



Impact of Social Media in Sensitising Nigerian Youths on the Implications of the Trending ‘Japa’ (Mass Migration) Syndrome

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ABSTRACT

Background: The "Japa" syndrome, referring to the mass migration of skilled and unskilled individuals from Africa, particularly Nigeria, to the overseas, particularly Europe and America in search of better opportunities, has become a pressing concern. Despite its potential benefits, this phenomenon poses significant socio-economic implications, including brain drain, labour shortages and disrupted social networks.

Objective: This study investigated the impact of social media in sensitising Nigerian youths on the implications of the trending ‘Japa’ (mass migration) syndrome.

Method: The study employed a library research method, leveraging existing literature to investigate the impact of social media on Nigerian youths' perceptions of the 'Japa' syndrome.

Results: Findings show that cultural, modernisation, and peer influences hinder the desired attitude and behaviour change for adherence to opportunities in Nigeria, despite exposure to social media ‘anti-japa’ campaigns.

Conclusion: The study concludes that social media play important role in shaping public perceptions of the ‘japa’ syndrome. Responsible journalism and balanced reporting are essential in portraying the complexities of youth migration.

Unique Contribution: This study offers new insights into the interplay of influences on media effects, informing policymakers, healthcare practitioners and communication experts.

Key Recommendations: Key recommendations include comprehensive community-based policies and cohesive intervention programmes involving key stakeholders are necessary to address the ‘japa’ syndrome; social media literacy initiatives focused on the ‘japa’ trend can empower audiences to critically engage with social media contents; and diversifying narratives in media coverage can counter stereotypes and misrepresentations.

Keywords: Japa syndrome, media enlightenment, youth migration, brain drain, social media.



INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the term “Japa” has gained attention, especially within African countries, particularly, Nigeria. It is used to describe the mass migration of skilled and unskilled individuals seeking better opportunities abroad. This phenomenon is not entirely new, as the history of human migration is as old as civilization itself. However, the socio-economic implications of this modern exodus are grievous. Asaju (2023) noted that the term ‘Japa’, a Nigerian slang for “to run away,” has transcended its colloquial roots to encapsulate a broader phenomenon: the mass exodus of skilled individuals from their home countries, particularly those in Africa, towards perceived greener pastures in Europe and America. This trend, fuelled by a complex interplay of economic hardship, political instability, and aspirations for a better life, has ignited intense debate and introspection within affected nations, thus leading to mass exodus of persons (Ogbaeja, & Nwafor, 2017).

Afunugo (2023) noted that one of the primary reasons behind this ‘Japa syndrome’ is economic instability. High levels of unemployment and limited economic opportunities at home drive young people to seek better prospects abroad. He however noted that youths migration is often linked to human trafficking and exploitation. Uninformed decisions, coupled with the lack of awareness, make young individuals susceptible to traffickers promising better opportunities abroad (Nwafor, Ezema, & Igwebuike, 2022).

Migration is not always a fruitless, difficult, wasteful, or poor endeavour. The company has a great chance of turning a profit; things seem good. Like any other endeavour, however, if equilibrium is broken and one activity strays too far, it has unfavourable effects and reduces profitability. Contrary to popular assumption, frequent cross-border travel and business are responsible for about 85% of African migration, according to a 2023 study by the African Centre for Strategic Studies. This makes a major contribution to keeping the economy stable. Remittances from migration help countries of origin by boosting food security, stabilising household incomes in unstable economies, and educating the next generation about investing, all of which point to the filling of job gaps and the socioeconomic welfare of destination nations. Therefore, the advantages of going back home appear to be entirely hypothetical, given that all other things stay the same. This definitely conveys a sense of unease. According to the OECD (2014), migration benefits host nations in a number of ways. These boost the local economy, foster cultural diversity, close skill gaps, account for 47% of workforce growth in the US and 70% in Europe, and increase tax revenues for the government.

Migration may be beneficial; however it is not a desired or favourable scenario when Africans migrate quickly to other countries in search of better living conditions, especially young professionals and skilled workers. Omonijo, Nnedum, and Ezeokana (2011), Odimegwu and Joe-Akunne (2023), and Oluwaseyi and Adeosun (2020) all conducted studies that show that young professionals in Nigeria make up the largest demographic group that migrates abroad or plans to migrate abroad. A number of things, such as bad management, high unemployment rates, difficult working conditions, unfavourable economic conditions, insufficient social services, and



insecurity, are driving their desire to move. The term "Japa syndrome" for migration in Nigeria is not unexpected.

An evaluation conducted in 2023 by the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies indicates that African migration has been steadily rising during the preceding 20 years. They believe that the current count of approximately 40 million African migrants is a 30% increase over data from 2010. It is plausible to expect that this trend will continue until 2024 given the significant push factor that exists right now (p. 1). The study indicates that African migrants in the countries they see as their dream destinations confront grave dangers from traffickers, militias, and even some government officials, including murder, torture, rape, persecution, and enslavement. Additional data indicates that around 15% of African migrants, especially those without proper documentation, are susceptible to trafficking and exploitation on the way and after they reach their new country (p. 2). Over 9,000 people have died in Africa as a result of migration since 2014. Twenty-five thousand more people have vanished from sight while sailing the oceans between Europe and Africa.

Of particular concern is the rate at which Nigerian professionals and intelligent workers are leaving the country. Oluwasanjo (2023) reports that the International College of Surgeons' Nigerian section has voiced concern over the apparent influx of Nigerian doctors to the UK seeking improved employment prospects. The speaker emphasised that an estimated 6,221 Nigerian physicians left for the United Kingdom during the course of the previous six years. He also said that Nigeria now has a doctor-to-patient ratio of over 4,000, exceeding the goal of one doctor for every 600 people set by the World Health Organisation. This is very, really awful. Afro-Barometer and CLEEN Foundation study from 2018 (cited by Olaoluwa, 2019) revealed that 33% of young, educated Nigerians had considered leaving the country for a variety of reasons. The study shows that although 35% of potential immigrants want to hunt for job, 24% wish to avoid financial difficulties. Thirty-five percent of people wish to travel within the next year or two, while twelve percent of people are actively seeking for ways to leave the country right now. Additionally, 52% of respondents said that they are thinking about leaving but have not yet finalised any plans. Based on survey results, over 80% of potential Nigerian immigrants are 35 years of age or younger, 45% are 25 years of age or younger, and about 35% have finished their higher education. According to Olaoluwa, more over a million Nigerians have left the nation since 2015; however, considering the bulk of them enter the country illegally and without proper papers, this number may be 10 times higher. Moreover, a significant portion of foreign tourists with valid visas have left the country after their visas expired, which explains why they are now considered floating citizens.

The phenomenon of 'Japa' (mass migration) among Nigerian youths has gained significant attention, yet research on the impact of social media in sensitizing them to its implications remains scarce (Liu, 2023). Despite existing studies on migration and social media, there is a research gap in understanding how social media influences Nigerian youths' perceptions and decisions regarding 'Japa', particularly in relation to its economic, social, and cultural implications. This study aims to bridge this knowledge gap by investigating the impact of social media on Nigerian youths' awareness and understanding of the 'Japa' syndrome, filling a critical void in the current literature.



Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

- i. Examine the impact of misrepresentation and stereotypes related to Japa syndrome in media portrayals
- ii. Ascertain the effectiveness of media campaigns in promoting awareness and understanding of the Japa syndrome and its consequences

Concept of “Japa” Syndrome

The Yoruba phrase "Japa," traditionally meaning "to run" or "to flee," has now become synonymous with the concept of forsaking Nigeria. Since garnering public attention in 2020, it has often been used to characterise the sense of urgency among middle-class young people to leave the country. In Japan, the main objective is to engage in running exercise; the final destination is of little significance. The term may have derived from Naira Marley's 2018 song of the same title. The underlying message is clear, despite Marley's focus on eluding law enforcement rather than broader migration (the video implies he is in the UK or Europe). His immediate need is to leave promptly. During the chorus, Marley energetically declares, "Japa to Canada, America, or Africa."

The global perception of migrants is that they are intruders who go to other countries in order to get what they did not create. They are maintained at a certain distance and regarded with profound contempt. Their designation as "emblems of exclusion and society ills" stems from their absence from the social plan and perceived inefficiency. The phenomenon of exclusionism arises from the excessive individualism and utilitarianism enforced by social media, resulting in apathy towards international migration. Without prior preparation, migrants are subjected to severe treatment upon their unexpected arrival in distant countries. Incarceration, physical torture, murder, looting of foreign-born migrants, and hostility are methods used to dehumanise migrants (Francis, 2019).

The Japa syndrome has had a substantial adverse impact on close friendships and familial relationships. Consequently, the limits of confidentiality among friends, relatives, and intimate acquaintances have expanded. Complicated understanding of the implications of friendship among friends results in heightened mistrust and uncertainty. The phenomenon known as the Japa syndrome is seen as a breach of Nigeria's commitment to its citizens. Each Nigerian who departs from the nation after obtaining education and training fails to express gratitude to the government for the resources used to finance their education. Further, Japa syndrome adversely affects Nigeria's labour force since the majority of those involved in this mass exodus are Nigerian youth, professionals, and skilled workers (Afunugo, 2023).

The Media Role in Sensitizing Youths on the Japa Syndrome

In view of the above, the media, as a critical stakeholder in societal enlightenment, plays a pivotal role in shaping the discourse around Japa Syndrome, unpacking the underlying problems, and exploring the prospects of this trend. The media serves as an educator, watchdog, and forum for public debate (Aibangbee, Nwaoboli & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2023; Nwaoboli, 2023). Enlightenment, in the context of Japa Syndrome, involves raising awareness about the factors driving the



syndrome, the experiences of migrants, the impact on source countries and host nations, and the policies that govern such migrations. Media enlightenment can take various forms, including investigative journalism, documentaries, talk shows, social media campaigns, and policy analyses (Nwaoboli, Nwammuo & Asemah, 2023).

According to Onyeka (2022), the media has the potential to shape public opinion and influence policy decisions. In the context of youth migration, informed media coverage can lead to discussions on policy reforms, both in Nigeria and destination countries. This includes addressing economic disparities, creating job opportunities, and implementing measures to curb human trafficking. He further noted that, media enlightenment can empower youth with information about legal migration options, educational opportunities abroad, and potential challenges they might face. By providing comprehensive insights, media can enable young individuals to make informed decisions about their future, reducing the likelihood of falling victim to exploitative tendencies.

Adeoye & Usman (2022) noted that the media acts as a vital tool for raising awareness about the Japa Syndrome. Through investigative reports, documentaries, and personal narratives, journalists bring to light the live experiences of those who choose to leave, highlighting the push factors such as unemployment, poor infrastructure, and inadequate educational opportunities. This creates a platform for open discussion, challenging societal narratives that may stigmatize migration or overlook the systemic issues driving it.

Furthermore, the media play crucial role in informing policy discourse (Nwaoboli, Arijeniwa, Oviasuyi & Tiekuro, 2021). By presenting data-driven analyses of the economic and social consequences of Japa, media outlets can prompt policymakers to address the root causes of the phenomenon. For instance, investigative reports on corruption or inefficient resource allocation can pressure governments to implement reforms that promote transparency and foster a more conducive environment for talent retention.

However, media engagement with Japa syndrome is not without its challenges. One concern is the potential for over simplification and sensationalism. The narrative surrounding Japa can be easily reduced to binary extremes, portraying migrants solely as victims or neglecting the agency and aspirations that drive their decisions. This simplistic approach can fuel xenophobia and hinder constructive dialogue about the complex realities of migration. Another challenge lies in ensuring balanced and nuanced coverage (Aligwe, Nwankwo, & Nwafor, 2017; Olalekan, 2023).

Akpan (2023) noted that media outlets contribute significantly to shaping public perceptions of youth migration. Through news reports, documentaries, and feature articles, the media constructs narratives that influence how people perceive the reasons behind youth migration, the challenges faced by migrants, and the potential benefits or drawbacks of this phenomenon. Sensationalized stories may create stereotypes, perpetuating biases and misconceptions. Therefore, responsible journalism is essential in portraying a balanced and accurate picture of youth migration, helping the public understand the diverse motivations and circumstances that drive young individuals to move abroad.



Causes of Migration (Japa) Among Nigerians

Migration among Nigerians is driven by a range of interconnected factors, most notably economic crises, which have historically prompted many to seek opportunities abroad. Economic challenges such as unemployment, low income, and poor economic development are significant contributors to this trend. Many Nigerians previously engaged in self-employment find that their daily earnings are insufficient to cover basic expenses. The inability of the Nigerian government to effectively manage and grow the economy over time has exacerbated this situation, leading to a notable increase in migration to European countries. Despite Nigeria being Africa's top oil producer, widespread corruption and poor leadership have left a substantial portion of the population in abject poverty, undermining the nation's economic potential and resulting in stagnation in GDP growth.

In addition to economic factors, terrorism and insecurity play a crucial role in driving Nigerians to seek safety abroad. The government's primary responsibility is to protect its citizens, yet inadequate security measures have left many feeling vulnerable amid frequent political and religious conflicts. This ongoing instability, highlighted by the Boko Haram insurgency and other violent incidents, compels a significant number of Nigerians to leave the country in search of safety and stability for themselves and their families.

Political instability has also been a persistent issue since Nigeria's independence in 1960. The country has faced continuous unrest, including the Biafran civil war, military coups, and ongoing ethnic tensions. These challenges have not only contributed to a decline in democratic governance but have also hampered economic efficiency. The marginalization of various ethnic groups, particularly in the Niger Delta, has led to serious social and economic grievances. As these communities experience extreme poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to basic resources, many individuals are drawn to migrate to European countries or the United States in pursuit of better living conditions.

Moreover, the state of Nigeria's educational system is often criticized for its poor quality, particularly within public institutions. Many Nigerians aspire to improve their education and skills through international study opportunities, yet financial barriers often restrict their ability to do so. This aspiration for higher education has further fueled migration, as individuals seek better educational prospects abroad.

Finally, cultural exchange serves as another motivating factor for migration among Nigerians. A general curiosity about other cultures drives many to explore and learn from different societies, leading them to embark on journeys that broaden their horizons and enrich their understanding of the world. This desire for cultural exploration complements the other factors influencing migration, creating a complex landscape of motivations for those seeking new opportunities beyond Nigeria's borders.



Effects of Migration (Japa) on Nigeria's Development

The tide of Nigerian youth migrating to Europe in recent years has stirred a complex current of both hope and apprehension. Driven by aspirations for a better life and fueled by the stark realities of limited opportunities at home, this exodus presents a multifaceted phenomenon with profound implications for Nigeria's development trajectory. To begin with, the Japa syndrome reflects a complex set of push and pulls factors. Push factors, such as high unemployment, limited economic opportunities, political instability, and insecurity, have driven many young Nigerians to seek better prospects abroad. Pull factors, including the promise of higher wages, better living standards, access to education, and the hope for a brighter future, have drawn them to Europe in search of a more secure and prosperous life. The departure of these young individuals has led to a significant brain drain, depriving Nigeria of skilled professionals, intellectuals, and potential leaders who could contribute to the country's development. The loss of human capital poses challenges to sectors such as healthcare, education, technology, and governance, as many highly educated and talented individuals seek opportunities abroad rather than in their home country. This brain drain undermines Nigeria's capacity for innovation, research, and development, hindering the country's progress in various fields (Ezeh, 2022).

Furthermore, Japa syndrome has implications for the country's labour market. Many of these individuals are in their prime working age, and their departure has led to labor shortages in critical sectors. This exodus of skilled and unskilled workers has affected the country's productivity and economic growth, particularly in areas such as healthcare, engineering, information technology, and entrepreneurship. The loss of these young, energetic, and enterprising individuals has hindered the development of a dynamic workforce and has limited the potential for economic diversification and innovation within Nigeria. In addition to the economic impact, Ojo (2022) noted that the Japa syndrome has social and demographic ramifications. It has led to the separation of families, disrupted social networks, and contributed to the erosion of community ties. The absence of young people, who are often the primary breadwinners and caregivers, has placed strains on families and communities, affecting the social fabric of Nigerian society. Moreover, the departure of these youths has implications for the country's demographic structure, potentially leading to an imbalance in age groups and a shortage of young, working-age individuals to support the country's development.

Even while the above point stands as negative effect, Osayi (2023) however noted that one undeniable benefit of the Japa trend is the influx of remittances sent back home. These financial contributions serve as lifelines for many families, enabling them to improve their standards of living and invest in education and healthcare. Remittances can also drive local economic activity, stimulating small businesses and entrepreneurship. However, the reliance on remittances can create a distorted economy, neglecting the development of productive sectors and fostering a culture of dependence. Moreover, the uneven distribution of remittances can exacerbate existing inequalities, with rural areas often lagging behind urban centers in reaping the benefits. Moreover, the experiences and exposure gained by Nigerian youths in Europe can also generate potential benefits for Nigeria's development. Some migrants acquire new skills, knowledge, and experiences abroad, which they can bring back to Nigeria to contribute to various sectors of the



economy. Additionally, some may develop entrepreneurial ventures, establish networks, or acquire advanced education and training that can be leveraged for the country's benefit upon their return.

In terms of policy implications, the Nigerian government faces the challenge of addressing the root causes of youth migration, creating opportunities for young people within the country, and harnessing the potential of returnees to contribute to national development. The narrative surrounding youth migration should not solely focus on loss. Instead, it is crucial to view it as an opportunity to build bridges and harness the potential of the Nigerian diaspora. Creating platforms for knowledge transfer and fostering collaboration between skilled migrants and their counterparts back home can leverage their expertise to drive innovation and development. Additionally, encouraging investment by diaspora members in key sectors can stimulate economic growth and create much-needed jobs.

METHODO

This study employed a library research method, leveraging existing literature on social media, migration, and youth behavior to investigate the impact of social media on Nigerian youths' perceptions of the 'Japa' (mass migration) syndrome. This approach was chosen due to its time and cost efficiency, comprehensive overview, and accessibility. While acknowledging limitations, such as potential data currency issues, biases, and generalizability concerns, library research provided a solid foundation for understanding the topic, laying groundwork for future studies to validate findings through primary research.

DISCUSSION

Findings from this study are diverse. First, it was found that economic instability is a significant factor driving Nigerian youths to migrate abroad (Afunugo, 2023). High levels of unemployment, low income, and poor economic development have compelled many to seek better opportunities elsewhere. This situation has been exacerbated by the Nigerian government's inability to effectively manage and grow the economy, leading to a marked increase in migration to European countries. This finding is supported by Omonijo, Nnedum, and Ezeokana (2011), who emphasized that economic hardship is a primary motivator for Nigerian youths to leave their home country.

In addition to economic factors, media representation plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of youth migration (Akpan, 2023). Sensationalized stories often create stereotypes that perpetuate biases and misconceptions. Therefore, responsible journalism is essential for portraying a balanced and accurate picture of youth migration, which helps the public understand the diverse motivations and circumstances driving young individuals to move abroad (Nwaoboli and Ajibulu, 2023). This perspective is reinforced by Onyeka (2022), who noted that informed media coverage can lead to discussions on policy reforms, addressing economic disparities, creating job opportunities, and implementing measures to curb human trafficking.

Moreover, the departure of skilled and educated Nigerian youths has resulted in a significant brain drain, depriving the country of professionals, intellectuals, and potential leaders who could contribute to its development (Ezeh, 2022). This brain drain undermines Nigeria's capacity for



innovation, research, and development, hindering progress across various fields. The loss of human capital poses serious challenges to critical sectors such as healthcare, education, technology, and governance, which rely on a skilled workforce to thrive.

The phenomenon known as the Japa syndrome also carries social and demographic ramifications, leading to the separation of families and disrupted social networks (Ojo, 2022). This migration trend contributes to the erosion of community ties, placing strains on families and affecting the social fabric of Nigerian society. Furthermore, the absence of young people has implications for the country's demographic structure, potentially resulting in an imbalance in age groups and a shortage of young, working-age individuals needed to support national development.

Lastly, the remittances sent back home by Nigerian migrants serve as vital lifelines for many families, enabling them to improve their standards of living and invest in education and healthcare (Osayi, 2023). However, this reliance on remittances can create a distorted economy, as it may neglect the development of productive sectors and foster a culture of dependence, ultimately hindering sustainable economic growth.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the Japa syndrome has profound implications for Nigeria's development, driven by economic instability, political instability, insecurity, and a desire for better living conditions. The exodus of skilled and educated youths has resulted in a significant brain drain, undermining Nigeria's capacity for innovation and development. However, remittances sent back home provide vital lifelines for many families, enabling them to improve their standards of living. It is therefore recommended that: Policymakers should establish regulatory frameworks to promote responsible social media usage and combat misinformation about the 'Japa' syndrome. Social media platforms should implement fact-checking mechanisms and promote credible sources to reduce the spread of false migration information.

Ethical Clearance

Ethical consent was obtained from the participants involved in this study. They were fully informed that their participation was voluntary and that the research was conducted solely for academic purposes. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and participants' rights were respected throughout the study.

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Conflict of Interest

The researchers declare no conflict of interest.



Authors' Contributions

Sonny O. Ekorugue conceived the study, designed the methodology, and contributed to the manuscript. Agboh Chioma Charity assisted in data collection and analysis. Imuetinyan Oke contributed to the literature review and manuscript writing. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Availability of Data and Materials

The datasets used in this study are available upon reasonable request.

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