



Insights



AIRTEL AFRICA DEPLOYS 1,500 BASE STATIONS IN ONE YEAR

PUNCH

Africa's second biggest telco, Airtel, expanded its telecommunications infrastructure in Nigeria with the addition of more than 1,500 base stations over the past year, strengthening broadband capacity and extending connectivity to

underserved areas as demand for data services continues to rise.

The expansion forms part of the company's broader investment strategy aimed at improving network quality, supporting growing internet adoption and reinforcing Nigeria's digital economy, the operator, which has 650 million customers, said in a statement. Over the past three years, Airtel Nigeria has increased its national site count from just above 13,000 to nearly 17,200 sites.

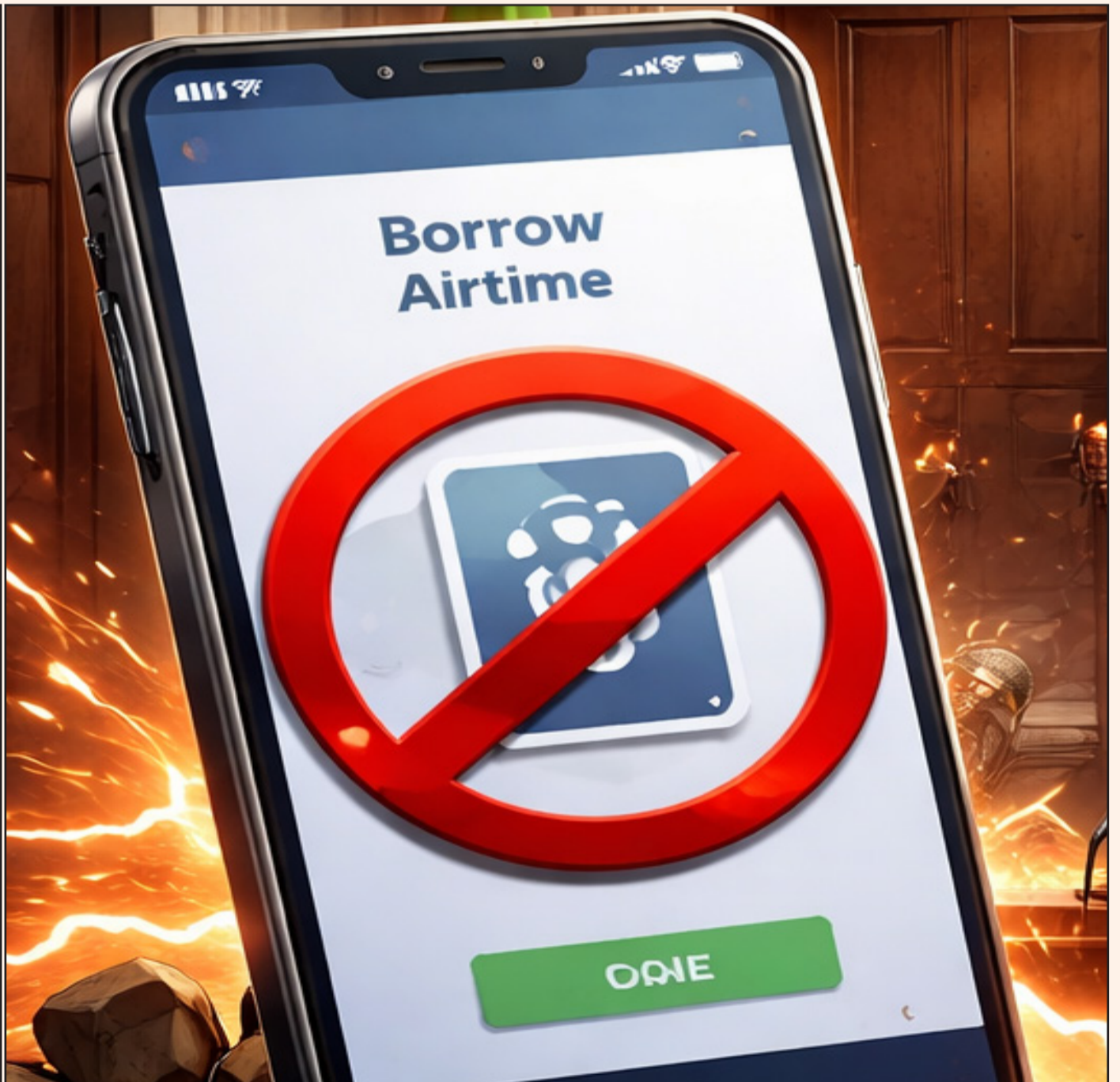
WHY MTN AND AIRTEL TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED AIRTIME LENDING IN NIGERIA

TEHCABAL

Nigeria's largest telecom operators are temporarily suspending airtime and data loan services, a once-sticky feature for prepaid users, as new consumer lending rules force them into full regulatory compliance.

On Thursday, MTN Nigeria, the country's largest telco, temporarily suspended its airtime and data lending product, Xtra-time, and Airtel Nigeria, the second-largest provider, followed suit on Friday, citing the need to align with "evolving requirements." Both companies say customers can still purchase airtime and bundles through standard channels.

Nigerian telecom providers are reviewing their digital lending services to consumers following new rules by the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC), passed in July 2025.

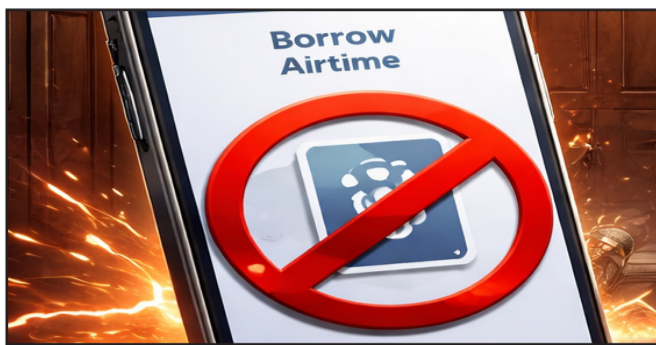


MTN NIGERIA HITS 25GBPS MILESTONE - FIRST IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA TO TEST BREAK-THROUGH TECH

NIGERIA COMMUNICATIONS WEEK

MTN Nigeria has etched its name in telecom history as the first in Sub-Saharan Africa to test a commercial 25Gbps full duplex microwave link on the E-band spectrum, partnering with Huawei to unlock ultra-high-speed 5G connectivity. Conducted using 1000MHz in the 80GHz E-band, the breakthrough quadruples spectral efficiency over traditional systems, enabling simultaneous two-way data transmission that supports video streaming, AR, and low-latency apps.





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Airtel Nigeria continues to expand its network capacity as it continues to build to close the gap with MTN Nigeria. Over the past three years, Airtel Nigeria has increased its national site count from just above 13,000 to nearly 17,200 sites, representing one of the fastest infrastructure consolidations by the operator, with more than 1,500 of those sites added in the past year alone. The expansion has targeted all ends of the market, deepening its capacity in congested urban corridors as well as improving its rural presence. Beyond towers, Airtel is also advancing plans for a second submarine cable internet landing point in Kwa Ibo in Akwa Ibom State as part of the 2Africa cable system rollout, which would improve redundancy, increase speeds, and enhance national network reliability. On the 5G side of things, Airtel has also more than doubled its 5G sites in recent months and plans to expand coverage to 25 percent of its sites across Nigeria's top 20 cities by year-end.

Airtel's aggressive infrastructure rollout carries implications across ntel's business pillars. For Project Titan, ntel is already benefiting from Airtel's strategy as we are on track to deliver colocation sites to support Airtel's infrastructure rollout. As this expansion continues, it is expected that with ntel's commitment to delivering a very high level of service—especially with a target power availability of 99.9%—ntel would in the coming years become a critical part of Airtel's expansion strategy. For Project Beam, this infrastructure rollout is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, Airtel's rollout is a strong signal that customer experience would continue to improve, making it difficult to compete directly on voice and data provision. On the other hand, a denser and faster Airtel network makes it a very suitable host network for ntel's national roaming services, meaning that the quality of connectivity ntel can promise its subscribers improves as Airtel's infrastructure improves.

WHY MTN AND AIRTEL TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED AIRTIME LENDING IN NIGERIA

In the past week, mobile network operators in Nigeria (MTN Nigeria and Airtel Nigeria) announced the suspension of their airtime and data lending services, citing the need to align with evolving regulatory requirements under the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC)'s Digital, Electronic, Online or Non-Traditional Consumer Lending Regulations introduced in July 2025. The FCCPC explained that operators were given a 90-day compliance window from July 2025, which was then extended to January 2026, and still the required steps were not completed. The FCCPC claims the suspension of these services is a direct consequence of the non-compliance of MNOs.

The financial value of these services is not small. In 2025, MTN Nigeria's fintech revenue stood at 191.3 billion naira, growing 80% from the previous year, with a significant portion of that coming from airtime lending and other value-added services rather than its core mobile money product. For Airtel, the "other" revenue bucket where airtime and data credit earnings sit reported \$113 million for the nine months to December 2025, compared to just \$6 million from its mobile money product SmartCash over the same period, making it clear that airtime lending is a service of great value.

In Issue 6 of this newsletter, it was highlighted that telco customers were considered one of the most exploited customer segments in the country by the FCCPC. Thus, this move seems like a response to addressing this phenomenon. For ntel, this carries a very specific lesson. The DEON framework requires any company providing or managing digital credit to officially register its operations. To get approved, businesses must hand over their corporate documents and be completely transparent about how they lend money, including their interest rates and any late fees. They also need to list every app they use to issue credit and prove that their systems keep customer data safe and secure under Nigerian law.

Thus, if ntel intends to offer any form of credit advance services, the compliance architecture must be built into the products before they are launched. In previous issues, there has also been an emphasis on the need for ntel to ensure it is fully compliant with the FCCPC's guidelines, as the commission has a renewed commitment to its mandate of protecting the customer. For ntel, as a re-emerging operator, it is important that we put all measures in place to avoid customer complaints, as bigger operators like MTN and Airtel have the ability to absorb losses associated with non-compliance. For ntel, it could be more damaging.



MTN NIGERIA HITS 25GBPS MILESTONE - FIRST IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA TO TEST BREAKTHROUGH TECH

MTN Nigeria has hit a milestone that no other operator in Sub-Saharan Africa has reached. In a partnership with Huawei, they successfully tested the first commercial 25Gbps full-duplex microwave link. Essentially, this technology uses the E-band spectrum to create a massive "invisible highway" for data, achieving four times the efficiency of traditional systems. By allowing simultaneous two-way transmission, this setup can eventually scale to a staggering 50Gbps. For the average subscriber, this means base stations can handle far more traffic without the typical "slowdown," leading to much better everyday speeds.

For ntel, this is a major signal for the future of Project Titan. A tower is only as valuable as the data pipeline feeding it, and MTN's breakthrough proves that backhaul capacity is entering a new era of efficiency. A site supported by a 25Gbps link is far more attractive for co-location because it can serve more users and handle much heavier data loads. The takeaway is clear: for Project Titan to stay competitive, we must treat backhaul capability as a core criterion—right alongside power and security. In today's market, a well-connected tower is the kind of infrastructure differentiation that operators are actually willing to pay for.