Chapter 2
Digital Television and its (Dys)Functions in Africa

John Bosco Mayiga
The University of Western Ontario, Canada

ABSTRACT

In 2006, the International Telecommunication Union resolved on a digital television broadcasting plan to migrate all television broadcasting systems from analogue to digital by June 2015. The stated objective of the switch to digital systems is to achieve qualitative and quantitative rationalization in order to maximize communication benefits. While digital migration may be seen as part of the exponential developments in science and innovation, it obscures serious conceptual issues and social inequalities. This chapter offers a theoretical examination of the ideological and political-economic logics behind the global digital terrestrial migration plan. From a broad critique of the concepts of "Knowledge Society/Information Society," taking a critical lens into the works of Daniel Bell (1974) and Manuel Castells (2000), and drawing from Guy Berger's (2010) critique of the digital migration process, author questions the logic of approximating digitization to development and argues that the mandatory migration of TV broadcasting systems requires critical analysis regarding its social costs to Africa.

INTRODUCTION

In 2004 and 2006, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which is the United Nations "specialized agency for information and communications technologies,"[1] held two conferences dubbed the Regional Radio Communications Conferences (RRC-04 and RRC-06) whose purpose was to develop a digital terrestrial broadcasting plan. During the last of these conferences (RRC-06) held in Geneva, Switzerland, an agreement (GE06) was reached which set June 2015 as the date for the switch over from analogue to digital. By this date, all countries party to this agreement (101 countries in Europe, Africa and the Middle East) are obliged to switch from analogue to digital braodcasting technology (Berger, 2010; Government of Uganda, 2009).

In an age when information technology has become a central resource for the negotiation of everyday life (Castells, 2000), the stated objective of the switch to digital systems is to achieve qualitative (aesthetic) and quantitative (more spectrum space) rationalization of broadcasting

technology and experience in order to maximize communication benefits. While the need for digital migration is symptomatic of the exponential transformations in information production and consumption in developed countries, it poses serious conceptual and development questions in developing countries. In this paper, I argue that the mandatory migration of TV broadcasting systems will further push African countries to the periphery of the production of information in a world system in which technologies and capacities of production are concentrated in the cores of the global North, or semi-peripheries within the global South. At the same time, African audiences will be reduced to net consumers of information with its embedded values of consumerism at the expense of development information. In order to argue this case, I explore the theoretical underpinnings of digital migration as a means of exposing the forces behind these changes. I then examine the political economy of digital migration, exploring how regional powers are positioning themselves to leverage this technological change, especially through the struggle to control the technical standards of digital migration. I conclude that Africa's marginality in the political economy of digital migration makes the continent and its inhabitants the least beneficiaries of a technological change that is supposed to be a key ingredient of the knowledge economy.

DIGITAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENTALISM

Since RRC-06, different countries in both the developed and developing world have integrated digital migration plans within their development trajectories, with emphasis on the strategic addition of digital migration to the overall economic development objectives. Within the digital migration discourse, terms like *digital migration*, *the switch over*, *analogue switch-off*, *digital switch-on* and *digitization* are variously used to refer to the same process of movement from analogue

to digital system of broadcasting. In this paper, I also use the terms interchangeably to refer the same process.

While the commonly stated utility of digital migration is to achieve the efficient and rational use of the spectrum, there are various social, political, economic and cultural appropriations that are articulated within specific countries' digital migration strategies. For example, South Africa foresees digital migration as contributing to "the delivery of quality education, health, medium and micro-enterprise programmes, the opportunity to develop new skills and the creation of new jobs, and new investment opportunities…" and therefore directly contribute to the "Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGI-SA)," which is the overall poverty eradication strategy (Government of South Africa, 2008, p.2). South Africa further projects digital migration as helping to address some of its historical, racial, and political problems, by contributing to building "social cohesion" and a "common national identity."

Uganda, on the other hand, looks at digital migration as enhancing "the mobilization of masses for social-economic development" and as a major contributor to the "government strategy for poverty eradication as envisaged in the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP)," which is the overall government strategy to fight poverty (Uganda Communications Commission, 2010, p.4). Needless to say, the factual basis of these lofty claims is hard to empirically establish.

LOCATING DIGITAL MIGRATION IN INFORMATION SOCIETY THEORIES: BETWEEN POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CULTURE

The Cultural Shift

The digitization of broadcasting can be conceptualized within the broad theories of the "information society." The concept of the information society has come to symbolize the difficulties of theorizing

14 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/digital-television-and-its-dysfunctions-in-africa/104780

Related Content

Diversity of Monetary Regimes and Reactions to the Pandemic Crisis: Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia Compared
Cornelia Sahling, Nikolay Nenovskyand Petar Pandushev Chobanov (2021). *Bridging Microeconomics and Macroeconomics and the Effects on Economic Development and Growth (pp. 276-296).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/diversity-of-monetary-regimes-and-reactions-to-the-pandemic-crisis/261564

Doing Business and Imperfections in the Development of Knowledge Economy in the Arab Countries
Ahmed Driouchi (2014). *Knowledge-Based Economic Policy Development in the Arab World (pp. 335-363).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/doing-business-and-imperfections-in-the-development-of-knowledge-economy-in-the-arab-countries/97796

Framework for Plastic Waste Management: Assessment of Factors Impacting the Circularity of Plastics
Rohan Ullah Khan, Marium Siddiqi, Hira Mahmoodand Muhammad Abrar Asghar (2022). *International Journal of Circular Economy and Waste Management (pp. 1-21).*
www.irma-international.org/article/framework-for-plastic-waste-management/302204

Online to Offline-based e-waste "Internet + Recycling" pattern building: Online to Offline-based e-waste
 (2022). *International Journal of Circular Economy and Waste Management (pp. 0-0).*
www.irma-international.org/article//311052

Tourist Attraction Perception of Jharkhand Cuisine: A Study on Tourists Visiting Jharkhand
Viveka Nand Sharmaand Arvind Hans (2022). *International Journal of Circular Economy and Waste Management (pp. 1-10).*
www.irma-international.org/article/tourist-attraction-perception-of-jharkhand-cuisine/306215