

Nigeria's changing broadcast landscape

By [Craig Ogusanyo](#), issued by [Ornico](#)

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Nigeria is a country rich in natural resources, with mammoth purchasing power, exciting business opportunities and a diverse population that is hungry for media content. The country's National Broadcasting Commission recently shared its desire to license more network stations; and this is one step closer to quenching the thirst for a diverse media.



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From 1932, when the Radio Diffusion Service started in Nigeria, basically serving as an extension of the Foreign Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) until 1992, when broadcasting in Nigeria was de-regulated, the broadcast media were owned either by the national, regional or state governments.

Government continued to monopolise broadcasting in Nigeria, despite the 1979 constitutional provision "that every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinion," which included the broadcast media.

It was not until the announcement of Decree 38 of 1992, under the leadership of General Babangida, now an Act of the National Assembly, that government really took a decisive step to part with its long-held monopoly of the broadcast sector. The decree established the National Broadcasting Commission and charged it with the regulation and deregulation of broadcasting in the country. The law empowered the Commission to define standards in the Nigerian broadcasting industry. The commission was also tasked with licensing, monitoring and regulating that industry's environment with the aim to encourage investment, development of quality programming and technology that is competitive on a global scale

A wave of requests from Nigerian entrepreneurs for broadcast licenses that would enable them to set up private broadcasting stations in the country flooded the NBC after 1992. This changed the broadcast landscape tremendously, as it allowed the ownership of radio and television by private companies and organisations in the country.

The deregulation of the broadcast industry afforded not only the emergence of private channels but also created opportunities for innovation. Private radio stations integrated digital content, such as webcasts. Cool FM and Brilla FM, both privately owned outfits, set the pace with Radio Nigeria, Ibadan and Radio Lagos/Eko FM as the first public radio stations to embrace online broadcasting on www.radionigeria.org and www.radiolagosekofm.com. Many other broadcasters, including Voice of Nigeria (www.voiceofnigeria.org), Channels Television (www.channelstv.com) and Nigerian Television Authority (www.nta.org) embraced webcasting, thus expanding their reach and visibility.

Within a period of 20 years, 155 private radio stations and 153 TV stations have opened up in Nigeria. These have thrived in spite of interrupted power supply, government interference, market uncertainties, technology and the need for a professional community.

Digitisation is perhaps the most intimidating and yet necessary challenge. Following the global declaration by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the late President Umaru Musa Yar-Adua in 2007 approved that the NBC would pilot the country's migration from analogue to digital television. The initial switch-over date of June 17 2012 passed without the goal being achieved. A new date has been set and is yet to be announced to the public. The hope is that this migration will happen before the ITU's 17 June 2015 deadline.

The benefits of Analogue-to-Digital migration include:

- Improved coverage of digital TV transmission

- Bandwidth available for wireless broadband services
- Enhanced sound and picture quality, in particular HDTV
- More channels (additional content)
- Access to radio

Digitisation will also mean an enhanced viewer experience through for instance: Electronic Programme Guide (EPG), subtitling, additional language options, and interactive services such as weather and news reports.

There has been some confusion in Nigeria with regards to what digitisation could mean for the industry, as there has been no open discourse either in the media or the public sphere. Digitisation will affect content production, transmission and reception -- and ultimately media monitoring in Nigeria. It will also contribute positively to media research with regards to ascertaining accurate subscription figures.

Countries such as Kenya, South Africa, Ghana and Morocco are already underway with the migration process. Although it seems slow in Nigeria, there are lessons to be learnt from these other African countries. The transition requires not only technological perspective but also legal direction. Government must provide policy direction and possibly put in place a subsidy that will enable lower market segments to acquire the digital receivers that will enable them to acquire digital television.

Digitisation will bridge the road between broadcast in African and Western countries. Broadcasters should know that there'll be hurdles they may encounter for a successful transition. There will be challenges in terms of equipment, human resource skill sets, new coverage planning, content curation and general public awareness. After all, as the chairperson of radio station Ray Power on 100.5FM and AIT, Raymond Dokpesi, said, "You cannot transmit on analogue platform to digitised nations. If you must remain competitive you must acquire the latest technology to be relevant." So players in the broadcasting industry in Nigeria and other African countries, and their respective viewers, must brace themselves for the effort that will be required to see digitisation through. Moreover, all parties must indeed look forward to an enhanced broadcasting experience.

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