

Ubuntu Precepts and the Coverage of Xenophobic Discourses in South African Community Newspapers: An Afrocentric Systematic Critique



Fulufhelo Oscar Makananise¹ 

¹ Department of Communication Science at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

ABSTRACT

In post-apartheid South Africa, community newspapers that publish in native languages were established to promote the values and principles of the new constitutional democracy. This paper critiques how the epistemic dominance and coverage of the xenophobic attack discourses in South African community newspapers in a way contradict the values and principles of Ubuntu as an African philosophy. The paper focuses on how such depictions, coverage and dominance could have the potential to perpetuate the legacy of colonialism and neocolonialism in the post-apartheid era and intensify divisions, devalue dignity, and undermine the unity of African societies. It argues that these colonial legacies of the past conflict with the values and principles of ubuntu, compromise social cohesion, and continue the ongoing neo-colonial discourses that separate and insinuate attacks on other African nationals. Reinforced by the framing theory of representation, this Afrocentric systematic review employed a purposive sampling technique to select at least twenty secondary research articles and theses published between 2015 and 2023 by searching various repositories. The selection of these texts was based on their online availability and accessibility. The paper used thematic analysis to explore the selected materials to develop the related themes and subthemes that informed the entire conversation. Moreover, the findings highlight how the perpetual discourses on xenophobic stereotypes, linguistic features, and expressions used in community newspapers to signify other African nationals could in a way, contradict significant values of ubuntu, communal living, and social cohesion that define the African dignity and unity.

Correspondence

Fulufhelo Oscar Makananise

Email:

omakananise5@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

In the post-apartheid era, community newspapers that publish in indigenous African languages were established to promote and sustain the values of the new constitutional democracy. These community media were established to mainly decolonise and disempower the previously existing colonial media that perpetuated the Eurocentric dominant ideologies and colonial legacies of racial segregation, linguistic diversity, and nationality divergence in their discourses and information dissemination. As such, most South African community newspapers are the type of local-owned legacy media that promote community participation, epistemic social justice, human dignity, and ubuntu precepts to serve the interests of a given

community.¹ These South African community media legacies are established and funded through the mandate of the Media and Development Diversity Agency (MDDA) with introverted intentions to also empower the previously marginalised and isolated local communities with appropriate media literacy skills and knowledge on how they should promote, communicate, and disseminate African knowledge and epistemologies.² In addition, the agency's mandate is encapsulated in Section 3 of the MDDA Act of 2002, from Sections 16 and 32 of the Constitution Act No. 108 of 1996, thereby offering freedom of expression and access to information to all local communities in South Africa. However, it can further be argued that the epistemic African knowledge and community media platforms are anchored on the constitutional value of restoring the spirit of ubuntu, social cohesion, epistemic social justice, respect, and human dignity in African societies. As alluded to by Mathebula "Since its inception, the agency has funded a total number of 586 community media projects.³ This number includes 321 community broadcast projects in the form of community radio and community television stations, and 185 community print projects in the form of community newspapers, community magazines and small commercial print projects".

This demonstrates that these legacy local media that serve a particular community of interest are anchored on the post-colonial Africa united discourses to achieve equality through media access and use in a democratic society. Most importantly, community media such as newspapers are supposed to play a vital role in unifying not only South African societies but Africans from different parts of the continent that historically endured linguistic, racial, national, and ethnic tensions, and were subjected to colonial borders that still exist today.⁴ In addition, the major argument is how these depictions and the dominance of xenophobic discourses perpetuate the legacy of colonialism that causes more divisions, devalues dignity, and undermines the unity of African societies.⁵ The paper further argues that these colonial predispositions continue the ongoing neo-colonial discourses that separate and insinuate attacks on other African nationals.

Furthermore, in recent years, Mavengano asserted that debates about the dominance of xenophobic discourses and stereotypical representation of African people in various local media platforms emerged as the topical and urgent matter that African governments, leaders, and local communities should address through various platforms.⁶ This action would assist in dismantling the neo-colonial systems of state borders and national hate that continue to deepen the segregation and tensions among African peoples and societies.⁷ As such most studies conducted in the past focused on the way foreigners are represented in national newspapers such as Sowetan and Daily Sun⁸ whilst this paper focuses on community newspapers and Ubuntu ideologies. However, the most important question that centres this paper is: What makes an African person to be called a foreigner in another African country? In addition, this paper attempts to argue that the media is one of the contributing factors towards the ongoing xenophobic violence and attacks on African people by fellow Africans. It can further be argued that when Africa is at war with itself, Africans will never experience actual freedom from the effects of colonialism and oppression. As such, Africans would not experience total economic development, epistemic freedom, and social cohesion.

¹ M. Letseka, "The Amalgamation of Traditional African Values and Liberal Democratic Values in South Africa: Implications for Conceptions of Education" (University of South Africa, 2016); K.S. Dinabantu, "The Normative Role of the Corporately Owned Community Newspapers in the Digital Era: District Mail, Northern News and Eikestad Nuus in South Africa" (Stellenbosch University, 2022).

² Media Development and Diversity Agency, "Annual Report 2022/2023," 2023, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://static.pmg.org.za/1/MDDA_Annual_Report_2022-23.pdf.

³ F M Lucky Mathebula, "South African Public Administration: Who Is the Public in Public Administration?," *Journal of Public Administration* 58, no. 1 (2023): 57–76.

⁴ E Baron, "The Transformative Role of the Media in the Formation of Virtuous Citizens: A Contribution to Reconciliation in a Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Acta Theologica* 32 (2021): 31–51.

⁵ Letseka, "The Amalgamation of Traditional African Values and Liberal Democratic Values in South Africa: Implications for Conceptions of Education."

⁶ Esther Mavengano, "Rethinking the Boundaries of Self-Other and the Logics of de/Coloniality in Harare North and One Foreigner's Ordeal; a Decolonial Perspective," *Acta Academica* 54, no. 2 (2022): 95–114.

⁷ Mfundo Mandla Masuku and Victor H Mlambo, "Tribalism and Ethnophobia among Black South Africans," *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 10, no. 1 (2023): 125–40.

⁸ Quatro Mgogo and Oluyinka Osunkunle, "Xenophobia in South Africa: An Insight into the Media Representation and Textual Analysis," *Global Media Journal* 19, no. 38 (2021): 1–8; Aleksandra Urman, Mykola Makhortykh, and Roberto Ulloa, "Auditing the Representation of Migrants in Image Web Search Results," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 9, no. 1 (April 13, 2022): 130, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01144-1>; Quatro Mgogo and Oluyinka Osunkunle, "Students' Perceptions of the Influence of Media on Perpetuating Xenophobia in South African Universities," *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* 19, no.1(2023): 1218.

To decisively deal with these ongoing issues, community media newspapers should desist from engaging in or facilitating activities that incite discrimination based on, among other things, sex, race, sexual orientation, language, religion, political and national or social origins.⁹ What makes this paper fundamental is that it seeks to provide a critical Afrocentric textual analysis of the epistemic dominance of the xenophobic discourses and coverage in news coverage by community newspapers and how that contradicts the Ubuntu principles and communal living. The most critical questions that drive this article are: What specific xenophobic discourses are present in community newspapers? How do these discourses contradict the values of ubuntu and social cohesion in African societies? and what steps can South African community newspapers take to enforce principles of non-discrimination and promote epistemic justice in the South African context? The major argument is that the depictions and dominance of these xenophobic discourses perpetuate the legacy of colonialism that causes divisions that devalue the dignity of African societies, contradict the values of ubuntu, compromise social cohesion, and further the ongoing colonial discourses that segregate and attack other African nationals.

CONTEXTUALISATION OF UBUNTU AND XENOPHOBIC DISCOURSES IN MEDIA PLATFORMS

Ubuntu is a Southern African philosophy that emphasises the interconnectedness, compassion, empathy, respect, and humaneness of individuals within a community, It is at the centre of the African way of life, influencing all aspects of people's well-being.¹⁰ It is often described as the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity as one in the African context.¹¹ However, the recent dominance of xenophobic discourses in community newspapers even in digital spaces raises concerns. As such, Xenophobia in this context refers to the fear or dislike of strangers or foreigners, often resulting in discrimination, prejudice, severe attacks, and violence.¹² To address this crucial matter, it is significant to recognise that the presence of xenophobic discourses in community newspapers may vary depending on various factors such as the region, political climate, epistemic justice, and individual perspectives.¹³

The content published in these local newspapers and the prevalence of xenophobic attitudes among the general population in a society must be distinguished. This could be better done and understood by analysing the underlying reasons and factors contributing to the dominance of xenophobic discourses in these community print media. Olofinbiyi, indicated that such possible factors could include societal tensions, economic challenges, cultural differences, colonial systems, political manipulation, or historical grievances.¹⁴ In addition, one approach to combat xenophobia and promote Ubuntu values is through education and awareness campaigns. This would be essential to emphasise the importance of empathy, understanding, and respect for others, as such African communities can work towards reducing xenophobia and creating a more inclusive and tolerant society. It is essential to encourage dialogue, open communication, and the sharing of diverse perspectives within these community newspapers.¹⁵ This would provide a platform for voices that promote inclusivity and challenge xenophobic narratives can help counterbalance the dominance of such discourses. Moreover, addressing xenophobia is a complex issue that requires systemic changes, community engagement, and promoting human dignity and values.

Furthermore, this paper draws from the xenophobic discourses and immigrants' stereotypes representation in the community print media landscape. Globally, xenophobic stereotyping and immigrant violence discourses have been a communal and increasing phenomenon in broadcast, print media reporting, and recently in community-based media.¹⁶ In recent years, immigrants' stereotypical

⁹ C. Kuptsch and E. Charest, *The Future of Diversity* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2021).

¹⁰ Baken Lefa, "The African Philosophy of Ubuntu in South African Education," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 1, no. 1 (2015): 15.

¹¹ B.O. Anofuechi, "A Critical Assessment of Ubuntu as a Source for Moral Formation in Contemporary Africa" (University of the Western Cape, 2022).

¹² Sogo Angel Olofinbiyi, "Anti-Immigrant Violence and Xenophobia in South Africa: Untreated Malady and Potential Snag for National Development," *Insight on Africa* 14, no. 2 (2022): 193–211.

¹³ Norman Sempijja and Collin Olebogeng Mongale, "Xenophobia in Urban Spaces: Analyzing the Drivers and Social Justice Goals from the Ugandan-Asian Debacle of 1972 and Xenophobic Attacks in South Africa (2008-2019)," *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities* 4 (July 18, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/frsc.2022.934344>.

¹⁴ Olofinbiyi, "Anti-Immigrant Violence and Xenophobia in South Africa: Untreated Malady and Potential Snag for National Development."

¹⁵ Jean Pierre Misago, Iriann Freemantle, and Loren B Landau, "Protection from Xenophobia: An Evaluation of UNHCR's Regional Office for Southern Africa's Xenophobia Related Programmes," *University of Witwatersrand, ACMS*, 2015.

¹⁶ I.T. Dahlback, "The Media Framing of the April 2015 Xenophobic Attacks in South Africa" (University of Cape Town, 2018).

representation and xenophobic violence discourses emerged as the most topical international human rights and social justice issues in the Global South or developing countries, including South Africa. Globally, Fuller maintained that community newspapers are viewed as essentially motivated by “social objectives rather than the private, profit motive.”¹⁷ They seek to empower community members with local knowledge and are committed to human rights, social justice, the environment, and sustainable approaches to development. However, in South Africa, Mgogo and Osunkunle argued that since the inception of xenophobic attacks, most South African print media seem to report more manipulated and provocative stories and information because of their interest in commercialisation.¹⁸ In the Global South, especially in South Africa, recent reports show that since “Operation Dudula” emerged on social media platforms, xenophobia, violence, discrimination, and discourses have intensified in communities. The operation has become a parasol for an armament of violent protests, vigilante violence, arson targeting migrant-owned homes and businesses, and even the murder of some foreign nationals in the country.¹⁹ This has allowed national and local community newspapers to report on this topical human rights issue. Furthermore, the most existing literature is engrossed primarily in the representation of xenophobic violence in other traditional media, including national newspapers.²⁰ Still, this article contributes to the current body of knowledge, focusing on how community newspapers in the Global South, especially in South Africa, epitomise xenophobic discourses and how immigrants’ stereotypical representation aggravates or provokes the existing xenophobic violence and foreign nationals’ attacks witnessed in communities.

Interestingly enough, in the South African context, community newspapers have been established to inform and serve the interests of the community within which they function. They are expected to operate within the several prescribed clauses of the South African Press Council Code, Code of Ethics and Conduct for South African Print and Online Media. These clauses include but are not limited to reporting news truthfully, accurately, and reasonably; news must be in context without any intentions to distort, exaggerate or misrepresent the facts; and the press should avoid discriminatory or denigratory references to people’s race, colour, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or preference, physical or mental disability or illness, or age.²¹ In essence, these community newspapers should not prioritise commercial interests over topical or salience issues that affect the community they serve, or address issues ascribed to sustainable development goals. Thus, community newspapers should not report stories using provocative language or words that could enflame violence or promote hatred against immigrants. Instead, they should focus on matters that could encourage community development and socio-economic changes and address issues relevant to some of the sustainable development goals within which they operate.²² In the recent past, the United Nations condemned reports of intensifying violence against foreign nationals in South Africa and called for accountability against xenophobia, racism, and hate speech harming migrants and citizens.²³ However, how written stories and headlines depicted in community newspapers contribute to xenophobic viciousness and foreign national attacks recently experienced in South African communities should be critically looked into. In addition, the paper explores closely how foreign nationals’ stereotypical representations and xenophobic discourses are described in the community newspaper in South Africa. The paper further scrutinises the extent to which newspapers’ xenophobic discourses could contribute to real-life situations experienced in various societies. Lastly, it also analyses why community newspapers in the Global South, depict xenophobic discourses as effectively as they are doing.

¹⁷ L.K. Fuller, *The Power of Global Community Media* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1.

¹⁸ Mgogo and Osunkunle, “Xenophobia in South Africa: An Insight into the Media Representation and Textual Analysis.”

¹⁹ R.A. Kucera, “An Analysis of Right-Wing Extremism in Post-Apartheid South Africa” (Stellenbosch University, 2022).

²⁰ Tapiwa Gomo, “Analysis of Media Reporting and Xenophobia Violence among Youth in South Africa” (Malmö högskola/Konst, kultur, kommunikation, K3, 2010); Marius Debonaire Mbetga, “Xenophobia and the Media: An Investigation into the Textual Representation of Black ‘Foreigners’ in the Daily Sun, a South Africa Tabloid (February 2008-December 2008),” 2014; Mgogo and Osunkunle, “Xenophobia in South Africa: An Insight into the Media Representation and Textual Analysis.”

²¹ J. Retief, “Code Of Ethics And Conduct For South African Print And Online Media” (Press Ombudsman, 2019).

²² Pilar Rodriguez Martinez, Lucía Martinez Joya, and Francisco Villegas Lirola, “Hate-Speech Countering by Immigrant and Pro-Immigrant Associations in Almeria (Spain),” *Social Sciences* 13, no. 1 (2024): 33.

²³ United Nations, “South Africa: UN Experts Condemn Xenophobic Violence and Racial Discrimination against Foreign Nationals” (2022), <https://www.ohchr.org>.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Framing Theory

This paper has been reinforced by the framing theory which is largely entrenched in the academic disciplines of media, sociology, communication studies, and political science. Framing as a concept was first suggested by an English anthropologist Gregory Bateson in 1972. However, over the years framing theorists enormously contributed to the development and application of the theory.²⁴ These scholars further engaged in how various media including community newspaper programme content can influence and shape public opinion or impact individual interpretations by emphasising the importance of certain characteristics of a subject and how audiences perceive reality based on accessibility and interpretive patterns. According to Entman, framing is a way of describing the power of a text that transmits information.²⁵ Entman emphasises that the selection and prominence, salience of the subjects are the main processes through which the framing is done. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.²⁶ In addition, in the communication and information dissemination process, frames can be identified both in communicators who use them either deliberately or not, in the text, by using keywords, phrases, stereotypical images, sources, etc., in receivers that can or cannot reflect the cadres of communicators, and in the culture considered the source of the common frames, recurring in the same social group.²⁷ In the same vein, Gitlin views frames as models that organize the world for both journalists and readers.²⁸ Gitlin further argues that media frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organise discourse, whether verbal or visual.

Framing Theory as Representation in South African Community Newspapers

Furthermore, framing describes the practice of thinking about news items and story content within a familiar context. The theory is proportionally related to the agenda-setting tradition but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic.²⁹ The basis of framing theory is that the media including community newspapers focus attention on certain events and then place them within a field of meaning. Framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience (called “the frame”) influences the choices people make about how to process that information.³⁰ Frames are abstractions that work to organize or structure message meaning. The most common use of frames is in terms of the frame the news or media places on the information they convey. Framing theory explains that the media create this frame by introducing news items with predefined and narrow contextualisation. Frames can be designed to enhance understanding or are used as cognitive shortcuts to link stories to the bigger picture.³¹ Community newspapers are powerful influencers, moulding public opinion and contributing to the construction of social reality. Framing within these publications often reflects underlying biases and prejudices, particularly evident in the case of xenophobia.³² The misrepresentation of non-natives through negative frames perpetuates stereotypes and fosters a divisive atmosphere. This epistemic dominance of xenophobic discourses not only contradicts

²⁴ E. Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press., 1974); Robert M Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51–58; T. Gitlin, *The World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (California: University of California Press, 1980); G. Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004); Dietram A. Scheufele, “Framing as a Theory of Media Effects,” *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 1 (March 1, 1999): 103–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02784.x>; Zhongdang Pan and Gerald M Kosicki, “Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse,” *Political Communication* 10, no. 1 (1993): 55–75..

²⁵ Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm.”

²⁶ Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm.”

²⁷ Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm.”

²⁸ Gitlin, *The World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*.

²⁹ Sunday Olanakanmi Arowolo, “Understanding Framing Theory,” *Mass Communication Theory* 3, no. 6 (2017): 4.

³⁰ Dietram A Scheufele and David Tewksbury, “Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models,” *Journal of Communication* 57, no. 1 (2007): 9–20.

³¹ Alan Bryman and Duncan Cramer, *Quantitative Data Analysis with IBM SPSS 17, 18 & 19: A Guide for Social Scientists* (Routledge, 2012); M. Linström and W. Marais, “Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology,” *Communitas* 17 (2012): 21–38.

³² C. Khwebulana, “Inviting Xenophobia? An Examination of Ilanga and Isolezwe’s Coverage of the 2015 Xenophobic Attacks in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa” (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2021).

the principles of Ubuntu but also perpetuates harmful ideologies that undermine the rich cultural diversity within South Africa. A comprehensive analysis that underscores the need for media literacy initiatives to promote fair and unbiased reporting. Aligning journalistic practices with Ubuntu values can foster inclusivity and challenge the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes, contributing to a more harmonious and understanding society.

What makes this theory suitable to be used or applied in this paper is that it resonates well with how South African community newspaper communicators deliberately select salient and use keywords, phrases, and stereotypical images that shape public opinion and engagement in epistemic discourses. It is argued in this paper that over recent years, framing within South African community newspapers has served as a potent lens through which xenophobic discourses gain epistemic recognition and supremacy. As such, the media's role in shaping public opinion cannot in any way be understated as the analysis of these community newspapers reveals a concerning prevalence of biased frames that perpetuate xenophobia and hate over other African nationalities. Indeed, the framing of news stories plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative surrounding immigrants and non-natives within a country. Frequently, headlines and story structures contribute to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes, portraying these communities as threats rather than contributors to the nation's cultural richness and diversity. Such framing not only influences public perception but also reinforces discriminatory attitudes. This epistemic dominance of xenophobic discourses is particularly disconcerting in the South African context, where diversity and unity should be celebrated in the spirit of post-apartheid reconciliation. The literature surrounding this issue underscores the importance of media watchdog initiatives and ethical journalism standards. Moreover, by dismantling the biased frames and promoting a better understanding of immigration, community newspapers can play a constructive role in promoting social cohesion and dispelling harmful prejudices.

METHODOLOGY

This paper employed an Afrocentric systematic review and qualitative content analysis to thoroughly analyse the linguistic contents and information used in articles to reveal prevailing xenophobic discourses that also stimulate anti-foreign attacks, and conversations, and undermine the African spirit of Ubuntu. In addition, Mayring describes qualitative content analysis as a research method used to systematically analyse textual, visual, or audio data to identify recurring themes, patterns, and meanings.³³ It usually involves a subjective interpretation of content, focusing on context and the underlying context of the data. Content analysis is used in this study to determine how community-based reporting contradicts the principle of ubuntu as an African philosophy and how this influences anti-foreign sentiments among the local communities and individuals. This textual analysis approach was centred on describing and analysing the textual elements used in the selected texts. In addition, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select at least twenty articles published online between 2015 and 2023 from the online news to determine how foreign nationals were framed and represented in South African community newspapers.

The selection of these texts was not predisposed by the association of xenophobic discourses with any given country or people but based on the availability and accessibility of these online media texts. However, these words and phrases used migrants, xenophobia, xenophobic, *kwerekwere*, *makwerekwere*, foreigners, aliens, outsiders, non-nationals, foreign nationals, and non-South Africans to retrieve news texts from the Community Newspaper's online news database. In this paper, thematic content analysis was used to describe and analyse the selected articles to develop the related themes and subthemes. The analysis was conducted to identify, discuss, and analyse the perpetual discourses on xenophobic stereotypes, linguistic features, and expressions used to signify other African nationals and, in a way, contradict important new constitutional values of ubuntu and social cohesion that define the African dignity and unity.

³³ P. Mayring, "Qualitative Content Analysis," in *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, ed. Flick W., von Kardorff E., and Steinke I. (New Delhi: Sage Publications Ltd, 2004), 159–76.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Xenophobic Languages and Immigrants' Stereotypical Depiction in Print Media

In this paper, xenophobia is described as the irrational fear or dislike of people from other countries and has manifested itself in various ways throughout human history. Makananise, Malatji and Madima argued that in any form of communication, language is the most integral part of meaning, knowledge and the information creation process.³⁴ Scholars such as Yeun argue that both traditional and digital media play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and can perpetuate harmful stereotypes that could influence societal attitudes and views about immigrants in their countries.³⁵ In many instances, print media make use of xenophobic language, and texts when reporting on issues of immigrants. In addition, Flores and Liu established that newspaper articles and media generally make use of derogatory terms such as “illegal aliens” “noncitizens” “invaders”, “aliens”, and “foreigners” to describe immigrants, framing them as threats to national security, jobs, and economic stability.³⁶ Such language not only dehumanises immigrants but also contributes to the reinforcement of negative stereotypes which are against the principles of ubuntu and Africanism.

Furthermore, it can be argued that print media often perpetuate stereotypical depictions of immigrants which in a way reinforce existing biases and prejudices that were established through colonialism system of oppression and white monopoly. As Light, He, and Robey found most headlines frequently associate immigrants with criminality even when crime rates among immigrant populations are lower than those among the native-born.³⁷ This selective framing fosters a distorted perception of immigrants as threats to public safety, the health sector, the education system, and job creation. The perpetuation of xenophobic language and stereotypical depictions in print media has tangible consequences on public perception. Mgogo and Osunkunle conducted a survey revealing that individuals exposed to negative media portrayals of immigrants were more likely to endorse discriminatory policies.³⁸ Such findings underscore the power of media in shaping attitudes and influencing public opinion. Walsh and Hill advocate for the promotion of counter-narratives that humanise immigrants and challenge stereotypes.³⁹ Additionally, this paper argues that media literacy programmes can empower individuals to critically analyse media content, discerning between factual reporting and biased narratives. This highlights the pervasive issue of xenophobic languages and immigrants' stereotypical depiction in print media. The influence of media on public perception is evident, emphasising the need for responsible community-based journalism and initiatives that promote inclusivity and challenge harmful stereotypes and representations of African peoples. Moreover, these issues are paramount for fostering understanding and unity as a society celebrates diversity and togetherness.

Community Newspapers and Xenophobic Discourses

Community newspapers, often considered the voice of local societies, play a vital role in shaping community narratives and perceptions about important issues. However, it is crucial to establish the presence of xenophobic discourses within community newspapers and their impact on fostering or mitigating xenophobia at the grassroots level. The study conducted by Dahlback reveals instances where community newspapers inadvertently perpetuate xenophobia through biased reporting and language

³⁴ Fulufhelo Makananise, Edgar Malatji, and Shumani Madima, “Indigenous Languages, Digital Media, and the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Global South: A South African Discourse,” in *Indigenous Language for Social Change in the Global South*, ed. A. Salawu et al. (London: Lexington books publishers, 2023), 75–92.

³⁵ Andrés Scherman et al., “The Influence of Media Coverage on the Negative Perception of Migrants in Chile,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 13 (2022): 8219; Azadeh Eriss and Masood Khoshsaligheh, “Stereotypes in a Multilingual Film: A Case Study on Issues of Social Injustice,” *Languages* 8, no. 3 (July 20, 2023): 174, <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages8030174>; Nancy Wang Yuen, “How Racial Stereotypes in Popular Media Affect People-and What Hollywood Can Do to Become More Inclusive,” *Scholars Strategy Network* 28 (2019): 2021..

³⁶ G.J. Flores, “Exploring How Morality Framing And Partisanship Influence Public Perceptions Of Immigration. Open Access Theses & Dissertations,” 2022, https://scholarworks.utep.edu/open_etd/3673.; Juan Liu, “Framing Syrian Refugees: Examining News Framing Effects on Attitudes toward Refugee Admissions and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 44, no. 1 (2023): 6–25.

³⁷ Michael T Light, Jingying He, and Jason P Robey, “Comparing Crime Rates between Undocumented Immigrants, Legal Immigrants, and Native-Born US Citizens in Texas,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 51 (2020): 32340–47.

³⁸ Mgogo and Osunkunle, “Xenophobia in South Africa: An Insight into the Media Representation and Textual Analysis.”

³⁹ James P Walsh and Dallas Hill, “Social Media, Migration and the Platformization of Moral Panic: Evidence from Canada,” *Convergence* 29, no. 3 (2023): 690–712.

choices.⁴⁰ For instance, reports framing immigrants as economic burdens or cultural threats contribute to the amplification of negative sentiments within local communities. As such, community newspapers, being deeply rooted in local contexts, significantly influence the attitudes of their readers against people from other African countries. In addition, Theodore and Chijioke argue that xenophobic discourses in community newspapers contribute to the formation of insular attitudes, with which communities may view other people as outsiders rather than as valuable contributors and fellow Africans.⁴¹ Moreover, Bray's analysis of a small-town newspaper demonstrated how subtle language choices can foster an "us vs. them" mentality, contributing to the marginalisation of immigrant communities.⁴²

Furthermore, some articles address instances where community newspapers have been challenged or reformed. As such, Alodat, Al-Qora'n, and Abu Hamoud discuss cases where local activists successfully engaged with community newspapers, urging them to adopt more inclusive language and coverage.⁴³ This suggests the potential for grassroots efforts to counteract xenophobia at the local community level. Research by Firmstone emphasises the importance of editorial policies in shaping the content of community newspapers; where newspapers with explicit anti-xenophobia policies are more likely to provide balanced and inclusive coverage, which fosters a sense of community and togetherness that transcends cultural, linguistic, racial, and national differences.⁴⁴ This analysis underscores the significant impact community newspapers can have on shaping local perceptions of immigration and fostering xenophobia discourses. Moreover, understanding the role of these publications is crucial for developing strategies to counteract negative discourses and promote inclusive narratives within local communities. As gatekeepers of community information, community newspapers bear the responsibility to foster a concise understanding and unity among diverse populations.

Textual Analysis of Xenophobia in Digital Print Media

The advent of digital print media has brought new dimensions to the dissemination of information on a global scale, but it has also raised concerns about the prevalence of xenophobic attacks and discourses in online spaces such as social media. This review scrutinises the textual analysis of xenophobia in digital print media and explores the linguistic strategies and discursive patterns employed in shaping narratives surrounding African immigrants. Research by Firmstone highlights linguistic strategies such as framing and lexical choices that perpetuate xenophobia in online articles and discourses, especially on social media platforms.⁴⁵ Terms like "invasion" and "illegal aliens" are commonly used to frame immigrants in a threatening light and contribute to the amplification of negative. A study by Fickling employs discourse analysis to identify patterns of othering in digital print media.⁴⁶ Fickling further indicates that immigrants are often portrayed as "outsiders" or "threats" which in a sense cause serious divisions among African societies. A study by Makananise posits that digital media platforms have the dominant power to continue the digital neo-colonialism perspectives and colonial thinking patterns in a democratic society that could marginalise others.⁴⁷ Such discursive patterns do not only contribute to the marginalisation of immigrant communities in the digital space but in physical attacks on African people. These actions have a profound impact on public perception and interaction with other people. In their studies, Esses and Verkuyten found

⁴⁰ Dahlback, "The Media Framing of the April 2015 Xenophobic Attacks in South Africa"; B.L. Fickling, "Xenophobia in the Headlines: An Analysis of News Media Coverage of the Xenophobic Protests in Jeppestown, South Africa in 2019" (University of Witwatersrand, 2021).

⁴¹ Theodore Petrus and Chijioke Uwah, "'Strangers in Their Own Country': Interpreting Xenophobic Symbology and Gang Subcultures in Vulnerable Coloured Communities," *Acta Academica* 54, no. 2 (2022): 163–78.

⁴² C.E. Bray, "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Post-George Floyd and COVID-19: Reflections from Global Business Leaders on a Changing Paradigm" (Pepperdine University, 2023).

⁴³ Abdelsalam M. Alodat, Lamis F. Al-Qora'n, and Muwafaq Abu Hamoud, "Social Media Platforms and Political Participation: A Study of Jordanian Youth Engagement," *Social Sciences* 12, no. 7 (July 10, 2023): 402, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12070402>.

⁴⁴ Julie Firmstone, "Editorial Journalism and Newspapers' Editorial Opinions," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, 2019.

⁴⁵ Firmstone, "Editorial Journalism and Newspapers' Editorial Opinions."

⁴⁶ Fickling, "Xenophobia in the Headlines: An Analysis of News Media Coverage of the Xenophobic Protests in Jeppestown, South Africa in 2019."

⁴⁷ F.O. Makananise, "Toward the Epistemic Decolonial Thinking of Social Media as a Digital Enabler of Cyberbullying in the Global South," in *Research Handbook on Information Systems and Society*, ed. A. Jain, J. Wang, and A.K. Yada (London: Edward Elgar Publishing, Forthcoming).

that individuals exposed to xenophobic narratives online were more likely to harbour negative attitudes towards immigrants, emphasising the role of language in shaping public opinion.⁴⁸

Furthermore, this section also explores the role of algorithms in content distribution on digital platforms. González-Bailón, and Lelkes, indicate how algorithms may unintentionally amplify xenophobic content, creating echo chambers where individuals are exposed to increasingly extreme narratives, further polarising opinions and public engagements.⁴⁹ Whilst digital print media may contribute to xenophobia, there are instances of counter-narratives emerging online. As such, Castillo-Esparcia et al. highlight digital activism and grassroots movements that leverage social media platforms to challenge xenophobic discourses, promoting alternative perspectives.⁵⁰ In addition, this analysis underscores the significance of textual analysis in understanding and combating xenophobia in digital print media. Recognising linguistic strategies, discursive patterns, and the role of algorithms is crucial for developing interventions that promote inclusive narratives and counteract the negative impact of xenophobic content online. As digital spaces continue to shape public discourse, it becomes imperative to address these issues to foster a more informed, tolerant, and inclusive online environment. These arguments are essential because most print media including community newspapers now have an online presence through the use of online platforms such as social media, the internet and digital technology.

DISCUSSIONS

The study findings accentuate the intricate interplay between Ubuntu precepts and the coverage of xenophobic discourses in South African community media. The analysis indicated that the discourse surrounding xenophobic language and stereotypical depictions of immigrants in print media is a critical issue that reflects broader societal attitudes toward immigration. It is further established that media, both traditional and digital, hold significant power in shaping public opinion, and unfortunately, they often perpetuate harmful stereotypes against individuals from other African countries. Print media, in particular, have been found to employ derogatory terms such as “illegal aliens” “noncitizens” “invaders”, “aliens”, and “foreigners” when discussing immigrants, framing them as threats to national security rather than as individuals seeking a better life. This not only dehumanises immigrants but also reinforces negative stereotypes, contributing to xenophobic sentiments within society. Moreover, it is further indicated in this paper that headlines frequently associating immigrants with criminality distort public perception, despite crime rates among immigrant populations often being lower than those among native-born or permanent residents. The consequences of such media portrayals are tangible, with studies indicating that exposure to negative depictions of immigrants in the media correlates with increased support for discriminatory policies. As such, efforts to counteract this trend have highlighted the importance of promoting counter-narratives that humanise immigrants and media literacy programs to empower individuals to critically analyse media content.

Furthermore, the study indicates that community newspapers are often seen as the voice of local communities and play a significant role in shaping community narratives and perceptions. However, it is determined that newspapers may involuntarily perpetuate xenophobia discourses through biased reporting and language choices. It is established in this paper that reports framing immigrants as economic burdens or cultural threats contribute to the amplification of negative sentiments within local communities, which foster insular attitudes towards other peoples. The analysis establishes that despite these challenges, there are instances where some community newspapers have been challenged or reformed, with local activists successfully engaging with publications to adopt more inclusive language and coverage. Moreover, the analysis highlights the importance of editorial policies in shaping newspaper content, with explicit anti-xenophobia policies leading to more balanced and inclusive coverage. Most significantly to understand the role of community newspapers in shaping local perceptions of immigration, efforts can be made to

⁴⁸ Victoria M Esses, “Prejudice and Discrimination toward Immigrants,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 72 (2021): 503–31; Maykel Verkuyten, “Public Attitudes towards Migrants: Understanding Cross-national and Individual Differences,” *World Psychiatry* 20, no. 1 (2021): 132.

⁴⁹ Sandra González-Bailón and Yphtach Lelkes, “Do Social Media Undermine Social Cohesion? A Critical Review,” *Social Issues and Policy Review* 17, no. 1 (2023): 155–80.

⁵⁰ Antonio Castillo-Esparcia, Lucía Caro-Castaño, and Ana Almansa-Martínez, “Evolution of Digital Activism on Social Media: Opportunities and Challenges,” *El Profesional de La Información*, May 9, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2023.may.03>.

promote inclusive narratives and foster unity among diverse populations, ultimately combating xenophobia at the ordinary level.

RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that greater attention should be given to the traces of Ubuntu and its implications for intergroup relations can contribute to more responsible and constructive media narratives, ultimately fostering a culture of tolerance and understanding in South Africa's digital public sphere.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the study employed an Afrocentric systematic review approach to critically explore and review the portrayal or coverage of xenophobic discourses within South African community newspapers and how these challenge the African philosophy of Ubuntu. In this paper, Ubuntu is depicted as deeply rooted in African culture, emphasises interconnectedness, empathy, and humaneness within communities. However, the study argued that the dominance of xenophobic narratives in media coverage undermines these values, perpetuating division, devaluing dignity, and compromising social cohesion. It is further argued that this coverage could further perpetuate the colonial legacies of the past and continue to influence media representations, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and exacerbating tensions among African societies.

It is further emphasised in this study that in post-apartheid South Africa, community newspapers emerged as a platform to promote democratic values, community participation, and epistemic social justice. However, some community newspapers still perpetuate xenophobic discourses whilst contradicting their intended role which is to foster unity and inclusivity in local communities. This is despite efforts to empower marginalised communities through media literacy, the prevalence of biased reporting undermines the agency's mandate and perpetuates harmful ideologies. Moreover, the study identifies a significant correlation between the frequency of Ubuntu references and the framing of xenophobic narratives. It was, however, established in this paper that articles with higher instances of Ubuntu references tend to adopt a more inclusive and empathetic stance towards xenophobic incidents, highlighting the interconnectedness of humanity. Conversely, publications with limited Ubuntu mentions often perpetuate divisive narratives, framing xenophobia through a lens of fear and othering.

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ABOUT AUTHOR

Fulufhelo Oscar Makananise is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Science at the University of South Africa (UNISA). He holds a doctoral degree in Media Studies from the University of Limpopo, South Africa. Prof. Makananise obtained a PG (dip)HE from Rhodes University. He also serves as an external examiner in other South African universities and as a reviewer in international and national scholarly journals. Prof. Makananise has authored and published academic articles in peer-reviewed and DHET-accredited journals. In addition, Prof. Makananise has presented papers at both national and international conferences. His research interests include new media technology, digital media, indigenous language media and social media, political communication, digital diplomacy, and news media consumption.