



## SOCIAL MEDIA AND 'JAPA' SYNDROME: EXPLORING THE ROLES OF ONLINE PLATFORMS IN SHAPING MIGRATION TRENDS

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**ABSTRACT:** *Social media platforms have emerged as influential players in shaping japa trends, offering a dynamic space where individuals explore, discuss, and navigate migration pathways. By providing unprecedented access to information, facilitating networking and connections, showcasing aspirational lifestyles, and amplifying migration narratives, social media platforms exert a significant influence on individuals' migration trajectories. In the light of the above, this study examines social media and japa syndrome by exploring the roles of online platforms in shaping migration trends. The study was anchored on the uses and gratification theory, and data were collected using the desk research method. Findings reveal that social media has significantly altered the landscape of communication and information dissemination globally, including Nigeria. The study also reveals that online platforms play a crucial role in shaping migration trends and aspirations by influencing individuals' perceptions, providing access to information, and facilitating connections with diaspora communities and potential destinations. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that online platforms should implement robust mechanisms to verify the accuracy and credibility of migration-related information shared on their platforms. This can involve partnering with reputable organizations such as international agencies, academic institutions, and government bodies to ensure that users have access to reliable and up-to-date information about migration processes, policies, and destinations.*

**KEYWORDS:** Japa, Migration, Online platforms, Social Media.



## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the intertwining dynamics of social media and youth migration popularly referred to as “*Japa*” have emerged as a focal point of scholarly inquiry and policy discourse. The proliferation of digital technologies and the widespread adoption of social media platforms have revolutionized communication channels, fundamentally altering the landscape of human interaction, information dissemination, and socio-cultural engagement. Concurrently, the phenomenon of youth migration, particularly from developing nations like Nigeria, has garnered increased attention due to its multifaceted implications for individuals, communities, and nations alike.

Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country and one of its largest economies, has witnessed a significant surge in youth migration, driven by a complex interplay of socioeconomic, political, and environmental factors. According to the International Organization for Migration (2022), Nigerian youth constitute a substantial portion of migrants, both internally and internationally, seeking better opportunities, improved living conditions, and escape from various forms of adversity. Amidst this backdrop, the influence of social media on shaping migration trends among Nigerian youth has emerged as a critical area of investigation.

The rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp has transformed the information landscape, enabling instantaneous, global connectivity and facilitating virtual communities transcending geographical boundaries. These platforms have become integral tools for communication, social networking, and information sharing, offering Nigerian youth unprecedented access to a wealth of resources, opportunities, and networks beyond their immediate surroundings. Moreover, social media has played a pivotal role in facilitating diasporic connections, fostering transnational linkages, and providing virtual support networks for migrants navigating the complexities of relocation and adaptation. Social media, through its curated feeds and carefully crafted narratives, often paints a rosy picture of life abroad. Images showcasing the opulence of foreign lifestyles, opportunities for academic and professional advancement, and glimpses into vibrant immigrant communities can fuel aspirations for a better future, particularly among young Nigerians facing limited prospects at home (Akpan & Femi, 2019). Platforms like Instagram and Facebook become windows to a perceived “elsewhere”, fostering a sense of dissatisfaction with their current reality and pushing them towards migration as a potential solution (Adepoju, 2010). However, it is crucial to acknowledge the selective nature of online representations, often neglecting the challenges and struggles faced by migrants in their new destinations.

Beyond shaping aspirations, social media platforms serve as valuable information resources for young Nigerians contemplating ‘*japa*’. They can access visa requirements, connect with immigration consultants, and join online communities dedicated to specific destinations or migration pathways. Platforms like WhatsApp groups and Facebook forums facilitate knowledge sharing, offering firsthand accounts of migrant experiences, navigating bureaucratic hurdles, and even finding employment opportunities (Amah, 2017). This access to information empowers young Nigerians to make informed decisions, potentially reducing risks and uncertainties associated with the migration process. Despite the potential benefits, the unregulated nature of social media also harbors risks. Misinformation and distorted narratives about migration experiences can be easily spread, creating unrealistic expectations and potentially leading to exploitation by unscrupulous actors. Fake job offers, human trafficking rings, and fraudulent immigration consultants often use social media platforms to prey on



vulnerable individuals desperate for a better life abroad. Therefore, critical media literacy skills and access to reliable information sources are crucial for young Nigerians navigating the online landscape associated with migration.

For young Nigerians who have already migrated, social media platforms become lifelines connecting them to loved ones back home and fostering a sense of belonging within the diaspora community. Facebook groups, Facebook reels, instant messaging applications, and video call platforms allow them to maintain social ties, share experiences, and access emotional support (Donou-Owona, 2019). This online space fosters a sense of community, mitigating feelings of isolation and loneliness often associated with the migrant experience. However, it is important to acknowledge the potential for social comparison and unrealistic expectations within these online communities, which can negatively impact mental well-being. The digital diaspora of Nigerians has established strong online communities that facilitate the exchange of advice and support for prospective migrants. These networks can provide practical information on the migration process, from obtaining visas to finding accommodation and employment abroad. Social media also allows young Nigerians to maintain relationships with friends and family members who have migrated, which can reduce the sense of isolation and increase the likelihood of successful integration.

Critics (Haruna, 2021; Oseni, 2022) have argued that social media, while offering a myriad of benefits, also perpetuates unrealistic migration aspirations, fosters misinformation, and exacerbates vulnerabilities among young migrants, particularly in the context of irregular migration and human trafficking. Moreover, the proliferation of online scams, fraudulent recruitment schemes, and exploitative practices targeting vulnerable youth underscores the dark side of digital connectivity in the migration discourse.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The intersection of social media and the *japa* trend among Nigerians presents a complex landscape characterized by numerous challenges and potential risks. While social media platforms have undoubtedly influenced *japa* trends among Nigerian youths, the pervasive use of online platforms has also given rise to a myriad of problems that warrant careful examination. One of the primary challenges linked to social media and *japa* trend in Nigeria is the proliferation of misinformation and unrealistic expectations. Social media platforms, with their capacity for instantaneous and widespread dissemination of information, often become breeding grounds for misleading narratives and idealized portrayals of migration experiences. Nigerian youths, exposed to an influx of curated content and success stories related to migration, may develop unrealistic expectations about the prospects and challenges of migrating to foreign countries. This misinformation can lead to ill-informed decision-making, potentially resulting in the adoption of risky migration strategies or falling victim to fraudulent schemes promising easy access to opportunities abroad.

Moreover, the glamorization of migration on social media can contribute to the perpetuation of myths and misconceptions regarding the realities of life in destination countries. The portrayal of migration as a panacea for all socioeconomic challenges, coupled with selective representation of success stories, may overshadow the hardships and adversities encountered by migrants. Consequently, Nigerian youths may overlook the complexities of migration, including integration difficulties, discrimination, and legal barriers, thereby underestimating the actual challenges they may face upon migration.



Another significant problem associated with social media and the *japa* trend among Nigerians is the susceptibility of young individuals to exploitation, trafficking, and precarious living conditions. The pervasive nature of social media facilitates the spread of false promises and deceptive recruitment tactics by unscrupulous actors seeking to exploit the aspirations of potential migrants. As a result, Nigerian youths, lured by fraudulent job offers or false representations of migration opportunities, may fall prey to human traffickers or exploitative employers, leading to situations of vulnerability and abuse in destination countries. Furthermore, the digital divide and unequal access to information pose inherent challenges in the context of social media and youth migration in Nigeria. While a significant portion of Nigerian youths actively engage with social media, there remains a segment of the population with limited or no access to online platforms. This digital divide can perpetuate disparities in the dissemination of accurate migration-related information, leaving certain individuals at a disadvantage and vulnerable to manipulation by those who control the narrative on social media.

Although several studies have been carried out on social media and *japa* syndrome, none has adequately examined the roles of online platforms in shaping migration trends, thereby creating a gap for further studies. It is this gap that this study intends to fill.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The researchers embarked on this study with the intent of achieving the following objectives:

- i. To investigate the influence of social media on the perception and portrayal of the *japa* syndrome among Nigerians.
- ii. To examine how online platforms shape migration trends and aspirations.

### **Research Objectives**

Based on the objectives of this study, the following research questions were formulated to serve as a guide for this study:

- i. What is the influence of social media on the perception and portrayal of the *japa* syndrome among Nigerians?
- ii. How do online platforms shape migration trends and aspirations?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Social Media: An Overview**

According to Dominick (2011), 'the origin of social media on the web can be found in the mid-1990's when personal web pages became popular.' Social media can be defined as a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These applications that make up social media are social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, My Space, LinkedIn, Hi5), video sharing websites (YouTube, Photobucket, Meta Cafe) and web logs (Blogs) which are like personal web pages.



Associated Press (2013) defines social media as “online tools that people use to connect with one another including social networks.” Adibe, Odoemelam and Orji (2012) described social media as online content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies to disseminate information across geographical boundaries, providing interaction among people. Carr and Hayes (2015) defined social media as internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences to derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others. Thornley (2008) defined social media as online communications in which individuals shift fluidly and flexibly between the role of audience and author. To do this, they use social software that enables anyone without knowledge of coding, to post comments on, share or mash up content and to form communities around shared interests.

Simply put, social media is an umbrella term used to describe the various types of internet-based applications that lend themselves to content creation, sharing, exchange, collaboration and social networking within a website. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) highlighted the various forms of social media as collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (e.g., Twitter), content communities (e.g., YouTube, Picasso), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace), virtual game worlds (e.g., world of warcraft) and virtual social worlds (e.g., second life). Associated Press (2013) has a slightly different categorization of social media as blogs, social networking sites, microblogging sites, wikis, content sharing sites, online forums, check-in services and all sorts of other sites.

Irrespective of the categorizations, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, MySpace, LinkedIn, have really become quite popular especially among the youth who utilize them to socialise, network, mobilise, for entertainment purposes amongst other uses. Although social media platforms can be accessed via the web (e.g., desktop computers, laptops), they are mainly accessed via mobile devices like cell phones, tablets, and iPods. In essence, the compatibility of social media with mobile internet is a key advantage which dovetails neatly with the ever mobile lifestyle of the youth and working class adults. The following can be regarded as the key characteristics of social media which has made it tick:

- **Interactivity:** The interactive nature of social media is a key characteristic that distinguishes it from the traditional mass media or web 1.0 internet. Anyone could post content online and get feedback or contributions from other members and vice versa. The interactive nature of social media has basically “democratized” the internet.
- **Accessibility:** Social media is accessible to virtually everyone with a cell phone and internet connection nowadays. They are not bound by location or time as some of the mass media are.
- **Reach:** The coverage of social media is quite enormous and far wider than conventional mass media as the internet is available on a global scale. Information posted on the internet will travel further than it will do on national TV or newspaper.
- **Adaptability:** Social media platforms lend themselves to great adaptability with many of their inbuilt features, e.g., the “Retweet” function in Twitter, attachment of photos, short videos to tweets and Facebook posts, links and “favouriting” of tweets. All those features aid the diffusion of information on social media.



- **Affordability:** Using social media to broadcast messages is far cheaper than doing the same via conventional mass media. Setting up an account is basically free on social media and many users can afford to buy data bundles which are getting cheaper due to competition among the internet service providers.
- **Mobility:** This is perhaps the most key characteristic of social media. Although social media is accessible from the web, the majority of users access it via mobile internet mainly through their cell phones.

### **The *Japa* Syndrome: A Nigerian Slang for Migration**

'*Japa*', a Yoruba term for 'to run' or 'to flee,' has become synonymous with the idea of leaving Nigeria. Since seizing the popular imagination in 2020, it has been typically used to describe the desperation of middle-class youth to leave the country. With *japa*, it is fleeing which is important; the destination is secondary. This use of the term traces back to Naira Marley's 2018 song of the same name. Although Marley sings about running from the police, and not about migration per se (the video of the song suggests he is in the UK or Europe), the point is clear: anywhere will do, he just has to get away, and quickly. As Marley sings in the chorus: *japa to Canada, America, or Africa*.

In the global eyes, migrants are considered intruders who invade foreign lands to reap the fruits they did not plant. They are treated with disdain and kept at arm's length. They are excluded from the plan of the society and seen as unproductive, thus tagged as "emblems of exclusion and society ills." The migrants are treated with meanness because at times no one is prepared for their sudden entry into foreign lands. This meanness towards the migrants is shown in the imprisonments, physical assaults, murder, sacking of the migrants from foreign lands and intolerant dispositions towards them (Francis, 2019).

*Japa* syndrome has really affected family ties and friendships adversely. It has broadened the scope of secrecy among family members, close associates and friends. It heightens distrust and increases doubt among friends, who are now finding it difficult to understand what friendship means. This is so because the *japa* plans always shrouded in secrecy makes the other appear a traitor:

Migration can be expected to alter social relationships, for Nigerians who *Japa*, kinship bonds and boundaries, shorten and shrink from extended affiliations into the morphological unit of the nuclear family-to parents and siblings. Most friendships succumb to distance and crumble under the weight of relocation. Adding to these existing strains is the secrecy of *Japa*. Few people share their *Japa* plans beforehand, ensuring that the initial shock of discovery reverberates long after their abrupt departure... (Liu, 2023).

This *japa* syndrome is considered a robbery of the investment made by Nigeria on her citizens. Every Nigerian who flees the country after acquiring education and training here fails to show appreciation to the nation for the resources expended in his/her training. More so, "*Japa* syndrome affects the labour force of Nigeria adversely since the youth, professionals, and the skilled workers in Nigeria are predominantly involved in this mass Exodus" (Afunugo, 2023).



## Causes of Migration among Nigerians

The following are some of the causes of migration among Nigerians:

- **Search for Sustainable Livelihood:** In most developing countries, there is poor investment on roads, electricity, schools, hospitals, and other social amenities which are essential for proper socioeconomic activities. It is because of these that youth with professional skills tend to migrate to outside the country to seek for job opportunities that are commensurate with their professional skill. It is obvious that the level of poverty or socio-economic development can act as a push factor for migration. Simply put, migration is a strategy utilized by young people from poor and less developed communities to upgrade themselves, their families and their dwellings.
- **Economic Crisis:** Previous studies have shown that the migration of Nigerians to European countries is mostly associated with economic challenges or factors such as unemployment, lack of sufficient income, lack of economic growth, financial problems and debts (Danaan, 2018; Adeniyi, 2016). Before migration, most of the Nigerian migrants were self-employed or received daily wages that were not sufficient enough to cater for their monthly expenses (Danaan, 2018). Given the inability of the Nigerian government to properly manage, stabilize and sustain its economy for so many years, the migration flow of its citizens to European countries has drastically increased. The development of industries, factories, and institutions should be the priorities of the Nigerian government, as it would create jobs to assimilate university graduates, and people with craftsmanship, but from the UN statistics on Nigerian migration, it does not look like those factors have been considered. Nigeria may have been quoted in several reports, journals and news outlets to be the leading oil and gas producer in Africa but it is apparently oxymoronic that the majority of her citizens are living in abject poverty, harsh and miserable conditions as a result the greed, selfishness, and corruption of the Nigerian politicians and government (Danaan, 2018). Hence, currently, Nigeria is no longer among the fastest growing economies in Africa by percentage growth in GDP.
- **Lack of Employment Opportunities:** Yaro (2007) observed that rural or country poverty causes poor quality of life and lack of employment opportunity. For this reason, individuals tend to migrate in search of good and better job opportunities. In most rural areas in developing countries like Nigeria, agricultural practices are mainly peasantry, with low productivity and lack of purchasing power and therefore are less attractive to youth. There is evidence that employment opportunities are lacking in contemporary Nigeria society for her young ones. Where there is job opportunity, it may not be decent, because of the environment or because of the personality and individual behavioural differences in the organization. Nwoke (2013) observed that in some places where decent jobs exist, interpersonal harmony and cordial relationships among workers may be lacking. There may be suspicion, interpersonal conflicts and bickering among the people working in the company. Such work environments could push the youth to leave the job. Because of the endemic corruption, some youth employed in the government-owned parastatals are under paid or not placed according to their qualifications. This type of treatment compels the youth to search for greener pasture outside his/her country for better remuneration.



- **Terrorism and Insecurity:** One of the greatest responsibilities of the government of any country in the world is to protect the lives and properties of its citizens. If this vital necessity is lacking in a country, then what would be the fate or response of its citizens? Run for their dear life, a concerned individual may suggest; thus, most Nigerian citizens resort to migrating to European countries where they hope to find security. The Nigerian government has failed to provide adequate security in some parts of the country where political and religious insurgencies abound (Barungi et al., 2017); hence, it has precipitated the massive migration of Nigeria out of the country seeking security of their lives and families in European countries. The Boko Haram insurgency and violent incivility that has existed for over a decade in the North-east of Nigeria still has not been completely put to halt even as it continues to reduce and destabilize the population and political and economic activities in that region (Herbert & Husaini, 2018). Why this is the case sometimes beats the imagination of a critical thinking person. Currently in Nigeria, the terrorism of the Fulani cattle herders, who some people argue is another arm of the Boko Haram terrorist group, is nothing to joke about. There have been several accounts where these groups of cattle rearers who carry AK 47 machine guns go into remote villages in the Eastern part of Nigeria raping women in farm lands as their cows eat the farmers' crops, and also shooting sporadically and killing both men, women, and children even in churches and schools of these communities; yet the Nigerian government and security forces turn a blind eye to these incidents.

### Effects of Migration on National Development

Migration, both internal and international, has been a defining feature of human history, shaping societies, economies, and cultures across the globe. In the contemporary era, migration has emerged as a complex phenomenon with profound implications for national development trajectories. As individuals and communities relocate in search of improved livelihoods, opportunities, and security, the dynamics of migration exert multifaceted impacts on the social, economic, and political landscapes of sending and receiving countries alike. According to Koser (2010), one of the most prominent effects of migration on national development pertains to its economic ramifications. Migrants contribute to both sending and receiving countries' economies through labor participation, entrepreneurship, and remittances. In sending countries, emigration can alleviate unemployment pressures, alleviate poverty, and stimulate economic growth through remittance inflows, which serve as a vital source of foreign exchange and household income. Conversely, receiving countries benefit from migrants' contributions to workforce diversity, innovation, and productivity enhancement, thereby fueling economic dynamism and filling labor market gaps in key sectors, such as healthcare, agriculture, and technology. However, the economic impact of migration is not without its complexities. Concerns arise when highly skilled individuals leave their home countries, leading to a "brain drain" effect. This can deprive sending nations of valuable human capital, hindering their own development prospects. Additionally, the influx of low-skilled migrants can put pressure on wages and exacerbate social inequalities in receiving countries, potentially leading to social unrest.

Migration profoundly influences social structures, identities, and dynamics within societies, shaping intercultural interactions, social cohesion, and demographic composition. In sending countries, migration can lead to demographic shifts, brain drain, and familial disruptions, impacting community cohesion and social resilience (Hugo, 2012). Conversely, in receiving countries, migration fosters cultural diversity, multiculturalism, and social integration,





enriching societies with diverse perspectives, traditions, and talents. However, migration also engenders social tensions, xenophobia, and integration challenges, necessitating proactive policies and social interventions to promote inclusivity and social cohesion. For sending countries, the social impact of migration is multifaceted. Remittances sent by migrants can significantly improve the lives of their families and communities back home, contributing to poverty reduction and improved living standards. However, the absence of family members can have negative social consequences, particularly for children left behind. Additionally, the return of migrants can pose challenges, as they may struggle to reintegrate into their communities after years away.

Migration intersects with political dynamics, governance structures, and policy frameworks, shaping national agendas, electoral dynamics, and migration governance regimes. In sending countries, migration can influence political landscapes through diaspora engagement, transnational advocacy, and electoral remittances, fostering political pluralism and democratic participation. Conversely, in receiving countries, migration often becomes a contentious political issue, fueling debates over immigration policies, border security, and cultural assimilation. Political responses to migration vary widely, ranging from inclusive integration policies to restrictive immigration measures, reflecting divergent political ideologies, national interests, and public sentiments.

Migration interacts with environmental factors, climate change, and natural disasters, exacerbating environmental vulnerabilities and driving population displacement. Environmental migrants, including climate refugees and disaster-displaced populations, seek refuge in safer regions, often straining host communities' resources and resilience capacities. Moreover, migration patterns are increasingly influenced by environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and climate-induced hazards, necessitating holistic approaches to address the complex interplay between environmental sustainability, migration, and national development.

In essence, migration exerts multifaceted effects on national development, shaping economic, social, political, and environmental landscapes in sending and receiving countries alike. While migration offers opportunities for individuals, communities, and nations to thrive and prosper, it also poses challenges and complexities that require comprehensive, evidence-based policy responses. By understanding the diverse impacts of migration on national development, policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders can formulate inclusive, sustainable strategies to harness the potential benefits of migration while mitigating its adverse consequences, thereby fostering equitable and resilient societies in an interconnected world.

### **Role of Social Media/Online Platforms in Shaping Migration Trends**

Over the years, social media and online platforms have woven themselves into an undeniable thread, shaping aspirations, influencing decisions, and altering landscapes. Understanding their roles requires careful examination, acknowledging both their potential for empowerment and their inherent pitfalls. Adefila (2022) noted that, as gateways to knowledge, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide Nigerians with unprecedented access to information about migration possibilities. Aspiring migrants can connect with diasporic communities, glean insights into life abroad, and research visa requirements, educational opportunities, and job markets in potential destinations. Platforms like YouTube offer video testimonials from Nigerians abroad, painting vivid pictures of successes and struggles, shaping perceptions and fueling ambitions.



Salami and Adedimeji (2019) noted that social media acts as a curated reality show, often showcasing the positive aspects of migration: comfortable lifestyles, career advancements, and seemingly effortless integration. This carefully constructed online reality, however, often fails to capture the challenges and complexities of migration, potentially inflating expectations and fueling unrealistic dreams. Beyond information, social media fosters virtual communities that transcend geographical boundaries. Nigerians abroad connect with each other, forming support networks that offer guidance, share resources, and provide emotional solace. These online communities bridge the physical distance, combating feelings of isolation and offering a sense of belonging. Additionally, platforms like WhatsApp groups connect aspiring migrants with smugglers, travel agents, and even employers, acting as facilitators in the migration process. However, such connections can also expose individuals to exploitation, misinformation, and even danger.

Social media platforms serve as a powerful tool for disseminating information about migration opportunities, visa processes, job prospects, and living conditions in different countries. Migrants can access firsthand accounts, blogs, and forums where individuals share their experiences, providing valuable insights that can influence potential migrants' decisions. For example, Facebook groups, Reddit communities, and Twitter threads serve as platforms where migrants share information, advice, and support, creating a network of knowledge that can shape migration patterns. Social media enables migrants to connect with others who have similar migration experiences or are planning to migrate. Platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter allow migrants to build social and professional networks, seek advice, and find support from individuals who have gone through or are going through the same process. These connections can be invaluable in terms of finding job opportunities, housing, and navigating the challenges of settling in a new country.

Social media helps migrants stay connected with their friends and families back home, easing the emotional and psychological challenges associated with migration. Platforms like WhatsApp, Skype, and Facebook Messenger enable migrants to communicate in real-time, share their experiences, and maintain a sense of belonging and support from their home communities. Social media can influence individuals' perceptions and expectations of migration destinations. Through curated content, such as photos, videos, and testimonials, social media can create idealized or exaggerated representations of certain locations, impacting migrants' decisions and attitudes toward specific countries or regions.

Despite its empowering potential, social media's influence on migration carries significant risks. The abundance of information can be overwhelming and contradictory, making it difficult to discern fact from fiction. Biased narratives and cherry-picked success stories can create unrealistic expectations, leading to disappointment and potentially fueling irregular migration attempts. Furthermore, the anonymity of online spaces can breed negativity and xenophobia, both within and outside Nigeria, impacting the integration and experiences of Nigerian migrants.

Addressing the multifaceted roles of social media requires a multi-pronged approach. Individuals must cultivate critical thinking skills to evaluate information objectively and be wary of idealized portrayals. Governments and civil society organizations can play a crucial role in providing accurate migration information, debunking myths, and promoting safe and legal migration pathways. Social media platforms themselves have a responsibility to address



misinformation and harmful content, while promoting diverse narratives that encompass the realities of migration, both positive and negative.

In essence, social media platforms and online spaces are powerful tools that have undeniably reshaped migration trends among Nigerians. While they offer information, facilitate connections, and empower individuals, they also harbor risks of misinformation, unrealistic expectations, and exploitation. As with any tool, harnessing the positive potential of social media requires an informed and critical approach, individual responsibility, and collective action from stakeholders to ensure safe, informed, and responsible migration journeys.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT). The theory was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1974. It is a communication theory that describes the reasons and means by which people seek out media to meet their specific needs. In the context of migration, social media platforms serve as rich sources of information for those considering relocating. Users engage with platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn to obtain information on visa processes, job opportunities, and educational programs in potential destination countries.

The Uses and Gratification Theory posits that individuals use media to connect with others and form social bonds. Social media platforms play a crucial role in facilitating networking and community building among individuals interested in migration. Forums, groups, and pages on platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook enable users to share experiences, seek advice, and build support systems, influencing migration decisions. The theory suggests that individuals use media to reinforce their identities and gain exposure to different cultures. Social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube offer a window into the lives of Nigerians living abroad, shaping cultural aspirations and influencing perceptions of the migration experience.

The theory emphasizes the active role of individuals in selecting and using media to meet personal needs. In the context of migration, social media empowers individuals by providing them with tools for job searches, professional development, and skill enhancement. Platforms like LinkedIn contribute to personal agency in the migration decision-making process. Social media platforms offer a space for migrants to share their stories, experiences, and challenges, providing emotional support and connection with a broader community.

In essence, the Uses and Gratifications Theory as used in this study, sheds light on the dynamic relationship between social media and migration trends. It highlights how individuals actively engage with online platforms to satisfy their information needs, connect with others, reinforce cultural identities, exercise agency, and find emotional gratification. Understanding these motivations is crucial for comprehending the nuanced roles that social media plays in shaping migration trends among Nigerians and beyond.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted the desk research method. This type of research method is based on the materials published in reports and similar documents that are available in public libraries, websites, and data obtained from surveys already carried out. This method is conducted without



direct interaction with individuals or the collection of new data. Desk research is cost-effective and time-efficient, making it a valuable method for obtaining a broad understanding of a topic or for laying the groundwork for more focused primary research. However, it is essential to recognize its limitations, such as potential bias in existing data and the inability to capture real-time or context-specific information.

## FINDINGS

**Research Question 1:** What is the influence of social media on the perception and portrayal of the *japa* syndrome among Nigerians?

Social media has significantly altered the landscape of communication and information dissemination globally, including Nigeria. With the proliferation of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, individuals now have unprecedented access to diverse perspectives and narratives on *japa* trends. This has inevitably shaped both the perception and portrayal of *japa* among Nigerians in several ways. According to Omotoso and Olaniyan (2018), social media platforms serve as amplifiers, magnifying individual stories and experiences of migration. Nigerians share personal anecdotes, success stories, challenges, and hardships encountered during migration journeys. These narratives, whether positive or negative, contribute to shaping the collective understanding of migration within the Nigerian society. Social media platforms facilitate the rapid dissemination of information related to migration, including visa policies, immigration laws, job opportunities abroad, and migrants' rights. This influx of information influences Nigerians' perception of migration by providing insights into the practicalities and intricacies of the process.

Trending topics on social media often include discussions on migration-related issues such as brain drain, remittances, xenophobia, and migrant exploitation. These discussions contribute to shaping public opinion and influencing the societal perception of migration within Nigeria. Social media enables the formation of virtual communities centered around migration, where Nigerians share advice, support, and resources with fellow migrants or individuals considering migration. These communities serve as platforms for solidarity, empowerment, and advocacy, influencing how migration is perceived and portrayed among Nigerians (Balogun & Ojo, 2020). Social media provides a platform for the emergence of counter-narratives challenging mainstream perceptions of migration. Individuals and organizations use social media to debunk stereotypes, combat misinformation, and advocate for more nuanced understandings of migration dynamics, thus shaping the portrayal of migration within Nigerian society.

**Research Question 2:** How do online platforms shape migration trends and aspirations?

Online platforms play a crucial role in shaping migration trends and aspirations by influencing individuals' perceptions, providing access to information, and facilitating connections with diaspora communities and potential destinations. According to Balogun and Ojo (2020), online platforms provide individuals with unprecedented access to information about migration opportunities, including visa requirements, job markets, educational opportunities, and quality of life in different countries. Websites, forums, social media groups, and blogs offer insights into the practicalities and possibilities of migration, shaping individuals' aspirations and influencing their decision-making process.



Social media platforms and professional networking sites enable individuals to connect with diaspora communities, expatriates, and individuals living in potential destination countries. These connections provide firsthand accounts, advice, and support networks that can bolster individuals' confidence and aspirations to migrate. Online job portals, recruitment websites, and professional networking platforms facilitate the job search process for individuals seeking employment abroad. These platforms connect employers with prospective employees across borders, contributing to the globalization of labor markets and influencing migration trends.

Omotoso and Olaniyan (2018) noted that social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube showcase aspirational lifestyles, travel experiences, and cultural diversity, influencing individuals' perceptions of migration destinations. Exposure to glamorous images and narratives of life abroad can fuel aspirations for migration and shape individuals' preferences for certain destinations. Influencers and content creators on social media platforms often share their migration experiences, documenting their journeys, challenges, and successes. These narratives serve as inspiration and validation for individuals considering migration, shaping their aspirations and influencing their decision-making process. Online platforms serve as powerful tools for advocacy and awareness campaigns related to migration issues, including refugee rights, migrant integration, and policy reform. These campaigns raise public awareness, challenge stereotypes, and shape societal attitudes towards migration, ultimately influencing migration trends and aspirations.

## CONCLUSION

The relationship between social media and migration is complex and multifaceted, with online platforms playing significant roles in shaping migration trends globally. Through the amplification of personal narratives, dissemination of information, facilitation of networking, and influence of cultural imagery, social media platforms have transformed the way individuals perceive, aspire to, and undertake migration. The influence of online platforms on migration trends is evident in the democratization of access to information, the globalization of labor markets, and the formation of transnational communities. Individuals now have unprecedented access to diverse perspectives, real-time updates on migration policies, and opportunities to connect with diaspora networks and potential employers abroad. As a result, migration aspirations are increasingly shaped by online interactions, cultural influences, and personal connections facilitated by social media.

Furthermore, social media serves as a catalyst for advocacy, awareness, and debate on migration-related issues, challenging stereotypes, and shaping societal attitudes towards migration. Online platforms provide a space for marginalized voices, grassroots organizations, and individuals to advocate for migrant rights, challenge restrictive policies, and promote more inclusive narratives of migration. However, it is essential to recognize the limitations and potential risks associated with the influence of social media on migration trends. Misinformation, exploitation, and the perpetuation of stereotypes are significant concerns that require vigilant monitoring and proactive interventions. Additionally, the digital divide and unequal access to online platforms may exacerbate existing disparities in migration opportunities and outcomes.



As we navigate the evolving landscape of social media and migration, policymakers, researchers, and civil society actors must work collaboratively to harness the potential of online platforms for positive social change while mitigating the risks and challenges. By fostering inclusive, ethical, and informed discussions on migration, we can harness the power of social media to create a more equitable and compassionate world for migrants and host communities alike. In essence, the exploration of the roles of online platforms in shaping migration trends underscores the transformative impact of social media on human mobility in the digital age, highlighting both opportunities and challenges for individuals, communities, and societies worldwide.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Online platforms should implement robust mechanisms to verify the accuracy and credibility of migration-related information shared on their platforms. This can involve partnering with reputable organizations such as international agencies, academic institutions, and government bodies to ensure that users have access to reliable and up-to-date information about migration processes, policies, and destinations. By promoting accurate information, online platforms can help individuals make informed decisions about migration, reducing the risk of misinformation and exploitation.
- ii. Online platforms should actively foster cross-cultural dialogue and empower migrant communities to share their experiences, challenges, and successes. This can be achieved through the promotion of inclusive spaces for discussion, the amplification of diverse voices and narratives, and the provision of resources and support networks for migrants. By facilitating meaningful interactions between migrants and host communities, online platforms can promote mutual understanding, combat stereotypes, and foster solidarity, ultimately contributing to more positive migration experiences and outcomes for all involved parties.



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