

Coverage of risk and “japa”(migration) syndrome in Nigeria

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Abstract: The study was carried out to determine the coverage of the risks associated with the migration of Nigerians to western countries in two Nigerian newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The Nation* newspapers. It content analyzed the two newspapers between the period of October 2023 to March 2024, when the news about the movement of many Nigerians, and labour migration to western countries were at its peak. The study anchored on Agenda Setting Theory. The findings revealed that the select newspapers reported the migration issues from October 2023 to March 2024. However, with regards to the frequency of the reports by the select newspapers, it was deduced that ‘Japa’ migration issues were under reported. Thus, it was discovered that both newspapers adapted similar pattern in the reportage of migration issues by reporting the issues in their respective papers. Based on the findings, it was recommended that issues related to ‘Japa’ migration represent a great challenge to Nigeria and the global community, as such, the print, broadcast, social media, opinion leaders, crisis and risk communication experts and those who have the capacity of shaping public debate, opinion and discourse among citizens should dedicate more space and time in reporting them.

Keywords — ‘Japa syndrome’, media coverage, migration, Newspapers, Risk communication

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INTRODUCTION

‘Japa’ is a yoruba word that has been variously translated as to ‘run, to flee, or to escape’. It is now a national slang for the drive of Nigerians to leave their national shores in search of greener pastures abroad/western world. It is the movement of Nigerians to the outside shores of the nation especially to western / developed world in search of greener pastures and better life for themselves, their families and loved ones. This ‘exodus’ mentality is perceived to be as a result of the current state of the economy of the nation which is seen as very harsh and frustrating, as the standard of living of an average Nigerian is low. Many could barely feed themselves; talk less of feeding their dependants. The root cause of the hardship were attributed to corruption and bad/poor governance which led to the national protest in all the states of the federation on the 1st August 2024 to 10th of August 2024. This national protest was tagged #Endbadgovernance protest. The protest took place in 36 states of the federation, including the Federal Capital Territory Abuja [1].

The massive movement/migration of Nigerians to Western world is usually characterized by socio-economic disparities, political instability and cultural influences. This massive movement has affected the

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workforce of the nation especially in the health industry and many are still warming up to move. Though, some move in search of higher and better standard in education and life, others move in search of better economic opportunities. Migration, which is defined as the movement of person or group of persons from one geographical unit to another across an administrative or political order, wishing to settle permanently or temporarily in a place other than the place of origin. Migration also involves an over-growing number of people moving internationally for a range of reasons, including work, protection, family reunion and so on [2]. The International Organization on Migration (IOM) World Migration Report [3] indicated that chronic lack of rural and urban employment opportunities, rapid increase in population pressure, poor economy and poor political will are the major forces behind the high migration among Nigerians. Though, some migrate legally, others migrate illegally, hence, the upsurge of this 'japa' (migration) syndrome has become a great concern to the citizens Nigeria especially with the case of those who migrate illegally as those illegal migrants travel through dangerous routes, Mediterranean sea, thick forest, Sahara desert etc to get out of their country at the expense of their lives, exposing their life's to danger, risk as well as death, as some die in the process, especially those who cannot contain themselves with and in the harsh reality of the danger that they have exposed or entangled themselves to and with.

This concern on the 'japa' of Nigerians to Western world is a topical issue in the nation and in most media organization (print, broadcast, social media). The coverage, creating awareness and implications of the 'japa' of Nigerians to western countries, is paramount as countries facing problems of migration especially illegal migrations believe the problem of terrorism and human trafficking heightened in their countries because of illegal migration [4]. This mass migration has sparked discussions on immigration policies and complexities of this phenomenon make it a topic of interest as well as a topical issue which calls for the attention of every stakeholder. There is therefore an immediate need to draw the attention of every stakeholder in order to look into this issue critically and come up with a solution to eradicate this menace, by averting the dangers/risks involved in migration, especially illegal migration and ultimately discourage the public from engaging in such illegal act. This struggle has attracted the attention of media outfits naturally and globally which have contributed to its publicity. It is therefore imperative for the Nigerian media to give it a fair coverage. This research seeks to examine such coverage by select Nigerian newspapers.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

The media, academic researchers, crisis/risk communication experts has a great role to play in enlightening the public on the implications of migration through their coverage of such reports. It is accepted that the mass media intervene in processes of individual and institutional communication to provide frameworks for the production and consumption of representation of such issues such as migration [5] Media agenda on migration 'japa' is believed to influence policy making in destination countries, particularly, due to a sense of crises linked to migration [6]. Media and academics have overtime set agenda for discussion and framing of stories regarding immigration. The flow has been about the government transmitting certain policies to media; which the media produce feedback into policy discourse. In addition to driving policy, 'media panics' also influences academic research on media coverage of migration. This in turn, gives rise to further policy changes, thus feeding a cycle. It is believed that the media reports, academic research, crisis and risk communication reports and the level of attention given to migration stories can help influence the potential migrants decision making process.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was based on Agenda Setting Theory and Risk Perception Model. The Agenda Setting Theory could be described as the agenda-setting function of the mass media. Coverage of 'japa' migration reports in the print media is also contingent upon the agenda-setting postulations. The mass media predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given time. The core idea of the theory is that the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceive as the main issues. The elements involved in agenda setting according to Folarin (2002) in Akpoghiran and Otite [7] are the quantity or frequency of reporting; the prominence given to the report and the degree of conflict generated in the reports. By frequency reporting of risks or crises in print media, and agenda 'fear' arises.

Risk Communication is a broad field of communication research – one that is connected to various fields like communication management, public relations and risk management Risk communication embraces four theoretical models that describes how risk communication is processed, how risk perception are formed and how risk decisions are made .They include risk perception model, mental noise model, negative dominance model and trust determination model. The risk perception model argues that various factors affect coverage of risks associated with migration especially with illegal migration and how these factors play an important role in determining levels of concern, worry, anger, anxiety, fear, hostility and outrage, which in turn can significantly change attitudes and behaviors. Concerns is perceived to be more intensified when the risk is perceived to be involuntary, inequitable, not beneficial and not under one's personal control, associated with untrustworthy individuals or organizations and associated with dreaded adverse and irreversible outcomes [8].

The two theories share a common denominator, while the Agenda setting highlights the domineering nature of media news in influencing thought patterns and processes in relation to news items, the Risk communication model heights the risk eminent on such 'japa' migration. These theories are important to ensure that the mass media play their societal roles, bearing in mind the ethics of the profession and adhering to ethics of journalism. The two theories capture clearly what the role of the

media should be in the society. The theories provide the benchmark or template for a dependable co-existence between the media and the society.

METHODS OR PROCEDURES

The study employed content analysis of the news stories of two select Nigerian newspaper –The Guardian and The Nation newspapers based on their readership, wider circulation, frequency of production, and accessibility to researchers. The study focuses on those stories about ‘japa’ migration on the newspapers, from October 2023 to March 2024. This period covered the time the issue of ‘japa’ of Nigerians to western countries was at its peak. It is perceived that the media will do a wider coverage of this migration revealing to the public, government and every stake holder the intensity of this movement as well as making known the inherent dangers and risks such movement could cause the nation and the inherent dangers accrued to such movement especially to those migrating illegally.

The unit of analysis was the news stories, editorials, cartoons, pictures and features posted by the two newspapers. The content categories of this study were frequency of coverage, direction of coverage. The population of the content was not many; hence, this study adopted a census study of the content population. There are 92 news stories on ‘japa’ migration covered by the select newspapers under the period under study and all were included in the study. The Guardian covered 66 stories, while The Nation covered 26 stories. The research instrument was coding sheet, which was used to extract the data from the manuscripts. The data were presented and analysed using descriptive method. To follow the rule of the mutual exclusivity of coding, where a unit of analysis contains two opposing descriptors, the researchers coded as present the descriptor with higher presence and coded as absent the descriptor with lesser presence. This approach aligns with existing literature in content study [9].

RESULTS

From the data, there are few stories on ‘japa’ migration coverage in the select Nigerian newspapers under study. It is obvious that *The Guardian* has more coverage (n = 66, 71.8%) than *The Nation* (n = 26, 28.2%). This indicates that *The Guardian* newspaper covered more compared to *The Nation* newspaper. The data shows that issues relating to ‘japa’ were reported more in news stories from the two newspapers and there was no much difference when it comes to coverage of the ‘japa’ migration in the select newspapers in their editorials and feature stories.

Findings reveals that the issues of job seeking, smuggling/trafficking, risk, deportation and crises were covered by the two select Nigerian newspapers during the period under study. The two newspapers paid attention to the above issues of migration.

It was also discovered that *The Guardian* and *The Nation* during the period under study allotted stories on migration more on full page space. Only 12 (13.1%) stories on migration covered by the two newspapers during the period under study were allotted on a three quarter page. This shows that both newspapers gave prominence in terms of space allotted to the stories of migration in their coverage even though there were few stories covered on the issue. Results shows that, *The Guardian* reported 15 (16.3%) stories on its front page, 51 (55.4%) stories on the inside page and no story was also published on the back page. *The Nation* reported a total of 6 (6.5%) stories on the front page, 20 (21.7%) on the inside page and no single story on the back page.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the two (*The Guardian* and *The Nation* newspapers) reported ‘Japa’ migration issues from October, 2023 to March, 2024. With reference to the frequency of the reports by the two newspapers, it was deduced that migration issues were under reported. Only 92 stories on migration were covered from the period under study (October 2023 – March 2024). This is not encouraging, considering how relevant the issue of migration is, especially with illegal migration, as this are issues of national and international concern and interests. Also, on the coverage of migration issues, most of the stories were placed on the inside page, rather than the front page or back page, making the newspaper not to have given adequate prominence on the issue. But against that, the study also found that the two newspapers tilted to a positive direction by way of condemning, educating and enlightening the audience/readers on the consequences of migration, especially on illegal migration. All the stories covered were positive – educating the masses on the dangers of illegal migration and concerns.

The findings were therefore, in line with Hericourt, and Spielvogel [10], who affirmed that the level and type of media exposure influence individual beliefs about the impact of migration which in turn, influences policy preferences. In this case, the newspapers giving coverage to the issue of migration and taking a further step towards bringing out the risks associated with it in their coverage shows that they believe in the fact that their coverage of the issue will have an impact on the audience and may in turn, influence policy on migration especially on illegal migration in the country.

The activities of the two newspapers towards the coverage could also be viewed from Branton and Dunaway [11] who found that media ownership and geographical proximity had a distinct bearing on how coverage of immigration policy was reported. Though, they contend that newspapers located close to the borders were more likely to print negative opinion pieces about immigration than newspapers further away from orders. In this case of the newspapers selected, it may be viewed from

the aspect of the newspapers' location and readership which may have given them more proximity to the victims or may be as Branton and Dunaway [11] reflected that economic concerns (the need to attract and retain audiences

to ensure profit, prompt media outlets, such as newspaper and television, to focus on sensational topics such as violence and crime or heightened concerns).

CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, it could be concluded that The Guardian and The Nation newspapers adapted similar pattern in the reportage of migration issues by reporting the issues in their respective pages. Based on the findings and conclusion, therefore, it is recommended that issues related to migration ('japa') represent a great challenge to the nation Nigeria, and the world at large. As such, the media – print, broadcast, social media, who have the capacity of shaping public debate and discourse among citizens should dedicate more spaces and time in reporting them. More so, the mass media as the watchdog in the society should prioritize issues related to illegal migration. This is fundamental because the mass media also have the responsibility to create awareness of issues of serious concern such as illegal migration.

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