

Ethnic Prejudice in Online Media Commentary About National Issues in Nigeria

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Abstract

Exploring how ethnic prejudices manifest in online media, particularly in Facebook comments on national issues, the study highlights that online platforms promote expressions of ethnicity, racism, hate speech, stereotyping, and incitement, often reflecting Nigeria's complex socio-political and ethnic landscape. Using the Critical Race Communication Theory (CRCT) it analyses Facebook comments on two national issues the 2025 Presidential Pardon and the alleged fake certificate of a Former Minister, sourced from two online news outlets that has presence on Facebook. The analysis reveals prevalent ethnic labelling, stereotyping, and inciting language, especially targeting ethnic groups and underscoring regional and ethnic polarizations. The discourse exacerbate ethnic marginalization, social injustice, and mistrust among ethnic groups. Underscoring how social media platforms can deepen ethnic divisions and disrupt peaceful coexistence by spreading misinformation, hate speech, and ethnic biases. It concludes that online media commentary in Nigeria is intertwined with ethnic prejudice, and calls for media literacy programs, responsible journalism, fact checking, stricter content moderation, and grassroots initiatives for ethnic reconciliation to promote national unity and social cohesion.

Keywords: Prejudice, ethnicity, online media, division and peace

1. INTRODUCTION

Amongst the key benefits of the online media is the freedom of participation and interaction it offers, making it possible for individuals to associate with groups that share their aspirations and those that oppose their ideologies, overtime such individuals gradually build behaviours through these social interactions with others which might influence their attitudes, perceptions and world view. Taiwo (2023) states that even though online platforms are democratic in nature, the cyberspace encourages the spreading negative ideologies, such as ethnicity, Racism, hate expressions, bigotry, extremism, aggression and even terrorism, stereotypes as well as amplifying discriminatory discourses turning the cyberspace to a nurturing ground for the expression and dissemination of a range of exclusionary, intolerant and extremist discourses.

Most conflict online in the opinion of Igboanusi (2017) is as a result of social factors such as control of power, competition for resources which is limited while religion, region, language and ideologies also forms motivating factors for disagreement of opinions on national issues. Online media remains one of the platforms every groups is exploring to defend its interest based on the social variables identified.

World over, social media platforms like Facebook has become a public sphere where national interest are discussed and debated. These online platforms provide a faceless encounter (people who have never met before) executed meaningfully. In Nigeria every national issue and almost every happening is reported on Facebook, such issues are discoursed on instantaneous manner, attracting comments and responses from every part or region as well as every ethnic group in the country (Ayantayo & Akintola 2017, Ayantayo 2021, Ewuzie & Ilo 2024 & Auwal 2018).

Adisa et'al., (2024) identified Facebook as one of the major platform driving and intensifying ethno-religious tensions in Ghana and Nigeria. They explained that Facebook, along with Twitter, amplifies false stories and manipulated videos that distort facts, incite violence, and deepen mistrust among ethnic and religious groups. For instance in Nigeria, the farmer–herder clashes due to circulation of misinformation on Facebook and bears “echo chambers,” where users engage mainly with like-minded people, reinforcing bias and intolerance.

Relying on readers' comments, this study set to identify prejudices based on ethnicity on national issues in Nigeria. It is the hope of the researchers that this study will contribute in helping to prevent ethnic conflict that may arise. To address the problem, the study is premised on the following research objectives: Analysing the tone and content of online comments related to ethnic, regional, and religious groups in Nigeria. Secondly to assess the effects of these comments on peaceful coexistence in the country.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the Critical Race Communication Theory (CRCT), though the idea of CRCT isn't a standalone theory rather it is rooted in the Critical Race theory (CRT), according to Mezie-Okoye (2025). Bothers on investigating the connection between Attitudes especially cultural on social constructs like race, ethnicity, religion and even political. It views racism as a systematic issue entrenched in laws and regulations rather than individual prejudices. While mezie-Okoye citing Marisa and Kahn (2021), said the term "critical" refers to critical theory rather than individual criticism.

The CRT being an interdisciplinary academic field, used to better understand social, political, and legal systems, as well as power distribution, but with optics of racism, ethnicity, religious sentiments and their

experiences. In the field communication the theory is accommodated as CRCT researchers and scholars (Griffin & Cummins 2012, Orbe 1998, and Matsuda, Crenshaw, Delgado, & Bell 1993) contend that It Examines how communication practices at levels of interpersonal, institutional, and mediated constructs, maintaining, and challenging racial and ethnic ideologies, identities, and hierarchies is central to the Critical Race Communication Theory while Emphasizing or streamlined to:

- Race as a communicative construct.
- The discourse is based on power and privilege.
- Media and everyday talk gives counter narratives.
- Communication has a role in reproducing or systemically disrupts racism.

This theory helps explain how race, ethnicity, and power interactions causes the feeling of ethnic marginalization and social injustice and why some feedbacks or comments on National issues in online media posts tends to have ethnic or regional affiliations in Nigeria.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A study by Taiwo, R. (2023). "*Yanmiri, Aboki, Afonja: Discursive construction of ethnic others in Nigerian online discussion*" adopting a qualitative discourse analysis approach based on the social representation theory, it investigated the discursive practices that construct ethnic others in Nigerian online forums, with focus on ethnic labelling and stereotyping. The study found that Ethnic censure is frequent in online discussions, this is as a result of differences in political view, history and socio-economic indices, explicitly labelling and stereotyping with socially undesirable terms: *Yanmiri, Aboki, Afonja*. These discursive constructions justify inequalities and a difference existing amongst groups as well as attributing behaviours to ethnic others to justify social exclusion or

discrimination. The study concludes that the online space is act as active arena or a fertile ground for reproduction and perpetuation of ethnic discrimination and prejudices.

Adisa, Segbefia, Mohammed, and Trofimova (2024) carried out a comparative study, using in-depth interviews engaging key players such as community leaders, policymakers, and media practitioners, examining the exacerbation of misinformation and disinformation on ethno-religious crisis in Ghana and Nigeria. It found that false narratives circulating on both the social and traditional media tends to escalate tensions, erode trust forming a barrier to conflict resolution. The study equally revealed that misinformation breaths stereotypes, grows divisions, and prolongs violence, highlighting that enhanced media literacy, acculturation of responsible journalism, fact checking as well as traditional media leveraging to counter fake and false information are some effective mitigation strategies. Ethno-religious animosity is deepening by this deceptive information and there is an urgent need for multidimensional interventions to rebuild trust and social cohesion in West African societies.

Auwal, A. M. (2018). In a study *Social media and hate speech: Analysis of comments on Biafra agitations, Arewa youths' ultimatum and their implications on peaceful coexistence in Nigeria*. The study purposively selected three media organisations with facebook accounts (Premium Times, Nigerianbulletin.com and Today.NG), utilizing the critical discourse analysis, sampling 112 comments revealing predominantly offensive, hateful, and inciting language that undermines peaceful coexistence hoisting ethnic/regional hostility and incitement to violence as well as polarising Nigeria along ethnic, regional, and religious divides. Auwal Illuminate the need for authorities to regulate social media through policies that will encourage responsible engagement to curtail the Sectarianism of hate

speech and promote Nigeria's unity in diversity.

Ayantayo (2021) studied *Language and Ethnic Sentiments in Readers' Comments on Facebook Pages of Selected Socio-Cultural Groups in Nigeria*, adopting a mixed method it sampled 400 comments from APC, OPC, MASSOB and MEND Facebook pages. Hinging on the Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory (ELIT), it was revealed that linguistics terms were used to showcase ethnic sentiments in 60% of the comments analysed, revealing significantly an ethnic polarized society is manifesting; groups representing the Eastern region showed higher ethnic sentiment frequencies, in correlation to resource control and marginalization of the region, terminologies inflame divisions ethnically impacting national cohesion and might results to ethnic conflict. The study conclusively positioned Facebook's role as critical platform for ethnic identity articulation and warns against the potential societal disintegration that such online ethnic sentiments induces, suggesting the mitigation of this online hostility in other to curtail future violence.

2.1 Ethnicity

A country created for colonial rule purpose, Taiwo citing Blench & Dendo (2003) states that Nigeria has over 500 ethnic groups, these ethnic nationalities were put together for commercial interest and ease of administration by the British. These groups have some features which include: common origin, kinship ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, shared history and language. The major ethnic groups given recognition by the constitution in terms of their population are: Hausa (in the North), Igbo (in the South East) and Yoruba (in the South West). Though there are other numerous minority ethnic groups like Fulani, Kanuri, Nupe, Igala, Tiv, Efik, Ibibio, Edo, Urhobo and Ijaw, Jukun, Kuteb, Ohrobo amongst hundreds others.

In the past decades, Ethnic consciousness became more intensive, Ethno-religious crises also intensified and groups rise to defend varying ethnic groupings such as the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), the Igbo People's Congress (IPC), the Arewa People's Congress (APC), the Egbesu Society of the Niger Delta, and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, the Indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) and at a point some of these groups became violent. (Akinyele, 2001).

There have been several ethnic and religious clashes, Ewuzie & Ilo (2024). Lack of trust and prejudices became so obvious as a result of the conflicts and other competition for scarce resource and control for power. The prejudices equally migrated to online interactions and it does not take time for discussions on any Nigerian issue to degenerate into struggles among ethnic groups, most especially the major ones. Taiwo (2023) recorded that expression often provocative, labelling and stereotyping of ethnic groups, overshadowing the ingredients of such main national issue.

3. METHODOLOGY

Adopting the Critical discourse analysis (CDA) as approach, which provide methods and theories for an empirical research to study the relations between discourse and sociocultural developments in different social domains, the practice in discursiveness that creates as well as reproduces an unbalanced power relation (to favour a group one belongs and discriminate those they don't belong to) is the prerogative of CDA. Jorgensen and Philips (2002) said this is observed between social groups or classes (e.g. female and male, tribe, ethnic, religious minorities and the majority). These effects are understood as ideological effects which culminate into conflicts between groups.

Two online news media with presences on Facebook were selected purposively for this

study, the selected news media are *Premium Times* and *Sahara Reporters*, and two national issues were studied (2025 Presidential Pardon and Alleged fake certificate of Mr. Geoffrey Uchechukwu Nnaji, Hon Minister of Science and Innovation). Sampled comments by readers on Facebook pages of the selected news media were read and carefully content categorized into:

- I. Hate, stereotype and labelling: Derogatory comments generalizing on ethnicity.
- II. Privilege, power and politics: framing leadership based on ethnic dominance.
- III. Inciting statement: Call for violent attacks against individuals, members of a particular ethnic group, religion or region.

The sampling frame for the Presidential pardon consists of 337 comments from 10th to 15th October 2025 (Premium times 111 comments while Sahara Reporters has 226 comments) and for the Alleged certificate forgery is 2,171 comments from 7th to 15th October 2025 (468 Premium time and 1,703 Sahara Reporters) from the Facebook post. However, a total of 40 and 71 comments were purposively sampled for the Presidential Pardon and Alleged Fake Certificate respectively from the two reports for analysis in order to discover the manifest content as categorized.

Table 3: Distribution of comments according to category for Presidential pardon

Category	Sahara Reporters	Premium Times	Category total	Percentage
Hate, stereotype & labelling.	15	5	20	50%
Privilege, power & politics.	13	2	15	37.5%
Inciting statement	4	1	5	12.5%
Total	32	8	40	100%

The table above reveals that Hate Speech, Stereotype & Labelling with 50% while other categories has 37.5% and 12.5%, this implies most comments tends to be Stereotype, hate speech and ethnic labelling.

3.1 Data presentation

Table 1: percentage distribution of Commentary from the selected online media on Presidential pardon

Online media	Frequency of comments	Percentage
Sahara Reporters	32	80%
Premium	8	20%
Total	40	100%

From the above, there was more engagement on Sahara Reporters page taking 80% of the entire commentary combined while premium times has only 8 responses of interest to this research.

Table 2: percentage distribution of Commentary from selected online media on Alleged Fake certificate

Online media	Frequency of comments	Percentage
Sahara Reporters	56	71%
Premium Times	15	29%
Total	71	100%

A total of 71 commentaries which concur with this were sampled on the alleged fake Certificate, Sahara reporters has 71% while premium times 29% of entire sampled Comments.

Table 4: Distribution of comments based on categories (Alleged Fake certificate)

Category	Sahara	Premium times	Category Total	Percentage
Hate, stereotype & labelling.	29	8	37	43.5%
Privilege, power & politics.	38	7	45	53%
Inciting statement	3	0	3	3.5%
Total	70	15	85	100%

On the issue of alleged fake certificate, most comments 45 representing 53% shows that Privilege, Power & politics is most manifest.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analysis of online comments on national issues in Nigeria, specifically regarding the 2025 Presidential Pardon and the alleged certificate forgery of the Hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Mr. Geoffrey Uchekukwu Nnaji, reveals deep ethnic prejudices manifested through the tone and content of social media discourse. The findings show a prevalence of derogatory comments targeting ethnic groups, stereotypes, and labeling, especially towards the Igbo ethnic group in the case of the alleged fake certificate, the comments reflects long standing socio political struggle. For example, comments from Premium Times' fake certificate discussion include negative stereotypes and disparaging ethnic remarks:

“hmmm igbo criminal. Tell the man to come to alaba market to be selling electronics fake that is what dey do nah business”

“Ibos keep messing themselv3s up serving zoo”

“If not fake life Wetin do shop for Aba Wey him go the do politics”

“What an igbo Man good for is business not education like that, can you see shame this one has brought to his igbos people not Government. This is an igbo Man, another Salisu Buhari from University of Toronto Canada in those days”

“Shege inyamuris and fraudulent na 5&6”

“Most of igbos won't understand that they have no place up there, anyone there is staying by God's grace”

Culled from: https://www.facebook.com/share/17e6WWLw_dj/

While some comments on Sahara Reporters' exhibited both pride and defiance among the same ethnic groups, signifying the polarized nature of online ethnic discourse.

“That is a true son of Igbo Land.”

“A true legend don't worry very soon you'll going to be our a counter general of the federal Republic of biafrans so that you earn more money...”

“We Igbos are very competent, straightforward and law abiding citizen.”

“Only igbos can do this, other tribes will never try it, they will send their social media dogs to start campaigning for them and turn it tribal, I remember one finance minister that forged nysc certificate under buhari.”

“That's very good. It can only happen in east. If it's south West and north they will be defend by people who prefer their political office holders to rule with fourge

certificates. Eg. BUHARI AND TINUBU.”

“Only Igbo man can resign in Africa politics”

“The best thing to do. So we still have good men like this in this COUNTRY. We're proud of this Ibo man. Maybe God want to use his resignation to teach others the way to go. Thank you Mr. Nnaji”.

Culled from:
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/14QVPsfZ4E9/>

Coming down to the issue of the Presidential pardon, the discourse was marked by accusations of nepotism, ethnic favouritism, and marginalization, as seen in comments disparaging the Yoruba and Biafran ethnic groups, while extolling Arewa's ethnic identity and advocating separatism especially comment from Sahara reporters:

“Na Funani bandit he release □”

“If dey release abba kyaril dey must release Evans the kisser if not they are not fair to igbos”

“Without including our own brother nnamdi kalu ... what an injustice”

“Israel and Egypt people migrated from Ohafia in ibo to North Africa. They traveled through Cameron to Sudan before they discovered Egypt. Igbo people are older than Adam. When Cain killed Abel in Babylon, he ran to Ohafia for refuge and changed his name to Kalu. That's why they say igbo means ancient people, i.e., they are older than Adam”

“In the case of nnamdi kanu, the Igbo people are behind it.”

“In a nutshell, a list of pardoned criminals? What of Nnamdi Kanu?”

Culled from:
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1BejkESG4q/>

These comments often amplified divisions and reinforced ethnic fault lines in the national narrative. Inciting language calling for violent actions and ethnic separation further depicts how online spaces serve as echo chambers that replicate and entrench ethnic bias and antagonism, some comments from Premium times.

“If the rule of law is workable and available in the judicial system in Nigeria. Tinubu for a long time should have resigned due to drug, money laundering and Chicago Certificate forgery related issues, I still thinking how Tinubu become the president of Nigeria after heavy criminal and questionable records, I think a vote of no confidence should have pass on him by the judiciary very sad indeed mad people everywhere in the Zoo”

“the war is over. Taker of the ogwu is now under users discretion. What a country”

“The illegal state of Nigeria will never again qualify to the World Cup because they chose Nepotism over competence. Only Arewa has the talented players for such a job, but because of crude tribalism, they are ignored for non-qualified Yibo and Yaribastards who under normal circumstance should have nothing to do with the football field. they are best in their skull mining and drug businesses.”

It is indeed a Yariba-Biafran team. The population of Arewa Republic is over one hundred and fifty million (More than the population of twenty African countries combined) but out of nepotism, not even a single talent was selected out of these 100 million people. Congratulations to South Africa and Benin Republic in advance.

By 2030, We must have actualised the Sovereign State of Arewa. We will go to the World Cup with 100% talents from Arewa Republic to break records and make history !God bless Arewa We love Arewa #ArewaRepublicNow”

Culled from:
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1FjLi9tKic/>

The analysis confirms the role of online media platforms like Facebook in reproducing ethnic prejudices, intensifying mistrust among groups, and disrupting peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. The findings align with previous studies like Auwal, A. M. (2018) and Ayantayo (2021), indicating that social media can amplify misinformation, ethnic stereotyping, and exclusionary narratives, this align with the CRCT showing that ethnicity is a communicative construct because the Media and everyday talk gives narratives and that Communication has a role in reproducing or systemically disrupt racism, Ethnicity, Religious intolerance which hamper national unity and exacerbate ethno-religious conflicts.

5. CONCLUSION

Conclusively, the study demonstrates that online media commentary on national issues in Nigeria is intertwined with ethnic prejudice and regional biases. Ethnic labelling, stereotyping, and inciting statements confirming the polarization or reproduction ethnic divisions in digital space or online environment, often undermining social cohesion and peaceful coexistence. The application of CRCT offers a critical lens to understand how these communication practices are embedded within systemic ethnic power relations and marginalization, which resonate beyond individual prejudices.

Consequently, the democratic participation avenue as well as freedom and anonymity provided by online media facilitate the spread of unintended harmful and derogatory ethnic

discourse that may fuel real world conflicts due Nigeria's history of ethnic conflicts and competition for limited resources and political power. Perpetuating ethnic prejudices online, significantly poses threat to national stability. The findings underscore the urgent need to address ethnic bias in online discourse to promote peaceful coexistence and national unity.

5.1 Recommendation

Based on the objectives the following recommendations are made:

- Develop and implement media literacy programs tailored on educating social media users to identify and critically engage with ethnic stereotypes, hate speech, and misinformation online. Similarly, Social media companies and regulatory bodies should create and enforce clear policies to detect and moderate ethnic hate speech and incitement effectively on their platforms.
- Promoting responsible journalism and equitable media representation that challenges ethnic bias and avoids inflammatory reporting on national issues, through supporting initiatives that amplify positively inter ethnic narratives and intercultural dialogue to counteract divisive online discourse that would foster community and grassroots engagement programs aimed at ethnic reconciliation and social cohesion to reduce offline ramifications of online ethnic hostilities.
- Individuals and organizations should enhance fact checking and verification mechanisms to curtail the spread of false information that fuels ethnic mistrust and conflict.

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