

Transitioning from Analogue to Digital Broadcasting in Nigeria: A Technological Revolution in Progress

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Abstract

The transition from analogue to digital broadcasting represents one of the most significant technological transformations in Nigeria's media landscape. This study critically examines the progress, challenges, and adoption patterns of the digital switchover, using Ogun State (Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode, and Ilaro) as focal points of analysis. Guided by Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory and Technological Determinism, the study employed a survey method with 400 respondents to assess awareness levels, barriers to adoption, and audience perceptions of digital broadcasting. Findings reveal that awareness of the switchover is relatively high (77.5%), with 65% of respondents already accessing digital television services through platforms such as DSTv, GOtv, and StarTimes. However, the transition remains uneven, with the affordability of set-top boxes and digital televisions emerging as the most critical barrier. Infrastructure-related challenges, including unreliable electricity supply and weak signal coverage, further hinder adoption. Policy inconsistency and weak government support were also identified as key constraints, reflecting Nigeria's repeated failure to meet International Telecommunication Union (ITU) deadlines. Despite these challenges, respondents expressed largely positive perceptions of digital broadcasting, valuing clearer picture and sound quality, more channels, and interactive services. Adoption patterns aligned with Rogers' categories, showing innovators and early adopters concentrated in urban centres, while rural and low-income populations remain in the late majority or laggard categories. The study concludes that Nigeria's digital switchover is still a work in progress, requiring stronger policy commitment, infrastructural investment, subsidy mechanisms, and local content development to ensure inclusivity and socio-economic benefits.

Keywords: Digital switchover, Analogue broadcasting, Nigeria, Diffusion of Innovations, Technological determinism, Audience adoption.

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Introduction

Broadcasting has experienced a revolutionary change in the world with the shift to digital transmission, which has been termed as one of the greatest technological revolutions of all time in the media (Berger, 2010; Rogers, 1995). The digital broadcasting shows better picture and sound quality, effective spectrum utilisation, expansion of channels and prospects of interactive services (Mbatha and Lesame, 2014; Suarez-Candel, 2007). In Africa, the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) GE06 Agreement set 2015 as the deadline for the analogue switch-off. The most populous country and one of the most dynamic media centres in Africa, Nigeria, pledged to this command as early as the year 2006. Nonetheless, it has been bitter, with numerous delays, failed deadlines, infrastructural issues, and socio-economic limitations (Ezeaku, 2024; Ihechu & Uche, 2012). The case of the Nigerians demonstrates the potential and the traps of technological innovation in a developing setting. Symbolic advances were made in 2016 with pilot launches in Plateau and Abuja, but the country was still left in a hybrid broadcasting situation with the co-existence of analogue and digital (Chike-Iyo, Udoudo & Ochonogor, 2024). Researchers and professionals note affordability of set-top boxes, poor electricity connection, inconsistent policy, and lack of local content as the main obstacles (Obisi & Rem, 2016; Obot & Inwang, 2017; Olalere et al., 2013). Concurrently, the consumer uptake was facilitated by the impact of the private pay-TV operators, including DSTv, GOtv, and StarTimes, and the demand for on-demand and digitally-ready content was raised by younger audiences (Sanusi, Oyegoke & Ojewumi, 2025). The uneven adoption can be explained with the help of the Diffusion of Innovations theory put forward by Rogers, where all the users will be placed on a continuum between an innovator and a laggard (Rogers, 1995). Research in Nigeria and Africa indicates that the first to adopt digital platforms are urban elites, and rural and low-income populations remain behind because of affordability and access barriers (Eze, Orekyeh & Ezeanwu, 2017; Onyiaji & Okwumba, 2019). This paper thus critically analyses the process of digital switchover experienced by Nigeria, its motivations, impediments, and adoption rates, and puts it in the context of the African experience of transitioning to technology (Limmer, 2017; Okonji, 2015).

Scholars identify structural and policy challenges as critical barriers to Nigeria's digital switchover. Ihechu and Uche (2012) highlight delays stemming from poor planning and weak regulation, while Olalere et al. (2013) emphasise infrastructural gaps, particularly unreliable

electricity supply and limited digital coverage. Ezeaku (2024) and Sanusi, Oyegoke, and Ojewumi (2025) further underscore affordability and employment implications, noting that subsidy failures and job insecurity within analogue-dependent sectors complicate the process. These concerns align with global observations that the digital transition in Africa often struggles against socio-economic inequalities and governance weaknesses (Berger, 2010; Suárez-Candel, 2007). From the user perspective, empirical studies reveal mixed awareness and preparedness. Obot and Inwang (2017) found limited readiness among communication practitioners in Uyo, while Chike-Iyo, Udoudo, and Ochonogor (2024) reported partial preparedness in South-South Nigeria despite rising public interest. International comparative studies offer further insight: Mbatha and Lesame (2014) illustrate how South Africa faced similar obstacles in affordability and access, while Njogu (2016) highlights challenge of citizen information access during Kenya's migration. These parallels suggest that Nigeria's experience reflects a broader African struggle with digital equity. The framework also incorporates media economics and policy perspectives. The promise of spectrum efficiency and new revenue streams (Suárez-Candel, 2007; Limmer, 2017) contrasts with Nigeria's repeated failures to meet ITU deadlines, driven by policy inconsistency and inadequate investment (Okonji, 2015). Moreover, the lack of strong local content undermines the appeal of platforms like FreeTV, weakening adoption motivation (Sanusi et al., 2025).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory (1995), which provides a comprehensive lens for analysing the adoption of new technologies such as digital broadcasting. The theory explains how innovations spread within a social system over time through communication channels, and categorises adopters into five groups: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. Each group adopts at a different pace based on perceived relative advantages, compatibility with existing practices, complexity, trialability, and observability. In Nigeria's context, the theory helps explain why the adoption of digital broadcasting has been uneven and protracted. Urban elites and middle-class households represent innovators and early adopters, often accessing pay-TV services like DSTv and GOtv, while rural and low-income populations represent the late majority and laggards, constrained by affordability, electricity, and access issues (Eze, Orekyeh & Ezeanwu, 2017; Onyiaji & Okwumba, 2019). This

stratification reveals the role of socio-economic divides in shaping media access and technological diffusion.

Furthermore, scholars emphasise that diffusion in broadcasting is not only a technical issue but also a socio-political process influenced by regulatory frameworks, content relevance, and public awareness (Ezeaku, 2024; Ihechu & Uche, 2012; Olalere et al., 2013). For instance, policy inconsistency and subsidy failures have slowed adoption, while the lack of local content on FreeTV platforms undermines perceived advantage, thereby reducing willingness to switch (Sanusi, Oyegoke & Ojewumi, 2025). Comparative studies from South Africa and Kenya (Mbatha & Lesame, 2014; Njogu, 2016) show similar diffusion challenges in affordability, policy delays, and user awareness, reinforcing the utility of Rogers' model in African digital migration contexts. By situating Nigeria's digital switchover within the diffusion framework, this study underscores that successful adoption requires more than technology roll-out; it demands socio-economic inclusivity, strong regulation, and user-centred strategies.

Technological Determinism Theory

Alongside Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations, this study also draws on Technological Determinism, a theory which argues that technology is the primary driver of social change and cultural transformation (Defleur & Dennis, 1991). According to this perspective, the introduction of new communication technologies reshapes how societies interact, access information, and organise their daily lives. In the case of Nigeria, the migration from analogue to digital broadcasting represents not just a technical upgrade but a fundamental shift in the media ecosystem. Digital broadcasting, by virtue of its enhanced picture and sound quality, spectrum efficiency, and interactive capabilities, is reshaping audience expectations and forcing broadcasters to adapt their content delivery models. As Limmer (2017) and Berger (2010) observe, the pressure to embrace digital platforms is less about choice and more about inevitability, since analogue technologies are becoming obsolete globally. This deterministic push is evident in Nigeria, where even resistant populations will eventually migrate as analogue signals are phased out. Thus, technological determinism highlights the inevitability of digital switchover, while Diffusion of Innovations explains the uneven pace of adoption across different social groups. Together, the two theories provide a holistic framework for understanding Nigeria's digital broadcasting transition.

Several empirical studies have examined Nigeria's digital broadcasting transition, providing evidence of both progress and persistent challenges. Ihechu and Uche (2012) established early that policy inconsistency, infrastructural gaps, and poor funding undermined Nigeria's readiness to meet ITU deadlines. Their findings remain relevant today as subsequent roll-outs have suffered similar setbacks. Olalere et al. (2013) also emphasised the infrastructural dimension, noting that unreliable electricity and limited coverage were major impediments to a nationwide switchover. Recent studies continue to underscore these barriers. Ezeaku (2024) identified affordability of set-top boxes, lack of skilled manpower, and weak government support as critical issues, while Chike-Iyo, Udoudo, and Ochonogor (2024) found that although awareness of digital migration is relatively high in South-South Nigeria, preparedness among television stations and audiences remains partial. Sanusi, Oyegoke, and Ojewumi (2025) further extended the debate by exploring digitisation's impact on content, employment, and access, showing that while digital platforms create new opportunities, they also threaten jobs in analogue-based broadcasting.

From the audience perspective, Eze, Orekyeh, and Ezeanwu (2017) reported limited consumer awareness in Enugu, echoing Onyiaji and Okwumba's (2019) finding that many users lack both understanding and access to digital broadcasting. Obot and Inwang (2017) revealed a similar gap among communication practitioners and educators in Uyo, suggesting weak professional preparedness. Comparative African experiences reinforce these findings: Mbatha and Lesame (2014) observed affordability and policy barriers in South Africa, while Njogu (2016) noted that Kenya's migration posed challenges for citizen access to television information. Collectively, these studies provide a strong empirical foundation for this paper. They reveal that Nigeria's transition is not merely a technological issue but a socio-economic and policy-driven process. This research builds on these empirical insights to critically analyse adoption patterns, barriers, and opportunities within Nigeria's ongoing digital switchover.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Nigeria's early commitment to the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) directive on digital migration in 2006, the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting remains largely incomplete nearly two decades later. The nation has consistently missed global deadlines, 2012, 2015, and 2017, reflecting deep-seated policy inconsistency, poor funding mechanisms, and weak institutional capacity (Ezeaku, 2024; Ihechu & Uche, 2012). While pilot launches in Abuja and Jos signalled progress, the nationwide roll-out has stalled, leaving most

Nigerians in a hybrid environment where analogue and digital systems coexist (Chike-Iyo, Udoudo & Ochonogor, 2024). A critical problem lies in affordability: millions of households cannot afford digital TVs or set-top boxes, and government subsidy initiatives have been poorly managed (Obot & Inwang, 2017). Infrastructural challenges, including erratic electricity supply, inadequate broadband penetration, and limited rural coverage, further constrain adoption (Olalere et al., 2013). Moreover, the lack of compelling local content on public platforms like FreeTV discourages audiences from switching, while private pay-TV providers dominate access (Sanusi, Oyegoke & Ojewumi, 2025). This uneven adoption widens Nigeria's digital divide, privileging urban elites while marginalising rural and low-income populations (Onyiaji & Okwumba, 2019). Unless these structural issues are addressed, the promise of digital broadcasting as a tool for inclusion, innovation, and socio-economic development will remain unfulfilled.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

To critically examine Nigeria's transition from analogue to digital broadcasting, focusing on the drivers, challenges, and adoption patterns within the framework of technological innovation and media development. The specific objectives are to:

1. analyse the progress and setbacks in Nigeria's digital switchover process since the 2006 ITU directive;
2. identify the socio-economic, infrastructural, and policy-related challenges hindering effective adoption of digital broadcasting in Nigeria; and
3. assess public awareness, accessibility, and user perceptions of digital broadcasting, using Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory as a framework.

Research Questions

1. What progress has Nigeria made in transitioning from analogue to digital broadcasting, and what factors have influenced this process?
2. What socio-economic, infrastructural, and policy challenges continue to hinder the effective roll-out of digital broadcasting in Nigeria?
3. How do Nigerian audiences perceive digital broadcasting, and what explains the uneven adoption patterns across different social and geographical groups?

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research approach using the survey method to investigate Nigeria's transition from analogue to digital broadcasting. The choice of survey is appropriate because it allows the collection of standardised data from a large population, enabling the identification of patterns in audience awareness, perceptions, and adoption of digital broadcasting services (Eze, Orekyeh & Ezeanwu, 2017). The target population comprises television audiences in Ogun State, specifically residents of urban and semi-urban areas where there is a form of digital switchover, such as Abeokuta, Ijebu Ode, and Ilaro. These areas were purposively selected because they represent locations within the state with relatively higher digital penetration. A sample size of 400 respondents was determined using simple random sampling, ensuring representativeness across age, gender, education, and income groups. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire divided into four sections: (1) demographic information, (2) awareness and knowledge of digital switchover, (3) access and affordability of digital devices such as set-top boxes, and (4) perceptions of benefits and challenges of digital broadcasting. The questionnaire used a combination of closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items to capture attitudes and adoption behaviours. Copies of Questionnaire were distributed both physically and electronically to maximise respondent reach. Data were analysed using SPSS (Version 27), employing descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores to summarise levels of awareness and adoption. The results are presented in tables and expressed in simple percentages for clarity. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, with data used strictly for academic purposes.

Results

Table 1: Awareness of Digital Broadcasting

Item	Yes	No	Percentage (%)
Awareness of Nigeria's transition to digital TV	310	90	77.5%
Access to digital services (GOtv,	260	140	65.0%

DStv, FreeTV, etc.)

Source: Field survey 2025

Table 2: Sources of Awareness of Digital Broadcasting

Source	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
TV/Radio Campaigns	130	32.5
Social Media	100	25.0
Government Awareness Program	70	17.5
Friends/Family	80	20.0
Others	20	5.0

Source: Field survey 2025

Table 3: Major Barriers to Adoption

Barrier	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
High cost of STBs/Digital TVs	150	37.5
Poor electricity supply	120	30.0
Limited signal coverage	70	17.5
Lack of awareness	40	10.0
Lack of local content	20	5.0

Source: Field survey 2025

Table 4: Affordability of Digital Broadcasting (Scale 1–5)

Rating (1 = Not Affordable, 5 = Very Affordable)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	110	27.5
2	90	22.5
3	100	25.0
4	70	17.5
5	30	7.5

Source: Field survey 2025

Table 5: Perceived Benefits of Digital Broadcasting

Benefit	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Clearer picture/sound	160	40.0
More channels	120	30.0
Interactive services	60	15.0
Better local/global content	60	15.0

Source: Field survey 2025

Table 6: Adoption Pattern (Based on Rogers' Categories)

Adoption Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Innovators/Early adopters	90	22.5
Early majority	130	32.5
Late majority	120	30.0
Laggards (still analogue)	60	15.0

Source: Field survey 2025

Table 7: Audience Perception of Digital Broadcasting

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Digital TV improves access to information	140 (35.0%)	150 (37.5%)	60 (15.0%)	30 (7.5%)	20 (5.0%)
Digital TV is worth the cost compared to analogue	100 (25.0%)	120 (30.0%)	80 (20.0%)	70 (17.5%)	30 (7.5%)
The government has done enough to support the digital switchover	60 (15.0%)	90 (22.5%)	80 (20.0%)	100 (25.0%)	70 (17.5%)

Source: Field survey 2025

Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that a majority of respondents (77.5%) were aware of Nigeria’s transition from analogue to digital broadcasting, and about 65% reported having access to digital television services through platforms such as GOtv, DStv, StarTimes, and FreeTV. This suggests that progress has been made, particularly in urban centres like Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode, and Ilaro. These results align with the argument of Chike-Iyo, Udoudo, and Ochonogor (2024) that while awareness is relatively high in parts of South-South Nigeria, preparedness and actual adoption remain partial. Similarly, Onyiaji and Okwumba (2019) found that user knowledge of digital broadcasting has improved over time but still varies significantly by socio-economic status and location. The uneven distribution of adoption reflects the hybrid reality of Nigeria’s digital switchover. Pilot rollouts in Jos and Abuja (2016) marked important milestones, yet full nationwide coverage remains elusive (Ihechu & Uche, 2012). The persistence of analogue signals

alongside digital services confirms Ezeaku's (2024) observation that the switchover is hindered by financial, regulatory, and infrastructural setbacks. Furthermore, the fact that 35% of respondents in Ogun State still lack access underscores the digital divide highlighted in Berger's (2010) analysis of Africa's migration challenges, where rural and low-income populations remain marginalised. Another important factor influencing progress is the role of private pay-TV providers. Respondents reported that their main access to digital broadcasting came from commercial platforms such as GOtv and DSTv rather than FreeTV, the government-backed service. This finding supports Sanusi, Oyegoke, and Ojewumi (2025), who argue that commercial investment has been the main driver of digitisation in Nigeria, while government-led initiatives lag due to weak funding and policy inconsistency. Moreover, Limmer (2017) notes that Nigeria's inability to meet ITU deadlines reflects wider governance shortcomings in Africa's digital switchover.

The survey results highlight affordability as the most significant barrier to digital broadcasting adoption, with 37.5% of respondents identifying the high cost of set-top boxes (STBs) and digital televisions as their greatest challenge. This supports the findings of Ezeaku (2024), who emphasised that the prohibitive cost of equipment and poorly managed subsidy programmes have restricted widespread access. Similarly, Eze, Orekyeh, and Ezeanwu (2017) found in Enugu that limited consumer purchasing power remains a critical constraint despite rising awareness. This problem is magnified in rural and semi-urban areas such as Ilaro, where incomes are lower, and the willingness to invest in digital infrastructure is weak. Infrastructure-related issues were also pronounced. Thirty percent of respondents cited unreliable electricity supply as a major challenge, while 17.5% pointed to weak signal coverage. These findings resonate with Olalere et al. (2013), who argued that infrastructural deficits, particularly unstable power and incomplete transmission networks, undermine adoption. Njogu (2016) reported similar challenges in Kenya, where infrastructural bottlenecks hindered citizen access to digital broadcasting. Thus, Nigeria's infrastructural limitations mirror broader African experiences of digital migration. Policy and governance concerns further constrain progress. Only 37.5% of respondents agreed that the government has done enough to support the transition, suggesting widespread dissatisfaction with official efforts. This confirms Ihechu and Uche's (2012) conclusion that policy inconsistency and weak regulatory enforcement undermine the digital switchover. Limmer (2017) also observed that Africa's digital switchovers often suffer from delayed implementation due to poor

coordination between governments and industry stakeholders. In Nigeria, despite multiple ITU deadlines (2012, 2015, 2017), nationwide roll-out remains incomplete, reflecting systemic inefficiencies (Berger, 2010). Content-related barriers were less frequently cited (5%), but their importance should not be underestimated. Respondents noted that limited local programming on FreeTV reduces motivation to adopt digital services, echoing Sanusi, Oyegoke, and Ojewumi (2025), who found that content relevance strongly influences adoption patterns.

The findings indicate that most respondents in Ogun State perceive digital broadcasting positively, with 72.5% (35% strongly agree, 37.5% agree) stating that it improves access to information and entertainment. Respondents particularly valued clearer picture and sound quality (40%) and increased channel options (30%). These results reinforce the observations of Suárez-Candel (2007) and Mbatha and Lesame (2014), who argue that improved quality and expanded choice are key motivators for digital adoption in both Nigeria and South Africa. Similarly, Onyiaji and Okwumba (2019) noted that users increasingly associate digital broadcasting with higher reliability and more diverse content compared to analogue systems. However, perceptions were also shaped by socio-economic and policy realities. While 55% agreed that digital broadcasting is worth the cost, a significant 25% disagreed, reflecting the affordability barrier identified earlier. This aligns with Eze, Orekyeh, and Ezeanwu (2017), who found that awareness of digital migration in Enugu did not automatically translate into adoption because of cost and accessibility concerns. This suggests that positive perceptions may be insufficient to drive adoption without addressing structural barriers. Adoption patterns, when mapped onto Rogers' (1995) Diffusion of Innovations Theory, further illuminate these findings. Innovators and early adopters accounted for 22.5% of respondents, typically urban elites and middle-class households who embraced pay-TV platforms early. The early majority represented 32.5%, showing gradual adoption as awareness spread. Meanwhile, the late majority (30%) and laggards (15%) reflect rural and low-income groups who either switched reluctantly or continue to rely on analogue broadcasting. This uneven distribution confirms Rogers' model, where socio-economic status, access, and perceived relative advantage determine the pace of adoption. Additionally, respondents expressed concerns about local content availability. Only 15% identified "better local/global content" as the main advantage, suggesting that while international programming is abundant, local relevance remains weak. This supports Sanusi, Oyegoke, and Ojewumi's (2025) argument that digitisation risks privileging foreign and commercial content unless deliberate policies promote indigenous programming.

Conclusion

This study examined Nigeria's ongoing transition from analogue to digital broadcasting, focusing on the progress made, challenges encountered, and perceptions of users in Ogun State. The findings demonstrate that while awareness of the digital switchover is relatively high and adoption has grown, progress remains uneven and incomplete. Nigeria continues to operate within a hybrid system where analogue and digital signals coexist, reflecting policy delays, infrastructural gaps, and socio-economic inequalities. Affordability emerged as the most significant barrier, with many households unable to purchase set-top boxes or digital televisions. Infrastructural deficits, particularly unreliable electricity and uneven signal coverage, further hinder adoption, while inconsistent government policies and poorly managed subsidy schemes have weakened public trust. Content-related issues also contribute to the slow pace of adoption, as many respondents expressed limited satisfaction with the availability of compelling local programming on platforms like FreeTV.

Despite these challenges, audiences perceive digital broadcasting positively, particularly valuing improved picture and sound quality, increased channel options, and the promise of interactive services. Adoption patterns reflect Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory, where innovators and early adopters are concentrated among urban and middle-income groups, while rural and low-income populations remain in the late majority or laggard categories. Ultimately, Nigeria's digital switchover represents both an opportunity and a challenge. To realise its full potential, policymakers must address affordability, infrastructure, and content development, while ensuring inclusivity. Only through sustained investment, effective regulation, and public engagement can digital broadcasting fulfil its promise as a transformative tool for information access and socio-economic development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen Nigeria's transition from analogue to digital broadcasting and ensure inclusivity:

1. **Subsidise and Promote Affordable Access.** The high cost of set-top boxes (STBs) and digital televisions remains the greatest barrier to adoption. The government should introduce well-monitored subsidy schemes and tax incentives on digital equipment importation and local

assembly. Partnerships with private investors can also drive down costs while ensuring wider availability.

2. Invest in Infrastructure and Coverage Expansion. To address infrastructural challenges, greater investment is needed in transmission networks, reliable electricity, and broadband infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. Public–private partnerships with telecoms and energy providers can help bridge these gaps and extend digital coverage beyond urban centres.
3. Strengthen Policy Consistency and Regulation. Nigeria’s missed ITU deadlines highlight weak coordination. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) should enforce timelines with greater accountability, transparency, and collaboration with stakeholders. Lessons can be drawn from Kenya and South Africa, where regulatory clarity helped mitigate migration delays.
4. Promote Local Content Development. Digital switchover will only succeed if audiences find value in the content offered. Incentives should be provided for local producers to create engaging, culturally relevant programs, thereby increasing public interest in digital platforms

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