

## **Abstract**

Broadcasting in South Africa is currently undergoing a major structural and technological change. The current analogue broadcasting signal is to be changed to a digital terrestrial signal, a process which will be accompanied by both significant challenges and opportunities. This research paper will examine the way in which the advantages, disadvantages and challenges associated with digital broadcasting and digital migration in South Africa impact this process, as well as the impact of political economy, corporate profit making motives, the neoliberal economic context and power dynamics in decision and policy making processes in relation to the socio-economic context of South Africa

Critical political economy of the media, theories of media policy and theories of universal access were used as the theoretical framework for this study. These theories were used because they examine and unpack issues of the media's role in a democracy, interplay of power dynamics, challenges of universal access and the ideal role of stakeholders in a policy making process. The research study used an exploratory and descriptive research design and adopted a qualitative approach analysing policy documents, press reports and interviews. The interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders and document analysis was conducted on various policy documents regarding the process of digital migration. Areas of exploration included the information divide; distributive justice; and universal access.

Findings of this study included that due to the power of the corporations in influencing policy, it would prove to be very difficult to manage to balance addressing universal access and the challenges which rise from corporate profit making. It seems as if the advantages of digital migration and ultimately digital broadcasting will be more prevalent within the telecommunications industry and not necessarily broadcasting. It seems as though there is large influence emanating from industry and corporate companies. This is a clear indication that the democratic process of policy making is flawed given the lack of participation. This process has been unclear, confusing and inconsistent with the ideal. The South African context is not a reflection of the ideal state of the media and democracy. It is recommended that the Minister of Communications makes every effort to ensure that this process is a smooth, transparent and efficient one.