

Influence of Social Media Reportage on Migration to Malaysia among Undergraduates

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Migration has become one of the defining issues in this globalised world. This is a known fact as research has shown that there have been periods of displacement and misplacement across borders and boundaries. The attention given to migration in recent times is quite alarming as individuals are now leaving their countries in search of jobs, medical care and education. There are events which have claimed the lives of so many Africans and despite these happenings, the increase in migration cannot be over emphasized. It is at the backdrop of this that this study sought to investigate the influence of social media reportage on migration to Malaysia. Anchoring this study on technological determinism theory of communication, a sample of 375 respondents were administered questionnaire using a multi stage sampling technique. Findings revealed that respondents are exposed to and are aware of social media stories on the flamboyant lifestyle of Malaysian returnees. Also, respondents show positive attitude to Malaysian migrants who return with a lot wealth in spite of the bad image they have been associated with. Therefore, the study recommended that social media users should be ethical in their reportage in order not to mislead the audience and that respondents should imbibe the culture of self censorship so as to check the attitudes that are formed as a result of exposure to social media messages.

Keywords: Social Media, Migration, Undergraduates, Malaysia.

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INTRODUCTION

Migration has become one of the defining issues in this globalised world and specifically in Africa. Kosho [1] writes that migration has a long tradition in Africa with Mali in the 4th century. The need for migration is prompted by search of jobs, medical care and education. There are events which have claimed the lives of so many Africans and despite these happenings, the increase in migration cannot be over emphasized. According to Kosho [1], so many people have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea while trying to get to their destinations in shanty boats and there have been cases of organ harvesting: which is the removal and selling of sensitive organs in the body such as the kidney and liver, and slave trade boom in various parts of the Asian continent. All these have formed debates globally.

However, the reasons why people migrate have been debated for a while and Shaw [2] gave an insight on factors that have led to the issue of migration. He highlighted that change in economic conditions, the choice of a better way of life and to acquire experience and training in areas of specialization are the reasons why people migrate. Also, he further stated that the

purpose of buying and selling is another reason why Africans in particular migrate.

The media have placed migration on the fore front in news coverage and social media have been used greatly in disseminating cases of the Malaysian migration. Social media has been on the rise in recent years and channels such as facebook, twitter, youtube and instagram enable real time communication anytime and anywhere.

Using migration to Malaysia as a case in point and with a population of 28 million, according to views on Nairaland [3], Malaysia has of late become the place for young Nigerians seeking greener pastures. On a daily basis, hundreds of Nigerians relocate to Malaysia, and the question has always been: what's so special about Malaysia that a lot of young Nigerians prefer that place than Europe and America? This question becomes timely given that most Nigerian men in Malaysia as reported on social media are either into drug business or internet fraud, while the ladies are into prostitution. However, social media flaunting of the flamboyant lifestyle of Malaysian migrants contradicts or perhaps portrays traveling to Malaysia as an end to a means. One might ask, what is the perception of the

public about migrating to Malaysia in the face of all these social vices and larger than life portrayal of Malaysia via social media? Therefore, this study seeks to ascertain the level of exposure, level of awareness, perception of Imo State University (IMSU) undergraduates to social media reportage on migration to Malaysia, and the attitude of IMSU undergraduates towards migration as a result of their perception of Malaysia.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Migration is the movement of people from one place to another in search of employment, market, education, health and other means of livelihood. The movement can be temporary or permanent. For Chikaire, Nnadi, Atoma, Egwuonwu & Echetama [4], Migration occurs as a response to economic development as well as social, cultural, environmental and political factors and effects on areas of origin as destination.

In Nigeria and many developing countries, there has also been an alarming move to other countries for greener pastures. Basically, it is majorly caused by lack of basic amenities such as pipe-borne water, electricity, good roads and health facilities, search for qualitative education and gainful employment.

While migration generates enormous benefits, it also can subject migrants to abuse. In the experience of the sample countries, governments have imposed suffering on migrants through mass expulsions, while private individuals have used deception and violence to condemn women and children to exploitation [5, 6].

Migration is a decision that impacts the welfare of the household, the home community, and in the end the whole economy in various ways [7]. The welfare implications of migration on the origin country are most often, though not always, sizable and positive. The main channels through which migration alleviates poverty are increased incomes from remittances, ability to smooth consumption, access to finance for starting a new business, as well as tapping on to the knowledge and resources provided by the international community of the migrant diaspora. Besides pure monetary gains, migration and remittances allow for higher investment in health care and education. Yet, not all impacts are positive: exploitation of migrants by unscrupulous recruiters or employers is reportedly widespread; separation from family can be stressful for migrants; and large scale immigration can pose serious challenges to a nation's identity and sovereignty.

Social Media and the Facilitation of Migration

Many researchers conceptualize the relationship between social media and migration by considering how it facilitates social ties between individuals [8-10]. Dekker and Engbersen [10] argue

that new communication channels opened by social media can transform migrant networks and thus facilitate migration through four key functions: (1) by strengthening strong ties with family and friends; (2) by creating weak ties to individuals that can assist in the process of migration (and integration); (3) by creating a network of latent ties; and (4) by creating a rich source of 'insider knowledge' on migration. Combined, these functions can serve to reduce the costs of migration through both reducing the emotional cost of separation and through allowing access to both information and contacts that can assist the migrant in having a smooth relocation. The implication of this is that social media can have different impacts on social relations.

Based on previous research and a review of the literature, Haythornthwaite [8] findings suggest that where ties are strong, communicators can influence each other to adapt their behaviour through verbal exchanges via different communication channels. Where ties are weak, communicators were historically more reliant upon formal means of communication; new media, however, allows previously unconnected people to communicate and can thus strengthen their network of weak ties. Komito [1] has similar findings. On one hand, social media facilitates the creation of weak ties through brief offline interactions or superficial online encounters based on a shared interest (for example, via a social networking sites, gaming environment, or forum). On the other, social media enables migrants to passively monitor past social connections, which can help to sustain community, even across distances. This leads to the observation that social media may slow down the process of integration while encouraging the mobility of migrants from one society to another given that it is increasingly possible to stay connected. It has been observed that 'new technologies made snowball migration easier by increasing the number of friends and relations abroad who can be found and might be willing to provide assistance [9]'.

Empirical Review

The study of Dekker and Engbersen [10], titled, "How Social Media Transform Migrant Networks and Facilitate Migration" argues that social media are not only new communication channels in migration networks, but that they actively transform the nature of these networks and thereby facilitate migration. Despite some limitations stemming from the 'digital divide', reduced trustworthiness of virtual ties, qualitative data reveal four relevant functions of social media that facilitate international migration. First, social media enhance the possibilities of maintaining strong ties with family and friends. Second, they are used to address weak ties that are relevant to organizing the process of migration and integration. Third, social media establish a new infrastructure consisting of latent ties. Fourth, they offer a rich source of insider knowledge on migration that is discrete and unofficial.

This makes potential migrants 'streetwise' with regard to the undertaking of migration. Based on these empirical findings the study concluded that social media are transforming migration networks and thereby lowering the threshold for migration.

In the study of Kosho [1] titled, "Media Influence On Public Opinion Attitudes Toward The Migration Crisis," it set out to examine the connection between media reports on immigration and public attitudes and actions, and how migration issues presented in the mainstream media impact the public and political discourse on international migration. Anchoring the study on the agenda setting theory of the press and adopting the survey research method, the results of various surveys of the public opinion in the European countries most affected by the influx of immigrants, show a high level of opposition and skepticism on domestic public opinion against immigrants. The UK is one of the countries with negative discourse concerning immigrants. Much of British society (three quarters) requires the reduction of immigrants, clearly showing a high level of opposition to the immigration in the UK. The British media analysis has shown a negative terminology on immigrants focused on the key words like 'illegal', 'failure', 'terrorist', etc. Unlike the United Kingdom, other European countries and the US, public attitudes on immigration are more tempered. Germans and Americans have more positive attitudes on immigrants, while the Greeks and Italians have the most negative views. Researches and monitoring of the media in Italy and Greece have found that news coverage urged the panic to resolve the issue of immigrants. The Studies on media reporting and public attitudes on immigration have shown that the images in the media, the descriptions and the labeling of the immigrants, influence public attitudes on immigrants and affect the policies on immigration. With the increase of the international movement of people, the attention is focused on the immigration policies and issues, in the frame of the portrayal of this phenomenon in the media and impact on the decision makers.

Yohanna, D. P. [11] in the study on Rural-Urban Migration among Youths in Nigeria: examined the causes of rural-urban migration; its impact on agriculture and rural development and its benefits to rural dwellers. Agriculture is the major source of employment among the rural dwellers in Nigeria. But with the discovery of oil, the attention of the government and other key players shifted to oil, thus neglecting the agriculture sector. This negligence, coupled with lack of basic amenities such as water, electricity, good roads, schools etc. in the rural areas led to massive movement of youths from the rural areas to urban areas in search of white collar jobs. The movement took away able-bodied young men and women from the rural areas leaving behind the aged and children who do not have the capacity to till the land,

thus affecting agriculture and rural development. The research was carried out using secondary resources. The research suggests that government and other stakeholders should invest more on infrastructural development in rural areas. This will reduce rural-urban migration. It is equally suggested that the defunct Agriculture Marketing Board should be revived. This will help farmers to get adequate reward for their farm products. Thus making agriculture attractive to young people and in turn checking the mass movement of youths from rural to urban areas.

Okezie, C. A. and Amir, B. H. [12]. Economic crossroads: The experiences of Nigeria and lessons from Malaysia tried to assess the economic performance in Nigeria with a view of identifying what went wrong and drawing lessons from Malaysia for its vision 2020. The two countries have the vision of becoming advanced economies by the year 2020. Nigeria's economic landscape especially since the oil boom of the mid 1970's has become the textbook example of Africa's economic growth and tragedy with a gross domestic product (GDP) of about \$43 billion in 2001, the economy has shrunk to a third of its size in 1981, per capita income has shrunk from \$1150 in 1991 to a barely \$300 in 2001. As at 2001, Nigeria had received appropriately \$300 billion from oil exports since the mid 1970's but per capita income was 20% less than the 1975 level. The economic structures remain highly undiversified, with oil accounting for then more 95% of exports and manufacturing sector accounting for less than one per cent of exports. In 1999 the country returned to the path of civil democratic governance, economic growth has risen substantially, with an annual average of 7.4% in the last decade. But the growth has not been inclusive, broad-based and transformational. The implication of the trend is that economic growth in Nigeria has not resulted in the desired structural changes that would make manufacturing the engine of growth, create employment, promote technological development and induce poverty alleviation. The one lesson for Nigeria is that for it to attend its Vision 2020 it must promote an all inclusive growth in all sectors.

Theoretical Framework Technological Determinism

This study was anchored on technological determinism theory. This communication theory was modelled by Marshall McLuhan. Technological determinism follows a predictable, traceable path largely beyond cultural or political influence. It is believed that all the effects of a technology can be deduced from its form [13]. In other words, our culture is moulded by how we are able to communicate. To understand this, there are a few main points are must comprehend. First, an invention in communication technology causes culture change [14]. Secondly, changes in modes of communication shape us [15-17].

According to this theory, media technology shapes how we as individuals in a society think, feel, act, and how our society operates as we move from one technological age to another (Tribal-Literate-print-Electronic-ICT). Propounded by theories Marshall McLuhan in 1962 technological determinism theory implies that we learn and feel and think the way we do because of the messages we receive through the current technology that is available. The radio required us to only listen and develop our sense of hearing. On the other hand, television engages both our hearing and visual senses. We then transfer those developed sense into our everyday lives and we want to use them again. The medium is then our message [18].

As the medium changes so does society's way of communicating. People can only use the medium for which it was created (phone for talking over lines or electronic mail for talking via computer). If the medium is impersonal (television) then the message too is impersonal. The theory also depicts that with every new system of media technology, society will change and adapt to that technology. There is a simple cause and effect analysis between the introduction of new technology and the changes in society's way of thinking, feeling, acting or believing [18].

Technological determinism has been defined as an approach that identifies technology, or technological advances, as the essential element in the processes of social change. As a technology is stabilized, its design tends to dictate users' behaviours, consequently diminishing human agency. This stance, however, ignores the social and cultural circumstances in which the technology was developed. Rather than acknowledging that a society or culture interacts with and even shapes the technologies that are used, a technological determinists view holds that the uses made the technology are largely determined by the structure of the technology itself, that is, that its functions follow grown its form [17].

This theory is relevant to this study in that media technology shapes how we as individuals in a society think, feel, act, and how our society operates as we move from one technological age to another. The way social media reports the lifestyles of Malaysian migrants and the get rich quick portrayal of traveling to Malaysia shapes how we perceive migration to Malaysia and other nations. These perceptions would in turn influence our actions or practice.

METHODOLOGY

The survey research method was adopted for this study. This method is appropriate and apt for a study of this nature that seeks to assess the opinions, views and perceptions of the public on the influence of social media messages. The research population is the entire undergraduate students of Imo State University

Owerri at 15,086 [19]. Using the online Australian calculator, the sample size is 375.

The sampling technique adopted for this study was the multi-stage sampling technique. This technique involves the arrangement of samples in stages, in which each stage requires a particular sampling procedure [20]. Thus, the sampling technique is as follows:

Stage 1: In this stage, Stratified sampling technique was used.

Here the population was broken down into strata. Since there are eleven Faculties in Imo State University, the University Owerri was categorized by the Faculties.

Stage 2: In this stage, the researcher adopted the non-proportionate sampling technique. In achieving this, the sample was divided by the number of Faculties in Imo State University Owerri, earlier established in stage 1. That is:

$$\text{Sample size} = 375$$

$$\text{No. of Faculties} = 11$$

Therefore, 34 respondents were sampled from each faculty. This was done to achieve representativeness

Stage 3: In this stage, the purposive sampling technique was used to sample 34 respondents in each of the 11 Faculties.

The instrument used in collecting the data for this study was questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 18 questions. The questionnaire was designed in two sections. Section A was used to ascertain the demographic characteristics of the respondents such as sex, gender, faculty, level and age. Section B obtained respondent's psychographic data. This aspect of questionnaire dealt with questions that are capable of answering the research question.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study sought to ascertain the level of exposure, level of awareness, perception of Imo State University Owerri, (IMSU) undergraduates to social media reportage on migration to Malaysia, and the attitude of IMSU undergraduates towards migration as a result of their perception of Malaysia. To gauge Respondents' Level of Exposure to Social Media stories on Malaysian Migrants flamboyant Life Style and the get-rich-quick syndrome associated to traveling to Malaysia, it was important to establish whether respondents have access to the social media or not. This is necessary because one cannot sample the opinions of respondents who might not even be exposed to social media stories on Malaysian migrants because they don't

have access to the social media. In respect of this, findings reveal that all respondents, that is 100% respondents have access to the social media. This revelation set the foreground on which other investigations were made. Given that all respondents have access to social media; it became imperative to ascertain the social media platforms they have access to. The argument is that some social media platforms are more influential than others and at such have a lot of traffics. In line with this, findings reveal that 100% respondents access Facebook. This is, however, not the same for Instagram, Twitter, Blogs which had 6.3%, 1.9% and 6.3% respectively. Furthermore, only 6.3% of respondents have access to all the social media platforms stated in the questionnaire. This implies that Facebook holds more subscribers than other social media platforms. It is safe to say that the views and opinions that respondents lent in this study were mostly coming from what they are exposed to on Facebook. In the same breath, ascertaining the frequency of access to these social media platforms, 28.6% and 46.7% of respondents indicated that they access these social media platforms very often and often respectively. These percentages put together are about 70% of the respondents accessing these social media frequently. This means that majority of the respondents access the social media frequently.

Responding to whether respondents have been exposed to social media stories on the flamboyant lifestyle of Malaysian migrants and the get-rich-quick inspired pictures and stories making rounds on the social media, 69.5% of respondents indicated yes. While 13.2% and 17.3% of respondents indicated No and Can't say. In further assessing respondents' level of exposure to these social media stories, findings from a five point likert scale revealed a mean score of 3.4 which is above the cut off zone of the decision rule of 3.0, Therefore, the respondents are highly exposed to these social media stories.

These findings pose a communication question as to why the acceptance and copious usage of the social media by respondents. These findings beg for explanation as to how the use of social media has come to stay in terms of getting information. In line with this, the theory of Diffusion of Innovation explains this phenomenon by better putting it into perspective. The basic assumptions of this theory which states that exposure of change target to new idea, object or practice (that is innovation) in a manner that they would pay attention to understand, internalize and adopt the new idea, object or practice (which is diffusion) for their own benefit. The findings of this study suggest how respondents have been able to utilize the social media to own benefit.

In response to the level of awareness, 82.7% respondents indicated that they are aware of social media stories and pictures of Nigerians who have been

to Malaysia and return with wealth and affluence. This means that majority of the respondents are aware. However, in assessing respondents' awareness level, a five point likert scale has a mean score of 3.5 which is above the decision rule used in this study. Therefore, respondents' level of awareness of social media stories on Malaysian migrant's lifestyle is high. This is in consonance with the level of exposure earlier revealed. This means that the higher the exposure, the higher the level of awareness. Thus, these findings further solidify the argument that one has to be exposed to mass media messages before being aware in the first place.

In addition, these findings are however suggestive of the how tenable the Agenda Setting theory is not just telling us what to think but what to think about. The implication is that flooding the social media with stores of migrants' lifestyle and the get-rich-quick portrayal of Malaysian is bound to raise the awareness level of such mass media stories as long social media users are exposed to them.

In response to this research question on perception of IMSU Owerri, undergraduates as a result of their exposure to social media stories of migration to Malaysia and Malaysian Migrants, findings revealed that at a mean score of 3.4 which is higher than the mean rating used for this study, respondents' exposure to social media stories on the flamboyant lifestyle of Malaysian migrants and the get-rich-quick portrayal of Malaysia has influence on how they perceive travelling out to Malaysia. But the influence according to findings is largely a negative influence. This interpretation is arrived at due the 41.2 % of respondents who indicated negative influence to the question of the kind of influence these social media stories has on their perceptions, especially as only 17.6% indicated positive influence. Given that the findings in response to the above research question revealed that at a mean score of 3.5, respondents see travelling to Malaysia as bad as the way social media portray her. This implies that a negative influence begets a negative perception.

Finally on attitude as a result of their perception of Malaysia, it was revealed that 58.8% respondents would be friendly to Malaysian migrants who became suspiciously wealthy upon their return, while 41.2% would be less friendly and indifferent. Supporting this, at a mean score of 3.7 which is above the mean rating of 3.0 used for this study, it was accepted that the attitude of respondents towards Malaysian migrants and to those who intend travelling to Malaysia is positive irrespective of what they have been exposed to in the social media.

These findings are however, in line with the acceptance of the alternate hypotheses which states that the attitude of respondents is positive. The tested hypothesis to this effect had calculated value of 208.4 which was higher than Chi-square table value of 9.488

at the degree of freedom of 4, using a 0.05 level of significance. Findings further revealed that the attitude of respondents is significantly related to their perception.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed the influence of social media reportage of Malaysian migrants on migration to Malaysia. It was observed that the larger than life kind of living by Malaysian migrants is perpetually reported on the social media and at such, is capable of exerting certain influences on the individuals who are exposed to such social media messages. One of the observed influences could be in the actual migration to Malaysia or otherwise.

The major findings of this study conform to the empirical studies reviewed in this study. Responses in this study showed a high level of exposure and awareness amongst respondents. In the opinion of the Researchers, The Social media should party more on the negative consequences of migration to Malaysia so as to create fear in the minds of people so as to reduce increase level of migration

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Given the finding that there is a high level of exposure and awareness amongst respondents, the study therefore recommends self-censorship so that respondents should take care in considering what they exposed themselves to.
- The study also recommends that social media users should be ethical in their reportage in order not to mislead the audience.
- In line with the findings of research question four, the study recommends that respondent's efforts should be placed on checking the attitudes that are formed as a result of exposure to social media messages.

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