

**Media influence on migration expectations: Experiences of Sub-Saharan Black African students**

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE**

Major: Journalism and Mass Communication

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2020

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## **DEDICATION**

The thesis is dedicated to my loving two children Dingiswayo and Hlezipe. You believed in me and encouraged me to fly many thousands of miles away from home. It was not an easy decision to make as a mother. I missed you so much every day!

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my gratitude to my Program of Committee: the chairperson, Dr Jan Lauren Boyles, and the committee members Dr Daniela Dimitrova and Dr Douglas Smith. Your professional guidance and mentorship were exceptional. I am at a different level of understanding the research than the time I first time I came. Yes, it was not an easy road, but you trusted in me and supported me greatly.

To all my family, friends and colleagues who supported me, thank you very much for your encouragement and support. Special mention goes to the leadership of Greenlee School of Journalism and Mass Communication. I could not have reached this far without your support. I shall always be grateful.

To all the participants who took part in this study, I appreciate your time and support. Without you, this project could not have been complete.

**ABSTRACT**

This study explored the mass media's influence on Sub-Saharan Black African Students (SBAS) to migrate to the US. The research involved interviews with 12 Iowa State University students to find out how media platforms (television and social media) shape SBAS' expectations and experiences of life in the US. It also examined the influence of media on their decision to migrate and further investigated how television and social media facilitated their integration into American society. The study found that the participants significantly used television more than social media as a source of information to create initial images about the economic condition of their target nation. Social media, given its level of interactivity compared to television, emerged as a preferred medium for confirmation of conditions in the target nation to further ground their decisions on migration. Furthermore, social media was extensively used as a means of integration into the American society. The results from this study address how university offices in the US can facilitate the migration and integration processes of international students from the home country to the resident nation.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Many people have traveled from sub-Saharan Africa<sup>1</sup> to the West to seek a better life and higher education (Okome, 2002). Migration records show higher numbers of Africans willingly came to the US since 1990 than the total number of slaves that came in chains before the abolishment of the slave trade in 1807 (Roberts, 2005). Today, the US is regarded as a country where real democracy, in practice, exists with great freedom (Barboza, 2010). According to Pew Research (2015), 3.8 million black migrants now live in the US. This population has increased more than four times since 1980 (Anderson, 2015). In the mid-2010s, sub-Saharan Africans formed nearly all African migrants arriving in the US (99%) with the remaining 1% from North Africa (Anderson, 2015).

What are the drivers that prompt people to move to America, apart from seeking education? There are different views on people's decisions whether to migrate or not. Migration resolutions are presumed to emerge from well-informed, reasonable options, considering the available economic opportunities at different locations (Yankow, 2003). Okome (2002) notes that Africans migrate to other countries for the same reasons that other migrants from other continents do. Political, social and economic factors -- such as low pay, lack of employment and/or violence -- may "push" them to migrate (Okome, 2002, p. 29). There are also other "pull factors" that stimulate migration, like the "possibility of earning higher pay, finding employment and/or freedom from violence," just to mention a few (Okome, 2002, p. 36). Some research findings hint that other factors, like stronger family and friend associations of earlier migrants,

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<sup>1</sup> The sub-Saharan Africa region covers all countries of the continent of Africa that are below the Sahara Desert, but excludes Sudan and the countries above the Sahara Desert in the north, which are considered as countries in the Arab League.



also boost the rate of migration (Munshi, 2003; Zahniser, 1999). Potential migrants ideally assess the information on economic circumstances as well as openings in their target nation (Stark and Bloom, 1985; Braga, 2007). The economies of most Western countries far exceed that of the sub-Saharan countries' economies. For instance, the projected Gross Domestic Product per capita (GDP) for the US in 2019 is \$65,062 -- compared to \$16,086 for Algeria or \$14,042 for South Africa in the same year (International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook, 2018). Holding this fact about the great economies of Western countries, migrants must have a reliable source of information that convinces them to embark on such long journeys. What is this source of information and how do they access it? In this thesis, it is being presumed that mass media is their biggest source (Valente, 1993).

The influence of media on migration decision-making of individuals from Africa has not been researched fully, however. While several studies have been conducted on migrant experiences in the host nations, these have largely taken place outside of Africa. Okome (2002) for instance, cites that "the immigration to the West [of African migrants], particularly to the US, remains woefully understudied" (p. 36). Given this lack of prior research, this study explores how media influence the expectations of life in the US by black African international students from sub-Saharan African regions. This study uses the lens of cultivation theory to assess the influence of media on migration, and to identify how they cope with the transition to the US through an acculturation model. The study uses in-depth, personal interviews to understand the experiences of migrants. The study establishes how media influence African migrants to move to the West. This study's findings will help potential migrants, by providing knowledge on the lifestyles they should expect in the West, rather than simply relying on media, which have mixed representations (some of which are incomplete or inaccurate). In terms of knowledge for

researchers, this study will reduce the knowledge gap that currently exists on the media's role on deciding to migrate. The findings could also be helpful to the ISU International Student and Scholars Office (ISSO) to assess or redesign their strategies to help immigrants cope with the cultural differences in the US.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Migration patterns

Migration has been described by Lee (1966) as a “permanent or semi-permanent change of residence. No restriction is placed upon the distance of the move or upon the voluntary or involuntary nature of the act...” (Lee, 1966, p. 49). The United Nations describes a migrant as:

...any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is (United Nations, n.d.).

In this study, Sub-Saharan Black African students are referred to as migrant students. Beginning in the 1980s, visible numbers of sub-Saharan Africans (around 130,000) started migrating to the US (Echeverria-Estrada & Batalova, 2019).

Table 1. Population Growth of Sub-Saharan African Migrants in the US

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Population in the US</b> | <b>Percentage growth from previous decade</b> |
|-------------|-----------------------------|---|
| 1980        | 130,000                     | -   |
| 1990        | 265,000                     | 103%  |
| 2000        | 691,000                     | 160%  |
| 2010        | 1,327,000                   | 92%   |
| 2018        | 2,019,000                   | 52%   |

Source: (Echeverria-Estrada & Batalova, 2019)

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the US experienced an influx of immigrants from Africa due to changes in migration laws – “like the Hart-Cellar Act of 1985, Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, and Immigration Act of 1990” (Asante et al., 2016, p. 367) -- all of which created new opportunities for migrants to voluntarily migrate to the US (Asante et al., 2016). [This thesis, it should be noted, does not cover undocumented migrants who come in masses on

dangerous, fragmented journeys through Europe (Collyer, 2007)]. For several migrants on these routes, their country of destination is not chosen as they depart their homes (Collyer, 2007).

Their destination keeps changing several times as the journey progresses (Collyer, 2007).

Some migrants have come to the US through winning the diversity visa lottery. This is an annual opportunity where people from all over the world in underrepresented nations apply to migrate to the US (Lobo, 2001). They are entered into a drawing/lottery to win a permanent resident visa to the US (Lobo, 2001). The 2020 Diversity Visa Lottery Program guidelines posted online now require that applicants be holders of at least a high school education (State Department, 2019). Others arrive through the unification program, in which migrants are given permanent visas on the basis of joining their family (Asante et al, 2016). Beyond the voluntary migration of Africans to the US, there are certain other circumstances that force migrants to leave their countries. These may include war, with migrants arriving in the US seeking status as refugees. In 2010, the composition of about 52,000 Africans who lawfully gained permanent residence in the US came to the country through family relations (48%), diversity visa program (24%), as asylum seekers (22%), through employment (5%), with other means falling into 1% (Batalova & Terrazas, 2010).

Many African immigrants hold diverse beliefs that coming to the US is an unquestionable route to a brighter future, with possibly even a chance to earn more money (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Portes and Rumbaut (1990) had similar findings, that unlike refugees who are forced out of their countries, immigrants and international students hold an ideal, positive image of life in the US. They perceive there are lots of openings for them, believing that life would be more satisfying than in their home countries (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). Some immigrants believe that once they set their feet in the US, their chances are very high to integrate into the system and

settle permanently in the US (Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2014; Altbach & Knight, 2007). Furthermore, they have the confidence that if one family member comes to the US, there is an opportunity to open sustainable doors for financing their families in Africa to eradicate or minimize poverty in their immediate and extended families (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Fischer and Malmberg (2001) note that there is a high probability that other family members would also get a chance to visit the US because of the ties and networks established in that country. As a result, they are prepared to go through any trouble to get a member of the family to the US (Altbach & Knight 2007; Asante et al., 2016). These families may get into big credits or sell family properties in order to secure funds for transportation, accommodation and food as they land in the US, believing that jobs in the US are highly rewarding, such that they could easily pay off their debts in Africa (Okonofua, 2013).

## **2.2 Recruitment and retention of international students**

The US hosts the highest number of international students in the world (Altbach, 2004). In the academic year (2013-2014), the US had an enrolment of 886,000 international students, accounting for 4% of total number of student enrolment in Higher Education in the country (Cantwell, 2019). A significant number (65%) of all students from foreign countries in the US were self-sponsored. (Cantwell, 2019). China supplied the highest number of foreign students in the US, followed by India, then South Korea ranked third, followed by Saudi Arabia, and finally Canada (Cantwell, 2019). Kigotho (2015) reported that there were only 31,113 SBAS enrolled in US in 2014, with most coming from “Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Cameroon and Ethiopia” (Kigotho 2015, para. 6)

Numerous institutions of higher education in the US proactively recruit international students (Özturgut, 2013). These approaches may include participating in international education recruitment fairs, forming a recruitment committee at the university-level tasked with

international recruitment or using local citizens (agents) who are based in various countries to recruit on the university's behalf (Özturgut, 2013). These agents are well positioned to recruit the students, as they know the cultures of the potential students and help with completion of student application forms to the university (Özturgut, 2013). Özturgut (2013) summarizes the following practices that Higher of Education Institutions follow to recruit international students, including:

- 1) Providing academic support and utilizing campus resources,
- 2) Attending and participating in international education fairs and recruitment events,
- 3) Partnering with other organizations (colleges and universities, non-profit and governmental institutions, high schools, for-profit organizations),
- 4) Passive marketing (Web advertising-online, brochures and booklets, etc.) and
- 5) Utilizing staff and faculty. (Özturgut, 2013, p. 6)

Higher education institutions compete against each other to recruit more international students on their campuses (Cantwell, 2019) by developing products that are more attractive to the students (Brown, 2009).

Why do these institutions need international students on their colleges? Just like the US has taken an active approach to have a diversity of people from other countries through the deliberate implementation of the Diversity Visa Lottery (Lobo, 2001; State Department, 2019), the colleges also take pride in having educating and having a diversity of international students at their campuses (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008). However, is it just the diversity of nationalities they struggle for? Universities often largely benefit from the hefty tuitions the international students pay compared to domestic students (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008). An international student's tuition is often times higher than the amount charged for domestic students (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Özturgut, 2013). International students prove to be a source of great revenue not only to the colleges themselves (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Slaughter & Cantwell, 2012; Cantwell, 2019), but also to the economy of the country (Cantwell 2019). Records show that in the 2013-

2014 academic period, international student revenues added about \$27 billion to the US economy (Institute for International Education, 2014).

Institutions also spend a lot of time, finances, and efforts on student retention of international students (Özturgut, 2013). There are a number of ways these institutions retain these students, which focuses on the challenges that international students face in their host nations. A high number of international students encounter “social problems related to social integration, daily life tasks, homesickness, and role conflicts” (Özturgut, 2013, p. 4). As students try to integrate into the host nation culture, they often feel the absence of their traditional support systems (Pedersen, 1991). It is very crucial at this point that there should be a ready social support from the institution to help them integrate into the system, have academic excellence and have self-confidence (Glass & Westmont, 2013). According to Özturgut (2013), higher education institutions follow some of these strategies to retain students: 1) Improving classroom lecturing skills of faculty with international students; 2) Supplementing programs to help students to improve their English proficiency through English clubs; 3) pairing an international student with a native one, and 4) Offering scholarships to outstanding international students to pay in-state tuition instead of international tuition. Students are also offered on campus jobs (Özturgut, 2013). Even though the universities gain from the high tuitions that the international students pay, the students [SBAS] benefit from the high quality of education, which offers them a competitive advantage not only at local level -- but also internationally, as the qualifications they get are recognized at an international level. This gives them a chance to get a better job in the future to have a higher return on their educational investment.

### **2.3 The power of foreign media on migration**

Where does this hope derive from? For migrants, the media present images of advanced economies, stable politics, and a socially exciting life of the Western world (Braga, 2007).

Prospective African migrants view all they see as a livable reality (Braga, 2007). A study by Okome (2002), for instance, found out that:

Innovations and advancements in international communication for instance, increase the awareness of national economic differences and opportunities, and give potential immigrants information on how to achieve their goal. Through movies, television, radio, print media, facsimile machines, and currently, the information super-highway; potential migrants gather information on what to do, what opportunities exist, and where to move (p. 35).

Okome et al. (2014) stress that the pervasiveness of entertainment media, especially American popular culture, may be a source of information for migrants on where to move. Television is a platform where both reality and fictional messages are broadcast. In the early 1950s, for example, American television presented a sitcom of an American family in a series called *Father Knows Best*, which many Americans watched and considered the family as a model (Holtzman and Sharpe, 2014). Viewers of such messages internalize this type of information (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014). As the world is globalizing, in the process there is growing dominance of Western culture, which is called cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1975; Tomlinson, 2012). Western culture is often viewed as the superior one compared with various world cultures because of the powerful mass media the West has globally (Gray, 2014).

The news media also have an extensive effect on how we perceive other cultures that are different from us (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014). Migrants consume messages through news channels like BBC or CCTV (Marsha, 2016). The news media depict the Western countries as well developed, characterized by stability and harmony (Marsh, 2016). However, when it comes to the depiction of Africa, the same media channels – like the BBC’s programs *Focus on Africa* and *Africa Live* – portray the continent with the focus on conflict, security, and politics (Marsh, 2016). For instance, the BBC followed the South Sudan clashes from the battlefield, showing pictures of human suffering from refugee camps (Marsh, 2016). These depictions cement beliefs



that African countries face broader economic and political challenges than do the Western countries (Marsh, 2016). Africa itself is represented as a continent full of misery, diseases and everything terrible about humankind, whereas the Western world is represented as a continent of steadiness, cleanliness and organization (Adeyanju & Neverson, 2007). Hansan and Zogby (2010) found out that these messages influence migrants to go live the highly-talked about “American Dream,” in the media, which posits that anyone can live their dream in the US. This is a driving force that migrants use to choose the US as their choice of destination (Hansan & Zogby, 2010). The question that now arises is does the media influence their decisions to come and experience in US? The extent to which the media plays a role in this decision-making process has not been research thoroughly.

Schiller (1975) notes that public media are a great conduit to transfer cultures from dominant to non-dominant ones. Information flow (the exchange of media messages between sender and receiver) is mostly from the dominant to the periphery (less developed societies) (Schiller 1975). Information flow is generally from powerful countries to less powerful ones. This has led to the Westernization of world cultures, as the West exports its cultures to less powerful nations (Gray, 2014). In most African countries (for example, Malawi), the local channels and movie theaters are dominated by American movies that depict the power and success of the US (Schiller, 1975), partly due to lack of local movie production (Gray, 2014). Television in Malawi was only introduced in 1999 (Gray, 2014). Prior to this time, people depended on foreign movies for entertainment (Gray, 2014). It is normal in Malawi for people to watch Western movies through their local channels (TV Malawi) and movie theatres (Gray 2014). These films are watched by young people from a tender age. These movies depict the US as a powerful country that has conquered many battles in the world, while also showing how

advanced the US is in technology and skills (Gray 2014). These images are a source of cultural shift in Malawi, resulting in the country losing its grip to communicate its own culture as media multinationals robbed it of its power (Gray, 2014). Schiller (1975) terms this phenomenon as cultural imperialism, defined as:

The sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system (p. 9)

Tomlinson (2012) explains cultural imperialism as “the spread of western capitalist- particularly American culture to every part of the globe, and the consequent threat of loss of distinct non-Western cultural traditions,” (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 355). Gray describes cultural imperialism occurring when media from one country occupies and takes possession of another -- its culture bleeding into the oppressed nation (Gray, 2014). Gray (2014) reports an interesting scenario where Malawi as a country is awash with media from America. Gray (2011) notes Malawi is affected by a lack of local production movies, with viewers of television depending on Hollywood movies for entertainment (Gray, 2014). There have been concerns in Malawi of this cultural influence from foreign media (Gray, 2014) For example, young people often adopt the culture portrayed in these movies, like embracing the American type of dressing. Similarly, Malawi women who are heavy viewers of Nigerian moves have adopted the Nigerian dressing and accent (Gray, 2014).

Upon arrival in host countries, African migrants are often considered as a marginal sect, represented in the media in various manners, which may range from victims, threats to the society, drug dealers or successful individuals in other arenas like sports (Lapchick, 2000; Falola & Afolabi, 2007; Harris, 2017). A survey by Lapchick (2000) denotes that a majority of whites still hold stereotypical views of African Americans that they are less smart, drug users, violent

and more likely to being violent against women. Migrant representation is generally stifled in the Western media, as often times they are depicted in masses such as victims of marginalization, and always seeking help (Horsti, 2007). Falola and Afolabi (2007) explain the representation of life experiences of African migrants as “suffering and smiling Africans” (p. 944), revealing that the African migrant is often depicted as putting up a smiling face in the media, while still having a life full of hardships (Falola & Afolabi, 2007). As a result, imaginary divides exist between the media depicting a life full of hardship in Africa, whilst on the other hand, showing potential for successful life in the Western world (Adeyanju & Oriola, 2011).

According to Goffman, the divide in perception is consistent with the ideology he called “presentation of self in everyday life” (Goffman, 1959). He further reveals that the world is created by performers -- like in a theatre where there is a front stage and a backstage, while the audience or observers get impressions of their actors (Goffman, 1959). He refers to the front stage as an arena where performers act in public, and the backstage as one where performers are in their relaxed and real-life state (Goffman, 1959). It is this front stage life that is characterized with fabricated success stories in Western countries that the migrants represent to the peers in their home country. The backstage, by comparison, firmly conceals the ugly, actual lifestyle they lead. It is this front stage lifestyle that creates a perception of the successful life of the African migrant in the Western world to the prospective migrant (Adeyanju & Oriola, 2011).

Despite having a mixed bag of how Africans are portrayed in Western media, Africans continue to make long journeys to the West. In a study carried out by Hidayati (2017), he reported that migrant international students base their decisions to migrate on “on benefit evaluation according to the cost and benefits of migrations. The cost may include to separate with parents and family, and also the problems in settling in new place and new society,”

(Hidayati, 2017, p. 522). Hidayati (2017) reported that disparities in “demographic, social and economic circumstances ” (p. 515) are compelling motivations for why people migrate. The migration network theory coined by Lee (1966) assumes that migrants who have contacts in their target nation are more likely to move to that nation, speaking to the social aspect of why migrants choose their destinations.

The question that now arises is: Does the media influence their decisions to come and experience life in US? And despite the negative media portrayal, why do African migrants keep trekking to the US? And how does the mass media, in particular, play into this decision-making process? Migrants are overloaded with televised messages from their tender ages -- particularly media content illustrating America as the most powerful nation on earth (Gray, 2014). They verify the existence of these things via media channels to minimize the risks and costs that come with migration before they decide to move (Cairncross, 1997; Hidayati, 2017).

To achieve this, the migrants turn to interactive media channels like social media. Hidayati (2017) cites that improvements in communication technology have led to great prospects for individuals to migrate. Advancement in technology has seen the birth of new media which is interactive (Jensen, 1998) and has fostered connections of migrants with the host nations (Hidayati, 2017).

## **2.4 Interactivity**

Interactivity for a long time has been assumed to be a “natural attribute of face to face conversation, but it has been proposed to occur in mediated communications settings as well,” (Rafaeli, 1998, p. 110). Kiouisis (2002) states that there is a great confusion to define interactivity among researchers. He asserts that the confusion comes in whether interactivity is 1) a feature of perception in exchanging of messages, 2) a reliance on technology applied in transmission of communications or 3) a view in the mind of users (Kiouisis, 2002).

Rafaeli (1988) defined interactivity as:

An expression of the extent that in a given series of communication exchanges, any third (or later) transmission (or message) is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to even earlier transmissions (p. 111).

Williams et al. (1988) described interactivity as “the degree to which participants in a communication process have control, and can exchange roles in, their mutual discourse,” (Williams et al., 1988, p. 10). Jensen (1998) similarly defines interactivity a “measure of media’s potential ability to let the user exert an influence on the content and/or form of the mediated communication” (Jensen, 1988, p. 201).

From the definitions given above, it can be firmly interpreted in simple language that in media interactivity, there must exist a path for the sender of the message to get to the receiver. And equally the receiver should also be able to switch into role of the sender -- to either communicate back to the sender or to other destinations through the same type of channel. Jensen (1998) explains that interactivity happens when there is a path back from the consumer of information to the provider or originator of information. The author contends that when information is produced and under the custodianship of the “central information provider” (Jensen, 1998, p. 186) and the same one has full management distributing that report and the main receiver [significant consumer] of that information is purely receiving, then that type of communication is called “one-way communication” (p. 186). He typically says that television falls into the one-way type of communication, as it is characterized with transmission of messages to the consumer without providing a path for consumer to talk back to the provider of the information (Jensen, 1998). Thus, television lacks interactivity (Jensen, 1998). Rafaeli (2002) talks about how two-way communication modern television embracing interactivity (Rafaeli, 2002). Jensen (1998) further explains the case of two-way communication as a direct contrasting

scenario of the one-way communication. In two-way communication, the information is generated and under the custodianship of the “information consumer” (Jensen, 1998, p. 186). The significant consumer’s role is creation of communications and distribution of input in a conversation structure like telephones (Jensen, 1998).

With the introduction of the new media, it has placed challenges on how to categorize these platforms as one-way or two-way communication (Jensen, 1998). It does not obviously fit into traditional one-way communication, and also awkwardly falls into the two-way communication because of the mass media component it has and the interpersonal element (Jensen, 1998). However, he ends up describing new media as interactive (Jensen, 1998). A two-communication channel is what defines the interactivity of a platform. In this study, social media is considered to be an interactive platform.

#### **2.4.1 Interactivity of Social media**

As migrants’ fears grow when they are deciding to move to a new environment, media become very crucial to make connections with friends and families in the host nation (Lee, 1966). Lee (1966) reports that migrants are likely to move to places where they already have connections (Lee, 1966). Wellman (1999) states that migrants turn to use social media as it has vast and accurate material to verify information on (Wellman, 1999). However, Bruns (2018) considers social media to generally play an “apparent role in enabling so much mis-and disinformation to circulate unchallenged throughout the society” (Bruns, 2018, p. 2). When the SBAS are in Africa, they seek to verify some issues in their target nation, using various social media platforms.

#### **2.4.2 WhatsApp and Facebook**

Across the globe, people make use of social media to communicate their encounters, assessments, information, guidance, alerts, instructions or any sort of concerns that tend to

interest their relations or friends. In this respect, WhatsApp is very popular in Africa (Mamvura & Masowa, 2017). It came to the market in 2009 and had reached a total of half a billion active users in five years -- making it the most widely used application in the world, second to Facebook (Shambare, 2014). Facebook had registered about 2.5 billion global users by the end of 2019 against WhatsApp, which had 1.6 billion by end of 2019 (Clement, 2019). There were about 139 million Facebook users in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2018 (Shapshak, 2018).

Migrants in Africa significantly use social media to make contacts with the host nation. WhatsApp is very well known for its ease of use, efficiency, reliable messaging, and low calling costs all over the world (Mamvura and Masowa, 2017). Users can have targeted audiences who may be family members, professionals or friends. Messages can be through texts, video, pictures and audio (Mamvura & Masowa, 2017). The users freely connect with each other because of the open, two-way type of communication, which is interactive in social media platforms. The receivers of the messages can comment of the messages and also send the messages to group chats. WhatsApp is available on most smartphones, and users send messages over internet using wi-fi or data network of the phone. Just like WhatsApp, Facebook is another popular interactive channel people use, especially more educated as it needs some advanced digital literacy than WhatsApp. Facebook users also have similar functionalities, where users post their photos and send messages that can be accessed by any Facebook user unless they are restricted (Ellison et al., 2007). Unlike WhatsApp, Facebook users can restrict who views their content to friends-only or for the entire public to see (Ellison et al., 2007). In their study of students at Michigan State University, Ellison et al. (2007) found out that only 13% of the Facebook users were able to use the restriction for friends to be the only viewers of their profile. Facebook users are also able to search for strangers they do not know and establish new connections (Lampe et al., 2006).

According to Williams (2006), Facebook users are always looking and admire other users who have vast knowledge, such that they seek to befriend them to tap from the vast knowledge.

Facebook and WhatsApp are social media platforms that have benefited individuals to maintain social contacts. They are media platforms that embrace interactivity of users in public and private.

In this digital era, people maintain close contacts through technology, which operates across distance barriers (Haythornthwaite, 2002). Haythornthwaite (2002) reports that social media has an attractive characteristic to connect persons who are not strongly tied together due to distance or relationship. Related to the attractive traits, social media has also eased communication and enhanced interactivity in this cyber world – including the potential to bring migrants closer together (Hidayati, 2017).

### **2.5 Social media as great informant in migration**

Interactions within these digital platforms make relocations to desired destination easier through their interactivity features by mitigating the costs and risks associated with relocation. (Cairncross, 1997; Hidayati, 2017). This concurs with Lee's study where he coined the migration networks theory, in which he asserts that people are likely to relocate to destinations where they have established connections (Lee, 1966). A study by Dekker and Engberson (2012) revealed some attractiveness offered by social media. They reported that it brought renovation of migration networks -- simplifying migration by reinforcing bonds with family and friends both at home and host nation (Dekker & Engberson, 2012). These social media contacts help to eradicate most of the fears they would have and facilitate their integration in the new society upon arrival (Dekker & Engberson 2012). In a study conducted by Hidayati (2017) on Indonesian students who migrated to study in Netherlands, he examined to what extent to which



the students used Facebook to decide to migrate. The migrants reported using social media (Facebook) to decide to migrate (Hidayati, 2017).

Social media is one of the media channels that provide an interactive platform where friends and families maintain their relationships. It further helps potential migrants virtually meet with people that have knowledge about their target nations to help them mitigate risks and clarify issues they might have about the target nation before they embark on the journey to their new homes.

## **2.6 Migrant transition**

As migrants leave their families in their countries to settle in the US, they go through a “transition where one ‘unplugs’ from their old world and ‘plugs’ into the new” (Bridges, 2003, p. 5). This is a phase of transition (Bridges, 2003). It is a dynamic as well as collaborative process, where an individual takes full responsibility for their successes and failures (Bridges, 2003). Arriving in the country of destination does not mean the end of all the troubles they were facing in their home countries; rather it is often the opening of new political, cultural, and socioeconomic challenges. In their host nation, students experience diverse and stressful situations that may range from finance, mental and academic challenges (Larson & Chastain, 1990). This may also include loss of religious beliefs, the systems of support unique to their country and cultural norms (Larson & Chastain, 1990).

In order to easily blend into a new culture, Nesdale and Mak (2000) point out that migrants carefully choose their country of destination where they perceive that their cultural and physical attributes will be similar to the dominant cultural group of their country. For instance, language can be an inhibiting factor for people to easily integrate into a new environment. This may explain why a high number of African migrants who come to the US are proficient in English (Radford, 2019). The US is an English-speaking country, where many immigrants find it

easy to blend in because of cultural similarities like language (Altbach & Knight, 2007). About 52% of the migrants who come to the US are English proficient (Radford, 2019).

Culture is one of the elements that distinguishes groups from one another (Cote, 1996). People tend to integrate easily with dominant cultures because they tend to share similarities (Nesdale & Mak, 2000). Culture in sub-Saharan Africa is generally a collective one, compared with the individualist culture in the US (Ma & Schoeneman, 1997). According to Kim et al. (1994) in an individualistic culture, people live a separate life that does not depend on others, with identities that are unique and independent of each other. On the other hand, in a collective culture, one's identity is defined by the surrounding community, group or family, with a great dependence of family and community members upon each other (Kim et al., 1994). Despite the full dependence upon each other in a collective culture, there is a setback of other individuals pulling down one's progress, a feature that is absent in an individualistic culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For instance, a brother at a village may be restricted movement to go live in an urban settlement, leaving his widowed mother. He is expected to take full responsibility of the mother, despite the fact that he has his own family. Most students from collective cultures refrain from seeking help from other sources, as they believe in keeping the problems to themselves rather than sharing them (Caplan, 2007). Self-concealment, or the capability to keep things discreet in collectivist culture, is considered a purposive, practice to always want to pursue help that safeguards the welfare of the groupings and avoids burdening the group (Wallace & Constantine 2005). However, in Western culture, self-concealment of such problems is considered harmful (Larson & Chastain, 1990). In Western culture, people are encouraged to talk to professional counselors or to seek psychological help about the problems they are facing (Burton et al., 2012). People of all ages experience different capabilities to learn or get

accustomed to new things or environments (Leventhal & March, 1993). Similarly, migrants coming into new environments are faced with different cultures, and will try to learn the unfamiliar environment, adjusting theirs in consistency with the local social norms and culture in order to blend in (Berry, 1980).

As an African migrant internalizes these media messages about foreign lands, he/she/they perceives what he/she/they see about it as reality, which Gerbner et al. (1986) define as Cultivation Theory.

### **2.7 Cultivation Theory**

The media has been very successful in drawing people to create a reality of places where they have never been (Holtzman and Sharpe, 2014). In a study by Gerbner et al. (1984), they found out that repetitive subjection to media cultivates the trust that messages communicated through media speak to reality of the world and are valid (Gerbner et. al., 1984). Gerbner described this television effect in his cultivation theory (Gerbner et. al., 1984; Gerbner et al, 1986). This theory originated as a project called “*Cultural Indicators*,” which had been “mapping the stable and recurrent features of the world of television and relating them to viewers’ conceptions of social reality since 1967,” (Gerbner et. al., 1984, p. 285-6). The study consistently found that “those who spend more time watching television are more likely to express views, beliefs, and assumptions that are congruent with television’s portrayals of life and society” (Gerbner et. al., 1984, p. 286).

Holtzman and Sharpe (2014) reinforce that through the theories of socialization, the messages we internalize in the foundation development age of human beings have significant impact on our perception of the world. Maccoby (2007) defines socialization as “ processes where naïve individuals are taught the skills, behavior, patterns, values and motivation needed for competent functioning in the culture the child is growing up,” (Maccoby, 2007, p. 3).

Holtzman and Sharpe (2014) state that recreation or pastime media present imageries which are repetitious (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014) like popular music and movies which tend to be channels that replace the formal and informal learning cementing what we have always known or discrediting past knowledge (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014; Gerbner, 1986).

Previous research shows that this media life that audiences relate to differs from the real world (Gerbner et al., 1980). The behavior of heavy viewers of television is influenced and modeled by the media so that they start to comprehend that and trust that the world is that indeed similar to the televised images they view (Stefanone et al., 2010; Gerbner et al., 1986).

Television has the potential to cultivate in heavy viewers related views of lifestyles of people they watch to be real and valid (Gerbner 1969; Gerbner et al., 1984). The collective impact of enormous exposure by viewers, over time, subtly influences the social reality for individuals and society (Gerbner, 1969). Gerbner et al. (1986) argue that mass media cultivates opinions and standards that formerly existed in the society. This is supported by Gerbner (1969)'s finding, which states that:

A change in the social bases and economic goals of message mass-production leads, sooner or later, to a transformation of the common symbolic environment that gives public meaning and sense of direction to human ( p. 138).

Thus, the media preserve and disseminate these values among members of the society, bringing uniformity (Gerbner, 1969).

Mass production and distribution of messages has taken a new twist in the digital age. With the advancement in technology nowadays, people have turned to use different types of new media that uses the internet, like social media through smartphones (Holtzman & Sharpe 2014). The behavior of users of social networks is consistent with those who consume media through television (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014). In social media, young people spend a long time logged

onto social networks -- sharing photos and befriending even those they have never met in person before (Stefanone et al., 2010). Holtzman and Sharpe (2014) state that new media have a rising influence on our perception of groupings differing from us as we become of age.

Burrell and Anderson (2008) state that apart from users of new media getting information and assistance about other countries, digital media presents pictures of other geographical areas, residences and lifestyles, further promoting aspirations to migrate. Similar findings were noted on the role of the internet in influencing people's interest in planning to migrate and their choice of target country (Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2014). They further posit that, with combined, extensive networks of private contacts through digital media, the internet enhances people's capabilities to make informed decisions on migration (Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2014). Noting Thulin and Vilhelmson (2014)'s positive statement on the internet enhancement capabilities to make informed decisions to migrate, these individuals are still faced with an imbalance between their lived experiences and the expectations in their host country. As a result, they go through a process called acculturation (Redfield et al., 1936).

## **2.8 Acculturation**

The use of acculturation theory started with anthropologists' concepts on indigenous peoples (Redfield et al., 1936). It has been refined from this definition by various scientists in their own disciplines. From the sociologists' point of view, they have defined acculturation as adapting to the dominant culture (Cote, 1996). For example, the "melting pot" (Ngo, 2008, p. 1) or Americanization was modified to assimilation when an influx of World War II immigrants from other nations came to America (Escobar & Vega, 2000).

Acculturation is an extremely complicated experience when the disparity between the home (old) and resident (new) culture is wide-ranging, which develops as acculturation stress (Berry & Kim, 1988). This stress is measured by looking at pre-sojourner and post sojourner

experiences. The more positive an immigrant's attitude is toward acculturation, the less stress they experience (Williams & Berry, 1991). Berry suggests a transactional model of managing cultural shock, in which he reports a relationship between mental wellbeing and adaptation being motivated by a person's interaction in a different society (Berry et al., 1987). This model defines how an individual analyzes harms, threats and challenges, which result in coping with stressful events (Berry et al., 1987).

Evaluation stress, on the other hand, emerges as a result of interaction and the coping skills as strategies used to adapt (Berry et al., 1987). An individual will try to first evaluate a situation to see if it has negative consequences if not addressed, and if it is important (Berry et al., 1987). If the evaluation is relevant, then second steps are taken to address the stress, like seeking counseling (Berry, 1988). However, if it is irrelevant to the individual, it is simply shelved away and not given priority (Berry et al., 1987; Berry, 1988). The interaction experiences are judged as positive (where interaction experiences improve one's life chances) or negative (where interaction experiences could be attributed to difficulties in making change) (Berry, 1988).

Acculturation, according to Berry and Sam (1997), involves a vigorous means of adjustment to pressure and the cultivation of coping strategies in reaction to pressure. Cultural shock gradually involves some trait of acculturation, while acculturation tension signifies the failures stemming from adapting and assimilation of different approaches (Hovey, 2000). For instance, attending an English club to improve language proficiency is recognized as a prospect for development (Hovey, 2000). Zuniga (2002) reports findings that confirm migrants who have a feeling of command over their lives exhibited higher toughness to stress. Cuellar et al. (2004)

also report few acculturation tension-experiences among immigrants with feelings of achievements, fulfillment, and success.

Previous historic research on acculturation, as proposed by Berry and Sam (1997), was purely based on the group. However, recent research emphasizes an individual basis (Escobar & Vega, 2000). As such they define stress as occurring when shortfalls are incurred in the individual while adapting or incorporating a different structure (which may include values, practices and societal responsibilities) (Hovey, 2000). In this case, stress is explained in terms of themes -- namely environmental demands (that will be both social and physical), subjective perception of stress (expectations and experiences) and biological responses (coping mechanisms) (Escobar & Vega, 2000). Taking into consideration the challenges students face in the host nation, students continue to migrate seeking higher education in foreign countries.

## **2.9 Conceptual framework**

Overall, international students experience cultural shock when they move from their places of origin to host countries, like the US. The process of cultural shock occurs following the difficult shift and acclimatization to a different culture and societal beliefs (Berry et al 1987). The cultural shock that the students experience is, therefore, attributed to the acculturation process. Berry (1980) defines this process as a state where migrants coming into new locations are confronted with diverse cultures, trying to learn the unaccustomed environment, while regulating theirs in homogeneity with the homegrown social norms and values in order to blend in.

In the same way, the achievement of a sojourner (student) in a different culture can be thought of in the psychological literature in respect to adjustments. Adjustments come in two aspects: psychological or sociocultural (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Psychological adjustments are related to intellectual well-being of international learners, and social cultural adjustments refer to

behavioral and cognitive aspects related to effective performance (Ward et al., 2004). According to Gudykunst and Kim (1984), immigrants and international students should be made aware and become well conversant with their host culture, and the attitudes of the hosts toward foreigners and other nationals and the degree of culture similarities and differences between the two countries. Zhou et al. (2008) note that, despite difficulties, knowing the culture of the people in the country of destination prior to making the trip can minimize the levels of stress.

Unlike refugees who are forced out of their countries, immigrants and international students hold an ideal positive view of life in the US, believing that life would be more satisfying than in their home countries (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). However, Williams and Berry (1991) record that creating unrealistic expectations can be a source of great disenchantment and stress in the post-migration era if expectations are unfulfilled. A study by Sellers and Neighbors (2008) supports that gaps in the pre-anticipations and post-resettlement realities of the resident country can lead to misery and suffering. Another study by Chou et al. (2011) revealed that migrants who did not anticipate any levels of discrimination prior to their arrival in the host country were more likely to be diagnosed with prolonged symptoms of stress than those who anticipated some discrimination. How does the African migrant handle this imbalance between her/her/their expectations and the reality of things on the ground?

This study employs the psychology of cultural shock developed by Ward et.al (2001) to analyze what happens to international students when they get to the new society. Ward et al.'s (2001) model helps explain how media exposure occurs through both cultivation theory (Gerbner et. al., 1986; Gerbner et. al., 1984) and acculturation (Berry et. al., 1987), which are both intertwined as the African migrants make the decision to move. It further describes the coping



strategies through the process of acculturation (Ward et. al., 2001). Much of the model has factors of politics, social, economic and culture (Ward et. al., 2001).

As the African migrant is still in his/her/their society of origin in Africa, he/she/they is exposed to media and internalizes messages (Gerbner et. al., 1986) that depict better economic, political, cultural and social life in Western countries, compared to the poverty, conflict, political instability in Africa (Braga, 2007; Fischer & Malmberg, 2001). This cultivates the desire to migrate to the West to live the American Dream. This migrant generally has personal characteristics like language fluency (Ward et. al., 2001). In this case, we assume he/she/they is proficient in English and that is a primary factor he/she/they uses to decide his/her/their destination (Magana & Hovey, 2003). He/she/they assumes he/she/they would not have difficulties to integrate because the languages of the two societies are similar (Magana and Hovey, 2003; Nesdale & Mak, 2000). If the languages are very different, the situation brings a lot of stress as he/she/they still desire to migrate (Berry et. al., 1987). The similar the cultures are, the less stressful it is to settle in the new society (Berry et. al., 1987; Nesdale & Mak, 2000).

Upon arrival in the society of settlement (US), the migrant may be faced with an imbalance in his/her/their expectations versus reality and goes through an acculturation process (Berry et. al., 1987). Language is a form of cultural identity (Cote, 1996). He/she/they expects to integrate well because of his/her/their English proficiency, but it turns out that he/she/they faces challenges due to differences in tone, accent, and pronunciations, realizing that both parties are not understanding each other (Magana & Hovey, 2003). This causes him/her/them some stress. How the migrant handles the stress of this language gap depends on his/her/their coping skills (Berry et. al., 1987). His/her/their coping strategies may include joining an English club to improve his/her/their accent, pronunciations, and tone (Magana & Hovey, 2003). This may also

trigger the migrant to look for individuals who speak his/her/their native language (Magana & Hovey, 2003).

In this study, I propose that there is a link between identity and acculturation. It is proposed that the migrant student's identity and well-being in a host country and acculturation are intertwined through the process of cross-cultural transition (Ward et. al., 2001), influenced by mass media (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014). Erikson (1968) defines identity as comprising an individual's mix of past encounters and perceptions, ego proficiencies, societal and self-expectancies. Migrant students are exposed to mass media before moving into the host nation (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014). Once they move and enter the host nation, there is a process of negotiation between their past, present and future experiences – again, through the mass media. This negotiation may cause a trauma or a crisis in some people. The crisis is what is called acculturation, which is the adoption of a dominant culture (Cote, 1996). Acculturation resulting from new experiences may lead migrants to lose sense of themselves, or their identity (Erikson, 1968).

In this paradigm, the mass media influences identity construction (Gerbner, 1969), which is an effort to manage and revise self-presentation (Goffman, 1959). In this case, the migrant student begins to review his/her/their own identity and characteristics (such as values, ideals, goals and behavioral characteristics) while developing and integrating new philosophies. The characteristics of the new situation in which they find themselves include: the length of the cultural contact (how long they have been in the new culture), the magnitude and quality of within and outside societal connections, differences between native and host cultures, degrees of behavioral variation (the gap between past and present) and societal backing (Ward et. al., 2001). All of these occur at an individual level (Ward et al., 2001). At a societal level, examples of

variables that change will include societal, political economic and cultural aspects in both native and host (settlement) societies.

This review of prior literature shows that there is a lack of research on how the media influences migration, especially from Africa. To date, little research has looked at both television and social media on how they affect the migration processes of the migrants [SBAS] to move into and settle in a new environment. On the contrary, most articles have been written about the political and economic conditions as a pull or push factors (Okome, 2002; Lee, 1966; Yankow, 2003). At the time of conducting this research, there is not a study readily and widely available that has focused on both television [news and movies] and social media [Facebook and WhatsApp] as media channels on how they separately influence the whole migration process of SBAS to US.

As a conceptual framework, this study used both cultivation and acculturation theories developed by Gerbner (Gerbner et al., 1984) and (Berry, 1980) respectively. As the African migrant sets foot in the US he/she/they is faced with an imbalance of realities due to the expectations he/she held about life in the US gained through the media he/she/they consumed in the home country. This degree of shock will depend on how much information they acquired about the host nation before migration (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984; Ward et al., 2004). This study focuses on the information they (migrants) access through media (television and social media) in order to adjust to their news environments.

To address the knowledge gap that exists in research on the influence of media on migration decision, I carried out a qualitative research by conducting in-depth interviews with migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. In-depth interviews helped to deliver a rich understanding of the experiences of the Black African migrants as they move and live in the US. In order to

understand the role of media influencing migration decisions and experiences of the migrants prior to leaving their home countries and on arrival in the US, the following research questions have been developed:

### **2.9.1 Research questions**

RQ1: How does television and social media shape expectations of life in the West for Sub-Saharan Black African Students?

RQ2: How does television and social media use influence migrant decision making to move to the West by Sub-Saharan Black African Students (SBAS)?

RQ3: To what extent does television and social media use accelerate integration of Sub-Saharan Black African Students in the West?

## CHAPTER 3. METHODS

### 3.1 Site and participant selection

In my study, I employed phenomenological in-depth interviews. I resolved to conduct in-depth interviews for my study, as this method is “generally viewed as essential for understanding how participants view their worlds” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 154). This study qualified as a phenomenological approach, as the participants shared common experiences like coming from the same area (Sub-Saharan Africa), and they are all black African students at Iowa State University. Phenomenological approaches involve study within a population that shares common experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological in-depth interviews were a good approach for this study, as I was able to mine additional value through getting more meaning from how participants express their experiences emotionally through speech and posture (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Other methods like surveys may not offer this emotional aspect. Interviews also offer the ability to ask follow-up questions or address probing issues that are not well understood by the researcher to elicit “elaborations and clarifications” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 159). Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend using a phenomenological approach, as it gives a researcher a “deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals” (p. 80)

I conducted 12 interviews for the study. Iowa State University was my ideal geographical area of study because it was in my proximity, and I did not need to worry about transport expenses. I selected black African students as the population for this study because 1) they share same race; 2) they come from the regions of sub-Saharan Africa that I wished to study; 3) they share the same level of education and 4) they are all in the US on temporary resident status under the umbrella of student visa permits (meaning they are expected to go back to their original

countries after completion of studies in US). Iowa State University has a diversity of international students. According to Iowa State University (ISU) records in 2018, the University had a total population of about 35,000, with 10.5% of the total enrolled as international students and 2.7% registered as Black or African American students (Iastate.edu.factbook, 2019).

### **3.2 Sampling**

This study used “*purposeful sampling*” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 148). Purposeful sampling is non-probability type of sampling that selects its sample based of the characteristic of the population (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this case, all interviewees came from the Sub-Saharan African region and were students at ISU for at least one year. To identify potential interviewees, I got my first few participants of my sample through networks I had established during prior events organized by International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) at ISU, Athari International Leadership Group, and the African Fellowship Group. I had already established a rapport with the prospective participants who are not close friends during the meetings we held as a group. This strategy fits with Creswell and Poth (2018), who state that “an important step in the process is to find people or places to study and gain access to and establish rapport with participants so that they provide good data” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 148). From the initial solicited participants from student organizations, I engaged the first solicited participants from the clubs for further referral of subsequent participants for interviews, a process termed as “*snowballing or chain sampling*” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 122). This is a non-probability sampling method where a researcher first recruits his participants from his/her/their acquaintances, and thereafter, the participants then refer other subjects they know to the researcher (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). This was more convenient as the recommended subjects referred already had the characteristics needed. This is more efficient than the researcher just going into the field to search for the subjects (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). They further state

that it is a very well-suited method of sampling where the topic is a sensitive one (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

I sought IRB approval for this study. After receiving IRB approval on January 6, 2020, I contacted my first prospective participants on January 12, 2020 to apprise them of the study goals and that their involvement or participation was absolutely voluntary (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A total of 24 emails were sent to prospective respondents to participate in the study. Twenty-four emails were sent out to prospective subjects, of which 12 responded. All potential interviewees in the snowball sample were contacted three times to participate. I followed up by email the non-respondents on January 31, 2020, and sent a final follow-up email on February 2, 2020. In total, two female subjects and 10 male subjects participated in the study. The target was to at least interview a minimum of 10-12 participants until a saturation point was reached. Saturation point is attained when a researcher gets no further new information from respondents (Guest et al., 2006).

Interviews were conducted with the participants, who in this study are international SBAS students, between January 15 to February 8, 2020. I disclosed to the subjects that they were free to stop participating in the study at any time and for any reason. My initial, official contact with the participants asking them to participate in the study was through emails. The content of the email included a request for the participant to voluntarily take part in the study, the objective of the research and “an informed consent for participants, informed of study procedures and their rights” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 152; Guest, 2006). Participants were duly informed why they had been invited to participate in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were also informed that the interview would be recorded. I observed the privacy of my participants by ensuring that the participants are not identifiable through their countries of origin being protected

to avoid any potential linkages to the participants. The participants were only asked the African regions (West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, or Southern Africa) they come from instead of the countries. This was followed to break any linkages that might lead to the identification of the subject in this study. In some cases, there could be only one student originating from a particular Sub-Saharan Africa nation enrolled at ISU, which would easily reveal participant's identification. The countries that fall into the four Sub-Saharan African regions have been listed and are attached in Appendix C of this document.

### **3.3 Data collection**

Data were collected from semi-structured interview questions, which were mainly open-ended (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The interview questions are attached in Appendix B. Open-ended questions are questions that cannot be answered by “yes” or “no,” but require respondent to explain; whereas closed questions require a respondent to answer, “yes” or “no,” (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Open-ended questions allow encourage respondents to add more information, including what they feel how they understand the subject and their attitudes towards it (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Short, open-ended questions bring out the significant insight of the matter (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). I constructed around 20 open-ended interview questions. On January 11, 2020, I conducted pilot interviews by interviewing a friend, who was not in the study's intended population. Pilot interviews help researchers to sharpen their skills at interviewing, and also give them a chance to redesign the interview questions that are not clear to participants (Janesick, 2016).

During the interviews I endeavored to avoid all leading questions. These are questions that encourage a desired or expected response by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I was cautious to only ask questions that were relevant to my study, being guided by the research questions. The questions inquired about the gap between their expectations and lived experiences



in the US and about the types of foreign media the participants accessed whilst in their home countries that depicted life in the US. All participants were asked the same type of questions, but where I was not clear, I posed probing questions to get clarity. I started the interview by ensuring that every participant had reviewed and signed an informed consent form. I then informed the participants that I was going to audio record the interview, to which all of them consented. I re-emphasized that their identification was not required in the study. I then engaged them into the interviews by first asking them simple demographic questions in order to build a rapport with them [participants]. During the interviews I was very attentive and took some notes where it was necessary. The average length of the interviews was 27.3 minutes per participant. Interviews were discontinued when I noticed that I had reached a saturation point -- a stage reached where no new information is no longer given by participants (Guest et. al, 2006). I discontinued the interviews when I noticed that I was getting similar responses from the subsequent respondents I interviewed.

After every single interview, I transcribed the interviews. (Note: I contacted and followed up with one subject through a phone call to get a clarification on a place name that was not clear in the interview. All transcribed interviews in digital files were securely stored in ISU's CyBox, an electronic cloud storage platform for official use. This system is password controlled and adheres to ISU's IRB policies for storing data. Only myself and my major professor had access to these files.

### **3.4 Analyzing data**

In analyzing the data, I developed categories and themes to analyze the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). A *code* as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute to a portion of data" (Saldana, 2013, p. 3). He emphasizes that coding is not just labeling, but is an initial step forward taken toward more

thorough and evocative analysis and interpretation for a report (Saldana, 2013). *Categories* are described as groups of those codes representing some segment of the data that grow into themes (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). On the other hand, a *theme*, generated from codes or categories, is a declarative phrase or sentence explaining a procedure, a relationship, or an insight which takes the analysis to an intense and more integrative degree to understand the experience of the participant (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). I generated themes from the codes and categories from significant statements and phrases. I identified the significant statements using the research questions as a guide (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Carefully, I went through the interview transcriptions and underlined and highlighted all major statements, notable sentences or quotations that offered an insight of how the respondents had undergone the event or phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thereafter, I created bunches (clusters) of meaning from the noteworthy statements into topics (themes) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The significant statements identified, and themes generated were used to describe the experiences of the participants and the background that influenced precisely how the respondents faced the event. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The themes covered all areas as relating to the participants' experiences, which included political, economic, social and cultural issues. This study included a variety of validity and reliability checks.

This study focused on migrant students from the Sub-Saharan Africa region who are registered at Iowa State University, as described below.

### **3.5 Demographics of the respondents**

The study draws upon the experiences of SBAS coming from the Sub-Saharan Africa region. The Sub-Saharan Africa is divided in four regions (West Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, and Central Africa). In this study, all the regions in the Sub-Saharan Africa are represented except Central Africa, which is home for French-speaking Africans. On average,

study participants were 29 years old ( $SD = 3.0675$ ). In terms of educational level, more than half of participants (58.3%) had bachelor's degrees, and roughly four-in-10 (41.7%) had master's degrees before arriving in the US. Of the respondents who were interviewed, 11 of the subjects were enrolled in a doctorate level programs at Iowa State University as per the table below

Table 2. Demographics of the respondents

| Participant number | Gender | Place of Origin in Africa | Current Level of Study | ISU College                   | Prior Highest Level of Education | Number of Years in the US |
|--------------------|--------|---------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1                  | Male   | West Africa               | PhD                    | Engineering                   | Bachelors                        | 1.5                       |
| 2                  | Male   | West Africa               | PhD                    | Engineering                   | Bachelors                        | 1.5                       |
| 3                  | Male   | East Africa               | PhD                    | Agriculture and Life Sciences | Bachelors                        | 4.5                       |
| 4                  | Male   | West Africa               | PhD                    | Engineering                   | Bachelors                        | 1.5                       |
| 5                  | Male   | Southern Africa           | PhD                    | Agriculture and Life Sciences | Bachelors                        | 1.5                       |
| 6                  | Male   | West Africa               | PhD                    | Agriculture and Life Sciences | Masters                          | 3.5                       |
| 7                  | Male   | East Africa               | PhD                    | Engineering                   | Masters                          | 1.5                       |
| 8                  | Male   | Southern Africa           | PhD                    | Agriculture and Life Sciences | Masters                          | 2.5                       |
| 9                  | Female | East Africa               | PhD                    | Agriculture and Life Sciences | Masters                          | 4.5                       |
| 10                 | Male   | East Africa               | PhD                    | Veterinary Medicine           | Masters                          | 4.5                       |
| 11                 | Female | East Africa               | PhD                    | Engineering                   | Bachelors                        | 1.5                       |
| 12                 | Male   | East Africa               | Masters                | Veterinary Medicine           | Bachelors                        | 2.5                       |

The majority of the students were enrolled in doctorate programs. The researcher also recruited only two females. The researcher believes that these facts did not affect the results of the study. Being enrolled in a doctorate program was a silent feature. However, it enhanced their utilization of digital platforms. In the views of the researcher, even if equal number of females and male participants were to be recruited, the results would not have changed because they are going through these experiences in the US first as black Africans. Most survey subjects were enrolled in degree program in STEM disciplines, and had been in the United States for an average of two and half years.

## CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

The aim of this study was to find out the influence of media on the expectations and experiences of life in US, while also examining the effects that media have on their decision making to come study in the US. This study's findings depict that television was the major source of media used to formulate the opinions about American lifestyles before migrating to the US. After exposure to pictures of the US that show a promising life, individuals are faced with a big decision to make whether to migrate or remain in their home countries. This study's findings show that these decisions are derived more from using social media platforms than television. In experiencing disparities between expectations and realities in the US, the students stated that social media had also helped them to more easily integrate in the US.

Every one of respondents had indicated that they had accessed some media (social media and television) through movies (broadcast on television) or televised cable news networks (like CNN), which gave them a rough idea of how life in the Western world is. Primary modes of social media used by the migrants included Facebook and WhatsApp. Some had learned about life in the US from interpersonal contacts -- established friends, alumni from American schools and family in the US -- who informed them about life in the US using social media. Very few indicated getting information directly from the universities, and for those that did, the information was very limited -- mainly helping them on the programs available and admission requirements (like taking admissions tests such as the GRE or TOEFL).

Television, in particular, had especially inspired some of the respondents to want to come study in the US. One respondent, for instance, cited the sophisticated technology in "24," a series that awed his imagination. After watching the show, the respondent said they wanted to come and be associated with similar high technology in the US. In spite of all the advanced technology

they wanted to come and experience, some respondents also cited that the crimes depicted in the movies made them feel that one had to always look over their shoulders to stay alive in the US. While television had actively shaped their images of America, students also experienced some surprises upon arrival. Thanks to media images, migrants also expected that it was easy to associate and make friendship with Americans. However, they were in disbelief that their social life here in the US was far from the African one where you know all your neighbors and they are your watchdog. Furthermore, some blamed the media for falsifying that jobs were plentiful, suggesting that money was easy to come by in the US. Being far away from family and friends in Africa, social media -- especially Facebook and WhatsApp -- were employed to maintain relationships. Television was largely viewed as a distractor to easy integration into the US society. One of the issues raised about television was media misrepresentation of facts about migrants in the US, which made some US citizens resent the presence of migrants in the US.

#### **4.1 Media exposure and perceived western lifestyles**

One of the purposes of this research was to find out how the media shapes the expectations of life in West. What perceptions do they (Sub-Saharan Black African Students) hold about life in the United States? And how does the media shape those images? For most respondents, media use initially helped them to develop their images of how life would be in the US. Broadly speaking, all respondents indicated accessing some content about the US from the media outlets they used.

Through the media, subjects contrasted their realistic state of life in Africa against their imagined state of life in the US. As viewers from the Sub-Saharan Africa region also consume media about Africa, which is most of the times negative compared to the Western media, it enhances the belief they already have that the West is a better place. For instance, one subject

reported watching the news and “thinking – yes, the US must be a great place and life there must be better compared to what I was used to... in my country.”

As another subject states:

It kind of, in a way, showed me what to expect in the country, the way how violence is, then I see that in movies, then sometimes racism...like I said all consciously it tells you the kind of things you might see like McDonald's -- the way they eat. So, I think the typical lifestyle kind of put it in my consciousness.

Another subject agreed:

Before I came to the US, I definitely thought that life in the US was you know...[I] had a rosy picture of what life in the US is – a very developed country, everything very developed and high-tech.

At the same time, subjects said that Western media influenced the locally-produced content they experienced. As an interviewee shared:

I used, of course, television. I think that for me, generally, I consumed content according to the media stations... these media stations were Westernizing their content...For example, if you listen to a radio station when it plays music from the Western world versus local music...

Another interview subject concurred:

Most things and activities on the internet are driven by the Western world, say the US, England, and other world powers. On social media we tend to see a lot of things pertaining to the West...Even in the movie industry you tend to watch the Western type of movies. You see them in African movies. Even on Facebook, WhatsApp and everything. If you see, it's like a global community where you get exposed on how you to do things in the US.

As another interviewee shared:

I would say everything is being Westernized. People try to copy culture and copy everything that happens here in the US -- and that's what we saw, we see every day from the media. On Facebook we see people portraying this kind of life, this kind of -- I would say culture. Everything is about what happens in the Western countries.

#### **4.2 Televised images as source of information**

Television, according to interviewees, played a central force in shaping media images of the West. In this study, similar sentiments were shared by most of the respondents, who indicated

that they were inspired by the positive things they watched on television (and televised movies) about the United States. American media personalities – like Oprah Winfrey and Trevor Noah – were noted as particular influences. As another subject noted:

I didn't know much about life in the US, but of course...watching TV gave me a picture of how life is in the US...But of course, when I came here, some of the things that happen in movies [broadcast on local television] are not there.

Entertainment programming – particularly movies broadcast on television -- provided another way to relate to lifestyles in the United States. As one interviewee said:

I saw better life [in America] in the movies, and it really looked [like a] better life. Though movies are made to be movies, so there were differences from reality. But obviously it made it look like, 'Oh! This is the best place to be. There is no place other than this!' So, we kind of want to 'Oh! I wanna go see this place. This is a very big building, I wanna go to New York and see the World Trade Center.'

Another subject reported that sitcoms helped learn more about American culture.

I used to watch Steve Harvey [television shows]...They had some influence on me to come to the US....Well, if I was with Steve Harvey's program, there are a lot of questions they ask. Questions about the American culture, questions about their food, questions about daily communication over here. Those are some of the things I also learnt.

Televised images of American technology were a theme repeated by other interviewees. For instance, one participant saw the advanced technology of the West, which was not available in his country, in the "X-Men" movie franchise broadcast on local television. One respondent, who has loved high technology from childhood, shared the same views of the existence of advanced technology that he perceived from the media:

The media reports the greatness of the US -- its sophistication, high-tech and all that -- and to a great extent, some of those things are right. When you come here you find scientists who are making like...high-end technologies who are innovating things, who are solving world problems.

For aspiring students, media images were especially impactful in framing how they thought about the educational system in the United States. Media content – especially films like



“Still in Harvard” or television programs like “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air” -- also helped prepare SBAS students. “Although it was based on high school, you try to extrapolate from those things,” one subject said. Another recalled that:

I remember watching the [televised movie] “Gifted Hands” by Ben Carson. So that movie, first of all, there is a novel of the movie. I read the novel and here I was watching the movie by Ben Carson. ...the scenes in that movie is the scene of a young ... primary school...or something like that where this child, Ben Carson’s position was... like a black...student in class and so he had a hard time like everyone else kind of... lot of discrimination and all.

These media products were integral in making the transition to an American college campus. As one interviewee stated, “college movies played a very key role in the way I envy America.” He expanded on this point, stating that:

You see the college movies tend to show the way they interact with each faculty, the way they interact among each other. The activities they actually do here are totally different from what we do in Africa. In Africa, I mean you can’t have very good relationship with your faculty.

Another interview subject similarly shared that:

It was exciting to see how the facilities, diversity of the university, the infrastructure was also exciting. It looks like also the people were friendly. And also, the professors and instructors were friendly.

#### **4.2.1 Mediated lifestyles versus reality**

In several other cases, however, reality did not match the images portrayed of the country they had seen on television. Roughly eight in 10 respondents said that they were surprised to see some evidence of negative scenarios or underdeveloped areas in the US upon their arrival. Several accused the media of creating false hopes for the Sub-Saharan students. “When you come to the US,” one interviewee said, “you think you will be meeting celebrities by the roadside, but you hardly see them. The media made me believe Snoop Dog would be my neighbor.” Interviewees were particularly shocked to find poverty in America. Several subjects

shared views that the media created a false perspective that jobs were easy to obtain in America.

For instance, one interviewee said:

It [the media] reported [that] the US looks like the Garden of Eden, where you could come and... things are so easy and people almost like pick money from the trees. But that's not true actually. You have to work to survive.

Migrant experiences, as reported in the study's interviews, have often been to the contrary; in the US you have to work harder to earn some income as jobs were not as easy to come by. A respondent from East Africa observed this:

I thought it's a place where you easily get a job and the jobs are highly paying. So generally I thought life in the US was good, and of course, like from the movies we watch, we watch on the news, I was thinking yes the US must be a great place and life there must be better compared to what I was used to.

Interviewees said had never expected to see economic inequality because the media had presented to them a picture that, as one interviewee said, "all America was like New York City." As another interviewee commented, "I feel what we see in the media is not always what it is here because we have people who are homeless even here in the US. When I landed in [name of airport retracted], I said 'Are we in America?'" Another subject made similar statements that:

[The] media cannot show you this [poverty]. They won't tell you that this is a place... Like yesterday I was checking, there are still places in America they don't have these basic amenities that are common in cities. But then you won't know. The media will not capture those things. They only capture the big cities.

Movies, televised widely in Africa, also often led to disconnects between portrayals of life in the United States and reality. As one interviewee said:

I think that the media really influenced so much of my understanding, my perception of what the US is, like Hollywood movies for example, and these movies of course are acted in different parts of the US and so... looking at the buildings in New York... and stuff like that.

### 4.3 News as formal source of information about the yonder world

Apart from televised movies, people in the Sub-Saharan Africa access news channels to get formal communication about life in the United States. They may access their local or international news channels for this purpose. In this study, respondents indicated that content from news channels also shaped their views about life in the US. Some respondents cited watching political news on CNN, FOX, BBC and some Press TV for instance. Political news, especially debates and elections, shaped how migrants perceived democratic life in the US. The news could be filtered through particular points of view, interview subjects noted.

You watch something on CNN, it may be different when you watch it on FOX news. So, I think in the US in that regard is ... I have been made to understand that media report opinions, might report facts, but then add opinion to it. Actually, makes you perceive the facts in a different light.

Just like subjects reported exaggerations of American life in entertainment media, consumers of news noticed a different type and level of exaggeration. One interviewee reported that:

Oh yeah, here [in the United States] it [news] is exaggerated most of the time. And information they repeat multiple times, it's frustrating you know and little bit exaggerated. Even in my country I know it's a little bit exaggerated. They exaggerate, but not to the extent here.

Another respondent from West Africa noted a discrepancy between the US local and international news reporting, stating that:

Every day on the local channels, it's always about crime, crime, somebody killing, somebody stealing, theft, burglary, people doing things that are we don't hear of everyday in the other parts of the world.

Other respondents questioned the context of local news in the United States. One respondent from East Africa, who is a heavy consumer of news, said:

With news, you see whatever is happening here [in the United States] and probably see the things people complain about here, and you try to compare with what you have back home, and you wonder why people are complaining. Because even sometimes when you

compare some of the worst situations here, they are much better than what would be back home.

In addition to television, respondents also indicated using social media to find out about American life on a smaller scale. Social media is an interactive platform where readers can also be authors of informal news. One of the subjects explained how social media helped him blend into new society:

There are a lot of activities which are planned through social media here. So, if you are part of a group on social media, you get more involved in social activities around here. So that I would consider it is helping integrate.

#### **4.4 Social media as source of information about the yonder world**

As previously indicated, respondents used social media on a very small scale to learn about the American life. Interviewees said they used social media more frequently prior to making the trip to the US. Many credited social media with expanding their knowledge about the US. One respondent said that the use of social media helped him form a positive image about the US:

It's [social media] like a global community where you get exposed on how you to do things in the US. I mean those are part of the things that really, really got me excited on the opportunities of coming to study in the US. You see that type of life, then you are like, I want that type of life for myself.

On social media, Facebook was a central source of information about American life. One respondent indicated that she learnt a lot about life in the US from accessing Facebook through her roommate in college. "At my start of college [years], there was introduction of Facebook," she said. "And now you know, [it] connected friends from around the world -- so you could see and other countries and the US." To learn about American life, one interviewee said she would access the accounts of motivational speakers in the US through social media, who encouraged her to study in the US. One subject indicated using social media to learn about American life:

...there is always a crisis when you change countries. This social media helped me a lot because I learnt a lot about the US. For example, before I move to Ames, I learnt about

Ames from YouTube, from social media and I just tried to find some kind of groups on Facebook and try to reach out to people.

Just like television, misrepresentation of American life is also evident on social media.

As one study subject complained, “Everything I see on [social] media about the US is perfect – it’s a perfect situation or perfect scenario, which is not true in real life.” She further expressed her discontentment:

In my opinion, social media is very good and informative, but sometimes people abuse social media. So, I think that the information that can be portrayed in social media can be misleading because it portrays a kind of perfect life, which is not a reality of how things are. It may give some kind of negative pressure to some people that may want to have certain kind of life [in the United States], which is not a true reflection of what life is.

Another subject went further to employ social media users that they should show the real life they experience in the US:

Everyone has to play their part, in like showing the actual life [in the United States], not just trying to portray a different life, but showing actual life -- who you are, where you are, the reality of what you want to tell to the people. Don’t show us that life is simple, but that you have to work. If you are from the countryside, show the beauty of the countryside, you know. Beauty doesn’t only lie in tall buildings; it also lies in nature.

Having acquired these images of life in the US from television and social media, the respondents reacted to the messages to decide to move to the US.

## **4.5 Media influence on migration decision**

### **4.5.1 Televised images and decision making**

As people grow into adolescence then adulthood, their dreams keep shifting according to what they see. They (the dreamers) weigh their current state against their desired destiny. Some of the things they desire might not be readily available within their home environment or country but may be available in other countries or on various continents. At this point, young people must make a critical decision: stay where there is limited opportunity or go to where dreams can be realized. Education is one primary driver in seeking to leave home. As one respondent said,

“We don’t have like PhD level in my country. That’s why I chose to do my education in US.”

Another interviewee concurred that “the standard of education here is much more is much better than we have back in Africa.” To seek these educational opportunities, how do students acquire information to make that crucial decision to leave home? SABS exposure to information about US lifestyles can be vast. Social media can be helpful in this regard.

#### **4.5.2 Social media influence on migration decision**

In this study, respondents relied more heavily upon using digital platforms, mainly social media, to make decisions to go study in the US rather than information gathered from television.

One subject explained the discomfort people feel when they change environments. The interviewee then praised how social media helped him settle down:

There is always a crisis when you change countries. Social media helped me a lot. Because I learnt a lot about the US. For example, before I moved to Ames, I learnt about Ames -- from YouTube, from social media -- and I just tried to find some kind of groups on Facebook and try to reach out to people. I go to social media to learn on how to handle things.

Some students went directly to the Facebook accounts for individual universities. Others relied upon additional social media platforms to prepare for the journey. “At that time, I used to watch YouTube every day,” one interviewee said. “So, something that was related to the US caught my attention because I was planning to come over here.”

Others used social media to build relationships with other students who could lend advice. One respondent indicated YouTube helped him access more information about student experiences in the US:

...You go on YouTube, there is lot of students in the US talking about their experiences in the US, talking about the faculty -- that sometimes you might feel that you might feel alone.

In a similar light, another interviewee reported using a WhatsApp chat group to “just discuss about schools in the United States and [for] those who are already here try to give

feedback to us, try to encourage us on what to do.” Some subjects conversed with friends who were in the US at college through social media, who encouraged them to proceed with applying to study here. Another respondent indicated getting in touch with students via a website called The Graduate Café, designed for students who were already admitted in US colleges. The interviewee explained that, “You go to the website, and you are like ‘Hey guys, I have been accepted to such and such a school.’” From here, the website participants exchanged information on different academic programs. From these exchanges, at least one-quarter of the subjects indicated that they learned via social media that they could enroll straight into a doctorate program without first obtaining a masters’ degree qualification, for instance. Digital platforms were also useful in acquiring information about financial aid packages and academic reputations.

As one subject noted:

I went online to actually look at schools in the US. I specifically chose Iowa University because going online I saw a lot of exciting things about Iowa. I saw the fact that they had a good ranking on the US News rankings.

Another student evaluated reputations online before making a decision, stating that, “I went to US News, which they call US news.com, where you could check the ranking, some of the information about the schools in the US, so I used that website a lot.” In addition to college websites, this study’s findings show that one-third of the interview respondents used emails to get information and clarifications from the faculty members in the US colleges.

I got information from colleagues who were students here because I wanted to enter into the academia, so, I thought it wise to ask them, ‘How do you enter? Do I need any better qualifications to get access into the academia over here?’ And what I was doing -- I wrote emails to a lot of faculty just to find out about the program and make sure that I had the prerequisite necessary skills to be admitted into a program here.

Email was also useful for another interview subject:

Actually, they told me through email about all kinds of information I should expect; the tests I have to take, like health inspection and immunization. May be some information

about the city or the universities, and immigration requirements.... I also tried to learn on the website of the university the life of the city, the university... all kinds of information from the website of the university.

Considering the number of subjects who indicated that television [movies and news] helped them build an impression of the US, this study's findings show that most of them used social media rather than television to make decisions to study in the US. As one interviewee illustrated:

Everything which is shown on the media, in the movies, the US looks beautiful. And who doesn't want to go see a beautiful country and live a good life?... I would say generally that's what affects people's decisions. In my case I wanted to come and see a country that is better than mine, I wanted education from a developed nation which is far much better from where I come from.

Other than using social media or television, additional findings of the study indicated that respondents often engaged in other means of cementing their decision to go study in the US. Some respondents took another extra step to physically discuss with friends in order to make that last decision to move:

I learnt about life in the US by talking with my friends who were already here. They told me what it feels like to be in the US. Besides the challenges of weather differences -- extreme cold, extreme hot...I felt it's something I could handle. I got myself prepared whatever I face, I am going to deal with it. So, my mind was made up before I came.

Major decisions are not made as a one-off analysis. Other interventions were used to make this difficult decision:

We have had series of events...that tells us the expectations and how life is in the US to international students. And most times what we do is if those who are already in the United States come visiting, they usually come and have a talk with those preparing to go. They would tell us what to expect and just make us have a feel of what life is like there.

This respondent got support from her mentors to go study in the US:

One of the reasons why I came to study in the US is because, I had had good reports from my previous mentors on the experience and quality learning that they had received from the United States. So, they encouraged me to look for opportunities and when it presented



itself, then I applied, and I was lucky that I was pick and that provided the opportunity to come here.

A high percentage of the decisions made to move to the US by this study's subjects were based upon social media interactions or interpersonal connections. Having made the decision to move to the US using media does not guarantee successful settlement in a new environment, however. It then requires accessing more information about the host society one is settling in.

#### **4.6 Media as a companion to migrant integration in a new society**

Of the interviewee sample, roughly 85% of the participants indicated that media had helped them to integrate well in the US. Social media provides a platform for senders and receivers of a message to connect. Coming from Africa into a new society, the SBAS lack friendship. As one subject said, "Leaving your family, your homes, your friends...it's like you are dumping yourself in the middle of the ocean and trying to see how you can start a new life there." For many, media use acts as a bonding influence. As one interviewee said:

The other positive thing about the media is very helpful in the US to integrate into the system or learn new things even when it comes to your academics because you can find your interests groups, you can worship together, work together.

Social media, according to interviewees, helped in blending in the America culture. As another interviewee shares:

I get a lot of information from Facebook and YouTube. So, it helped me a lot. So, I met a lot of people from different countries -- from Africa as well -- met people with the same interests as me, thinking as me. I learnt about the culture as well here because everything is digitalized here...

As another subject noted:

People do also communicate via social media...a lot of activities are planned through social media here. So, if you are part of a group on social media, you get more involved in social activities around.. it is helping integrate.

Social media, in fact, can help facilitate integration across a variety of activities:

It [social media use] has been very helpful, especially the Facebook. You can sell, you

can buy, meet people, new people on Facebook. For example, ... I joined a small group of about 15-20 people... it was difficult for me to learn their names, so I used the Facebook.

Another respondent used social media to find new friends:

I have made friends who do not have the same background as me. Some from this country, some from different countries to help me integrate. It's totally different life outside. It's not what I was taught when young. So, when I learn their culture, whenever, its different culture, I can now integrate. I can get into the system.

In other cases, social media helped reinforce that the experiences of SBAS were shared and not unusual. As one interviewee said, "People are friendly, but still you feel you left all your friends in Africa, and here you are alone. So [I] just tend to listen to people's experiences on YouTube."

#### **4.6.1 Social media as a tour guide**

In a new environment where SBAS know very limited number of people, social media emerges as a helpful source. YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp were greatly used in the host nation to integrate into the new US society. Being many thousands of miles away from home, Sub Saharan African International students try to keep in touch with their families and friends in and outside of the country with aim to calm down anxiety and help settle down in the US. One respondent described the feeling of being away from family and friends, "Leaving your family, your homes, your friends...it's like you are dumping yourself in the middle of the ocean and trying to see how you can start a new life there."

Nearly all respondents indicated that they were able to keep in touch with their families back using social media. (Only one responded indicated that he rarely uses social media to contact his family because the network is not available at his home. Instead, he uses the ordinary phone). Nearly all interviewees reported using WhatsApp to connect with people. WhatsApp is popular in Africa, as it is considered fairly priced because it uses the internet for its operation. It

allows you to make both audio and video calls with element of conference calls. No charges are recovered apart from making sure you have internet access.

Technology also helped ease other language-driven interactions. One participant stated, for instance, that to navigate within the cities of the US was complex because they were bigger than the cities back in Africa. So social media turned out to be a very helpful tool to get around the city and to arrive at their desired destinations on time. They could simply post a request on their social media group chats (like Facebook) and someone would offer to drive them there. Another respondent, for instance, learned through social media that she could use an app to order coffee at places like Starbucks. Another East African respondent said he frequently watched YouTube in order to learn how to date women in the US. To improve his English proficiency, one subject said he used Western media in a special way to help him understand Americans well and let them understand him:

...when it comes to communication between foreigners and... Americans wherever you are they will be that difference in terms of speaking so most times, the way they struggle to understand us sometimes, is the way we struggle to understand them too. It [is] so because we don't have the same accent... What I did is that I watched some movies to see if I could get to hear what they are saying and try to pick the words, put them together.

The SBAS also flourished in their academic pursuits by using social media, where they formed groups with assist each other. The SBAS indicated that the US education system was different, and they needed to get acquainted to it. One subject from East Africa shared that social media helped in this regard:

...The other positive thing about the [social] media is very helpful in the US to integrate into the system or learn new things even when it comes to your academics because you can find your interests groups

Similarly, another subject indicated using WhatsApp for academic purposes:

There is a [WhatsApp] group, we call it [name withheld for privacy], of which I happen to be the leaders now. But then I joined as a new member. It's just a WhatsApp group that we created for students who want to come and study in the United States. So, we were having classes in the evenings to prepare for GRE and TOEFL for one hour every day... so we share [on WhatsApp] some applications, teach each other some school information. Then we just discuss about schools in the United States.

This respondent also indicated getting in touch with the university faculty to understand their expectations through LinkedIn. He added this:

LinkedIn was where I just got in under my profile. I did random search on any school I am applying to ... so I could communicate with people like students, faculties, too...I had to email the program coordinators, email some faculties, understand and ask questions about the school and what their expectations are... So, I already had a feel of what it is and because of the connection I had with them. I always kept in touch [via social media] with my progress.

The SBAS were not only exposed to social media which they utilized to familiarize themselves with what the new environment offered; television was also at their disposal but it was largely avoided as they [SBAS] felt it was more of a hindrance to integration, as it provided wrong information about Africans, which made Americans look down upon them.

#### **4.6.2 Television as a tour guide**

In this study, some interviewees reported that television often fueled misrepresentation of migrants in the media, making it more difficult for them to integrate into American life.

One subject noted this about the television channels in the US, stating that "So, I don't think they portray us the way it really is because the reality is Africa is ... Africa to a large extent is very peaceful." Another subject shared related views that he felt that Americans think SBAS move to the US because they think Africa is inhabitable. Others were concerned more about media shortfalls on educating the citizens of the United States about Africa. One subject said that Western media has not done much to educate citizens in the US on the status of Africa as a continent or about its citizens:

But in the US here their basic subscription only covers what is happening in the US may

be some place in the Middle East... but not what is happening in Africa. That explains why an average American does not know anything about what is happening in other parts of America too, because they are not exposed to what is happening in other parts of the world. Their TV is good, but their channels are not good enough.

According to this interviewee, Americans often look down upon people from Africa, which – in turn -- frustrates migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, making it harder for them to integrate into American civilization. According to interviews, the media use may play a role in these preconceptions that US citizens have about migrants. This makes it difficult for migrants to integrate. A respondent from East Africa shared that these views:

It [the media] does not really go into understanding or may be explaining the real issues, that are happening causing the issues the people are having today. So, if you watch that kind of news, or if you follow the kind of narrative that is formulated by the Trump's groups, you may have an idea that migrants are a problem in this country.

This negative aspect affected most of the students interviewed in terms of their abilities to integrate in the American society. This creates a challenging sphere between migrants and citizens in the host nation, making it difficult to blend in the American society, interviewees said. For instance, one participant from West Africa cited a case where an America student quizzed him if where he come from there is a "jungle."

I feel the idea they have about life in Africa is different from what it really is in reality. I believe they feel... Most times they ask you questions that make you think you are not coming from a place where...The assumption about the place is...they make it sound like it's a place that is not kind of habitable and is not comfortable for you to live in. Some of them ask me in the US that... is there a jungle where you live?

Similar views were shared by another subject on how migrants are portrayed in the media which affected their rate of integration in the US society:

Most of the migrants, whatever is portrayed about them is most of the times negative. It's like they are portrayed in crime, doing bad things, it's very rare to see Africans or migrants to being talked about in the positive aspect. Not all interview subjects agreed with this idea, though.

One respondent related that television was, in fact, a good source of information for what was happening around his environment and the US as a whole. It made him knowledgeable about issues to talk about when he met with his friends that helped with integration. He noted:

It does help in the sense that, see, like you follow things on the news [television news]. Those topics are what people discuss. Sometimes you don't feel left out regards to certain issues because through the media you know what is going on. So, when people talk about something, you are not like an outsider... So, from a social standpoint, that helps one to get involved...and help to integrate.

On the whole, however, subjects praised the role of media, broadly speaking, to helping them integrate into American life. As one interviewee noted:

I think my expectations have been met to be honest because of the media. Being in small town Ames, I feel like, because of the media I knew what to expect in a small town like Ames. And its media that have portrayed small towns to be generally quiet as people are generally minding their own businesses...

Another interviewee concurred stating:

...Sometimes you don't feel left out regards to certain issues because through the media you know what is going on...you are not like an outsider in terms of like what people are discussing... So, from a social standpoint of view, that helps one to get involved... I mean just being social that's what people talk about... and to help integrate.

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

Historically, people all over the world have traveled from one nation to another to find a better life economically (Yankow, 2003). Examining this idea in the context of African migration, this study examined the influence of television and social media on 1) how and to what degree SBAS students formed opinions about lifestyles in America, 2) how and to what degree the media impacted their decision making to move to the US and 3) how and to what degree the media accelerated their integration into American society. This thesis particularly focused upon two media platforms: television (mainly televised movies and news) and social media (mainly Facebook and WhatsApp).

Through media use, SBAS students formed images that America was a beautiful place that offered a better life and better education. Most of the respondents in this study started to internalize televised images at a tender age – particularly media content illustrating America as the most powerful nation on earth (Gray, 2014). Portes and Rumbaut (1990) had parallel findings that -- unlike refugees who are compelled to leave their countries -- immigrants and international students hold an ideal, positive image of life in the US. The findings in the study depicted that majority of the respondents accessed content about American lifestyles well before the decision of migrating to the US was reached. The findings show that respondents used television more than social media to form these initial images. This finding aligns with the works of Gerbner (1984) on Cultivation Theory, which states that heavy viewers of television tend to believe the content they consume as reality. The study's findings also show that respondents were more inclined to view entertainment programming (especially televised movies) about the United States rather than news. The characteristics of the movies were largely fictional, illustrating exaggerated lifestyles of the US. This finding aligns with Stanley et al. (2003), who for instance,

contended that consistent exposure to television and the absence of direct encounters in a variety of issues generate an exotic world that becomes intensively authentic to the audience. This exaggerated television content is likely to be believed as reality by viewers (Gerbner, 1984).

This study also finds that social media was actively used to base decisions on whether or not to move to the US. Social media offers an interactive platform for respondents to clarify and confirm issues before they move. Television, on the other hand, is characterized by one-way communication and lacks instant feedback. This is knotted to social learning theory, which stresses the significance of watching and developing the activities, opinions and emotive responses of other people (Bandura & Walters, 1977). From this study, it emerged that SBAS turned to social media to mitigate the costs and risks involved with migrating to the yonder world they had never visited. Interviewees emphasized the interactive nature (where sender and receivers exchange messages) of social media (Jensen, 1998). Here, they could cross check some crucial matters of doubt before setting off on the long journey. Television broadly furnished the SBAS with images of the host nation, but lacked the interactive traits, as it does not provide a path back from receiver to the sender of the message to clarify issues (Jensen, 1998).

This study's findings show that social media helped SBAS to settle in the US. On the other hand, television was significantly viewed as an obstacle to the rate of integration into the American society. Television, in some cases, misrepresented the migrants. According to interviewees, this often led to Americans looking down on the SBAS. The study unearthed that, despite the SBAS wanting to integrate into the host society, they displayed strong desires to hold on to their original identities. Erikson (1968) defines identity as comprising an individual's mix of past encounters and perceptions, ego proficiencies, societal and self-expectancies. Once the SBAS arrive into the new environment, their original cultures and host cultures clash, which may



cause some crisis or shock in some people (Erikson, 1968) The crisis is what is called acculturation, which may include adoption of a dominant culture (Cote, 1996). Acculturation resulting from new experiences may lead migrants to lose sense of themselves, or their identity (Erikson, 1968). They (SBAS) expected Americans to accept and respect them as they are. The SBAS did not want to fully and permanently trade their identities. Instead they took temporary approaches to change their original behaviors. A change of behavior in the SBAS was only employed to facilitate some transactions between them and Americans temporarily, and not a permanent shift in their culture. Berry (1980) developed this process of adopting change (known as acculturation theory), where migrants coming into a new environment learn the new cultures.

From the findings in this study, media emerged as the main source of information that ignites the push and pull factors in the SBAS, as they notice the gap between their current state and the world yonder. The general picture from the findings shows that the SBAS utilized media to realize that their home countries were economically lacking. However, television was significantly used to gather information about the exotic world than social media. Social media was preferred media, as reported by interviewees, to decide whether to migrate.

## **5.1 Media as source of information about host nation**

### **5.1.1 Television as storytellers for the yonder world**

Gerbner (1986) contends that the human race, as social beings, is associated with storytelling from the beginning of time. We depend on these stories to enlighten ourselves about places we have been and not been (Gerbner, 1986). Culture is transmitted through television to audience members (Gerbner et al., 2002). Shanahan et al., (1999) similarly claim that researchers have repeatedly visualized television as a “cultural river,” (Shanahan et al., 1999 p. 12). where everybody to some extent flows with it (Shanahan et al., 1999). Decades later, Mosharafa (2015) shared results that the knowledge that we continue to obtain about a world beyond our reach is

learned through an assortment of stories, and not through our own encounters. Still today, the television has taken the role of telling these stories to masses through media (Shanahan et al., 1999). This study similarly found out that SBAS who were interviewed accessed information about the US through televised stories about the West. The students cited watching televised fiction movies, soaps, sitcoms and news.

In this study, findings show that most of the subjects depended on television (especially televised movies) rather than news as their main source of information to formulate images of America. This finding aligns with Stanley et al. (2003), which states that oftentimes people utilize entertainment materials to create a picture of their universe of everything that is further than their reach to experience. Television is easily reachable within homes (Miller, 2002). These repetitive, televised images acquired at an early age form the basis of the world perspective that potential migrants hold about distant places (Gerbner et al., 2002). Time spent with this content reinforces these thoughts. Novak (1986) asserted that people's thoughts and beliefs and behavior are more conditioned with the things that you spend more time on, the responsibilities one holds, views and narratives they internalize. He further argued that society spends more time watching television apart from working and sleeping (Novak, 1986). As a result, we should not be surprised to see people taking up the lifestyles they see portrayed on television (Novak, 1986). In a similar light, Shanahan et al., (1999) assert that these beliefs and viewpoints gained through television watching are sustainable over long periods in the lives of heavy television viewers.

This study was guided by cultivation theory, which looks at the consequences of steady, recurring, pervasive and indisputable precedents of pictures and ideas that television (particularly thrilling, fictional theatre) provides (Gerbner et al., 1984). Their study consistently found that intense viewing of televised images is more likely to cause in the viewers, perspectives and

thoughts, which are coherent with television's depictions of lifestyles and society (Gerbner et al., 1984). Gerbner et al. (1984) explain cultivation as a repetitive subjection to media that promotes the trust that messages transmitted through media speak to reality of the world and are valid (Gerbner et al., 1984). First, in the context of this study, televised news media have historically portrayed the Western countries as well established -- characterized by steadiness and harmonization (Marsh, 2016). However, when it extends to the portrayal of Africa, the same media channels expose Africa with the emphasis on conflict, security, and political issues (Marsh, 2016; Adeyanju & Neverson 2007). As viewers constantly internalize these televised messages, they create imaginary pictures about that environment and believe it is reality (Gerbner et al., 1984).

### **5.1.2 News as an informant about the host nation**

Prior research has shown that Western culture is viewed as the dominant one when rated against various world cultures, owing to the powerful mass media the West has globally (Gray, 2014). The news media additionally have an extensive effect in what manner we perceive other cultures that are different from us (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014). The news channels are characterized with information portraying Western culture as the best over the African cultures (Holtzman & Shape, 2014). The Western world is represented as continent of modern culture, steadiness while the African continent is associated with primitive culture, more lacking economically, poor politics and full of misery (Marsha, 2016).

Schiller (1975) describes this as cultural imperialism, where civilization favors the more powerful nations over the periphery nations. Cultural imperialism is evident in global news, as it promotes the Western world and its culture dominating the news (Schiller, 1975). Further, Western media often televises content about the deep poverty, war torn zones in Africa (Schiller, 1975). These opposing televised messages from the news channels helped SBAS form a

conclusive picture about the US as a great nation, with a well-advanced democracy compared to their home countries in Africa. Through television, the media managed to cement the already existing beliefs about Africa; that it is a poor continent filled with all sorts of misery and lacking democracy. The news channels are formal source of credible news about things happening in world.

World news enhances the exotic picture that viewers in Africa have about the US that it is a reality -- a concept drawn by Gerbner et al., (1984) in his cultivation theory, which states that television enhance already existing beliefs. Potential migrants in Africa internalize these news messages from channels like BBC or CCTV (Marsha, 2016). The more the viewers watch these televised messages, the more they believe the messages to be true, according to cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1986). In this study, subjects reported significantly using television to initially access views or images about the US, but then still verified some of the messages through social media, where they had personal contacts they trusted had accurate information about the host nation. Other researchers like (Wellman, 1999; Hidayati, 2017) found similar behaviors that migrants sought alternative means like social media which had vast and accurate material to verify information on (Wellman, 1999). However, they still indicated news content was subjective depending on the news channels you watched. The news channels are formal source of credible news about things happening in world. It becomes a problem when news channels misrepresent their content about events around the world as people fully depend on them information about distant places. A general problem that was noted in this study is that news media in the West misrepresent to viewers information about Africa (Marsha, 2016). This study's findings, therefore, are largely consistent with Gerbner, who asserts that heavy viewers of television are likely to hold what they view about the world as reality (Gerbner et al., 1986).

Likewise, in this study, respondents stated that they crossed the borders primarily to access the higher quality of education they saw in the media existing in the US than their home countries.

With these differing views the African migrants makes a cost benefit analysis whether to migrate or remain in their home country. Decision making to migrate becomes the toughest thing potential migrants are faced with after internalizing the beautiful images about the West.

## **5.2 Media as a leader on decisions to migrate**

When prospective migrants are planning their long journeys -- whether temporary or permanent – they are faced with a dilemma on what the new environment will offer them. Being many thousands of miles away from America, migrants are faced with a dilemma to ascertain if this exotic life they desire is exactly as perceived through television. Migrating to a new environment is characterized with ignorance of the new place and fears of discovering things to be very different from your perception (Lee, 1966). Potential migrants would want to mitigate these costs and risks associated with the migrating to that host nation (Hidayati, 2017). Migration resolutions are assumed to emerge from well-informed, reasonable options, bearing in mind the available economic opportunities at different locations (Yankow, 2003). In this study, the SBAS reported going further using social media [WhatsApp and Facebook] to seek more information from established contacts in the target nation who had accurate and direct experiences of that new environment. This information-seeking behavior aligns with previous studies (Stark and Bloom, 1985; Braga, 2007; Okome, 2002) that showed that potential migrants ideally evaluate the information on economic conditions.

Every person is liable to face uneasiness when moving into a new environment. In this study, migrants have shown significant use of media to reduce this nervousness. Television as a media platform imports the status of how the yonder world is and presents it to the aspiring migrants, to evaluate it against their current conditions (Okome, 2002) in their home countries in

Africa. This study's findings are consistent with Hidayati (2017)'s outcome where he established that migrants [Indonesian student] significantly used social media [Facebook] to base their decision migrate to Netherlands. In Hidayati (2017)'s study and this study, the respondent in both cases similarly said they needed and sought connections to confirm information via social media before they incurred the hefty costs that the long journeys attracted. Braga (2007) noted a similar relationship between exposure to external media and migrants' choice to move to other countries depending on the information they consume. Migrants wanted to know, for instance, if the host nation offered more economic opportunities than their home country before making that long journey to avoid disappointment on arrival in host nation (Braga, 2007). Findings in a research by Cairncross (1997) indicated that social media offered and mitigated migration costs and risks thereby promoting migration. SBAS interviewees in this study similarly said they needed and sought connections to confirm information via social media before they incurred the hefty costs that the long journeys attracted.

Many indicated they confirmed these facts through friends and spouses through social media in order to mitigate the cost and risks of migrating. In all, they wanted to be sure if the standards they were seeking were better in the host nation than their home country. This can be summarized as "benefit evaluation" (Hidayati, 2017, p. 522) between the two nations. Migrants would want to assess and ascertain that the costs they incur are lower than the benefits they are to gain for the migration to be meaningful or significant. This practice of information seeking before deciding to migrate aligns with several studies carried out by (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Braga, 2007; Okome, 2002; Hidayati, 2017). Hidayati (2017) reported parallel findings that international students base their decisions to migrate on "on benefit evaluation according to the cost and benefits of migrations. The cost may include to "separate with parents and family, and

also the problems in settling in new place and new society” (Hidayati, 2017, p. 522).

In this study, respondents primarily turned to social media to cross verify images about the US that they developed from other media sources. After messages have been cultivated (Gerbner et al., 1984), migrants seek concrete ideas from real people. Dekker and Engbersen (2014) established that social media offered quick feedback around the latest information on migration that potential migrants would need. This study found similar outcomes. Participants said did not learn this tactical information on whether to migrate or not from mass media; they learned it after talking to their friends and other colleagues on social media. This behavior is consistent with findings identified by Triandafyllidou and Maroukis (2012), who argued that social media platforms like Facebook groups were used as a check-point to verify dependability of information obtained from other sources of media.

The interactive feature of social media is key to consider in the process of migration because they need to verify information before embarking on the journey (Lee, 1966). Television lacks this private, interactive piece to directly answer individual-level migrant questions because it is one-way communication (Jensen, 1998). Social media – on the other hand -- offers instant, personalized feedback that enables users to discuss, seek clarification and get immediate feedback from others. (Hidayati, 2017). It should be noted that while both studies focus on social media, this thesis is different from Hidayati’s work (2017), as it encompassed students from Sub-Saharan Africa, who have rarely been studied before. Social media’s interactivity provided a stage for migrants to weigh their costs benefits whether staying in the home country was a better option or not (Hidayati, 2017). This information-seeking helps to reduce the gap between their expectations and experiences as much as possible, so that they avoid cultural shock (Berry, 1980) when they arrive in their host nation.

### **5.3 Media used for swift integration in a new environment**

Making it to the country of destination does not mean the end of all the troubles migrants were facing in their home countries; rather it is often the opening of new political, cultural and socioeconomic challenges. As the successes and failures of the SBAS in a foreign land rests right in their hands (Bridges, 2003), the acculturative stress could be a hindrance to their success. Therefore, they seek ways to reduce it through a process called acculturation (Redfield et al., 1936; Cote, 1996; Berry & Sam, 1997). In this study, as migrants [SBAS] arrived in the US, some of their cultures came in conflict with the American culture. Confusion and distress about social identity may bring uncertainty about aspects of personal identity. The idea here is that acculturative experiences involve not only integration, but also a source of defeat of a person's original culture, in which he loses his/her identity. In study, we focus on strategies that the migrants [SBAS] employ through media to integrate in the US.

Migrants often find themselves to be in acculturation stress, which is a result of the gap between the new culture and the old culture (Berry & Kim, 1988). In this study the SBAS indicated facing challenges related to social, cultural and economic matters, which were a result of the gap or difference in how they were accustomed to doing things in the home country versus the host nation. For interviewees, the friction came in on negotiating within oneself whether to adopt certain practices or not from the Americans, which were different from African way of doing things. A study by Larson and Chastain (1990) noted similar challenges faced by migrants. This forced the SBAS to adjust in some of their old ways of practicing things by learning the American way of doing things through media, where they could observe how to conduct themselves. Bandura and Walter (1977) reported a finding that stresses that people significantly learn through watching and developing the activities, opinions and emotive responses of other people (Bandura & Walters, 1977). This learning helped to reduce the disparity between the



home and the host cultures, thereby reducing some stress. Berry (1980) states the stress is reduced as the gap between two cultures diminishes. For a successful transition from their home country to target nation, migrants thrive on contacts they established with the host nation (Lee, 1966). Haythornthwaite (2002) reports that social media has an attractive characteristic to connect persons who are not strongly tied together because of distance or relationships. This concurs with Lee's study on the migration networks theory, in which he asserts that people are likely to migrate to places where they already have connections or contacts (Lee, 1966). People tend maintain connections with people they share similar cultures, beliefs, values and interests (Lee, 1966). This study shows that social media helped the migrants connect with others for support. This is special to an African culture, where people collectively depend upon each other. For instance, interviewees indicated forming social groups around academic concerns, where they encouraged each other in adjusting to the American education system. In this study, migrants indicated a special emphasis on this bonding capacity of social media groups. Maintaining connections with people with whom you share culture, values and interests is very important aspect for integration in a new society. In this study, migrants depended on social media to maintain connections with friends, family and other people who helped with their integration into a new society.

### **5.3.1 Maintaining self-identity with acculturation**

As migrants arrive in the new environment, they are not only faced with challenges of maintaining connections with friends back home and in the new environment, but migrants are faced with cultural conflicts from the two countries (original and host cultures) (Berry, 1997). The findings in this study are consistent with prior studies (Axelson 1986; Berry, 1997; Cote, 1996), researchers who reported that people tend to safeguard their original culture by selecting what culture to trade. In the process of acculturation, migrants may choose what to adopt from

the dominant culture of the host nation (Berry, 1980). Defining the African culture, it is largely a communal one (Kim et al., 1994), where individuals rely on each other for accomplishments (Kim et al., 1994). In contrast, the Western culture is more private and independent (Kim et al., 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Given this collision, the migrants would not want to fully lose their identity by fully adopting the new culture (Elias & Lemish, 2008). The subjects in this study indicated their interests to maintain their original identity, expecting Americans to accept and respect them for what they are.

Migrants struggle to preserve their original identity in the midst of a culturally divided life, where there is a diverse array of cultures meeting in the same environment (Elias & Lemish, 2008). Much as the migrants in this study wished to have the easy, exciting life like one they perceived whilst in their homes in Africa, this study found out that a significant number of migrants were not geared to absolutely abandon their cultures. Instead, they wanted a good life that did not come into conflict with their home culture. They expected Americans to respect their own cultures.

As a result, SBAS tried to sustain their identities through the use of social media. In the host nation, students experienced diverse, stressful situations that may range from finance or mental health to academics (Larson & Chastain, 1990). SBAS subjects in this study indicated using social media to overcome such challenges through joining social groups on social media. Here, they found help from other African migrants to get around in the new society. In joining the social groups through WhatsApp or Facebook, the SBAS tended to maintain their cultural identity of an African culture, depending on each other for success. Interacting within the new social context in America, the SBAS attempted to reflectively revise what they had previously acquired and replace with suitable behaviors. In their use of media, SBAS adjusted their social

identities to blend into the American way of life. Their social media efficacy may be attributed to the fact that young students were better able to maneuver around the digital platform to help them learn the new culture using the social media. All the participants indicated being comfortable in using the digital platforms.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

Human beings naturally get excited about things they acquire information about. In this study, the researcher set to find out the role of media to give migrants the motive to move. To date, there has been very limited research on television and social media as source of information for migration. Most research that has been done on migration has concentrated on ‘push and pull’ factors that caused people to move. (Lee, 1966). This research is unique in that it focuses on how media channels can act as pull and push factors. More specifically, this study was undertaken to explore how and to what extent media platforms (television and social media) shape SBAS’ expectations and experiences of life in the US. It also examined the influence of media on their decision to migrate. And it further investigated how television and social media facilitate their integration in the American society. Through in-depth interviews, this study established that television and social media are powerful forces that can influence how migrants learn and adapt to new environments.

The first objective of the study was aimed at exploring to what extent media (television and social media) shaped SBAS’ experiences and expectations of life in the US. The study’s findings signified that television played a large role than social media in the shaping of the SBAS’s expectations and experiences of the US lifestyles. According to interviewees, social media played a very insignificant part of forming these perceptions because migrants had already formed images of the US from television viewing at a young age. Information delivered from television forms an imaginary world people that users formulate at a young age. This study’s second objective was aimed to establish the influence media (television and social media) exerted on prospective migrants to decide to move to a new environment. In this study, all the SBAS interviewed indicated that the higher quality of education and better life in the US inspired

them to make that decision to move. In making this decision, the SBAS indicated broader uses of social media than television. Social media was illustrated to have an advantage over television, as its platform offered an attractive interactive communication platform. Prospective migrants would use social media to clarify and confirm with connections (friends and family) information about the host nation. In this way they would mitigate the risks and costs of migration. In this study, it was found that the respondents relied more on social media to reduce the gap of information that existed between the perceived world they created through televised images and the reality of the target nation. The last objective of this study focused on the arrival of the SBAS in an unfamiliar society. This study explored the use of television and social media as a means of strategy to cope with changes in a host nation. In this study, social media was the preferred media to help with integration because it helped SBAS connect with new friends in the host nation and also maintain relations with family back home. Television, on the other hand, was viewed as an impediment in the smooth blending of the SBAS into American culture, as it largely portrayed the migrants in a negative way.

### **6.1 Limitations**

In every research that is conducted, limitations exist, which may or may not be out of a researcher's control. First, in carrying out this study, the researcher made deliberate assumptions that Sub-Saharan African migrants share a common culture. The reality is that the Sub-Saharan Africa is a vast region with diverse cultures. In reality, the Sub-Saharan region is often divided according to influence of the religion: West Africa is predominantly Muslims, whereas Southern Africa is Christian. East and Central embrace both Islam and Christianity. Despite these regional variations, for the purposes of this study, the culture is assumed as being similar. This might influence the study's findings, as different cultures in Africa access media like television in distinct ways. The study had intended to draw respondents from all the four regions of the Sub-

Saharan Africa (including West Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, and Central Africa).

However, no respondent emerged from Central Africa, which is a French-speaking region of the Sub-Saharan Africa. While Iowa State University might not have students from French-speaking countries in Africa, other universities in the US likely have such students. Therefore, in the future, increasing the sample size by engaging other universities in the US would likely solve the issue.

Second, as a researcher from sub-Saharan Africa, there may also be some common experiences that existed between myself and my participants. The common experiences might involve the language, food or religious beliefs, for instance. This may have influenced the researcher's assumptions on some of the topics discussed by interviewees. Under this cognizance, it was important to set aside these assumptions and experiences. This process is called "bracketing personal experiences" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 78). Creswell and Poth (2018) mentioned that it is often difficult for researchers to completely bracket themselves, or wholly set apart their experiences. I tried my best to avoid letting my own experiences influence the study by setting aside my views. This was achieved by not asking leading questions that related to my personal experiences.

Third, this study's sample was drawn from Iowa State students. As a result, the demographics of the respondents in the study could be described as young and highly educated. All subjects indicated that they had good digital literacy skills and were able to navigate through the social media platforms. This could have skewed the findings. For instance, such young and educated demographics may favor and spend more time on social media than television than older populations. This design consideration could be improved in the future by expanding the sample to include persons who are not college students but are migrants from Sub-Saharan

Africa. In addition, the study had a small sample size. In this study, I contacted 24 potential subjects to participate in the research, resulting in 12 interviewees. Only two of the participants were females. In future studies, it would be good to balance the number of male and female participants to have equal representation. Qualitative research studies indicate that the results cannot not be replicated or generalized (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As my population is entirely students, it is possible that some students were simply not willing to spend 45 to 60 minutes of their time participating in an interview. In future studies, it would be a good design to include incentives for the participants to promote participation.

Lastly, this study employed qualitative research methods only and its results may not be generalized. This study's findings were based only on one college out of many colleges in the US. It would be recommended to undertake the same study using a mix of the research methods of qualitative and quantitative methods (including more colleges) to see if the study may have replicated results, which could be applied to larger populations. It could be beneficial to use an online survey method, which would capture students from several universities in the US.

## **6.2 Future Research**

One unexpected theme that developed from subject interviews surrounded media ownership. Respondents in this study said that they did not put too much trust in content they internalized from television. Many SBAS said they viewed the messages as subjective because the media often serves corporate interests. The content, subjects said, would differ depending on the channels watched, often reflecting the interests and ideologies of elites. A future study could examine to what degree media ownership affects migrants' dependability on television to make decision to migrate. This study would incorporate focus groups to capture more information, as respondents would get motivated to speak on issues that have been raised by other participants. I

would have 3 groups of at least 6-8 participants per group. I would employ snowball sampling to recruit the members.

Another angle that could be examined would find out how audio messages (music) from foreign media could influence migrants to move. It would be interesting to find out if audio messages have the same influence as other mediated images. My interview questions could possibly include, for instance:

- What comes to your mind when you are listening to a particular type of foreign music (popular music)?
- Can you describe how popular music has changed your lifestyle?
- How can you describe the characteristics of your friends in relation to popular music?

I would also carry out a qualitative study to understand these emotions. My population would include any migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa who have been in the US for at least one year. The study would use phenomenological interviews to understand their emotions as to how they feel when they listen to popular music. My sample size would not exceed 15 participants, who would be recruited through snowball sampling.

As for the present study, the findings could benefit both current and future Black African students coming from Africa, in that there will readily be available information about the expectations and experiences of Black African students in the US. There are several other stakeholders who will benefit from this study. The ISSO will benefit from this study by preparing themselves to help international students settle in the community in regard to areas that may negatively affect them like housing, hefty tuitions and language. Local elected community leaders (who benefit from student rentals and other utilities) could help them integrate into the



new environment. Faculty members would learn what problems international students face academically so that they plan for their special studies and other support activities. In the research field, this research reduces the knowledge gap about migration.

Previous research that has been done on migration has mostly focused on the economic factors that drive migrants to move. This study indicates that media, in particular, ignites the 'push' and 'pull' factors that result in migrants relocating. This study advanced and established that, for migrants (SBAS students) to come to the US, their move was ignited through watching televised images about the US. This led to a cost-benefit analysis of the mediated pull factors weighed against the lived experiences of their push factors in their Sub-Saharan Africa home. The study also found out that though television was the main source of information about the yonder world, the SBAS preferred to use social media to arrive at a decision to migrate. Social media helped to mitigate the costs and risks associated with migration through its interactive platforms, where the SBAS could privately verify issues that they had about migration through established personal contacts they already had in the US. Television, on the other hand was more public and lacked the interactive piece to facilitate conversation between contacts in the host nation and the migrant in Africa. Further, the study found out that for a swift integration of the SBAS in US, they again significantly used social media to learn new ways to negotiate the African culture.

Any research is conducted is aimed at improving the welfare of human beings and their environment. As for this study, the findings could benefit both current and future Black African students coming from Africa, in that there will readily be available reliable information about the expectations and experiences of Black African students in the US. There are several stakeholders that will benefit from this study like the following: The ISSO will benefit from this study by

preparing themselves to help international students settle in the community in regard to areas that negatively affect them like housing, hefty tuitions and language. The elected community leaders like City Halls who benefit from student rentals and other utilities will need to know how students feel about their services in the city and how they could help them integrate in the new environment as they plan for the city developments. The faculty members benefit to know what problems international students face academically so that they plan for their special studies and other support activities, which might lead to the successful integration of the SBAS in the US.

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**APPENDIX A. IRB EXEMPTION**

IRB 10/2019

**Institutional Review Board**Office for Responsible  
ResearchVice President for  
Research2420 Lincoln Way, Suite  
202Ames, Iowa  
50014515 294-  
4566**Date:** 01/06/2020**To:** Annie Banda Jan L Boyles**From:** Office for Responsible Research**Title: Media Influence on Migration Expectations: Experiences of Black African International Students from Sub-Saharan Africa****IRB ID: 20-003****Submission Type:** Initial Submission **Exemption Date:** 01/06/2020

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from most requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.104 or 21 CFR 56.104 because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

2018 - 2 (i): Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) when the information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

The determination of exemption means that:

- **You do not need to submit an application for continuing review. Instead, you will receive a request for a brief status update every three years. The status update is intended to verify that the study is still ongoing.**

- **You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application.** Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any *modifications to the research procedures* (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, nature or duration of behavioral interventions, use of deception, etc.), any change in *privacy or confidentiality protections*, modifications that result in the *inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations*, removing plans for informing participants about the study, any *change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants*, and/or any change such that the revised procedures do not fall into one or more of the [regulatory exemption categories](#). The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

- All **changes to key personnel** must receive prior approval.

- **Promptly inform the IRB of any addition of or change in federal funding for this study.** Approval of the protocol referenced above applies only to funding sources that are specifically identified in the corresponding IRB application.

**Detailed information about requirements for submitting modifications for exempt research can be found on our [website](#).** For modifications that require prior approval, an amendment to the most recent IRB application must be submitted in IRBManager. A determination of exemption or approval from the IRB must be granted before implementing the proposed changes.

Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

Additionally  
:

- All research involving human participants must be submitted for IRB review. **Only the IRB or its designees may make the determination of exemption**, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

- **Please inform the IRB if the Principal Investigator and/or Supervising Investigator end their role or involvement with the project** with sufficient time to allow an alternate PI/Supervising Investigator to assume oversight responsibility. Projects must have an [eligible PI](#) to remain open.

- **Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences** involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) **any other unanticipated problems involving risks** to subjects or others.

- **Approval from other entities may also be needed.** For example, access to data from private records (e.g., student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. **An IRB determination of exemption in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.**

- Your research study may be subject to **post-approval monitoring by Iowa State University's Office for Responsible Research**. In some cases, it may also be subject to formal audit or inspection by federal agencies and study sponsors.
- Upon completion of the project, transfer of IRB oversight to another IRB, or departure of the PI and/or Supervising Investigator, please initiate a Project Closure in IRBManager to officially close the project. For information on instances when a study may be closed, please refer to the [IRB Study Closure Policy](#).

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or [IRB@iastate.edu](mailto:IRB@iastate.edu).

## **APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### *Open-ended questions*

1. Can you describe what inspired you to come study in the US?
2. How did you learn about life in the US?
  - a. Follow-up: What information did you learn directly from colleges and universities about the US before arriving?
3. Describe the types of media you used before coming to the US.
4. How often were you consuming content based on Western lifestyles?
5. How would you describe that content?
  - a. Follow-up: Can you share more specifics on a television program or film that influenced your views of the United States? Why did it provide an influence to you?
  - b. Follow-up: Can you describe a program or video you watched in your country that described how international students integrate in US?
6. Do you feel that migrants are accurately portrayed in American media? Why or why not?
7. To what extent did the media representation of the US match your expectations and experiences as an international student in the US?
  - a. Follow-up: What has been the most surprising adjustment to life in the US?
  - b. Follow-up: How have you managed to handle the differences in your expectations and what you have so far gone through in the US?
8. Can you describe how social media help you to integrate in the United States?
9. How would you describe the US media channels that you access in the US since your arrival? How are these different from the channels you used before arriving?
10. What media do you now used to communicate with family back home?
11. What is your likelihood of extending your stay in the US after completion of your studies?
12. How likely are you to encourage family or friends to come to the US to do school?

### *Demographics questions*

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your age?
3. What country do you come from? (This information will not be published but is only used to ensure the participants are from Sub-Saharan Africa region)

4. Are you in the undergraduate or graduate program? What was your level of education before you arrived at ISU? What is your major area of study?
5. When did you come to the United States?



**APPENDIX C. SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

| <b>East Africa</b> | <b>Southern Africa</b> | <b>West Africa</b> | <b>Central Africa</b>  |
|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Burundi            | South Africa           | Benin              | Cameroon               |
| Comoros            | Angola                 | Burkina Faso       | chad                   |
| Eritrea            | Botswana               | Cape Verde         | Gabon                  |
| Ethiopia           | Lesotho                | Cote d'Ivoire      | Euqatorial Guinea      |
|                    |                        |                    | Democratic Republic of |
| Kenya              | Malawi                 | Gambia             | Congo                  |
| Madagascar         | Mozambique             | Ghana              | Republic of Congo      |
| Uganda             | Namibia                | Guinea             | Sao Tome and Principe  |
|                    |                        | Guinea-            |                        |
| Rwanda             | Swaziland              | Bissau             |                        |
| Seychelles         | Zambia                 | Liberia            |                        |
| Somalia            | Zimbabwe               | Mali               |                        |
| Tanzania           |                        | Mauritania         |                        |
|                    |                        | Niger              |                        |
|                    |                        | Nigeria            |                        |
|                    |                        | Senegal            |                        |
|                    |                        | Sierra Leone       |                        |
|                    |                        | Togo               |                        |