



# The Continuous Negative Framing of Africa in the Media: A Content Analysis of Stories sourced by the *Ghanaian Times* Newspaper from the BBC

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## ABSTRACT

This article looked at how the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ newspaper, using stories sourced from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), framed Africa to the rest of the world. The study which utilized the mixed approach also employed the gatekeeping, framing and cultural imperialist theories in its attempt to find out which of the regional blocs in Africa dominated the coverage and whether the portrayal was positive or negative. The study found that the majority of the stories that the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ sourced from the BBC were negative about Africa hence framing Africa as an unhealthy place for living. Out of the 154 stories the newspaper sourced from the BBC, only 52 stories focused on the positive happenings in Africa while 94 stories painted a catastrophic image about Africa. Also, political unrest and crime were the two dominant themes Africa was associated with. In all, the general image of Africa as portrayed by the newspaper was negative as the editors focused more on negative stories of Africa compared to the positives amidst the abundance of stories published by the BBC. This arguably means that Africa’s negative image could only be corrected if editors are deliberate in selecting more positive stories about Africa for publication. This work will indeed add to the literature on the framing of Africa in the media especially the contribution of the African media to the dominant negative image Africa continues to be associated with.

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### Publication History

Received: 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2024

Accepted: 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2024

Published online:

6<sup>th</sup> August, 2024

*Keywords: Africa, Images, Gatekeeping, Media Framing, BBC Stories, Regional Blocs Coverage*

## INTRODUCTION

Media portrayal of Africa over the years has come under scrutiny as many question the continuous negative labelling of Africa despite the many positive happenings in the continent. While the Western media is easily cited as spearheading the negative portrayal of Africa,<sup>1</sup> fingers are now pointed at Africans and African media for facilitating the negative portrayal of Africa.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Zeph-Ojiako and Anakwuba posit that Africa’s negative image is caused by media within and without through the avenues they provide

<sup>1</sup> B. G. Hawk, *Africa’s Media Image* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992); Kuselwa Gongo, “‘Distinctly African’: The Representation of Africans in City Press” (2007); Michael Yao Wodui Serwornoo, *The Image of Africa in Ghana’s Press*, vol. 2 (Open Book Publishers, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0227>.

<sup>2</sup> Japhace Poncian, “The Persistence of Western Negative Perceptions about Africa: Factoring in the Role of Africans,” *Journal of African Studies and Development* 7, no. 3 (2015): 72–80.

for the continuous spread of negative news about Africa.<sup>3</sup> According to Baah-Acheamfour, the sourcing of stories on Africa from Western media outlets is the foremost way through which negativity on Africa is highlighted and entrenched and the Western media devotes their energies and lenses largely to Africa's negatives compared to the abounding positive happenings on the continent.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) which is largely described as an influential and trusted source of information on Africa by African media<sup>5</sup> is also noted as leading the negative portrayal on Africa.<sup>6</sup> This obviously means a high sense of circumspection to be exercised by African news Editors when sourcing content from the BBC as even international news coverage of Africa has been described by some scholars for its episodic, simplistic and relentlessly negative content.<sup>7</sup> Such representations of Africa are indeed deemed both powerful and dangerous as they perpetuate negative stereotypes, reinforce neo-colonial power imbalance and undermine inter-cultural empathy and connectedness.<sup>8</sup> This research therefore seeks to find out the nature of stories sourced from the BBC which is described not only as the dominant media in terms of reportage on Africa<sup>9</sup> but also the most trusted source for news by editors in Ghana<sup>10</sup> and how the stories contribute to Africa's overall image in the media. The following Research Questions underlie the study:

1. What is the nature of BBC stories on Africa?
2. What is the dominant frame Africa is associated with per the publications?
3. Which African sub-region dominates in terms of stories?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Negative perceptions about Africa date back to the days of Herodotus who suggested that Africa was not only different but also more threatening, sinister, and dangerous than historical and medieval Greece.<sup>11</sup> Africa has continued to suffer in terms of its image even from the 17th century, as the argument had been that Africa is a place of suffering because the slave trade provoked war, disease, famine, and poverty.<sup>12</sup> In the early 19th century, Hegel wrote in his philosophy of history that Africa is not a historical continent and its people are capable of neither development nor education.<sup>13</sup> The narrative and descriptions have arguably not been different even in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, especially by the media.

Africa has largely been depicted in numerous negative ways with images like a place of famine and hunger,<sup>14</sup> civil wars,<sup>15</sup> 'dark continent',<sup>16</sup> nearly swallowed by crime through narcotic trade,<sup>17</sup> plagued

<sup>3</sup> Chizirim Favour Zeph-Ojiako and Blessing Winny Anakwuba, "Promoting the Image of Africa through Media: The Role of African Leaders (Case Study of Nigeria)," *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities* 20, no. 3 (October 30, 2020): 80–98, <https://doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v20i3.5>.

<sup>4</sup> K. Baah-Acheamfour, "African Image in the Media: A Study of the 'Ghanaian Times' and 'Daily Graphic,'" <https://www.modernghana.com/>, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Bicket and Melissa Wall, "BBC News in the United States: A 'super-Alternative' News Medium Emerges," *Media, Culture & Society* 31, no. 3 (May 20, 2009): 365–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443709102711>; Jonathan Temin, "Considering the Role of the BBC in African Conflict," *Review of African Political Economy* 30, no. 98 (2003): 654–60; Serwornoo, *The Image of Africa in Ghana's Press*.

<sup>6</sup> Kwaku Baah-Acheamfour, "Image Creation about Africa Within the State-Owned Media Space: A Content Analysis of the Ghanaian Times Newspaper," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, February 23, 2024, 149–59, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2024527>.

<sup>7</sup> Mel Bunce, "International News and the Image of Africa: New Storytellers, New Narratives," *Images of Africa: Creation, Negotiation and Subversion*, 2015, 42–62; Serwornoo, *The Image of Africa in Ghana's Press*.

<sup>8</sup> J.A. Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (London: University of California Press, 2001); R. Silverstone, *Media and Morality: On The Rise of the Mediapolis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Bicket and Wall, "BBC News in the United States: A 'super-Alternative' News Medium Emerges"; Temin, "Considering the Role of the BBC in African Conflict."

<sup>10</sup> Baah-Acheamfour, "African Image in the Media: A Study of the 'Ghanaian Times' and 'Daily Graphic.'"

<sup>11</sup> Roberts Bates, "Africa Through Western Eyes - The World's Dark Continent or Capitalism's Shining Light?," Think Africa Press, October 31, 2012, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201210310994.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Poncian, "The Persistence of Western Negative Perceptions about Africa: Factoring in the Role of Africans."

<sup>13</sup> John D Fage, "The Development of African Historiography," *General History of Africa* 1 (1981): 25–42.

<sup>14</sup> Tom Cohen, "African Leaders Use Summit to Fight Negative Perceptions," *The World Today* 66, no. 6 (2014): 20–22.

<sup>15</sup> Tom Cargill, "Investment In Africa: All to Play For," *World Today* 66, no. 6 (2010): 20–22.

<sup>16</sup> J. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> K. A. Aning, "Narcotic Trade Is Still Serious in Ghana," July 21, 2011, [www.myjoyonline.com](http://www.myjoyonline.com).

with corruption,<sup>18</sup> poverty-stricken, war-ravaged,<sup>19</sup> and disease-ridden continent, which also reinforce other negative stereotypes.<sup>20</sup>

It is also said to be deviled by civil wars, military coups, and dependence,<sup>21</sup> that it is primitive with people living in villages and shantytowns<sup>22</sup> with many children malnourished<sup>23</sup> at the expense of the developmentally oriented happenings on the continent. Thus, Western media paint a fatalistic picture of Africa as if nothing good exists on the continent when evidence abounds of Africa's positive strides. This biased portrayal according to Kromah, is selectively done by the Western media to prove to their already misinformed audiences that they have full knowledge about Africa and activities there when indeed they are naïve about happenings in Africa which some Westerners tend to think is one country.<sup>24</sup> An unbiased reportage will help determine the true image of Africa to the rest of the world to guide decisions on Africa.<sup>25</sup>

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three theories underpin this work namely The Gatekeeping Theory, Framing and Cultural Imperialist Theory.

### Gate Keeping Theory

The gatekeeping theory is significant as far as media content selection and circulation are concerned.<sup>26</sup> It is used to determine the selection processes of editors as far as publications are concerned. Kurt Levin is credited as the originator of the theory as it formed the foundation of his social psychological works until he passed on in 1947. Other Scholars led by Shoemaker have adopted the idea to explain the processes leading to the selection of news stories or the gates that the stories go through before they finally find space in the newspaper or other media.<sup>27</sup> The theory indeed emphasizes the existence of filters before the news is disseminated.

The Gate Keeping Theory is significant to this work as it brings out not only the nature of stories that the media allows the public to have access to based on their judgement but also the rationale and benchmarks for such decisions. Indeed, it is the choice of stories the editors select from the BBC for publication that will cause a definite image to be formed about Africa over time. Katz and Lazarsfeld indeed define gatekeeping as the controlling of a strategic portion of a channel, so as to have the power of decision over whether whatever is flowing through that channel will enter the group or not.<sup>28</sup> Through this process, many people have to decide whether or not the audience will hear or see the news. Gatekeepers of the media are message filters, and they include reporters, writers, editors, producers and even government officials. The concept involves every aspect of message selection, handling and control.<sup>29</sup> In this current work, the gatekeepers were the editors of the newspaper who decided what story made

<sup>18</sup> K. Pratt, "Current African Leaders Lowering Standards" (Ghana: Joy News Television, May 27, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Jamie B. Wallace, "American Perceptions of Africa Based on Media Representations," *African Renaissance* 2, no.3(2005):93–96.

<sup>20</sup> J. Michira, "Images of Africa in the Western Media,"

[http://www.teachingliterature.org/teachingliterature/pdf/multi/images\\_of\\_Africa\\_michira/pdf.](http://www.teachingliterature.org/teachingliterature/pdf/multi/images_of_Africa_michira/pdf.), 2002.

<sup>21</sup> S. Araya, "Mis-Representation at Its Best: Perceptions of Africa through Foreign Eyes," 2008,

[www.africanholocaust.net/news\\_ah/eyesofafrica.html](http://www.africanholocaust.net/news_ah/eyesofafrica.html); Richard Dowden, *Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles* (Granta Books, 2014); Cargill, "Investment In Africa: All to Play For"; Cohen, "African Leaders Use Summit to Fight Negative Perceptions."

<sup>22</sup> Kunahira. S.K., "Portrayal of Africa in American Media," *Content Analysis of News Week Magazine's - 1998-2008*, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> J McKinney and M. Mahadeo, "Media Representations of Africa: Still the Same Old Story?," *Policy & Practice-A Development Education Review*, no. 4 (2007).

<sup>24</sup> Alhaji G V Kromah, "Africa In The Western Media: Cycle of Contra-Positives and Selective Perceptions," See [Http://www.theperspective.org/Africa\\_Westernmedia.html](http://www.theperspective.org/Africa_Westernmedia.html), 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Tokunbo Ojo, "Post-NWICO Debate: Image of Africa in the Western Media," in *Media in Transition 2 Conference: Globalization and Convergence*, Cambridge, MA, May, vol. 10, 2002; Baah-Acheamfour, "African Image in the Media: A Study of the 'Ghanaian Times' and 'Daily Graphic'"; Rod Chavis, "Africa in the Western Media," in *Paper Presented at the Sixth Annual African Studies Consortium Workshop* (University Of Pennsylvania - African Studies Center, 1998), <https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Workshop/chavis98.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Kasper Welbers and Michaël Opgenhaffen, "Social Media Gatekeeping: An Analysis of the Gatekeeping Influence of Newspapers' Public Facebook Pages," *New Media & Society* 20, no. 12 (2018): 4728–47.

<sup>27</sup> P. J. Shoemaker, *Gate Keeping* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> Katz. E. and P. Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence - The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communication* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> Shoemaker, *Gate Keeping*.

headlines on a given day and how the continuous publication of certain story types culminated in a frame or theme that Africa could be depicted or associated with.

### **Framing Theory**

This theory which has been built upon by Erving Goffman in 1974 has its roots in the works of Gregory Bateson who originated the idea in 1972. Framing as a theory, seeks to describe the practice of thinking about news items and story content within familiar contexts.<sup>30</sup> Thus, it helps in focusing the attention of audiences on certain events and then placing them within a field of meaning. Entman elevates the discussion on framing in mass communication by describing it as "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation and/or solution."<sup>31</sup> Entman indeed sees salience and selection as key elements of framing as he says that salience foregrounds a message, making it noticeable, meaningful, or memorable and that selection involves choosing some aspects of news and ignoring others.<sup>32</sup> In the case of this work, the salience and selection were on the stories that Editors of the newspaper picked from the BBC and the message and image that such stories generated about Africa.

Framing has indeed been instrumental in media content analysis and meaning-making as well as discursive portrayals.<sup>33</sup> It is also deemed useful in issues and personality construction analysis<sup>34</sup> as well as symbolic representation.<sup>35</sup> The concept of framing rests, basically, on the idea that communication is constructed by asserting certain narratives, identities, themes, beliefs, values and ideas over others.<sup>36</sup> This can be done through the use of framing devices such as keywords, roots, quotes, storylines, catchphrases, narratives and life stories.<sup>37</sup> Framing is therefore an important concept for this research because it is intrinsically related to using words or language to contribute to identity formation and in this case how Africa has been represented to the rest of the world via media. This is against the backdrop that the continuous publication of certain stories by the media leads the audiences to categorize, label, interpret, and evaluate information.<sup>38</sup>

### **Cultural Imperialist Theory**

This is a theory espoused by Herb Schiller in 1973 and it emphasizes the superiority of Western cultures and media over that of the Third World including Africa. Schiller by this theory posits that Western nations dominate the media around the world which in turn has a powerful effect on Third World Cultures by imposing on them Western views and therefore destroying their native cultures.<sup>39</sup> This theory was significant to this work as it helped in finding out the extent to which the newspaper also supports the claim that Western Media and culture are superior to African culture including media thereby devaluing and eroding the rich African culture.<sup>40</sup> A similar trend in the publications of the newspaper will mean it is not only as guilty as the Western media but is also supporting Western Media like the BBC in painting a

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<sup>30</sup> Sunday Olasunkanmi Arowolo, "Understanding Framing Theory," *Mass Communication Theory* 3, no. 6 (2017): 4.

<sup>31</sup> Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and US Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>32</sup> Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and US Foreign Policy*, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Jennifer Sclafani, "Family as a Framing Resource for Political Identity Construction: Introduction Sequences in Presidential Primary Debates," *Language in Society* 44, no. 3 (2015): 369–99; R M Colvin et al., "The Role of Conflict Framing and Social Identity in Public Opinion about Land Use Change: An Experimental Test in the Australian Context," *Environmental Policy and Governance* 30, no. 2 (2020): 84–98.

<sup>34</sup> Ming M Boyer, Loes Aaldering, and Sophie Lecheler, "Motivated Reasoning in Identity Politics: Group Status as a Moderator of Political Motivations," *Political Studies* 70, no. 2 (2022): 385–401.

<sup>35</sup> Nana Kwame Osei Fordjour and Etse Sikanku, "Vice-Presidential Candidates, Language Frames, and Functions across Two Continental Divides: An Analysis of Acceptance Speeches," *International Journal of Communication* 16 (2022): 19.

<sup>36</sup> Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo and Virginia Mapedzahama, "Towards Afrocentric Counter-Narratives of Race and Racism in Australia," *Australasian Review of African Studies*, 2018, 1-6; G. E. Sikanku, "A Framing Analysis of Barack Obama's Afrocentric Representation in the New York Times and Daily Nation," *Legon Journal for International Affairs and Diplomacy* 10, no. 2 (2020): 1–31.

<sup>37</sup> Fordjour and Sikanku, "Vice-Presidential Candidates, Language Frames, and Functions across Two Continental Divides: An Analysis of Acceptance Speeches."

<sup>38</sup> K Lowry and P. Xie, *Africa in the Media* (Cambridge: Ted Publication, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> H.J. Schiller, *Communication and Cultural Domination* (White Plains, NY: International Arts and Social Sciences Press, 1973).

<sup>40</sup> David Croteau and William Hoynes, "Social Inequality and Media Representation," *Media/Society: Industries, Images and Audiences*, 1997, 185–216.

catastrophic image of Africa as a place not worth living. It will also help in evaluating assertions by Scholars that Western Media publications about Africa are largely negative hence calling on African media to help correct the image of Africa in the media.<sup>41</sup> Again, it will help validate the assertion by Zeph-Ojiako and Anakwuba, that Africa's negative image is caused by media within and outside Africa.<sup>42</sup> Thus, a predominant selection of negative stories about Africa will mean the 'Ghanaian Times' newspaper and its editors are as guilty of portraying a catastrophic image of Africa just like the Western media which are criticized for deliberately and continuously overfocusing on Africa's negatives compared to the positives.

## METHODOLOGY

The work employed the mixed method in collecting and analysing data. Thus, there was a blend of qualitative and quantitative tools in getting it done as the content-analysed data was complemented with an interview with the editor of the 'Ghanaian Times' newspaper to situate the data gathered from the African page of the newspaper. Interviews as purposive conversations will give insight into a phenomenon and in our case the choice of stories published by the editors and what meaning is put on it and again its culmination in themes and frames about Africa.<sup>43</sup> Hsieh and Shannon on the relevance of qualitative content analysis posit that it allows for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns.<sup>44</sup> Quantitative Content Analysis, according to Wimmer and Dominick, enables the study in its analysis of communication to measure variables and it does so in a manner that is systematic, objective and quantitative.<sup>45</sup> Content analysis primarily focuses on the "characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text".<sup>46</sup> Walizer and Wiener also define content analysis as a systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded data.<sup>47</sup> In the case of this work, the focus was on content found on the African pages of the 'Ghanaian Times' newspaper.

Content analysis has also been described as a good methodological process for studying frames, themes and representation in content.<sup>48</sup> It is also good for analysing phenomena such as media content.<sup>49</sup> According to Krippendorff, qualitative content analysis is mostly used in media studies to analyse units of news articles such as headlines, photos and paragraphs in the context of framing theory.<sup>50</sup> The researcher, to analyse the stories which finally culminate into themes and frames on Africa concerning the African news stories of 'Ghanaian Times', had to analyse the content of the entire news stories on the African page. A coding protocol was indeed designed to guide this work and based on the Holtis model of an average of three coders in determining inter-coder reliability, 0.90 acceptance was reached.<sup>51</sup>

Also, the Week Construction Approach as espoused by Stempel was used in collecting and sampling data for analysis.<sup>52</sup> In all, 70 editions of the newspaper were sampled for analysis and it covered the period 2019 to 2023 and again based on the approach which calls for 14 editions to be selected to represent a year of publication. Using the Simple Random Sampling, a day which was Monday was selected to begin the sampling process of the various editions and since the newspaper does not appear in

<sup>41</sup> Hawk, *Africa's Media Image*; Emmanuel Alozie, "Sudan and South Africa-a Framing Analysis of Mail & Guardian Online's Coverage of Darfur: Research Section," *Ecquid Novi* 26, no. 1 (2005): 63-84.

<sup>42</sup> Zeph-Ojiako and Anakwuba, "Promoting the Image of Africa through Media: The Role of African Leaders (Case Study of Nigeria)."

<sup>43</sup> Steinar Kvale, "The Qualitative Research Interview: A Phenomenological and a Hermeneutical Mode of Understanding," *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 14, no. 2 (1983): 171.

<sup>44</sup> Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E Shannon, "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis," *Qualitative Health Research* 15, no. 9 (2005): 1278.

<sup>45</sup> Roger Wimmer and Joseph Dominick, "Mass Media Research: An Introduction 8th Ed," Belmont, CA: Thomson Higher Education, 2006.

<sup>46</sup> Hsieh and Shannon, "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis," 1278.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Walizer and Paul Wienir, *Research Methods and Analysis: Searching for Relationships*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

<sup>48</sup> David Deacon et al., *Researching Communications: A Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Cultural Analysis* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2021).

<sup>49</sup> Wimmer and Dominick, "Mass Media Research: An Introduction 8th Ed."

<sup>50</sup> K. Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2004).

<sup>51</sup> O. R. Holtis, *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Reading, MA: Wesley Publications, 1956).

<sup>52</sup> Guido H Stempel, "Sample Size for Classifying Subject Matter in Dailies.," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (1952): 333.

the stands on Sundays, another day which was Tuesday was also randomly selected to complete the 14 editions for the year. The process was repeated to arrive at the 70 editions sampled and made up of 154 stories. It also represented five (5) years of publication as the interview data helped interpret well the African-page content. ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ was also purposively selected because the focus was on state-owned print media which is not under any pressure to engage in sensationalism as it enjoys government subvention and also the paper is less explored for research purposes compared to the ‘*Daily Graphic*’.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study which sought to find out the most current image of Africa in the Ghanaian media ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ per the stories sourced from the BBC, was based on content analysis with interviews conducted to situate the findings. By looking at the continuous selection and publication of certain stories on Africa, a definite image was created to depict the continent. The work also focused on the regional blocs in Africa which according to the BBC stories is safe to live or otherwise. Both qualitative and quantitative tools were employed in analysing the data which covered the period 2019-2023, as the period saw the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ newspaper sourcing 154 stories from the BBC.

### The Tone of BBC stories found in the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’

Table 1 depicts the tone of the stories sourced from the BBC by the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’. The results showed an overwhelming concentration on negative stories compared to the positives hence painting a catastrophic image of Africa as an unhealthy and unsafe continent. Indeed, out of the 154 BBC-sourced stories, over 60 percent (61.0 %) of the stories painted a gloomy picture of Africa compared to 33.8 percent of positive stories. The results give credence to assertions by Serwornoo and Baah-Acheamfour that stories on Africa as covered by the Western media led by the BBC are largely negative including those which find expression in the Ghanaian media.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, resources are arguably devoted to covering Africa’s negatives compared to the positive happenings on the continent. This negative trend in terms of Africa’s image can indeed be overturned if Editors of African media deliberately focus on the positive stories on Africa as a way of countering the negatives just as *City Press* in South Africa is doing, which is even encouraged by Scholars like Gongo and Jodah and Asemah.<sup>54</sup> This is especially so when the Western media led by the BBC is the most preferred destination for stories on Africa by African Media including the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the editor for the newspaper in explaining the rationale for selecting such stories posited that such stories are “fresh, well-edited and compelling and also the public deserve to know about all happenings in Africa, both positive and negative(interview data). Thus, there is no room to skew story selection to paint a rosy picture of Africa. Table 1 below gives a clearer picture of the tone of the stories.

**Table 1: Nature and Number of Stories Published by ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ from British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)**

| Nature Image | Ghanaian Times Newspaper |      |
|--------------|--------------------------|------|
|              | Frequency                | (%)  |
| Positive     | 52                       | 33.8 |
| Negative     | 94                       | 61.0 |
| Neutral      | 8                        | 5.2  |
| Total        | 154                      | 100  |

### Dominant Theme Africa is Associated With

<sup>53</sup> Serwornoo, *The Image of Africa in Ghana’s Press*; Baah-Acheamfour, “Image Creation about Africa Within the State-Owned Media Space: A Content Analysis of the Ghanaian Times Newspaper.”

<sup>54</sup> Gongo, “‘Distinctly African’: The Representation of Africans in City Press”; Martha Joda and Ezekiel S Asemah, “Africa and the Western Media: Analysis of British Broadcasting Corporation’s (BBC) Africa Eye and Cable News Network’s (CNN) Inside Africa,” *Sau Journal Of Management And Social Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2022): 1–10.

<sup>55</sup> Baah-Acheamfour, “Image Creation about Africa Within the State-Owned Media Space: A Content Analysis of the Ghanaian Times Newspaper.”

Figure 1 gives a harrowing picture of how Africa was framed in the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ through its continuous publication of stories from the BBC which the Editor of the newspaper deems, the “most reliable and credible source of information on Africa as the stories are not only fresh but well written and also BBC covers many countries and issues on the continent” (Interview data). Africa was indeed framed negatively as a crises-torn area which is not worth living in as out of the 154 stories published about Africa, 94(61.0%) of the stories framed Africa negatively while 52 stories representing 33.8% framed Africa in a positive light. Political unrest and crime emerged as the two top negative images that Africa is associated with. This is out of the 16 story patterns established through the coding of stories published. Political unrest accounted for 20(13.0%) and 19(12.3%) stories respectively. The results confirm the assertion by Serwornoo and Baah-Acheamfour that BBC stories about Africa are largely negative and that Ghanaian media on the note of convenience contribute to framing Africa negatively through their continuous selection and publication of such stories from the BBC.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, by the exercise of their gatekeeping function, editors of the newspaper add bite to the cultural imperialist theory that Western media, content and culture are superior to that of the third world including Africa.

The results again, go a long way to confirm Temin assertion that BBC is indeed influential in Africa.<sup>57</sup> Bicket and Melissa and Serwornoo also posit that BBC News is not only trusted but strong in the world of which Africa is a part, such that when the stories were even negative about Africa, the editors still went for such stories.<sup>58</sup> The chart below shows the various images portrayed about Africa per the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ editors’ focus on BBC stories.

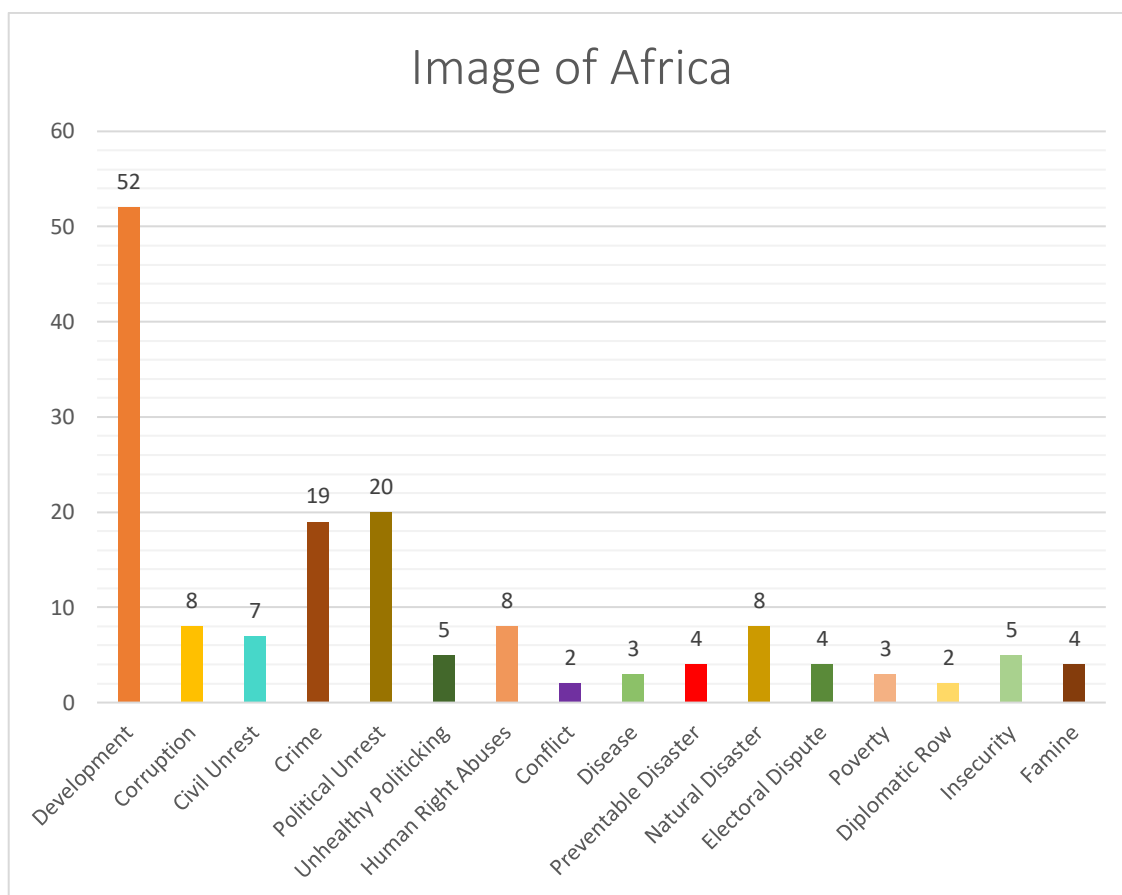


Figure 1: Images of Africa flowing from BBC stories sourced by the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ Newspaper

### Regional Distribution of BBC Stories in the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’

<sup>56</sup> Serwornoo, *The Image of Africa in Ghana’s Press*; Baah-Acheamfour, “Image Creation about Africa Within the State-Owned Media Space: A Content Analysis of the Ghanaian Times Newspaper.”

<sup>57</sup> Temin, “Considering the Role of the BBC in African Conflict.”

<sup>58</sup> Bicket and Wall, “BBC News in the United States: A ‘super-Alternative’ News Medium Emerges”; Serwornoo, *The Image of Africa in Ghana’s Press*.

The results from the publications showed that the Eastern Africa region was the most preferred destination for stories on Africa compared to the other regional blocs like Western Africa, Northern Africa, Southern Africa, and Central Africa. Out of the 154 stories, Eastern Africa accounted for 63(40.9%) stories with the least covered area being Central Africa which had 12(7.8%) stories. The rest were Western Africa with 46(30.0%) stories, followed by Northern Africa and Southern Africa with 17(11.0%) and 16(10.3%) stories respectively. Consequently, the Eastern African enclave arguably appears very busy hence attracting the lenses of the BBC which is described by Bicket and Melissa (2009) as a very influential media across the world hence a positive image of the area projected by the BBC could arguably open the place up for commerce, investment among other positive activities that good publicity and image could bring a people, country or region.

A negative image could also cause the place to be seen as not conducive for business or livelihood in general as media according to scholars like Happer and Philo, Owolabi, Ullah and Khan, Santos et al indeed shape opinions and views of people regarding issues or the world.<sup>59</sup> On the choice of stories selected for publication, the Editor of the newspaper indicated that the focus was actually on fresh and current issues or occurrences on the African continent whether positive or negative, as the people deserve to know about happenings in Africa and that the newspaper has no intention in skewing reportage just to paint a rosy picture about the continent (interview data).

Table 2 provides a summary of the regional distribution of the BBC-sourced stories on Africa.

**Table 2: Regional Distribution Of Bbc Stories In The ‘Ghanaian Times’**

| Nature<br>Image | Ghanaian Times Newspaper (Frequency and %) |                   |                   |                    |                    |
|-----------------|--|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
|                 | Eastern<br>Africa                          | Western<br>Africa | Central<br>Africa | Northern<br>Africa | Southern<br>Africa |
| Positive        | 19(30.1%)                                  | 20(43.5%)         | 4(33.3%)          | 3(17.6%)           | 6(37.5%)           |
| Negative        | 42(66.7%)                                  | 25(54.3%)         | 6(50.0%)          | 13(76.5%)          | 8(50.0%)           |
| Neutral         | 2(3.2%)                                    | 1(2.2%)           | 2(16.7%)          | 1(5.9%)            | 2(12.5%)           |
| Total (154)     | 63   | 46                | 12                | 17                 | 16                 |

### Positive Stories Distribution Per the BBC Stories on Africa

The results showed that the West African sub-region was the most positively framed area hence the safest area among the five regional blocs, and it was closely followed by the Eastern African area. Out of the 52 positive stories sourced by the ‘Ghanaian Times’ from the BBC, Western Africa had 20(38.5%) and was closely followed by Eastern Africa with 19(36.5%) which represented a deficit of just one (1) story. The two were followed by Southern Africa with 6(11.5%), Central Africa with 4(7.7%) and lastly, Northern Africa with 3(5.8%) of the total number of stories. The positive happenings centred around good governance, law and order, infrastructural development, human rights, buoyant economic activities including tourism, and decent livelihood among others. The positive portrayal indexes are significant to this work as they arguably point to the safest place for livelihood, investment, and holidays among other daily life decisions. According to Happer and Philo, a lot of people get to know other parts of the world through the media hence a good frame of an area by a giant like the BBC is deemed influential and powerful in the world through its portrayals and coverage could go a long way to influence the decisions of people regarding such areas.<sup>60</sup> For instance, according to Munjal and Grover, investors prefer safer

<sup>59</sup> Catherine Happer and Greg Philo, “The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change,” *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 1, no. 1 (2013): 321–36; Dare Owolabi, “The Role of Mass Media in Public Opinion Formation and Governance,” *Icheke Journal of the Faculty of Humanities* 17, no. 4 (2019).; Rooh Ullah and Adnan Khan, “The Role of Mass Media in Shaping Public Opinion,” *Rooh Ullah’s Lab*, 2020; Íris Santos, Luís Miguel Carvalho, and Benedita Portugal e Melo, “The Media’s Role in Shaping the Public Opinion on Education: A Thematic and Frame Analysis of Externalisation to World Situations in the Portuguese Media,” *Research in Comparative and International Education* 17, no. 1 (2022): 29–50.

<sup>60</sup> Happer and Philo, “The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change”; Bicket and Wall, “BBC News in the United States: A ‘super-Alternative’ News Medium Emerges.”



zones for business and investment activities.<sup>61</sup> Table 3 below illustrates the regional distribution of the positive stories by the BBC sourced by the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ newspaper.

**Table 3: Positive Stories By The Bbc On Africa Published By ‘*Ghanaian Times*’**

| Nature          | Ghanaian Times Newspaper |      |
|-----------------|--------------------------|------|
| Image           | Frequency                | (%)  |
| Eastern Africa  | 19                       | 36.5 |
| Western Africa  | 20                       | 38.5 |
| Central Africa  | 4                        | 7.7  |
| Northern Africa | 3                        | 5.8  |
| Southern Africa | 6                        | 11.5 |
| Total (154)     | 52                       | 100  |

### Negative Frame and Regional Distribution

This aspect looked at the regional bloc with the highest number of negative stories, revealing the place arguably branded by the media as unhealthy and unsafe for livelihood. The Eastern African area which dominated in terms of the overall number of stories sourced from the BBC by the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ newspaper also topped the chart with the highest number of negative stories. Out of the 94 negative stories, Eastern Africa accounted for 42(44.7%), followed by Western Africa with 25(26.6%) stories with the least negative area being Central Africa with 6 stories. Northern Africa was third on the log with 13(13.8%) stories and was followed by Southern Africa which had 8(8.5%) stories. Accordingly, Eastern Africa led by Kenya, Rwanda, and Somalia, among others dominated the negative frame log with issues like political unrest, crime, corruption, human rights abuses, poverty, and diseases, among others being prevalent in such areas according to the BBC stories. Per the negative stories, the area is arguably framed and branded unsafe for livelihood and could be unattractive to potential investors especially those from other jurisdictions as asserted by Munjal and Glover.<sup>62</sup> Table 3 below illustrates the regional distribution of the positive stories by the BBC sourced by the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ newspaper.

**Table 4: Negative Stories By The Bbc As Carried By The Ghanaian Times Regional Distribution Of Bbc Stories In The Ghanaian Times**

| Nature          | Ghanaian Times Newspaper |      |
|-----------------|--------------------------|------|
| Image           | Frequency                | (%)  |
| Eastern Africa  | 42                       | 44.7 |
| Western Africa  | 25                       | 26.6 |
| Central Africa  | 6                        | 6.4  |
| Northern Africa | 13                       | 13.8 |
| Southern Africa | 8                        | 8.5  |
| Total (154)     | 94                       | 100  |

### Discussion Summary

Per the results, Africa’s negative image in the media has generally not changed and African media are as guilty as the foreign media in framing Africa with catastrophic images per their publication. This is so

<sup>61</sup> S. Munjal and K. L. Glover, “Investors’ Preference for Investment Avenues: A Study,” *International Advanced Research Journal in Science, Engineering and Technology Impact Factor 7 9*, no. 2 (February 2022): 105.

<sup>62</sup> Munjal and Glover, “Investors’ Preference for Investment Avenues: A Study.”

even when editors of the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ newspaper had the luxury of choosing from a myriad of stories on Africa from the BBC. The editors still went for more negative stories on Africa than positive stories. Out of the 154 stories published by the newspaper, only 52 portrayed Africa positively while 94 were negative frames. Political unrest and crime emerged as the two dominant images of Africa with 38 and 36 stories respectively. Again, while the West African sub-region was deemed the safest area in Africa having recorded 20 out of the 52 positive stories Africa was framed with, the East African sub-region emerged as the region with the most negative frames having recorded 42 out of the 94 negative stories. However, all together, the East African area was also the most covered area per the publications as it accounted for 63 out of the total 154 stories the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ sourced from the BBC.

## CONCLUSION

There is indeed evidence of African media including the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ continuous reliance on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for stories even when such stories are largely negative about Africa. There is also evidence to the effect that African media and editors in the exercise of their gatekeeping functions, opt for more negative stories on Africa compared to the positive happenings on the continent which also deserve publication. Thus, on the note of convenience, editors are publishing negative stories on Africa thereby contributing to the overall negative frame of the continent. Hence the ‘*Ghanaian Times*’ is as guilty as any foreign media accused of painting a catastrophic image of Africa. This adds bite to the assertion by Zeph-Ojiako and Anakwuba that Africa’s negative image is caused by media within and without through the avenues they provide for the continuous spread of negative news about Africa.<sup>63</sup> Also, the East African sub-region was the most preferred destination for all stories on Africa including negative stories while the West African sub-region recorded the highest number of positive stories hence framed as the safest place in Africa for livelihood.

## RECOMMENDATION

It is trite saying that the dominant image of Africa in the media is still negative be it in the African or foreign media. However, the findings point to the fact that the distant gap between the positive stories and the negative stories seems to be narrowing indicating that appeals for editors to be deliberate in terms of their story selection on Africa in the exercise of their gatekeeping functions, is yielding results. The gap is no longer wide as other research works such as Hawk, Alozie, Kunahira, Baah-Acheamfour, and Serwornoo among others have indicated. There is still the need for steps to be doubled in selecting more positive stories on Africa to constitute publications for each day. By so doing, the negative image of Africa would be overturned as a new and healthy image reflecting the many positive and healthy occurrences in Africa is projected.

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<sup>63</sup> Zeph-Ojiako and Anakwuba, “Promoting the Image of Africa through Media: The Role of African Leaders (Case Study of Nigeria).”

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