

Social Media, Diaspora Identity, and Belonging: Communication Practices of African Migrant Communities in Western Societies

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Abstract

This review examines the ways social media mediate identity formation, transnational communication, and experiences of belonging among African migrant communities in Western societies. Drawing on an interdisciplinary narrative synthesis of scholarship published through 2019, it considers digital communication practices across diverse African diasporas, with particular attention to homeland relationships, online community formation, cultural self-representation and social exclusion. The review identifies social media as relational environments rather than merely technological channels: they enable migrants to maintain family ties, exchange practical information, circulate cultural memory and participate simultaneously in homeland and host-society networks. Digital storytelling and community interaction also support hybrid identities, intergenerational dialogue and collective responses to marginalising representations. These possibilities, however, remain unevenly distributed. Differences in affordability, digital literacy, language, gender, generation and migration circumstances shape access and participation, while online racism, surveillance, misinformation and competing transnational obligations can undermine trust and constrain self-expression. The reviewed literature indicates that online connections do not automatically produce social integration; their significance depends on the extent to which migrants can translate digital participation into recognition, support and meaningful offline relationships. The study concludes that diasporic belonging is dynamic, multilocal and negotiated through interactions between technological affordances and wider social inequalities. It recommends comparative longitudinal research across African communities and Western destinations, alongside participatory approaches capable of capturing private communication and marginalised perspectives. Community organisations and policymakers should prioritise affordable connectivity, culturally responsive digital literacy, accessible migrant services and protections against discrimination and exploitative data practices. Future investigations should also examine platform governance and emerging technologies without assuming that expanded connectivity necessarily yields inclusion.

Keywords: African diaspora; social media; diasporic identity; transnational communication; migrant belonging; digital exclusion.

1. Introduction

1.1 African Migration and Digital Diasporas

African migration to Western societies represents a complex historical and contemporary process shaped by economic opportunity, educational mobility, political instability, family reunification and changing global inequalities. Although African diasporic communities have long maintained transnational relationships through interpersonal networks, cultural associations and traditional media, digital technologies have introduced new possibilities for sustaining these connections across geographical boundaries. Consequently, African migrants increasingly participate in digitally mediated social environments that connect their experiences in receiving societies with continuing relationships in their countries of origin. Tetey (2009) conceptualises these developments through African transnationalism, demonstrating how internet-based communication enables geographically dispersed populations to maintain collective attachments and participate in activities extending beyond national territories.

The emergence of digital diasporas has transformed the relationship between migration, territorial displacement and collective identity. Digital communication provides opportunities for migrants to participate in homeland debates, construct shared narratives and maintain connections with geographically dispersed compatriots. Bernal (2005), examining Eritrean diasporic engagement through the Dehai website, demonstrates how online communication can facilitate transnational public spheres in which migrants participate in discussions concerning national identity, citizenship and homeland affairs. Such environments illustrate that geographical separation need not eliminate opportunities for collective identification, although virtual participation remains embedded within existing social relationships and political circumstances.

Within Nigerian migrant communities, digital platforms provide particularly revealing examples of how geographical mobility intersects with cultural expression. Online forums facilitate interactions between homeland residents and migrants living in Western societies, allowing participants to communicate across distinct linguistic and sociocultural environments. Heyd and Honkanen (2015), analysing Nigerian diasporic discourse on Nairaland, demonstrate how geographical references and affectionate place names contribute to the symbolic construction of identity. Their findings establish that representations of cities, countries and familiar localities constitute meaningful communicative resources through which migrants negotiate relationships with their origins and present places of residence.

Beyond geographical identification, diasporic communication involves the continuous reconstruction of cultural membership through personal storytelling and linguistic expression. Digital environments enable migrants to narrate experiences of relocation, interpret encounters with unfamiliar societies and articulate competing understandings of cultural authenticity. Heyd

(2016) demonstrates that narratives exchanged within Nigerian online communities contribute to identity formation through linguistic choices, geographical references and accounts of belonging. These communicative practices reveal that diasporic identity is neither entirely inherited nor determined by residence, but continually produced through interactions connecting personal experiences with collective cultural understandings.

Digital connectivity has equally expanded the participation of African migrants in homeland information environments. Diasporic online journalism allows migrants to contribute to public discussions, circulate alternative perspectives and maintain engagement with developments in their countries of origin. Examining Nigeria's evolving media environment, Kperogi (2012) identifies the growing significance of diaspora-operated digital news platforms and their relationship with established domestic journalism. Such developments demonstrate how communication technologies enable migrants to occupy multiple informational spaces, participating in the public life of their countries of origin while residing within Western media environments.

Nevertheless, digital participation also fulfils practical needs associated with settlement and everyday migration experiences. Social media can facilitate access to culturally familiar information, interpersonal assistance and informal networks that help migrants navigate unfamiliar institutions. Atiso, Kammer and Adkins (2018), examining Ghanaian immigrants in Maryland, United States, identify the importance of social-media-mediated personal networks as information sources. Their research demonstrates how established interpersonal relationships and digital communication intersect in migrants' information-seeking practices, highlighting the significance of community connections within receiving societies.

Experiences of digital belonging also vary according to generation, gender and social positioning. Second-generation migrants may negotiate cultural expectations inherited from their families alongside the identities and relationships developed within Western societies. Sanyu (2018), investigating Ghanaian women in Hamburg, demonstrates how new media create opportunities for maintaining communication networks and expressing diasporic identities amid experiences of social exclusion. However, digitally mediated connections operate alongside wider social and cultural circumstances, making belonging a multidimensional process that cannot be understood exclusively through technological participation.

Diasporic communication must therefore be situated within the broader relationships connecting migration, identity and transnational social experience. Online environments can sustain cultural solidarity while simultaneously reproducing disagreements and divisions associated with homeland circumstances. Silverman (2018), examining West African diasporic media and communication, demonstrates how mediated representations of conflict influence migrants' understandings of collective identity. For African migrant communities in Western societies, these dynamics foreground the importance of examining social media as interconnected spaces

of cultural negotiation, transnational engagement, and everyday relationship formation rather than merely instruments for exchanging information.

1.2 Social Media, Identity, and Belonging

Social media have become important communicative environments through which African migrants construct cultural identities, negotiate social recognition and sustain relationships across geographical boundaries. Unlike conventional communication channels, interactive platforms permit migrants to participate in collective identity formation while simultaneously negotiating their positions within receiving societies. Brinkerhoff (2009) conceptualises digital diasporas as transnational formations through which geographically dispersed populations maintain shared affiliations, mobilise collective resources and pursue engagement with their countries of origin. This perspective establishes identity and belonging as relational processes shaped by migrants' continuing interactions with multiple social environments.

Within Nigerian diasporic communities, online communication demonstrates how cultural identification is actively performed through language, ethnicity and representations of shared heritage. Examining Nairaland, a Nigerian digital discussion forum, Heyd (2014) illustrates how participants employ ethnic labels, Nigerian Pidgin and narratives of belonging to construct and negotiate racial and cultural identities. Such communicative practices demonstrate how digital environments enable migrants to express cultural distinctiveness while navigating diverse linguistic expectations and competing understandings of national membership.

The relationship between digital connectivity and belonging also reflects the geographical complexity of African diasporic experiences. Research examining Somali online networks demonstrates that diasporic identification encompasses simultaneous attachments to local communities, receiving countries, and transnational relationships. Kok and Rogers (2017) identify these intersecting geographical orientations through the concept of transglobalization, challenging assumptions that digital participation necessarily produces exclusively homeland-oriented identities. Their findings highlight the importance of examining everyday community participation alongside broader transnational affiliations.

Visual communication introduces another dimension of digitally mediated identity formation. Photographs, videos and personal narratives allow migrants to represent family relationships, cultural continuity and experiences of settlement. In a comparative study of Filipino migration to New Zealand, Aguirre and Davies (2015) demonstrate how Facebook photography facilitates symbolic claims to national belonging. Such practices provide a useful analytical perspective for investigating how African migrants construct visual representations of their lives within Western societies.

Belonging is equally negotiated through personal narratives that reconcile inherited cultural identities with experiences of migration. Drawing on Facebook interactions among former Polish refugees, Baran (2018) demonstrates how autobiographical storytelling enables migrants to articulate contrasting understandings of ethnicity, nationality and individual agency. These findings illuminate the potential significance of digitally mediated storytelling for examining identity negotiation across migrant generations and cultural contexts.

Nevertheless, digital connectivity does not automatically guarantee social inclusion. Migrants may experience discrimination, unequal technological access and tensions between cultural self-expression and expectations of integration. Ponzanesi (2019) situates these contradictions within a critical understanding of digital migration, emphasising the intersections of connectivity, surveillance and differentiated mobility. Examining African migrant communities through this perspective requires attention to the social circumstances that shape online participation and determine whether digitally mediated relationships translate into meaningful belonging within Western societies.

1.3 Scope and Objectives of Review

This review critically examines the relationship between social media, diasporic identity and belonging among African migrant communities residing in Western societies. Its geographical scope encompasses African populations across Europe, North America and other Western destinations, with particular attention to the communication practices through which migrants sustain homeland connections, negotiate cultural identities and establish relationships within receiving societies. It considers diverse migrant experiences while recognising variations associated with nationality, ethnicity, gender, generation and socioeconomic circumstances.

The primary objective is to investigate how digitally mediated communication influences identity formation, transnational relationships and perceptions of belonging among African migrants. Specifically, the review explores the roles of online communities, interpersonal networks, cultural representation and digital storytelling in sustaining collective identities and facilitating social participation. It also examines how racial discrimination, digital inequalities, cultural expectations and competing national attachments shape migrants' experiences within virtual and physical environments.

Adopting an interdisciplinary perspective informed by migration studies, communication scholarship and diaspora research, the review synthesises relevant theoretical arguments and empirical findings concerning African migrants' digital practices. Particular emphasis is placed on identifying recurring patterns, contextual differences and methodological limitations within existing scholarship. The review also identifies emerging communication practices and research gaps requiring further investigation to advance understanding of digitally mediated belonging in contemporary African diasporas.

2. Digital Communication in African Diasporas

Digital communication has transformed how African migrants maintain relationships, exchange information, and participate in geographically dispersed communities. Rather than severing social connections upon departure, migrants increasingly use networked technologies to preserve everyday contact while developing relationships within receiving societies. Diminescu (2008) conceptualises this transformation through the connected migrant, whose mobility is accompanied by enduring interpersonal connections. Applied to African diasporas, this perspective shifts attention from geographical separation towards the communicative practices through which relationships remain active across national boundaries.

These practices extend beyond maintaining connections with countries of origin. Ethnographic research among Ghanaians living in London identifies distinct technological practices involving cultural preservation and the pursuit of opportunities abroad. Burrell and Anderson (2008) demonstrate how migrants incorporated digital technologies into Ghanaian community events while using the internet to explore information, contacts and opportunities. Digital communication consequently encompasses both homeland-oriented exchanges and outward-looking activities associated with education, employment, geographical mobility and new social relationships.

The everyday circulation of photographs, messages and personal updates also sustains relationships without requiring continuous direct conversations. Studying Polish and Filipino migrants in Ireland, Komito (2011) demonstrates how social media facilitate background awareness of dispersed relatives and acquaintances, strengthening relationships through routine exposure to others' activities. This comparative perspective is relevant to African migrant communities, where shared images, community announcements and interpersonal exchanges may reproduce familiarity across borders. Such interactions establish digital communication as an ordinary component of transnational social life rather than an occasional response to geographical separation.

Digital networks additionally shape the information available to prospective migrants and established diaspora populations. Drawing on evidence from European destinations and origin countries, including Morocco, Dekker, Engbersen and Faber (2016) demonstrate that online communication operates predominantly through existing social relationships, although new connections may emerge. Information about destinations and migration opportunities circulates through these networks, while participation varies according to education, age and available contacts. These differences deserve attention because technological connectivity does not necessarily guarantee equal access to reliable information or practical assistance.

Online communication also provides opportunities for articulating collective concerns and negotiating representations of homeland identity. Examining Biafra-related blogs and discussion

forums, Chilwa (2012) demonstrates how participants residing within and outside Nigeria employ digital discourse to express grievances, construct collective narratives and mobilise support. These interactions reveal the capacity of online networks to connect geographically dispersed audiences through shared cultural and historical concerns. They equally demonstrate that diasporic communication may reproduce distinct ethnic affiliations, ideological differences and competing interpretations of national belonging.

Diaspora-produced journalism extends these exchanges into transnational information environments. Research examining Ethiopian online media reveals how expatriate editors negotiate relationships between journalistic professionalism and advocacy while reporting on homeland developments. Skjerdal (2011) situates these editorial practices within the political circumstances influencing Ethiopian media production. Such outlets broaden opportunities for accessing and circulating homeland information, although their communicative functions remain influenced by editorial priorities, audience expectations and the social circumstances surrounding their establishment.

Digital communication also operates as an infrastructure supporting migrants' economic and social relationships. Examining Zimbabwean migrants in the United Kingdom, Manase (2013) documents how diaspora websites, online shopping services and money-transfer platforms contributed to networks connecting migrants with communities in Zimbabwe. These practices demonstrate that digital participation involves material responsibilities alongside symbolic attachments. Communication platforms can therefore support practical assistance, facilitate economic exchanges and sustain transnational relationships that might otherwise prove difficult to maintain consistently.

Participation nevertheless varies considerably within migrant families. Research involving Moroccan-Dutch youth demonstrates how digital technologies mediate transnational relationships while providing spaces for negotiating generational expectations and gender relations. Leurs and Ponzanesi (2013) establish that messaging, social networking and online discussions are embedded within broader household relationships. Their findings challenge assumptions that shared ethnic origins necessarily produce identical communication practices, emphasising the influence of age, family position, social expectations and individual autonomy on technological engagement.

The significance of these differences becomes clearer when communication platforms are considered collectively. Developing the theory of polymedia through research involving Filipino and Caribbean transnational families, Madianou and Miller (2013) demonstrate that choosing between available communication channels carries emotional and moral implications. Within African diasporas, voice calls, public posts and private messages may communicate different degrees of intimacy, obligation and visibility. Examining these choices alongside unequal connectivity, linguistic preferences and household relationships provides an analytical

foundation for understanding how digitally mediated interactions influence migrants' everyday experiences of geographical distance, interpersonal proximity and social presence.

3. Social Media and Diasporic Identity Formation

Social media have transformed diasporic identity formation by providing African migrants with interactive environments in which cultural affiliation, collective memory and national belonging can be continuously reconstructed. Rather than constituting a fixed inheritance, diasporic identity emerges through communication practices that connect migrants' experiences in receiving societies with their cultural origins. Bernal (2014), examining Eritrean digital networks, demonstrates how diaspora-operated websites enable dispersed populations to negotiate national identity and citizenship beyond territorial boundaries. These interactions illustrate how digitally mediated participation can extend national identification while accommodating competing interpretations of collective belonging.

Within Nigerian migrant communities, digital platforms facilitate the construction of identities that simultaneously reflect homeland attachments and experiences of settlement abroad. Through an examination of Nigerian diasporic online activities, Adeniyi (2016) identifies how migrants develop individual and collective identities through internet participation. Online discussions, digital self-representation and community interactions provide opportunities for expressing cultural affiliations and assuming social roles. However, identities established within virtual environments may differ from those recognised in everyday offline relationships, highlighting the contextual character of digital self-presentation.

Diasporic identity formation also depends on how migrants interpret and reconstruct cultural heritage across generations. Investigating Moroccan-Dutch websites, Brouwer (2006) demonstrates how second-generation migrants employ online communication to establish cultural connections while negotiating their positions within Dutch society. Such interactions create opportunities to reinterpret inherited cultural expectations and articulate identities influenced by both parental homelands and contemporary experiences. Digital environments consequently provide spaces where cultural continuity and transformation coexist rather than operate as mutually exclusive processes.

Gender and generation further influence how migrants experience identity formation through social media. Examining Moroccan-Dutch youth, Leurs (2015) demonstrates how internet forums, social networking platforms and other digital environments facilitate identity negotiation within unequal social and cultural relationships. Young migrants employ these spaces to articulate personal experiences, negotiate cultural expectations and challenge marginalising representations. Their digital participation illustrates how identity formation is shaped by the interaction between individual agency, community membership and wider social hierarchies within receiving societies.

Visual communication introduces additional possibilities for constructing and communicating diasporic identities. Photographs, online narratives and digitally circulated cultural symbols allow migrants to represent their relationships with inherited traditions and contemporary social environments. Examining second-generation Iranian Americans, Alinejad (2017) demonstrates how digital media practices mediate cultural memory, racial identification and expressions of diasporic belonging. Although situated outside the African context, these findings provide a comparative perspective for investigating how African migrant communities employ digital representations to negotiate intergenerational identities.

Collective identity is equally sustained through the circulation of homeland information and shared cultural memories. Chari (2015), examining Zimbabwean diaspora audiences, demonstrates how online news consumption enables geographically dispersed migrants to maintain symbolic attachments to their country of origin. Engagement with homeland developments provides opportunities to preserve collective identification despite physical separation. Such practices reveal that diasporic identity involves continuing participation in shared informational environments as well as interpersonal relationships maintained through social networking platforms.

Media representation constitutes another important dimension of African diasporic identity formation. Migrant-produced media provide opportunities to articulate culturally grounded perspectives and challenge representations that overlook community experiences. Examining African diasporic journalism in the United Kingdom, Ogunyemi (2015) explores how cultural expectations and sensitive community issues influence editorial decision-making. These negotiations demonstrate that mediated identity is shaped not only by the messages migrants produce but also by the cultural boundaries governing public expression and community recognition.

The relationship between online participation and collective identity additionally depends on the organisation of diasporic associations. Investigating Basque diaspora groups on Facebook, Oiarzabal (2012) identifies how social networking technologies facilitate interactions among geographically dispersed members and support established community organisations. Such findings provide comparative insights into the ways African migrant associations might employ digital platforms to maintain cultural activities, strengthen interpersonal connections and communicate shared identities across multiple receiving societies.

Nevertheless, online environments should not be understood as culturally neutral spaces in which collective identities emerge without disagreement. Trandafoiu (2013), examining Romanian migrant communities, demonstrates how diaspora-operated websites become arenas for cultural expression, collective identification and competing understandings of national membership. These dynamics provide an analytical basis for examining how African migrants negotiate cultural authenticity, social recognition and competing affiliations within digital communities.

Attention to such interactions is essential for understanding diasporic identity as a continually negotiated relationship between inherited cultural attachments, contemporary migration experiences and digitally mediated representations of belonging.

4. Transnational Networks and Homeland Connections

Transnational networks constitute an essential dimension of African diasporic life, enabling migrants to sustain relationships with relatives, communities and institutions across geographical boundaries. The expansion of social media has transformed these networks by facilitating continuous interpersonal communication and widening access to geographically dispersed social connections. Dekker and Engbersen (2014) demonstrate that social media strengthen existing interpersonal relationships, activate weaker connections, and provide access to informal migration-related information. These communicative possibilities establish digital networks as important resources through which migrants maintain homeland relationships while negotiating settlement within receiving societies.

Among Nigerian migrants residing in Britain, communication with the homeland represents an important means of preserving familial relationships and negotiating experiences of geographical separation. Adeniyi (2016) demonstrates how Nigerian diaspora members employ different communication technologies according to personal circumstances, technological availability and disparities between homeland and receiving-country communication infrastructures. These practices illustrate how migrants combine conventional communication channels with emerging digital platforms to maintain relationships and sustain awareness of developments within their communities of origin.

Transnational communication also contributes to the formation and maintenance of geographically dispersed communities. Examining Haitian internet forums, Parham (2004) demonstrates how online discussions facilitate collective deliberation and strengthen connections among migrants sharing common national affiliations. However, the difficulties associated with translating virtual engagement into coordinated offline activities highlight the continuing importance of established interpersonal relationships. This comparative perspective demonstrates that digital networks complement rather than replace the social institutions and community associations underpinning African diasporic relationships.

Homeland connections extend beyond interpersonal communication to encompass material responsibilities and simultaneous participation in different socioeconomic environments. Research involving Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands demonstrates how transnational commitments coexist with economic participation within receiving societies. Mazzucato (2008) identifies migrants' simultaneous engagement in homeland and host-country economies, illustrating the interconnected character of transnational livelihoods. Within these relationships,

digital communication can facilitate the coordination of family obligations, financial transfers, and community activities across geographical distances.

The maintenance of transnational family relationships additionally involves emotional practices that cannot be understood exclusively through communication frequency. Madianou (2016), examining Filipino migrants in the United Kingdom, conceptualises ambient co-presence as the continuous awareness of distant family members facilitated by interconnected communication technologies. This perspective illuminates how routine digital interactions may sustain emotional proximity among African migrants and their relatives. Nevertheless, continuous connectivity can generate interpersonal tensions when expectations surrounding availability, responsiveness, and family participation remain unfulfilled.

These tensions become particularly significant where homeland relationships involve financial responsibilities and competing expectations. Examining Nigerian migrant households, Ikuomola (2015) demonstrates that remittance distribution can generate disagreements concerning accountability, family obligations and the allocation of financial resources. Such findings foreground the importance of examining digital communication alongside the material circumstances shaping transnational relationships. Regular contact may strengthen familial attachments while simultaneously exposing migrants to competing demands from geographically dispersed relatives.

Homeland-oriented communication also enables African migrants to participate in collective discussions concerning national developments. Research examining Somali diasporic media demonstrates how websites and broadcasting platforms facilitate engagement with homeland affairs while transmitting competing interpretations of political and communal conflicts. Osman (2015) identifies the potential for such communication environments to reproduce homeland disagreements within diaspora communities. Transnational networks consequently represent spaces of cultural solidarity and information exchange, but they may also facilitate the continuation of existing social divisions.

Digital connectivity is further complicated by unequal communication freedoms and concerns surrounding surveillance. Investigating Eritrean refugees in Italy, Opas and McMurray (2015) demonstrate how apprehensions about government surveillance influence communication with relatives residing in Eritrea. Their findings reveal how perceived risks can encourage self-censorship and discourage communication. These circumstances demonstrate that opportunities for sustaining homeland connections are shaped by political conditions alongside technological access and individual communication preferences.

The everyday maintenance of geographically dispersed relationships also depends on the social circumstances governing technological choices. Drawing on comparative research involving transnational families across several countries, Wilding (2006) demonstrates how

communication practices reflect familial expectations, cultural circumstances and unequal access to digital technologies. For African migrant communities in Western societies, these interconnected considerations provide an analytical basis for examining how digital communication mediates emotional attachments, practical obligations and changing relationships between migrants and their homelands.

5. Online Communities and Migrant Belonging

Online communities have become environments through which African migrants negotiate belonging beyond national boundaries. Their significance extends beyond communication to reciprocal recognition, cultural expression and participation in collective activities. Examining first- and second-generation African communities in Britain, Waite and Cook (2011) identify simultaneous attachments to different places. Their findings demonstrate that belonging cannot be reduced to a choice between homeland loyalty and participation in a receiving society.

For Nigerian migrants, digital interaction provides opportunities to reconcile inherited cultural affiliations with identities developed abroad. Online discussions can also create spaces where participants seek acceptance from compatriots with different migration experiences. Adeniyi and Suleiman (2017) examine identity construction among migrant Nigerians, highlighting the relationship between virtual self-presentation and understandings of home. Recognition within an online community may reinforce, complicate or diverge from migrants' offline identities.

Belonging is also shaped by gender, generation and the cultural expectations encountered in Western societies. Studying young women of African descent in Norway, Mainsah (2014) explores how digital social networks facilitate negotiations of identity and community across local and transnational settings. Online belonging thus develops through situated relationships rather than membership in an undifferentiated African diaspora. Digital platforms connect participants across borders while sustaining affiliations grounded in particular social circumstances.

Shared historical experiences provide another basis for online community formation. Analysing Facebook and Twitter activity among Rwandan diasporic populations in North America and Europe, Martin (2019) identifies expressions of collective memory, cultural attachment and forced displacement. Digital interaction allows participants to maintain connections with compatriots and communicate narratives meaningful to dispersed audiences. Such communities may incorporate unresolved historical suffering alongside cultural pride and interpersonal solidarity.

Belonging within receiving societies also depends on whether digital contacts facilitate wider participation. Research involving refugees from Eritrea, Syria and Afghanistan in the Netherlands demonstrates that social media can assist language learning, cultural familiarisation

and relationship building. Alencar (2018) distinguishes connections within migrant communities from relationships extending into host-society networks. This distinction helps assess whether online participation supports inclusion or principally reinforces existing diasporic ties.

Technological participation should therefore be assessed through opportunities migrants can meaningfully exercise. Drawing on research with resettled refugees, Díaz Andrade and Doolin (2016) identify capabilities associated with communication, understanding a new society, maintaining connections and expressing cultural identity. This framework helps assess online communities among African migrants. Membership alone offers an incomplete measure of belonging where language barriers, limited resources or exclusion restrict meaningful social participation.

Online relationships may generate a sense of place through exchanges of advice, personal experiences and assistance. Marino (2015), examining Italian migrant forums in London, describes digital togetherness as a process through which participants construct supportive communities intersecting with urban social life. This comparative evidence suggests that online spaces can facilitate offline encounters and collective activities. Such connections matter when evaluating African migrants' participation in local communities.

Platform organisation influences which accounts of community receive recognition. Analysing an Arab Canadian Facebook community, Al-Rawi (2019) demonstrates how administrators and participants shape discussions about heritage, imagined nationhood and identification with Canada. This comparison highlights the importance of moderation, participation and narrative visibility. Within African migrant communities, online solidarity should consequently be examined alongside differences in whose experiences are represented, acknowledged or marginalised.

Online participation does not necessarily strengthen homeland attachment in predictable ways. Studying young white South African migrants in Britain, Timcke (2010) demonstrates how internet-mediated connections reshape migrants' imaginings of home, including among individuals initially seeking distance from national origins. Such variations caution against assuming that digital communities produce uniform attachments. African migrants may use similar technologies to sustain familiar affiliations, reassess inherited identities or develop relationships that alter their sense of belonging.

6. Digital Challenges, Exclusion, and Identity Negotiation

Digital connectivity expands African migrants' capacity to sustain relationships and participate in diasporic communities, yet access to these opportunities is uneven. Digital exclusion encompasses more than physical access to devices; it also reflects disparities in affordability, connectivity, literacy, institutional accessibility and the capacity to convert technology into

meaningful social participation. Evidence from Nigeria demonstrates the multidimensional character of this divide, with differences in access and frequency of digital-service use varying according to users' circumstances and country of residence (Okunola, Rowley & Johnson, 2017). Such disparities remain significant for migrant populations whose social, administrative and transnational lives increasingly depend upon digitally mediated infrastructures.

Migrants may possess smartphones while remaining disadvantaged by limited data, unfamiliar interfaces, inadequate language proficiency or uncertainty about trustworthy information. Research involving Syrian and Iraqi migrants entering Europe shows that digital information environments can simultaneously assist migration and expose users to misleading, inaccessible or difficult-to-verify information (Borkert, Fisher & Yafi, 2018). Consequently, digital inclusion should not be equated with device ownership; effective participation also requires information literacy, confidence and access to reliable networks.

Young and vulnerable migrants face particularly complex forms of exclusion. Kutscher and Kreß (2018) demonstrate that digital media are indispensable for unaccompanied refugees maintaining family relationships and navigating receiving societies, yet socioeconomic inequalities affect the extent to which these resources can be used. Connectivity therefore reproduces aspects of offline inequality even as it provides mechanisms for overcoming geographical separation.

Digital infrastructures may also become mechanisms of surveillance and control. Through the concept of digital passages, Latonero and Kift (2018) show that technologies assisting migrant mobility can simultaneously enable monitoring, data extraction and institutional control. African migrants negotiating precarious legal or social positions may therefore manage online visibility strategically, balancing the benefits of participation against concerns surrounding privacy, identification and surveillance.

Table 1. Digital Challenges Shaping Diasporic Belonging

Digital challenge	Migrant experience	Identity implication
Unequal connectivity	Restricted data, devices or digital skills	Unequal participation in diaspora communities
Information uncertainty	Misinformation and unreliable migration advice	Heightened vulnerability and mistrust
Surveillance and data exposure	Monitoring or unwanted visibility	Strategic self-censorship and selective disclosure
Online racism	Hostile stereotypes and discriminatory discourse	Defensive, hybrid or solidarity-based identities
Network instability	Changing contacts during migration	Fluid relationships and shifting belonging

Exclusion is additionally produced through the discursive environment of social media. Anti-immigrant communities can circulate racialised representations that position migrants as socially threatening or culturally incompatible. Ekman (2019) demonstrates how interactive Facebook communication can normalise anti-immigration and racist sentiments. For African migrants in Western societies, exposure to such discourse may intensify racial consciousness, encourage selective self-presentation and influence decisions about whether cultural identities are publicly displayed or confined to trusted networks.

Identity negotiation also involves the representation of place. Georgalou (2019) shows how migrants employ social media discourse to construct relationships with homeland and destination spaces. These practices illuminate how African migrants can present identities combining memories of origin, experiences of settlement and aspirations for social recognition without necessarily resolving these dimensions into a single national affiliation.

For second-generation African populations, inherited histories introduce further complexity. Among Eritrean diaspora youth, collective narratives transmitted between generations contribute substantially to identity and belonging (Graf, 2018). Such inherited attachments may intersect with digitally circulated cultural narratives, producing identities positioned simultaneously within homeland histories and Western social environments.

Migration itself can destabilise social networks. Among sub-Saharan African migrants moving through Turkey and Greece, relationships and communication networks changed in response to critical events and shifting opportunities (Wissink & Mazzucato, 2018). Digital networks should therefore be understood as dynamic rather than permanently supportive structures.

More broadly, digital migration scholarship cautions against treating technology as independently transformative. Digital practices operate within wider structures of race, gender, legal status, class and geopolitical inequality (Leurs & Smets, 2018). For African diasporas, identity negotiation consequently emerges from the interaction between technological opportunities and social constraints, making digital belonging simultaneously enabling, unequal and continually renegotiated.

7. Emerging Trends and Research Directions

Research on African digital diasporas must move beyond platform-centred descriptions towards explanations of how online and offline relationships jointly produce belonging. A relational framework situates communication within intersecting structures of race, gender, class and mobility, rather than treating connectivity as inherently emancipatory. Candidatu, Leurs and Ponzanesi (2019) establish this direction, inviting comparisons of how African migrants in different Western societies experience similar platforms under unequal institutional conditions.

Such comparisons should also distinguish recent arrivals from long-established and locally born second-generation populations.

Emerging scholarship must examine migrant-generated cultural production. Digital autobiographies, podcasts and visual storytelling provide opportunities to investigate how migrants narrate intergenerational change and reconcile competing expectations of home and settlement. Through analysis of online autobiographical writing by a Nigerian diasporic author, Onuoha (2018) illustrates relationships between digital expression, remembered homeland identities and changing domestic roles. Future studies could compare these practices across generations, platforms and African linguistic communities.

Methodological innovation presents another priority. Surveys can register platform usage without revealing the emotional significance of particular exchanges. Alinejad et al. (2019) propose ‘mattering maps’, integrating digital trace analysis with situated qualitative interpretation. Applied to African diaspora networks, this approach could illuminate intersections between public conversations, private relationships and local associations. Research designs must nevertheless address consent, contextual interpretation and risks of exposing vulnerable participants.

Persistent inequalities demand attention as African migrants adopt sophisticated communication tools. Comparative research should examine affordability, language, digital literacy, accessibility and differences in infrastructure between countries of origin and settlement. Mutsvairo and Ragnedda (2019) document the multidimensional character of Africa’s digital divide, indicating why assumptions of universal connectivity require scrutiny. Longitudinal studies could establish how unequal access affects family contact, service access and participation in diasporic public life.

The ethics of migrant connectivity warrant sustained investigation. Research on technologically mediated migration from the Horn of Africa highlights how networked communication intersects with coercion, exploitation and informational asymmetries. Van Reisen et al. (2019) illuminate these risks through studies of migration routes towards Europe. Future diaspora research should investigate whether digital safety, data extraction and surveillance continue influencing communication after settlement, without conflating refugees’ experiences with those of all African migrants.

Research must examine migrants as producers of public knowledge rather than subjects of representations generated elsewhere. Georgiou (2018) analyses digital initiatives through which migrants address European audiences and challenge prevailing narratives of displacement. African diaspora scholarship could investigate when online testimony gains visibility, informs intercultural encounters or encounters institutional resistance. Participatory methods would allow

migrant communities to formulate research questions and interpret representations of their own experiences.

Emerging financial technologies may reshape the material foundations of transnational belonging. Rodima-Taylor and Grimes (2019) investigate distributed-ledger applications associated with migration, remittances and identity verification across Africa, Asia and Europe, while identifying new vulnerabilities. Subsequent studies should assess whether these systems lower transaction costs, strengthen trust and expand participation among African migrants. Evaluations require evidence from users, remittance recipients and community organisations, alongside attention to regulation, technological dependence and unequal access.

Conclusion

This review examined how social media shape communication, identity formation and experiences of belonging among African migrants in Western societies. Synthesising scholarship, it demonstrated that digital platforms are neither substitutes for physical communities nor neutral channels of information. Rather, they are social environments in which migrants sustain family relationships, circulate cultural knowledge, negotiate multiple affiliations and participate in transnational networks. Evidence drawn from Nigerian, Ghanaian, Somali, Eritrean, Zimbabwean and other diasporic contexts revealed variation across nationality, generation, gender, socioeconomic position and migration circumstances. These findings fulfil the review's central objective by establishing that digitally mediated belonging is relational, context-dependent and continually negotiated.

The synthesis identified three interconnected dynamics. First, messaging, online communities and diaspora-produced media enable migrants to maintain homeland connections while developing relationships within receiving societies. Second, digital self-representation and storytelling provide opportunities to preserve cultural memory, challenge marginalising narratives and articulate hybrid identities. Third, unequal connectivity, racialised hostility, surveillance and competing familial expectations constrain participation and may reproduce exclusions. Digital access alone, therefore, cannot establish inclusion; the social value of connectivity depends on migrants' capacity to participate safely, exercise agency and translate online relationships into practical support and recognition.

Future scholarship should prioritise longitudinal and comparative research spanning African communities and Western destinations, while examining relationships between online participation and offline belonging. Participatory and mixed-method approaches would capture private communication, intergenerational change and the experiences of digitally marginalised migrants without exposing vulnerable participants. Researchers should investigate platform governance, algorithmic visibility, privacy and emerging financial technologies through ethically grounded designs. For community organisations and policymakers, the findings support

culturally responsive digital-literacy initiatives, affordable connectivity, accessible migrant services and safeguards against online discrimination and data exploitation. Such measures should be developed with migrant communities rather than imposed upon them, recognising their aspirations and their active role in shaping transnational social life.

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