

Harnessing the Harmonious Sounds of Naija Music as Tool for Ethnic Integration in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria, a nation of cultural diversity with several ethnic groups, has contended with challenges related to ethnic tensions and management strategies for national unity. In the continual search for measures of fostering national integration, this study looks at a different perspective on the role of contemporary Nigerian music, often called "Naija music," as a tool for fostering ethnic integration in the country. Relying on secondary sources such as articles, journals, texts, blogs and music data from streaming platforms, through content analysis, it observes that Naija music, characterised by its universal appeal, transcends geographical, linguistic, and cultural boundaries, making it a unifying force that brings Nigerians from various ethnic backgrounds together. This paper argues that the popularity of Naija music, characterised by artists with audiences across all states of the federation, can foster common bonds amongst the diverse entities within the country. This cross-cultural appreciation of Naija music demonstrates its potential as a unifying force in Nigeria. The findings of this research offer valuable insights into the use of music to foster national integration, enhance social cohesion, and promote unity among Nigerians, especially the youths who constitute a significant population.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Integration, National Unity, Naija Music, Youths.

Introduction

Nigeria, with its assorted ethnic composition, has consistently struggled with national integration, given the numerous arrangements of identities, which, despite government efforts at unification, find themselves at more common points of divergence than convergence. As a result, ethnic tensions continue to rise with hostilities directed by members of one ethnic group against another. The government has pursued several measures to unify the country's diverse elements, such as adopting federalism, the federal character principle, unity schools, a national service scheme, etc. Despite these measures, Nigeria continues to grapple with problems of ethnic integration. The need for one whole and indivisible Nigeria calls for exploring other methods to cater to the unending need for ethnic integration.

Therefore, this study looks at music's role in fostering national integration,

particularly pop music, which has become part of mainstream among the youths who patronise songs of artists of diverse identities across the country. This is observable in social events such as weddings, concerts, and festivals, where music from artists, regardless of their ethnic background, is unanimously patronised and enjoyed by all who listen to them. This discernible pattern, therefore, raises the question of the role of music to serve as a low-hanging complementary instrument of national integration in the country.

Accordingly, as Nigeria continues to explore ways to foster national integration, pop music can serve as an instrument to enhance unity by bringing people of diverse ethnic identities together. This unity is attained in the nuances, slang, dance, and melodies of the songs, which helps to connect individuals to similar sources of entertainment and bridge the ethnic divides that exist between them.

Review of Literature

Plurality and Diversity of the Nigerian State

Imam et al. (2014) contend that with over 374 different ethnic groups and a population of over 180 million, Nigeria is the third-most ethnically diverse country in the world, with a jumble of cumbersome and intricate identities. Nigeria adopted a federal system, which is best fit for managing diversity in a manner that guarantees uniformity and preservation of group identity. However, the present reality is that the federal system itself has been defiled, with Osaghae & Suberu (2005) holding that the country is severely divided, with critical political issues fiercely disputed along the lines of convoluted ethnic, religious, and regional divisions with consequences fertile for state fragility and disintegration.

Another defining characteristic of the plural nature of Nigerian Society is the existence of multilingualism, numbering over 515, spoken by over 373 ethnic groups. Similarly, as with multiple ethnic identities, Nigeria is also diverse along religious lines, not in the stretch of ethnicity, but with consequences as striking as ethnicity. This position is reaffirmed by Osaghae and Suberu (2005), stating that religious identification ranks next to ethnicity and serves to activate ethnicity. Adediran et al. (2021) reiterate that over the years, attempts by Christianity and Islam to outwit one another in terms of doctrine, commitment, organisation, and development have stymied their unity and led to the development of fanaticism, which has crystallised along ethnic lines. According to Canci & Odukoya (2016), the Igbo and other smaller ethnic groups living in the South are largely Christians, whereas the Hausa-Fulani and other smaller ethnic groups living in the North of the country are Muslims. At the same time, the Yoruba people of the Southwest are almost equally Muslim and Christian, while groups in the middle belt consist of a mixture of Christians and Muslims. This split between the Muslim North and Christian South in

Nigeria, particularly in Northern Nigeria, where Islamic identity predominates, increases ethnic fractionalisations.

Furthermore, Osaghae and Suberu (2005) argue that the country is also diverse along regional lines, particularly the North/South divide, which later became three regions and subsequently four before it collapsed under military rule. With regionalism reduced to "North for Northerners," "East for Easterners," and "West for Westerners," a discriminatory system that denied rights and privileges to persons from other regions living in these areas and removed them from the political process had taken root, further contributing to the strengthening of the divide between natives and non-natives. (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005) The country is also geographically diverse, with a semiofficial demarcation of the country into geopolitical zones in the aftermath of the 1995 constitutional conference to accommodate states based on their ethnic similarity (Temitope Faluyi et al., 2019). This geographical demarcation also constitutes a form of plurality within the country, as pertinent national issues are usually considered along the lines of the geopolitical arrangement of the country, which sometimes at the elite level and the level of the masses generates contentious conflicts, further deepening flames of hostility in the country.

Thus, from the preceding discussions, Nigeria's plural nature remains despite several legal and constitutional measures to wield disparate identities together. Some of these measures include the adoption of Federalism, the federal character principle, the quota system, zoning, etc. The inadequacies of these measures lie not in their capacity not to respond to the needs that demand them but largely in the manner of implementation.

Management of Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria

Ojie & Ewruhjakpor (2009) opine that the first strategy for managing Nigeria's heterogeneity, particularly in response to conflict, was the adoption of Federalism,

with the contention by Suberu (2010) that Nigerian Federalism serves as a model of constructive federalist ethnic conflict-management. Furthermore, Ukiwo (2005) adds that Nigeria has used a variety of strategies to manage ethnic diversity, including the establishment of regions, states, and local governments, the switch from parliamentary system of government to presidential system of government, the institutionalisation of quota systems, the outlawing of ethnic political parties, consociational politicking, and the adoption of the federal character principle, blaming inadequate implementation, distorted views, and a lack of political will as the causes of the persistent ethnic squabbles in the country.

Others include the therapeutic policies of the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) and Unity Schools. Another adopted strategy for managing conflict is the Rotational Presidency between the six geopolitical zones to ensure the polity's fairness, equity, and fair play (Ojie & Ewhrudjakpor, 2009; Ndubuisi, 2014). Other measures identified by Adediran et al. (2021) include the institutionalisation of democratic tenets, the protection of cultural rights, including the religious and linguistic rights of minorities, the promotion of inclusive narratives and socialisation mechanisms, the establishment of the inter-religious council and the inter-ethnic council, respect and tolerance of cultural differences, and intergovernmental organisations.

Within the plethora of these measures, this study locates the role of Pop music in Nigeria, which has become a dominant feature of national identity. Given the general geographic acceptance of the audience in Nigeria, particularly amongst the youths, it suffices to propose that music can significantly help blur divisive lines in Nigeria and foster social integration. Thus, the next section examines music and social integration, particularly within the Nigerian context.

Music and National Integration in Nigeria

Olaniyan (2006) argues that Nigeria's diverse ethnic makeup presents challenges in establishing a shared national identity, and transitioning from ethnic to national identity can be facilitated through social events, which can effectively communicate national identity through language, dance, drama, music, etc. Olabiwonninu and Amole (2019) contend that music helps to communicate ideas, portray culture, socialise people, stimulate emotions, etc. Implicit from the above is the potential role of music in fostering group integration. According to Parncutt & Dorfer (2011), once existential issues are resolved, art and music may play an essential secondary role in integration, with integration involving acceptance by groups, the lack of prejudice and frequency of contact, stressing that music plays an important role in the negotiation, construction, and maintenance of identities, as the kind of music listened to, shapes and expresses the identity of the listener.

Jerome et al. (2022) explain that music serves diverse functions, including emotional expression, aesthetic pleasure, entertainment, communication, symbolic portrayal, adherence to societal norms, affirmation of social institutions and religious ceremonies, cultural continuity and stability, and social integration. Sa'id et al. (2021) assert that music fosters unity and a shared sense of belonging among individuals, transcending diverse backgrounds. Lidskog (2016) further reiterates that music serves as a symbolic marker for groups, allowing expression and preservation of identity, and provides a platform for shaping and reconsidering identity over time. (Lidskog, 2016).

Koelsch (2013) outlines the social functions of music, comprising: (i) contact-fostering connection among diverse individuals; (ii) cognition- enhancing understanding of the music maker's perspective; (iii) co-pathy- promoting emotional resonance and group cohesion; (iv) communication- facilitating interaction between listener and performer; (v)

coordination- fostering enjoyment through synchronised actions like dancing; (vi) cooperation- involving multiple individuals in music production; and (vii) social cohesion- harmonising diverse backgrounds and blurring divisive identities. These distinct social functions of music help to knit together individuals, thus imbibing the cultural elements of the music and translating them to interactions and relations with other individuals.

In Nigeria, popular music enjoys favourable patronage, particularly amongst the youth. Ojukwu et al. (2016) define popular music as all current musical expressions that possess widespread and immediate appeal, inherently capturing the attention of a large audience. The authors note further that social media and other contemporary technologies have facilitated the diffusion of popular music, turning it into a powerful catalyst for transformation in both societal behaviour and a nation's economy. Ogunrinade (2016) posits that popular music, such as hip-hop and afrobeat, enjoys broad acceptance, transcending cultural and geographical boundaries. It is characterised by universal accessibility, disregarding ethnicity, religion, geography, gender, age, and socio-economic status. According to Jerome, Perry et al. (2022), popular music plays a crucial role in shaping identity, fostering unity, and instilling pride. Examples like Hani music in China, Minoritet1 in Norway, and Iban in Malaysia illustrate how popular music can weave together diverse ethnic identities, reshaping notions of nationalism and influencing majority/minority dynamics, leading to the empirical contention by Jerome, Su-Hie et al. (2022) that Pop music plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' perceptions of unity and belonging, stressing that popular music has a significant impact on the way regular individuals perceive and experience a sense of unity and inclusion within various contexts, be it within a community, a specific location, a region, or a country.

Nigerian artists skillfully blend elements of their cultural identity into music, incorporating local and foreign styles. By

drawing from various regions, artists present a national expression rather than an ethnic one, contributing to establishing a unified Nigerian identity. Historical figures such as Victor Olaiya, I.K. Dairo, Celestine Ukwu, Osita Osadebe, and Fela Anikulapo Kuti exemplify this approach across highlife, juju, and Afrobeat genres (Olaniyan, 2006). Ojukwu et al. (2016) stresses that the language of pop music in Nigeria is mostly composed of pidgin English and a medley of local languages such as Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, showcasing linguistic variety, while some exclusively perform in local languages. Those who perform exclusively in local languages also enjoy widespread patronage by people from other ethnic backgrounds, which, in the aforementioned social functions of music, helps to ensure co-pathy and social cohesion and promotes national cultural identity.

A new generation of artists such as 2face Idibia, usually credited with attracting a whole new generation of millennials to Nigerian music, Psquare, Olumaintain, Lagbaja Dbanj, etc., heralded a new generation of Pop Music from the early 2000s. (Ojukwu et al., 2016) These artists enjoyed significant national acclaim and patronage that saw them perform in almost every nook and cranny of the country. From festivals to concerts to university socials and national events, their music traversed the entirety of the Nigerian ethnic makeup, which blurred divisive lines of tribal or ethnic disharmony. The rendition of their music with largely pidgin language is seen as a catalyst for revitalising national identity, given its capacity to foster linguistic unity, facilitate social identification, and promote informal bonding and solidarity.

Such is the pattern in which the "new school" artists have emerged, whose music further transcends the ethnic conclave of their environment, enabled by the availability of various streaming platforms such as Spotify Music, Apple Music, etc. This new generation of Afrobeats artists embraces a wider inflexion of national music and churns out lyrics focused on love,

parties, fun, national issues, and sometimes religion. These current class of artists have laid the foundation for the new Afrobeats, with pioneering acts like Davido, Wizkid, Tiwa Savage, Yemi Alade, Burna Boy Olamide, Phyno, MI, etc. championing a

new generation and with fans across all states in the Nigerian federation.

For example, in 2021, Spotify data revealed the top 10 music-listening cities in Nigeria, and the data is shown in Table 1 below.

No	State	City
1	Lagos	Lagos
2	Niger	Suleja
3	FCT	Abuja
4	Rivers	Port Harcourt
5	Edo	Benin City
6	Enugu	Enugu
7	Anambra	Onitsha
8	Kano	Kano
9	Oyo	Ibadan
10	Imo	Owerri

Source: (Spotify 2021:SocietyNow, 2021)

Table 1 above shows that pop music by these new school artists is patronised across the major regions in Nigeria, even in states and cities that are accorded minority status within the Nigerian federation. It is also revealed that the most listened-to artists include Burna Boy, wizkid and Asake. Data also shows a 291% year-over-year rise in local music consumption, as Nigerians listened to as much local music in 2022 as they did in 2021. (Eberechukwu Elike, 2022.) Another benefit of pop music in Nigeria, which is a significant part of the entertainment industry, according to Onanuga (2019), is its impact on bolstering the country's economy, with artists consistently securing prestigious accolades at international award ceremonies annually. According to National Bureau of Statistics data, the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector consistently contributed at least 4% to Nigeria's GDP between 2016 and 2021 (Vanguard 2023.) This attests to the significant music consumption in Nigeria

across all areas.

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Theory

This study is anchored on the social identity theory, which explains group mentality and how groups or categories of people behave in collectivity. It was propounded by Tajfel and Turner (1986). The theory helps to understand how humans form and maintain their social identities. The theory states that individuals forge an identity for themselves, maintained through social contact with others. Group membership are formed based on shared characteristics like race, gender, religious affiliations or social status. The Social Identity theory also posits that people derive a part of their self-concept from their perceived membership in a group, which thus intertwines personal identity with group identity. The social identity theory highlights how a person's sense of belonging and status within a group

shapes attitudes and behaviours. The social identity approach emphasises the dynamic and multifaceted nature of identity. Therefore, as stated above, group affiliations are not static; they shift in response to the complex dynamics of human relationships and other environmental factors. (Cynthia, 2023: Paul, 2023)

One major factor that has influenced the growth of Naija Music is the intense emotional and social attachment music lovers feel towards their music idols and the music they produce. From the data available in this study, Naija music has played a pivotal role in unifying a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria. Naija music has been a significant source of employment and empowerment for Nigeria's predominantly youthful population. This accounts for why Naija music enjoys a national appeal. Across the lengths and breadth of Nigeria's vast territory, music is a unifying language enjoyed by all. However, in this study, it must be pointed out that certain musical contents and lyrics do not meet the required values and customs of specific regions in the country, thus subject to censorship. This explains why contemporary Nigerian artists take the time to produce danceable, entertaining music that also addresses contemporary societal issues and trends in the industry. Therefore, even social groups can influence the music that makes the airwaves.

The Unifying Power of Naija Music; Emergence and Characteristics of Contemporary Naija Music, Naija 's music's widespread popularity and appeal.

Historically, Afrobeats originated as a fusion of elements such as traditional African rhythm, Jazz, Funk, and other contemporary musical elements. The use of lengthy instrumental solos, horn components, repeated grooves and complex interplay of diverse rhythms characterised this unique musical genre. Afrobeat attracted worldwide recognition because of its ability to fuse different styles. "Music is a weapon." these were the famous words of

the King and Pioneer of Afrobeats, Fela Kuti, who used his music to protest and radicalism against successive military regimes in a post-independent Nigeria seeking a national identity.

Kwubei (2023) sees music as an integral part of Nigerian Society, with elements of varying cultural identities, particularly through interculturalism. Examples of contemporary Naija Musicians who have reflected some vital elements of interculturalism in their music are Phyno and Olamide with songs such as Fada Fada, Burna Boy and Asake with Sungba, and many others. Interculturalism is reflected in the ways and manners in which artists of diverse ethnic backgrounds in Nigeria unite to churn out musical content that gains nationwide acceptance through the use of popular slang spoken across Nigeria. (Kwubei, 2023) Nwamara (2019) also shared this sentiment about the impact of music in Nigeria by describing music as an integral part of the everyday life of Nigerians, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or background. As a result, music is believed to play an essential role in early character moulding and inculcating cultural and moral values in Nigeria through various kinds of music. For music to facilitate national unity, there must be a fusion of diverse Nigerian languages, as is already being done, as this allows it to gain broader national appeal across all strata of Nigerian Society. (Nwamara, 2019)

Music plays a dual role in Nigeria. First, it contributes to human resource development, which provides employment and entertainment to many people across Nigeria. The second role, which is the focal point of this study, is music as a contributor to, national integration, and nation-building. (Okoye, 2022) Afrobeat/Naija music has become Nigeria's selling point over the years by promoting Nigeria's cultural and global identity, tourism, economy, cross-cultural influence, and, above all, a form of national integration. Contemporary Naija Music artists like Olamide, Davido, Wizkid, and Asake enjoy nationwide support, and they have contributed a great deal in forging a sense of

unity and national consciousness through their lyrics, which are national in outlook. Naija music is popularly enjoyed across all regions of the country, and its core characteristics in this contemporary time of infusing the various languages and dialects are noteworthy aspects of Naija music, which is a selling point. (Juliet, 2023)

Previously, live musical performances were exclusive to elites during important celebrations. However, music has become accessible to every Nigerian with access to phones or other music-enabled devices. Artists like Burna Boy, Davido, Wizkid, and Olamide are transcending boundaries, bringing Afrobeats/Naija Music to a global audience by captivating famous venues across Europe and North America. This trend suggests that Naija music could become a vital tool for national integration

and interconnectedness if strategically utilised by the government. Recent years have seen Wizkid, Davido, Burna Boy, Olamide, Rema, Asake, and others playing pivotal roles in exporting Naija music to a global audience, evident in the numerous invitations they receive to international music shows and festivals. Consequently, Naija music has effectively bridged cultural and physical barriers, establishing itself in a global music industry once dominated by the American music scene. Notably, Rema, an emerging Naija artist, made history by performing his hit songs at the FIFA Ballon d'Or for the first time, marking a significant milestone for Nigeria's music industry. This transboundary sojourn of Nigerian pop music and acceptance attests to Naija music's capacity to bridge ethnic rupture in the country.

Table 2: Contemporary Naija Music Artists with Cross-Ethnic Fan Bases: Patterns and trends in music Consumption and Appreciation

Artist	Top 5 Location of Listeners
Asake	Lagos, NG 542,833 listeners Katsina, NG 228,948 listeners Port Harcourt, NG 201,286 listeners London, GB 197,341 Listeners Nairobi, KE 160,364 listener
Odumodu	Lagos, NG 434,757 listeners Katsina, NG 197,547 listeners Port Harcourt, NG 186,836 listeners Ibadan, NG 102,910 listeners Anambra, NG 57,367 listeners
Davido.	Lagos, NG 484,311 listeners London, GB 255,340 Listeners Katsina, NG 202,840 listeners Port Harcourt, NG 185,463 listeners Amsterdam, NL 176,291 listeners

Artist	Top 5 Location of Listeners
MI	Lagos, NG 54,817 listeners Katsina, NG 21,012 listeners Port Harcourt, NG 20,464 listeners Ibadan, NG 10,339 listeners Accra, GH 4,478 listeners
Omah lay	Lagos, NG 457,473 listeners Paris, FR 212,808 listeners Katsina, NG 196,854 listeners
Kizz Daniel	Lagos, NG 422,795 listeners Katsina, NG 164,150 listeners Port Harcourt, NG 152,769 listeners Nairobi, KE 4,239,964 mol London, GB 99,669 Listeners

Source: Spotify 2023

Table 2 above consists of selected artists representing various ethnic identities in Nigeria, with Odumodu from the Eastern part of the country, Asake, Davido, and Kizz Daniel from the western part, MI from the North and Omah from the minority region of the country. This shows that despite their diverse backgrounds, they enjoy patronage from different audiences across all regions of the country.

Implications for Ethnic Integration and National Unity

Nigerian music is a powerful cultural and national cohesion catalyst through various interconnected elements. Rooted in a shared cultural experience, it intricately weaves diverse elements from Nigeria's rich cultural tapestry, breaking down barriers and fostering a common identity among its people. This inclusivity is exemplified in the language used by many Nigerian artists,

seamlessly blending English with local languages to make their music accessible to individuals from different linguistic backgrounds. Moreover, the celebration of diversity within the lyrics and themes of Nigerian music promotes a sense of unity amid the country's various cultural identities.

The popularity of iconic artists like Wizkid, Davido, and Burna Boy transcends regional and ethnic boundaries, providing a shared cultural reference point for people nationwide. This popularity contributes to a positive national narrative by communicating uplifting stories about Nigeria and its potential and acts as a form of cultural diplomacy on the global stage. Nigerian music, embraced particularly by the youth, serves as a unifying force among the younger generation, resonating with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Social media platforms

amplify this unity, creating virtual spaces where conversations and interactions around Nigerian music connect people. Additionally, cross-cultural collaborations within the music industry and the vibrant festival and concert culture featuring popular Nigerian artists further exemplify unity, showcasing how individuals from diverse backgrounds can come together for a common cultural celebration.

Emphasis must also be laid on the importance of music education to foster national development. Music education enlightens the populace and music Producers on the economics of music production, the employment opportunities that music offers and its unifying potential. When Musical artists are properly educated, they can use the contents of their music to promote socialisation, traditional heritage, unity, oneness and harmony. (Daniel Anazia, 2016.) expressed concerns about the lyrics and contents of contemporary Naija music, which he describes as a necessity since music is a means to foster socialisation on a large scale. The pervasive nature of contemporary Naija music has affected teenagers' and youths' social and moral behaviour. Most contemporary artists focus on the business side of music while paying little or no attention to the contents of the music. Some musical content has been proven to contribute to moral decadence in Society, thereby betraying the essence of national integration. Some of these lyrics focus on sexualisation, money, drugs, partying, girls, clubbing, etc., which have adverse effects on the socialisation, mood and social interactions of Nigerian youths. Therefore, Naija music can only influence nation-building if it promotes creativity and positive messages that centre on the beautiful side of love, national unity, harmony, oneness and societal issues.

Ogunrinade (2015) stresses that, music creates job and wealth opportunities for a wide variety of people in the country, ranging from Music Producers to songwriters, Videographers, Graphic designers, etc. Hence, music offers unlimited potential for national development at both the human and

material levels of a multicultural and multilingual society like Nigeria. In the same vein, Udo-Awaih and Kelechukwu (2018.) emphasised that Nigerian music constitutes a significant part of the tourism industry. With its current trends and trajectory, it has the potential to become a strong and domineering global musical genre that can surpass hip-hop and other established global genres if properly nurtured, supported and exported as a product. With a unique selling point and a Nationwide consumption rate, Naija music can contribute to economic growth and elusive national integration.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Nigerian music catalyses national integration by providing a shared cultural experience, promoting inclusivity, celebrating diversity, and fostering a positive national narrative. From its historical roots to contemporary manifestations, Naija music has evolved into a cultural phenomenon that transcends ethnic, linguistic, and regional boundaries. Naija artist's widespread appeal and influence contribute to a sense of unity among the diverse cultural identities within Nigeria. Moreover, the proliferation of streaming platforms has further widened the reach of Naija music, enabling it to resonate with audiences across different demographics and geographic locations. Additionally, the collaborative nature of the music industry and the vibrant festival culture surrounding Nigerian music exemplify the spirit of unity and cooperation among artists and fans alike. Therefore, it can be implied that contemporary pop music in Nigeria has the potential capacity to perform significant welding of ethnic identities through its language medley and its appeal, which is adopted in various social events such as concerts, festivals, sports and games, and other national programs.

There is a call for greater investment in music education and support for the music industry to harness its full potential for national development. Nigeria can leverage its rich musical heritage to drive cultural

diplomacy and social integration by nurturing talent, promoting creativity, and fostering an environment conducive to artistic expression. With proper guidance and stewardship, Naija music can emerge as a dominant global genre, representing Nigeria's cultural richness and serving as a national unity and pride catalyst. Therefore, more efforts should be put into promoting Naija music, and contemporary Naija artists should partner with the government and relevant agencies of Society in promoting peace, harmony and national development.

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