


Chapter 6

Tweeting to Vindicate the “Marginalised Nigerian Diaspora” in China: A Content Analysis of Nigeria MFAs’ Online Communications

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ABSTRACT

In a bid to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic in its territory, the Chinese government embarked on a number of muscular policies right from the early stages of the pandemic. One of such policies was aimed at forcing Africans living in the Guangdong province to accept COVID-19 prevention and containment measures. Subsequently viewed as xenophobic, this policy rapidly degenerated into a diplomatic incident, opposing Chinese and African governments. Through its officials and its diplomats, the Nigerian government in particular condemned the Chinese policies using Twitter among other digital platforms. This chapter seeks to show how Nigerian diplomats deployed Twitter to critique China’s perceived xenophobic treatment of Nigerian diasporas in its territory during the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter is based on a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of 12 randomly selected tweets generated by senior staffers at Nigeria’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to denounce the maltreatment of the Nigerian Diaspora in China.

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INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemics in China and its subsequent spread in the whole world has caused not only economic damages and heavy losses in human lives, but also far-reaching diplomatic issues involving China and specific nations. Many of such diplomatic issues directly emanated from the perceived “inhuman” ways in which China treated expatriates on her soil, reportedly/apparently in a bid to mitigate and quash the COVID-19 epidemics. One of the communities of expatriates that have suffered such “inhuman” treatment has been African Diasporas – particularly Nigerians living in China. There have, in effect, been various allegations of African expatriates evicted from their homes, stripped of their visas, treated as sub-humans, denied access to hotels /shelters and restaurant and more disturbing, abandoned to suffer and die on the streets of the Chinese city of Guangzhou, all these in the midst of travails provoked by the COVID-19 (Onoja 2020; Sudworth, 2021; Verma, 2020). The above-mentioned allegations have partly been fuelled or inspired by online propaganda, particularly the online contents generated by African bloggers, political activists and citizen journalists.

This state of affairs has, of course, provoked waves of anti-Chinese feelings in African countries (Chu 2020a,b; Chang & Fung 2021; Christensen 2020) as well as in other parts of the world (Gupta, 2020; Adam, 2020). In Nigeria in particular, the government used both official government fora and the unofficial pronouncements of its diplomats to condemn the “maltreatment” of its citizens in China and seek immediate redress. The Nigerian government’s reaction to the perceived maltreatment of the Nigerian Diaspora in China can be assessed through a content analysis of Nigeria’s MFA’s online communications around the incident in April 2020. In this paper, attention is given to two things. First, the paper provides a qualitative content analysis of 12 tweets generated by senior staffers at Nigeria’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to denounce the maltreatment of the Nigerian Diaspora in China and “chronicle” or reveal Nigeria’s management of the incident. Second, the paper presents the result of a quantitative analysis of publics’ reaction to the 12 tweets. The quantitative and qualitative content analysis has as objective to ascertain both national and international audiences’ reaction to Nigeria MFA’s response to the maltreatment of the Nigeria Diaspora in China.

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