

# **INFLUENCE OF EXPOSURE TO JAPA CONTENTS ON INSTAGRAM ON MIGRATION INTENTIONS AMONG NORTHERN NIGERIAN YOUTHS**

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## **Abstract**

The surge in youth migration intentions in Nigeria, popularly dubbed “JAPA,” has increasingly been shaped by digital platforms. Hence, this study explores how Instagram content contributes to migration aspirations and decisions among Northern Nigerian youths. Grounded in Social Cognitive Theory and framed within development communication discourse, the study highlights Instagram as a powerful communication space where migration is glamorised through

aspirational storytelling, memes, and peer-influenced narratives. Using a survey of 400 respondents aged 18–35 from Northern Nigeria, the study investigates exposure levels, content types, perceptions, and the perceived influence of Instagram’s migration-related content. Findings show that while frequency of exposure influences migration intention, perception of the content plays a more significant role in shaping decisions. Moreover, the glamorisation of migration, often devoid of real risks and challenges, may lead to uninformed or idealised aspirations. These insights stress the urgent need for strategic media literacy campaigns and responsible storytelling on digital platforms. Thus, this paper contributes to the discourse on development communication by interrogating how digital narratives shape youth agency, risk perception, and decision-making. It argues that empowering youth through critical engagement with media content is vital for promoting informed decisions and sustainable societal development.

**Keywords:** Development Communication, Digital Narratives, Youth Empowerment, Social Media, Migration, Northern Nigeria

## Introduction

Migration, defined as the movement of people between geographical areas, has long shaped human history (Anyanwu & Erhijakpor, 2010, cited in Nwoke, 2019). Among Nigerian youths, this movement takes two main forms: internal migration involving relocation within Nigeria; and external migration involving emigration abroad. Recently, rising economic hardship, social instability, and governance failures have fueled a surge in youth migration intentions (Nwoke, 2019). Popularly dubbed JAPA, a Yoruba slang meaning “to flee,” this trend has gained momentum, particularly on social

media platforms like Instagram (Adegoke, 2023; Akakpo & Bokpin, 2021).

Importantly, migration is often viewed as a pathway to personal and economic advancement (Adegoke, 2023). It may be temporary or permanent, depending on individual goals. Although it can offer benefits to migrants and their families, outcomes are shaped by underlying motivations (Olawale & Ridwan, 2021). Traditionally, economic pressures, insecurity, unemployment, and poor governance have been dominant push factors (Olawale & Ridwan, 2021). However, social media now adds a new layer by creating an “alternative reality” through curated content.

As social media has revolutionised information access, interaction, and decision-making, it is influencing how individuals perceive and pursue migration (Adepoju, 2010; Adegoke, 2023). Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter build communities that connect users to global migration networks (Nwaoboli et al., 2023). Although migration is primarily motivated by the pursuit of opportunities, today’s JAPA movement is heavily influenced by digital narratives (Adegoke, 2023). Instagram, in particular, is flooded with posts showcasing successful migrants’ luxury lifestyles, often creating an illusion of effortless success (Ikharo et al., 2024). Such portrayals raise concerns about how social media amplifies the JAPA phenomenon and its impact on youth decision-making.

While there is a growing body of research on social media and migration (Adegoke, 2023; Dekker et al., 2015; Obi et al., 2020), there is a limited understanding of how exposure to JAPA-related contents on visually engaging platform like Instagram shapes migration intentions and decisions among specific demography such as Northern Nigerian youths. By addressing these gaps, this study aims to provide a deeper

understanding of how Instagram facilitates migration intention and decision-making among Northern Nigerian youths, offering insights for policymakers, educators, and migration stakeholders.

## **Research Questions**

Hence this study seeks to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. To what extent are Northern Nigerian youths exposed to JAPA-related content on Instagram?
2. What are the categories of JAPA-related content on Instagram Northern Nigerian youths are engaging with?
3. What is the perception of Northern Nigerian youths about JAPA content on Instagram?
4. What is the perceived influence of JAPA content on Instagram on migration intentions and decisions among Northern Nigerian youths?

## **Literature Review**

### **JAPA: An Overview**

The term *Japa*, from the Yoruba language, literally means “run” or “flee” (Ikharo et al., 2024). Unlike traditional migration, Japa reflects a sense of urgency and desperation rather than planned relocation. As Afunugo (2023) noted, this phenomenon is largely driven by economic instability, with high unemployment and limited opportunities pushing many Nigerian youths to seek better prospects abroad. The focus is often on escaping hardship rather than choosing a specific destination (Ikharo et al., 2024).

More than a linguistic term, *Japa* has become urban slang symbolising the mass exodus of frustrated youth (Adegoke, 2023). It captures the widespread desire to escape worsening economic and social conditions, particularly among the educated middle class who feel stifled by poor governance and lack of upward mobility (Ikharo et al., 2024). Though rooted in Yoruba culture, *Japa* has gained nationwide usage, cutting across ethnic and linguistic lines. It is especially popular among millennials and Gen Z, who are active in digital spaces and migration-related discourse (Adegoke, 2023).

### **Social Media Exposure, Youth, and Migration Intention/Decision**

The relationship between social media exposure and youth migration intention is complex. Research shows that social media can act as a catalyst by enabling communication and sharing of migration-related information. Obi *et al.* (2020) noted that online platforms support migration aspirations by connecting individuals to established migrant networks, which enhances the likelihood of actual migration. Similarly, Dekker *et al.* (2015) found that online media facilitate transnational communication and knowledge exchange within migration networks.

Adegoke (2023) also examined social media's role in Nigeria's *Japa* trend, focusing on migration to countries like the UK, Canada, the US, and France. While social media served as a useful tool for gathering information, the study found limited direct influence on migration decisions. Offline networks, such as family and friends, and private online communities were more significant. Socioeconomic factors, including unemployment and insecurity, were more decisive than digital displays of affluence. This suggests social media mainly aids navigation rather than fuelling aspirations,

reinforcing the importance of both digital and traditional social ties.

Psychological responses to social media also influence behaviour. Yoo et al. (2018) observed that such exposure can shift risk perceptions, indirectly affecting decisions like migration. Lin and Zheng (2023) further noted that dissatisfaction linked to social media use may heighten migration intentions, illustrating a link between digital experiences and aspirations. For youths, social media offers a lens to assess migration's potential risks and rewards. However, the impact is not uniform; misinformation and contradictory narratives can create confusion (Abu et al., 2022). Nevertheless, when properly leveraged, social media remains a valuable tool in shaping informed migration choices.

### **Theoretical Framework: Social Cognitive Theory**

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), developed by Albert Bandura, views learning as a social process shaped by observation, imitation, and modelling. Widely used in media studies, SCT explains how media exposure influences cognition and behaviour. A key concept is self-efficacy, one's belief in their ability to act and succeed (Adhikari et al., 2019; Li & Sun, 2019). Research shows media can enhance self-efficacy, prompting behavioural changes in contexts such as health and environmental decision-making.

In social media contexts, SCT has been applied to explore how digital content affects decision-making. Riaz *et al.* (2023) and Malik *et al.* (2022) observed that social media significantly shapes users' cognitive engagement, influencing perceptions and actions. Similarly, Bilderback (2024) linked cognitive overload from social media to decision-making

impacts, while Khalid *et al.* (2020) found it plays a role in adolescents' social and moral development.

Hence, this study adopts SCT to understand how Instagram's Japa narratives influence migration intentions among Northern Nigerian youths. Repeated exposure to such content may boost perceived self-efficacy regarding migration, while peer and influencer modelling could reinforce migration as a desirable path, aligning with SCT's emphasis on observational learning and social reinforcement. Based on the foregoing discourse, this study inferred these hypotheses:

H1: Perceived influence of Instagram JAPA-related content on migration intention and decision differs significantly based on the frequency of exposure to JAPA-related content on Instagram

H2: Exposure to Instagram JAPA-related content and perception of the content significantly predict the perceived influence of Instagram JAPA-related content on migration intention and decision

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a survey research design to examine the influence of the JAPA echo on Instagram on migration intentions among Northern Nigerian youths. A structured online questionnaire was distributed, and 400 valid responses were selected for analysis. The sample size of 400 was determined using the infinite population formula, which is appropriate when the total population size is unknown or very large (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The questionnaire included items measuring exposure to migration-related content on Instagram, perceived self-efficacy in migration decision-making, and migration intentions. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics to

determine relationships between media exposure and migration aspirations.

## **Results**

### **Demographic Profile of Respondents**

This study surveyed 400 respondents aged 18 to 35, reflecting a youthful population. Age distribution was relatively balanced: 34% (136) were aged 18–24, 33.5% (134) were 25–30, and 32.5% (130) were 31–35. The sample was predominantly female (56.5%, 226), while 43.3% (173) were male, and one respondent (0.3%) preferred not to disclose. Regarding employment status, 38% (152) were employed, 26.3% (105) self-employed, 19.8% (79) students, and 15.5% (62) unemployed. Two respondents (0.5%) were undergoing National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). Educational attainment was notably high: 61.3% (245) held a Bachelor's degree, 28.7% (115) had a Postgraduate qualification, 4% (16) held Diploma/NCE, 2.8% (11) HND, and 1.1% (4) completed only secondary school. Additionally, 2.3% (9) were undergraduates. Respondents were drawn from various Northern Nigerian states, ensuring geographic diversity. Kaduna had the highest representation (31%, 124), followed by Kano (17.3%, 69), Kwara (12.5%, 50), and Katsina (12.3%, 49). Others included Niger (7.2%, 29), Gombe (5%, 20), Borno (3.8%, 15), and Kebbi (3.5%, 14). Smaller proportions were from Nasarawa (2%, 8), Taraba (1.5%, 6), Yobe and Bauchi (1% , 4), Jigawa, Plateau, and Kogi (0.5% , 2), and Benue and Sokoto (0.3% , 1)

### **Frequency of Exposure to JAPA-related Content on Instagram**

The study examined how often respondents encountered JAPA-related content on Instagram (see Table 1). A significant

portion, 43.3% (173), reported frequent exposure, highlighting the platform’s role in migration discourse. Additionally, 39.5% (158) encountered such content occasionally, while 17.3% (69) rarely did.

Table 1: Frequency of Exposure to JAPA-related Content on Instagram

| Extent of Exposure | Frequency  | Percentage   |
|--------------------|------------|--------------|
| Rarely             | 69         | 17.3         |
| Occasionally       | 158        | 39.5         |
| Frequently         | 173        | 43.3         |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>400</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

**Categories of JAPA-related content Respondents’ engage with on Instagram**

Analysis of content types shows that humorous and light-hearted material dominates migration discussions. Memes and jokes were the most engaged category, with 32.3% (129) interacting with them exclusively. Another 10.8% (43) engaged solely with discussions on migration opportunities, while 6.3% (25) focused on migration stories and testimonies. Many respondents consumed a mix of content types. About 10.3% (41) engaged with memes and migration stories, and 10% (40) interacted with a combination of memes, stories, and opportunity discussions. News reports had relatively low exclusive engagement, only 5% (20) engaged with them alone, though some combined them with other formats.

**Perceived Influence of JAPA-related Content on Instagram on Migration Intention and Decision**

Table 3 shows that respondents generally perceive Instagram content as influential in shaping migration intentions. The overall mean score (M = 3.42, SD = 1.35) reflects 68.4% agreement that JAPA-related content affects migration considerations. Specifically, 66.2% believe such content encourages migration intentions (M = 3.31, SD = 1.47), while 71.6% think it motivates people to seek better opportunities abroad in education, work, or security (M = 3.58, SD = 1.40). Additionally, 67.4% agree that users often take tangible steps—such as researching visas or contacting agents, after engaging with this content (M = 3.37, SD = 1.19).

Table 2: Perceived Influence of JAPA-related Content on Instagram on Migration Intention and Decision

| Items                                                                                                    | Level of Agreement*(%) |      |      |      |      | M    | S<br>D | Overall % |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|--------|-----------|
|                                                                                                          | 1                      | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    |      |        |           |
| JAPA content on Instagram encourage peoples migration intention                                          | 17.5                   | 13.0 | 24.8 | 10.8 | 34.0 | 3.31 | 1.47   | 66.2      |
| JAPA content on Instagram make people consider migrating abroad for better opportunities like education, | 15.3                   | 5.8  | 19.0 | 26.0 | 34.0 | 3.58 | 1.40   | 71.6      |

employments,  
security concerns  
and lot more

People take steps 9.3 15 22 36. 16 3. 1. 67.4  
toward migration .0 .3 8 .8 37 19  
(e.g. researching  
visa processes,  
applying for jobs  
abroad, and  
contacting  
agents) after  
seeing  
JAPA-related  
content.

**Total** 3. 1. 68.4  
42 35

\*Scale:1 = Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

**Perception of JAPA-related Content on Instagram**

Respondents largely perceive JAPA-related content as glamorising migration. The mean score (M = 3.01, SD = 1.15) and agreement level of 60.2% suggest a leaning toward the view that Instagram portrays migration too positively. Notably, 68.6% agree that such content downplays the hardships involved (M = 3.43, SD = 1.28). Conversely, only 51.8% believe the platform offers a balanced view that includes both benefits and risks (M = 2.59, SD = 1.02), highlighting concerns about selective representation.

Table 3: Perception of JAPA-related Content on Instagram

\*Scale:1 = Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4=

| Items                                                                        | Level of Agreement*(%) |      |      |      |      | M    | S<br>D | Over<br>all<br>% |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|--------|------------------|
|                                                                              | 1                      | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    |      |        |                  |
| JAPA content on Instagram glamorise migration without showing the challenges | 13.0                   | 8.8  | 21.8 | 35.3 | 21.3 | 3.43 | 1.28   | 68.6             |
| Instagram provide balanced content about migration, including its risks      | 14.0                   | 34.5 | 34.5 | 12.5 | 4.5  | 2.59 | 1.02   | 51.8             |
| Total                                                                        |                        |      |      |      |      | 3.01 | 1.15   | 60.2             |

Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

**H1: Perceived influence of Instagram JAPA-related content on migration intention and decision differs significantly based on the frequency of exposure to JAPA-related content on Instagram**

A one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in migration intention based on exposure to JAPA-related content on Instagram ( $p = .001$ ). Those with occasional exposure reported the highest migration intention ( $M = 8.56$ ,  $SD = 2.19$ ), followed by frequent ( $M = 7.70$ ,  $SD = 2.94$ ), and rare exposure groups ( $M = 7.52$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ).

Table 5: One-Way ANOVA for Perceived Influence of Instagram JAPA-related Content on Migration Intention and Decision by Frequency of Exposure to Instagram JAPA-related Content

|                | Sum of Squares  | df         | Mean Square | F     | P-value |
|----------------|-----------------|------------|-------------|-------|---------|
| Between Groups | 80.524          | 2          | 40.262      | 6.784 | .001*   |
| Within Groups  | 2356.010        | 397        | 5.935       |       |         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>2436.533</b> | <b>399</b> |             |       |         |

Note: \* $p < .05$  indicates statistical significance.

Post hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD and Bonferroni tests showed significant differences between the occasional and rare ( $p = .009$ ), and occasional and frequent ( $p = .004$ ) exposure groups. However, the difference between rare and frequent exposure was not significant ( $p = .856$ ). Effect size calculations indicated a modest association: Eta-squared ( $\eta^2 = .033$ ) and omega-squared ( $\omega^2 = .028$ ) suggest that approximately 3% of the variance in migration intention is explained by exposure to JAPA-related content on Instagram.

**H2: Exposure to Instagram JAPA-related content and perception of the content significantly predict the perceived influence of Instagram JAPA-related content on migration intention and decision**

Multiple linear regression (Table 6) showed that 42% of the variance in perceived influence of Instagram JAPA-related content on migration intention is explained by exposure and perception variables ( $R^2 = .420$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Exposure to JAPA content (EIC) was a weak but significant predictor ( $\beta = .103$ ,  $p = .007$ ), while perception of the content (PJRI) had a stronger, highly significant effect ( $\beta = .650$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

Table 6: Association of Exposure to JAPA-related Content on Instagram and its Perception with Perceived Influence of Instagram JAPA-related Content on Migration Intention and Decision

| Model | $\beta$ | SE  | t     | p     |
|-------|---------|-----|-------|-------|
| EIC   | .103    | .06 | 2.69  | .007* |
| PJRI  | .650    | .06 | 16.91 | .001* |

F (397, 2) = 143.53      p = .001      R<sup>2</sup> = .420

Note: EIC = Exposure to JAPA-related Content on Instagram;  
PJRI = Perception of JAPA-related Content on Instagram

**Discussion of findings**

This study reveals that JAPA-related content on Instagram significantly shapes migration intentions among Northern Nigerian youths. A large proportion reported at least occasional exposure, with memes and jokes being the most engaged content type, followed by migration stories, opportunity discussions, and news reports. This suggests that migration discourse is framed more informally and emotionally than informatively. Findings support Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), particularly Bandura’s ideas of observational learning and self-efficacy (Adhikari et al., 2019; Li & Sun, 2019). Engagement with JAPA content was linked to stronger migration intentions, with perception of the content proving a stronger predictor than exposure. This aligns with Riaz et al. (2023) and Malik et al. (2022), who emphasise cognitive engagement over mere media contact. Respondents widely perceive JAPA content as glamorising migration, echoing Ikharo *et al.* (2024), who argue that social media idealises migration while neglecting its challenges. Similarly, the study aligns with Lin and Zheng’s (2023) view that

dissatisfaction, amplified by social media, drives migration aspirations. The findings affirm social media's role as a key force in shaping migration narratives, consistent with Obi *et al.* (2020) and Dekker *et al.* (2015). However, concerns remain about misinformation and lack of balanced representation (Abu et al., 2022).

Thus, the study reinforces the need for policies addressing migration-related misinformation and promoting media literacy. Nevertheless, while this study has revealed insights on migration intention and digital media, it is limited by its focus on Instagram and Northern Nigeria, reducing generalisability to other contexts. Self-reported data and the cross-sectional design also limit causal conclusions.

## **Conclusion**

This study establishes the critical role that Instagram plays in shaping migration intentions and decisions among Northern Nigerian youths, particularly through emotionally charged and aspirational content under the JAPA narrative. While exposure to such content is influential, the perception of its glamorised portrayal of migration has an even stronger effect on decision-making. This reinforces the insights of Social Cognitive Theory that media influence is shaped by cognitive engagement. From a development communication standpoint, this phenomenon reflects the need to interrogate and reshape digital narratives that influence public opinion and social behaviour.

## **Recommendations**

Hence, this study proposed the following recommendations:

1. A partnership between the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and social media platforms, particularly Instagram to develop real-time monitoring tools to flag and track trends in JAPA-related contents.

2. In addition, the NOA needs to collaborate with influencers to design counter-narrative content (e.g., short videos, infographics) that mimics the engaging style of memes/jokes but provides factual, balanced information about migration challenges.
3. Furthermore, the NOA should implement media literacy programmes in schools and communities to teach critical evaluation of social media content with a focus on distinguishing between misleading, entertainment, and factual information, particularly on migration issues.
4. Lastly, the agency should establish counseling and support systems for youths considering migration.

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