

STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF EVENT MANAGEMENT INNOVATIONS IN NIGERIA: A CONCISE REVIEW

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Abstract

This paper critically examined the challenges confronting the adoption and sustainability of innovative practices in event management in Nigeria, with the aim of proposing strategic pathways for enhancing innovation-driven event delivery. The study was informed by the need to address persistent structural, institutional, and operational constraints that impede the effective integration of innovation within the Nigerian event management sector. A descriptive research approach was employed, drawing extensively on relevant scholarly literature, policy documents, and industry reports to identify and analyze the major impediments to innovation adoption. The findings revealed that infrastructural inadequacies, limited access to sustainable financing, insufficient professional capacity, regulatory bottlenecks, and weak inter-organizational collaboration constitute significant barriers to the implementation of innovative event management practices in Nigeria. In response to these challenges, the study identified key strategic measures, including strengthened institutional and policy support, sustained investment in digital and physical infrastructure, continuous capacity building and professional development, the adoption of diversified financing and sponsorship models, and enhanced collaboration among key industry stakeholders. The study concludes that the advancement of event management innovation in Nigeria requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder, and policy-driven approach that integrates human, technological, and financial resources. It therefore recommends the formulation and implementation of supportive regulatory frameworks, increased investment in capacity development and infrastructure, and the promotion of collaborative networks as critical mechanisms for improving efficiency, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability in Nigeria's event management industry.

Keywords: Event management, innovation, challenges, strategies, Nigeria

Introduction

Event management has become a strategic service industry that contributes significantly to economic development, tourism, cultural preservation, knowledge exchange, and social integration. It involves the systematic planning, coordination, implementation, and evaluation of sports competitions, cultural festivals, academic conferences, exhibitions, and corporate events. In Nigeria, event management plays an important role in employment generation, local revenue mobilization, destination branding, and community development. Major sporting events, cultural festivals such as the Argungu Fishing Festival, Durbar Festival, Osun-Osogbo Festival, and Calabar Carnival, as well as conferences organized by higher institutions and professional associations, stimulate sectors including hospitality, transportation, media, security, and the creative industry, thereby enhancing destination competitiveness and socio-economic development (Getz & Page, 2016; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018; Ojo & Mejabi, 2025).

The growing complexity of contemporary events has made innovation indispensable to successful event management. Event management innovation refers to the application of new technologies, creative ideas, managerial approaches, and operational processes that improve planning, implementation, participant satisfaction, operational efficiency, safety, and sustainability (Getz & Page, 2016; Bladen et al., 2018). Technological innovations include digital ticketing, online registration, mobile payment systems, event management software, artificial intelligence, live streaming, and data analytics, while organizational innovations encompass collaborative planning, volunteer management systems, and integrated communication platforms. Experiential innovations such as hybrid participation, digital storytelling, immersive audience engagement, and

virtual exhibitions have transformed the delivery of sports events, cultural festivals, and academic conferences, making events more accessible, interactive, and efficient (Breaking Barriers, 2025).

The successful adoption of these innovations depends on an enabling environment characterized by reliable infrastructure, skilled professionals, supportive policies, sustainable financing, and strong stakeholder collaboration. Stable electricity, broadband connectivity, modern venues, efficient transportation systems, and affordable digital technologies provide the foundation for innovative event delivery. Equally important are competent event managers who continuously update their professional skills and organizations that embrace internationally recognized sustainability standards such as ISO 20121, which promotes environmentally responsible, socially inclusive, and economically sustainable event management (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2024).

Globally, event management has shifted toward digital transformation, sustainability, and audience-centred service delivery. Advanced economies routinely employ smart ticketing systems, biometric accreditation, integrated event management platforms, artificial intelligence, data analytics, and advanced security technologies to improve operational efficiency and participant experience. Hybrid and virtual event models have expanded participation beyond physical venues, while sustainable practices such as waste reduction, renewable energy utilization, and carbon footprint assessment have become integral to international best practices. These developments are supported by strong regulatory frameworks, standardized professional training, and continuous quality improvement (Getz & Page, 2016; OECD, 2021; ISO, 2024).

Across Africa, event management innovation continues to expand through digital transformation, urbanization, and the growth of the sports, tourism, and creative industries. Countries such as

South Africa, Kenya, Rwanda, and Morocco have increasingly adopted online registration systems, mobile payment platforms, hybrid conferencing, and digital marketing for sports tournaments, cultural festivals, and international conferences. Nevertheless, inadequate infrastructure, limited funding, shortages of skilled personnel, and weak institutional support continue to constrain innovation across many African countries (OECD, 2021; United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2022). Despite these challenges, African event managers increasingly integrate modern technologies with indigenous cultural values to enhance authenticity, community participation, and audience engagement (Breaking Barriers, 2025).

In Nigeria, however, the adoption of innovative event management practices remains inconsistent. While major events organized in urban centres increasingly utilize digital technologies and creative event designs, many events—particularly those organized by educational institutions and grassroots sports organizations—continue to rely on conventional manual systems. This uneven adoption is largely attributable to inadequate digital infrastructure, unreliable electricity supply, poor internet connectivity, limited financial resources, shortages of skilled professionals, and fragmented institutional support (Getz & Page, 2016; Ojo & Mejabi, 2025). In addition, the absence of standardized professional certification and complex regulatory procedures discourages experimentation and the adoption of innovative event practices (Ajiboye, 2025).

Consequently, many sports events still lack electronic accreditation systems, integrated scheduling platforms, performance analytics, and live digital broadcasting. Cultural festivals often face the challenge of balancing technological modernization with the preservation of cultural authenticity, while many academic conferences have yet to fully embrace hybrid participation, virtual presentations, and digital knowledge management systems. These limitations reduce operational

efficiency, participant satisfaction, international visibility, and the competitiveness of Nigeria's event management industry. Despite the growing importance of innovation in improving event quality, sustainability, and global relevance, a considerable gap remains between international best practices and current realities in Nigeria. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the challenges confronting event management innovations in Nigeria and proposes strategic pathways for enhancing innovation in sports events, cultural festivals, and academic conferences.

Concept of Event Management Innovation

Innovation in event management refers to the introduction and application of new ideas, technologies, processes, and organizational methods that improve event planning, execution, and evaluation (Ayemere, 2025). Such innovations include digital registration and ticketing systems, mobile event applications, data analytics for audience engagement, virtual and hybrid event platforms, and sustainable event practices. While this definition comprehensively captures the technological and operational dimensions of innovation, it places limited emphasis on contextual adaptability and stakeholder collaboration, which are critical in developing economies such as Nigeria where infrastructural and regulatory constraints significantly influence innovation outcomes.

According to Ojo and Mejabi (2025), innovation enables event managers to respond to changing client expectations, global competition, and technological advancements. In Nigeria, innovation is increasingly viewed as a survival strategy for event management firms operating in a highly competitive and dynamic environment. This perspective effectively links innovation to competitiveness and market survival; however, it tends to frame innovation primarily as a reactive

strategy rather than a proactive and strategic process that can shape industry standards and long-term sustainability.

Event management innovation has also been defined as the continuous process of integrating creative solutions, digital tools, and strategic partnerships to enhance event value, efficiency, and audience experience (Breaking Barriers, 2025). This definition emphasizes innovation as an ongoing and collaborative process rather than a one-time technological adoption. Although this definition appropriately highlights collaboration and continuity, it lacks explicit consideration of structural barriers such as finance, policy, and human capacity, which often determine whether such innovative processes can be sustained in practice. Ajiboye (2025) conceptualized innovation in service industries, including event management, as the transformation of traditional operational models through institutional support, professionalization, and technology-driven reforms aimed at improving service delivery and accountability. This definition is strong in acknowledging institutional and policy dimensions of innovation; however, it remains broad and does not sufficiently address the experiential and audience-centered aspects that are central to successful event management innovation

Challenges of Event Management Innovations in Nigeria

Despite the growing recognition of innovation as a catalyst for efficiency, competitiveness, and sustainability in event delivery, the Nigerian event management industry continues to experience systemic challenges that constrain the adoption and institutionalization of innovative practices. These constraints cut across diverse event typologies, including sports competitions, cultural festivals, and academic conferences, and reflect structural, financial, human, and policy-related deficiencies within the broader socio-economic environment.

A. Data Security and Cybersecurity Concerns

The increasing reliance on digital platforms for event registration, ticketing, payments, and participant engagement has heightened concerns about data security and cybersecurity within Nigeria's event management sector. Fear of data breaches, cyberattacks, identity theft, online fraud, and system failures discourages many event organizers from fully embracing digital innovations, particularly in academic conferences where sensitive personal and institutional data are processed. These concerns are further compounded by inadequate cybersecurity awareness, weak institutional cybersecurity policies, and limited investment in secure digital infrastructure, all of which undermine stakeholders' confidence in digital event management systems (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2023; National Information Technology Development Agency [NITDA], 2023). In addition, although Nigeria has enacted the Nigeria Data Protection Act (NDPA) 2023 to strengthen data privacy and cybersecurity governance, inconsistent implementation and limited compliance among organizations continue to constrain the diffusion of digital innovations within the event management industry (NITDA, 2023; World Bank, 2023).

B. Human Capital and Skills Deficit

A persistent shortage of professionally trained event managers significantly undermines innovation adoption in Nigeria. Many practitioners enter the industry without formal education or certification in event management, digital technologies, or sustainability frameworks (Professions.ng, n.d.-a). Ajiboye (2025) observed that inadequate investment in human capital development weakens innovation outcomes across service industries. In sports events, this deficit manifests in poor utilization of performance analytics and safety technologies, while academic conferences often lack competent technical personnel to manage hybrid and virtual platforms.

C. Inadequate Infrastructure

Infrastructural inadequacies remain a major impediment to event management innovation in Nigeria. Unreliable electricity supply, limited broadband penetration, and poor internet connectivity restrict the effective deployment of digital tools such as live streaming, electronic accreditation systems, and real-time event analytics (Professions.ng, n.d.-b). Sports events frequently experience disruptions in electronic scoring and crowd management systems, while cultural festivals particularly those hosted in rural or semi-urban areas which are constrained in their ability to integrate modern engagement technologies. The high cost of alternative power sources further discourages innovation investment (Ayemere, 2025).

D. Inconsistent Policy Support

The absence of coherent and supportive policy frameworks limits innovation in Nigeria's event management industry. Unlike jurisdictions where event management is recognized as a strategic economic sector, Nigeria lacks clear national policies that incentivize innovation through grants, tax reliefs, or capacity-building initiatives (Breaking Barriers, 2025). This policy vacuum reduces motivation for event organizers to invest in innovative technologies and sustainable practices, particularly for large-scale sports events and cultural festivals that require long-term planning.

E. Limited Access to Finance

Financial constraints constitute one of the most critical barriers to innovation adoption. Event management innovations require substantial capital investment in technology, skilled personnel, and modern equipment. However, many Nigerian event organizers especially those managing academic conferences and grassroots sports events operate with limited budgets and face difficulties accessing loans, sponsorships, or grants (Ojo & Mejabi, 2025). As a result, organizers

often prioritize basic logistics over innovative solutions, limiting efficiency and global competitiveness.

F. Limited Continuous Professional Development

Closely linked to skills deficits is the lack of structured continuous professional development opportunities within the industry. Few formal training programs, workshops, or certification courses emphasize innovation, digital transformation, or sustainability in event management (Ojo & Mejabi, 2025). Consequently, practitioners remain poorly exposed to emerging global trends such as hybrid event models, audience analytics, and green event frameworks, reducing their adaptability and innovation readiness.

G. Low Awareness of Global Best Practices

Limited exposure to global best practices further constrains innovation capacity among Nigerian event managers. Many practitioners are unaware of contemporary innovations such as data-driven audience engagement, immersive event technologies, and internationally recognized sustainability standards (Ajiboye, 2025). This knowledge gap reduces competitiveness and inhibits the localization of proven global models for sports events, cultural festivals, and academic conferences.

H. Market Competition and Industry Fragmentation

Nigeria's event management industry is highly competitive yet fragmented, with numerous small- and medium-scale firms offering similar services. While competition should theoretically stimulate innovation, limited resources and weak collaboration often result in price-based competition rather than creative differentiation (Ojo & Mejabi, 2025). Fragmentation also limits collective bargaining power, shared learning, and coordinated innovation initiatives within the industry.

I. Regulatory and Bureaucratic Bottlenecks

Complex regulatory procedures present significant challenges to innovation. Event organizers often face multiple permit requirements, security clearances, and approvals from various government agencies, leading to planning delays and increased operational uncertainty (Professions.ng, n.d.-a). Ajiboye (2025) argued that bureaucratic inefficiencies within Nigeria's public sector discourage experimentation and flexibility, particularly in large-scale sports events and cultural festivals that require extensive government coordination.

J. Resistance to Change

Resistance to change among event managers and key stakeholders remains a notable barrier to innovation adoption. Overreliance on traditional planning methods and skepticism toward new technologies reduce willingness to experiment with innovative approaches (Ojo & Mejabi, 2025). This resistance is particularly evident in long-established cultural festivals and institutionally driven academic conferences, where adherence to tradition often outweighs innovation imperatives.

K. Weak Collaboration and Networking

Effective innovation thrives on collaboration among event managers, technology providers, sponsors, academic institutions, and regulatory bodies. However, weak networking and limited industry coordination in Nigeria restrict knowledge sharing and resource pooling (Breaking Barriers, 2025). The absence of strong professional associations and innovation clusters contributes to fragmented and unsustainable innovation efforts.

L. Weak Integration of Sustainability Practices

Although sustainability is a core component of global event management innovation, its integration in Nigeria remains limited. Many sports events and cultural festivals lack structured

waste management systems, energy-efficient technologies, and environmentally responsible procurement practices (Ayemere, 2025). Financial constraints, limited awareness, and weak regulatory enforcement contribute to the slow adoption of sustainable event innovations.

Strategies for Overcoming the Challenges of Event Management Innovations

Effective adoption and sustainability of event management innovations in Nigeria require a multidimensional strategic approach that addresses infrastructural, financial, human capacity, regulatory, and collaborative challenges confronting the sector.

A. Capacity Building and Professional Development

Strengthening human capital remains a fundamental strategy for sustaining innovation in event management. Higher education institutions should integrate comprehensive event management, digital innovation, and entrepreneurship courses into their curricula to equip graduates with relevant theoretical and practical competencies. Continuous professional development should be encouraged through regular workshops, seminars, and certification programmes organized by professional bodies and industry associations (Ojo & Mejabi, 2025). Furthermore, structured mentorship programmes and apprenticeship schemes can facilitate effective knowledge transfer from experienced professionals to emerging practitioners. Such initiatives enhance technical proficiency, managerial competence, and adaptive capacity, thereby enabling event managers to respond effectively to the dynamic demands of innovative event delivery.

B. Collaboration and Industry Networking

Strategic collaboration among event managers, technology providers, academic institutions, tourism agencies, and security organizations is essential for strengthening innovation capacity within the event management industry. Industry associations can function as platforms for networking, resource sharing, joint research initiatives, and collective advocacy for policy reforms (Professions.ng, n.d.-d). Cross-sector partnerships foster the exchange of ideas, technologies, and best practices, thereby enhancing creativity and operational efficiency. Empirical evidence suggests that collaborative innovation ecosystems contribute significantly to improved service quality, sustainability, and competitiveness in event management (Breaking Barriers, 2025).

C. Innovative Financing and Sponsorship Models

To address financial constraints associated with innovation adoption, event organizers should explore diversified financing strategies such as corporate sponsorships, brand partnerships, crowdfunding, ticketing innovations, and government or donor grants. Diversification of revenue sources enhances financial stability and reduces overreliance on a single funding stream (Breaking Barriers, 2025). Additionally, the application of performance indicators and impact assessment tools to demonstrate return on investment (ROI) can improve sponsor confidence and attract long-term financial commitments. Transparent financial reporting and value-driven sponsorship proposals further strengthen investor trust and support the sustainability of innovative event practices.

D. Investment in Digital and Physical Infrastructure

Addressing infrastructural deficiencies requires deliberate investment in both digital and physical infrastructure. Strengthened public–private partnerships (PPPs) can improve electricity supply, broadband connectivity, transportation networks, and the quality of event venues, thereby creating an enabling environment for innovative event management. Investment in digital infrastructure is particularly critical for facilitating the adoption of emerging event technologies such as virtual and hybrid event platforms, digital ticketing systems, cloud-based event management software, and data-driven decision-making tools (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021; World Bank, 2023). Furthermore, event managers should prioritize the adoption of secure, scalable, and cost-effective digital platforms that support online registration, participant communication, electronic ticketing, audience engagement, live streaming, and real-time data analytics. The effective deployment of such technologies enhances operational efficiency, improves participant experience, strengthens organizational resilience, and supports evidence-based decision-making in event planning and management (Getz & Page, 2016; International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2024).

E. Regulatory Reforms and Policy Support

Supportive regulatory frameworks are essential for fostering innovation in event management. Government agencies should streamline event approval and licensing processes by reducing bureaucratic bottlenecks and ensuring clarity and consistency in regulatory requirements. Simplified procedures would lower compliance costs and encourage experimentation with innovative event formats and technologies (Ajiboye, 2025). Moreover, policy incentives such as tax reliefs, innovation grants, and subsidies for technology-driven or environmentally sustainable

events can further stimulate innovation adoption. A stable and enabling policy environment enhances investor confidence and promotes long-term growth within the event management sector.

Conclusion

From the journey so far, the researchers concluded that event management innovation is essential for improving service quality, competitiveness, and sustainability in Nigeria's event industry. However, infrastructural deficits, financial limitations, skills gaps, regulatory barriers, and market competition continue to hinder innovation. This paper has demonstrated that these challenges can be addressed through strategic investments in infrastructure, innovative financing, professional development, regulatory reform, and collaborative partnerships. A coordinated and multi-stakeholder approach is therefore necessary to unlock the full potential of event management innovations in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to enhance the adoption and sustainability of event management innovations in Nigeria.

1. Government and regulatory agencies should provide stronger institutional and policy support by simplifying event approval processes, establishing clear regulatory frameworks, and offering incentives such as grants and tax reliefs to encourage innovation in the event management sector.
2. Stakeholders in event management should invest in continuous capacity building through education, training, and professional development programmes, while also improving

access to reliable digital and physical infrastructure such as internet connectivity, power supply, and modern event technologies.

3. Event organizers and industry associations should promote collaboration and networking among key stakeholders and adopt diversified and transparent financing models, including sponsorships and partnerships, to ensure financial sustainability and continuous innovation.

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