REVIEW ARTICLE

The impact of social media on the wellbeing and social integration of migrants from Zimbabwe in South Africa: An introductory literature review

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ABSTRACT

Migration is the movement of people from their original habitat to a place outside the border of their country of origin with the main aim of settling in the other country. The motives for this relocation are usually not predetermined and could be voluntary or involuntary, and the wellbeing of migrants is affected during the migration period. Distortion in social cohesion led to struggles in communal integration, harmonious living, language barriers, and access to economic activities by migrants. This manuscript concerns a review of narrative literature on the role of social media in facilitating wellbeing and social integration of migrants. A desktop review methodology was used to review secondary data from databases such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect and EBSCOhost. Social media are mostly used for entertainment, news, and social interaction. Furthermore, it may assist migrants to connect with their loved ones in their countries of origin, thereby possibly enhancing their wellbeing. It is therefore important to understand the contribution of social media on the wellbeing and social integration of migrants. Findings from the review showed that social media help migrants to decide to make the move to another country and cushion the anxieties associated with the move. Migrants are often assisted through social media to make informed decisions about the host country. It was concluded that social media usage can contribute to social integration, building of a social identity and social networks, and social participation in the real world.

Keywords: Migrants; social integration; social media; South Africa; wellbeing; Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

The United Nations Department of Economics and Social affairs, Population Division [1] maintains that 281 million people (approximately 3.6 per cent of all the people in the world) are migrants. Migrants often embark on dangerous and sometimes fatal journeys to escape poverty and/or oppression or to move to greener pastures. An increase in the population and a lack of economic growth contribute to people being displaced in search for greener pastures.[2] The political and economic fiasco in Zimbabwe has led to a large-

scale influx of Zimbabwean citizens into neighbouring South Africa.[3, 4] Zimbabweans are currently exposed to political unrest during which many citizens have lost their lives and their infrastructures have been destroyed or damaged. Political humiliation forced many Zimbabweans to migrate to neighbouring countries, and specifically to South Africa, without considering how their wellbeing would be affected while living in a foreign country.[5, 6] Economically, Zimbabwe is experiencing high rates of inflation and unemployment. These lead to intense challenges to the wellbeing of Zimbabweans, even prior to their migration to another country. To make matters even worse, on arriving in the neighbouring country, they are often exposed to xenophobic attacks.

The majority of migrants are often faced with the challenges discussed so far and seldom have the ability to address these issues. Migrants often turn to social media to facilitate transnational urbanism, as continuity of interrelationships between the country of origin and the destination country is maintained.[2, 7, 8] This advancement has enabled the network of migrants and their families, relatives, and associates in their host countries and at their homes. Without sufficient and appropriate social and emotional support, migrants may end up with unpleasant experiences of migration, staying unhappy, resenting their lives in the new country, pining for their familiar homelands and cultures, and occasionally engaging in socially inappropriate and dysfunctional behaviours such as emotional and physical abuse, and conflicts with residents of the host country.[9-11]

Social media are an essential source of information for migrants. In their study, [12, 13] found that Zimbabwean migrants illustrated the importance of the social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter. These social media platforms enhance communication between these migrants and families, and being in contact with their loved ones contributes to their wellbeing. Refugees use social media to integrate into the host country and communicate with friends and family in their countries of origin in order to obtain emotional and social support.[14] Zimbabwean migrants operate in transnational spaces and engage in virtual communities on the internet that enable them to maintain ties between origin and destination spaces.[8] Social media play an important role in that it assists migrants to integrate through the benefits of social networking.[15]

Statistics South Africa in 2013 reported the largest number of immigrants to South Africa come from Zimbabwe.[16-18] The beginning of the 1980s saw an increase in the migration of Zimbabwean citizens to South Africa. The rate of migration further increased in the early 2000s to the present, beginning from 20% and increasing to 42% in the early 2000s (2000 and 2010) when the Zimbabwean nationals started to migrate to South Africa.[19, 20] This migration rate continued to increase from 50 to 75% (under the age of 35), and the number of male migrants increased from 60 to 70% .[21] Between 2020 and 2023, the migration rate has been increasing by 7.77 per 1 000 people of the population. During this period, the immigrants have experienced systematic exclusion, such as not getting jobs or having to get permanent residence [22-26], biopsychosocial and minority stress, including victimization, xenophobic attacks, and psychosomatic symptoms. [27]

Migrating to a new country is a long process that involves adaptation and acceptance. Most times, migrants are thrust into fast, impersonal, growing/advanced societies that can be confusing and overwhelming.[28, 29] Generally, these migrants have little or no preparation for the challenges they might face in their host countries. Consequently, adaptation to their new environment is often highly challenging. Migrants usually lack the required resources to support them through the adaptation process in the new country, such as accommodation and food.[30] This often generates feelings of isolation and loneliness for newcomers as they grapple with settlement issues. Migrants also often face challenges such as discrimination, prejudice, and being misunderstood. [31]

Five questions for digital migration learning from digital connectivity and forced migration in or to Europe.[32] These questions were: (i) Why Europe? (ii) Where are the field and focus of digital migration studies? (iii) Where is the human in digital migration? (iv) Where is the political in digital migration? and (v) How can we de-centre Europe in digital migration studies? These questions are related to this review, specifically questions three (3) and four (4), showing that social media play a vital role in migration, whether positive or negative. However, once migrated, they are more likely to face challenges such as neglection, leading to unstable mental wellbeing. Zimbabwean migrants are flocking to South Africa due to political unrest in their country. South Africa is perceived as a greener pasture or country, and they believe that their psychosocial wellbeing, economic, and lifestyle will be the better. These, at times aggravated by a depressed economy, may contribute to making immigrants scapegoats. The citizens of the country these immigrants have migrated to are often suspicious of newcomers. These suspicions are triggered by not knowing the motives or intentions of the individuals to migrate and invade what others perceive as their political, economic, and social environment .[33-35] The impact of xenophobic attacks in South Africa is on the regional integration agenda .[33] When migrants settle into communities, they have to engage with the citizens of the host country.[36] The attitudes of the citizens in the host country may enhance or challenge the social integration of migrants into their new community. This challenges us to ask, "Where is the human in migration?"

It is evident that migrants face several challenges in their host countries that affect their wellbeing and social integration into their new community. However, Zimbabwean migrants who are in South Africa legally experience less or no discrimination, for instance by being hired by private and public organizations and institutions.[36, 37] Refugees use social media, such as Facebook, Twitter (X), LinkedIn, or Instagram, and others to integrate into the host country and to communicate with friends and family in their countries of origin for emotional and social support.[14] Social media platforms can be used concurrently or not. Social integration involves accepting and acting in line with the host country's values and norms in order to build social capital.[37] Mutual recognition between immigrants and citizens of the host country could improve the individual and communal wellbeing of migrants.

This narrative review was aimed at literature on understanding the contribution of social media on migrants' wellbeing and social integration by focusing on Zimbabwean immigrants in South Africa. The authors reviewed literature on challenges faced by immigrants in the host country, South Africa.

2. Problem statement

When asked about their experiencing of migrating to another country, the majority of migrants often mention socio-cultural, political, structural, and institutional challenges experienced in their host countries. The difficulties included a lack of housing, having an unpredictable and often homeless life, being vulnerable to exploitation (being poor or undocumented), and witnessing or experiencing traumatic events, conflicts, language barriers, and marginalisation.[38-40] However, psychological challenges, which have an adverse effect on the wellbeing of the migrants, are often not mentioned. Research supports the notion that social media play an important role in the wellbeing and social integration of migrants.[40-42] In general, South Africa is perceived as a fertile country by her neighbouring countries (Kingdom of Eswatini, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and others), which leads to people migrating as documented, undocumented, skilled, unskilled, asylum seekers, refugees, and others. Being away from their home country, each individual is affected differently, either positive (better life) or negative (victim of exploitation). Migrants experience longer working hours and low wages, indicating that these working conditions have a negative impact on their wellbeing, leading to conditions such as depression and anxiety.[43] Zimbabwean migrants in South

Africa are not exception to this. This study thus entailed a review of literature on the impact of social media on the wellbeing and social integration of migrants in their host countries. The objective was to review literature on the impact or role of social media on the challenges faced by migrants, and specifically Zimbabwean migrants, in South Africa. The second objective was to review literature on the psychological challenges faced by migrants.

3. Method

A qualitative desktop method was used. Qualitative research is a systematic data-gathering tool used to understand issues.[44] The authors used a narrative desktop review to peruse literature on the phenomenon under investigation. Publications (including special issues, journal articles, books, chapters, briefs, editorials, workplace guidelines, and annual reports) from multiple search engines, including Google Scholar, PsychNet, World of Science journals and online journals (for instance, African Journals Online) were used. Three themes were discussed: (i) general challenges faced by migrants in other host countries, (ii) challenges faced by Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa, and (ii) the impact of social networks on migrants' wellbeing in the community. Data were thematically analysed to explore literature on the impact of social media on the wellbeing and social integration of migrants. The data drawn from the literature review assisted the authors to build the argument that social media can assist integration and building social identity, social networks, and social participation, which contribute to the wellbeing of migrants.

Key words such as "migrants", "Zimbabwean", "South Africa", "psychological challenges", "social media", "social integration" and "wellbeing" were used in the search and to determine the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Reference lists in the consulted publications were used to manually snowball the search for more publications, knowing that one article could lead to another to be used in the study. Due to the scope and word limit of this review, the search was limited to publications in the period 2005 to 2023, which covered 18 years of literature on migration. There has been an increasing rate of Zimbabwean migrants to the world, including South Africa, in the early 2000s. This is supported by [45-48], who show that it is essential to review and value the literature from when the migration started. Therefore, the current authors found value in reviewing literature from the early 2000s (2005 to be specific) to 2023. Titles and abstracts were screened independently. Thereafter, a full-text screen was conducted by the authors to determine which articles met the inclusion criteria. The data were analysed using [49] thematic analysis. Data saturation was reached after finding a duplication of themes from the authors individually analysing the retrieved data, with cross-checking by an external moderator. Articles were retrieved and included based on the selection criteria for analysis. Articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria, for instance, those that focused on countries other than Zimbabwe and South Africa, were excluded. Publications before 2005 were also excluded, and, as such, the study excluded publications outside the stipulated period (2005 to 2023), key words or consulted search engines. Some studies were published in the context of migration; however, during full-text data extraction, these studies were excluded, as they did not match the focus of the current review. These included studies that did not refer to psychological challenges, social media, social integration, and wellbeing of migrants.

4. Findings and discussions

Two specific concepts were used in the review of literature, namely migrants (with a review of general international literature) and Zimbabwean migrants (with a review of literature specifically by scholars who have published work on Zimbabwean migrants). These two concepts are used interchangeably in the discussion of the literature review. We used [49] six-phase thematic analysis of data to engage with the theme and the sub-themes. Firstly, we read and extracted data to familiarise ourselves with the data; secondly, we

organized data systematically by developing codes separately to ensure that there is no biasness; thirdly, we generated themes to address the aim of the review. Lastly, themes were identified and aligned with the aim of the review. The main results are presented in **Table 1** below. The themes that were identified during data extraction were general challenges faced by migrants in other host countries; challenges faced by Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa; social media, health, wellbeing, and social integration of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa; and the impact of social networks on migrants' wellbeing in the community.

Table 1. Emerging Themes and Sub-themes

Emerged themes		Sub-themes	
1.	General challenges faced by migrants in other host countries	i.	Economic challenges
		ii.	Social exclusion
2.	Challenges faced by Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa	i.	No social services
		ii.	Xenophobic attacks
		iii.	Access to other services
3.	Social media, health, wellbeing, and social integration of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa		
4.	The impact of social networks on migrants' wellbeing in the community	i.	Social network role
		ii.	Social environment of migrants in South Africa

4.1 General challenges faced by migrants in other host countries

Migrants face several challenges in their host countries. This is not an exception for those who have migrated from Zimbabwe to South Africa.[50] Some of these challenges are economic integration [33-35], communication barriers [51, 52], and financial insecurity [24, 53, 54], which are sources of stress (especially in the initial period of migrating).

Sub-theme 1: Economic challenges

The challenging economic climate in Zimbabwe contributes largely to Zimbabwean migrants moving to South Africa for a better economy and more job opportunities. Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa further experience communication barriers, as they are often not knowledgeable in the 11 official South African languages. To add to that, moving to another country is costly. Unemployment, which many migrants are challenged with when arriving in the host country, leads to stress and affects people's wellbeing. Achieving permanent immigration status, family separation, intergenerational strains, and gender role changes create special stresses for many newcomers. Immigrants often face systemic discrimination in policy and in practice, which is a major challenge with respect to employment and educational opportunities. Migrants often encounter challenges in terms of unbearable working and living conditions and are faced with many barriers to adjust to new cities and communities.[41, 42, 55, 56] These may negatively impact migrants' wellbeing and mental health.

Sub-theme 2: Social exclusion

Migrants are often considered marginal citizens who are responsible for rising crime rates and are seen as a threat to social stability.[57] Non-natives of the host country often experience stress, arising from migration, perceived discrimination, and social exclusion, thus leading to a higher incidence of mental health problems and lower subjective wellbeing.[58] These are some of the general challenges migrants face in their host countries, which brings us to the challenges specifically faced by Zimbabwean migrants to South Africa.

4.2 Challenges faced by Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa

Sub-theme 1: No social services

Zimbabwean immigrants most of the time witness threatening and/or physical violence in South Africa.[38] Further reported migrants mentioned assault, rape, and murder in South Africa, and a general feeling of helplessness. The migrants also experienced minimal opportunities to obtain resources and employment, as well as exploitation and coercion. All these factors contributed to challenges to the wellbeing of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa. In addition, they faced challenges in obtaining basic services such as access to food, water, and housing.[30, 59] Due to the inhumane treatment often experienced by Zimbabwean migrants, they are less likely to have access to these basic services. Accommodation is another major challenge; as it is often, if not most of the time, difficult to find accommodation in host countries. Migrants are often treated like less than human beings in accommodation centres .[30] Most Zimbabwean migrants stay in informal settlements in South Africa and when evicted from these informal settlements, they are likely to be deported to Zimbabwe. This is also applicable to issues of unemployment. No appropriate wages are guaranteed, even when migrants find employment, as Zimbabwean migrants are often exploited and paid lower wages than their South African counterparts. Migrants have also been confronted by arguments that the high unemployment rate in South Africa is attributed to the presence of Zimbabwean migrants in the country.[43]

Sub-theme 2: Xenophobic attached

Zimbabwean migrants are viewed as job stealers, drug dealers and/or thieves, are usually referred to as *'Lekwerekwere'* (foreigners). [21] Consequently, Zimbabwean migrants are exposed to xenophobic attacks, being incarcerated, and being murdered. [38-40] Constant harassment from police officers to collect bribes is also commonly experienced. [5, 22, 23]

The challenges faced by immigrants may have an adverse effect on their lives and wellbeing. [31] It could lead to post-traumatic stress disorder, due to insufficient and a lack of appropriate social and emotional support, as they do not find the immigration process satisfactory. The consequence could be that migrants remain unhappy, resent their lives in the new country, and eventually display socially inappropriate and dysfunctional behaviour [9], which contribute to them not experiencing a sense of meaning and purpose. Challenges usually encountered by Zimbabwean migrants may lead to poor health outcomes, thereby affecting migrants' wellbeing. [38] Moreover, a lack of functional, social support; past trauma; concurrent stressful life events like harassment by police and immigration officers; and psychological distress (including emotions of shame) will lead to psychological distress, thus negatively affecting the wellbeing of immigrants.

Sub-theme 3: Access to some other services

In South Africa, not all migrants from Zimbabwe have negative experiences, for instance,[36, 37] reported that those legal migrants in South Africa who have work or study permits, and permanent residence are more likely to receive all benefits that are given to South Africa citizens. Some migrants also work in government or private organizations. South Africa has accommodated Zimbabwe students to study in South Africa, including awarding them scholarships and bursaries. In South Africa, many citizens attribute their problems to foreign nationals.[43], also state that not all Zimbabwean migrants had bad experiences when relocating to South Africa. [36, 37] These positive experiences would have not happened had it not been for communication through social media and networks where work and funding opportunities are shared. [5, 24]

4.3 Social media, health wellbeing and social integration of Zimbabwean in South Africa migrants

Social media have played an important role in ensuring that people from different societies come together, with no exception to migrants who have been socially integrated to a bigger society; for instance, migrants who have moved from Zimbabwe to South Africa, and have become part society. [23, 36, 60] Migrants move because of better opportunities, which bring hope and boost their mental wellbeing. [61] When social integration takes place, there is a blending of culture, norms, communication, and functional integration.[62] Social media are used for showing different cultures that can be attractive to migrants, as well as norms and values that are more likely to be of the same value of those who want to migrate.[63] Such attractive practices are communicated via social media, and this may lead to functional integration.

4.4 The impact of social networks on migrants' wellbeing in the community

Sub-theme 1: Social network role

Social media enrich social networking between migrants and their social ties such as friends, family, and individuals, which can assist in the migration and integration processes.[12, 13, 64, 65] postulate that social media reinforce social networks, which are crucial in migration decisions. This implies that social networks enhance social integration from society to society to live in harmony and peace. This is supported by [66], who opine that social media enable social capital among migrants and their networks. Highlighted some of the important contributions of social media, which include that social media promote migration, diaspora engagements, integration, and migration research.[67] Social media offer more prospects for diaspora relations, engagements, discussion, and identity creation, which can lead to social integration that promotes positive wellbeing among migrants.[21]

During the Covid-19 pandemic, social media played a vital role because it offered reachable, convenient, and affordable communication channels, especially during the hard lockdown periods when movement restrictions disrupted face-to-face interactions.[59] Social media are useful in providing rapid, affordable, reliable, and accessible communication passages that are beneficial for migrant communities.[68, 69] Information pathways for migrants and their networks are facilitated through social media. Social media ensure online interaction and virtual communities for migrants and their network, which are treasured by the migrants.

Sub-theme 2: Social environment of migrants in South Africa

Zimbabweans in South Africa develop a social network, usually in the small communities where they interact and connect.[7] These social networks act as a bridge to social cohesion among Zimbabweans in the communities. It assists new migrants to settle down and gain employment. In the process, migrants integrate socially in the communities in which they live and work. Social integration influences social relationships and offer those who just migrated to South Africa the opportunity to join the already existing built structure. Social networks is to ensure that new Zimbabwean migrants settle down and are taught survival mechanisms in the city, especially through businesses.[21] As previously stated,[70] maintains that social integration involves accepting and acting to the host country's values and norms to building social capital. Mutual recognition between the parties improves wellbeing of migrants. This shows that Zimbabwe migrants need so be able to engage with the social environment of South Africa. Once Zimbabwean migrants have engaged with the social environment, it is easier for them to incorporate into job markets and to adopt the values and customs South Africa. It is essential for Zimbabwe migrants to fit into the structure and culture of South Africa. Interacting with the society or community, will prevent Zimbabwean migrants from intergroup relations as South Africa is diverse country, reducing prejudice and conflict.

5. Conclusion

Migration as a whole is often not a pleasant experience, considering that the process involves adaptation and acceptance. Migrants often face difficult challenges (xenophobic attacks, discrimination, stigma, and many more) as they strive to adapt to their new environment. Social media play an important role in assisting migrants to integrate into the new communities and society. Migrants also face psychological effects, which later have an adverse impact on their wellbeing. In this review, the challenges discussed as experienced by Zimbabwean migrants include political, economic, and social factors, such as loss of human rights; lower wages or cheap labour; transmission of diseases; and poor accommodation. The consulted literature highlighted the psychosocial impact of these challenges on the Zimbabwean migrants' wellbeing, and further emphasised that migrants are prone to depression, anxiety, and emotional imbalance. The literature review showed that challenges faced by Zimbabwean migrants may negatively impact their wellbeing. It was also clear that many studies attested to the positive impact of social media on Zimbabwean migrants' wellbeing and in assisting them in their social integration into South Africa.

6. Recommendations

Based on the current desktop review, it is recommended that future empirical research should be conducted on the impact of the challenges faced by Zimbabwean migrants on their wellbeing. More attention should be given to the impact of these challenges on the wellbeing of Zimbabwean migrants. Studies of this magnitude could be conducted in future, focusing on other African host countries such as the Kingdom of Eswatini, Lesotho, and Mozambique to assess whether the challenges recorded by the Zimbabwean migrants to South Africa are aligned to those indicated by migrants when settling in other African countries.

Author contributions

N.S. and W.T. captured the idea and E.F. edited the drafts.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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