

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN FUELING INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS AMONG YOUTH IN ABUJA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The increasing migration aspirations among Nigerian youth is now expressed with the use of JAPA, a Yoruba word for run, flee or escape. The situation has assumed a dangerous dimension as young career Nigerians in the medical, teaching and financial sectors are also joining the bandwagon. The general objective of this study was to determine the impact of social media in fueling migration aspirations among youth in Nigeria. The researcher used descriptive survey for the study while a sample of 470 youth were sampled from the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The researcher found that social media moderately influences the migration aspirations of youth in Nigeria. The researcher found that attitudes towards international migration (p -value < 0.05), subjective norm (p -value < 0.05) and perceived behaviour control (p -value < 0.05) significantly moderated the influence of social media on the migration aspirations of both boys and girls. The researcher highlighted the implications of these results and made recommendations.

Keywords: Social media; migration, influence; youth, planned behaviour.

Introduction

Understanding the factors that drive the international migration aspirations of young people, especially from Africa, is a problem confronting stakeholders and researchers. This is partly because of the growing number of young Africans migrating to Europe and other parts of the world. The United Nations (2019) says that in 2019 alone, a total of 29,529.3 persons migrated from Africa. It adds that Africa alone produced 2.0% of the world's international migrants. The Food and Agriculture of the United Nations (2017) carried out a study to ascertain the demographics of migrants in Africa and found the prevalence of both internal and international migration in Africa. The result of the study showed that rural dwellers are more likely to engage in internal migration than any other category of citizens. On the other hand, urban dwellers are more likely to engage in international migration than their rural counterparts. In the area of gender distribution, males are more likely to migrate than their female counterparts. What this mean is that campaigns aimed at controlling migration needs to take into account the demographics of the population involved. Concerning age, younger people between the ages of 15-34 are more likely to migrate than those of any other age category. Employment was reported to be the central driver of migration. However,

women who migrate do so for family-related reasons.

Even though international migration is a common phenomenon in Africa, studies on migration about the continent have primarily been conducted in developed countries. The United Nations in a World Migration Report (2020) notes that there is an uneven distribution regarding studies on migration, with most of such studies being conducted by scholars from developed countries. In addition, such studies focus more on destination countries. The report notes:

There was a continued increase in the number of migration-related academic publications, with the largest ever academic output produced during the last two years. Academic output on migration is dominated with perspectives from destination countries, especially in relation to Europe. A geographic comparison of the primary affiliations of authors in selected journals shows that most are from institutions in developed countries (p.4).

The submission above has two implications on the current study. First, it makes a case for studies on migration from developing countries. Second, it makes a case for studies to be conducted from the perspective of countries of origin of international migrants.

Beyond the regional statistics on international migration, Nigeria as a country has had practical cases of migration instances. In 2019, there was a story that broke concerning the condition of Nigerian migrants in Libya. The media was washed with stories of international migrants with particular attention to Nigerian migrants to Libya who were stranded in Libya. The alarm attracted humanitarian attention from the National Emergency Management Agency office (NEMA) who coordinated the return of stranded Nigerians from Libya. Between April 2017 to June 2019, according to statistics from NEMA, a total of 13,884 stranded Nigerians were evacuated from Libya. The gender distribution of the returnees showed that 8,096 of them were males while 5,788 were females (Pulse, 2019). From 2017 to date when the Libya saga broke out, the federal government of Nigeria launched an advocacy advertising through print and electronic media to discourage international migration among citizens. In some of the messages, returnees were brought to give testimonies of their horrible experiences in Libya and other countries as a way of educating Nigerians on the need not to engage in international migration. The messages also attempted to make Nigerians realize that whatever challenges facing Nigeria, are also obtainable in other parts of the world. The objective was to make Nigerians see merit in staying in their country instead of risking their lives in their effort to migrate to other countries based largely on fake promises. Despite these messages, the migration syndrome, known as *JAPA* has continued to rage. This makes it imperative to understand the contributing role of social media in fueling migration aspirations among youth in Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Stakeholders and researchers are struggling to understand why there is currently high migration aspiration among Nigerian youths. The increasing migration aspiration among Nigerian youths is now expressed with the use of *JAPA*, a Yoruba word for run, flee or escape. The situation has assumed a dangerous dimension as young career Nigerians in the medical, teaching and financial sectors are also joining the bandwagon. This trend has led to brain drain in some key sectors of Nigerian society. Added to this is increasing readiness to engage in irregular

migration or take other desperate measures like human trafficking and drug trafficking to fulfil migration aspirations. Information is a key consideration in understanding the drivers of migration aspirations. Social media platforms have become essential sources of information for youth globally. Therefore, studies are needed to understand the contributing role of social media in fueling migration aspirations among Nigerian youth.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study was to determine the impact of social media in fueling migration aspirations among youth in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Ascertain the influence of social media on international migration aspirations among youths in Abuja.
2. Determine if the impact of social media on migration aspiration is the same for youths with different educational levels.

Literature Review

Migration is the movement of people from one place to another. Usually, migration can be internal or international. When people move from one location to another within the same country, it is referred to as internal migration. However, when people move from one country to another, it is referred to as international migration. Migration has an impact on both the places of origin and the receiving country. Odeh (2002) cited in Kari Malasowe and Ogbu (2018) corroborates that migration has changed the shape of countries whose citizens migrate and those of receiving countries.

Africa is one of the continents whose citizens engage in migration. The United Nations (2006) says that Europe is going through large number of international migrants who are mainly from Africa. UN adds that 15 of the 20 most developed countries in the world are in Europe. On the other hand, the first 20 countries with low development are from the African continent with 50 percent of such countries coming from West Africa which share border with Europe. United Nations regrets that the population of Africa is growing ahead of its economy and that Africa has grown poorer in the last 20 years.

Although scholars (Bredeloup, & Pliez, 2005; De, 2008; Bredeloup, 2008) often argue that the history of Africa as a continent is tied to mobility, international migration has become a global problem with countries over the world taking legal measures to monitor entrance into their countries. The United States of America that is destination for 50% of the world migrants is currently taking steps to combat the scourge of irregular migration. The Former President, Donald Trump, made immigration a key issue in his campaign during the 2016 US presidential election. He regarded immigration as a central problem that America needed to address to combat crime and ensure that jobs meant for Americans are not taken over by migrants. Consequently, the US former president during his stay in office took critical decisions that suggested how serious his administration took the issue of migration. Some of the decisions included: placing a ban on citizens of eight countries from gaining access to the United States that were largely Muslim countries. Reduction in the admissions of refugees to an all-time low since the start of the resettlement programme in 1980. The Trump led government also supported the arrest of international migrants in the United States of America, among others (Pierce & Selee, 2017). The immigration policies of Trump attracted the attention of world leaders, a situation that put pressure on the diplomatic relationship of US and countries whose citizens were negatively affected by such policies. Leaders of other countries such as Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau opted to accept immigrants rejected by American government. Also, countries that were negatively affected by such policies like Iran and Iraq threaten to retaliate (Williams, 2017). The point is that the migration is a global problem deserving of a scholarly enquiry. It is currently creating a breakdown in the diplomatic relationships of countries of the world.

For some time now, Nigeria has faced the problem of migration. Some Nigerians migrate to other countries without following the established procedures for entering such countries. Okunade (2017) conducted a study with the objective to ascertain existing routes through which Nigerians engage in irregular migration. The researcher studied a sample of 110 immigration officers. The result of the study showed that there are numerous

exit routes through which some Nigerians migrate to other parts of the world. Altai Consulting (2015) carried out a study to ascertain irregular migration in West and North Africa Mediterranean. The result of the study revealed that despite the fact people have heard of terrible things that happen to irregular migrants on their way to the destination country, there was still a strong desire for migration. According to the results, people still felt the need for them to migrate to other countries in search of greener pasture. Danziger (2019) avers that job-seeking remains one of the top reasons that fuel irregular migration. However, conflict, terrorism and other natural occurrences also contribute to international migration.

The government of Nigeria identifies irregular migration as a problem, thus discourages her citizens from engaging in it. The media in Nigeria, in collaboration with relevant government agencies, have launched different advocacy adverts with a view to dissuading Nigerians from engaging in irregular migration. The advocacy advert messages are carried in both print and electronic media. In Nigeria, media report indicate that some of the irregular migrants are sold into slavery for as low as \$400. This act of trading humans in exchange for money runs contrary to the abolished slave trade. That is to say irregular migration has brought back the era of slave trade, where humans were sold in a manner similar to goods and services.

Social Media and Migration Aspirations

Social media are computer-mediated communication platforms that allow people to generate and share messages. Social media platforms are based on the ideology of web 2.0 which promote and allows interactivity in online communication. Sivarajah *et al.* (2015) note that Web 2.0 technologies can be defined as second generation web services that offer platforms for participatory communication, promote collaboration, interaction and networking. Researchers (Anttiroiko, 2010; Grimmeliikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015) agree that social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, among others are integral parts of Web 2.0.

Social media platforms allow for different message formats such as text, video, illustrations, photos and audio. As a result of its compatibility

to different message formats, it can be used for a variety of purposes like marketing, politicking, teaching and learning, health education, advocacy and conscientization. Social media platforms also promote interaction between people who are separated by distance. For example, a person from Nigeria can engage in communication with another based in the USA and their messages will be delivered at the click of a button. Ahmad et al. (2022) note that social media platforms allow for interactivity, thus making communication easier, effective and efficient.

Social media platforms are capable of fueling migration aspirations in several ways. For example, social media users can be friends with people from other countries, and the process of maintaining constant communication with such friends could trigger migration aspirations. Another way that social media could trigger migration aspirations is through information from other countries that are made available via social media platforms. Additionally, those whose relations or friends have migrated to other countries may be compelled to develop migration aspirations, if they maintain social media interactions with them.

Dekker et al. (2015) did a study to understand the role of social media in migration networks with the use of a survey research design and found that social media have been found useful for migration networks for international communication. The researchers reported further that when non-migrants engage in social media communication with migrants, it increases their propensity to migrate. Georgalou (2021) reports that social media platforms are at the centre of the world's migration crisis. Dekker and Engbersen (2013) conducted a survey and found that there are four basic ways through which social platforms aid migration aspirations. These are, first, social media platforms make it possible for migrants to maintain ties with their loved ones even after migration. In the second place, social media platforms address weak ties that are useful in coordinating migration and integration. Thirdly, social media platforms allow individuals to establish new ties after migration. Finally, social media offer helpful insider information that assists migrants in coping in their destination countries. Klvaňová (2010), in a study, also reported that social media are important sources of information that fuel migration propensity.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher applied the theory of planned behaviour to study social media's influence on migration aspirations of youths. Icek Ajzen suggested the theory of planned behaviour in 1985 (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). The essence of the theory is to explain human behaviour, thus making it appropriate for the study because migration itself is a behaviour. The theory of planned behaviour argues that the intention of a person to execute an action or carry out a behaviour is largely based on the intention regarding such a behaviour. Behaviour intentions itself is determined by three variables namely: Attitude towards an action, subjective norms, as well as perceived behavioural control (Maichum, Parichatnon & Peng 2016; Raygor 2016; Zhang et al., 2018). In the views of Ajzen (1986), intention is "a person's readiness to perform a given behaviour." Attitude defines the assessment that a person has concerning the behaviour in question. Such an assessment may be positive or negative. Within the context of this study, it refers to the attitude that a person has concerning migration. The second variable which is subjective norms refers to the opinion which individuals that a person respect has about an issue. In other words, the views people that are important to a person have regarding an issue. Within the context of this study, it may mean what persons that are important to an individual think about migration. Examples of such persons may include: Mentors, role models, friends, family members, among others. Perceived behavioural control (PBC) is used in reference to how less demanding or demanding it is for a person to carry out an action. Within the context of this study, it is used in reference to how easy it is for a person to carry out international migration or how difficult it is. Migration studies (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996; Matthes & Schmuck 2015; Quillian, 1995) have examined demographics as moderators of international migration with little attention paid to psychographics. Therefore, the researcher applied this theory to understand the influence of social media in influencing the migration aspirations of youths in Nigeria. Based on this theory, the researcher hypothesized:

H1: Attitude toward international migration significantly moderates the impact of social media on migration aspirations for both boys and girls.

H2: Subjective norms significantly moderates the impact of social media on migration aspirations for both boys and girls.

H3: Perceived behavioral control significantly moderates the impact of social media on migration aspirations for both boys and girls.

Methodology

The researcher applied survey research design to execute this study. Descriptive survey was used because it enabled the researcher to describe, explain, as well as analyze the influence of social media in fueling migration aspirations. This study's population comprised youths aged 18-35 years from the federal capital territory, Abuja, who are social media users. No available document indicates the total number of youth in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The researcher determined whether the sample was adequate through the use of a *priori* power analysis with the G*power programme. The researcher set the baselines with power (1 – β) at 0.90, 0.30 effect size f, and α = .05. The outcome revealed that a total sample size of 470 participants was required to ascertain statistical differences at the .05. level of significance.

Sampling Procedure

The researcher selected the sample size for this study using the respondent-driven chain referral sampling technique. This type of sampling begins by first identifying the initial participants who recommend prospective participants. The initial participants were sampled through social media announcements that were sent on Facebook. To be

included in the study, a participant must be between 18-35 years old and have at least one active social media account.

Instrument for Data Collection

The researcher used a structured questionnaire to collect data for the study. The questionnaire collected demographic and psychographic data. Three communication experts from the University of Abuja, validated the instrument taking into account the clarity of presentation, logicity and appropriateness. We ascertained the reliability of the instrument using a test-retest technique. Therefore, we administered 40 copies of the drafted questionnaire to selected respondents (who were not part of the actual study), and after two weeks, we contacted them again and administered the instrument, the outcome showed a correlation coefficient of .89, an indication that the instrument was reliable.

Results

Out of the 470 copies of the questionnaire that were administered to the respondents, 455 copies representing 97%, were filled and returned. All the participants were youths between the ages of 18-35 years. Regarding gender, 54% were males, while 46% were females. Also, 56% had jobs, while 44% had no paid employment as at the time of participating in the study. All the participants were active social media users. 95% of the respondents reported that they make use of social media daily while 5% reported that their use of social media was irregular.

Table 1: Influence of social media on migration aspirations

S/N	Items	Frequency	Percentage
1	No influence	78	17%
2	Low influence	105	23%
3	Moderate influence	201	44%
4	Nigh influence	71	16%
5	Total	455	100%

In Table 1, the researcher determined the influence of social media on the migration aspirations of youths in Abuja, Nigeria. The study's result showed that most participants reported that social media contribute to their migration aspirations. The degree of influence differed as the majority indicated moderate influence while few indicated high influence.

Table 2: Regression analysis of the predictive power of level of education on the influence of social media on migration aspirations

Educational level	Constant	β	R square	F. value	P. value
Primary	3.103	.182	.393	54.520	.003
Secondary		.258			.002
Tertiary		.517			.001

The objective of Table 2 was to ascertain the predictive role of educational levels like primary, secondary and tertiary levels on the influence of social media on the migration aspirations of youth within the study area. The findings from the study revealed an overall contribution of 39.3% of educational levels in explaining the influence of social media on migration aspirations, $R^2=.391$, $p=0.001$, $F(2,311)$ 54.520. Further analysis revealed that those with tertiary education ($\beta=.517$) are more likely to be influenced than those with secondary and primary education put together.

Table 3: Correlation analysis on the theory of planned behaviour influence of social media on migration aspirations

Item	Gender					
	Boys			Girls		
H1 Attitude towards Int'l migration	R	P	Dec.	R	p	Dec.
	.981**	.01	Sig	.782**	.01	Sig
H2 Perceived behaviour control	.989**	.01	Sig	.781**	.03	Sig
H3 Subjective norm	.828**	.03	sig	.921**	.02	Sig

**** : correlation is significant at 0.05**

The essence of Table 3 above was to ascertain how variables from the theory of planned behaviour moderate the influence of social media on migration aspirations for both boys and girls. The researcher found that attitude towards international migration (p-value < 0.05), subjective norm (p-value < 0.05) and perceived behaviour control (p-value < 0.05) significantly moderate the influence of social media on the migration intention of both boys and girls. Consequently, our findings support hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 and we conclude with 95% confidence that variables from the planned behaviour theory significantly moderate social media's influence on migration aspirations for both boys and girls.

Discussion of Findings

In this study, the researcher examined the influence of social media on migration aspirations among youth in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The researcher found that social media

moderately influence the migration aspirations of youths within the study area. This result is consistent with those of Dekker et al. (2015), Georgalou (2021), Klvaňová (2010), who

reported that social media play crucial role in promoting migration aspirations. However, these studies were not conducted in Nigeria and the current study has added the Nigerian angle. Additionally, the current study has shown that level of education is an essential consideration in determining the influence of social media on the migration aspirations of youths in Nigeria. The more educated, the more likelihood that social media messages will influence migration aspirations. This could be because educated youth have an expectation regarding the type of life they desire to live so when that expectation is not met, they nurse migration aspirations with the hope that their countries of destination will meet their expectations.

Additional findings showed that variables from theory of planned behaviour moderate the influence of social media messages on the migration aspirations of youth. For example, the attitudes that boys and girls have regarding international migration influences their migration aspirations. That is to say that those who have positive attitudes towards international migration are more likely to be influenced by social media than those with negative attitudes. Also, we found that perceived behaviour control and subjective norm significantly moderate the influence of social media on migration aspirations. The result of this study is consistent with those of Maichum, Parichatnon, and Peng (2016), Raygor (2016), Zhang Chen, Wu Zhang and Song, (2018) whose studies showed that the theory of planned behaviour is reliable in predicting human behaviour. Therefore, the result of the current study has shown that the theory of planned behaviour is a relevant framework for explaining the impact of social media on migration aspirations.

Implications of the Findings

The results of this study have implications on theory, practice and scholarship. In the area of theory, the results have tested and validated variables from theory of planned behaviour. This is because our results have shown that elements from theory of planned behaviour such as attitudes towards an action, subjective norms and perceived behaviour control are essential in moderating the influence that social media have on the audience. This understanding in turn has implications on practice because it implies that for

advocacy messages to be effective for behaviour change, there is the need for such messages to pay attention to the attitudes that the target receivers have about the issue, their subjective norms as well as perceived behaviour control. This, therefore, makes it imperative for planners of advocacy messages to research into their target before crafting their messages. In addition to theory and practice, our results have implications on scholarship. This is because it has extended arguments on the impact of social media to include how it effects migration. The result of this study has added to previous studies on issues related to migration studies and how to curtail it. It is hoped that these findings will be beneficial for policies and programmes on migrations.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Taking into account the result of this study, the researcher concludes that social media moderately influence the migration aspirations of youth in Abuja, Nigeria. The researcher recommends that social media should be used as platforms for anti-migration messages by those who are interested in combating irregular migration. It is also recommended that the variables from the theory of planned behaviour as well as the educational levels of target participants should be considered when drafting messages on anti-migration. Despite the contributions of this, it has some limitations. First, the researcher was not able to get the exact number of social media users in Abuja. This limitation did not affect the outcome of the study because a priori power analysis was conducted before selecting the sample. The current study applied a survey research design. We suggest that further studies should make use of other designs like experimental design wherein there should be a pre-test/post-test exercises. Also, a content analysis of the message contents of advocacy advertisement is needed to understand the message elements used. Finally, further studies should also examine how other demographics like employment status, age and gender intervene in the responses of both decided international migrants and people with no international migration plans.

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