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THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SEEMS INSEPARABLE: A CLEAR-CUT DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE TWO PROCESS VARIABLES

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Abstract

In a time where digital systems and connectivity dominate our daily life, the terms communication and information are often process variables used interchangeably, yet, they are not the same, even though they are deeply connected and has led to conceptual ambiguity in both academic and professional contexts. This paper critically examines the nuanced relationship between communication and information, arguing that despite their apparent inseparability, they are fundamentally distinct. While information refers to structured data, facts, messages or content with meaning and value; communication on the other hand, denotes the dynamic process through which that information is shared, transmitted, interpreted and responded to between people or systems. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature from information science, communication theory, and digital studies, the paper outlines the characteristics, roles and practical implications of both concepts. It also explores how emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and big data, further complicate this relationship. The paper concludes that while the two concepts often work together, it is important to understand their differences in order to use them effectively in fields like education, media, policy, technology and public communication.

Keywords: *Communication; Information; Process Variables; Digital Media; Data; Human Interaction and Knowledge Sharing*

Introduction

All over the world, effective communication and adequate information can be regarded as the wheel on which the tyre of every organization's and personal life rotates. This is as a result of the role they perform as the backbone of any organization, institution, agency, business enterprise, company or individual. Often, the words "information" and "communication" seems interwoven and most times they are used interchangeably. They are often used intertwined in both academic and everyday contexts, which sometimes leads to a blurred understanding of their distinct meanings. It is very possible to have listened to someone who will inform that: "S/he has communicated with someone", meaning that information has been given. But giving information is a one-way process and communication is a two-way process. Despite the obvious important attached to these two concepts, there is a dichotomy between them.

A careful examination reveals that communication and information are not the same. Understanding their differences is essential, especially in disciplines such as communication studies, information science, media, health, information technology and education (Bawden & Robinson, 2022). In education, for instance, a teacher may provide information through lectures or textbooks, but effective communication ensures that students understand and apply that information. In healthcare, medical records hold information, but communication between healthcare providers and patients determines outcomes. In artificial intelligence and machine learning, algorithms can process vast amounts of information, but communication interfaces are needed to make sense of data outputs for human users (Crawford, 2021).

Moreover, the ethics of information handling privacy, accuracy and bias differ from the ethics of communication, which often concern consent, respect, clarity and intention (Mittelstadt & Floridi, 2022). Policymakers, media practitioners, educators and scientists must recognize these distinction process variables to navigate the complex information ecosystem responsibly. As education manager, there is the need to give a clear cut distinction between the two concepts and using each in its rightful place can only improve exchanges within the provision enumerated. Hence, for both concepts to be effective, it must be clear, correct, complete, concise and compassionate because effective management of communication and information allows fast, accurate and reliable access to records, ensuring

the timely destruction of redundant thoughts, emotion and ideas as well as the identification and protection of vital and historically important records (Oyewale, 2022).

It is then pertinent to give a clear difference in the concepts of communication and information which often times is been assumed to be the same by many concerned stakeholders (students, parents, school owners, education planners and policy makers) most especially in the area of general education as well as other related field.

Statement of the Problem

As our society becomes more reliant on digital platforms and interconnected networks, the concepts of communication and information are frequently used interchangeably, both in academic discussions and everyday discourse. This overlap has led to significant conceptual process variables confusion, making it difficult to draw a clear boundary between what constitutes information and what qualifies as communication. While both are central to knowledge exchange and meaning-making, they serve different purposes and operate under distinct principles.

The problem arises when these terms are assumed to mean the same thing, which can lead to misinterpretation. For example, in educational settings, the mere delivery of information does not guarantee effective communication or understanding. Despite ongoing academic discourse, there remains a lack of clarity in how scholars, professionals and institutions distinguish between the two concepts. This ambiguity affects theoretical understanding, practical application and policy formulation in disciplines that rely heavily on accurate knowledge transfer.

Therefore, there is a pressing need to revisit and clearly define the boundaries between communication and information, highlighting their individual characteristics, functions and interdependencies. Clarifying these distinctions will help reduce conceptual errors and present more precise thinking and practice across multiple disciplines.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative conceptual analysis approach to examine and distinguish the concepts of communication and information. Rather than relying on empirical data collection, the research is rooted in an extensive review and critical interpretation of scholarly literature majorly published in less than 5 years. Academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles and credible reports in the fields of communication studies, information science, digital media and philosophy of technology were analyzed to gather insights into how these concepts have evolved and how scholars currently define and apply them. The process involved purposive selection of recent and authoritative sources that specifically address the theoretical frameworks and practical implications of both communication and information. Emphasis was placed on identifying differences in how these concepts function, both in traditional human contexts and in modern digital systems influenced by artificial intelligence and data technologies. The study categorized recurring ideas and conceptual arguments into clear themes such as the nature of information, the process of communication, the role of context and the influence of technology. These themes formed the basis for drawing a structured comparison between the two concepts. By relying on conceptual clarity and critical reflection, this methodology supports a theoretical exploration rather than experimental testing, allowing for a deeper understanding of the intellectual boundaries between communication and information.

Communication as a Concept

The term 'communication' evolved from Latin language term ‘communicare’, which literally means to share, to make something common, or to participate in something jointly. It is closely related to the word ‘communis’, which means common or shared (Craig, 2021). This origin reflects the core idea of communication as an act that brings people together by sharing ideas, emotions, or knowledge. At its root, communication isn’t just about passing messages; it is about creating understanding and mutual meaning between people. Communication therefore means transferring thoughts, information, emotion, ideas, opinions, knowledge and data through gesture, voice, symbols, signs and expressions from one person to another.

Communicating with someone means intending to enter into a dialogue whether on a physical face-to-face way, through social media (Facebook, Whatsapp, Telegram, Instagram,

X-space), by email or other means. Communication is about asking questions and listening to answers. It is about receiving information, analyzing responses, reassessing your position, and moving the discussion forward. Sometimes this will finally result in information being circulated. When people communicate with each other, they exchange various forms of meaning, such as ideas and information, through a common system of symbols. Communication, at its simplest, is the act of transferring information from one place to another. The mode of transferring thoughts can be in verbal which happens through voice; written words which express or convey the message using printed or digital media such as books, magazines, forums, social media, websites or emails; visually using logos, maps, charts or graphs; or non-verbally using body language or any facial expressions, signs, symbols, colours, gestures and the tone and pitch of voice; over the phone through apps, calls and video (McQuail & Deuze, 2020; Olowo, Fashiku, Adebakin, & Ajadi, 2020). In practice, it is often a combination of several of these.

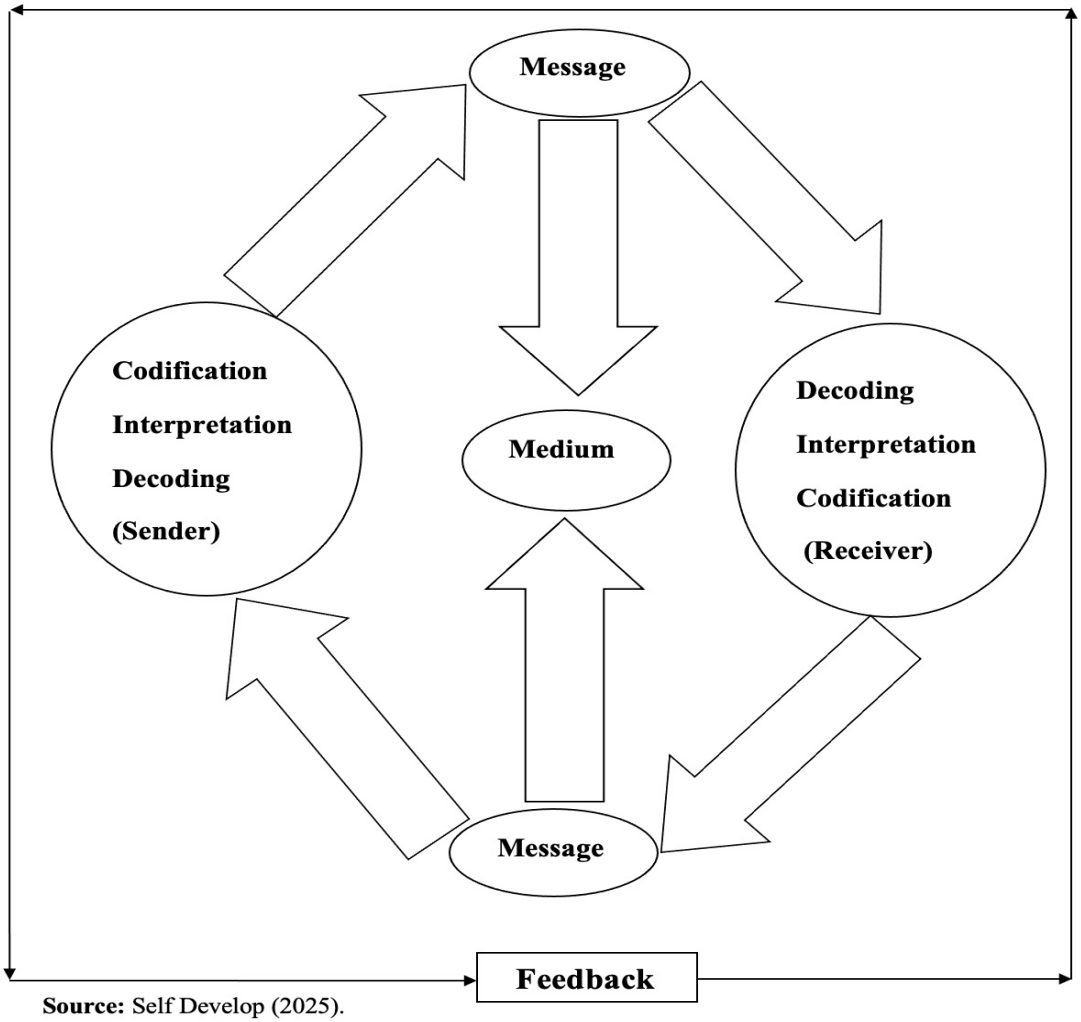
It has been estimated that people spend more time communicating than they spend on any other complex activity in life. Communication takes place on many levels, from the simplest interpersonal and small-group exchanges among friends to mass communication, as experienced in public speeches, magazines, or news broadcasts. Still, not all communication is interactive, for example, in some cases communication is a one-way process. Radio and television programs, newspapers, films and magazines are usually one-way messages created by teams of people. In all of these cases, a great deal of communication has taken place between people as they planned for, encoded, revised and edited the message that is read, seen or heard by listeners, readers or viewers, these people will never meet. The ideas conveyed in a one-way message seldom remain solely in the mind of the receiver. Students use information from encyclopaedias to create their own oral and written messages. People often encode messages about other messages as they talk with or write to others about things they have seen, read or heard. Consequently, a single communication process is often linked with other communication processes. From all indications, three things are most important and essential in any communication process. They are Sender, Receiver and the Channel which is the medium (Craig, 2021).

- The sender is encoding the message in any form like voice, written or any signs. So, they are offered as Encoder

- The receiver is decoding the message from the sender to understand the message. So, they often called as Decoder.
- Channel: Any messages or information needs some channel or a medium. Example: television is an audio-visual medium which decodes the electronic signals into an audio visual to the audience
- Communication is simply the act of transferring information from one place, person or group to another.

Process of Communication

F1: Flow of Communication Concept



Source: Self Develop (2025).

From the above Figure 1, communication concept can best be summarized as the transmission of a message from a sender to a receiver in an understandable manner. That is, communication concept involves sharing of a common meaning between the sender (Encoder) and the receiver (Decoder). The communication process begins with the sender and ends with the receiver. The sender is an individual, group, or organization who initiates the communication. This source is initially responsible for the success of the message. The sender's experiences, attitudes, knowledge, skill, perceptions and culture influence the message. The written words, spoken words and nonverbal language selected are paramount in ensuring the receiver interprets the message as intended by the sender. All communication begins with the sender. When encoding a message, the sender has to begin by deciding what he/she wants to transmit. This decision by the sender is based on what he/she believes about the receiver's knowledge and assumptions, along with what additional information he/she wants the receiver to have. It is important for the sender to use symbols that are familiar to the intended receiver. A good way for the sender to improve encoding their message is to mentally visualize the communication from the receiver's point of view.

After receiving a message, the receiver responds in some way and signals that response to the sender. The signal may take the form of a spoken comment, a long sigh, a written message, a smile or some other action. Even a lack of response, is in a sense, a form of response. Without feedback, the sender cannot confirm that the receiver has interpreted the message correctly. Feedback is a key component in the communication process because it allows the sender to evaluate the effectiveness of the message. Feedback ultimately provides an opportunity for the sender to take corrective action to clarify a misunderstood message. Feedback plays an important role by indicating significant communication barriers: differences in background, different interpretations of words and differing emotional reactions.

Information as a Concept

The term information originates from the Latin word 'informatio', which means a formation, conception, teaching or creation of an idea or a concept that shapes understanding. It is derived from the verb 'informare', which means to form, to shape or to mould the mind (Capurro & Hjorland, 2003; Floridi, 2021). Information, at its core, refers to processed data that is meaningful and useful to the receiver. It is the content or message that has been

structured in a way that conveys knowledge, meaning or value. Information can exist independently of communication, it can be stored in books, digital files, signs or databases and accessed without immediate interaction with a sender (Shannon & Weaver, 1949, as cited in Lupton, 2022; Floridi, 2021). From this angle, information is an object or substance that can be collected, stored, manipulated and retrieved. Information is a flexible term and as a concept it has many meanings.

The concept of information is closely related to notions of constraint, communication, control, data, form, education, instruction, knowledge, meaning, mental stimulus, pattern, perception, proposition, representation and entropy. Information refers to facts and opinions provided and received during the course of daily life and are directly obtain from people, mass media, electronic data banks, schools, religious centres and experience in the environment. In its most restricted technical meaning, information is an ordered sequence of symbols. Information is concerned with the acquisition, recording, organisation, retrieval, display and dissemination. Information can be transmitted in time, via data storage and space, via communication and telecommunication. Information is expressed either as the content of a message or through direct or indirect observation (Abdulkareem & Fashiku, 2008; Kenett & Shmueli, 2016).

Nature of Information

Sources of information are often categorized as primary sources such as records of events or evidence as they are first described or actually happened without any interpretation or commentary; secondary sources that otherwise provide an added value to a primary source, such as to summarize, interpret or reorganize; and tertiary material sources that digest other sources like index or abstract. These classifications are based on the originality of the material and the proximity of the source or origin. This informs the user as to whether the originator is reporting information that is first hand or is conveying the experiences and opinions of others which is considered second hand.

Information is processed, organized and structured data. It provides context for data and enables decision making processes. The information available through a collection of data may be derived by analysis. For example, data may be collected from a single student academic performance at a given school; this becomes information when the school is able to

identify the greatest number of credit pass or least number of credit pass in a particular subject. The key characteristic of information is that it is subject to interpretation and processing. Information can be said to be that portion of the content of a signal or message which conveys meaning. Information is not knowledge itself, but rather the representation of it. Information is often layered, the data available at one level are processed into information to be interpreted at the next level. For example, in written text each symbol or letter conveys information relevant to the word it is part of, each word conveys information relevant to the phrase it is part of, each phrase conveys information relevant to the sentence it is part of, and so on until information at the top level is interpreted and becomes knowledge of the pertinent domain.

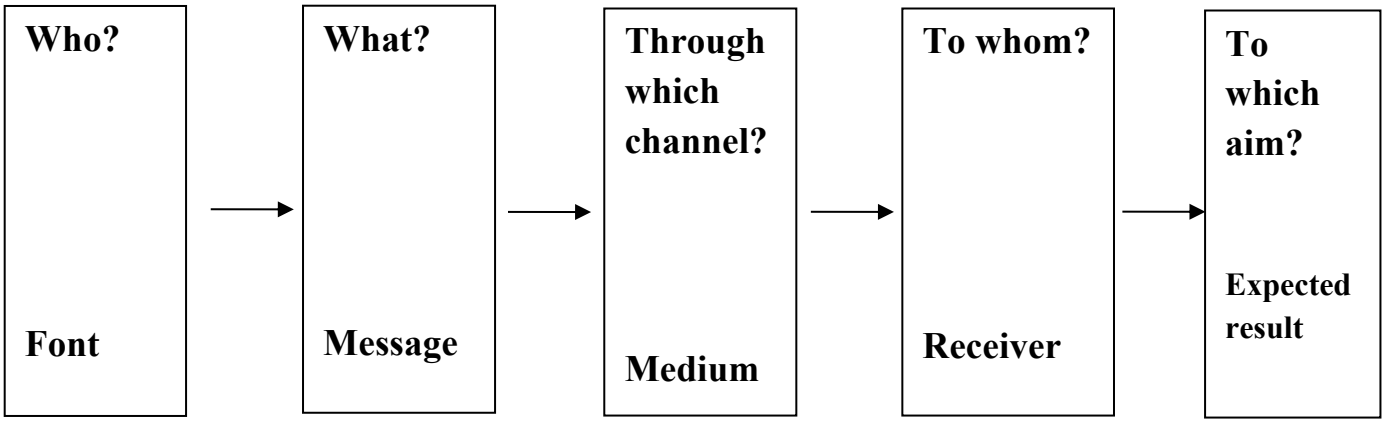
Moreover, in the digital age, information is often commodified. The explosion of big data and the Internet of Things has shown that vast amounts of information can be generated by machines, sometimes without direct human involvement (Kitchin, 2021). This has led to the concept of "datafication," where human behaviour is quantified into information, thereby showing that information can exist beyond interpersonal communication. Giving information is, of course, necessary and important. It is usually in form of a statement. For example, in a typical secondary school, the principal may wish to call for end of the term staff meeting or may decided to call for a staff briefing on school policy and the information for such meetings will be stated for staff to see. It is evident that information is not only important but urgently needed in virtually every area of life. Whether in schools, workplaces, government institutions or research environments, the timely and accurate availability of information is essential for smooth operations and meaningful development. For decision-makers, policy developers and administrators, information provides the basis for sound judgment. Without it, planning and implementing strategies would be largely speculative, often resulting in ineffective outcomes.

Information also has a powerful influence on individuals. When people receive accurate and relevant information, it can shift their thinking, broaden their understanding and positively shape their attitudes and behaviours. It enhances their personal knowledge, equipping them to make better choices and respond more effectively to situations. Furthermore, information is dynamic, it builds upon itself. Researchers and scholars heavily rely on previously established facts and findings to create new works such as dissertations,

journal articles, books and research papers. Likewise, professionals in various sectors such as doctors, engineers, educators and scientists apply information in practical ways to perform their duties more effectively and to resolve complex challenges. In this way, information becomes a tool that drives efficiency and enhances performance.

Process of Information

F2: Flow of Information Concept



Source: Self Develop (2025).

From F2 above, it could be observed that the transmission of information from a sender to a receiver flows through a linear five cardinal point of who (that is the person that will originate the message), what (the type of information is to be given), how (the channel or medium the message will pass through), whom (the person that will receive the message, that is the person the message is meant for) and to which aim (achieving the intending objective of the message). The content of the message refers to "objective" facts and it codified independently from the human relationship between the informer (sender) and the informed (receiver).

Conclusion

From the above discussion, while communication and information are closely connected and often appear inseparable, they serve fundamentally different purposes. It could be seen from the process variables perspective of context that the concept of communication is greatly different from the concept of information; communication concept is an active interaction, context-driven process of transmitting and interpreting that substance while information

concept is an isolated action, which is the substance, the content or the message that can exist independently.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Educational institutions, especially those offering courses in communication studies, information science and digital media, should clearly distinguish between the terms "communication" and "information" in their curricula. This will help students build a more accurate understanding of both concepts and their practical relevance in various professional fields.
- In sectors such as education, healthcare, journalism and IT, training programs should emphasize not just the transmission of information, but also the importance of clear and effective communication. Professionals should be equipped with skills that go beyond content delivery to include context, interpretation and feedback.
- Scholars from disciplines such as philosophy, information science, education and communication should engage in interdisciplinary research to deepen the conceptual boundaries and interactions between information and communication. Such collaboration can lead to the development of more refined theories and models.
- Policymakers should recognize that managing information (data storage, security, and privacy) is different from managing communication (truthfulness, clarity, consent). Regulatory frameworks should be designed to reflect these differences, especially in media, technology, and data governance.
- Researchers should explore how emerging technologies like AI, big data and machine learning impact the distinction between information and communication. More studies are needed to understand how machines communicate and whether what they generate qualifies as information in the human sense.

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