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**AFRICA IN THE EYES OF CABLE NETWORK NEWS (CNN) AND ALJAZEERA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The thrust of this study was to ascertain the frequency and nature of coverage given to the African region by CNN and Aljazeera. The objectives however were predicated on the ideology that the mass media can facilitate global peace and understanding through meaningful exchange of information and ideas. The news programmes of CNN and Aljazeera were content analysed for fifteen (15) days with a view to streamlining the pattern of coverage given to Africa by the two networks. Analysis was done quantitatively and qualitatively. Inter-coder reliability showed a correlation of  $r=86$ . Data revealed that much of Africa was not reported by CNN in contradistinction to Aljazeera. It was further found that CNN had a preponderance of unfavourable news (75%) while Aljazeera had a fairly equitable distribution of 47% across the favourable and unfavourable categories. A synthesis of the data showed Aljazeera to be more favourably disposed towards the reportage of Africa. It was however recommended that global news media should enrich their portals with penetration. This no doubt will ensure the coverage of areas considered too distant to reach. It was further recommended that there should be an emerging drive by the governments of African countries to develop communication facilities that will help launch Africa to the world so as to break the dependency on global media.*

**KEYWORDS** – Africa \*Aljazeera \* CNN\* Global media \* News flow

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## **OVERVIEW**

Communication is central to international relations. The indispensability of communication in this regard cannot be controverted since it accords understanding to issues that bind the peoples of the world together. Contemporary studies reveal that countries, the world over, are now more than ever concerned about the kind of reportage they get from the global media.

In today's interdependent world, information has now become an economic resource. Information plays a vital role in perception. If favourably cast, information opens a vista of opportunities for countries especially when viewed against the backdrop of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). Prosperity of nations is no doubt intrinsically linked to the reverberating role of communication in global socio-economic as well as socio-political trends.

Hasan (2013) opines that “today we are surrounded by a multi-level convergent media world where all modes of communication and information are continually reforming to adapt to the enduring demands of technologies, thus changing the way we create, consume, learn and interact

with each other”(p.84). The imputation however is that the mass media undeniably string the peoples of the world together.

Dupree (1990) notes that “relations between governments are now more than ever strongly influenced by the people’s views of their own interest which in turn is shaped by the people’s information” (P.11).

It has however been noted that in an interdependent world such as ours, we are affected by almost any event almost anywhere. This unequivocally accords unrivalled importance to news (information) as an indispensable resource in global policies.

The forgoing interestingly justifies UNESCO’s declaration on fundamental principles concerning “the contribution of the mass media in strengthening peace and international understanding”. Most problems which threaten mankind as a matter of urgency require multi-lateral co-operation among nations with a view to strengthening and entrenching sustainable solutions.

By inference, therefore, the importance of foreign news as an essential element in international relations as well as a precursor to international peace can never be overemphasized.

Unfortunately, scholars have observed that the flow of foreign news in the various media of communication has been found to be very inadequate and unbalanced. It has also been posited that news hardly flows from the developing countries to the developed countries which advertently engenders undesirable consequences for the former.

If the foregoing is anything to go by, it therefore, follows that the flow of international news is from bigger to smaller countries, technologically advanced to less technologically advanced countries. The presupposition however is the proclivity for media audience to read/hear more about America/Britain than any other African country in the global media.

The news flow pattern herein depicted has been typified as “a one way flow pattern” where news flows from the First World countries to the Third World countries with adverse effects that manifest in both quantitative and qualitative imbalances.

In the face of global exigencies, it is expected that the creative powers of the media will be deployed by mainstream media to enthrone equity, fairness and justice. In line with this are concepts like freedom of information, free flow of information, balanced flow of information, all centered around, the pursuit of objective truth and free exchange of ideas and knowledge. This invariably will allow for a proactive process where solutions and actions can be portrayed through collaborative efforts. The gravitation therefore will be towards tackling the problems faced by countries of the world with a view to highlighting on the critical aspects of the solutions.

*Cable News Network (CNN)* and *Aljazeera* (English) in terms of reach, operations and mandate, fall within the purview of the global media. These news channels, through reportage, provide the audience with a peep into countries beyond their immediate sensory perception. If the information so received about a given country falls within parameters considered favourable, the implications most certainly resonate in terms of economic growth and prospects.

It must however be noted that in Sub- Sahara Africa, *Cable News Network (CNN)* and *Aljazeera* seem to be veritable sources of foreign news. This therefore explains why the preoccupation of governments in sub Sahara Africa seems to be on the nature of reportage on issues and events around them in the windows of the world as epitomized by the news package of these networks.

Based on the foregoing, the thrust of this study is therefore predicated on the frequency and nature of coverage given to the African region by *CNN* and *Aljazeera* in the light of the cardinal role of the media to facilitate global peace and understanding through meaningful exchange of information and ideas.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The preponderance of news coverage on Europe /North America in contradistinction to the paucity of news on Africa and the developing countries of Asia precipitated the call for a New World Information and Communication Order. This call itself was premised on the need to make global news flow more even and balanced.

It has been further argued that the present news flow pattern allows for a dependency situation where more is known about the developed countries of Europe and America while little is known about Africa. This no doubt has led to the perpetuation of stereotypes that are obviously unwholesome and do not support international co-operation based on fairness, equity and just treatment.

Since the world is fast becoming a global village, it is assumed that the peoples of the world are most likely to be affected by almost any event almost anywhere. In other words, the peoples of Europe and America need African news as much as Africans desire news on their countries. McBride, (1980) have noted:

that communications role in international relations is important and indeed vital because it governs the ability of international opinion to come fully to grips with the problems which threaten mankind's survival - problems which cannot be solved without consultation and co-operation between countries (p.34).

Contemporary events bearing international dimensions have shown that such problems include racism, destruction of the environment and many others. These no doubt are the challenges and dangers that affect all nations.

In Feuby's (1990) view, the world has never been more abundantly informed about itself. The call for a New World Information and Communication Order was geared towards redressing the news flow imbalance. Though the call witnessed an exchange of inflammatory rhetoric, it drew attention to the fact that some countries were not only under reported in the global media but badly reported too. This no doubt jeopardizes the cultural and national identity of most Third World countries.

Decades after the New World Information and Communication Order debate drew the attention of the world to the global news flow imbalance; one begins to wonder if there has been gravitation towards greater and more visible representation of Africa and Asia in the global media.

In addition to the quantitative imbalance in the flow of global news, there is perhaps a more serious qualitative imbalance which manifests itself in the dominance of unfavourable Third World news. According to Momoh (1990) "it is common knowledge that news from Third World countries usually make their appearances in the media of developed countries only when they are sensational (p.97).

How far this trend has changed in the present news flow pattern remains the concern of this study. In other words, how much of African news is embedded in the news programmes of *CNN* and *Aljazeera*? More descriptively so, is there a preponderance of favourable reportage of Africa by these networks? The problem of this study is therefore preconceived in the foregoing.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Going by the clamour for greater representation in the global media by Third World countries, this study sets to:

- i. Find out the frequency of coverage given to Africa by *Cable News Network (CNN)* and *Aljazeera* (English).
- ii. Ascertain the nature of coverage given to Africa by the two networks under study.
- iii. Infer from the foregoing if *CNN* and *Aljazeera* differ in their reportage of Africa.

### **Research Questions**

1. How often does news on Africa meet the cut-off taste of *CNN* and *Aljazeera*?
2. To what extent is Africa favourably reported on *CNN* and *Aljazeera*?
3. To what extent is there a disparity between the way *CNN* and *Aljazeera* report Africa

### **Operationalization of terms**

**Coverage** – The reportage a country receives in a given medium.

**Frequency** – The number of times a country is reported within a given period.

**Nature of coverage** –The direction of the reportage measured in terms of *Favourable*, *Neutral* and *Unfavourable*.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The communications media through their information function provide us with windows into the world outside our immediate sensory perception. The information so received from the mass media enable us react intelligently to our society while equipping us with the much needed knowledge to adapt systematically to our environment.

As aptly noted by Asadu and Usua(2011), “the mass media of communication have become necessities of life. Today somebody in America, Britain or Japan interacts freely with somebody in Nigeria and we know freely what happens in another clime without physically being there”(p.5). Amakiri (2008) in a similar context notes that “the mass media act as socio-political and cultural mediators by setting the economic, social and political agenda of the polity” (p.25).

In describing the dynamics of international communication, Bittner (1989) asserts that the strength of the global mass media is measured in terms of its efficacy as an integrative instrument of pressure in the game of international politics. Interestingly, international politics is known for intense competition for advantage taking in order to maximize national power. Scholars have however observed that within the field of international communication, the views of the powerful constitute the dominant opinion in world affairs.

By extrapolation therefore global news flow is being dominated by the economically rich and technologically advanced nations to the detriment of the developing countries. By inference, therefore, Lee et.al (2001) have analyzed that this trend seems to render international news ethnocentric and status centered with an ideological slant.

Rodman (2012) posits that “the United States of America, sends out far more mass media products – such as movies, recordings, TV programmes and books – than it imports” (p. 10). Schiller (1969) as cited by Rodman (2012) described the American domination of world media product as being so strong and so long lasting that the global mass media are now being referred to as the ‘American Empire’.

The Pew Research center for people and the press Global Attitudes Survey (2009) found that “the spread of US ideas and customs is disliked by majorities in almost every country. That sentiment is prevalent in friendly nations such as France (58%), Argentina (78%) and Turkey (88%)” (<http://pewglobal.org/display.php?ReportID=263>, Junes 2009). Underlying this notion is the lateral observation that many countries dislike America’s incursion into their native cultures accusing the United States of cultural imperialism.

Lending credence to this, McQuail (2010) notes that “an essential attribute of culture is communication since cultures can hardly develop, survive, extend and generally succeed without communication” (p. 13). It has been further noted that Third World countries have made significant scientific and technological strides which have contributed significantly to the progress of civilization yet such achievements are usually treated as less striking developments by the Western media. In a study by Amakiri (2008), it was found that the “Libyan multi-billion dollar underground river project, to irrigate the desert for agriculture was hardly given a mention in Western media” (p.185).

The role of international communication in this emergent order as further noted by Amakiri (2009) is to “propagate the ideals of globalization, presenting the phenomenon as an inevitable and irreversible process, manipulating the target population into believing that anything, including ideas emanating from the developed countries is worth it” (p.119).

To authenticate this presupposition is the indication by UNESCO figures that about 80% of world news emanates from the trans-regional news agencies, viz AP, Reuters and AFP. These agencies own more than 700 bureaus and have about 8000 correspondents in more than thirty countries. It has been further posited that the United States remains the world’s largest distributor of motion pictures. Elaborating further, Amakiri (2009) notes that:

with the advantage of being owners of the international mass media, the developed countries bombard the poor nations with their version of news and saturate their thoughts with foreign values and ideas thereby predisposing them to indoctrination as sanctioned by media hegemony. This precisely is the basis of the concept of media imperialism which has created an information dependent status for the Third World (p.119).

The presupposition is that communication disparities and domination occur at different levels and in different forms. It could occur between developed and developing countries, between developed countries belonging to the same ideological system and between Third World countries themselves.

Though age long, the UNESCO declaration “for the establishment of a new equilibrium and greater reciprocity in the flow of information which will be conducive to the institution of a just and lasting peace and to the economic and political independence of nations” resonates eloquently.

The potency of information in the area of mutual understanding and peace is quite incontrovertible. Nwosu (1990) notes that:

In this era of political, economic and other uncertainties, the peoples of the world need understanding which comes

through effective, fair and equitable communication in order to keep living and interacting together as members of the international community of nations (p.35)

This however provides a platform for assessment in terms of how much of African news is carried in the global media. Since information precipitates global peace, the ultimate goal of the global media should be to strengthen global peace through adequate and balanced coverage of the nations of the world. Having entered the era of globalization, Africa can no longer be inveigled in the praxis of a dark continent. Herein lies the justification for this study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study by its very nature necessitates content analysis. Content analysis according to Kerlinger (2000) is a “method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and qualitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables (p.67). It has been further affirmed by Wimmer and Dominick (2011) that content analysis is systematic and objective. The justification for this design is that it will enable the researcher to study the manifest content of news broadcasts on *Aljazeera* and *Cable News Network (CNN)* with a view to streamlining the frequency and nature of coverage given to Africa by the two networks from the 13<sup>th</sup> through 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2013.

The population of this study represents the totality of news broadcast within the review period. By deduction, therefore, this represents fifteen (15) days news broadcasts. In terms of sampling procedure, the two networks – *CNN* and *Aljazeera*- were purposively selected based on reach and ubiquity. Descriptively, across cable and satellite networks, in Nigeria, *CNN* and *Aljazeera* seem to be channels that cut across subscription bouquets thus enhancing their accessibility by audience members. On the other hand, the population of the study was considered quite manageable thus negating the need for a sample.

Coding sheets were used for the study. The coding sheets in this regard enabled the researcher to classify data in predetermined spaces. Classifications were therefore made to capture the dateline of news stories.

The procedure for analysis consisted of an operationalised definition of the subject matter. To this end, the subject matter was defined thus, ‘any news story, on Africa as a continent or on countries within the African continent’. Measurement was carried out for news content that dovetailed within the purview of this definition.

Frequency was measured in terms of the number of times news on Africa was aired within the study period. The numerical value for frequency was nominal while the nature of coverage was assessed thematically to reflect the coverage of the subject matter in terms of favourable, neutral and unfavourable. Succinctly described, analysis was done quantitatively (frequency) and

qualitatively (nature). Comparison of frequency and nature of coverage by the two networks was done using simple disaggregation index.

To ensure reliability and researcher non bias, a professional coder was employed to assist in the coding. A total of 89 items were categorized. Based on the categorizations, the coders agreed on 77 and disagreed on 12 categories. Differences in coding were computed using Holsti (1968) formula:

$$\frac{2(c1.2)}{c1+c2}$$

$$c1+c2$$

Where: C1.2 = number of category assignment agreed on

C1+C2 = total number of category assignment made by both coders

r= correlation

$$=2 (77)$$

$$= 89 +89$$

$$= \frac{2 \times 77}{178}$$

$$= \frac{154}{178}$$

$$0.86$$

The computation shows a high degree of correlation which no doubt holds validation for the coding categories.



**Data Presentation**

Data is here presented in tables with interpretations drawn therefrom

**Table 1: Reportage of Africa on CNN from 13<sup>th</sup> June – 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2013**

Date	Day	Time	Country	Story	Direction	Duration	News category	Reporter
13/06/13	Thurs	9.29pm	South Africa	Mandela's Dwindling health	U	2''	Connect the world	Aisha Sesay
14/06/13	Friday	9.00pm	-	-	-	-	-	-
15/06/13	Sat	9.30pm	South Africa	Mandel's health	U	90'	World Report	Aisha Sesay
16/06/13	Sun	9.00pm	-	-	-	-	-	-
17/06/13	Mon	9.00pm	Ethiopia	Girls' Rising	U	3''	Connect the world	Jake Tapper
18/06/13	Tues	9.00pm	-	-	-	-	-	-
19/06/13	Wed	9.00pm	-	-	-	-	-	-
20/06/13	Thurs	9.00pm	-	-	-	-	-	-
21/06/13	Friday	9.33pm	Egypt	Massive rally for Egypt's president	N	3''	CNN Preview	Hamdi Alkhshali
21/06/13	Friday	9.47pm	Nigeria	Afrobeats, the sound of the West Africa	F	2''	CNN preview	Vladimir Duthiers
22/06/13	Sat	9.00pm	-	-	-	-	-	-
23/06/13	Sun	9/00pm	-	-	-	-	-	-
24/06/13	Mon	9.15pm	South Africa	Mandela's health	U	3''	Connect the world	Aisha Sesay
25/06/13	Tues	9.18pm	South Africa	Mandela's health	U	5''	Connect the world	Aisha Sesay
26/06/13	Wed	12.00pm	South Africa	Mandela's health	U	4''	Connect the world	Robin Curnow

**Table 2a: Reportage of Africa on Aljazeera (13<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> June, 2013)**

DAY/DATE	TIME	COUNTRY	NATURE	PROGRAMME	STORY
Thursday 13/06/2013	8:30pm	Uganda	Favourable	The news stream	Ugandan's discuss new budget plans
Friday 14/06/2013	8:20pm	South Africa	Favourable	News south to north	A generic look at the war against the phenomenon of cyber crime
Saturday 15/06/2013	8:00pm	Egypt		News Hour	Egypt to cut ties with Syrian government. Egyptian president announces the closing of Syrian embassy.  Libya gun battle: gun men battle Benghazi security forces in clash
Saturday 15/06/2013	8:15pm	Libya	Unfavourable		
Sunday 16/06/2013	8:00pm	Uganda	Unfavourable	News hour	Cartel Clashes: Lord's resistance army attacks village
Sunday 16/06/2013	8.00pm	South Africa	favourable	News hour	Nelson Mandela's health: In serious condition but improving
Sunday 16/06/2013	8:00pm	South Africa	Unfavourable	News Hour	Marketing the day of the African child: years after apartheid and people still face challenges
Monday 17/06/2013	8:30pm	South Africa	Favourable	Talk to Aljazeera	An Interview By Mike Hanna with Frank Chikane a former adviser to Nelson Mandela, talking about the achievements of Nelson Mandela, his fight and the challenges of South Africa after apartheid.
Tuesday 18/06/2013	8:50pm	South Africa	Unfavourable	News hour	South Africa "Water technology." Children using playtime on new merry go round technology to generate water. Clean water is a problem in Africa.
Wednesday 19/06/2013	8:00pm	Somalia	Unfavourable	News hour	Attack: 15 dead in Al'shabaab's raid
<b>Reportage of Africa on Aljazeera (20<sup>th</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> June, 2013)</b>					
Thursday 20/06/2013	8:00pm	Nigeria	Unfavourable	News hour	Nigeria violence: dozens killed in various attacks. This is happening only few days after students were killed in Maiduguri

Friday 21/06/2013	8:10pm	Zimbabwe	Unfavourable	News hour	Zimbabwe : land reforms
Saturday 22/06/2013	8:06pm	South Africa	Neutral	News hour	New political party launch in south Africa.
Sunday 23/06/2013	9:00pm	Mali	Favourable	World news	Mali ceases fire: Government of Mali and Rebels agree on cease fire.
Monday 24/06/2013	-	-	-	-	-
Tuesday 25/06/2013	8:35pm	Nigeria	Neutral	News hour	Abuja hosts a confab on same sex marriage.
Wednesday 26/06/2013	8:00pm	South Africa	Unfavourable	News hour	Mandela may be in his very last days on earth
Wednesday 26/06/2013	8:00pm	Senegal & South Africa	Favourable	News hour	Obama tours Africa on state visit to Senegal, South Africa
Thursday 27/06/2013	8:45pm	Lybia	Favourable	News hour	A man rescued at sea.

**Table 3: Frequency of African News on CNN and Aljazeera**

NETWORK	STUDY PERIOD (13 <sup>TH</sup> -27 <sup>TH</sup> JUNE,2013) DAYS	NO. OF DAYS AFRICA WAS REPORTED	PERCENTAGE
CNN	15	8	53
Aljazeera	15	15	100

Table 3 above shows that of the fifteen day study period, CNN featured news on Africa across eight (8) days representing a frequency count of about 53% while Aljazeera featured Africa across the fifteen day study period representing 100%.

**Table 4: Nature of African News on CNN and Aljazeera**

NETWORK	STUDY PERIOD (DAYS)	NEWS ITEMS			
		F	N	U	Total
CNN	15	1 (12)	1 (13)	6 (75)	8 (100)
Aljazeera	15	7 (47)	1 (6)	7 (47)	15 (100)

(Figures in Parenthesis represent percentage calculation)

Legend

F – Favourable

N – Neutral

U – Unfavourable

As shown on Table 4, the news highlight on Africa by *CNN* had a preponderance of unfavourable news (75%) while the favourable and neutral news items on Africa had 12% count respectively. For *Aljazeera*, the distribution of news items on the favourable and unfavourable tilts, as shown on the table, seems to be at par with 47% count for each category. The two networks however had marginal neutral slants.

**Table 5: Aggregation Index**

Network	STUDY PERIOD (DAYS)	NEWS HIGHLIGHT	FAVOURABLE	NEUTRAL	UNFAVOURABLE
CNN	15	8	1	1	6
Aljazeera	15	15	7	1	7

Table 5 shows that *Aljazeera* gave more highlights on Africa within the study period than *CNN*. In terms of nature, direction and treatment, the table also shows that *Aljazeera*'s report on Africa reflected an equitable spread across the favourable and unfavourable categories while *CNN* had a preponderance of unfavourable news on Africa within the study period. This becomes more glaring when graphically represented (see *fig 1*).

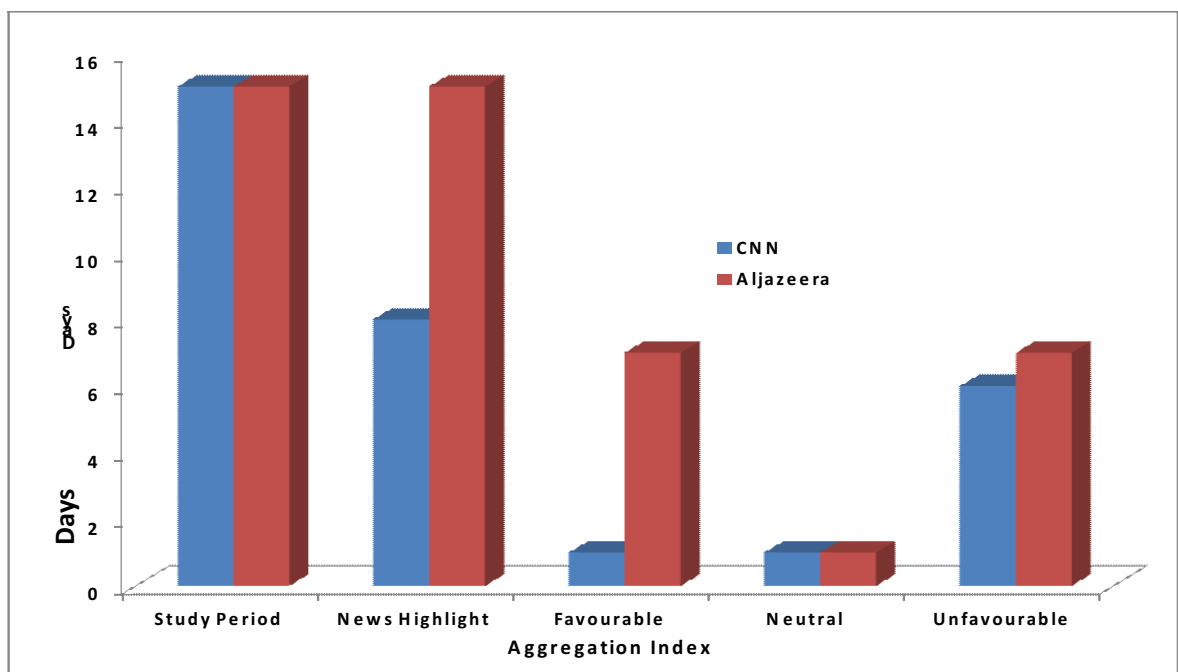


Fig. 1: Cumulative coverage on Africa by CNN and Aljazeera

## DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study seem to dovetail within the framework of quantitative and qualitative notions of imbalance in international news flow. Much of Africa was not reported by *CNN* in contradistinction to *Aljazeera*. This no doubt lends further credence to geographic proximity as a factor in international news flow.

It was further found that the bulk of *CNN* report on Africa was unfavourable. Within the study period, *CNN* seemed to focus more on Nelson Mandela's failing health. The imputation however is that there was a significant shift in the reportage of more structural sectors like politics and the economy. For *Aljazeera*, the unfavourable reportage of Africa focused more on the political insurrection in Egypt, the Benghazi (Libya) security breakdown and the activities of the *Al' Shabaab* rebels in Somalia. This interestingly was balanced out by its favourable reports like the emerging economic skyline in Uganda.

The study further revealed that for *CNN*, within the study period, the reportage featured just a few countries in the African region and these countries, South Africa, Egypt, Zimbabwe, etc., frequently made the rounds. In other words the *CNN* reports within the study period oscillated between South Africa and Egypt. This however cannot be divorced from the political turmoil in Egypt and Nelson Mandela's health. Incidentally, the same correspondents featured in all the reports on Africa within the study period. This finding holds corroboration for the fact that Africa only makes the news when it borders on macabre and sensationalism.

Comparatively, as revealed in this analysis, *Aljazeera* seemed to be more favourably disposed towards the reportage of African news, within the study period, than *CNN* with a 100% quantitative coverage on Africa as against *CNN*'s 53% while its qualitative coverage (favorable) stood at 47% with that of *CNN* standing at 12%. The imputation from the foregoing is deleterious and unpalatable.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Since the world has become a global village, global media networks should endeavour to break new grounds on global reportage by recruiting more correspondents with a view to enriching their news portals with penetration. This no doubt will ensure the coverage of areas considered too distant to reach.
2. In the wake of the perception of news as an economic resource, the stereotype associated with news as an unfavourable event should be broken. Happy moments and developments can aptly be conceptualized as news. When inculcated, this ideology will help break the jinx of disaster reporting that now assumes the colouration of global media.
3. There should be an emerging drive by the governments of African countries to develop communication facilities that can help launch Africa to the world so as to break the dependency on global media which seem to be inveigled in the inertia of inadequate and

unfavourable reportage of Africa. To this end, the facilities of PANA should be reactivated and expanded.

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