# Illuminating the Invaluable Contributions of Content Providers to Digital Broadcasting in Nigeria

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# Abstract

**Background**: The involvement of complex technologies in the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting appears to have propelled the technical dimension of the subject to overshadow the overriding status of 'content' in broadcasting. It should not be so. To reverse the trend, this study sought to throw light on the invaluable role of content providers in digital television broadcasting in Nigeria.

**Materials and Methods:** With reliance on content analysis of Programme Schedules of three major television channels in the country as well as interviews with a cross section of experienced industry players and some communication scholars, the study gathered, retrieved and analyzed ample data. Roger Fidler's Theory of Mediamorphosis, upon which the study was anchored, helped to place the analysis and responses in perspective.

**Results:** Findings revealed that there has been no substantial departure from the nature, quantum and quality of television content in place since the days of the analogue regime.

**Conclusion**: The paper therefore called on relevant opinion moulders, policy makers and particularly the nation's broadcast regulator to urgently sensitize content providers on the critical contributions which they are obliged to make to ensure the success of digital broadcasting in Nigeria.

Keywords: Content Providers, Contributions, Digital, Nigeria, Television Broadcasting

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# I. INTRODUCTION

In search of how best to meet the millennium development goal of making internet access available to majority of the world's population, the International Telecommunication Union, ITU, set out to evolve an alldigital plan for a greater and more competent use of frequencies including those for broadcasting. To this end, a number of countries in Europe, Africa and parts of Asia which met in Geneva in 2006, ratified the resolution in support of the digitization of the broadcast media landscape to replace traditional analogue terrestrial system with digital terrestrial broadcasting. The primary goal of the digitization plan, was to ensure resource saving in the usage of broadcast frequencies, high transmission quality, and a large enough data capacity to allow for a sufficient number of attractive programmes. Beutler (2012), attributes the attraction of such technological advancement, to the advent of digital media such as Compact Disc (CD) through which customers had become familiar with the value of high audio and video quality amidst scarce spectrum space.

A major benefit of the new plan can be located in its capacity to accommodate more broadcast content than was hitherto possible with the same amount of spectrum under the analogue transmission system. The way the system functions is that through multiplexes transmitters, signals are received by television viewers via digital set-top-boxes or some other integrated reception devices which can be decoded by a standard terrestrial antenna. This opportunity which the design offers for transmission of multiple forms of content on the same spectrum, is no doubt, a welcome development to television broadcasters and their disparate viewers. Put differently, it was gratifying to stakeholders across the board, that the design facilitated spectrum efficiency.

In Nigeria, which is the geographical location of relevance to this study, the flag off in 2016, of fifteen digital channels in Jos, North Central Nigeria, positioned the country among the league of countries that had progressed to a phase in the digitization process, known as digital switch over (DSO). Against the backdrop of challenges which had impeded earlier efforts at moving forward in the process, the switch over plan served as a bench mark to guide Nigeria on the migration from analogue to digital broadcasting. Perhaps, the most touted challenge was the capital-intensive nature of rolling out one network and switching off another. The challenge which though tedious, was one, Nigeria or any other nation urgently needed to surmount because digitization had become a settled matter in view of the world-wide course of direction that had been charted for the

phenomenon. In truth, the global deadline of 2015 originally set for it, had made compliance the key word because no nation could afford to be isolated with respect to the subject. To do otherwise, was to continue to live with the short-comings of analogue transmission in contrast to digitization which eliminates noises and other interferences of the analogue system in addition to the persuasive option of multiple channeling.

Unfortunately, many developing nations could not make as much progress in the transition as expected. The revelation by Lai Mohammed, Nigeria's Information Minister, that the country was only able to roll out the DSO in 6 locations as at the end of 2019, was rather disheartening for a switch over process scheduled to hold in no less than 37 locations. However, Nigeria would probably do a lot more, going by her publicized determination "to create one million jobs in the next three years through the manufacturing of set-top-boxes (decoders) and TV sets, TV and Film production as well as TV and Online advertising and Data among others" (Mohammed, 2020). Ordinarily, content providers ought not to wait for the completion of the digitization process before packaging attractive productions in their data banks, but they appear to have done so for a while. Is the Minister's message inspiring enough to put many of them, into a mood for massive production of content? This is the core issue which this study examines as part of exploring the level of preparedness of television content providers to play their role in the new order of digital broadcasting in Nigeria.

# Statement of the Problem

Broadcasting is indisputably recognized to rest on two legs: a) Content, that is, news, programmes, advertisements, slogans, jingles and all forms of messages designed to inform, educate and entertain broadcast audiences far and near: b) Sundry technical facilities for the production, storage, packaging, retrieval and transmission of content. In an effective broadcasting system, both legs which complement each other, are virtually inseparable because, without content, there is nothing to transmit and without transmission, content is practically wasted making it expedient to take both legs sequentially by producing and then transmitting content. Arguably, relevant stakeholders in the broadcast industry have had ample time to consummate all that the transition entails in the last decade since the ITU concluded on the imperatives of digitization. Surprisingly, global attention has been focused more on only one of the two legs - the required technologies and systems; efforts at upgrading content to fill the massive spectrum to be freed by the technical process are yet to receive a corresponding attention.

While recognizing the importance of modern technologies in the digitization process, the main purpose of television broadcasting remains the satisfaction which viewers can gain from broadcast content. This is probably why it is often said that in broadcasting, content is king. But then, available evidence suggests that there is insufficient broadcast content in Nigeria (Obono and Madu, 2018). It is therefore time to call attention to the adverse implications of inadequate quantity and unimpressive quality of content in Nigeria and indeed, other countries where similar tepid approaches to digitization subsist. Accordingly, this study seeks to identify the main causes of a lull in broadcast content development and production in Nigeria. The goal is to propel content providers in the country to rise up to the challenges of meeting the type, quantum and quality of content required in the new broadcasting order. To aid the study, the following two research questions were formulated:

1. Why are content providers in Nigeria not massively engaged in increased productivity of television content which digitization envisages?

2. How best can content providers be encouraged to meet the professional requirements for more and qualitative television content?

#### Digitization and content provisioning in Nigeria

The superiority of digital broadcasting over the analogue system in many respects, such as bigger space capacity and cleaner signals are too patent and palpable to warrant anyone having a second thought about digitization. In fact, as aptly put by Ihechu and Uche, (2012), the gains of the digitization of broadcasting are countless; hence, many countries instantly embraced the new system as soon as it was broached by the ITU in 2006. In Nigeria, plans to digitize the country's broadcast media landscape began in 2007 during the administration of the late President UmaruYar'Adua which approved a phased transition to be concluded by 17th June 2012. To attain a smooth operation of a free digital TV service called 'Free TV' rather than the one based on subscriptions, the government's White Paper, constituted a policy frame work composed of a) the Digital Transition Implementation Team "DigiTeam Nigeria", b) the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and c) the National Communication Commission (NCC). Unfortunately, the team failed to meet the 2012 deadline, the ITU target of 2015 as well as the rescheduled target date of 2017.

The major impediment was same all through Africa - a continent, with a gamut of infrastructural challenges, as corroborated by findings in Kenya by Ndonye, Khaemba and Bartoo (2015). The impediment was so overwhelming that the first thoughts of African policy makers on digitization was to focus essentially on the digital switch over (Olivier, 2014). It can be argued that the posture was misplaced because it was not a true reflection of all that digitization required. As the president, Association of Telecommunication Companies of

Nigeria, OlusolaTeniola and reported by Adepetun and Mwantok (2018) emphasized, digitization is not a 'plug and play' affair considering that transmitting signals without content can only terminate in ineffectual broadcasting. Instead, the live wire of any broadcasting outfit according to Azubuike and Okiriko (2019) is good programming - the scheduling of content for transmission.

Although broadcasting outfit refers essentially to both radio and television, the outfit which is the main concern of this study is television. The choice was determined by the awesome direct and unique impact which television's combined features of sound and picture more technically described as audio-visual has on people, despite the unquestionable observation by Pate(2014) that radio is more affordable and available to people and that it operates for longer hours than television, in developing societies. It is certainly easier to appreciate technological change visually, making it seem as if digitization is practically more of a television business because picture quality tells a more appealing story. It is therefore more probable for people to better appreciate broadcast digitization when they see sparkling pictures on their screens as compared to analogue hazy images. But then, a story-line must accompany pictures, films, graphics or any transmittable illustration to complete what can be regarded as content.

Thus, the digital system having become acknowledged for its capacity to create a far larger space for content than its analogue predecessor, it becomes practically impossible to playdown the contributions of television content providers to the success of digital broadcasting in Nigeria. In earnest, a television outfit with a dearth of content has an almost incurable deficiency, because to constantly repeat content may result in monotonous transmission while to hook-on to some other stations can depict lack of originality just as to pirate content can attract legal sanctions (Coker, 2020). Therefore, the panacea for optimal utilization of available spectrum in the digital era, is to develop and produce huge and qualitative content.

However, the urge to engage in massive production of content may become an illusion if digitization is continuously seen as a one-sided phenomenon which it is not. A better approach highlighted by Nkaka and Mukumbwa (2016) is the policy that separates content service provisioning from signal distribution. Such dichotomy which elevates content provisioning to a stand-alone concept, is more likely to create greater impetus for providers to buckle up and increase productivity. The more the quantum of content produced, the easier it is, to meet the first aspect of what digitization envisages, which is content in abundance (Idachaba, 2018). At the same time, the quantum of content may not satisfy the second aspect which is compelling or qualitative content.

To develop compelling content involves a number of issues which include: i) in-depth research into viewing habits, lifestyles and cultural practices within a broadcast terrain; ii) availability of production components such as high digital resolution cameras; iii) right specs of microphones for clean audio; and iv) appropriate post–production software for improved graphics, effects and embellishment. A combination of these requirements listed by the chairman of DigiTeam Nigeria, Engineer, Edward Amana, and reported by Oyeyemi (2017) is what can guarantee good content "with real substance in terms of clear story and narrative it is telling." For television content to be qualitative, it must be premised on well accepted professional guiding principles such as: Philosophy, Objective and Format. According to Iredia (2017, p21), television content providers need "to identify a philosophy around which to build content bearing in mind the objective to be achieved and the design for developing and producing its episodes." In other words, answers to some pertinent questions that can help a content provider evolve a good plan of action include the following: What is the main purpose of the particular type of content? What does it seek to achieve? Is the objective achievable? If so, what format should distinguish it from other productions, should it adopt?

There are other conditions that good content may have to satisfy. An otherwise good quality content, for instance, may still not qualify for transmission if certain regulations embargo it. In Nigeria, the broadcast regulator, the National Broadcasting Commission has several codes that must be followed in content transmission. One of them is the rule which demands no less than 70 percent local contents. In which case, all foreign productions, irrespective of their attractive status have to compete for the little window which remains after the ratio of local content has been filled. In addition, because television stations have to create programmes based on audience needs, Nigeria's national broadcaster - the Nigerian Television Authority NTA has over the years raised its bar of local content to over 90 percent while a private outfit, Silverbird Television, STV, with a higher foreign-sourced content also maintains no less than the approved 70 percent local content mark (Obono and Madu, 2018).

A review of the state of broadcast content provisioning in Nigeria can hardly be concluded without drawing attention to the country's daily adverse environmental challenges which characterize broadcast operations, content provisioning inclusive. Challenges such as obsolete tools still in use by providers amidst echoes of digitization, poor public power supply, high broadcast licensing conditions and in particular high licensing fees and charges in a weak economy which make it difficult to have many content providers are quite inhibitive. What this implies, as appropriately articulated by Abu (2017), is that television content providers in Nigeria are ill-equipped, understaffed and poorly remunerated. Therefore, for broadcast digitization to succeed in the country, the most rational option is to begin by redressing the challenges listed above.

# Theoretical framework

The history of the evolution of the media over the years has clearly shown that "when newer forms of communication media emerge, the older forms usually do not die, rather they continue to evolve and adapt" (Nwammuo, 2011, p115). This observation is founded not only on the practical evidence of how each new medium usually emerged to take prominence over the existing one, but also by the works of media futurist, Roger Fidler who as far back as 1997 had found that 'new medium does not develop on its own but instead morph from something that already exists.' This was indeed, the central focus of Fidler's work known as the Theory of Mediamorphosis which clearly exposes the common pattern of development in communication media. The contention of the theorist is that all forms of communication media belong to one family and are interdependent. This study is therefore persuasively anchored on the Theory of Mediamorphosis because of its capacity to throw ample light on the relationship between different media forms thereby amplifying the differences and similarities between old and new media forms. This viewpoint helped this study to focus on its two dominant forms which are a) analogue broadcasting and b) digital broadcasting.

There are at least three main tenets in Fidler's theory which are directly applicable to this study's appreciation of how analogue broadcasting influenced the emergence of digital broadcasting. These are that:

- i. old media forms influence new ones. This throws light on the fact that digital broadcasting was influenced by analogue broadcasting and that the newer of both was essentially upgraded from the older one.
- ii. both old and new media forms have the same goal. This shows clearly why both analogue and digital broadcasting provide information, that is, content to the same audience which in the case of television is viewers
- iii. new media forms always retain and spread the dominant traits of the old form until they fizzle out gradually. In relation to this study, the theory explains why both digital and analogue broadcasting have the same dominant trait which is content and its production and transmission facilities. Once digital receivers make their way into the markets, the old television sets are upgraded using set top boxes to bridge the gap to gradually fizzle out over time.

The common origin which the theory of Mediamorphosis lays down for broadcast media evolution makes it necessary to explain how to identify one form from the other. For example, whereas the study recognizes that both digital and analogue broadcasting use spectrum, the volume of broadcast content which digital broadcasting accommodates within the same spectrum size, is far greater than that of analogue broadcasting. Also, although both forms transmit picture and sound the output of digital broadcasting is virtually spotless and fresh while that of the analogue system is often hazy and distorted. Against this backdrop therefore, the theory of Mediamorphosis accentuates the essence of encouraging content providers to endeavour to attain a huge quantum of content which digital broadcasting requires to flourish.

# **II. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

To gather data for this study, two approaches i) content analysis and ii) interviews were employed. The rationale was that whereas interviews would be oral description of events which could be heavily opinionated, content analysis of a critical operational document would no doubt serve as undeniable written evidence. Thus, as a first step, Programme schedules or guides for the first quarter of 2020, that is January to March of the three leading television stations in Nigeria were content analyzed. The stations were: the Nigerian Television Authority NTA, Channels Television and the Africa Independent Television AIT.

Interviews were thereafter conducted with 15 key players in the industry divided into two groups A and B. Group A, had six (6) content providers while group B, had nine (9) general stakeholders. To ensure a fair representation of diverse interests, the groups were further aligned to consist of 4 television operatives and 2 independent producers, for group A, while for group B, the interviewees consisted of: 2 policy makers, 3 veterans and 4 communication scholars. This classification made it easy to gather fresh facts from professionals currently engaged in producing content. At the same time, the inclusion of policy makers, veterans and scholars helped to gather facts on best practices in the industry especially the theoretical foundation for content provisioning. Members of both groups were allowed to comment on each other's views as well as on the observations arrived at through the content analysis of the programme guides.

# III. RESULTS

### **Content Analysis of Programme schedules**

To ascertain the quantum and quality of content available for television broadcasting in Nigeria at the dawn of digitization, the first step taken was to subject the programme schedules/guides of the selected leading television stations in the country to a thorough analysis. This produced several findings such as the number of local and foreign contents scheduled for transmission as well as programme types. Two major findings which are most relevant to this study are highlighted below:

## a.) Freshness of content

In television broadcasting, transmission is organized on quarterly basis. In the first quarter of 2020 whose schedules were analyzed, no difference was found between content scheduled for transmission in the first quarter of the year, that is, January-March 2020 and those advertised for transmission for the succeeding quarter of April-June 2020. What this showed was that there were no fresh concepts for the second quarter; although some of the subsisting titles had subsequent episodes. In which case, content scheduling was virtually static.

#### b) Transmission of repeated content

Many scheduled programmes failed which necessitated repeating old content, but more importantly, certain programmes were officially scheduled to be repeated. For example, Channels Television programme 'Sunrise daily' transmitted between 7am and 9am was repeated at 1am from Monday to Friday daily. At AIT, 'Democracy Today' which was aired at 7pm on weekdays, was also repeated at 3am. In the case of NTA, 'Tuesday Live' aired at 10.30pm on Tuesdays as the title implies, was repeated at 5am on Saturdays.

The implication of a combination of failed programmes and scheduled repeats is that there was insufficiency of content which suggests that content providers were not enthusiastic about producing new materials for transmission. The researchers then proceeded to compare this conclusion with the views obtained from resource persons interviewed in an attempt to answer the research questions earlier formulated for the study.

# Research Question 1. Why are broadcast content providers in Nigeria not massively engaged in increased productivity of television content which digitization envisages?

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Content	Group A: Content Providers	Group B: General Stakeholders							
Quantity	<ul><li>Above Average</li><li>Too many challenges</li></ul>	<ul><li>Just Average</li><li>No difference from past figures</li></ul>							
Quality	<ul><li>More efforts in progress</li><li>Improvement expected</li></ul>	<ul> <li>Can be much better</li> <li>Greater adherence to best practices required</li> </ul>							

#### Table 1. State of content: Summary of views

Group A, that is, content providers claimed that the number of programmes, news, adverts etc. which formed the quantum of broadcast content available to them was well above average, but those listed under Group B as general stakeholders disagreed and rated the state of content as 'just' average thereby corroborating the findings reached earlier from content analysis of the programme schedules. The stakeholders premised their rating on their observation of repeat programming in the selected three major television stations. Some of the veteran broadcasters in the group alleged that the situation at the level of state stations was more precarious because the stations have over time not been able to sustain non-stop transmission which they contended may have been due to several factors including paucity of content.

On their part, content providers argued that repeat programming was a deliberate policy designed to give viewers a second opportunity to watch a popular programme which they missed when it was first transmitted. They also contended that their performance cannot be rated as low or a mere average when viewed against the backdrop of the numerous challenges which usually hindered content production in Nigeria. They listed several inadequacies which made the assignment herculean to include inadequate manpower and facilities, lack of funds to meet the capital-intensive nature of content development and production, high licensing fees and charges, poor personnel remuneration which helped to deplete the number of content providers and an exceedingly weak infrastructural base. Communication scholars and veteran members in the group also opined that the challenges were sufficiently strong enough to reduce productivity.

Unfortunately, although these challenges can explain the deficiency of content insufficiency; they cannot cure the trend. Consequently, communication scholars in particular argued that except a special intervention was immediately arranged to redress the situation, the statusquo of repeat programming which implies unused spectrum would remain in vogue in television broadcasting in Nigeria. In other words, it is counter-productive to pretend to be embracing digital broadcasting while leaving unexploited, the large space which digitization offers. The scholars therefore argued that government and the broadcast regulator in particular should urgently identify motivational packages that can encourage increased productivity of content for the overall success of digital broadcasting in Nigeria. At the same time, the veteran broadcasters reminded the content providers of the need to adhere to the convention of first having in place, 13 episodes of a programme, before scheduling it for transmission in a quarter.

As for quality of content, the providers gave assurances of more robust efforts directed at content development and production with a firm promise of some appreciable degree of instant improvement. They called for more government support such as a recent intervention by the Nigerian government which discounted debts owed by many television stations to help them cushion the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. The general stakeholders on their part, were skeptical of the promises by content providers. They argued that the current state of broadcasting in the country could not compare favourably with that of South Africa where television was introduced only in 1976 when Nigerian began television broadcasting as far back as 1959. The communication scholars maintained that Nigerian broadcasters needed to pay more attention to details by adhering more strictly to best global practices in the industry

# **Research** Question 2. How best can content providers be encouraged to meet theprofessional requirements for more and qualitative television content in Nigeria?

In order to articulate a set of solutions for how to increase content provisioning that would be compelling to television viewers, all the 15 interviewees were asked to make suggestions. The consensus among them all was that genuine efforts should be made to first mitigate the several challenges which often confronted content providers. From the responses, content providers identified challenges that could be grouped into 3, while the general stakeholders identified 4. In the order of severity, the listings of both groups were almost similar except for the 4<sup>th</sup> challenge – 'Cynicism' - which was articulated by policy makers but denied by content providers as shown in Table 2 below which places the items in a descending order of severity.

Tuble 21 Industry chancinges in the order of severity							
Content Providers	General Stakeholders						
Inadequate Resources	Inadequate Resources						
Harsh Environment	• Cynicism						
• Weak Professionalism	Weak Professionalism						
• Nil	Harsh Environment						

Table	2	Industry	challenges	in	the	order	പ	severity
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As can be seen in the above table, 'Inadequacy of resources' was rated as the most severe challenge. This rating is virtually unquestionable as it was agreed to by the two groups. Ordinarily, this is understandable because any project that lacks adequate human and material resources would be tedious to accomplish. Indeed, independent producers which this study, for ease of categorization added to content providers, drew attention to the fact that although they provide content on their own, Nigeria's broadcast regulator, was yet to license any of them as content providers. This clearly establishes that the numerical strength of officially recognized content providers in Nigeria is scanty. Whereas all the interviewees were on the same page on this, they were not so on the issue of 'Cynicism' which the content providers failed to identify as one of their challenges. The stakeholders on their part did not only list it, but placed it immediately next to the uppermost challenge - inadequate resources. They were convinced that content providers must have been pushed to a state of despair by the uninspiring implementation of the digitization process which featured failed successive target dates for the transition. To alter such inclination towards skepticism, veteran broadcasters, suggested a reorientation programme for content providers, without which their lack of faith might place digital broadcasting in the country in jeopardy.

Another area of disagreement was that of 'Weak Professionalism' which the veteran broadcasters claimed was deliberately underscored by content providers. The argument was that television content production in Nigeria was still marred by careless audio-visual mistakes, basic technical lapses such as 'lip sync'-incoherence between sound and lips movement, frequent disruption to transmission, incorrect pronunciation of local names especially in news and current affairs content, late transmission of certain programmes and failure to adhere strictly to a station's advertised quarterly programme schedule thereby committing several professional blunders. This was corroborated by other stakeholders who testified that manpower development was poorly handled in many television stations in the country without regards for the special needs of an industry whose technologies were changing by the day. This same feeling may have influenced the earlier suggestion by Obot and Inwang (2017, p123) that content providers needed "to be trained on content generation, processing, storage and transmission."

On the issue of 'Harsh Environment', content providers were transparently bitter. They specifically pointed to the issue of poor public power supply which often compelled them to divert a huge percentage of

their meagre funds to procure diesel for production. They also complained about the changed attitude of the nation's broadcast regulator, from a worthy partner in the past, to a current 'punitive' supervisor. The general stakeholders admonished the broadcast regulator to be more concerned about uplifting the professional standards of the practitioners rather than producing a fault-finding broadcasting code filled with breaches and sanctions. In fact, all the interviewees called on the Nigeria government to create an enabling environment for excellence in broadcasting. A similar appeal had been made by Edong (2018), to government to ensure enhanced delivery of digital broadcast equipment by removing all tariffs on equipment and where possible, mandating their assemblage in the country. Such government support would no doubt inspire broadcasters to be more productive and efficient.

# **IV. CONCLUSION**

The study has established that the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting which commenced in Nigeria in 2007 has had several challenges. One of them, the insufficiency of content for television broadcasting, which was the main concern of the study was recognized as subsisting. The reasons for this which were found to be numerous included inadequacy of resources, harsh operating environment, cynicism by industry players and weak professionalism. To reverse the situation, the study drew attention to the need for the government to create an enabling environment for television broadcasting in Nigeria while it called on content providers to rise up to their mandate by working assiduously for the development and production of content in abundance in line with the demands of digital broadcasting. On this note, the study calls for the following recommendations:

- 1. A speedy completion of the digital switch over which had only been done in 6 out of 37 locations as at June 2020. This would remove the cynicism of industry players foisted by government's lethargy in playing her part in the digitization policy
- 2. The fulfillment of the promise by government to create one million jobs in the next three years through the manufacturing of set-top-boxes (decoders) and TV sets, TV and Film production as well as TV and Online advertising and Data among other things
- 3. The establishment of a viable regulatory authority whose primary concern would be the attainment of best practices in television broadcasting. The regulator should increase participation in broadcast content provisioning by licensing more providers such as operatives found competent enough to be so recognized among independent producers
- 4. Ensuring high ethical and operational standards for industry players that can guarantee professional excellence in television broadcasting. To this end, all organizations, bodies or individuals licensed as content providers must put an immediate end to programme failures and repeat programming. With digitization, those unable to watch programmes can arrange to record them to be viewed later rather than compelling other station adherents to watch repeats
- 5. Sustaining broadcasting as a vibrant occupation through proper funding of its operations. Latest audiovisual facilities, should be procured while broadcast operatives should be adequately remunerated.

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