Chapter 26
Integration of Policies and Regulatory Frameworks for the Convergent ICT Industry in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This chapter commenced with a background to the concept of convergence particularly how it has brought about various opportunities in different aspects of life and led to the blurring of the boundaries between IT and telecommunications in the last two decades. It then discussed the various dimensions of convergence notably– technological, technical and content and later reviewed the digital revolution and the ICT environment in the context of Nigeria and considered the various contending interests and issues in broadcasting, telecommunications and other information industries in Nigeria in form of policies, ICT legislations and governmental organs. It made proposals towards the final emergence of one regulatory body to administer these convergent technologies. The chapter, as the way forward, canvassed for addressing convergence through appropriate ICT policy and regulatory mechanisms, unified licensing as parts of a broader strategy to promote growth and better position Nigeria within regional and global information environments.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, the advances made in the telecommunications industry and the convergence with computing and broadcasting technologies have made it much easier and faster to process, distribute or access diverse information resources. The way information is now accessed and transmitted around the world, for example through Internet has fundamentally altered how societies organise and govern themselves and conduct commerce and trade. Today, ICTs form the backbone of industries such as global financial industry, travel and tourism, distance learning, etc and are increasingly becoming a value-adding component in everyday life events such as education, health, security, entertainment and communication. ICTs are also a critical component for accelerating in-

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novation, business competitiveness, promoting efficiencies in the delivery of services, democratic governance, human development and economic growth (Zambia Ministry of Communications & Transport, 2003). There has been the emergence of major changes in the global information and communication technology (ICT) environment, the result of which are: (1) increased liberalisation in the telecommunications sector, and (2) the rapid rate of technological innovation in the sector. Costs of communications have dropped rapidly, particularly in the developed world, as has cut the cost of technology allowing access to the Internet (cable, satellite, computers, software). (Namibia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information and Broadcasting, 2002).

The convergence of technology platforms has resulted in exciting opportunities in the areas of media and entertainment, e-business, and the dissemination of knowledge for a variety of purposes, be it in the creation of online learning programmes, egovernment services, or a national lottery system. Business has led the way in exploiting the convergence, with previously unheard-of mergers occurring between telecommunications operators, publishing houses, and the film and music industry. The boundaries between IT and Telecommunications are thus becoming increasingly blurred, and the impacts of ICTs on all aspects of life are more dispersed (Namibia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information and Broadcasting, 2002). Moreover, the convergence has equally brought new challenges to the information industries. Apart from the concomitant convergence of related business interests and the convergence of related policy issues, one of the main challenges is the management of the regulatory policies by which these converging technologies are administered. In Nigeria today, the reality of convergence does not seem to be fully properly appreciated. This state of affairs is clearly demonstrated by the tone of the recently proposed communication policy in which only one paragraph in the whole document makes a passing reference to convergence. The broadcasting and information technology policies also suffer similar defects.

However, with the recent adoption of converged licensing option by the Nigerian Communications Commission, the Nigerian ICT industry hopes to keep pace with global technological trends and developments. The objective of this chapter is to take a critical look at the various contending interests in broadcasting, telecommunications and other information industries in Nigeria in form of policies and regulations and to make proposals towards the final emergence of one regulatory body to administer these convergent technologies.

BACKGROUND

An information-based economy is underpinned by information, electronic media and telecommunication technologies that support the exchange of information in a network of users. This network comprises a variety of terminal devices, including telephones, receiving devices and computers, connected to an information infrastructure, incorporating broadcasting and telecommunications, of which the Internet is an increasingly more important component. It is notable that Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) and their associated networks, including the Internet, are understood as performing together the various functions of information creation, processing, transport, preservation and delivery, in a growing diversity of ways. Thus, ICT as a concept incorporates the information in itself, known as content (i.e. sound, images, text and data), as well as the technologies used for broadcasting and telecommunication. ICT supports the different stages namely creation, processing, storage and delivery of content. When properly connected to a broadcasting and telecommunications infrastructure, all of this can operate in a wider, even global, network. Taken together then: