Irene N. Osemeka

Telecommunication and National Integration in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges

Abstract

The quest for national integration constitutes one of the greatest concerns of many African states including Nigeria, which has the most heterogeneous population in the continent. Numerous policies, plans and programmes have been adopted to integrate Nigeria’s ethnic nationalities but the efforts are yet to yield the desired result. However, there are high hopes that the revolution in Nigeria’s telecommunication sector will ultimately accelerate the process of national integration. While the telecoms sector is increasing the country’s integrative capacity, it is also increasing avenues for the perpetration of crime and violence which is threatening the country’s existence as a composite state. Hence, this paper examines the interface between the telecoms sector and Nigeria’s national integration efforts.

Introduction

The advancement in telecommunication technology has given a renewed impetus to human interaction and made commonplace, the globalization phenomenon. Populations are
being integrated across national boundaries through increased trade and a wide array of social media including the Face Book and Tweeter. Against this background, many African states are still saddled with the problem of national integration. The lack of national integration in African states is primarily, attributed to the artificiality of states boundaries and the distribution of nations across state by the colonial powers.

Efforts to integrate diverse ethnic groups within individual African states led to the adoption of various strategies. Initially one-party states were adopted in the immediate years after independence followed by multi-party states. The experiments were meant to use political parties as avenues to foster cooperation and to ensure participatory politics but the efforts in many cases, amplified the cleavages among the groups and led to conflicts in many parts of the African continent.

Nigeria passed through these stages of experiments but the intervention of the military elite and contestations over power and economic resources contributed to the civil war of 1967-1970 which brought the country to the verge of disintegration.¹ Numerous strategies to promote national unity were continually pursued by successive administrations in the post-war years. Notable among these were the state creation exercises in 1967, 1976, 1987, 1991, 1996 and the establishment of Unity Schools in selected locations around the country. The National Youth Service Corp Scheme and Federal Character Principle were additional avenues through which various administrations sought to forge national unity.² Despite the efforts, Nigeria’s unity remains fragile characterized by a high incidence of violent conflicts often
expressed along ethnic and religious lines. Besides, political participation revolves around ethnic associations such as the Egbe-Omo-Oduduwa, Arewa Peoples Forum, Ohaneze Ndi Igbo and Ijaw Peoples Union. Such associations which are growing in number and prominence have become the fulcrums around which the narrow interests of Nigeria's ethnic nationalities are articulated. While ethnic associations are not necessarily an anomaly, they tend to be used as avenues to foster nationalism: greater allegiance to ethnic group in a manner that diminishes nationalism: collective allegiance to the state.

In the midst of numerous challenges and the threat of disintegration, Nigeria has made commendable progress in the telecommunication sector. This is evident in the widespread use of mobile phones in the country. Before the privatization of the telecoms sector in 2000, ownership of a telephone line was one of the indicators of wealth in Nigeria. With the telecoms revolution, over 60% of the Nigerian population own at least one mobile telephone line. The long queues at phone booths have given way to streets littered with large umbrella-covered Call Centers bearing the names of various multinational telecoms companies. At the macro-economic level, Nigeria's telecoms sector has attracted the highest investment in Africa with over 12.7 billion dollars invested between 1998 and 2008. Adeyemi Adepetun aptly described the exponential growth witnessed in Nigeria's telecoms sector when he stated “Today, Nigeria leads other African markets with an 11.4 million mobile penetration, an installed capacity of 226.6 million lines and an 81.1 per cent teledensity penetration. It inches to a 50 million internet user’s mark.”
There are copious publications on telecommunication in Africa and Nigeria, in view of the transformation that the continent has witnessed especially in the area of commerce, banking, media and social interaction. In one study, Sunday Posu submitted that there is a correlation between the level of telecommunication use and indices of economic growth. Citing examples from Africa including Nigeria, Aker and Mbiti proved that the widespread use of mobile phones has had a staggering effect on the continent’s economy. They also acknowledged a remarkable growth in the use of mobile phones even in some poor African countries but concluded, “the challenge is now to ensure complementary access to public goods and the development of appropriate policies to evaluate and propagate the benefits of mobile phones throughout the continent”.

Focusing on Nigeria, Ahmed Rufai also stressed that the transformation in the telecommunication sector has been revolutionary and has contributed to the country’s economic growth but observed that Nigeria, is not yet there. In, Development Communication, Anaeto and Anaeto illustrated that a planned and systematic use of resources such as the radio, television and telephones, could transform individuals and societies in ways that supports national development. Amienyi anchored Anaeto and Anaeto’s point by stressing the link between national integration and development. Amienyi asserted that national integration is a substantive part of national development but is more concerned with promoting cohesiveness which will allow a development-oriented social change to occur. The paper is thematically in tandem with the works cited but pays particular attention to the telecoms sector demonstrating the prospects of the telecoms revolution.
on Nigeria’s national integration efforts. It also examines the challenges and suggests measures that will ensure a telecoms sector that can promote the conditions that support national integration. It is the view of the paper that although a sustained growth in the telecoms sector has the tendency to increase Nigeria’s integrative capacity, the sector can provide resources for the country’s disintegration. As such, there is need for a systematic planning and implementation of telecommunication policy. It is also important to address the constraints posed by the ailing power sector, deficit in rural mobile telephony infrastructure and inadequacies in Nigeria’s road, rail, water and air transportation, to make the telecoms sector an effective avenue for national integration in Nigeria.

Definition of Terms and Conceptual Discourse
Generally, telecommunication is used to refer to electronic devices such as mobile phones, internet services and other related devices that transmit information over long distances with the aid of cable or electric wire (copper) and optical fiber (electromagnetic fields/wireless). The second key term relevant to the discourse is national integration. This refers to the efforts that aim at evolving a common bond, a collective identity and the subordination of parochial loyalties of the various ethnic nationalities that make up a state. Thus, national integration involves the display of a common aspiration to live together; an aspiration in which the people concerned are willing to transcend the heterogeneity embedded in language, history and religious diversity. It is based on such an understanding that Rosberg and Coleman defined national integration as, “the progressive reduction of
cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogenous political community.\textsuperscript{13}

In Amienyi's view, the process of national integration requires a significant number of citizens to develop identification with the nation that supersedes identification with the ethnic, cultural or religious group. They must also acquire political awareness, share common norms and values and develop attitudes favourable to the display of integrative behaviour'.\textsuperscript{14} Both explanations imply that national integration is an evolutionary process and requires a deliberate engineering with the aim of instilling a common aspiration to live together among groups that are culturally, linguistically and religiously distinct as is the case of Nigeria.

There are several theories that can be employed to show the interface between telecommunication and national integration. One of such is the general systems theory. The theory was originally propounded by the Viennese Biologist, Ludwig von Bertalanfany with contributions from William Ross, Margaret Mead and other scholars in 1950's. The systems theory is explained as "a set of biological, technological, or material partners co-operating on a common purpose".\textsuperscript{15} At the core of the systems theory is the view that interaction between systems and their elements is important in determining their respective functions. In other words, there is a dynamic relationship between the component parts of a system and its whole. An underlying aspect of the general systems theory is the notion of inter-relationship and interdependence of all phenomena. This presupposes that the interaction between the component parts and the whole is mutually beneficial to both. Another view point discernible from the systems theory is,
while the component and whole can be distinguished they are mutually dependent on one another to function effectively. Thus, the pursuit of national integration must be based on the realization that the process requires the cooperation of all the constituent parts working together in a manner that is beneficial to all ethnic nationalities. However national integration is only a concept that must be put in practice to make it realizable. In practical terms, national integration requires some key drivers such as sustained economic growth, social mobilization across classes and territorial space and a people oriented governance to induce in the citizens, an emotional attachment to the nation. Again, the mobile phone and internet at least in modern times are indispensable modes of communication necessary for effective governance, a sustainable economy and for social mobilization. It is in the light of this that, Alabi, rightly argued, “It will be virtually impossible for any group of people to define their collective identities or make decisions about their common and binding interests, without communication” Alabi’s assertion, implies that communication which includes transportation and telecommunication are prerequisites for national development and integration.

Nonetheless, the fact that the diverse communities in Nigeria are linked by various means of communication is not a guarantee that they develop a readiness to work together. Sunday Posu reminds us of the technophilic and technophobic schools of thought whose views differ on the link between telecommunication and national development. The technophiles assert that telecommunication has a positive impact on development since it can leapfrog stages of development but the technophobics argue that the telecoms
sector is already widening the gap between the rich and the huge investment in that sector has deprived other sectors of the economy, the potential for growth. Thus, telecommunication does not necessarily translate to national integration, but serves to stimulate conditions that are necessary for it to occur.

The Evolution of Telecommunication in Nigeria

In the past, Nigerians relied on diverse ways and means to communicate and this contributed to the emergence of large polities in pre-colonial times. Apart from land routes and waterways, the talking drums, lung blown horns, drum beats and emissaries were means of communication among the Nigerian communities. Some of these forms of communication are still in use in many rural communities.

The establishment of the Nigerian telecommunication dates back to the colonial period. The telegraph cable was introduced in 1886 and connected colonial offices in Lagos, Freetown and Accra to London. The main objective for its establishment was to facilitate communication between the various administrative stations in British West Africa, which were jointly administered at the time. From a few coastal locations in West Africa, telegraph cables and telephone lines were extended to interior towns. Between 1923 and 1952, telephone lines were extended from Lagos to Oshogbo, Kaduna, Kano, Benin and Enugu.

With a population of about 40 million in 1960, Nigeria had a Tele-density of 0.5 lines to 1000 people. There were also 18,724 lines and 121 Exchanges. The inadequacy of telephone services was such that it required several days to receive telegraph messages while telephones and other related
services were mainly available at post offices and other government establishments. Nigeria’s urban areas benefitted the most in comparison to the rural areas. Towns like Lagos, Calabar, Kano, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Kaduna and Ibadan. These towns were regional administrative centers during the colonial period and as such, benefitted from the development of telecommunication infrastructure. Even so, not many urban dwellers had access to telecommunication services. Ownership of a telephone line was one of the indicators of wealth and was generally associated with successful entrepreneurs and top government officials. As a result, a majority relied more on conventional methods of communication such as the rail system, waterways, road transportation, letter writing and telegraphs.

Access to telecommunication services in Nigeria began to widen from 1986 with the establishment of the Post and Telecommunication Department (P&T) and the Nigerian External Communication (NET), in 1986. The P&T was later reconstituted to form the Nigerian Postal Services while the NET was merged with a new company referred to as, Nigerian Telecommunication (NITEL). With the restructuring in the telecom sector, the country’s telephone lines increased to 20,000 lines in 1986. The sector received a further boost after the establishment of the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) in 1992. The NCC issued licenses to 7 fixed telephony providers and activated 90,000 additional lines, 35 internet service providers with a customer base of 17,000 and 9 payphone services. Efforts to expand telecommunication infrastructure continued and in 1998 the number of lines increased to 40,000 with a population of about a 100 million. Even with the expansion, the teledensity
was only a 0.4 to 1000. Consequently, it was still customary to find long queues at NITEL offices throughout the country. Telecoms services in Nigeria remained inadequate until 2000, when the liberalization policy was implemented by the President Olusegun Obasanjo administration. The deregulation exercise was implemented to increase efficiency in the telecoms sector which had become comatose after many years of mismanagement and corruption. The exercise began in earnest from 2001 with the issuance of licenses to ECONET Wireless, (then V MOBILE, VODACOM and presently AIRTEL) and MTN. MTEL was established from NITEL and was licensed as Nigeria’s national carrier. In the following year, GLOBACOM was issued a license making it the fourth mobile telephony operator in the country. One of the major outcomes of the deregulation exercise was that the number of telephone lines in Nigeria increased astronomically from about a million in the late 1990’s to about 38 million by July of 2007. The subscriber population rose to 81.9 million in 2010 implying that over half the Nigerian population has access to mobile phones. Furthermore, NCC, issued licenses to Internet Service Providers (ISP’s). The policy led to the proliferation of Cyber Cafés and Call Centers in many Nigerian urban centers where telecom services hardly existed. Even with the reforms, internet services were initially available at a high cost and only corporate organizations and wealthy individuals could subscribe. Ownership of a mobile was still a wealth indicator in the early years of its introduction. For instance, between 2001 and 2003, mobile phone lines cost between N 17,000 and N20,000 while the cheapest telephone sets cost between
N10, 000 and N15,000. With the entry of more mobile phone companies into the telecoms industry, prices of phone lines and Air Time dropped considerably. Between 2009 and 2012 the cost of phone lines dropped from about N500 to N200.24

**Telecommunication and Nigeria’s National Integration: A Process in Progress**

To some extent, the amalgamation of 1914 by Frederick Lord Lugard was intended to facilitate the administration of the vast territory of diverse ethnic groups inhabiting the present day Nigeria. 25Furthermore, the creation of the Nigerian state was not borne out of a general desire by the various ethnic groups to come together yet, the exercise provided some inducements for national integration. The creation of the Nigerian state provided a sense of shared territory and the prospect of adopting English as a language of communication between the various language groups. The harmonization of the administration also provided a common avenue through which the groups could metamorphose from the state to a nation. However, birthing the state before the nation from the Nigerian experience, as it has been for other African states, is similar to putting the cart before the horse. Consequently, the Nigerian nation remains at an embryonic stage of integration, undermined by suspicion and animosities at all levels of intergroup relations.

While the country continues to explore various avenues towards national integration, the telecommunication revolution has demonstrated great prospects for growth in various aspects of national development which is necessary to induce national integration. In this section, we examine how telecommunication technology is strengthening conditions
that support national integration. The conditions though not exhaustive include economic growth, rural development, youth development and mobilization, security and the prompt resolution of conflicts.  

Telecommunication in addition to other variants of transportation infrastructure stimulates trade and commerce. Trade and commerce also stimulates production, distribution and the development of marketing networks. Such processes require different but related levels of human interaction and thus promotes interdependency between communities as they strive to exchange goods and services they lack for those they need. Thus, economic growth fosters cooperation necessary to advance the cause of national integration. However, it will be difficult in contemporary times, for any country to conceive of economic growth without a virile telecoms sector. In the light of this, the revolution in Nigeria’s telecoms sector has been a welcome development especially in view of the obvious lapses in the country’s transportation sector.

The widespread access to telecoms services is minimizing inadequacies in the transportation sector in many African states including Nigeria. Apart from representing additional avenues of communication mobile phones and the internet have the advantage of speed and affordability because of its low cost when compared to the cost of travel by air, road, rail and water ways in Nigeria. Although telecoms services are not replacements for other forms of transportation, their use tends to covertly increase demand for transport services by expanding possibilities for trade through lower search cost for goods labour and services. The effect of the telecoms revolution on Nigeria’s local economy has been remarkable and in many ways,
production, distribution and marketing capacities has been enhanced. It is now easier and faster to access goods and services from any part of the country. With the mobile phone, a customer in Lagos, Abuja or Maiduguri can place an order for traditional cloth woven by the Ebira in Okene, dried fish from Uyo, groundnut oil from Kano, fish from Ahoda or palm oil from Sapele.

The use of mobile phones is boosting internal trade and interaction between the rural and urban dwellers as finished goods from urban industrial centers are exchanged for agricultural produce from the rural areas. This is more so with the use of e-payments, which is provided by a vast network of commercial banks that also depend heavily on information communication technology, (ICT). Using data collected from many African states, Aker and Mbiti illustrate that the trend in Nigeria is replicated in many parts of Africa. They show that with the use of mobile phones, firms are recording a higher productivity, market efficiency, a better management of the supply chain, the reduction of search cost and the creation of jobs in many African states.27

In one study, Ali Mazrui argued that efforts at national integration must focus on bridging the gap between the rural and the urban population.28 The widespread use of telecommunication has ensured that rural dwellers are not restricted to their social circles as in the colonial period when villagers would gather to celebrate the arrival of a letter from a relative in the city, because they were rare moments. In effect, rural dwellers have access to information in real time. There is now greater opportunity to mobilize for diverse
purposes with ease, share information and develop an interest in issues of common concerns. In other words, the use of telecoms services has expanded the capacities for inter-group relations which is an important recipe for integration at the sub-state level.

The revolution in the telecoms sector has contributed significantly to employment generation which is one of the stimulants of economic growth. Obi Igbokwe emphasized the positive impact of the telecoms sector on the Nigeria economy when he stated that by 2004, about 5000 jobs were created directly and more than 400,000 indirectly in the telecoms sector alone. 29 Apart from the formal sector, a sizeable number of people are gainfully employed as operators of Call Centers and vendors who sell mobile phone lines, recharge cards, phone accessories and computers. Over 1000 people are gainfully employed as marketers, importers, technicians, apprentices and food vendors at the Computer village located at Ikeja business area of Lagos. The emergence and subsequent growth of the market coincided with the years following the privatization of the telecoms industry in 2001. 30

Apart from expanding the possibilities for integrative behavior through the promotion of economic interaction the process of national integration can be strengthened when there are conditions that allow for the participation of a majority in the political process. The experience in Nigeria shows that the use of telecommunication has widened the opportunity for a greater number of Nigerians to contribute to the democratic process especially as it relates to campaigning, elections and the voting culture. These various modes of communication now act as rapid information dispensers and complement
other conventional modes of mass communication such as the print and electronic media. Telecoms services are more appreciated in rural areas where many cannot afford the cost of newspapers and where the radio and television have limited coverage.

With the mobile phones information spreads simultaneously around the country from the dial of the phone, via the Bulk Short Message Service (SMS) and the internet. The various modes of telecommunication services have given the voiceless, voice and because people have a choice of either revealing or concealing their identities, they are more opportuned to engage in frank discussions. The trend raised the level of interest and participation of Nigerians in the 2011 elections and subsequent elections. One avenue which President Good luck Jonathan utilized during his election campaign was the, Face Book. This strategy raised his profile and popularized his candidacy. President Good Luck relayed the programmes of the ruling PDP party via the social media and this became an effective way of campaigning for the elections. The idea of using social media as a means of reaching out to potential voters was adopted by other candidates at the state and local government levels. With the use of digital campaigning candidates were able to access far more people than were seen at campaign rallies and at a cheaper cost.

In addition, the actual process of election was computerized and this contributed to a more open procedure. Voter's personal details were captured on the computer and this helped to minimize the rate of fraud. Using the Advanced Fingerprint Detection Software, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was able to detect about
The ability to identify such flaws is covertly strengthening Nigeria’s election procedure and illustrating that reliance on telecommunication technology will contribute to strengthen the democratic process.

To a considerable extent, elections were more participatory involving sections of the population who would otherwise have acted as spectators taking part in the bargaining process. One example that can be cited is that of Babatunde Fashola and the commercial motorcycle riders, popularly referred to as Okada, during the 2011 elections in Lagos. With the aid of the mobile phone, a majority of the motorcycle riders were mobilized and they were able to dialogue with the Governor. At the special campaign rally in Lagos, the commercial motor cycle riders promised to vote for the governor if he would allow them to continue to as commercial riders in Lagos. The ability to reach out to a large number people or what is generally referred to as crowd sourcing was the general trend in other parts of country. Aside from the support from Okada riders, the mobilization of other such sections was evident across communities in Nigeria. In many parts of the country, representatives of various associations including village associations, youth associations, town meetings, market women associations, road transport workers, various guilds were mobilized partly as a result, of the prevalence of mobile phones during the elections. To a large extent, the use of mobile phones helped to glamorize elections in Nigeria as many candidates and their support team could reel out countless text messages to potential voters.

Apart from the noticeable trends during campaigns and elections, there are many ways in which the telecoms
revolution is enhancing governance and paving the way for the emergence of an ‘e republic’ (electronic republic) albeit at an embryonic stage in view of the low rate of mobile phone penetration in the country. 34

The widespread use of telecoms is also enhancing access to information on public services. The Nigerian government is already utilizing such avenues to enhance revenue generation as payment for public services such as water and electric bills could be done through e-banking. Although such access routes to public services and information is still developing, the use of telecoms is allowing for a greater awareness on issues of governance and this is giving more room for interaction between government and the citizenry.

A major condition required for national integration to occur is the ability of the state to provide security of lives and property. There is no doubt that the use of mobile phones, internet services and other related devices has increased the capacity of the Nigerian law enforcement agencies to provide security. While insecurity still looms in the country, the prospects that the security needs of the citizenry will be considerably addressed is far greater than the years before 2000. There is no doubt that the use of telecom devices for combating and managing conflicts is not new in the country but the speed with which information is gathered and shared among relevant agencies has increased to reflect the advancement in telecommunication technology. The edge that the use of telecoms has given to the Nigerian law enforcement agencies is enormous considering that the agencies are under-funded and under-equipped.

As an example reliance on telecoms devices has already proved useful to the law enforcement agencies in unearthing
some sensational crimes not to mention several smaller incidents. Two of the incidents are those of Cynthia Osokogu’s murder by four young men and the conviction of Henry Orkar, a member of the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta who was arrested in connection with the Independence Day bombing at Abuja in 2010.35 There is no doubt that the use of mobile phones and the internet facilitated the execution of both crimes but the law enforcement agencies were able to arrest the perpetrators using the same medium. At the level of the individual, access to a mobile phone in Nigeria is boosting the feeling of personal security as there are greater chances of reaching out for help in time of need. In effect, the use of telecom devices has increased the capacity to detect crime which will serve as a deterrent to criminals and boost crime prevention efforts. The cases cited, illustrate the Nigerian government’s capacity to secure lives and property which is necessary to endear the citizens to the state and foster the willingness to identify with the country.

The widespread use of telecom services has expanded opportunities for the mobilization of the youths through access to information which is required for education. E-libraries have become common features in education institutions. In addition, access to internet services has afforded the youth access to information on various skills and technics that are relevant for their development and by extension their ability to contribute to the national integration project.

The telecoms companies have also been actively engaged in numerous youth development projects and poverty alleviation programmes in the country. Some of the popular programmes
and projects are the MTN Project Fame and the MTN Foundation Youth Skills Development. The programmes focus on the development of talents within the entertainment industry while the company has embarked on training the youth in selected technical and vocational schools in the country. There is also GLOBACOMS Youth Empowerment Programmes that has partnered with the state governments to train unemployed youth as commercial telephone operators. ETISALAT has also been involved in Career Mentoring programmes for Youth Corpers and the “Adopt a School Initiative which aims at contributing to the educational development of selected schools across the country. With the VISAFONE’s Reality TV show “The Debaters” the youth are encouraged to discuss issues that are crucial to national development. Such focus on the youth represents additional avenues for mobilizing the younger generation who constitute over 40% of the Nigerian population and whose involvement in the socio-economic process is crucial for national integration to occur.  

Experience has shown that the Nigerian youth have the potential to make or mar the national integration project. Though the Nigerian youth continues to demonstrate their skills nationally and internationally in various fields of endeavor, the bulk of armed actors and criminals whether among the Niger Delta or Boko Haram militants are roughly between the ages of 20 and 40. Therefore, efforts to provide progressive activities for youths as has been adopted by telecoms operators in Nigeria, is gainful since it diverts attention away from violence and crime which undermines efforts at national integration.
The Nigerian Telecoms Sector and the Challenges for National Integration

In modern times, telecommunication has an edge over conventional modes of communication considering the speed with which information can be accessed or relayed. However, there are challenges that hinder Nigeria's ability to harness the capacity of telecoms sector as a medium to promote national integration. One major hindrance to Nigeria’s economic growth including the operations of the telecom sector is inadequate power supply. The telecommunication companies depend partly on generating plants and spend huge sums of money on fuelling them. According to reports by MTN, the company powers about 1,600 base stations in Nigeria with generators. The overall effect of inadequate powers supply is that telecom service providers are unable to provide seamless online services while it also cuts down on access period to subscribers. The poor state of infrastructure is another hindrance to an effective telecommunication sector and its ability to contribute to national integration. Mobile phones and the internet can help people transact business faster and without direct physical contact but none of these modes can be used to move goods from one location to another. Just like Nigeria, the problem of inadequate infrastructure is a common phenomenon in many African countries. Alex Perry observed, “the African continent suffers from infrastructural deficit, “Many investors must provide their own power, water and access roads and this situation undercuts local and international competitiveness”.

There is also the problem of slow transmission and low penetration rate in Nigeria. This is against the background that telecommunication multi-nationals are reaping good profit on
their investments in Africa and in particular, Nigeria. In a report by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a subscriber in Africa spends at least 900 dollars yearly on mobile telephone services. On the contrary, an average European subscriber spends about half the same amount annually. There have been attempts to reduce the cost of Air Time by the telecom companies in Nigeria through the reduction of the cost of Airtime to Hundred Naira (N100) and Fifty Naira, (N50) digits. The effort has only provided affordable units of Air Time but the call rates are not necessarily lower. Some of the companies have blamed the high cost of their services on government policies. The companies have to contend with high import duties and parallel taxation policies apart from other operational costs.

The Way Forward
Access to a telephone line has become the right of citizens in many parts of the industrialized world. Nigeria is also advancing towards such a position with the progress recorded in the telecoms sector. It is apparent that many Nigerians own between two and three mobile phone lines each but the phones are not always functional owing to power failure and poor quality of service. Hence, it is important to upgrade and increase telecoms facilities in the country for more efficiency, which will boost efficiency in other sectors of national development, needed to stimulate national integration. In addition, the Nigerian government must continue to implement the deregulation policy in the power sector. Such a policy will attract a host of Independent Power Producers (IPP’s) into the Nigeria’s power sector. Apart from hydro and natural gas, other sources of power generation such as coal
and solar energy should be explored while the refurbishment of existing plants is necessary as a short-term measure to mitigate inadequacies in Nigeria’s power sector.

It is pertinent to develop other means of transportation infrastructure in Nigeria so that the benefits of the telecoms sector can be fully realized. For instance, the construction of the Union Pacific, a part of the transcontinental lines in the United States of America revolutionized the American economy in the mid 1800’s. It also contributed immensely to the integration of the American colonies which were populated by people of diverse languages and religion. 

Taking a cue from the American experience, there is need to revolutionize the road, rail, water and air transportation systems by opening up those sectors to private investment in the same manner as was done in the telecoms sector. Emphasizing the need for investment in transportation infrastructure, Jean Jiguep, Deputy Secretary of ITU Abidjan, observed, “without transportation trade in goods will be impossible”. In other words, the neglect of other sectors of communication will hinder growth in many sectors of national development and ultimately limit the degree of economic interdependence among Nigerians.

An effective telecommunication system is necessary to facilitate good governance which will aid the cause of national integration. Reliance on telecommunication can boost public service delivery and enhance people-government relations. In the light of this, the Nigerian government must embark on the computerization of its services. Computerization of government services will translate to a lower cost, lower risk and increase in accessibility. The establishment of the National Information Technology
Development Agency (NITDA), which oversees the e-government programme and the launch of the federal government’s official web site for the presidency, are steps in the right direction. It is important to constantly update the site, to sustain people-government communication needed for national integration. Closely related to this, is the need to expand literacy programmes for optimum utilization of telecoms services. Telecoms services are grossly under-utilized owing partly, to low literacy levels. This explains why a majority of subscribers in Nigeria can only access voice data services.

Most rural areas of Nigeria remain outside the telecommunication networks or at best have selected service areas characterized by poor quality of service (Qos). As a result, the Nigerian government in partnership with service providers must embark on the expansion of rural telephony projects. Again, rural telephony projects will benefit from a downward review of bandwidth pricing by multi-national telecoms companies. A viable rural telephony could be achieved through collaboration between the Nigerian government and telecommunication multi-nationals with the aim of establishing a price regime that is subsidized for rural dwellers. This will help bridge the internal digital divide between the urban and rural areas of the country.

It is imperative on the part of the telecommunication companies to harmonize operations in terms of the utilization of infrastructure. The idea of co-location is already gaining popularity as telecoms operators are able to share common facilities. One area which is fast gaining recognition and which will improve the cooperate image of the telecoms sector is investment in the health services, sports, education
and youth entertainment. These avenues will serve to complement government’s efforts in the area of social welfare as one of the sources of discontent among Nigerians is the inability of government to fund social welfare programmes. The Nigerian government must also support the operations of telecoms companies including indigenous companies such as Omatek and Zinnox. Both companies have complemented the efforts of multi-national companies in the area of job creation. To this end, there is need to streamline the tax regime and lower customs tariff as telecoms companies depend mainly on imported raw materials.

Conclusion
The account has shown that the revolution in Nigeria’s telecommunication sector has great prospects for national integration. The paper has demonstrated that telecoms services is boosting Nigeria’s economy and promoting interdependence at all levels of interaction. The sector is also enhancing political participation and widening access to government services and public goods. Therefore, efforts to increase efficiency in this sector will contribute to national integration on the long run. Much as telecommunication has been a major catalyst for growth in diverse sectors of the Nigeria’s development, it is also providing avenues that make it easier to perpetrate crime and violent conflicts and inadvertently reducing Nigeria’s integrative capacity. As a result, the root causes of conflicts such as poverty, youth unemployment, religious intolerance and corruption must be tackled.

More importantly, national integration operates at an emotive level and as such, the nature of governance must not be
simply democratic but must be such that justice, fairness and equity are clearly discernible to make the citizens evolve sentiments that transcend their ethnic, religious and linguistic diversities. The failure to build efforts at national integration around these key issues has led to disaffection of a majority of Nigerians who are rather gravitating towards their ethnic enclaves. As an example, a majority of Nigerians are dissatisfied with the implementation of programmes such as the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) Scheme, the Federal Character Principle, Quota System, Federal Government Colleges, Revenue Allocation Formula and the Boundary Adjustment Principles. To many Nigerian, these programmes and policies have become avenues of exclusion rather than inclusion and partly, their mismanagement has contributed to the lack of enthusiasm to live together.

Endnotes


5. Emma Ebeleke, Vanguard, 12th October.

6. Adeyemi Adepetun, 2.7 Billion users active on internet, ICT now more affordable, Vanguard, 10th April, 2013, 25.


17. Posu, “Information Communication Technologies,”


20. Rufai, “Telecoms Revolution; Nigeria…..”


24. A SIM presently costs N100 at MTN Shops in Lagos and it takes between 8 and 10 hours to activate the


31. Alex Perry, TIME, July 11, 2011, 42


35. “Cynthia Osokogu was choked to death” Vanguard, 13th April, 2013, 7. Also see, Adelani Adepega, “IG Orders Manhunt for Murdered Policemen”, Punch 9th April, 2013


38. Interview with Mr. Horsefall Onamare (Senior Manager (Retail), MTN Nigeria, Lagos Office), Victoria Island, Lagos, 16th April 2012.

39. Alex Perry, TIME 11, July, 2011, 4

40. Jean Jiguep, “Role of Telecommunication in Economic Integration,” Being the keynote address by the Deputy Secretary General, ITU, Abidjan, 17 June,


42. Jean Jiguep, “Role of Telecommunication in Economic Integration,” Being the keynote address by the Deputy Secretary General, ITU, Abidjan, 17 June, 1991, University of Pennsylvania, Africa Study Center, 2
