

XENOPHOBIA AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: A STUDY AND MORAL EVALUATION OF CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN-NIGERIAN CONFLICTS ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Afunugo, Kenechi Nnaemeka
Department of Religion and Human Relations
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
nk.afunugo@unizik.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of digital platforms in shaping xenophobic tensions and national identity between South Africans and Nigerians. It uses a qualitative methodology that includes content analysis of social media discourse and interviews with affected individuals. Social identity theory was utilized in evaluating its observations. The research addresses the growing problem of xenophobic rhetoric against Nigerians in South Africa, often fueled by online interactions in contemporary times. It seeks to fill a gap in understanding how these digital conflicts contribute to national identity formation and exacerbate real-world violence. A moral evaluation highlights the ethical responsibilities of individuals; social media platforms, and governments in mitigating xenophobic hate speech and promoting intercultural dialogue. The findings suggest that digital platforms amplify xenophobic sentiments, creating echo chambers that deepen divisions between the two nationalities. This was clearly exemplified in the focus of this research which is recent online tensions between Nigerians and South Africans regarding the booking and cancellation of ride-hailing services like Bolt and Uber, as well as the frustration caused by the increase in online purchases made by Nigerians in South Africa. These purchases were often used as pranks, causing financial losses for drivers and businesses. The study recommends stricter moderation policies in social media; government-led bilateral dialogues; and educational programs that emphasize shared Africans identities and histories to foster mutual understanding and reduce conflict.

Keywords: Xenophobia, National Identity, Moral Evaluation, Digital Platforms, Conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

The role of digital platforms in escalating conflicts and tensions between nationalities cannot be overemphasized. In this regards, Zeitsoff (2017) argues in his framework that digital platforms, distinctively social media, influences conflicts by reducing communication costs, increasing the speed and spread of information, and driving strategic interactions and adaptations among conflict actions. He affirms that it provides new data that reshapes available information, influencing the dynamics of the conflict itself. Niekerk et al (2013) aver that social media fosters information-based conflict by enabling rapid dissemination and access to information, which can shape political landscapes and fuel civil disturbances. The authors enunciate that its role in major political events, such as the 2009 Iranian elections and the 2011 uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, shows how it can be used to mobilize populations and challenge established authorities. Niekerk et al posit that by means of facilitating communication, organization and the spread of both accurate and false information, social media services as a tool in strategic security and military operations, amplifying its influence in modern conflict.

Uzochukwu et al (2019) maintain that hate speech on digital platforms, especially social media, contributes to societal conflicts by influencing public opinion. Their study highlight the difficulty in clearly defining and measuring hate speech, as it can be manipulated to target

opposition or suppress criticism. Relatively, Proctor (2021) portrays that digital space, significantly social media, is constantly weaponized in fragile states in fueling conflict through disinformation, electoral manipulation, and extremist recruitment. Hochwald (2024) states that digital platforms affect intra-state conflicts by amplifying civil society's influence, challenging authoritarian regimes, and by shifting power dynamics. He insists that social media have been used by both revolutionaries and governments, playing roles in events like the Arab Spring. Initially viewed as empowering citizens, the author enunciates that governments now also exploit these tools for their own security and control, reshaping conflicts strategies.

The contemporary South African-Nigerian conflicts on virtual interfaces, particularly pertinent to the frustrations regarding the dubious and deceitful online bookings and cancellations of ride-hailing services like Bolt and Uber which both nations experiences alongside the increase in volume of online purchases made by Nigerians in South Africa; represent a significant manifestation of xenophobia, deeply intertwined with issues of national identity. These tensions are often expressed through social media, where economic competition, immigration, and cultural differences fuel hostile interactions. This study critically examines the role of digital platforms in escalating xenophobic rhetoric, exploring how online spaces shape and reflect broader societal attitudes. Additionally, it provides a moral evaluation of these conflicts, questioning the ethical implications of digital discourse and its impact on both nations' identities and relations in an increasingly interconnected world. The Social Identity Theory (SIT) was utilized in evaluating this work. This study employs a qualitative approach, incorporating analysis of social media discussions and conducting interviews with impacted individuals.

THE DYNAMICS OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICA AND NIGERIA

The relationship between South Africa and Nigeria is characterized by both rivalry and partnership, as they compete for influence in Africa while occasionally collaborating on regional and global issues. Odubajo et al (2017) examine the evolving relationship between Nigeria and South Africa, emphasizing their competition for regional dominance in Africa while pursuing national interests. The authors highlight that their interactions fluctuate between political conflict and cooperation. They conclude that both collaboration and competition shape their relations, and their ability to work together could benefit the African continent, though their pursuit of national interests may either foster or hinder this potential cooperation. Deliberating on the interplay of the relationship between South Africa and Nigeria, Adebajo (2019) accentuates that it is typified by both collaborations and competition. While they are pivotal to Africa's political and economic integration, tensions arise from differing perceptions. He intimates that Nigerians feel South Africans are ungrateful for Nigeria's role in the anti-apartheid struggle and see South African companies as dominating their market, while South Africans criticize Nigerian involvement in crime and face challenges doing business in Nigeria. Despite these differences, Adebajo delineates that both nations share economic, social, and political similarities and are vital players in shaping Africa's future.

Ogo et al (2015) analyzes the changing dynamics of the relationship between Nigeria and South Africa since Nigeria's independence. Initially, relations were strained due to Nigeria's anti-apartheid stance, which the South African government viewed as hostile. However, in 1992, diplomatic ties improved following a visit from South African president De Klerk. While tensions arose during the Mandela-Abacha era, relations normalized under Mbeki and Obasanjo. The Zuma and Jonathan administrations faced diplomatic challenges, alternating between cooperation and discord. The authors argue that both countries, as Africa's largest economies, should prioritize friendly relations to promote mutual benefits and strengthen their bilateral ties. Ajiboye (2024) analyzes the economic relationship between South Africa and Nigeria from 2013 to 2018; stressing that it is marked by significant trade, investment, and diplomatic interacting,

despite underlying tensions and challenges. According to the author, the period saw fluctuating trade volumes, peaking at \$6.1 billion in 2014 and declining to \$3.8 billion by 2018, influenced by commodity prices and regulatory issues. Both nations have made investments in each other's economies, particularly in telecommunications and banking, yet face challenges like trade imbalances and infrastructure limitations. Ajiboye's study highlights the need for improved cooperation through initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) and emphasizes the importance of transitioning from competitive to collaborative relations to enhance economic growth and regional integration.

Bariledum et al (2022) while studying the foreign policies of Nigeria and South Africa alongside their contributions to African development, observe that while both nations are pivotal to Africa's progress, Nigeria's foreign policy has a greater impact compared to South Africa's. The authors illuminate that the relationship between the two countries has fluctuated between tension and cooperation, marked by regional leadership competition. They conclude that in order to effectively tackle current African challenges, Nigeria and South Africa should strengthen their ties and establish a collaborative political, economic and cultural agenda, with Nigeria recognizing South Africa's potential to alleviate some leadership pressures. Ogunnubi et al (2022) articulate the issue of xenophobia in South Africa and its effects on Nigeria-South Africa relations, highlighting the paradox of xenophobia attacks despite shared African ideals of unity. Discussing the rivalry and cooperation between the two countries; the authors argue that the Nigerian government's inadequate use of citizen diplomacy contributes to the prejudice and violence faced by Nigerians in South Africa. They propose policy recommendations to strengthen the Nigeria-South Africa partnership, including the implementation of a cultural mix policy and early warning systems to address and reduce xenophobic conflicts.

Odock (2002) while examining the shift in relations between Nigeria and South Africa from competition to cooperation attributes this change to evolving national interests and a shared goal of continental leadership amid globalization. The author argues that while this cooperation offers potential benefits, foreign multinational cooperation's dominate key economic sectors likely making them the primary beneficiaries. Additionally, difference in the internal class structures of the ruling elites in both countries may limit the depth of their cooperation, raising doubts about their ability to effectively tackle the challenges posed by globalization.

MORAL ASSESSMENT OF THE DYNAMICS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICA AND NIGERIA

The findings from this study in conjunction with the insights from C. Ezenwokike, O. Otama, K. Ezelibe and J. Ozor (personal communication, September 3rd, 2024) exhibit that the relationship between South Africa and Nigeria is shaped by a complex interplay of historical, economic, political, and cultural factors. Both nations have endured colonial legacies and struggles for independence, particularly South Africa's fight against apartheid. This shared history underscores the importance of solidarity and mutual support among African nations as they work to overcome the lasting impacts of colonialism. A moral assessment of their dynamics promotes the necessity for collaboration rather than competition in fostering unity across the continent.

As two of Africa's largest economies, Nigeria and South Africa often find themselves in competition for influence and resources, leading to ethical considerations around their economic interactions. This rivalry raises questions about the balance between cooperation and protectionism. A moral evaluation favours collaborative efforts in trade, investment, and infrastructure development, which can benefit both countries and contribute to regional stability. In the political arena, changes in leadership and differing policies can strain relations, emphasizing the need for respectful diplomatic engagement to promote peace and stability within the region.

Social issues, including xenophobia in South Africa and the perceptions of Nigeria immigrants, require a moral lens that prioritizes empathy, understanding, and the rejection of discrimination. Both countries play crucial roles in the African Union and other regional organizations, and their collaboration on security and development issues reflects a moral responsibility to promote African unity and progress. Via fostering cultural exchanges and mutual respect for each other's traditions; South Africa and Nigeria have the opportunity to enrich their relationship, working together towards a more united and prosperous Africa while addressing contemporary challenges.

NIGERIA-SOUTH AFRICA ONLINE DISPUTES OVER FRAUDULENT BOLT AND UBER DRIVERS ORDERS

The online tensions and conflict between Nigerians and South Africans apposite to the use of ride-hailing services like Bolt and Uber escalated with South Africans booking rides in Nigeria and canceling them to prank Nigerian drivers, causing financial losses and frustration. In retaliation, according to I. Mojekwu, O. Adebisi, N. Johnson, D. Newman, and L. Mohammed (Personal communication, September 5th, 2024), Nigerians started doing the same, booking and canceling rides in South Africa. This resulted in a price surge in cities like Cape Town and Johannesburg, leaving some South Africans stranded due to increased ride costs.

Ikeji (2024) records that in retaliation to the recent “order war” initiated by South Africans, Nigerian users drove up taxi fares in South Africa by coordinating ride-hailing drivers to gather at particular spots. This follows South Africans bragging on X (formerly twitter) about intentionally wasting Nigerian driver's time by placing ride orders and then canceling them. Ikeji underscores that Nigerians and some South Africans expressed outrage over the prank, describing it as vile and cruel. Ezeamalu (2024) underlines that an X user, @i-am-feezeah, criticized both South Africans and Nigerians for their actions in the Bolt conflict, pointing out that innocent drivers trying to support their families are the ones suffering.

Abdullahi (2024) details that the challenge sparked a social media debate, with Nigerians leveraging their larger population to dominate the prank. He further recounts that X users highlighted the financial disadvantage of the online war for South Africans. Some South Africans conceded defeat, while others expressed concerns over the impact on driver's livelihoods. Abdullahi notes that the rivalry intensified following the withdrawal of Nigeria born Chidinma Adetshina from the Miss South Africa pageant due to backlash over her nationality. Opanuga (2024) chronicles that Bolt Nigeria's country manager, Yahaya Mohammed, addressed the fake ride request issue involving individuals in Nigeria and South Africa, assuring measures to protect drivers and enhance platform security. Despite these steps, tensions between Nigerians and South Africans kept heightening online, with users in X exchanging heated remarks. Opanuga relates that some warn of worsening conflicts, while others highlight the risks of fueling animosity between the two nations. The online feud according to the author reflects deeper frustrations, with both sides engaging in banter and raising concerns about the real-world impact of the issue.

Jade Empress #ATE (2024, August 23) an X user, made a resounding statement regarding the issue against South Africans thus:

This time around you are targeting the Nigerians minding their own business in their own country? You cannot even use the excuse that it is because they are illegal in your country. They are in their own country, yet you are doing this. Later you people will deny the xenophobia when accused. (p.1).

Amara_Nwankpa (2024, August 23), another X user consents that “xenophobia harms random, innocent people” (p. 1). While Thabiso (2024 August 24), a South African X user delineates that:

“This is behind wrong. This guy is in his own country trying to make an honest living. Is your beef not with the illegal immigrants in South Africa Kanti? There's nothing funny about this, you are a horrible person” (p. 1). Maya (2024) enunciates in his own perspective that the situation of these online bookings is worsened by Nigeria's fuel scarcity and rising cost of living, with screenshots showing South Africans mocking their Nigerian victims in local languages. The author streamlines that in retaliation, Nigerians escalated the fake ride orders by engaging South African drivers in time-wasting conversations, giving absurd locations like “Illorin post office” in Cape Town. Maya illustrates that one Nigerian even joked about transporting human body parts, to which a South African driver shockingly agreed, offering advice on packaging. According to his documentation, Nigerians vowed to continue these pranks, with one X user stating, “we go lower until we find oil” (p. 3). The synopsis of Maya's report showcases that Uber and Bolt apps can be easily manipulated for mischief, allowing users to book riders in other countries without detection. Kupemba et al (2024) elucidate that Bolt subsequently suspended accounts and restricted inter-country ride requests due to the rise in fake ride booking between Nigeria and South Africa, impacting its operations. They intimate that Bolt confirmed that the restriction only applies to Nigeria and South Africa.

NIGERIA'S NETIZENS EXTENDING ONLINE DISPUTE TO FRAUDULENT ORDERING OF ONLINE GOODS

Zage (2024) records that the online conflict went beyond ride-hailing requests, with some Nigerians placing fake food orders from South Africa businesses, as illustrated in an X user's post (cited by Zage) to wit: “South Africa has restaurants where you can order food and pay upon delivery. I am not saying anything” (p.1). This statement by Harry @chiditweets,042 August 22, 2024 (cited by Zage), highlights a practice in South African restaurants where customers can order food and pay upon delivery. The X user thus was calling attention to Nigerian Netizens to use that platform in frustrating the South Africans more by ordering fraudulent online food to frustrate South Africans online fast food vendors.

Zage (2024) details that the tension between Nigeria and South Africa stems from xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in South Africa, particularly in 2019 when Nigerian-owned businesses were targeted. He stresses that while Nigerians in South Africa often possess better skill and education, locals accuse them of organized crime. Despite this, Nigeria historically supported South Africa during apartheid, issuing passports to South Africans, boycotting events, and raising awareness through cultural contributions. The author maintains that the future of the relationship between South Africa and Nigeria depends on resolving underlying issues and rebuilding mutual respect.

Jaiyeola (2024) specified that there were also Nigerians who visited online relationship sites, seeking to connect with new friends with the motive of frustrating them. Lethabo Francina (cited by Jaiyeola) shared on her X account that “someone asked me to wait for him on a street in South Africa, but after two hours, I realized it was all just a prank” (p. 3). One can thus reckon the height of the online beef. Ikeji (2024) assents that Nigerians later intensified the online war by targeting additional South African businesses, including restaurants offering pay-on-delivery services, in a coordinated effort to disrupt operations as act of retaliation.

THE REMOTE CAUSES OF TENSION BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICANS AND NIGERIANS IN DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL SPACES

Udeoji (2017) asserts that the remote causes of the online and physical crises between South Africa and Nigeria stem from a combination of ineffective migration control leading to increased migrant influx, poor governance resulting in unemployment and socioeconomic challenges, fears among South Africans about job competition and identity loss due to migrants, and the

involvement of some Nigerians in criminal activities. She avers that these factors contribute to ongoing xenophobic violence against Nigerian migrants, including extrajudicial killings, which threaten regional stability and hinder economic integration efforts in Africa. Nwanganga et al (2022) in their study, highlights that the tension between South Africa in both digital and physical spaces is rooted in the deepening poverty among South Africans, which has been linked to the rising incidence of xenophobic attacks on Nigerians and other foreign nationals in South Africa. The South African government's failure to effectively address these attacks has contributed to a culture of xenophobia exacerbated by economic hardship and social unrest. The authors posit that this environment of fear and hostility is fueled by misconceptions about migrants taking jobs and resources, creating a volatile atmosphere that affects both digital and physical interactions between South Africans and Nigerians.

Ultimately, from the findings of this study apposite to the recent online tensions between South Africa and Nigeria, the remote causes of the conflict between the two nations both in digital and physical spaces stem from various underlying causes, primarily rooted in economic competition and xenophobia. Many Nigerians migrate to South Africa in search of better opportunities, leading to perceptions among South Africans that these immigrants are taking jobs and resources amid existing high unemployment rates. This competition fosters resentment and a sense of rivalry, exacerbated by waves of xenophobic violence directed at Nigerians, who are often scapegoated for comprehensive economic frustrations. This animosity is further fueled by stereotypes portraying Nigerians as heavily involved in criminal activities, such as drug trafficking and internet fraud, which fosters distrust and deepens societal divides.

Additionally, the historical relationship between the two nations has evolved negatively since Nigeria's support for South Africa during apartheid, with contemporary political and diplomatic tensions surfacing during episodes of xenophobia or inflammatory rhetoric from leaders. Social media has amplified these tensions, as incidents of violence against Nigerians are widely shared, often leading to heated discussions and misinformation. Cultural differences and misunderstandings further contribute to the strain, as varying values and communication styles can lead to conflict in everyday interactions, both online and in urban communications. This complex interplay of factors creates an ongoing atmosphere of hostility and resentment between the two countries.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY (SIT)

Neighbors et al (2013) posit that Social Identity Theory examines how being part of a group shapes one's self-image and influences how one view others within their peculiar group, those outside it, and members of competing groups. The theory has been widely applied to understand why people tend to favour their own group (in-group favouritism) and discriminate against those not in their group (out-group bias).

McLeod (2023) expounds that Social Identity Theory developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, suggests that a significant part of an individual's self-concept comes from their association with social groups. The theory aims to explain the mental processes and social conditions that drive intergroup behaviour, particularly in relation to prejudice, bias, and discrimination. The author stresses that a person's social identity is shaped by the groups they belong to, forming an important aspect of their sense of self. McLeod intimates that in 1979, Tajfel and Turner argued that belonging to groups – whether it is one's nationality, social class, family, or sports team – serves as a major source of pride and self-worth.

Ellemers (2024) declares that in social psychology, Social Identity Theory explores the relationship between personal identity and group identity. It seeks to clarify and predicts when people view themselves as unique individuals versus members of a group. The theory also

examines how both personal and social identities influence individual perceptions and group behaviour.

EVALUATING THE DIGITAL TENSION BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICANS AND NIGERIANS USING SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Social Identity Theory (SIT) suggests that individuals categorize themselves and others into groups, forming part of their self-concept based on their group memberships. In this context, South Africans and Nigerians, belonging to distinct national identities, experience a sense of in-group versus out-group competition. Negative stereotyping, reinforced by past conflicts such as xenophobic attacks in South Africa and perceptions of economic competition, amplifies this tension. Nigerians are often portrayed in South African media and digital spaces as competitors for jobs and resources, while Nigerians, in turn, view these reactions as unfair and discriminatory. According to Social Identity Theory, individuals derive their self-esteem from their group identity and any perceived threat to the status or dominance of their group, leads to defensive behaviour. On digital platforms, this results in South Africans and Nigerians displaying behaviours that reinforce their national superiority. South Africans may argue about sovereignty, the protection of local resources, and the impact of Nigerian immigration, while Nigerians emphasize their entrepreneurial spirit and contributions to the South African economy. These digital interactions become polarized, with both groups engaging in collective self-affirmation, further deepening the divide.

Furthermore, evaluating the recent digital tension between South Africans and Nigerians regarding fraudulent online booking of Ubers and goods from the lens of Social Identity Theory; one underscores that both groups perceive each other as distinct in-groups and out-groups. South Africans often attribute these fraudulent activities to Nigerians, reinforcing negative stereotypes and deepening the divide. In turn, Nigerians feel unfairly targeted and defend their collective identity, leading to heightened online conflict. These cycles of attacks, counter-attacks, blames, and defenses are fueled by social competition, comparison and antagonism, where each group focuses on preserving its national image while amplifying the negative traits of the other.

It is imperative to reinforce that social comparison which is a key aspect of Social Identity Theory ignites social competition which produces social antagonism. This also explains why the tensions persist online. Each group compares itself to the other, often highlighting positive traits within their in-group and focusing on negative traits of the out-group. These comparisons are often exacerbated by sensationalized news, cultural differences, and economic disparities, creating a cycle of digital hostility. This dynamic can also extend to the diaspora, where South Africans and Nigerians engage in debates over national pride and cultural identity, often reinforcing the negative stereotypes that lead to further division and online conflict.

MORAL EVALUATION OF DIGITAL CONFLICTS BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICANS AND NIGERIANS

The digital conflicts between South Africans and Nigerians often seen on social media can be morally evaluated through the lens of ethics, mutual respect, the psychological backlash associated with it, and the value of intercultural dialogues. These online clashes are usually rooted in xenophobia, competition, and misinformation, with users from both sides engaging in harmful generalizations and accusations that deepen divisions rather than promoting understanding. An ethical perspective suggests that the propagation of hate speech, stereotyping, and cyber-bullying violates the principles of human dignity and mutual respect. These digital conflicts foster intolerance and perpetuate false narratives about both groups, ignoring the shared histories and struggles both nations have faced, especially regarding colonialism and economic

hardship. The ease of spreading misinformation online exacerbates tensions, as sensationalist posts and divisive rhetoric gain traction more rapidly than calls for unity and peace.

The moral implications also extend to the psychological and emotional well-being of individuals involved in or exposed to these digital conflicts. Online hate speech and xenophobic rhetoric have tangible consequences, creating a toxic environment that fosters anxiety, stress, and even fear among those targeted. Such hostile interactions undermine efforts to build cross-cultural friendships and alliances that could otherwise foster solidarity between the two nations. For bystanders, especially younger generations exposed to these digital exchanges, it sets a negative example of how differences should be addressed, reinforcing harmful patterns of communication. Africans are celebrated for their deep sense of oneness and togetherness, a cultural ethos exemplified by the “Ubuntu philosophy”, which emphasizes that “I am because we are” pertinent to the elucidation of Samkange et al (1980). This communal spirit is integral to African identity, fostering harmony and mutual support across diverse cultures. Consequently, cyber-bullying, particularly between South Africans and Nigerians, is profoundly alien to this worldview. Such actions undermine the foundational values of solidarity and interconnectedness that African societies cherish. Therefore, cyber-bullying should be actively discouraged, as it contradicts the very principles that bind Africans together.

Consequently, a moral solution to these conflicts would involve using digital platforms for constructive dialogue, promoting empathy, and recognizing the shared humanity of all participants. Social media could serve as a pace for educating each other on cultural differences, encouraging collaboration, and finding common ground in regional development, entrepreneurship, and addressing social injustices. By choosing kindness and understanding over hostility, both South Africans and Nigerians can shift these online interactions toward reconciliation and mutual respect.

CONCLUSION

This study offers valuable insights into how online interactions can fuel and reflect broader social tensions. The research highlights how these conflicts are often rooted in historical grievances, socio-economic disparities and cultural stereotypes. Digital platforms, as spaces for free expression, often amplify these tension by providing a stage for both constructive dialogue and harmful rhetoric. The analysis underscores the complexity of national identity in a globalized world and reveals how the internet has become a battle ground for expressing, defending, and sometimes attacking collective identities. Ultimately, this study provides a nuanced view of the ongoing struggles over belonging and acceptance in a multicultural society.

However, the research has limitations. It primarily focuses on digital interactions and interviews with people engaged which may not fully capture the depth of offline relationship and other socio-political factors influencing xenophobic attitudes. The scope is also restricted by the availability and accessibility of online data, which may not reflect the entire spectrum of the populations involved. Furthermore, the study's reliance on digital content, which is often anonymized or pseudonymous, poses challenge in verifying the authenticity of the sentiments expressed. This limitation suggests that while digital platforms provide significant insights, they cannot comprehensively represent the realities and complexities of offline experiences and identity struggles.

Notwithstanding that this paper is by no means exhaustive; it has made a valuable contribution to understanding the role of digital interfaces in intensifying conflicts and tensions between nationalities. Further research could benefit from a broader scope that includes offline interviews, ethnographic studies, and longitudinal analyses to better understand the roots and consequences of these conflicts. Additionally, examining similar xenophobic tension in other

regions or between different national groups could provide a comparative perspective, highlighting universal themes and unique regional dynamics. In diversifying methodologies and expanding the geographic focus, further studies can deepen the understanding of how digital and offline identities intersect and influence one another in an increasingly interconnected world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study proffers the following potential recommendations pertinent to its findings:

1. Promotion of digital literacy alongside educational curricula reform. Programs that encourage Netizens (Users) on identifying misinformation and understanding the complexities of immigration and national identity to combat xenophobia online should be enhanced. Effort should be made by the governments of both South Africa and Nigeria to integrate topics related to xenophobia, migration, and national identity into school curricula to foster a culture of acceptance from a young age.
2. Strengthening cross-cultural dialogues together with community engagement initiatives. There should be concerted efforts by both nations stakeholders targeted at facilitating discussions and workshop to foster mutual understanding and address stereotypes. Local initiatives that involve both South African and Nigerian nationals in community-building activities to enhance solidarity should be encouraged and appropriated.
3. Policy implementation in addition to research and documentation. Those in the reins of government alongside the citizens of both South Africa and Nigeria should advocate for policies that address the root causes of xenophobia, including economic disparities, and ensure fair treatment of immigrants. They should also encourage ongoing research into the impacts of xenophobia and national identity to inform policy makers and community leaders.
4. The government of both South Africa and Nigeria should leverage on the intelligence and capacity of their digital experts to urge and ensure that digital platforms takes more active role in monitoring and moderating hate speech, while promoting positive narratives about diversity.

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