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Nigerian Broadcasting in the Digital Age from Max Weber's Perspective

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Abstract
This article examined Nigerian broadcasting in the digital age through Max Weber's sociology of the press, focusing on organisational change in licensed radio and television stations and the exercise of regulatory authority by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC). It adopted a conceptual analytical approach based on an integrative review and critical synthesis of multidisciplinary literature. The review considered recent peer-reviewed studies relevant to digital broadcasting, supplemented by selected theoretical, legal and regulatory sources. The literature was analysed through Weber's concepts of bureaucracy, rationalisation and legal-rational authority. The analysis indicated that digital broadcasting required greater coordination among broadcast functions, expanded professional responsibilities and broadened public participation in information production and circulation. It also revealed differing views on professional authority and bureaucratic organisation. The study found that communicative authority had become more distributed without eliminating the institutional responsibilities of licensed broadcasters or the NBC's statutory authority. It concluded that digitalisation had required bureaucratic structures and legal-rational authority to accommodate new forms of communication while retaining their institutional significance.

Keywords: *Digital broadcasting; Nigerian broadcasting; Weber's sociology of the press; Bureaucracy; Legal-rational authority; Communicative authority.*

Introduction

Digital transformation of broadcasting has fundamentally reshaped the structure, regulation and exercise of authority within media institutions worldwide (Bin Hyacinth, Elewodalu, Ogwezzy-Ndisika, & Suraj, 2025). In Nigeria, this transition extends beyond technological change to encompass evolving relationships between licensed radio and television stations and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the statutory regulator of the broadcast industry (Ajayi, Ernest-Onuiri, Evboren, Falana, & Lawal, 2016). Max Weber's sociology of the press

provides a useful lens for analysing these developments because it draws attention to the organisational structures, bureaucratic arrangements and forms of legal-rational authority that shape modern media institutions.

Nigeria's transition to digital broadcasting has changed how licensed radio and television stations produce and disseminate content (Arihilam & Ikonne, 2023). The shift has introduced new technologies, expanded distribution channels and strengthened the importance of formal administrative procedures (Bakare & Ekeocha, 2018). From a Weberian perspective, these changes are not merely technological. Rather, they also reflect processes of rationalisation, bureaucratisation and the continual importance of formal rules in the organisation and regulation of broadcasting (Mabweazara & Happer, 2025). As broadcast stations adapt to technological innovation, the relationship between broadcasters and the NBC becomes increasingly important for understanding how authority, professional practice and institutional regulation operate within Nigeria's changing broadcast environment.

Statement of the Problem

Existing studies on Nigerian broadcasting have made tremendous contributions to debates on digital migration (Onyiaji & Okwumba, 2019), regulation (Olimma & Nzan-Ayang, 2023; Bashir, 2020), content and technological adoption (Sanusi, Oyegoke, & Ojewumi, 2025). However, these studies have paid less attention to the institutional consequences of digital transformation for the relationship between licensed broadcasters and the NBC. Consequently, the changing character of regulatory authority, bureaucratic organisation and institutional legitimacy remains insufficiently explained. By drawing on Weber's sociology of the press, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how digitalisation is reshaping broadcast operations and regulation in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

Accordingly, the objectives of this article are to:

1. examine how digital broadcasting has influenced the organisation and operations of licensed radio and television stations in Nigeria; and
2. analyse the exercise of regulatory authority by the NBC in Nigeria's digital broadcasting.

Methodological Approach

This study adopted a conceptual analytical approach informed by an integrative review and critical synthesis of multidisciplinary literature. The literature was identified through searches of multiple academic databases, focusing on studies published within the last ten years. Peer-reviewed studies relevant to Nigerian broadcasting in the digital age were included, with selection guided primarily by their recency and direct relevance to the study's focus. Older or less directly relevant studies were excluded from the core review. The selected literature was critically examined and synthesised through Weber's sociology of the press. The methodological approach adopted in this study is summarised below in Table 1:

Table 1: Methodological Approach

Methodological Element	Application in this Study
Research design	Conceptual analytical study
Methodological approach	Integrative review and critical synthesis
Literature identification	Multiple academic databases
Publication period	Last ten years
Selection criteria	Recent, peer-reviewed and relevant studies
Sources of evidence	Journal articles, scholarly books, policy and regulatory documents
Theoretical framework	Weber's sociology of the press
Analytical focus	Organisational transformation, communicative authority and regulatory governance
Analytical procedure	Critical comparison and Weberian interpretation

Conceptual Review

Max Weber's Sociology of the Press

Weber regarded the press as more than a channel for transmitting information. He conceived it as a social institution whose organisation, economic interests and authority influence wider social and political life (Reese, 2022; Bélair-Gagnon & Revers, 2018). His proposal for a sociology of the press, presented at the First German Conference of Sociologists in 1910, shifted attention from media content to the structures through which news is produced and circulated (Hanke, 2025; Vera-Zambrano & Powers, 2022). Rather than treating newspapers as isolated enterprises, Weber situated them within the broader organisation of modern society (Hafez, 2020).

Weber's analysis emphasises bureaucracy, rationalisation and legal-rational authority as central features of modern institutions (Hafez, 2020; du Gay, 2020). Bureaucracy involves defined roles, established procedures and hierarchical administration, while rationalisation emphasises systematic procedures, technical expertise and organisational efficiency. Legal-rational authority derives legitimacy from formally established rules and defined jurisdictions. These concepts provide a basis for examining how media institutions organise their activities and exercise authority. Hovden (2023) demonstrates the continuing importance of institutional structures in journalism, while Bashir (2020) highlights the role of regulatory frameworks in Nigeria's media environment.

Weber and Digital Media Relevance

Although Weber's sociology of the press developed in the context of early twentieth-century newspapers, its institutional concerns remain relevant to contemporary digital media. Digitalisation has transformed information production, distribution and consumption while creating new relationships among media organisations, digital platforms, regulators and audiences (Hafez, 2020; Reese, 2022). Bélair-Gagnon and Revers (2018) show that journalism remains embedded in organisational structures and professional routines despite technological change, while Vera-Zambrano and Powers (2022) demonstrate the continuing relevance of Weberian ideas to journalistic judgement and institutional legitimacy. Digital transformation therefore provides a new context for examining institutional adaptation.

Digital Broadcasting and Structure of Nigerian Broadcast Institutions

The transition from analogue to digital broadcasting has required Nigerian radio and television stations to reorganise their internal operations. Functions that were previously handled by separate units increasingly require collaboration among editorial, engineering, information technology and transmission personnel (Westlund, Krumsvik & Lewis, 2021). This coordination requires defined responsibilities and recognised lines of authority to sustain broadcasting across multiple platforms (Emwinromwankhoe, 2020). Digital convergence has consequently encouraged integrated workflows, greater collaboration and multiskilling within broadcast organisations (Telkmann, 2021). These developments indicate a shift towards more coordinated organisational structures within Nigeria's broadcast institutions.

Technological changes have also altered everyday broadcast practices. News gathering, editorial meetings, programme scheduling and content distribution increasingly operate through integrated digital systems that facilitate coordination across organisational units (Kiesow, 2021; Ilan, 2021). At the same time, social media enable members of the public to produce and circulate information outside conventional newsroom structures, challenging the exclusive gatekeeping role of professional editors (Hanke, 2025). Although editorial judgement remains central to professional broadcasting, the volume and immediacy of user-generated content make verification and professional responsibility quite necessary (Flew & Martin, 2022). Hafez (2020) relates such procedural discipline to Weber's broader conception of rationalised institutional practice.

Professional responsibilities have consequently expanded alongside technological change. Journalists, producers and engineers increasingly require digital competencies, while managers make decisions concerning content production, technology acquisition, resource allocation and audience engagement (Min & Fink, 2021). These responsibilities affect the effective use of personnel, equipment and financial resources. Although digital platforms have widened participation in information production, licensed broadcasters remain responsible for ensuring that transmitted content meets professional and ethical standards (Apuke & Omar, 2021). Martin (2021) similarly highlights the continuing importance of professional and organisational capacity within changing digital news environments. Thus, technological adoption has implications not only for equipment but also for skills, responsibilities and institutional performance.

Legal-Rational Authority and Broadcast Regulation in Nigeria

Weber's concept of legal-rational authority provides a useful framework for understanding the statutory role of the NBC. Established by law, the Commission derives its authority from formally defined powers rather than the personal influence of its officials. Its mandate to regulate broadcasting, issue licences and enforce standards reflects Weber's view that modern bureaucracies exercise authority through codified rules and defined jurisdictions (Itanyi, Kouletakis, & Lawal-Arowolo, 2021). The NBC was established under Decree No. 38 of 1992, now the National Broadcasting Commission Act, Cap. N11, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (2004), which empowers it to license, monitor and regulate broadcasting in Nigeria. Political interference may raise questions about regulatory autonomy, but its statutory mandate remains the legal basis of its authority (Olubiyi & Oriakhogba, 2021).

Licensing, monitoring and compliance constitute core mechanisms through which the NBC exercises legal-rational authority over broadcasters (Malam & Rabilu, 2020). Stations are required to obtain licences before commencing operations, while existing broadcasters are monitored for compliance with statutory and professional standards (Mgbeokwere, 2018). Through these procedures, legal provisions are translated into routine administrative practices governing broadcast activities and responses to regulatory directives (Okoduwa, 2019). Such procedural order corresponds with Weber's conception of bureaucracy, in which authority is exercised through predictable rules, defined jurisdictions and disciplined administration.

Sanctions reinforce compliance with statutory obligations and professional standards. However, Weber's perspective suggests that bureaucratic authority depends not only on enforcement capacity but also on the legitimacy of its exercise (Kettl, 2022). Regulatory decisions perceived as consistent, impartial and transparent are more likely to command institutional confidence than those perceived as politically influenced or selectively applied (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2021). Accountability therefore requires regulatory actions to remain open to legal scrutiny, administrative review and public justification (Short, 2021). Such safeguards strengthen legal-rational authority by demonstrating that regulatory power operates through established rules rather than arbitrary discretion.

Weberian Interpretation of Digital Broadcasting

The reviewed literature generally indicates that digital broadcasting has transformed the organisation and operation of broadcast institutions through technological integration, administrative coordination and changing professional routines (Westlund et al., 2021; Emwinromwankhoe, 2020). However, scholars differ in how these changes are interpreted. Min and Fink (2021) emphasise expanding professional responsibilities, whereas Hafez (2020) relates similar developments to bureaucratic rationalisation. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that digitalisation has not simply altered broadcasting technologies; it has also intensified organisational coordination and the importance of specialised professional roles.

Digital technologies have also changed patterns of information production by expanding participation beyond conventional newsrooms (Reese, 2022; Vera-Zambrano & Powers, 2022). Although, their implications for professional authority remain contested. Reese (2022) highlights the emergence of hybrid media systems, while Vera-Zambrano and Powers (2022) emphasise the continuing significance of professional judgement. From a Weberian perspective, these positions are not necessarily contradictory. Digitalisation may broaden access to communication while leaving professional institutions responsible for verification, standards and the organisation of credible public information.

With regard to the second objective, the literature indicates that digital broadcasting has increased the complexity of regulating a changing media environment (Bashir, 2020; Malam & Rabilu, 2020). Olubiyi and Oriakhogba (2021) emphasise the statutory basis of the NBC's authority, whereas Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2021) draw attention to transparency and public confidence in regulatory institutions. These perspectives reinforce Weber's proposition that legal-rational authority depends on formally established rules as well as the legitimacy accorded to their exercise. In Nigeria's digital broadcasting environment, therefore, regulatory authority must operate through both legal structures and credible institutional practices.

Redistribution of Communicative Authority in Nigerian Broadcasting

Digital broadcasting has broadened participation in public communication by enabling citizens and digital platforms to produce and circulate information alongside established media organisations (Reese, 2022; Vera-Zambrano & Powers, 2022). However, scholars differ in their assessment of its implications for professional authority. Apuke and Omar (2021) emphasise the ethical responsibilities associated with expanded digital participation, whereas Hanke (2025) highlights the continuing relevance of institutional journalism. In line with Weberian perspective, these positions suggest that digitalisation has widened the channels through which communication occurs without eliminating the institutional responsibilities of licensed broadcasters. Professional verification and editorial accountability therefore remain important within an increasingly distributed communication environment.

Bureaucracy in the Digital Era

The reviewed literature indicates that digital transformation has expanded organisational coordination and administrative responsibilities within broadcasting (Westlund et al., 2021; Ilan, 2021). At the same time, studies of digital journalism emphasise flexibility, technological innovation and multiskilling (Min & Fink, 2021). These developments may appear to challenge conventional bureaucratic arrangements, yet a Weberian interpretation suggests that technological complexity can increase the need for specialised expertise, coordinated administration and clearly defined responsibilities. Digitalisation therefore appears to reshape rather than eliminate bureaucratic organisation within Nigerian broadcasting, particularly as institutions adapt to increasingly complex operational and technological demands.

Implications

This study contributes to media and communication scholarship by applying Weber's sociology of the press to changes in Nigerian broadcasting. The analysis indicates that technological innovation does not necessarily weaken bureaucratic organisation. Instead, digital technologies can redistribute responsibilities, increase the need for specialised skills and alter how professional roles are coordinated. The study therefore places organisational structure, professional expertise and institutional authority at the centre of discussions about digital broadcasting, while affirming the usefulness of Weberian concepts for analysing changes within broadcast institutions.

The findings also have practical implications for broadcasting in Nigeria. As digital technologies increase the number of actors involved in producing and circulating public information, the NBC will need clear procedures, consistent application of rules and meaningful engagement with relevant stakeholders. The Commission should strengthen institutional independence and accountability, while licensed broadcasters should invest in staff development, organisational capacity and technological innovation. These measures will support professional standards, responsible broadcasting and public confidence as Nigerian broadcasting continues to adopt digital technologies.

Synthesis of the Principal Conceptual Findings

The reviewed literature points to developments in the organisation of broadcast stations, professional practice and relationships with audiences and regulatory institutions. Digital technologies require closer coordination among technical, editorial and managerial functions, alongside new skills and revised work procedures (Westlund et al., 2021; Min & Fink, 2021). Audiences and digital platforms also participate more directly in information production and circulation, placing greater emphasis on verification, editorial judgement and professional accountability (Apuke & Omar, 2021; Reese, 2022). Table 2 summarises the principal areas of convergence and divergence in these perspectives and presents their interpretation through Weber's sociology of the press.

Table 2. Synthesis of Converging and Diverging Perspectives on Digital Broadcasting

Conceptual Theme	Convergence	Divergence	Weberian Synthesis
Organisational transformation	Digital broadcasting strengthens organisational coordination.	Scholars differ on whether this reflects technological adaptation or bureaucratic rationalisation.	Both interpretations explain complementary dimensions of institutional change.
Communicative authority	Digital platforms broaden participation.	Debate continues over the authority of licensed broadcasters.	Communicative authority is redistributed while institutional legitimacy endures.
Broadcast	Digital	Scholars emphasise either	Effective regulation

Conceptual Theme	Convergence	Divergence	Weberian Synthesis
regulation	broadcasting increases regulatory complexity.	statutory authority or institutional legitimacy.	requires both legal authority and legitimacy.
Bureaucratic governance	Digital transformation expands governance responsibilities.	Innovation is sometimes viewed as reducing bureaucracy.	Bureaucracy adapts rather than disappears.

Conclusion

This study examined Nigerian broadcasting in the digital age through Weber's sociology of the press, focusing on organisational arrangements and regulatory authority. The review indicates that digital technologies have created new demands for coordination, professional skills and audience participation, while formal broadcast institutions continue to structure operations. The NBC retains legal authority through licensing, monitoring and enforcement. Based on Weberian analytical lens, digitalisation does not eliminate bureaucracy or legal-rational authority but requires these arrangements to accommodate new communication practices and forms of participation. Communicative authority is distributed among broadcasters, audiences and digital platforms, while institutional responsibilities persist. Weber's sociology of the press therefore remains useful for interpreting the relationship between technological developments, organisational practice and institutional authority in Nigerian broadcasting.

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