gaining acceptance, remain underutilised. Moreover, mixed-methods research, which combines the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, is still relatively rare. By systematically analysing the methods employed in twenty recent studies, this research assesses whether Nigerian communication scholars are embracing methodological innovation or adhering to traditional quantitative approaches.

Empirical Review of Related Studies

A considerable body of empirical research has examined the patterns of communication and media studies both within Nigeria and globally, offering critical insights into the evolving dynamics of the field. For instance, Ojebode (2019) conducted a comprehensive review of communication research outputs in Nigeria, revealing a disproportionate focus on political communication and development

communication, with limited attention given to emerging areas such as digital media, environmental communication, and health communication.

Similarly, Oso (2012) argues that Nigerian media research tends to replicate traditional paradigms rooted in Western theoretical traditions, often neglecting indigenous theories and culturally grounded methodologies. This inclination, according to Oso, perpetuates a reliance on normative and media effects theories at the expense of more context-specific frameworks that might better capture Nigeria's complex socio-political realities. International studies echo these concerns, highlighting the tendency for media research in developing contexts to mirror global paradigms without adequate localisation (McQuail, 2010). Such findings underscore the necessity of evaluating not only the topical focus of Nigerian media studies but also their theoretical orientation, methodological rigour, and contextual relevance.

Further empirical inquiries into the methodologies employed within Nigerian communication studies reveal a dominance of quantitative research approaches, particularly survey methods, over qualitative and mixed-methods designs. Ekeanyanwu (2015) found that a significant proportion of published articles in Nigerian communication journals between 2010 and 2015 utilized survey techniques, often relying heavily on questionnaires as the principal instrument of data collection. This methodological inclination has raised concerns about the depth and richness of insights being generated, especially considering the complex nature of communication phenomena that may benefit more from qualitative techniques such as ethnography, case studies, and narrative analyses (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014).

Additionally, studies such as Asemah (2011) point out that while quantitative methods dominate, many of these studies exhibit weaknesses in research design, including issues related to sampling techniques, validity, and reliability. Moreover, there is evidence of a growing but still limited adoption of content analysis as a method for studying media texts and patterns, a gap that this present study seeks to address. These methodological patterns reveal significant implications for the knowledge produced within Nigerian communication and media scholarship and highlight the need for methodological diversification.

Empirical studies have also documented patterns in the theoretical frameworks adopted in Nigerian communication research. Okunna (1999) and later scholars such as Nwabueze (2018) observe that communication research in Nigeria is predominantly underpinned by a narrow range of theories, particularly agenda-setting, uses and gratifications, and cultivation theory. While these theories provide valuable lenses for examining media effects and audience behaviour, their dominance limits theoretical innovation and the exploration of alternative perspectives.

In contrast, contemporary global media studies increasingly incorporate interdisciplinary theories, drawing from sociology, psychology, political science, and cultural studies to offer more nuanced analyses (Couldry, 2012). Nigerian research has been slow to fully integrate such interdisciplinary approaches, resulting in a body of work that, while growing in quantity, may lack the critical depth and theoretical pluralism necessary for a mature academic discipline.

The limited use of emerging frameworks such as critical race theory, feminist media theory, and theories of digital publics further constrains the field's ability to interrogate

complex socio-cultural phenomena comprehensively. The current study, therefore, builds upon these empirical findings by systematically analysing the theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and topical orientations that characterize recent Nigerian communication and media scholarship.

Thus, gaps identify in the theoretical exploration that this study further investigates and tries to bridge are, first, the disproportionate focus on political communication and development communication, with limited attention given to emerging areas such as digital media, feminist media theory, gender theories, and so on. Secondly, an over reliance on Western normative theories, as against local theories that could suit the complexities of the Nigerian socio-political and economic environments. Third, over concentration on quantitative methodological inclination and questionnaire, which has raised concerns about the depth and richness of insights being generated, especially considering the complex nature of communication and media phenomena that may benefit more from qualitative techniques such as narratives, ethnography, FGD, that provide robust exploratory data. Fourth, limited adoption of interdisciplinary research despite the central role that communication and media play across all fields in the society.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two major theoretical traditions that have historically guided scholarship in communication and media studies: Normative Theory and Theories of Media Effects. The Normative Theory of the press, as articulated by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956), emphasises the ideal roles that media systems are expected to play in society, such as fostering democracy, promoting accountability, and serving the public interest. In the Nigerian

context, where the media is often positioned as a tool for national development and political mobilisation, normative theory provides a useful lens for understanding the motivations underlying scholarly inquiry.

Nigerian media studies, suggests critically assessing how media institutions ought to function, especially in emerging democracies (Oso, 2012). Hence, the application of Normative Theory in this study facilitates a deeper appreciation of the assumptions and expectations embedded within the patterns of research analysed.

Complementing this perspective are the Theories of Media Effects, which investigate the influence of media on individuals, institutions, and society. Foundational media effect theories such as Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, 1998), and Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973) have been widely utilised in Nigerian communication research, reflecting a predominant concern with the media's ability to shape perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. The frequent deployment of these theories, points to an underlying research tradition that privileges the examination of media impacts over other possible analytical approaches, such as media production studies or audience ethnography (Nwabueze, 2018). By incorporating theories of Media Effects into this article, this study is positioned to critically assess the degree to which Nigerian communication research is preoccupied with traditional notions of media influence, and whether there is evidence of a shift towards more nuanced, contemporary understandings of media-society relationships.

The normative theories, over the years, have been criticised for their linear communication pattern- a one way or at the most, two-way flow of information, unlike contemporary theories that promote participatory

communication. Relatedly, newer theories such as the Selectivity Processes and the Individual Difference theory, have weakened the powers of the traditional media effect theories. The audience of the media are at liberty to select what content to consume or ignore based on their individual differences and tastes and what aligns with their inherent beliefs and schemata.

Despite the criticisms of the Normative Theory and Media Effects Theories, the integration of both in this study provides a comprehensive framework for this content analysis. While Normative Theory illuminates the aspirational dimensions of media research, the ideals and functions media are expected to fulfil, theories of Media Effects reveal the empirical focus on media influence that dominates much of the academic discourse. Together, they offer a robust interpretive structure for categorizing, analysing, and understanding the patterns, methodological choices, theoretical orientations, and topical emphases found in contemporary Nigerian communication and media studies. This dual-theoretical approach ensures that the study does not merely catalogue research trends but also critically engages with the epistemological and ideological undercurrents that shape the production of knowledge within the field.

Since the normative theories and the media effects theories have over the years, been criticised as too western-centric, this study, therefore, is poised to ascertain if there is a shift or dynamic change in the adoption of theories in communication and media studies from Normative and Media Effect Theories to other local or emerging theories proposed to explain the peculiarities of the global South and related environments such as Nigeria

Research Methodology

This study employed mixed methods research approach, a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analyses to examine patterns of research in communication and media studies in Nigeria. Content analysis is a systematic, objective, and replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Neuendorf, 2017).

The mixed method research (MMR) was deemed most appropriate because it allows for the analysis of manifest content across a selected corpus of academic articles using a pragmatic approach. MMR with its “pragmatic tenets should be the main driver of social and behavioural science research in other to make complete sense of phenomenon, (Fajemisin, 2018, p.142).

Given that the primary aim of this research is to identify patterns in the form of topics and sub-genres, theoretical frameworks, methodological design, and data analysis techniques, the Quan-Qual research strands (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2018), provides the necessary structure to yield reliable data for inferences. Furthermore, Content Analysis is ideal in social research topics when it comes to exploring trends and patterns (Bryman, Sloan, & Clark, 2021).

The sampling frame consists of twenty (20) scholarly articles published between 2015 and 2025 in reputable online academic journals accessible through Google Scholar, SCOPUS-indexed journals, and other databases recommended for communication and media research. The articles were

selected using purposive sampling, targeting studies that explicitly focused on communication and media topics within the Nigerian context.

Data Analysis and Findings

This section presents the results of the mixed content analysis of twenty (20) scholarly articles on communication and media studies in Nigeria, published between the years 2015 and 2025. The analysis focused on variables such as sub-genres of communication and media, type of theories used, and the methodological approaches. Each result is summarised in a table and discussed based on the patterns observed.

A manual coding sheet was developed based on the units of analysis in the research questions including sub-genre of articles/research topics, type of theories used, and research methodology adopted. Each article was manually coded following clearly defined coding rules to ensure consistency and minimise subjective interpretation. Codes were assigned numerical values to enable statistical analysis.

Data collected from the coding sheets were manually coded and analysed for presentation. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were generated to provide a comprehensive overview of the research patterns. Tables were employed to present the distribution of sub-genres/topics, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches. The findings from this analysis form the empirical foundation upon which discussions, interpretations, and recommendations were made.

Selected Articles (2015 – 2025)

Articles	Year
Digital Media and the Banalization of Deception	2025
Collaborative Journalism Around the Globe: A Systematic Review	2025
Social Media Platforms, Youths and Sustainable Peacebuilding in Nigeria	2024
Social Media Influencers & Political Influence Operations: The Data Boys Example in Nigeria	2024
A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Nigeria's 2023 Pre-election Memes	2023
Exploration into Usage, Frequency, and Prominence of Propaganda Devices	2023
Examining the Role of Social Media and Mobile Social Networking	2023
Online Harassment of Journalists in Nigeria	2022
Online Media and Global Communication Research in Nigeria	2022
The 2021 Nigerian Twitter Ban: A Text-Analytics and Survey Insight	2021
Changing Communication Patterns Among Youths in Nigeria	2021
Social Media as Solidarity Vehicle During the 2020 #EndSARS Protests	2020
ICT, Social Media, and Migration Nexus in Nigeria	2020
Framing of Boko Haram in Nigerian Newspapers	2019
Women Mobilisation via Mobile Social Media in Nigeria	2019
Everything's Negative About Nigeria: US Media Reporting	2018
Journalists and Political Sources in Nigeria	2017
Press Freedom and Nigeria's Cybercrime Act of 2015: An Assessment	2016
Narcotizing Dysfunction of the Social Media in Nigeria	2016
Discursive Strategies in Nigeria's 2015 Facebook Campaign Discourse	2015

Descriptive Statistics Tabular Analysis of Results

Table 1a. Q1: Sub-genres/Topics Studies in the Articles

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Digital Media	7	35.0%
Media and Society	3	15.0%
Political Communication	10	50.0%

The articles are split across three sub-genres, with Political Communication (50%) being the most prominent. Digital Media follows with 35%, while Media and Society appears least studied.

Table 1b: Topics

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Journalism Practice	6	30.0%
Media Regulation	5	25.0%
Social Media Use	9	45.0%

Social Media Use is the most studied topic (45%), followed by Journalism Practice (30%) and Media Regulation (25%), showing a strong emphasis on digital behaviour and media performance.

Table 2: Q2. Theories Used in the Articles

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Narcotizing Dysfunction	2	10.0%
Framing	3	15.0%
Uses and Gratifications	4	20.0%
MCDA	1	5.0%
Cultivation	2	10.0%
None	8	40.0%

Analysis on the theories used showed that Uses and Gratifications Theory (20%) and Framing theory (15%) were most frequently used, while few articles adopted Cultivation Theory (10%), Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis-MCDA (5%), and Narcotizing Dysfunction (10%) theories. Interestingly, 40% of the studies had no clearly stated theoretical framework, indicating a gap in theoretical grounding or a preference to be exempted.

Table 3. Q3. Research Method Used

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Quantitative	8	40.0%
Qualitative	8	40.0%
Mixed Methods	4	20.0%

The above tables revealed that Quantitative and Qualitative methods are evenly used (with a distribution of 40% each), while Mixed Methods appeared four times, equivalent to 20% of the selected studies. This reflects a somewhat balanced adoption of objective, subjective and pragmatic strands and worldviews.

Table 3.1. Methodology

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Survey	8	40.0%
Content Analysis	7	35.0%
Case Study	5	25.0%

The coding exercise revealed that Survey (40%) and Content Analysis (35%) were the most common methodologies, while case study had 25%. This demonstrates a preference for both empirical and textual data sources.

Table 3.2. Instruments

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Questionnaire	4	20.0%
Document Review	3	15.0%
Interview	6	30.0%
Coding Sheet	5	25.0%
FGD	1	5.0%
None	1	5.0%

The analysis revealed that Interviews (30%) and Coding Sheets (25%) were the most used/preferred instruments in the selected studies. 10% of studies lacked formal instruments, which could be attributed to their theoretical nature.

Table 3.3 Sampling

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Probability	9	45.0%
Purposive	11	55.0%

Although with a slight gap, Purposive sampling (55%) was more frequently employed than general non-probability sampling (45%). This shows targeted participant selection, and intention in most studies.

Table 3.4. Methods of Analysis

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Descriptive Statistics	10	50.0%
Thematic Analysis	10	50.0%

All 20 articles analysed revealed an even distribution of Descriptive Statistics and Thematic Analysis, with each accounting for 50%.

Discussion of Finding

This study examines the patterns of research in communication and media studies in Nigeria with focus on scholarly articles published between 2015 and 2025. The analysis of the designated articles provided insights into the overarching sub-genres/topics, theories adopted, and the methods/approaches commonly used in the last decade in Nigeria. The findings are discussed below based on the three research questions posed:

Q1. Dominant Sub-genres/Topics in Communication and Media Research

Overall, the analysis of this study revealed that Political Communication emerged as the most dominant sub-genre of the twenty articles analysed. This finding is significant as it reflects the high level of responsiveness to Nigeria's evolving political climate, especially issues concerning electoral processes, political discourse, and media regulation. This finding aligns with previous studies by Okoye (2020) and Uche (2018) that early Nigerian communication research overwhelmingly concentrated on politically charged topics such as media and governance, election reporting, and the role of journalism in democracy. It is therefore interesting to know that political issues and political communication still dominate scholarly discourse in contemporary environments.

The sub-genre of Digital media followed, implying a shift towards interrogating how digital technologies are reshaping communication practices, particularly among youths and during political mobilisations like the #EndSARS movement. This finding correlates with studies by Eze (2019) and Bala (2022), wherein the scholars noted there

has been a discernible shift in topical focus, with scholars paying increasing attention to issues such as digital literacy, online journalism, misinformation, and youth media engagement. Although Media and Society had less adoption, it showed an interest in social justice and civic engagement, and calls for a shift in research focus to such areas as well as other emerging issues in the polity.

Relatedly, the topics in the articles that stood out from the sub-genres revolved around Social Media Use, followed by Journalism Practice, and Media Regulation. This finding correlates with Afolayan & Ajayi (2021) study, wherein the scholars recognised digital platforms as transformative tools in political participation, activism, and public discourse in Nigeria. The significant representation of journalism-focused studies demonstrates an ongoing concern with protocolled ethical standards, newsroom practices, and press freedom, while media regulation studies primarily addressed legislative frameworks like the "Cybercrime Act" and their implications for press freedom. These topics indicate academic alignment with national socio-political priorities and global digital shifts.

Q2. Theoretical Frameworks Employed

A key concern of this study was the extent to which Nigerian communication scholars engage theoretical frameworks. Findings show that while theories such as Uses and Gratifications and Framing Theory were applied, a striking 40% of the studies did not explicitly state any theoretical underpinning. This suggests a significant theoretical gap and may point to a tendency among scholars to emphasise empirical findings over conceptual grounding (Umeogu, 2018). Such gaps limit the explanatory depth of research and underscore the need for stronger

theoretical engagement. The limited use of advanced or context-specific theories reflects either a lack of access to emerging theoretical paradigms or a pedagogical gap in scholarly problems mapping.

The theoretical discovery of this study, therefore, aligns with earlier study by Ojebuyi & Folarin (2021), that found Uses and Gratification Theory to be the most utilised theory in communication and media studies with Framing Theory as the “other” most utilised. This contrasts with previous studies that found Agenda-Setting and Media Dependency Theories as the “other” most utilised theories in the field. Therefore, there is still an over reliance in normative and media effects theories, with no discernible shift or adoption of emerging theories such as feminist media theories, critical race theory, theories of network societies, and other evolving theories in the field.

Q3. Research Methods and Approaches Used

Research methods and approaches within this study is all-encompassing focusing on the main research paradigms, the methods, techniques/instruments, sampling, and method of data analysis. The study found an even distribution between quantitative and qualitative methods, followed by mixed methods. This paradigmatic balance reflects a healthy methodological pluralism within the field.

Survey and Content Analysis emerged as the most utilized methodologies trailed by Case Study. The preference for surveys suggests a proclivity toward measurable outcomes, while content analysis reflects a focus on text and media discourse. However, the relatively lower application of ethnographic or experimental methods reveals an opportunity for methodological diversification in future studies.

Research instruments, sampling technique and data analysis reflects the following: for the instrument, interviews, coding sheets and questionnaires are the most frequently used tools, indicating a reliance on both structured and semi-structured techniques. Purposive sampling was more common than non-probability sampling, reflecting researchers' preference for selecting respondents based on relevance rather than randomness. This approach, while practical, raises concerns about the generalisability of findings. Data analysis methods, studies were evenly split between Descriptive Statistics and Thematic Analysis, demonstrating a dual orientation toward interpretative depth and quantitative representation.

Thus, it can be deduced that the balanced methodological deployment of quantitative and qualitative research approaches in the 20 articles reviewed, is a departure from earlier findings in the field in the last decade, which found higher preference and dominance of quantitative over qualitative method and other research approaches (see Ekeanyanwu, 2015; Nneoma and Martins, 2021). Additionally, survey maintained its place as the most utilised research technique, often relying heavily on questionnaires as the principal instrument of data collection.

Conclusion

The investigation on the patterns of research in communication and media studies in Nigeria over a ten-year period (2015-2025), identified the dominant research sub-genres, topical trends, theoretical orientations, and methodological preferences. Through a systematic content analysis of twenty peer-reviewed articles, the findings reveal a discipline that is both responsive to Nigeria's evolving socio-political realities and increasingly attuned to global media transformations.

The results demonstrate a strong concentration on political communication and digital media, reflecting the impact of digital technologies and political events on research focus in Nigeria. Social media use emerged as the leading topic, emphasizing the centrality of platforms like Twitter and Facebook in contemporary discourse, activism, and youth engagement. However, while the field has shown a commendable balance between quantitative and qualitative methods, and between descriptive and thematic analytical approaches, it continues to face notable challenges, particularly the inconsistent application of theoretical frameworks, with nearly half of the articles lacking a clearly defined theoretical underpinning.

The predominance of purposive sampling, surveys, and content analysis methods highlights practical orientations in research design but also suggests a need for deeper critical engagement with alternative methodologies.

In summary, the study provides a reflective lens on the nature of media and communication research in Nigeria, pointing to both its strengths and the critical gaps that need to be addressed for the field to mature.

Recommendations

First, there is need to emphasise the promotion of interdisciplinary collaboration, with scholars encouraged to explore topics on media and society and media regulation, and to expand the scope of research to other related disciplines such as political science,

sociology, and information technology. Such interdisciplinary efforts can enhance the relevance and applicability of media research in addressing Nigeria's complex socio-political challenges.

Second, scholars should strengthen theoretical application to prioritise the consistent and deliberate integration of theoretical frameworks. This can be achieved if Nigerian scholars move beyond mere empirical reporting by rooting their studies in robust, contextually relevant theories that enhance scholarly dialogue and analytical depth, and to adopt more recent, interdisciplinary theories.

Third, while surveys and content analysis remain dominant, there is a compelling need to diversify methodological choices by incorporating mixed methods, ethnography, longitudinal studies, experimental design and focus group that offer richer insights into phenomena.

Finally, the need to institutionalise longitudinal research and studies that track changes in communication behaviour, media policies, and public discourse. Institutional support for longitudinal projects will help establish empirical baselines and policy-relevant insights.

By addressing these recommendations, the Nigerian media and communication research landscape can become more globally competitive, theoretically grounded, and socially impactful.

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