



Japa Narratives on Social Media and Emotional Reactions to Migration Discourse among Undergraduates of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Nigeria

¹Oludare Ebenezer Ogunyombo* & ²Emmanuel Olukunle Olumuji

^{1&2}Department of Mass Communication, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye, Nigeria

¹<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3529-2720>

²<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3468-9868>

***Corresponding Author:** ogunyombo.oludare@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Background: Migration discourse on social media has been quite intensified among Nigerian youths. This has resulted in what is commonly referred to as the ‘*japa syndrome*’- a common phrase describing these narratives among Nigerians. While existing works have largely focused on economic and structural drivers in these narratives, studies on the emotional impact and reactions to these narratives, particularly among Nigerian youths, are rare.

Objectives: This study examined the emotional responses of Nigerian youths to migration and diaspora discourse on social media within the context of the *Japa* phenomenon. It focused on the affective dimensions shaping youths’ decisions to migrate or remain in Nigeria.

Method: Using a descriptive quantitative design, data were collected through a 15-item questionnaire administered via the students’ WhatsApp group at Olabisi Onabanjo University. Google Analytics also aided the analysis of the data.

Result: Findings reveal that social media exerts a complex emotional influence on migration perceptions because diaspora success narratives often inspire hope and ambition while also triggering comparison-induced stress. However, most respondents reported predominantly positive emotional engagement, including motivation, identity exploration, and community formation. Therefore, social media serves as a space where migration aspirations are constructed, negotiated, and expressed.

Unique Contribution: This research contributes to migration literature by integrating emotional analysis into the discourse on youth migration. It offers novel insights into how digital platforms mediate affective experiences in migration and diaspora conversations and proposes policy interventions that resonate with the emotional realities of youths in emerging economies.

Recommendations: The study recommends emotionally informed communication strategies to balance migration narratives and engage youths more effectively. Policy interventions should promote balanced narratives by highlighting local opportunities alongside diaspora success stories.

Keywords: Diaspora communication; Emotional reaction; *Japa*; Migration; Nigeria youth; Social media



INTRODUCTION

Social media has fundamentally reshaped global communication by enabling real-time interaction across geographic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have evolved into dynamic arenas for intercultural dialogue, political participation, and knowledge dissemination (Hakimi et al. 2024; Cheng, Wang & Kong 2022). This transformation has expanded the scope of communication beyond traditional media systems, allowing individuals to actively construct and circulate narratives. Within migration contexts, social media functions as a transnational communication infrastructure linking diaspora communities with their home countries. These platforms facilitate the exchange of ideas, cultural practices, and personal experiences, often through multimedia formats that enhance emotional engagement (Yuna et al., 2022). As digital public spheres, they sustain diasporic ties while enabling the construction of hybrid identities that span national boundaries (Chekirova, 2022).

In Nigeria, social media plays a central role in migration discourse, particularly through the popularisation of *Japa*, a term describing the increasing emigration of youths seeking better opportunities abroad. Diaspora narratives circulating online, especially those emphasising success, shape perceptions of life abroad and influence migration aspirations. These narratives provide access to information, create networks, and normalise migration as a desirable life trajectory (Ikharo et al., 2024; Okunade & Awosusi, 2023).

Despite extensive research on migration drivers (Adegoke, 2023; Adeyamju et al., 2024; Ikharo et al., 2024; Korinya & Dansale, 2025), limited attention has been paid to the emotional responses elicited by diaspora content. Social media often amplifies idealised portrayals of life abroad, evoking emotions such as hope, excitement, envy, and frustration (Andersson, 2019; Appel, Gerlach & Crusius, 2015; Chou & Edge, 2012; Kramer, Guillory & Hancock, 2014). These emotional engagements shape how youths evaluate opportunities at home and abroad, potentially influencing migration decisions based on mediated representations rather than lived realities. This study addresses this gap by examining how Nigerian youths emotionally engage with diaspora narratives on social media, identifying dominant emotional responses, and analysing how these emotions influence migration intentions.

Therefore, the specific objectives of this paper are to examine how OOU undergraduates emotionally engage with social media content shared by diaspora communities, particularly Nigerians living abroad; what emotions are most commonly expressed by OOU undergraduates when discussing migration on social media; how exposure to social media narratives from diaspora communities affect their emotions regarding life abroad; and how social media content from diaspora communities influence OOU undergraduates' migration decisions.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Japa Discourse and Diasporic Conversations

The term *Japa*, derived from Yoruba and meaning “to flee,” has evolved into a defining concept in Nigeria’s contemporary migration discourse. It reflects both structural challenges, such as economic instability, unemployment, insecurity, and governance deficits, and aspirational desires for improved living standards (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023). Migration is therefore framed as both a coping strategy and a pathway to upward mobility. Social media therefore, amplifies this discourse by circulating diaspora narratives and providing practical migration guidance. Content creators share information on visas, employment, and relocation processes while portraying life abroad as attainable and desirable (Adegoke, 2023; Ikhara et al., 2024). These representations generate feedback loops in which visible success reinforces migration aspirations and normalises outward mobility.

Economic and political conditions remain the central push factors driving migration, as high graduate underemployment, limited career opportunities, and dissatisfaction with governance reinforce the perception that opportunities abroad are more rewarding and stable (Adeyamu et al., 2024; Okunade et al., 2023). Political developments, including the #EndSARS protests, have further deepened disillusionment, positioning migration as both an economic and political response. However, despite the prominence of these economic and political drivers and the widespread circulation of migration success narratives, including in existing studies, a critical research gap exists in the disconnect between these motivations and the realities experienced by migrants. Social media amplifies stories of success while often downplaying challenges such as discrimination, credential barriers, underemployment, and emotional strain, thereby fostering what has been described as a “migration delusion,” where expectations are inflated and risks underestimated (Adegoke, 2023; Ebekue, 2024).

The implications of this trend are multifaceted. While migration offers opportunities for individual advancement, it contributes to brain drain and intensifies inequality between households with and without diaspora connections. The valorisation of foreign experience further reinforces migration as the dominant route to self-actualisation, potentially undermining confidence in local opportunities (Korinya & Dansale, 2025; Adeyamu et al., 2024).

Digital Diaspora and the Mediation of Migration Narratives

Digital diaspora refers to the use of social media by migrant communities to sustain connections, share experiences, and shape migration narratives (Andersson 2019). These narratives extend beyond host societies, influencing audiences in home countries, particularly youths who rely on them to construct migration aspirations. Diaspora content creators, sometimes described as “Japa ambassadors,” produce vlogs, short videos, and posts that combine practical advice with aspirational storytelling (Ebekue, 2025). This participatory environment allows both migrants and non-migrants to contribute to the circulation of migration narratives (Llontop et al. 2023; Ertz, Barragán Maravilla & Cao, 2025).



These narratives are not neutral; they are emotionally and politically charged. They evoke hope, nostalgia, anxiety, and aspiration, depending on how experiences are framed (Festa 2023; Leurs et al., 2020). Nigerian youths engage with such content through processes of comparison and identity negotiation, imagining themselves within transnational spaces. Importantly, audiences are active interpreters. Many youths critically assess diaspora content, questioning overly idealised portrayals while responding to counter-narratives that highlight challenges abroad. This interaction produces diverse emotional responses, shaping whether migration is perceived as desirable, risky, or necessary (Llontop et al., 2023).

Digital diaspora narratives influence migration in several ways. They amplify aspirations by showcasing success, generate emotional engagement through storytelling, provide practical knowledge for migration planning, and foster dissatisfaction with local conditions through comparative framing (Leurs et al., 2020; Ebekue, 2025). As such, they play a dual role as informational and affective drivers of migration.

Social Media, Emotional Engagement and Youth Aspirations

Social media operates as an affective environment where emotions significantly shape migration aspirations. Platforms evoke feelings such as hope, envy, nostalgia, and belonging, which influence how youths interpret migration possibilities (Madianou 2019). Hope emerges as a dominant emotional response, driven by exposure to success narratives and perceived opportunities abroad. These narratives make migration appear achievable, particularly where offline information is limited (De Zúñiga Jung & Valenzuela, 2012). However, hope often coexists with envy, as users compare their lives with curated portrayals of success, leading to feelings of inadequacy and heightened migration desire (Chou & Edge, 2012; Tandoc Jr. et al., 2015).

Nostalgia and belonging also shape engagement. Diaspora content that highlights cultural practices evokes emotional connections that can simultaneously strengthen attachment to home and encourage migration by presenting the possibility of maintaining identity abroad (Wildschut et al., 2006; Michael, 2025). Online communities further reinforce belonging by providing emotional support and normalising migration as a shared experience.

Repeated exposure to emotionally charged content influences psychological well-being through mechanisms such as emotional contagion (Kramer, Guillory & Hancock, 2014). While some youths feel empowered and motivated, others experience stress or distorted expectations, particularly when exposed to idealised narratives (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). Migration decisions are thus shaped by the interplay of emotion and cognition. Content that combines emotional appeal with practical guidance is more likely to influence behaviour, while purely aspirational content may produce unrealistic expectations that weaken decision-making processes.



THEORETICAL REVIEW

Networked Individualism Theory

Networked individualism explains the shift from tightly knit social groups to flexible, digitally mediated networks. The term was originally coined by Barry Wellman in 2000 and subsequently introduced into scholarly discourse through its first publication by Manuel Castells and Wellman in 2001. A more comprehensive elaboration of the concept was later provided by Lee Rainie and Wellman in their 2012 volume *Networked: The New Social Operating System* (Rainie & Wellman 2012; Castells, 2002; Wellman, 2008; Wellman, 2000). According to the theory, individuals now rely on personalised connections for information and support, facilitated by social media technologies. In migration discourse, youths are increasingly depend on platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and Facebook for migration-related information. These platforms enable cross-border interactions and support the formation of hybrid identities that connect local experiences with global aspirations (van Dijck et al., 2018). Migration discussions are therefore embedded within digital micro-networks rather than traditional community structures.

Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory was first proposed by psychologist Leon Festinger in 1954. Social comparison theory posits that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their circumstances with those of others, particularly under conditions of uncertainty (Festinger, 1954; Butts, 2020; Powdthavee, 2014; Crusius, Corcoran & Mussweiler, 2022). Social media intensifies this process by providing continuous exposure to curated lifestyles and migration success stories (Vogel et al., 2014). Upward comparisons with successful migrants can inspire ambition but also generate feelings of inadequacy and pressure to migrate. Conversely, downward comparisons with less favourable migration experiences may reduce migration intentions. These emotional responses play a critical role in shaping behaviour and decision-making (Wang et al., 2017; Appel et al., 2020).

Intersection of Networked Individualism Theory and Social Comparison Theory

Networked individualism and social comparison theory together provide a comprehensive framework for understanding migration aspirations. While the former explains how individuals access migration information through digital networks, the latter accounts for the emotional responses triggered by engagement with such content. For instance, a youth may join an online scholarship or migration group, reflecting networked individualism, and feel motivated after observing peers succeed, illustrating upward social comparison. Alternatively, exposure to narratives of hardship may discourage migration through downward comparison. These interactions demonstrate that migration decisions are shaped by both informational access and emotional engagement, reinforcing the role of social media as both a structural and affective force in contemporary migration discourse.



METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-method approach within a descriptive research design, focusing on OOU students aged 15–35 in line with the African Union Youth Charter (2006). The population comprised students of Olabisi Onabanjo University within this age bracket. A quantitative survey method was employed using a 15-item questionnaire designed on Google Forms. The instrument was adapted from established studies (Wildschut et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2017; Uzowuihe, 2023; Odunlami et al., 2025) and structured into four thematic sections aligned with the research objectives.

To ensure validity, the instrument was pre-tested on 30 students, and the feedback informed revisions for clarity and precision. A second pilot test was conducted, after which reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a high coefficient ($\alpha = 0.91$), indicating strong internal consistency. With an estimated population of 32,000 students (OOU official website, February 27, 2026), a sample size of 380 was determined using the SurveyMonkey sample size calculator set at 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error, 50-50 distribution. Seven faculties out of the fourteen were selected through simple random sampling, while convenience sampling was used to access respondents through students' faculty WhatsApp groups.

In this case, convenience sampling was used to reach relevant participants, as WhatsApp is widely used in academic settings and makes it easier to collect responses, increase participation, and reduce bias. This approach also helped include different subgroups within the WhatsApp groups, improving how well the findings can be applied more broadly (Morgan, 1996; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kumar, 2019; Singer et al., 2023).

Access to these platforms was granted by student associations' leaders, and the questionnaire link was shared for two weeks on the platforms. Data were analysed descriptively using Google Forms analytics, which presents results in percentage-based formats (Ulum et al., 2023; Manggaberani & Darlis, 2024).

RESULTS

Demographic Analysis

A total of 489 responses were collected, exceeding the minimum sample size and enhancing generalisability. The majority of respondents were aged 16–25 (86.9%), indicating a predominantly youthful sample.



Analysis in Relation to Research Objectives

Research Objective 1: How OOU undergraduates emotionally engage with social media content shared by diaspora communities.

Table 1: Emotional Immersion in Diaspora Content

Emotional Reaction	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
I feel a sense of global Nigerian identity when I engage with Nigerian communities living abroad on social media.	111 (23%)	206 (42%)	121 (25%)	38 (8%)	13 (3%)	489 (100%)
I identify with the personal migration stories shared by influencers living abroad.	60 (12%)	205 (42%)	158 (32%)	53 (11%)	13 (3%)	489 (100%)
Social Media content from Nigerians abroad shapes how I emotionally process life in Nigeria.	89 (18%)	167 (34%)	118 (24%)	86 (18%)	29 (6%)	489 (100%)
I experience feelings of inadequacy or FOMO after reading about the success stories of Nigerians abroad.	95 (19.4%)	163 (33.3%)	124 (25.3%)	73 (15%)	34 (7%)	489 (100%)

In Table 1, the findings revealed a nuanced emotional engagement with diaspora content. About 65% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that such content evokes emotions such as hope, envy, and nostalgia, indicating a strong emotional connection. Identification with migration stories was also moderate, with 54% agreeing, while 32% remained uncertain. Similarly, 52% agreed that diaspora content influences how they emotionally process life in Nigeria, although 24% disagreed, reflecting divided perceptions. Feelings of inadequacy and fear of missing out were present but not dominant. Approximately 53% acknowledged such feelings, while a notable proportion expressed uncertainty or disagreement. Overall, the findings suggest complex emotional engagement characterised by strong resonance alongside varied psychological responses.

Research Objective 2: Emotions most commonly expressed by OOU undergraduates when discussing migration on social media.

Table 2: Commonly Expressed Emotions (Belonging, Community and Identity)

Emotional Reactions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Exposure to the lifestyle content of people living abroad on social media boosts my motivation to improve my life	93(19%)	235 (48%)	124 (25%)	28 (6%)	9 (2%)	489 (100%)
I use social media to imagine myself as part of a community beyond Nigeria.	95 (19%)	213 (44%)	104 (21%)	66 (14%)	11 (2%)	489 (100%)
Diaspora platforms help me connect with values, beliefs, and aspirations that differ from local norms.	96 (20%)	237 (48%)	123 (25%)	28 (6%)	5 (1%)	489 (100%)
My social media engagement with Nigerians living abroad influences how I evaluate my personal identity.	57 (12%)	150 (31%)	161 (33%)	92 (19%)	29 (6%)	489 (100%)



From Table 2, a strong sense of global identity emerged, with 67% of respondents agreeing that engagement with diaspora content fosters a broader Nigerian identity. Similarly, 68% reported that such platforms connect them to values and aspirations beyond local norms.

Additionally, 63% indicated that they use diaspora content to imagine themselves as part of a global community. However, the influence on personal identity was less consistent, with only 43% agreeing that such content affects self-perception, while others expressed uncertainty or disagreement. These results suggest that while social media fosters aspiration, belonging, and identity expansion, its impact on personal identity formation varies across individuals.

Research Objective 3: How exposure to social media narratives from diaspora communities affects OOU undergraduates' emotions regarding life abroad.

Table 3: Exposure and Emotional Response (Psychological Effects and Migration Attitudes)

Emotional Reactions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Exposure to the lifestyle content on social media from diaspora communities boosts my motivation to improve my life	152 (31%)	225 (46%)	78 (16%)	29 (6%)	5 (1%)	489 (100%)
I feel emotionally distant or disconnected from Nigerian society after engaging with social media content from diaspora communities	54 (11%)	112 (23%)	137 (28%)	152 (31%)	34 (7%)	489 (100%)
The emotional connection I feel to the social media narratives from diaspora communities makes me want to relocate abroad.	98 (20%)	166 (34%)	134 (27.4%)	69 (14.1%)	22 (4.5%)	489 (100%)
I sometimes experience mental stress or dissatisfaction after comparing my life in Nigeria to those abroad, as expressed by diaspora communities on social media.	67 (14%)	137 (28%)	122 (25%)	116 (23%)	47 (10%)	489 (100%)

Table 3 shows that exposure to diaspora narratives was largely motivational. A significant 77% of respondents reported increased motivation to improve their lives, while 54% indicated that such emotional engagement encourages their desire to migrate. However, emotional detachment from Nigeria was not widespread. While 34% reported some level of disconnection, 38% disagreed, suggesting that many youths maintain strong ties to their home country. Social comparison produced mixed effects. About 42% reported stress or dissatisfaction from comparing their lives with those abroad, while others disagreed or were uncertain, indicating that such effects are not universal.



Research Objective 4: How social media content from diaspora communities influence OOU undergraduates’ migration decisions.

Table 4: Influence on Migration Decisions

Emotional Reactions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
If social media were not part of my life, I might feel less urgency to leave Nigeria.	64 (13%)	137 (28%)	117 (24%)	137 (28%)	34 (7%)	489 (100%)
Due to what I see on social media, I have joined online groups that provide migration advice and emotional support.	39 (8%)	117 (24%)	113 (23%)	166 (34%)	54 (11%)	489 (100%)
Emotional narratives on social media from diaspora communities have influenced my plan to migrate	59 (12%)	142 (29%)	132 (27%)	122 (25%)	34 (7%)	489 (100%)

From Table 4, the influence of social media on migration decisions appears mixed. Approximately 41% of respondents reported increased urgency to migrate, while 35% disagreed and 24% remained uncertain. Similarly, 41% indicated that diaspora narratives directly influence their migration plans. Notably, 32% reported actively participating in online migration communities, suggesting that social media functions not only as an information source but also as a tool for planning and support.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that social media plays a significant role in shaping Nigerian youths’ emotional responses to migration narratives. The prevalence of hope, envy, and nostalgia aligns with Odunlami et al. (2025), who argue that idealised diaspora content resonates strongly with youths. However, negative emotions such as inadequacy were less dominant, contrasting with studies linking social media use to anxiety and low self-esteem (Eze et al., 2025; Efetobore, 2022). This suggests that such effects may be subtle or not fully recognised by respondents (Kumar, 2023).

The emergence of a global Nigerian identity supports Udenze (2022), highlighting the role of social media in identity construction and community building. Additionally, the findings reinforce the idea that digital platforms facilitate exposure to diverse values and aspirations. Importantly, the study challenges the notion that diaspora engagement leads to emotional detachment from Nigeria. Instead, many respondents maintain strong cultural ties, indicating a hybrid identity that combines local belonging with global aspiration.

The motivational influence of diaspora content is also evident, with 77% reporting increased drive for self-improvement. This aligns with LEAP Africa (2024) and Uzowuihe (2023), who note that social media highlights opportunities and improved living standards abroad. Social comparison, while present, was not a dominant source of distress. This contrasts with literature



emphasising its negative psychological effects (Cheng et al., 2022; Taylor & Armes, 2024), suggesting that social media may function more as a source of aspiration than dissatisfaction in this context.

The transition from passive consumption to active engagement is particularly notable. Participation in online migration groups reflects the role of social media in facilitating planning and collective support (Dambo et al., 2022). Overall, the findings support the assumptions of networked individualism and social comparison theory. Digital networks provide access to migration narratives, while emotional responses shape how these narratives influence aspirations and decisions.

CONCLUSION

From the findings, this study concludes that social media plays a complex role in shaping youths' emotional engagement with migration narratives. However, while it fosters hope, aspiration, and a sense of global identity, its influence is not uniform. Therefore, the study recommends that policy interventions should promote balanced narratives by highlighting local opportunities alongside diaspora success stories. Mental health initiatives should encourage critical engagement with social media to manage emotional pressures. Migration policies should also incorporate psychological support mechanisms, recognising the emotional impact of digital narratives. Furthermore, leveraging diaspora networks for mentorship can transform migration discourse into opportunities for national development.

AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

Future studies should examine additional factors such as family influence and peer networks using inferential approaches. Expanding research across multiple institutions and regions would also provide broader insights into contextual variations.

Ethical Clearance

Ethical alignment was maintained by seeking consent from the student group's leadership prior to sharing the study on their WhatsApp platform. Participants were further notified of their right to voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their responses for academic use.

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We received no funding for conducting this study.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest in conducting this study, either for political or commercial reasons,



Authors' Contribution

Oludare E. Ogunyombo conceived the idea, developed the research instrument and collected the data. Emmanuel O. Olumuji reviewed the data analysis and fine-tuned the presentation. Both authors have reviewed, approved and are responsible for the final draft of the manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data sets used in this study are available on reasonable request.

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