AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF ONITSHA RESIDENTS ON 'JAPA' SYNDROME AMONG NIGERIANS

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ABSTRACT
This study examined the awareness and perception of Onitsha residents on 'japa' syndrome in Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design. A questionnaire was used to generate data from the respondents. Findings showed that 40% ofOnitsha residents are aware of Japa syndrome to a great extent. Further findings showed that most (39%) of the respondents obtained information about 'Japa' issues through the Internet medium, followed by friends and television medium. They also perceived the 'Japa' issues as a positive development. The researchers affirmed that Onitsha residents are aware of japa syndrome. The researchers recommended that Nigerian media should keep informing its citizens of the latest trends or developments in the country and beyond.

Introduction

Nigerians are known for inventing uniquewords or slangto catch 'cruise' and make themselves self-happy. One such word that has become popular recently is "Japa". The word 'japa' has become a household name, especially among young Nigerians at home and abroad. Japa is slang derived from the Yoruba language (spoken in South-West Nigeria), which means to run swiftly out of a difficult situation. Interestingly, this word is now popularly used when referring to one migrating from Nigeria to another part of the world. According to the International Organisation for Migration (UN Migration Report, 2020), international migration is shaped by economic, geographic, demographic, and other factors.

Nigeria is an oil-rich country with a thriving technology scene and entertainment industry that continues to contribute to the nation's

Gross Domestic Product. However, many Nigerians, especially the middle class, are heading abroad in the hope and pursuit of a brighter future due to various significant reasons.*The Guardian* of September 10, 2022, reported that 'the mass exit from Nigeria, tagged 'japa', caused by a high level of insecurity, unemployment, infrastructure deficit, hunger and failure of the various levels of government to provide opportunities for the youths to live their desired life and achieve their dreams, is becoming a social epidemic.

A statistic in May 2022 showed that the number of Nigerians granted study visas to the United Kingdom increased by over 500 percent in two years. The UK government said as of March 2020, a total of 9,355 sponsored study visas were granted, but by March 2022, the figure had increased to 58,887 as of September, about 70,000 Nigerians were granted study visas to the United Kingdom alone. Furthermore, out of 722,962 non-immigrant visas issued by the United States as of June 2022, Nigerians got 6,915 with the B1/B2 category recording the highest at 5,061. Other categories of visas issued include G2, J1, C1,/D, A1, K2, H3, and P4 (Ojoko, 2022).

The first wave of 'Japa' (Nigerian slang for emigration) in Nigeria was in the '70/80s. Confronted with an uncertain future owing to military interregnums and a volatile economy, the Nigerian young journeyed to the West; the US, and the UK. Over the years more Nigerians have departed the country in pursuit of their dreams abroad. Some of these Diaspora Nigerians have shown themselves in different human enterprises. And they constitute a financial bulwark for the country, reportedly remitting about $25 billion annually (Nwabufo, 2021).

The Japa syndrome among the Nigerian populace especially the youths, represents the mass exodus of Nigerians abroad. The trend has evolved to represent a way of escape for Nigerians to secure a better life for themselves and their families. The skilled workers most involved in the mass emigration are doctors/nurses, tech workers, and most recently teachers. The *Punch* reported on November 29, 2022, that the Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors revealed that only about 10,000 resident doctors were left in the country, adding that about 100 resident doctors leave the country monthly to seek greener pastures.Moreso, the Registrar and Chief Executive Officer of the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria, Prof. Josiah Ajiboye, said over 260 Nigerian teachers have migrated to Canada alone within the year 2022. He also said the United Nations had hintedat its intention to embark on mass recruitment of teachers from Nigeria (Osaji, 2022).

Meanwhile, several studies have been carried out in the area of media, communication, and migration, for instance, Aniyi (2019) investigated media portrayal and perception of Nigerian migrants as threats to Ghana's National interest. The researcher adopted mixed research methods (survey and content analysis). Their study focused on media portrayal and perception. The researchers did not look at the issue of japa which is the major literature gap the present study aims to fill. Oyokunyi&Adomi (2019) examined coverage of migration stories by selectNigerian National Dailies. The researchers were interested on media coverage of migration stories, not inawareness and perception of Onitsha residents on 'Japa' syndrome among Nigerians.Ezegwu&Onuama (2018) investigated audience reaction to media campaigns on illegal immigration in south-south Nigeria. The researchers adopted a survey design. Although, not much has been done especially in the area of japa. It is against this backdrop that this study was carried out to find outthe awareness and perception of Onitsha residents on 'Japa' syndrome among Nigerians.

Statement of the Problem

Since finding its way into the Nigerian lexicon and being perceived as the latest biggest movement after Afrobeats, Nigerians are emigrating from Africa's biggest economyin droves. Japa, a Yoruba slang which means 'to run, flee or escape', has taken root in the minds of young Nigerians and become something they aspire to, in hopes of a better future in a more structured system. Illegal immigration of Nigerians to foreign countries is a social phenomenon that has affected the reputation of Nigeria amongst the comity of nations. The Sahara Desertthe and Mediterranean Sea have become cemeteries for Nigerian immigrants who are risking their lives in the deadliest voyage to cross into Europe in search of greener pastures. Many Nigerians are helplessly trapped in the desert where they can neither continue with the journey nor return to the country. Many equally die in the desert as a result of exhaustion due to harsh weather or due to the activities of armed

bandits along the desert routes (Ezegwu&Onuama, 2018).

However, although many researchers such as Chukwu, Uduma, Nwoga, & Aja, (2020), Ezegwu&Onuama, 2018, Aniyi (2019),and Adeniyi (2016) have worked on migration and mediareportage, and communication among other things. There is a dearth of literature, especially in the area of 'japa', thetrendingissue in Nigeria in recent times. This study is, therefore, an attempt to cover the gaps in the literature byexaminingthe awareness and perception of Onitsha residents on 'japa' syndrome in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are Onitsha residents aware of the 'japa' syndrome in Nigerians?
2. What is the mass media channel through which Onitsha residents obtain information about 'japa' issues in Nigeria?
3. What is the Onitsha residents' perception of 'japa' syndrome among Nigerians?

Reasons for the Japa Syndrome in Nigeria

Japa is a Yoruba word that means to leave a place quickly. In recent times, young, middle-aged, and old Nigerians have Japa in their numbers. The following may have contributed to the high rate of Japa in Nigeria:

i. Nigeria is becoming more dangerous for the youths

The EndSars saga reflects the extent to which Nigeria is no longer a haven for the youths. This is coupled with police brutality towards youths who are seen possessing electrical gadgets such as laptops. In turn, the lack of security for personal property and life increased the number of youths applying to travel out of the country.This is also compounded by the constant activities of kidnappers, bandits, terrorists, and other forms of criminality. According to data sourced from the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and National Security Tracker (NST), 4,545 people were killed by non-state actors, while 4,611 others were kidnapped in 2022 (Uthman & Oluwafemi, 2023).

ii. Poor human capital development

Despite being one of the developing countries with prospects in Africa, Nigeria has a very poor structure for human development. This has seen the death of many talents and the migration of many talented people out of the country. People employed are either underpaid or managing their jobs by planning to leave the country. With no necessary institutions to provide jobs, the unemployment rate in the country continues to increase. The rise in inflation further makes it unbearable for many people.According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), poor human development has also affected the educational system. In the ranking, Nigeria was ranked 169 in 2019 for human development. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also reported that the country had the world's highest number of out-of-school children (Olabisi, 2022).

iii. Frustration, ASUU strike, and hardship associated with the Nigerian education system:

The Nigerian education system keeps frustrating the ambitions and aspirations of students with the frequent culture of disruptions to the process of acquiring knowledge. Like almost every other thing in the country, Nigerian education comes with persistent hardship and frustration ranging from the purchase of forms to taking courses, paying tuition fees, and others. The learning process could be difficult if facilities are not available, and this has driven millions to pursue education abroad.

Also, the frequent strike embarkedon by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has affected many students in Nigeria's public schools. The youth have to bear the brunt and are at the receiving end. Being unable to go to school to learn and make a meaningful life is frustrating. This action of the government and academic staff union has addedto the pains of the young people and encouraged people with the guts to seek alternative routes for a better tomorrow; hence the Japa mindset takes control. In every part of the world you visit, you

see Nigerians "Japa"to continue their education. Nigerians are hardworking and intelligent people who need a conducive environment to strife.

In July 2022, the Association of Nigerian Students in Europe revealed that Europe alone has more than three million Nigerians enrolled in different higher institutions of learning. A survey also indicates that 89.87 percent of Nigerian youths prefer to study in a university outside the country. Seventy-three percent of Nigerians, 60 percent of doctors, and 89.87 percent of students want to leave the country. They want to flee the country (Oludotun, 2023).

iv. Unemployment:

First, Nigerian youths are frustrated with socio-economic challenges fueled by unfulfilled government promises and bad leadership marked by the absence of transparency and accountability. The situation brought about cold development, siphoning scarce resources that could improve infrastructure and hinder education growth, and public health and stacking the deck against the poor masses. Nigeria's unemployment rate stood at 5.3 percent in the fourth quarter of 2022 and 4.1 percent in the first quarter of 2023, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Chronological data show that the unemployment rate in Nigeria has risen constantly in the past years. Nigeria's youth population eligible to work is about 40 million out of which only 14.7 million are fully employed and another 11.2 million are unemployed (NBS, 2023).

The Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) projected the unemployment rate in Nigeria to rise to 37 percent by the end of 2023 while in the same positive vein, the United Kingdom is offering to pay an annual salary of over N15 million to Nigerians who are willing to migrate there and work as teachers.Also, it would be recalled that sometimein 2022, the Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors revealed that about 50 percent of Nigerian doctors had already found their way out of the country. The University College Hospital (UCH), Ibadan, also corroborated the fact that more than 600 of its clinical workers have resigned their appointments. At the same time, in early February 2022, the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH) also revealed that more than 150 nurses resigned from their appointments with the tertiary hospital (Ibeh, 2023).

v. Better career opportunities

The propelling factor motivating people to travel out of the country is the need for a better standard of living. The flexibility of work, pay, and immense opportunities have seen people with skills such as IT, Engineering, and Medicine migrate out of the country. This is the most significant movement of young talented people out of the country. This includes talents such as doctors, nurses, IT engineers, University lecturers, and technicians. It also covers individuals who have completed their studies with no intentions of returning to the country.

vi. As a means to escape from poverty

With the depreciation of the Naira, everyone is looking for how to earn in dollars. This is with the hope of improving the standard of living.According to the World Bank, in 2018, about 82.9 million Nigerians were impoverished. Data obtained from World Bank in its December 2022 Nigeria Development Update, the World Bank said inflation pushed five million Nigerians into poverty between January and October 2022. In June 2023, Nigeria Development Update, the World Bank said that the accelerating inflation pushed an additional four million Nigerians into poverty in the first five months of 2023 (Jaiyeola, Olatunji, &Ikpoto, 2023) This showed that between 2022 and 2023, not less than nine million Nigerians have been pushed into poverty as a result of inflation. Thus, most Nigerians see traveling abroad (japa) as a means to escape from poverty and earn good wages. Most advanced countries pay their workers in foreign currency and when such money is sent home and exchangedfor Naira. It will be huge, which can be used to improve one's living standard.

Review of Empirical Studies

Ezegwu&Onuama (2018) investigated audience reaction to media campaigns on illegalimmigration in south-south Nigeria. The researchers adopted a survey design. The researchers found theaudience in South-south Nigeria is fully aware of illegal migration campaigning. It was also discovered that respondents perceived the campaign to be beneficial to society. The respondents' sources of exposure to information on illegal immigration campaign messages were through the television medium. The researchers recommended that since the awareness level of the camp, the sign is low, the government should

work with private media organizations to facilitate the spread of the campaign. Television stations should also pass the campaign messages through their news bars. Drama, talk shows,and phone-inprogrammes should be used to educate Nigerians on the dangers of illegal migration.

Ezegwu&Onuama (2018) study is different from the present study in terms of the place of study and the subject matter. They studied south-south Nigeria, which comprised six states, while the present study examined Onitsha residents in Anambra State, Nigeria. Also, Ezegwu&Onuama (2018) were interested in audience reaction to media campaigns on illegal immigration in south-south Nigeria whereas the present study is on awarenessand perception of Onitsha residents on 'Japa' syndrome among Nigerians. Both studies are similar in terms of methodological approach, as both of them utilisedsurvey research design.

Chukwu, Uduma, Nwoga, & Aja, (2020), in a study, migration and media reportage in Nigerian 21stCentury: Issues and Challenges" The researchers relied on secondary data. The researchers argued that media reportage of migrationin Nigeria is still at its nascent stage and also fraught with challenges. The researchers argue that thereseems to be anunholy alliance between the media and politicians to slant the newsagainst migrants and incite the people against them for the benefit of securingvotes. Hate speechthatcontravenes international conventions is employed. Press coverage that promoted hate speech and hostility towards migrants and refugees was systematic and persistent in a proportion of the press.

The researchers recommended thataggressive enlightenment and education of the public on the need to acceptandintegrate migrants, especially refugees into our communities and there should be proper and adequate training and equipping of journalists on migrationreporting. Chukwu, Uduma, Nwoga, & Aja, (2020), used a qualitative research design in their study whereas the present study used a survey method. Chukwu, et al (2020),the study focused onmigration and media reportage in Nigerian 21st Century: Issues and Challenges whereas the current study is on awarenessand perception of Onitsha residents on 'Japa' syndrome among Nigerians. The present study used a theory to support the work whereas Chukwu et al (2020) did not use any theory in their work.

Adeniyi (2016) investigates the communication practices of Nigerian Diaspora members in Britain. The researcher used mixed methods (survey and in-depth interview). The researcher examined how they mitigate longing and negotiateto belong in the distance. It studies their choices of media in communicating and examines the factors that shape those choices over space and time. The paper notes that the decision on the media to use is shifty, as it is largely dependent on personal needs, ever-changing technologies of communication, and the disparity in development between homeland and hostland, amongst other factors. Emerging in the circumstance is the fact of mitigation of distance through the use of different media, both old and new, either in their indications or from their point. Adeniyi's (2016) study was carried out among Nigerian Diaspora members in Britain and the researcher used a mixed research method while the present study was carried out in Onitsha in Anambra State and the researchers used a survey research method.

Oyokunyi & Adomi (2019) examined the coverage of migration stories by select Nigerian national daily newspapers. The selected dailies were: *The Sun, Guardian,* and *Punch*. The content analysis method was adopted by the researchers to examine the major migration stories mostly reported in the media, as well asthe direction and prominence level accorded the stories. The study spanned 12 months (January-December 2017). The researchers discovered that the Nigerian newspapers did not give adequate or in-depth coverage of migration as only 21 stories were reported in this category. Further findings showed that migrants are also often depicted as victims in the framing analysis of mostmigration stories amongst other results. The researchers recommended that the Nigerian press must step up her reportage of migration stories by ensuring that such stories are given adequate attention and in-depth analysis through media genres like editorials, opinion articles, and even special pullouts with details.

Oyokunyi & Adomi (2019) study is different from the present study. The researchers carried out a content analysis research design and they studied: *The Sun, Guardian,* and *Punch* newspapers while the present study carried out a survey research method. Oyokunyi &Adomi's study was carried out in 2019, while their period of studywas between January and December 2017. The present study period is 2023.

Aniyi (2019) investigated media portrayal and perception of Nigerian migrants as threats to Ghana's National interest. The researcher adopted mixed research methods (survey and content analysis). The researcher discovered that media coverage of Nigerians and Nigeria in the Ghanaian media was generally negative. The researcher notes that like their Western counterparts, Ghanaian media focused on stories of chaos, crime, violence, or crisis, and the sentiment or tone of depiction was negative. The researcher recommended that African media educators should emphasize mutual understanding in their training while Nigerian embassies should engage with media firms in their area of jurisdiction to create a more positive outlook.

Aniyi (2019) investigated media portrayal and perception of Nigerian migrants as threats to Ghana's National interest and used mixed research methods whereas the present study is about awareness and perception of Onitsha residents on 'japa' syndrome among Nigerians and the researchers used survey research methods. The reviews showed that there is a dearth of literature in the area of 'japa' syndrome, even though there are studies in areas of immigration. This study will fill the literature gap.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on social responsibility theory. This theory is an extension of libertarian theory, in that the press recognizes that it has a responsibility to society to carry out itsessential functions (Hassan, 2014). The social responsibility theory posits that the power and near monopoly position of the mediaimposes on them an obligation to be socially responsible in discharging their duties. The theory explains that the media owe society a duty to be socially responsible in discharging their duties or obligations. McQuail (1987), citing Ezegwu, &Onuama (2018) while highlighting the main principles of the social responsibilities theory, asserts among others, that the media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to society. These obligations amongst others involve adequately informing, educating, and mobilizing the masses against the practice and promotion of 'japa'. By way of fulfilling the social responsibility function, the mass media owe the public a duty to provide adequate information that will ultimately dissuade people from embarking on 'Japa'.

Methodology

The survey research method was adopted for this study due to the nature of the study. A survey as a research instrument focuses on a representative sample derived from the entire population of a study. This method is appropriate and suitable because it involves awareness, attitude, and perception of Onitsha residents on 'japa' syndrome among Nigerians. The population of this study comprises Onitsha residents estimated at one million and four hundred and eighty-three thousand (1,483,000) people based on the National Population Census projected figure for 2021. Onitsha is the commercial nerve center of Anambra State. Residents of the city are made up of people from different ethnic groups and other countries, thus, it provided the researchers opportunity to elicit data from diverse audiences. The sample size was determined by using the Krejcie and Morgan online calculator method. The method says when the population of study falls between 1000000 and above. The sample size is therefore 384.

Sampling Technique

The multi-stage sampling procedure was used in this study. Multi-stage sampling is a sampling technique that involves two or more stages of selection. Inthe first stage, the population was categorized into 8 clusters comprising major streets and their surrounding feeder roads in Onitsha. The reason is that it ensured easy access and removed any cluster errors. In the second stage, forty-eight (48) respondents were purposively selected from each of the clusters to make a total of 384 respondents. The reason for using the purposive sampling technique at this stage is to ensure that the researchers focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, which generates answers to research questions. In the third stage, an available sampling technique was used to distribute copies of research questions to available adults (between 18 years and above). This is because of the mobile nature of the respondents. Therefore, those that were available and accessible during the time of the study were given copies of the questionnaire.

Table 1: Distribution of the sampling frame in Onitsha

Cluster	Sample Size
Awka Road	48
Nkisi Road	48
Ezeiweka Road	48
Venn Road	48
Upper Iweka Road Cluster	48
Oguta Road Cluster	48
Onitsha/Owerri Road Cluster	48
Limca Road	48
Total	**384**

Data Presentation and Analysis

The percentage method was used in data analysis and presentation. Out of 384 copies of the questionnaire administered to respondents in Onitsha, in Anambra State, only 361 (94%) were returned and found useable, thus giving the questionnaire a mortality rate of 23 (6%). Therefore, only 361 copies of the questionnaires were used for data analysis. The demographic data of the respondents indicate that 193 (53%) are females, while 168 (47%) are males. The age brackets of the respondents indicate that 18 and 27 (36%) accounted for most, while the age bracket of 48 and above (15%) was the smallest number of the respondents sampled. Further analysis revealed that unemployed respondents were 109 (31%). The analysis showed that 245 (68%) respondents were married while 116 (32%) were single.

Table 2: Extent of awareness of 'Japa' syndrome among respondents in Onitsha

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Very great extent	119	33
Great extent	143	40
Very low extent	45	12
Low extent	31	9
Can't say	23	6
Total	**361**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 reveals the extent of respondents' awareness of the 'Japa' syndrome among respondents in Onitsha. The majority (40%) of the respondents said they were aware. The implication is that many of the respondents are aware ofthe 'Japa' syndrome in Nigeria.

Table 3: Mass media channels through which Onitsha residents obtain information about 'Japa' issues in Nigeria

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	51	14
TV	62	10
Internet	142	39
Newspapers & Magazines	34	9
From a Friend	72	20
Total	**361**	**100**

Field Survey: 2023

The data above indicate the mass media channels through which the respondents obtain information about 'japa' issues in Nigeria. From the analysis above most (39%) of the respondents obtain information about 'japa' issues through the internet medium.

Table 4: Respondents'Perception of 'japa' syndrome among Nigerians

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	241	67
Negative	77	21
Can't say	43	12
Total	**361**	**100**

Field Survey: 2023

The significance of the data above indicates that the majority (67%) of respondents

perceived the 'japa' syndrome among Nigerians as a positive development.

Discussion of Findings

The aim of research question one was to find out the extent to which respondents are aware of the 'japa' syndrome among Nigerians. The findings showed that the respondents (40%) are aware of Japa syndrome to a great extent. The finding further points to the fact that many Nigerians are aware of the 'japa' syndrome. This showed that the media are updating Nigerians on the mass exodus of its citizens to other countries. The social responsibility functions of media to the society, according to McQuail (1987) as cited in Ezegwu, &Onuama (2018) while highlighting the main principles of the social responsibilities theory, asserts among others, that the media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to the society. These obligations amongst others involve adequately informing, educating, and mobilizing the masses, especially in this case against the practice and promotion of 'Japa'.

The aim of research question two was to identify the mass media channels through which Onitsha residents obtain information about 'japa' issues in Nigeria. The data obtained showed that the majority (39%) of the respondents obtained information about 'japa' issues through the Internet medium, followed by friends and television medium. As a communication medium, the utility of the Internet is multi-dimensional. The introduction of the internet has changed the way we communicate. With internet technology, a series of computers are linked and pass information from one server to another. Kayode-Adedeji & Agwu (2015) observe that the use of the internet has grown in Nigeria. Similarly, Aririguzoh, Sobowale, Usaini & Amoka (2020), state that the internet has made it possible for users to pass across different types of messages, text, voice, pictures, and videos; at the click of the mouse. People can send messages to others in diverse places, countries, and continents. Research question three showed that the majority (67%) of respondents perceived the 'japa' syndrome among Nigerians as a positive development.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In line with the findings, the study concludes that the majority of Onitsha residents are aware of Japasyndrome e to a great extent. The finding further points to the fact that the media are updating Nigerians on the mass exodus of its citizens to other countries. The researchers also concluded thatmost respondents obtained information about 'japa' issues through the internet, followed by friends and television. They also perceived the 'japa' issues as a positive development. Given this, the study made the following recommendations:

i. Nigerian media should keep informing its citizens of the latest trends or developments in the country and beyond.

ii. Nigerians should continue to utilize the benefit of the internet for numerous purposes and relyon authentic sources on the internet for news and other important things.

iii. Since most respondents perceive the 'japa' thing as a positive development, Nigerians moving abroad should do genuine things and be good ambassadors of the country abroad.

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