

## Digital Media and Research Integrity in Communication Research in Nigeria

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### Abstract

**Background:** The influx of digital media communication into the research sphere in Nigeria today is largely directed towards creating new scenarios and paradoxes, which necessitates that researchers be equipped to address them effectively.

**Objective:** The study explored the digital landscape, data collection methods, ethical considerations, challenges, and ethical dilemmas facing communication researchers in Nigeria.

**Method:** This research employs a descriptive survey design. The specific participants for this study consist of 400 postgraduate students from higher education institutions in Delta State who have access to digital media. The snowball sampling technique was utilised, which is fast and non-discriminative in collecting data from all communities. From 400 respondents who received the data collection instrument, 392 entries were filled correctly and analysed.

**Result:** The investigation revealed a striking variety in the demographic profile of 392 postgraduate students. The variations were noted in the differences in gender, age, marital status, and educational discipline. The article highlights the necessity of ethical considerations in research using digital media, which stresses such aspects as the protection of personal information, the relevance of the information, the necessity of transparency, and the use of real data. The findings show that digital media platforms, for example, social media networks and online news portals, are widely utilised for data collection by researchers. Besides, issues associated with the acquisition of digital data, like misinformation, data privacy, and ethical difficulties, are recognised by the study in the digital researcher's field.

**Conclusion:** The advent of digital media and the attainment of research integrity communication significantly reshaped how communication research is conducted, bringing both opportunities and challenges.

**Contribution:** This study has raised ethical issues that need to be considered when using digital media platforms for communication research.

**Recommendations:** Drawing on ethically acceptable research, collaboration alongside digital literacy will be the right tools for stakeholders to handle the difficulties that come with the era of digital communication in Nigeria. In the end, this will ensure that communication research continues to be good, relevant, and socially applicable in our society.

**Keywords:** Digital Media, Research Integrity, Data Collection, Ethical Consideration and Communication

## Introduction

In the era of artificial intelligence, ethical research concerns are essential to refocusing attention on difficult problems including biased algorithms, data privacy, the authority and duty of machines, and their obligation. Researchers now need to prepare for and confront new situations and paradoxes that have emerged as a result of the fast growth of digital media in Nigeria's communication-based research environment (Elias, 2014). This is because communication research is one of the pillars upon which communication primarily focuses on establishing public opinion, formulating policies, and sparking the nation's societal growth (Liao 2023). Researchers now have access to a wider variety of data sources and can more easily obtain previously unavailable material thanks to the rise of very diversified digital platforms including social network sites, online news portals, and digital library services. According to Beverungen et al. (2019), digital media presents novel prospects and plays a unique function in the data collection and information-gathering process for academics due to its unprecedented accessibility. Because of digital platforms, the amount of digital data has increased. Researchers use a wide range of tools, including social networks, online news portals, and digital archives. An abundance of well-researched studies in the field of communication has been made possible by the growth in digital material. The journalism, public relations, advertising, and digital marketing industries receive notable and game-changing enhancements through this (Ijeh 2008, Bateman 2021).

Nigerian communication research has been profoundly impacted by digital media, which presents both benefits and drawbacks in terms of upholding the quality of the study. In addition to providing academics with an abundance of data sources to examine, the growing diversity of digital platforms such as social media networks, online media platforms, and digital archives has also made this data accessible and prepared for analysis. The widespread availability of digital information has made it possible to conduct more in-depth and sophisticated research in a variety of communication-related fields, as demonstrated by the studies conducted by Mitcham (2003), Nicholas et al. (2014), Ijeh et al (2015), Ufuophu-Biri and Ijeh (2021) and Nigmatullina (2022). The numerous prospects that are there in the study of digital media and research integrity have been illuminated by these scholars. Conversely, however, the quick spread of concerns concerning false information, data privacy violations, and unethical research methods have also been brought up by material on digital platforms (Kia-Keating et al., 2017). Digital media platforms are changing the way that data is gathered and examined. Researchers may benefit greatly from social media since it provides real-time access to a vast amount of user-generated data and allows them

to monitor attitudes, patterns, and trends (Ijeh et al. 2015). A wide variety of text and multimedia data are produced by online news sources and digital libraries for use in historical research content analysis and study (Kuzmina 2023). Furthermore, investigators are also considering digital technologies for data collection such as social media analytics tools, video-conferencing platforms for interviews, and online surveys as fundamental to get data from a larger and more varied sample of people, but they also save money and cut down on the time and expense of doing so compared to the old method (Eppes et al. 2022). However, ethical concerns must be addressed from a variety of angles by academic scientists, which might cause complications while collecting data in the digital media environment. In today's digital world, issues like informed consent, data privacy, trustworthy data-gathering techniques, and openness in data analysis procedures have become extremely important.

According to Okereka et al. (2024), digital media is a crucial component of data collecting for maintaining research integrity in communication studies. As such, it offers researchers a plethora of platforms and tools for data collection and analysis. It provides researchers with an abundance of both traditional and novel approaches, such as online questionnaires, data analysis of digital media content, interviews conducted through digital platforms (e.g., Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp), and software for social network analysis that can be utilised to gather precise data (Jackson 2022). Because the researchers can obtain real-time data, engage with a larger audience, and do in-depth analyses thanks to digital technologies, the research findings cannot be questioned due to issues with validity and reliability. Granello and Wheaton (2004) assert that using digital media in data collection not only improves research efficiency but also aids in decision support by pushing the frontiers of knowledge and comprehension in communication research in the Nigerian context (Okereka et al. 2024; Miller 2021).

Scholars in Nigeria's communication niche are focusing on creating research ethics and demanding that digital media be studied transparently (Nwanne 2014; Olaniran et al. 2020). Jahun (2018) highlights the importance of ethical norms that govern the creation and implementation of practices related to data creation, analysis, and dissemination. In the view of Golder et al. (2017), significant efforts have already begun to correct disinformation and promote digital literacy among researchers and the general public. However, as digital media becomes more prevalent, they provide barriers to the advancement of public information consumption, and the integrity of research is gravely jeopardized as technological challenges arise (Shilton et al. 2016). The rapid dissemination of information via digital platforms has led to concerns about false information, unauthorized access to personal data, and unethical research practices. Research integrity becomes more important in Nigeria, where the unfettered dissemination of fake news and misinformation poses serious dangers to social cohesion and democratic systems (Olaniran et al. 2020).

Ethical researchers have a plethora of obstacles to overcome in order to preserve research integrity in communication, especially with the arrival of digital media. These concerns range across several facets of the research process, encompassing the gathering, analyzing, and sharing of data. There are also persistent problems, such as the lack of control and regulation of digital media content, the propagation of false information and fake news, and the labor-intensive process of guaranteeing data integrity, privacy, and confidentiality (Goodyear 2017). Finally, a significant issue with researching digital media platforms is ethical conundrums. However, the focus is on

finding ways to address the issue of bias and manipulation in the gathering and processing of data from digital media (Singh et al. 2020; Resnik et al. 2016). Overall, there digital media has impacted significantly on the research process and empirical evidence is needed to understand how this has affected research in communication.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study was to spotlight digital media and research integrity in communication research in Nigeria. In doing so, attention was paid to various forms of digital platforms and how they operate. The specific objectives were to:

1. evaluate the digital media environment and communication researchers' landscape concerning platforms used among researchers for research integrity.
2. examine the digital media for data collection for research integrity in communication research.
3. determine the communication researcher's perception of ethical considerations using digital media for research integrity.
4. identify the main challenges faced by researchers on digital media and research integrity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Grounded Theory**

In the social sciences, grounded theory is a type of research methodology that views ideas as evolving from evidence. It makes use of strategies such as inductive reasoning, theoretical sampling, coding, continual comparison, and memo writing, all of which were developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their 1967 book *"The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research"* (Corbin 2017). Grounded theory is quite useful when it comes to ethical concerns in media research, especially in the digital setting. Grounded theory on ethical concerns can benefit from the researchers' field observations, interviews, observation documentation, and policy discoveries. Coding facilitates the identification of concepts and categories, as well as themes, within ethical dilemmas (Noble et al. 2016). This strategy makes it easier to create a rich viewpoint on the issue under study that is particular to the given environment. Grounded theory may therefore be applied to the study of ethical problems within the context of digital media. In conclusion, grounded theory can assist in addressing ethical concerns in digital media research as a middle-range methodology. This focuses on the situations, methods, and outcomes of moral conundrums. Measures for addressing ethical concerns, such as policies, training and education programmes, and ethical directives, might be suggested based on the grounded theory (Mahoney et al. 2020). As an illustration, interviews, open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and theory development may all be used in qualitative studies on ethical issues surrounding the use of digital media in Nigeria. As a result, it enhances the field's ethics and best practices while also expanding awareness of the academic community and real-life solutions for the multifaceted ethical dilemmas that arise from the use of digital media (Corbin 2017).

It illustrates how social media circumstances that makeup society impact the ethical facets of communication studies as an application of the theory. Opaquen provides a methodical approach to considering data privacy, transparency, and actual data utilisation. Regarding the ethical concerns raised by the theory, it is clear that the first roots of these difficulties date back to the dawn of the information era, even though the rise of social media has made the ethical challenges associated with information systems more pressing. It offers suggestions for upcoming moral standards for social media network material and is supported by empirical data (Hennell et al. 2020). It provides scholars with a helpful theoretical framework to help them navigate the complexities and possibilities of the digital era as it sheds light on what ethical concerns and their immediate processes might look like (Mahoney et al. 2020).

## **Research Hypothesis**

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between digital media data collection methods and ethical considerations in communication research.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between ethical considerations and the challenges in digital media communication research.

## **Methodology**

The research is a descriptive survey since it works effectively for gathering specific data from a diverse group of people using a sample representation of that diverse group (Umukoro & Ogwezi, 2021). This entails the use of a questionnaire to collect data from sampled respondents (Umukoro et al., 2018; Ivwighren & Umukoro, 2022; Umukoro & Ogwezi, 2022). Furthermore, it fits the objective of descriptive research since it does not seek to prove a cause-and-effect link; rather, it describes the present situation regarding the use of digital media and ethical integrity. The study encompassed a population of about 5,000 postgraduate students from four public institutions in Delta State, taking into account their prior research experience and availability to digital platforms. According to Taro Yamane's 1967 sample size method, a 400 sample size was purposefully selected for the study at a confidence level of 95% (Umukoro, 2012). An exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling approach was utilized to distribute the instrument, while a random sampling technique was applied to reach the study's actual participants. For data collection, a structured questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale was purposefully distributed to 100 respondents from each of the institutions making use of their online resources.

Face and content validity were applied to ensure the questionnaire measured what it intended regarding clarity, relevance, construct, and content that covers all aspects of the study objectives. To test the reliability of the instrument and establish the degree of consistency with which the instrument measures the objectives of the study, the researchers adopted the Cronbach Alpha method. However, a lower limit of 0.6 is acknowledged as a reasonable and reliable measurement in this study since the number of items on the scale varied. With this strategy, the researchers concentrated on the respondents according to their knowledge level of subject-matter expertise.

To analyse, the researchers employed a summarised table, and simple percentages were used to discuss data while mean and standard deviation were used for descriptive statistics. A Spearman

Rank was used for the inferential statistics to test the hypothesis, and the findings were shown in tables. It is crucial to make clear that the benchmark criterion for accepting or rejecting the mean score was 3.00 and above due to the responder format being a five-point Likert scale. Data was analysed using Stata 15.0 software, and the choice to accept or reject the hypothesis was based on the P-value at less than or greater than 0.05.

## Result

Among the 400 copies of the questionnaire that were filled, 392 were correctly filled, while 8 copies were discarded due to incorrect filling. This means that the return rate for the study instrument was 98%. The result of the study is presented below based on the study's objectives.

## Data Presentation/Discussion

**Table 1: Demographic Data of Respondents**

Gender	Age	Status	Post Programme	Graduate
<b>Male</b>	<b>192 (49%)</b>	18-37years 192 (49%)	Single 137 (35%)	Ph.D 122 (32%)
<b>Female</b>	<b>200 (51%)</b>	38-57years 85 (22%)	Married 185 (47%)	M.Phil 19 (5%)
		58-77 years 69 (18%)	Others 70 (18%)	M.Sc. 205 (52%)
		78-and above 46 (11%)		Diploma 46 (11%)
<b>392 (100%)</b>	<b>392 (100%)</b>	<b>392 (100%)</b>		<b>392 (100%)</b>

Table 1 shows the demographic features of the surveyed in the case of gender, age, marital status, and educational aspiration. The data depicts that the sample analyzed is 392 postgraduate student participants from the 400 intended for the study and among them, 192 (49%) were males while 200 (51%) were females. It is thus revealed that females take the lead in the given sample compared to males. The next data provided results illustrating the distribution of respondents across different age groups of adults decided deliberately for the study. According to the data, the majority of respondents, accounting for 49%, fall within the age range of 18 to 37 years. This implies that a considerable number of the study participants are relatively young. Furthermore, 22% of the survey participants fall within the age bracket of 38-57 years thereby indicating a fair number of middle-aged respondents. Again, 18% of the survey participants are aged 58-77 years and finally, 11% are 78 years and above. These imply that the study sample has a fair division of young, middle-aged, and aged respondents.

Among the respondents, 137 (35%) were singles and 185 (47%) were married. This shows that more than half of the respondents are married and others in the bracket of divorced, separated, or widowed are 70 (18%). The respondents are divided into a sample of various educational pursuits who are familiar with the implications and usage of research methodology. Doctorate students (122 respondents, 32%), Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) (19 respondents, 5%), Masters students (205 respondents, 52%), and 46 respondents (11%) are for postgraduate diplomas. In general, the data shows the represented population is expressive in gender indicators, variance in age, marital status, and educational aspirations attributes which extensively illustrate the mixtures seen. To interpret the research results correctly and to make sure the results of the demographic characters studied can be applied to the general public. Other results are further analyzed based on the study objectives.

**Objective 1:** digital media environment and communication researchers’ landscape concerning platforms used among researchers for research integrity.

**Table 2: Rating of frequency on digital media platforms used by researchers**

S/N	ITEMS	NO	1	2	3	4	5	MEAN SCORE	DECISION
1	Digital Archives and Databases	392	5	19	93	101	174	4.07	Accepted
2	Online News Portal	392	11	18	93	107	163	4.00	Accepted
3	Social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter)	392	4	12	75	113	188	4.12	Accepted
4	Academic Research Platforms (e.g., Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia)	392	26	49	105	114	98	3.27	Accepted

Field Output, 2024

The result for the study as shown in Table 2 shows that social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter surpass all other information sources, obtaining the highest average score of 4.12. It emphasizes the essence of social media to let the researchers have accurate data collection and analysis. Also, a digital archive and database, having a mean score of 4.07 are popular types of platforms used by researchers to study different structures under greater magnification for comprehensive analysis. Online news portals typically receive around 4.00 on average score as a popular data source for communication scholars, which can deliver detailed and instantaneous information for research purposes since they are current and essential. However, academic research-driven platforms including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Academia incurred a mean score of 3.27 observed an overwhelming social media engagement. This suggests its growing adoption among researchers. Such inequality may spring from the sophisticated nature of these platforms or the requirement for institutional access which might limit their adaptation in research studies.

**Objective 2:** Digital media for data collection for research integrity in communication research.

**Table 3: Rating of preferred data collection methods for data integrity in communication research**

S/N	ITEMS	NO	1	2	3	4	5	MEAN SCORE	DECISION
1	Online surveys	392	10	32	105	110	135	3.83	Accepted
2	Content analysis of digital media content	392	3	7	84	92	206	4.33	Accepted
3	Interviews conducted via digital platforms (e.g., Zoom, Skype)	392	7	37	62	184	102	3.85	Accepted
4	Social media analytics tools	392	17	41	17	167	150	4.00	Accepted

Field Output, 2024

The result of the study as indicated in Table 3 shows that online interviews conducted via Skype and Zoom, yielded an average rating of 3.85. implying that researchers may interview remotely and reach a larger audience by using digital platforms, which opens up more inclusive and varied research options. Online surveys trail somewhat, with 3.83 suggesting that respondents find them to be a handy option.

**Table 4: Respondents rating on perception of ethical considerations using digital media for research integrity**

S/N	ITEMS	NO	1	2	3	4	5	MEAN SCORE	DECISION
1	Respect for participant privacy and confidentiality	392	2	5	84	102	198	4.25	Accepted
2	Informed consent obtained from research participants	392	7	15	10	150	201	4.26	Accepted
3	Transparency in data collection and analysis methods	392	19	22	77	169	105	3.81	Accepted
4	Avoidance of data manipulation or selective reporting	392	43	35	168	96	50	3.55	Accepted

Field Output, 2024

The result of the study as shown in Table 4 shows that the most distinguishing ethical aspect of researchers is the informed consent obtained from research participants as revealed by the mean score of 4. 26. This implies that the informed nature of research participants should not be taken for granted and researchers should ensure that there is clear understanding of research objectives, methods, and the associated risks including the rights and privacy of participants. This not only secures the safety of research participants but also develops trust and cooperation between the researcher and research subjects. As well, the participant's privacy and confidentiality have mean scores of 4.25 placing researchers with the highest emphasis on the principle which is also one of the core ethical principles. This adherence to protecting participants' privacy and confidentiality is a clear indication of the ethical standard that all researchers take to heart in their work. The next thing is the transparency of data collection and analysis methods which have a mean score of 3. 81, which is consequently another ethical issue to be noted. Researchers are known for being transparent, and for their research to be reliable and trustworthy. This openness can help to guarantee the reliability of the findings and the ethical values upheld by the scientific community at its best. Avoidance of data manipulation draws behind with a 3.55 mean score implying that on the aspect of ethical consideration, data manipulations still struggle with research integrity.



**Objective 4:** Challenge faced by researchers on digital media and research integrity.

**Table 5: Respondents rating on challenges and ethical dilemmas**

S/N	ITEMS	NO	1	2	3	4	5	MEAN SCORE	DECISION
1	Lack of regulation and oversight of digital media content	392	5	9	80	100	198	4.21	Accepted
2	Proliferation of misinformation and fake news	392	7	17	41	145	182	4.23	Accepted
3	Difficulty in ensuring data privacy, confidentiality, and integrity	392	12	17	91	167	105	3.85	Accepted
4	Ethical dilemmas when researching digital media platforms	392	13	35	168	106	70	3.47	Accepted
5	Addressing issues of bias and manipulation in digital media data collection and analysis	392	18	30	122	101	121	3.70	Accepted

Field Output, 2024

Table 5 shows all endemic problems and ethical concerns communication scholars often come across when they are in the process of digital media research. The average values suggest the degree to which experts consider the problems the worst danger. The key factor that necessitates attention is the lack of any self-regulation and supervision of digital content including media, which is noted as an average score of 4.23. Making it even more challenging for the researcher to operate in the digital environment, no lax guidelines and measures of accountability are up for online content. There is also a problem of the proliferation of misinformation and fake news, which displays an average score of 4.21. This mass circulating of fictitious and misleading data on digital spaces is so disastrous that it can harm research integrity as indicated hereafter. Although, the other central issue is about data privacy, confidentiality, and integrity, with an average score of 3.85. Protecting sensitive research participant information and maintaining digital data security is crucial. Although researchers see the risk of digital sites spreading biases and allowing data manipulation as something that can destroy the relevance of their findings, they do not overlook the advantages of digital sites. Furthermore, the ethical dilemmas when researching digital media platforms are serious with a mean score of 3.47. Digital research has several novel ethical issues and risks that mean that researchers need to recruit and retain their participants with extreme care. Thus, the analysis reveals a multilevel scenario that is concerned with the challenges involved with using digital media for communication research. Resolving these problems will be a key element in supporting research honesty and will be critical for it to be properly, responsibly researched, and impactful.

**Descriptive Statistic**

**Table 6: summarize dmprrri dmdcri ecdmri ceddMRI**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Obs</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
<i><b>DMPRRI</b></i>	392	3.809949	.8875587	1	5
<i><b>DMDCRI</b></i>	392	3.929592	.8457103	2	5
<i><b>ECDMRI</b></i>	392	4.054422	.530272	1	5
<i><b>CDMRI</b></i>	392	3.988405	.3748698	2.423529	4.931373

STATA Output, 2024

Table 6 shows the summary of the descriptive statistics for the four variables on digital media for digital media platforms, data collection methods, ethical issues, and the challenges researchers face in holding research integrity:

The dmprrri (Digital Media Researcher for Research Integrity) survey was based on the average score of the respondents' varying degrees of digital media effect. According to the dmprrri survey, respondent preference was based on the different degrees of effect that media had an average score of 3.81. This sends the message that social researchers acknowledge the role that digital media platforms play in their endeavors. Standard deviation coincides with the variable reactions of people, which reads 'Variance of 0.81, illustrating perceptions that reflect the diverse attitudes of the survey respondents which are at the level ranging from low to high importance. dmdcri (Digital Media for Data Collection Methods for Research Integrity) shows that most of the data collection methods had a high rating average resulting in an overall high average of 3.93 indicating that researchers view these methods as effective. The standard deviation of 0.62 is precise and shows that the effectiveness levels are divergent, as responses range from moderate to marked improvements in effectiveness.

Likewise, ecdMRI (Ethical Considerations), the highest note on the scale was occupied by ethical concerns related to digital media research. 4.05, which offers a special instance of moral behavior. The replies range in significance from low to high, as indicated by the standard deviation of 0.64, which suggests that respondents had different viewpoints. cdmri (Challenges in Digital Media Research Integrity) indicates that researchers rated the severity or frequency of challenges and ethical dilemmas moderately high, with an average score of 3.99. This is given by the standard deviation equal to 0.37 shows the degree of similarity among the responses, the range of the answers is the same or close, tilting towards the norm. demonstrates a range of responses from mild to severe or frequent.

Overall, the findings show that the researchers value digital platforms, data-gathering techniques, and ethical concerns highly while doing their study. Even yet, it is clear that most researchers recognize obstacles and potential ethical conundrums, albeit to a lower degree, and they endorse the trend toward the acknowledgment of the significance and efficacy of ethical issues consideration. This comprehensive perspective highlights the challenging environment in which modern communication research is conducted in the digital age, where possibilities and challenges coexist and influence the ethics and integrity of this field.

### Testing the Hypothesis

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between digital media data collection methods and ethical considerations in communication research.

**Table 7: spearman dmdcri ecdmri**

Number of Obs	392	Decision
Spearman's rho	0.0229	Accepted
Prob> t	0.6511	

STATA Output, 2024

The result as shown in Table 7 shows that there is no evident connection between digital media and ethical considerations in communication science. With a Spearman's rho of 0.0229, and a probability value of 0.6511 and (P-value =0.05) or the 5% level, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. This means that, according to the analysis done, there is no direct relationship between how data is collected through digital media and the ethical issues in communication research. Therefore, the null hypothesis is being accepted.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between ethical considerations and challenges in digital media communication research.

**Table 8: spearman ecdmri ceddMRI**

Number of Obs	392	Decision
Spearman's rho	0.7015	Rejected
Prob> t	0.0000	

STATA Output, 2024

To assess the relationship, the Table 8 indicates the number of observed as 392 whereby the value used is considerably specific. The Spearman rho coefficient is 0.7015, as a measure of the strength and direction of the relationship between ethical considerations and challenges and ethical dilemmas in digital media communication research. Values close to one suggest that the variables are going together very well. The p=|t| correlation value related to Spearman's rho coefficient is 0.0000. This p-value shows the probability of the correlation coefficient being obtained if there were no relationships between the variables. A p-value less than 0.05 suggests that the correlation is statistically significant. This suggests that there is a strong relationship between ethical considerations and the challenges faced by researchers in digital media communication research. Under the above circumstances, the hypothesis is rejected.

### Discussion

The first hypothesis is that digital media, which has multiple platforms and data collection methods, plays a major role in the ethical consideration of communication research. Liao's (2023) study lends credence to this proposition by stating that digital media, just like digital format tools,

rely on technology as a key factor that describes its being and its integrity for research. The view of Jackson (2022) is also corroborated here on how it provides researchers with an abundance of both traditional and novel approaches, such as online questionnaires, data analysis of digital media content, interviews conducted through digital platforms (e.g., Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp), and software for social network analysis that can be utilised to gather precise data. This study resonates with the study of Okereka et al. (2024), confirming the great power of digital media in data collection in research. It also supports Olaniran and Baruwa's (2020) alignment with the need to face the challenges of ethical considerations in communication research. The results indicate that digital media channels, including social media networks, online news portals, and digital archives, are quite frequently employed by researchers to gather and analyze data. It was also shown that researchers regard ethical concerns, like respect for participant privacy and confidentiality, informed consent, and transparency in data collection and analysis methods as the key to the maintenance of research integrity in the digital age. The study outcomes, therefore highlight a crucial task for researchers, considering the ethics and ensuring that they do not compromise the integrity and credibility of research, which gets done in the digital media field in line with the grounded theory of giving academics a useful theoretical framework to aid in navigating the opportunities and complexity of the digital age by illuminating potential ethical issues and their rapid resolution as opine by Mahoney et al. (2020).

The second hypothesis on the relationship existing between challenges in digital media communication research negatively impacts the perception of research integrity among the concerned parties. This finding is supported by Goodyear (2017) and Resnik et al. (2016) when they found that persistent issues such as the dissemination of incorrect information and fake news, the absence of oversight and regulation of digital media material, and the time-consuming procedure of ensuring data integrity, privacy, and confidentiality. Rather, the possibilities for exploring new strategies in the corporate communications area become a great new opportunity. This outlook is similar to the idea that challenges in digital media research can be the catalyst for innovation and growth in communication practices, despite the complexity they bring. Similarly, Singh et al. (2020) touched upon the issue of finding a balance between ethics and challenges in the process of digital media communication research. Researchers' observations probably highlight the mutual nature of ethical decision-making and the difficulties of bringing research data security in the digital era to a new level. This understanding provides helpful information to back up the thesis of the negative impact of issues in digital media communication study on the perception of research integrity among stakeholders backed by the grounded theory according to Mahoney et al. (2020) and Corbin (2017) through the use of enhancement of the field's ethics and best practices while also expanding awareness of the academic community. However, the various dimensions of the problems in the digital media are very crucial.

## **Conclusion**

The dawn of digital media and the attainment of research integrity communication has reshaped a lot how communication research is carried out, and this has come with both opportunities and challenges. The results of the study show that researchers use different digital media platforms, such as social media, online news portals, and digital archives, for data collection and analysis. But with the speed at which the information is spread across the digital platforms even results in ethical questions of misinformation, data privacy breaches, and unethical research practices. Scientists realize how crucial it is to take into consideration ethical issues, for example, respect for

the confidentiality of participants' data, the significance of personal informed consent, and the transparency of data collection and analysis methods. Although there are a lot of benefits, but also faces many challenges, such as the absence of regulation and the control of digital media content, the spread of misinformation and fake news, and the protection of data privacy, confidentiality, and integrity. As the digital age brings new levels of complexity and research ethics along, the key players should focus more on enhancing ethical research practices, building collaboration, and increasing digital literacy. Communication research in Nigeria would remain apt, relevant, and socially answering if it addresses the issues.

### **Recommendations**

1. The researchers, industry stakeholders, and governmental organizations should collaborate and emphasize adherence to the highest ethical standards for data monitoring, analysis, and distribution to ensure that standards are upheld on digital media and research integrity.
2. There should be restrictions on the spread of false information and scholars and the general public should be provided with digital literacy education by making educational campaigns available to the general public, starting fact-checking projects, and promoting critical scrutiny of the digital world.
3. Provision should be made available for frameworks that address the ethical and intellectual aspects of using digital material responsibly for research in the rapidly evolving digital landscape

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