

Nigerian Migrant Trust In Online Job Advertisements and Post Migration Lived Experience

Daniel Ofomegbe Ekharefo, Ph.D.

Department of Mass Communication, University of Benin, Benin City Nigeria

Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital communication has altered international labour migration by making online recruitment platforms a primary source of employment information for prospective migrants. While these platforms have widened access to overseas opportunities, they have also increased exposure to fraudulent recruitment practices, deceptive advertising, and exploitative labour arrangements. This study examines how trust in online job advertisements influences the migration decisions and post migration experiences of Nigerian migrants in the diaspora. Drawing on an interpretivist paradigm and a phenomenological qualitative design, data were generated through in depth interviews with Nigerian migrants who secured employment through online recruitment platforms before relocating abroad. The findings indicate that professional website design, social media endorsements, and perceived organisational legitimacy encouraged high levels of trust in digital advertisements. Economic hardship, unemployment, and aspirations for improved living conditions further reduced participants' willingness to question the authenticity of recruitment messages. Although several respondents reported improved access to public infrastructure and social services after migration, many experienced substantial differences between advertised employment conditions and workplace realities. Participants described contract substitution, poor remuneration, excessive working hours, restrictions on labour mobility, discrimination, and psychological distress. Despite these challenges, many developed adaptive strategies through informal migrant support networks and greater digital awareness. The study argues that digital trust represents a critical stage in contemporary migration processes because decisions made within online environments often determine migrants' subsequent exposure to labour exploitation. It recommends stronger regulation of international online recruitment, bilateral labour agreements between sending and receiving countries, and comprehensive digital literacy programmes designed to protect prospective migrants from deceptive online employment practices.

Keywords: online media advertisements; digital trust; Nigerian migrants; labour migration; recruitment fraud; diaspora; digital literacy

Introduction

Digital communication technologies have fundamentally reshaped international migration by changing how prospective migrants obtain information, evaluate employment opportunities, and interact with recruiters. Online job portals, social networking sites, recruitment agencies, and mobile messaging applications now provide immediate access to employment opportunities across national borders. For many Nigerians seeking improved economic prospects, these digital platforms represent the first point of contact with potential employers and migration intermediaries. They have reduced geographical barriers and expanded access to international labour markets, enabling employers and

recruiters to reach applicants who previously had limited opportunities for overseas employment. At the same time, these technological developments have created conditions that enable deceptive recruitment practices to flourish, exposing vulnerable job seekers to fraudulent advertisements and exploitative labour arrangements (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2019).

The growing dependence on digital media has altered the relationship between trust and migration decision making. Trust functions as a cognitive mechanism through which individuals evaluate the credibility of information when complete verification is impossible. Within online recruitment environments, prospective migrants frequently rely on website appearance, corporate branding, testimonials, verification symbols, and peer recommendations as indicators of authenticity. These cues often substitute for direct institutional verification, particularly where applicants possess limited access to official recruitment information or lack previous international migration experience. Such dependence becomes especially significant in developing economies characterised by unemployment, inflation, declining purchasing power, and limited professional opportunities, where migration is increasingly viewed as a pathway to economic security.

Nigeria has experienced a sustained increase in outward migration over the past decade. Rising unemployment, deteriorating economic conditions, political uncertainty, insecurity, and declining public confidence in domestic opportunities have encouraged many educated and skilled citizens to pursue employment abroad. Popular discourse surrounding the *Japa* phenomenon reflects this growing desire to relocate in search of better living standards and professional advancement. Digital media have become central to this migration culture by circulating employment advertisements, migration success stories, and testimonials that portray overseas employment as both attainable and financially rewarding. While many of these opportunities are genuine, others conceal exploitative labour practices, contract substitution, debt bondage, and fraudulent recruitment schemes that become apparent only after migrants arrive in destination countries.

Existing scholarship has extensively examined labour migration, digital communication, recruitment fraud, and migrant vulnerability. Studies within communication research have investigated online credibility, digital persuasion, and media trust, whereas migration research has concentrated largely on labour exploitation, discrimination, irregular migration, and integration in host societies. These two areas of scholarship have frequently developed independently, creating limited understanding of how digital trust constructed before migration influences migrants' subsequent lived experiences after relocation. This separation overlooks the continuity between the digital environment where migration decisions are made and the physical workplaces where migrants eventually experience either opportunity or exploitation.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between trust in online media advertisements and the lived experiences of Nigerian migrants in the diaspora. Rather than treating online recruitment simply as a technological process, the study considers digital trust as an important social mechanism through which economic

vulnerability, communication practices, and migration aspirations intersect. Understanding this relationship contributes to migration scholarship by demonstrating that labour precarity often originates before physical movement occurs, emerging during the digital interactions that shape migration decisions. Such an approach extends current discussions on digital migration by linking communication processes with labour outcomes and migrant wellbeing.

The study also contributes practical evidence for policymakers responsible for labour migration governance. As recruitment increasingly shifts to digital platforms operating across multiple jurisdictions, conventional regulatory approaches remain inadequate for protecting prospective migrants. Empirical evidence drawn from migrants' own experiences therefore provides valuable insights into the weaknesses of current recruitment systems and identifies policy interventions capable of reducing fraudulent practices while supporting safer labour mobility.

Research Problem

Digital recruitment has become an important component of international labour migration, yet regulatory systems have not evolved at the same pace as technological change. Thousands of prospective migrants now obtain employment information through websites, social media platforms, messaging applications, and online recruitment agencies that operate across national boundaries. Although these platforms have improved access to legitimate employment opportunities, they have also created favourable conditions for deception, identity manipulation, contract substitution, and fraudulent labour recruitment. Professional website designs, sophisticated branding, fabricated testimonials, and algorithmically amplified social proof frequently create impressions of legitimacy that prospective migrants interpret as evidence of institutional credibility.

For many Nigerians experiencing prolonged unemployment, economic instability, and limited domestic opportunities, online recruitment advertisements represent realistic pathways towards financial security. Economic pressure often reduces opportunities for careful verification, encouraging applicants to rely on digital indicators of trustworthiness rather than independent institutional confirmation. While many eventually migrate successfully, others encounter conditions that differ substantially from those originally advertised, including exploitative contracts, lower wages, excessive workloads, restricted mobility, discrimination, and poor living conditions.

Despite increasing scholarly interest in digital communication and migration, relatively few studies have examined how trust established within online recruitment environments directly influences migrants' experiences after relocation. Communication research has concentrated largely on misinformation, online credibility, and digital behaviour, whereas migration studies have focused primarily on labour market integration, exploitation, and discrimination in destination countries. The relationship between these two stages of migration remains insufficiently understood. Specifically, limited empirical evidence explains how digital trust generated before departure contributes to later experiences of vulnerability, resilience, or adaptation within host countries.

This gap limits theoretical understanding of digital migration and constrains policy responses aimed at protecting prospective migrants. Without examining the entire migration trajectory from online recruitment to post migration experiences, interventions remain fragmented and reactive rather than preventive. The present study addresses this deficiency by investigating how Nigerian migrants construct trust in online media advertisements and how this trust shapes their lived experiences following international migration.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine the relationship between trust in online media advertisements and the lived experiences of Nigerian migrants in the diaspora.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. examine the technological and social factors that generate trust in online job advertisements among prospective Nigerian migrants;
2. analyse the economic and cognitive factors influencing migrants' assessment of online recruitment credibility;
3. explore the extent to which advertised employment conditions correspond with migrants' actual workplace experiences after relocation; and
4. identify the coping strategies developed by Nigerian migrants in response to employment challenges, labour exploitation, and institutional constraints encountered in host countries.

Theoretical Foundation

This study is anchored in **Media Richness Theory (MRT)** and **Bounded Rationality Theory**, supported by insights from migration scholarship. Together, these perspectives explain how prospective migrants construct trust in online recruitment messages and how this trust influences migration decisions and post migration experiences.

Media Richness Theory, developed by Daft and Lengel (1986), argues that communication media differ in their capacity to transmit information and reduce uncertainty. Rich media provide multiple communication cues, immediate feedback, personalised interaction, and visual information that enable individuals to make informed judgements. Contemporary digital recruitment platforms increasingly exhibit these characteristics through professionally designed websites, corporate branding, verification symbols, interactive chat services, testimonial videos, and multimedia presentations. Such features often create strong perceptions of legitimacy, encouraging prospective migrants to interpret technical sophistication as evidence of organisational credibility.

Although MRT originally explained communication effectiveness within organisational settings, recent developments demonstrate that the same communication features may also be manipulated for deceptive purposes. Fraudulent recruiters increasingly employ

sophisticated digital designs that imitate reputable organisations, thereby reducing users' suspicion and encouraging compliance. Rather than reducing uncertainty through accurate information, rich digital environments may generate misplaced confidence by exploiting visual credibility. The present study therefore extends the application of MRT beyond organisational communication by demonstrating that media richness can also become an instrument for digital deception within transnational labour recruitment.

The second theoretical perspective is Herbert Simon's (1957) Bounded Rationality Theory. Contrary to classical economic assumptions that individuals make perfectly informed decisions, bounded rationality proposes that decision making occurs under conditions of incomplete information, limited cognitive capacity, and environmental constraints. Individuals therefore settle for decisions that appear satisfactory rather than objectively optimal.

This perspective provides a useful explanation for migration decisions within contemporary Nigeria. Persistent unemployment, inflation, declining purchasing power, insecurity, and limited professional opportunities create conditions in which migration is increasingly viewed as an urgent survival strategy rather than a carefully calculated investment. Under such circumstances, prospective migrants frequently prioritise opportunities promising immediate economic relief while paying less attention to potential risks. Professional website designs, attractive salary packages, rapid visa processing promises, and positive online testimonials become cognitively persuasive because they satisfy existing aspirations for economic mobility. Consequently, trust develops not solely because recruitment messages are credible but because they correspond with deeply held expectations of escape from difficult socioeconomic conditions.

Migration scholarship further strengthens this interpretation. Push and Pull Theory explains that migration results from conditions encouraging departure from the country of origin alongside attractions offered by destination countries. Economic hardship, unemployment, political uncertainty, and insecurity function as powerful push factors in Nigeria, whereas higher wages, improved infrastructure, career advancement, and social stability constitute important pull factors elsewhere. However, digital recruitment platforms increasingly mediate these traditional migration forces by shaping how destination opportunities are presented and interpreted. The digital environment therefore becomes an active participant in migration decision making rather than merely a channel through which information passes.

The integration of these theoretical perspectives provides an appropriate framework for understanding the findings of this study. Media Richness Theory explains how online advertisements generate perceptions of credibility, while Bounded Rationality clarifies why economically vulnerable individuals frequently accept such messages with limited verification. Migration theory then situates these individual decisions within broader structural conditions influencing international labour mobility. Collectively, these perspectives explain how trust established in digital environments subsequently influences migrants' experiences within physical workplaces.

Literature Review

Digital technologies have fundamentally altered contemporary migration by expanding access to employment opportunities while simultaneously increasing exposure to recruitment fraud and labour exploitation. Recent scholarship demonstrates that digital media no longer function merely as communication channels but increasingly shape migration aspirations, decision making, and mobility patterns. Despite substantial research on migration and digital communication, important conceptual divisions remain between studies examining online trust and those investigating migrants' post migration experiences.

Research on online trust consistently identifies credibility as a multidimensional construct influenced by technological, institutional, and social factors. Fogg (2003) argues that users frequently evaluate website credibility through visual presentation, perceived professionalism, organisational identity, and technical quality rather than through systematic verification of underlying information. Later studies similarly conclude that interface design strongly influences users' perceptions of authenticity, particularly where independent verification is difficult (Tsikerdekis & Zeadally, 2014). While these studies explain mechanisms underlying digital persuasion, they generally examine credibility within consumer behaviour or online communication rather than international labour migration.

Communication scholars have also demonstrated that social media increasingly influence credibility assessments through peer interaction and algorithmic visibility. Cialdini's concept of social proof suggests that individuals often interpret the behaviour of others as evidence of appropriate action under uncertain circumstances. Within digital environments, user comments, endorsements, sharing behaviour, and engagement metrics frequently substitute for formal institutional verification. Although such collective validation may increase confidence, research increasingly indicates that these signals are vulnerable to manipulation through fabricated testimonials, coordinated engagement, and automated accounts. Algorithm driven visibility may therefore amplify deceptive content rather than reliable information, particularly where audiences possess limited digital literacy.

Migration research presents a complementary but largely separate body of evidence. International migration has traditionally been explained through economic inequalities, labour demand, political instability, family reunification, and environmental change (Castles et al., 2014). Contemporary studies continue to identify unemployment, declining wages, insecurity, and limited career opportunities as important drivers of outward migration from many African countries, including Nigeria (Awumbila, 2017; Adepoju, 2018). These structural conditions encourage increasing dependence on digital recruitment platforms that promise rapid access to overseas employment.

Existing literature also documents persistent exploitation within international labour migration. Migrants frequently encounter misleading contracts, excessive working hours, passport confiscation, wage theft, occupational downgrading, discrimination, and

restricted labour mobility (ILO, 2019). Studies conducted across Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Europe, and North America demonstrate that many migrants occupy precarious employment despite possessing professional qualifications. Labour market segmentation, restrictive sponsorship systems, and limited recognition of foreign credentials frequently undermine migrants' economic expectations after relocation.

Although these findings provide valuable evidence regarding migrant vulnerability, relatively few studies explicitly connect exploitation within destination countries to trust established during digital recruitment. Most migration research examines employment conditions after arrival without considering how online communication shaped migrants' initial decisions. Conversely, digital communication studies often analyse credibility without tracing its long term consequences for migrants' lived experiences. This separation obscures important continuities between online persuasion and labour precarity.

Recent interdisciplinary scholarship has begun to recognise digital platforms as migration infrastructures rather than passive communication tools. Digital recruitment increasingly influences who migrates, where migrants travel, and the conditions under which they are employed. Nevertheless, empirical evidence explaining how digital trust translates into workplace realities remains limited, particularly within African migration contexts. Nigerian migration research has largely concentrated on remittances, irregular migration, human trafficking, or migration intentions, with comparatively little attention devoted to online recruitment mechanisms and their long term implications.

This study contributes to addressing this gap by integrating communication and migration perspectives. Rather than examining online trust or migrant exploitation independently, it analyses their relationship as components of a continuous migration process. In doing so, the study advances understanding of how digital communication influences labour migration beyond the point of departure and demonstrates that recruitment messages encountered online frequently shape migrants' subsequent experiences of opportunity, vulnerability, and adaptation.

Methodology

This study adopted an **interpretivist research philosophy** because it sought to understand how Nigerian migrants interpreted their experiences of online recruitment and international migration. An interpretivist perspective recognises that meanings are socially constructed and are best understood through participants' own accounts of lived experience.

A **qualitative phenomenological research design** was employed to capture participants' perceptions of digital trust, migration decision making, and workplace experiences after relocation. Phenomenology was appropriate because the study focused on understanding how migrants interpreted the transition from expectations created by online advertisements to the realities encountered within destination countries.

The study population comprised Nigerian migrants who secured employment through online recruitment platforms before relocating abroad. Participants were selected through **purposive sampling**, with **snowball sampling** subsequently used to identify additional respondents who satisfied the inclusion criteria. Selection focused on migrants who had personally experienced international recruitment through digital platforms and could provide detailed accounts of their migration trajectories.

Data were generated through **in depth semi structured interviews**, allowing participants to describe their recruitment experiences, migration decisions, employment conditions, and coping strategies in their own words. Interviews provided rich qualitative evidence concerning the relationship between digital trust and post migration realities.

The interview data were analysed using **thematic analysis**, enabling recurrent patterns and shared meanings to emerge across participants' narratives. Coding focused on identifying major themes associated with trust formation, recruitment practices, labour experiences, psychological consequences, and adaptive responses.

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, interview guides were reviewed for content validity before data collection commenced. Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. Participants gave informed consent, anonymity was protected through pseudonyms, participation remained voluntary, and all interview materials were treated confidentially. These procedures ensured that participants could discuss sensitive migration experiences without compromising their personal safety or legal status.

The qualitative methodology provided detailed insights into the relationship between online recruitment practices and migrants' lived experiences, allowing the study to move beyond descriptive accounts of migration and examine the social processes through which digital trust influences labour mobility and migrant wellbeing.

Findings

The findings demonstrate that trust established through online media advertisements significantly influenced participants' migration decisions and their subsequent experiences in destination countries. Although a few respondents achieved the opportunities they initially sought, most reported substantial discrepancies between advertised employment conditions and workplace realities. Analysis of the interview data generated five interconnected themes that explain how digital trust evolved into either opportunity or vulnerability after migration.

Digital Credibility and Trust Formation

Participants consistently described professional website design, corporate branding, official logos, interactive communication channels, and positive testimonials as the principal factors that convinced them that online recruitment advertisements were

authentic. Rather than conducting extensive independent verification, respondents frequently interpreted visual sophistication as evidence of institutional legitimacy.

Several participants explained that recruitment websites appeared comparable to those of established multinational organisations. Corporate email addresses, professionally produced videos, downloadable application forms, and responsive customer service reinforced perceptions that the recruiters were credible. These technological features reduced uncertainty and encouraged confidence in overseas employment opportunities.

Social media also strengthened trust through peer validation. Participants frequently encountered recruitment advertisements that had been shared repeatedly across Facebook groups, WhatsApp communities, Telegram channels, and LinkedIn networks. Positive comments from individuals claiming successful migration experiences reinforced confidence in the advertised opportunities. For many respondents, endorsements from fellow Nigerians carried greater weight than official institutional verification because they appeared to represent authentic lived experiences.

These findings suggest that digital trust was constructed through a combination of technological sophistication and social influence rather than through careful verification of organisational legitimacy. Participants rarely distinguished between professional digital presentation and genuine institutional credibility.

Economic Vulnerability and Migration Decisions

Economic conditions within Nigeria emerged as a major factor influencing participants' willingness to trust online recruitment advertisements. Most respondents described prolonged unemployment, underemployment, inflation, declining purchasing power, and increasing family responsibilities as circumstances that encouraged them to pursue overseas employment.

Participants acknowledged that financial pressure often reduced their willingness to question attractive employment offers. High salary packages, accommodation benefits, medical insurance, and rapid visa processing appeared particularly convincing because they aligned with existing aspirations for economic mobility. Several respondents admitted overlooking inconsistencies in recruitment procedures because they believed migration represented their only realistic opportunity for financial improvement.

One participant explained that repeated job rejections in Nigeria made overseas opportunities appear increasingly attractive regardless of potential risks. Another described how family expectations and financial obligations created psychological pressure to accept employment offers without demanding extensive verification. Others noted that worsening economic conditions had normalised migration as a survival strategy, making online recruitment advertisements particularly persuasive.

The findings indicate that economic vulnerability did not simply encourage migration; it also influenced how participants evaluated online information. Under conditions of financial hardship, optimism frequently outweighed scepticism, reducing critical assessment of recruitment messages.

Discrepancies Between Advertised Employment and Workplace Reality

The most consistent finding concerned the significant differences between advertised employment conditions and migrants' actual experiences after arrival. While respondents had accepted positions based on promises of professional employment, competitive salaries, regulated working hours, and supportive working environments, many encountered conditions that differed substantially from those originally presented.

Participants described several forms of contractual discrepancy. Some discovered that their occupational roles had been changed immediately after arrival. Professional positions advertised online were replaced with lower skilled employment involving substantially lower wages. Others reported reductions in agreed salaries, unpaid overtime, denial of leave, confiscation of passports, and restrictions on changing employers.

Respondents employed within domestic service, construction, hospitality, and manual labour sectors appeared particularly vulnerable to exploitative employment arrangements. Several participants indicated that new employment contracts were presented after arrival, often written in languages they could not understand. Refusal to sign these contracts was reportedly met with threats of dismissal, deportation, or financial penalties associated with visa sponsorship.

Although participants recognised these practices as exploitative, most felt unable to challenge employers because their legal status depended upon maintaining employment. This imbalance of power limited access to legal protection and reinforced dependence upon employers even when working conditions violated the original recruitment agreements.

Nevertheless, the findings also revealed variation in migrant experiences. A minority of respondents reported that their employers honoured contractual obligations and provided supportive working environments. These participants generally migrated through established recruitment agencies with stronger institutional oversight. Their experiences indicate that online recruitment itself does not inevitably produce exploitation; rather, vulnerability increases where regulatory safeguards are weak or absent.

Psychological and Social Consequences

The discrepancies between digital expectations and workplace realities produced important psychological consequences for many participants. Financial losses associated with recruitment fees, travel costs, loans, and family investments intensified feelings of disappointment when promised employment conditions failed to materialise.

Several respondents described experiencing anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and declining self esteem after discovering that their professional qualifications were not recognised or that they had been assigned work below their skill levels. Participants who had occupied respected professional positions in Nigeria reported particular difficulty adjusting to downward occupational mobility.

An additional finding concerned the tension between migrants' public and private identities. Many participants admitted presenting idealised images of life abroad through social media despite experiencing considerable hardship. They explained that acknowledging failure would disappoint relatives who had financed their migration or reinforce perceptions that their decision to migrate had been misguided. Consequently, digital platforms that initially encouraged migration also became spaces where migrants felt obliged to maintain narratives of success regardless of lived reality.

Financial pressure further intensified psychological distress. Respondents frequently remained responsible for supporting relatives in Nigeria while simultaneously repaying debts incurred during migration. Delayed salaries, unexpected living expenses, and reduced earnings limited their ability to meet these obligations, creating feelings of guilt, frustration, and social isolation.

These findings demonstrate that labour exploitation extends beyond economic deprivation to include significant emotional and psychological consequences that influence migrants' wellbeing long after relocation.

Resilience, Adaptation, and Informal Support Networks

Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated considerable resilience by developing strategies that enabled them to cope with adverse circumstances. Informal support networks emerged as one of the most important resources available to migrants experiencing workplace difficulties.

Many respondents joined WhatsApp groups, community associations, religious organisations, and informal Nigerian migrant networks through which information about employment opportunities, accommodation, immigration procedures, and legal assistance was exchanged. These networks compensated for the limited institutional support available in many destination countries.

Participants also described acquiring greater digital awareness following their experiences. Individuals who had previously trusted online recruitment advertisements without extensive verification became considerably more cautious when evaluating subsequent employment opportunities. Several respondents actively warned prospective migrants in Nigeria about fraudulent recruiters through social media, community meetings, and personal communication.

This transition from vulnerability to digital awareness represents an important finding of the study. Experience of deception encouraged participants to become informal educators within their own communities, promoting greater scrutiny of recruitment advertisements and emphasising the importance of verifying agencies before making migration decisions.

The findings therefore suggest that although exploitative recruitment practices create substantial hardship, migrants are not passive recipients of adversity. Through shared experience, collective support, and improved digital literacy, many gradually develop practical strategies that strengthen resilience and reduce future vulnerability.

Taken together, these findings indicate that trust constructed within digital environments extends well beyond communication processes and directly influences labour migration outcomes. Professional online presentation, peer endorsement, and economic necessity collectively shaped migration decisions, while inadequate regulatory oversight permitted substantial discrepancies between recruitment promises and workplace realities. The evidence also demonstrates that migrants' responses evolve over time, moving from initial trust and optimism towards critical digital awareness, collective resilience, and greater caution in evaluating online employment opportunities.

The next section critically discusses these findings in relation to contemporary scholarship on digital communication, migration, labour exploitation, and online trust.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that digital trust is not merely a communication outcome but a decisive factor influencing migration trajectories and labour experiences. By linking the digital recruitment environment with migrants' post migration realities, the study contributes to an emerging body of scholarship that examines migration as a continuous process extending from online interaction to workplace integration.

The first major finding concerns the influence of professional digital presentation on trust formation. Participants consistently interpreted sophisticated website design, corporate branding, official logos, and interactive communication features as indicators of organisational legitimacy. This finding supports Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986), which proposes that richer communication environments reduce uncertainty by providing multiple informational cues. However, the present study extends this theoretical perspective by demonstrating that these same features can be deliberately manipulated to manufacture credibility rather than communicate authenticity. Professional visual presentation therefore becomes a mechanism through which fraudulent recruiters reduce scepticism and encourage compliance.

These findings are consistent with Fogg's (2003) work on web credibility, which argues that users frequently evaluate online trustworthiness through visual appearance before considering substantive evidence. Similar observations have been reported by Tsikerdekis and Zeadally (2014), who found that cybercriminals increasingly imitate legitimate

institutional identities to exploit users' cognitive shortcuts during online decision making. The present study advances these arguments by showing that digital credibility possesses tangible labour market consequences, influencing migration decisions that ultimately affect employment outcomes and personal wellbeing.

A second contribution concerns the relationship between economic vulnerability and online trust. Participants repeatedly described unemployment, inflation, declining income, and family responsibilities as important reasons for accepting overseas employment opportunities with limited verification. These findings reinforce Bounded Rationality Theory (Simon, 1957), suggesting that decisions are frequently shaped by environmental constraints rather than complete information. Under severe economic pressure, respondents prioritised immediate opportunities over comprehensive risk assessment, increasing their susceptibility to deceptive recruitment.

This interpretation complements African migration scholarship emphasising the role of structural inequalities in shaping migration decisions (Adepoju, 2018; Awumbila, 2017). While previous studies have largely explained migration through economic push factors, the present findings demonstrate that these same structural conditions also influence how individuals interpret digital information. Economic hardship therefore functions both as a driver of migration and as a condition that reduces critical evaluation of recruitment messages.

The evidence relating to discrepancies between advertised employment conditions and workplace realities provides further insight into contemporary labour migration. Many participants experienced contract substitution, wage reductions, occupational downgrading, excessive working hours, restrictions on labour mobility, and exploitative employment practices after arrival. These experiences correspond with International Labour Organization (2019) reports documenting abusive recruitment systems within several destination countries. However, this study identifies an earlier stage in the process by demonstrating that labour precarity frequently originates within digital recruitment environments before physical migration occurs.

Existing migration research has generally concentrated on exploitation occurring after migrants reach destination countries (Castles et al., 2014). The present findings suggest that this perspective is incomplete because vulnerability begins during recruitment through the creation of misplaced digital trust. Recruitment advertisements therefore represent more than information sources; they constitute mechanisms through which unequal labour relationships are initiated.

Another significant finding concerns migrants' psychological experiences. Participants described anxiety, disappointment, reduced self esteem, and emotional distress arising from the gap between migration expectations and lived realities. These experiences support previous research demonstrating that migration related exploitation has important mental health consequences (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). The study extends this literature by highlighting the tension between migrants' offline experiences and their online identities.

Many respondents continued portraying successful lives through social media despite experiencing severe workplace difficulties. This behaviour reflects broader social pressures surrounding migration within Nigeria, where overseas relocation is frequently associated with economic success and upward social mobility. Maintaining positive digital identities therefore became a strategy for preserving personal dignity and protecting family expectations, even when those representations differed substantially from reality. Such findings illustrate how digital platforms continue influencing migrants' experiences long after recruitment has ended.

The findings also reveal important evidence of migrant agency. Although participants encountered considerable adversity, many developed practical coping strategies through informal support networks, religious organisations, and online communities. These networks enabled migrants to exchange information, identify trustworthy employers, obtain legal advice, and support one another during periods of hardship.

This evidence challenges portrayals of migrants solely as passive victims of exploitation. Consistent with contemporary migration scholarship, participants actively negotiated difficult circumstances by mobilising social capital and shared experience. Their increasing digital awareness also enabled many to educate prospective migrants in Nigeria about deceptive recruitment practices. Experience therefore became an important source of informal digital literacy capable of reducing future vulnerability within migrant communities.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that trust in online media advertisements has consequences extending far beyond communication processes. Digital trust influences migration decisions, employment outcomes, psychological wellbeing, and migrants' long term capacity for adaptation. Effective migration governance must therefore address both the digital recruitment environment and workplace regulation if exploitation is to be reduced.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between trust in online media advertisements and the lived experiences of Nigerian migrants in the diaspora. The findings demonstrate that trust established during online recruitment significantly shapes migration decisions and influences subsequent employment experiences within destination countries.

Professional digital presentation, peer endorsements, and persuasive online communication encouraged participants to perceive recruitment advertisements as credible. Economic hardship, unemployment, and aspirations for improved living conditions further strengthened this trust by reducing opportunities for careful verification. While some respondents secured legitimate employment, many experienced substantial differences between advertised conditions and workplace realities, including contract substitution, exploitative employment practices, discrimination, financial hardship, and psychological distress.

The study demonstrates that labour precarity should not be understood solely as a workplace phenomenon. Rather, vulnerability frequently originates during digital recruitment through communication practices that manufacture misplaced trust. This finding contributes to migration and communication scholarship by integrating digital trust with post migration experiences within a single analytical framework.

Despite considerable challenges, participants also demonstrated resilience through informal support networks, community organisations, and improved digital awareness. These adaptive responses illustrate migrants' capacity to negotiate difficult circumstances while contributing valuable knowledge that may protect future migrants from similar experiences.

Overall, the study establishes that digital communication has become an important determinant of contemporary labour migration. Improving the governance of online recruitment therefore represents an essential component of migrant protection and ethical international labour mobility.

Practical Implications

The findings have important implications for governments, labour regulators, recruitment agencies, digital platform providers, and migrant support organisations.

First, stronger regulation of international online recruitment is required. Recruitment agencies operating across national borders should undergo mandatory licensing, transparent monitoring, and periodic compliance assessments to reduce fraudulent practices.

Second, digital platforms hosting employment advertisements should strengthen identity verification procedures for international recruiters. Verification systems should extend beyond payment authentication to include evidence of legal registration, physical business presence, and recognised labour accreditation.

Third, comprehensive digital literacy programmes should be developed for prospective migrants. Such programmes should focus on recognising fraudulent recruitment indicators, verifying employment agencies, understanding contractual obligations, and reporting suspected scams before financial commitments are made.

Fourth, bilateral labour agreements between Nigeria and major destination countries should strengthen protection for migrant workers by ensuring transparency during recruitment, recognising digital employment contracts, and establishing effective complaint mechanisms for labour disputes.

Finally, migrant associations, civil society organisations, and diaspora groups should be integrated into awareness campaigns because they possess valuable experiential

knowledge capable of improving recruitment practices and reducing misinformation within migrant communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. The Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment should establish a comprehensive national registry of licensed international recruitment agencies that is publicly accessible through digital platforms.
2. Government agencies should collaborate with the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) to monitor cross border online recruitment activities and prosecute fraudulent recruiters.
3. Bilateral labour agreements should require verification of employment contracts before visas are issued, ensuring consistency between advertised positions and actual employment conditions.
4. Digital literacy education should become an integral component of migration advisory services provided by relevant government agencies, educational institutions, and civil society organisations.
5. Destination countries should strengthen labour inspection systems and provide accessible reporting mechanisms that enable migrant workers to report exploitative employment practices without fear of retaliation.
6. Future research should employ comparative and mixed methods approaches to examine digital recruitment practices across different migrant destinations and occupational sectors.

References

- Adepoju, A. (2018). *Migration dynamics, refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/africa>
- Awumbila, M. (2017). Drivers of migration and urbanisation in Africa: Key trends and issues. *United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Cities, Human Mobility and International Migration*.
<https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/27/papers/II/paper-Awumbila-final.pdf>
- Bhugra, D., & Becker, M. A. (2005). Migration, cultural bereavement and cultural identity. *World Psychiatry*, 4(1), 18–24.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1414713/>
- Castles, S., de Haas, H., & Miller, M. J. (2014). *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world* (5th ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

- Cialdini, R. B. (2009). *Influence: Science and practice* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1986). Organizational information requirements, media richness and structural design. *Management Science*, 32(5), 554–571. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.32.5.554>
- Fogg, B. J. (2003). *Persuasive technology: Using computers to change what we think and do*. Morgan Kaufmann.
- International Labour Organization. (2019). *General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment and definition of recruitment fees and related costs*. International Labour Office. <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/fair-recruitment>
- Simon, H. A. (1957). *Models of man: Social and rational*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Tsikerdekis, M., & Zeadally, S. (2014). Online deception in social media. *Communications of the ACM*, 57(9), 72–80. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2629612>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.
- International Organization for Migration. (2024). *World migration report 2024*. International Organization for Migration. <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/>
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2024). *International migration 2024: Highlights*. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2020). *Global report on trafficking in persons 2020*. United Nations. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/glotip.html>
- World Bank. (2024). *Migration and development brief 40: Remittances remain resilient*. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues>