

U.S. MASS MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT:  
THE AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores how Africans perceive their continent is portrayed by U.S. media, and what Africans think about these portrayals. Africa is a continent known in the United States and other Western nations for darkness, wars, famine and other vices. Africans were asked to describe the kinds of news stories on Africa they see reported by U.S. media, whether those representations are accurate or not, and ways they feel those misrepresentations can be corrected. The participant responses were analyzed using Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm as the theoretical framework. An online survey was administered through Qualtrics resulting in 99 participants dropping to 68 qualitative responses. Participants argued that though Africa is faced with some negativity, there is more to the continent and its people than is portrayed, stating that the good outweighs the bad.

*Keywords: Africa, Africans, Perception, Portrayal, Misrepresentation, U.S. Media, Narrative Theory.*

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Knowledge is gained largely by interaction with people, but most especially through exposure to news media. News items flood the air waves, print media, and the Internet on a regular basis, and people are exposed to information they wouldn't have easily gotten on their own. Residual knowledge remains with audiences long after their experiences. Information and perception the Western public have about Africa comes from exposure to what the media say, rather than interactions with people from Africa. The voices of Africans have barely been heard in addressing how their continent is perceived.

Ebo (1992) argues that the negative and misguided images of Africa in U.S. media results in Americans having a negative image about the continent, because most of what they know is what the media portray. "The tropes about Africa have become common place because of the falsification of information about the continent by Western media sources" (Asante, 2013, p. 108). Journalists often only get one side of a story, distorted by a misunderstanding of the continent and its diverse nations and peoples, so understanding what Africans think and feel about U.S. news media's portrayal of Africa can better inform journalistic practices; which will in the long run help U.S. media in the accurate presentation of Africa and Africans to the world. That is part of the objectives this thesis hopes to achieve.

## **Rationale**

Studies on the perception of the U.S. on Africa have been done in the past, finding that Africa is often represented as a dark continent, stricken with poverty, wars, crises, famine, and hunger (Asante, 2013; Danker-Dake, 2008; Ebo, 1992; Harth, 2012; Mahadeo & McKinney, 2007; Odine, 2013). This research will build upon those studies by adding the African perspective, perceptions of Africans on how they are portrayed in U.S. media, and what notions can be corrected. This thesis sought to discover the perceptions of the stereotypes used and whether Africans believe U.S. journalists are capturing the real Africa. In addition, this thesis sought whether Africans themselves agree with these stereotypes or if there appears to be journalistic motives behind consistently relying on stereotypical reports.

This research is important because there are many studies focusing on U.S. media representations, and it would be good to get an insight into what Africans think. As an African, most Americans I have met confess to knowing little or nothing about the continent of Africa. The little they claim to know is almost always along the lines of negativity. For a long time, I have heard Africans complain about how U.S. media portray the African continent in a bad light and how Africa is nothing like the way it is portrayed. The reason why I chose to carry out this research is to systematically explore the attitudes of Africans towards U.S. media portrayal of Africa and Africans. Research is lacking in this area as most studies focus on how Africa is portrayed in the media, and not on what Africans think about these portrayals. Thus, this is an interesting and vital subject to investigate.

This thesis makes use of a qualitative research approach. A qualitative research study not only adds to literature, but also gives voice to under-represented groups. The theoretical perspective used in this study is narrative theory (Fisher, 1984) “Narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions chronologically connected” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 32). This research is timely as globalization connects nations and continents, with new technologies emerging daily and Africa becoming more relevant in world markets. It is important to understand Africans’ perceptions of how Africa is portrayed in U.S. media, what they think is the reason behind the portrayal, explore whether or not they agree with what is being said and shown about them, what they will suggest can be done by Africans to correct the bad impression, and how they think Africa can be correctly portrayed by U.S. media and individuals or groups responsible for stereotypical representations or misrepresentations. Using narrative theory, this thesis allows participants to tell their own stories on their perceptions of U.S. media portrayals of Africa.

### **African Context**

There is a continuous presentation of Africa as a needy, dependent, war-ridden, hunger-stricken, hopeless continent. The continent is seen as this homogenous backward continent, with uncivilized people whose lives are not seen as equal to those from other continents, especially the West (Michira, 2002; Oguh, 2015). Even after attaining political independence for over 50 years, Africa is still viewed the same way, as dark and backward (Poncian, 2015). This negativity has persisted with little or no change, with most of these negative impressions blamed on the bias from media, how they report on

Africa, the images and videos that accompany African news reports, and their choice of words/language while reporting (Ogunyemi, 2011; Poncian, 2015).

In addressing this, Poncian (2015) stated that, even the “Africa Rising” maxim currently being used when addressing the progress of Africa has done nothing in changing the way Africa is viewed by the West. Poncian (2015) added that Africa is changing, but this change does not annihilate the deep-rooted negative impression already imbedded in the minds and subconscious of people. Matshikiza (2001) argues that Africa should not try so hard to live up to the set standard, because it is being judged by the expectations set by the West. When the leading international magazine, *The Economist*, did a cover story on Africa in 2000, and entitled it “Hopeless Africa,” it turned out to be a “disguised blessing” (Matshikiza, 2001, p. 12). Explaining further, Matshikiza (2001) stated that the title exposed how Africa is represented in Western media, which discredits the ethic of balanced reporting expected from media, “in that none of its contributors actually came from the African continent, or had a deep understanding of its issues” (p. 12). There is a possibility that Africa is not in its entirety plagued with this negativity, but the fact that some of these negative things still happen on the continent has negatively affected the perception of people outside the continent.

Ogunyemi (2011) sees the Internet as a tool for Africans to speak up for themselves. Just like with the methodology used in this research, the author suggests that, “the Internet has the potential to resolve the issues at the core of these perspectives by enabling ethnographical communication about Africa, that is, communication from African perspectives” (p. 458). Until Africans relentlessly unite as one nation in speaking

up for themselves, and educating the world through media and other outlets, the fight in eradicating negative stereotypes will be a somewhat difficult one to win.

### **Africa: Diverse with Rich Cultural Heritage**

Africa is the world's second largest continent in both size and population of 1.1 billion people as of 2013 ("Africa guide," 2016; Figure 1). Filled with diversity of language, religion, ethnicity, and culture, it houses 54 reorganized countries with Algeria as the largest country by area, and Nigeria by population. These 54 countries fall under one of five regions: North, West, East, South, and Central, all with a wide variety of religious beliefs, with Christianity being the largest religion, followed by Islam, and other traditional religions (Lug, & Cooperman, 2010). Over 2000 languages are spoken in Africa, which makes it the most multilingual continent in the world. In my country-of-origin, Nigeria, over 500 languages are spoken (Crozier, David, Blench, & Roger, 1992). The cultural richness of the continent is often overlooked in media stories.

In addition to neglecting its virtues, Africa has repeatedly been referred to as a country by many people (Seay & Dionne, 2015). It is hardly seen as a continent, thereby the mistake of lumping 54 countries into one and calling it a country. This one mistake, among others, leads to misconceptions and generalizations of the continent. The list of all 54 countries composed in order of the region they fall under can be seen in Appendix D.



Figure 1 Map of Africa (Retrieved from <https://www.africaguide.com/afmap.htm>)



On a trip to Nigeria in December of 2015, I carried out a pilot study for my thesis. Since my topic focuses on Africans, what better place to start from than right in the heart of Africa? After I got approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of West Texas A&M University, I went to work. It was interesting how the few people I talked to had a lot to say about how Western media, and U.S. media in particular, misrepresent Africa through media reports. The following represents the responses from participants in the pilot study, apart from the later results of this thesis.

In the words of Isaac: “Africa has been bastardized.” Isaac went on to give an example of a particular incident that happened during the last census exercise in Nigeria. Isaac talked about how lopsided the reporting from the *CNN* correspondents covering that census in the city of Lagos were. He said that *CNN* chose to cover one of the not-so-developed parts of Lagos that showed dirty roads, unruly people, old buildings, and, of course, an excess of people. Isaac complained saying that the image of that side of Lagos was what the whole world came to believe Nigeria looked like, which in reality is not the case.

All participants admitted that there is definitely some truth in the representation of Africa by U.S. media, but what they are more concerned with is the one-sidedness of media reports. The participants stated that despite hardships faced by many African countries, there is a lot of good and newsworthy achievements coming from Africa that are not being reported by Western media. They added that until U.S. media start recognizing these achievements as newsworthy and report them, there will continue to be bias in their styles of reporting. Stella who felt very passionate about my research said she has made it a point to defend her country and continent in any and every way

possible. She talked about how she gets involved in online debates with strangers in defense of her country, saying that “every day I go online and I come across ignorant stories and comments made by people who have never been to Africa and believe everything they hear in the media, how they demean Africans with inappropriate comments.” Sarah talked about how she educates people about Africa, and how sometimes she lets her emotions get the best of her, and lashes out in fierce defense of her country and its people. But she believes that if more Africans are willing to stand up and speak out for their continent, a little can go a long way in correcting negative impressions.

Alex who had previously studied at a university in Germany recalled how someone once told him that he had always thought Nigeria was a country where people danced around fires with little or no clothes on, and he was surprised to see an educated, well-spoken, and well-mannered Nigerian. Alex added that he wasn't upset with what the person had said to him because he knew that the person didn't know any better, and he saw an avenue to educate and tell the person more about Nigeria and Africa. Alex further stated that he believes people are open to learning new things, but the problem is that they don't necessarily go out of their way to get information about things, or to get enlightened about topics that have little or no relevance to their daily lives. Alex then advised that Africans shouldn't always be too quick to get mad at those who still refer to their continent negatively; instead they should see it as an opportunity to introduce another side, “a better side” of Africa to them. That way, though slowly, people will eventually start gaining knowledge of Africa and start seeing it in a much different way than they already do.

Johnson complained bitterly about how U.S.-based and other Western-based non-profit organizations (NPO) completely bastardize Africa with the kind of images they use to promote and solicit funding for their organizations. He said “all you ever see is pictures of malnourished hunger-stricken children with flies in their eyes, laying very frail and weak,” adding that it is this kind of presentation that sends the image of Africa back into “darkness” more and more. Johnson also added that it is heartbreaking to imagine a lot of people will make generalizations and conclude that everybody in Africa looks that way: “it breaks my heart to think that that is the Africa some people ever get to know, it is not all that bad, we don’t all look that way, that population does not represent even a quarter of the population of people in the continent.” Not all that comes out of Africa is as bad as media make it look. Admittedly there is some truth to what is being reported, but not as compared to the many wonderful “good” coming out of the continent.

Another participant Robin talked about a conversation he once had with someone he was working with one time he traveled to the U.S. They talked about the forthcoming election in the U.S. (at that time) and his colleague, who is a white male, talked about how he thought some of the presidential candidates were very corrupt and he didn’t think any of them were better than the other. He then said to the Robin, “You are from Nigeria, you should know a lot about corruption, you of all people should understand better what I am talking about.” This was a shock to Robin even as he tried to correct his colleague’s impression. Robin made him understand that as a person, he knew about corruption, not solely because he is Nigerian. Robin later concluded by saying that his colleague admitted to getting his information from the Internet and he only just assumed that what he saw was correct without looking into facts. The Internet is a go-to tool for a lot of

people on different issues and topics, and it is sometimes difficult to know verified facts on the information garnered from it.

This study will give more insight into the minds of Africans, to help the world see through their eyes. It also serves as a platform where Africans can make their voices heard and help in educating the world to see Africa as it should be seen, not only as what the media want us to believe it is, which takes us farther into more and more research that could be in the future. This study has opened doors into a lot more avenues for researchers, as there is a lot more that can be done in looking further into the African perspective.

### **Chapter Summaries**

This chapter introduced the study, and discussed the rationale behind choosing the topic. This chapter also discussed facts on Africa, alongside reports from the pilot study that was conducted before the commencement of the thesis.

### **Chapter II: Literature Review**

In chapter two, the literature review explains how the African continent is represented by U.S media, the agenda setting strategies driving U.S. media reports about the continent, and media bias adopted in the U.S. media style of reporting. Colonialism tends to be the bedrock of the misrepresentations and stereotypes surrounding the African continent. These concepts will be explained further in the bid to create more understanding about how and why Africa is portrayed and reasons why I chose this topic. Walter Fisher's (1984) narrative theory is the theoretical framework used in this study, which posits that human beings are storytellers and life should be viewed as a series of

narratives that are unfolding. This theory can help give more meaning to the way people perceive and respond to the messages they come across in their everyday dealings.

### **Chapter III: Method**

Chapter three details the participants and procedure used in carrying out this study. It also explains the qualitative methods used in gathering responses from participants and analyzing the data gathered. The chapter provides an explanation of the participant selection process, alongside a justification of the research methods used.

### **Chapter IV: Results**

The results of the study alongside the analysis of the emerging themes are discussed in chapter four. Participants shared their accounts of how they have seen their continent represented by the U.S. media, and what they truly feel about those representations. Those narratives were analyzed for themes related to the research questions.

### **Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusion**

The discussion and conclusion of this study are in chapter five. This chapter discusses the relevance of the study to the academic world and beyond, the need for future research, and enhancing understanding of all sides of the African continent. The chapter also considers any limitations of the current study and possible areas in which further research would be beneficial. Every research has limitations; limitations which only open more room for further research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Africa is the world's second largest continent in both size and population, comprising 54 independent countries, with over 2000 different languages spoken (Boyes, 2013), yet is frequently portrayed as a country by Western, mostly U.S. news media (Asante, 2013). It is a continent with large cultural differences and economic disparities. Despite fluctuations in the continent's economy, many African countries have experienced substantial economic growth (Zamfir, 2016). According to Mijiyawa (2013), agriculture is a great contributing factor to Africa's gross domestic product (GDP). Openness to trade and high urbanization are additional contributing factors. For example, Nigeria has a large movie industry, globally known as Nollywood, which comes in third behind Hollywood and Bollywood. As a result of the number of film productions in a year, it is considered one of the world's leading movie industries (Chowdhury, Landes, Santini, Tejada, & Visconti, 2008; Onuzulike, 2008). Part of this lack of knowledge is a result of the kind of messages U.S. media reports on issues or events that affect Africa.

Most of what U.S. citizens know, or think they know, about Africa and Africans is what has been reported by various media agencies (Huifen & Doh, 2012). Rarely are Africa's achievements and immense contributions to the world represented in the U.S. media. These achievements are seldom even considered as news worthy in the U.S.

media outlets (Danker-Dake, 2008). Some people argue that the word “Africa” is synonymous with a lot that is “bad”:

I have heard of a game played at some social gatherings where someone asks, what's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word, Africa?

Participants yell out the terms such as: poverty, dangerous, people are naked, lions, spears and lions, little grass houses, malnourished children, blood diamond wars, chaos, ramshackle villages and corruption. What this game demonstrates is the ignorance of the participants and their complete immersion in the negativity about Africa. (Asante, 2013, p. 110)

The kind of information people consume about Africa affects the way they view the continent; because of the distance, their perceptions are solely based on what has been heard or seen via media rather than experienced first-hand.

With globalization, knowing about the happenings in other countries is becoming a thing of relevance to more people. Because U.S. citizens depend on the media to provide news and information on events and happenings around the world, whether the reports affect listeners/receivers directly or indirectly, they tend to form mental images based on what the media report (Besova & Cooley, 2009). This can be problematic as Besova and Cooley (2009) found that the more attention given to a country depends highly on how relevant the country is in the world economy, politics, and culture. The more relevance a country holds in any of the sectors, the more coverage it receives from Western media, in this case, U.S. and U.K. media. The coverage thus privileges cultures that directly impact the U.S. and limits exposure to others.

This is not a new phenomenon. In an analysis of images of Africa presented in American travelogues, Fabian (2013) argues that the U.S. and most Western countries use Africa in measuring and judging the successes of their own countries. Fabian examined different travelogues from the late nineteenth century and how their authors wrote about their African experiences. He discovered that what was written in those travelogues during that time had, and continues to have an effect on how the U.S. and other Westerners view Africa. These travelogues portrayed Africa as stagnant in order to gain readership and appeal to audiences living in what was portrayed as more successful countries (Fabian, 2013). This is an example of how many different media are responsible for shaping the perception the U.S. has on the African continent. This is essentially an early example of agenda setting.

### **Agenda Setting**

Media are known for their agenda-setting prowess, which potentially shapes and creates public opinion (Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004). Mass media are a very powerful tool for informing, educating, and entertaining large audiences. This is explained further in McCombs and Shaw's (1993) agenda setting theory, which argues that media hold a certain level of influence in determining what their audiences think about, and the relevance they attach to it. "News stories teach audiences how to think about issues, both by including (or excluding) certain information, and by emphasizing (or ignoring) certain aspects of an issue or story" (Kogen, 2014, p. 4). Most of what people tend to believe or think about their country and/or other countries is what they see or hear from different media, be it on the television, radio or newspaper (Wanta et al., 2004; Besova & Cooley, 2009).



The media exert great power and influence over the minds of the governments, investors and the general public alike. In continuing to spread the bad news, and failing to have eyes to recognize the good news when it is there, the media plays a potent role in maintaining ancient prejudices – and these prejudices and hardly be overstressed. (Matshikiza, 2001, p. 13)

The power to shape minds and opinions that the media hold in their hands cannot be over-emphasized,

This is true not only for news media. Even more impactful today are social media, which are accessible to most people. Social media hold a lot of power and do a lot of informing, educating, and entertaining for their users. Content on social media spreads like wild fire because different platforms make it easy to share content with an unlimited number of receivers with just the click of a button (Gündüz & Pembecioğlu, 2014). Those images and the stories attached to them might or might not be authentic.

Often as part of the agenda-setting function, news on wars, crisis, famine, and terrorist attacks are covered on a daily basis. According to Tsikata (2014) the preexisting bias and negative representations of Africa dating back to the time of colonialism is what is being used and dwelt upon by media due to the convenience and perceived fit to existing frames.

The more the Western media limit their representations of African nations to pre-existing uncritical frames, the more violence and famine are considered typical of “uncivilized” Africa, and the more other sources feed into such frames in global media flows, thereby damaging the collective image of the continent. (p. 39)

The argument above depicts an uncritical media relying on long existing tropes rather than attempting to redefine the agenda of media where Africa is concerned.

Kogen (2014) in a framing analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA), argues that the relevance of an event/issue and the interest the U. S. has in it is a great determinant of why a story is being covered by the media. According to Kogen's analysis of randomly sampled news stories, hunger in Africa is framed as less news-worthy, and unlikely to spark public debate, so this is reflected in the way and manner the issue is covered. These stories are being reported in a way that suggests no solution to the problem and the U.S. remains detached from the news in a way that suggests Africa should find solutions to their own problems:

This construction of the news lets the U.S. government off the hook when it comes to the role of U.S. foreign policy in alleviating suffering in Africa, and denies American citizens the ability to judge for themselves how they think U.S. policy ought to reflect, if at all, the existence of suffering elsewhere in the world. (Kogen, 2014, p. 20)

This goes to show that the media not only influence their audience, but sometimes even the foreign policy of their country, which further showcases the power media possess.

U.S. news outlets have always reported news events about Africa but to what extent? In a content analysis of three U.S. news media evening news-casts over three decades, Kalyango and Onyebadi (2012) demonstrated there was a steady decline in the coverage of news events from the African region, compared to other regions. Kalyango and Onyebadi (2012) noted that “developing nations generally receive less attention in the U.S. media than industrialized nations, unless they either have natural resources such

as oil, or are engulfed in deadly crises” (p. 669). Happenings in Africa are considered news worthy when the media have accompanying horrible images of starving and sickly looking people or people in dire need (Franks, 2014). The lack of these horrible images deprioritizes the news-worthiness of the specific event.

Different representations, especially negative ones of Africa by U.S. media, have been identified in recent research. Mahadeo and McKinney (2007) identified dominant themes in the news that negatively shape opinions about Africa and Africans. One of the themes is the political and financial corruption Africa has faced. The authors questioned why the West does not think of ways it can help Africa succeed in their political and financial sectors, but instead always reports on these irregularities. Mahadeo and McKinney (2007) contended that news sources have avoided addressing the truth that most of the money is being stolen by those in power and is being stored and saved in Western banks. The authors also addressed the issue of how Africa has been made synonymous with poverty and wars. According to Ebo (1992), the negative and misguided images of Africa by American media are responsible for the bad image that Americans have about the continent because all they know is what the media portray.

### **Media Bias**

Journalists are meant to abide by certain codes of conduct when reporting any kind of news. Failure to abide by these codes results in biased reporting; these codes are required in order to achieve balanced reporting. According to Mohammed (2013), “these ethical codes of conduct emphasize a high level of professionalism which guides media practice – truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, fairness and impartiality” (p. 50). Once there is failure in following these guidelines, then the information being passed to

audiences becomes diluted from its original state, which leads to elevation of generalizations (Mohammed, 2013). Similar to reporting on Africa by the U.S. media, these elevation of generalizations leads to the notion that the problem/issue at hand affects not only a fragment of a group, but the whole group at large.

In 2008, Danker-Dake's content analysis of stories on Africa in the *New York Times* for a constructed nine-week period, sought to find the degree to which news on crises was reported. Within the crisis news analyzed, the majority of the articles had to do with wars, coups and terrorism, AIDS and disease, protests, corruption, human rights, famine and starvation. The media reinforces the negative ways Africa is viewed through their approach to news reports from the region.

Some studies show that news coverage, images, stories in travelogues and reports by U.S. based non-profit organizations about Africa hide the real Africa. Domestic growth, improvement in the health and economic sectors is rarely ever addressed, or is rarely ever considered newsworthy. There has been a decline in what is considered newsworthy by editors of U.S. media in the happenings in developing nations of Africa (Hachten & Beil, 1985). Rothmyer (2011) argued that Western-based non-profit organizations (NPO) prefer bad news on Africa because the sadder and gloomier they paint the picture of the country or region they are working in, the more attention they stand to get, which automatically means more funding to finance their work. Therefore, the NPOs shift their focus away from their accomplishments and successful projects, and focus more on needs and challenges. Although many Africans do not dispute the fact that their continent is plagued with many of the problems portrayed, they also see the representation as lopsided. Often media reports do not give a complete picture of the real

situation, and Africans believe that their numerous successes, achievements, and potentials should be reported alongside the challenges (Rothmyer, 2011). Along with better media representation, NPOs and other U.S. based agencies that report or inform on Africa should provide more equitable representation as well.

In a content analysis of various American magazines, Kunihiro (2007) sought to find the reason behind the over reporting of the same problem faced by Africa by news media, while shifting focus and attention from Africa's achievements and progress. The study demonstrates that these magazines concentrated on more catastrophic events over other less dramatic ones. The study showed that the coverage of Africa by these U.S. magazines had not changed over the last 18 years, and the same stereotypical reports continue to be broadcast.

Odine (2013) argues that news emanating from Africa is cherry picked, edited, and swayed to suit Western audiences. Odine refers to this as "selective reporting" (p. 205). Africa is a continent not devoid of conflict, but the way and manner U.S. news media choose to report on these conflicts will go a long way in determining the kind and quality of knowledge their audiences have about Africa. Odine (2013) argues that, for news of conflict about Africa to be free of any form of bias, it must take a journalist who not only understands the conflict, but also understands the role in reporting it. The author also mentioned "peace journalism" as a way in which respect for differences, ethics, and experiences can be achieved. The concept of peace journalism was posited by Johan Galtung in the 1970s, which lays prominence on the resolution of conflict, causes of conflict, the use of different sources for news spreading, and adopting the use of language that does not over-stress and exaggerate how conflict is being shaped. Rodney-Gumede

(2016) sees peace journalism as what happens when journalists choose the kinds of stories to report, then go ahead and report them in a manner that will make people respond non-violently to the conflict at hand.

Africa is a beautiful continent with a lot of achievements, but rarely is positive news reported by the media; the negative stories are shown and blown out of proportion (Danker-Dake, 2008). Ferris and Dustan (2014) researched how Africa is perceived through Western eyes, listing news via electronic media as part of the sources that shape Westerners' perceptions on Africa. The study assessed that 90% of reported news on Africa was negative. The study provided suggestions on how to improve those perceptions to make them more positive than negative. It suggested that African reporters who work for these Western news media should work towards encouraging positive coverage and reporting of news from Africa. It also suggested that most of the work of positive reframing of the continent has to be done by Africans. The Western public were also seen as agents of change who can pressure these media into unbiased and fair reporting; however, the bias is strongly rooted in colonial expectations.

### **Colonialism**

Bias harkens back to the colonization of the Americas, which brought with it the slave trade and colonialism in Africa, whereby conquering nations established the continent as weaker and underdeveloped (Asante, 2013; Harth, 2012). The stereotypes of the past persist in current media representation. The hegemony of the slave masters in Africa plays part in how Africa is viewed in recent years. Asante (2013) examined the factors that brought about the negative perceptions of Westerners towards Africa, dating it decades back to the period of colonization and the selling of black slaves.

Colonial masters took over Africa with the excuse that Africans were not enlightened enough to be on their own, which introduced slave trade and other oppression. According to Poncian (2015),

Colonialism went even further; because of what they thought they knew about Africa – a land of fantastical beasts and cannibals, slaves, ‘backward races’ and so on – the colonial powers managed to convince themselves that they were subjugating Africans (and others) *for their own good*. (p. 73)

Harth (2012) provided an historical analysis of the origin of stereotypes and myths about Africa dating back to colonialism. Poverty, violence, hopelessness, darkness, slavery, and hunger are the main stereotypes of Africa. Additionally, some U.S. citizens have the notion that Africa is a jungle where people live without civilization and are at war with each other. Harth (2012) identified European colonizers as the main originators of these stereotypes and myths. She argues that colonizers created these stereotypes to justify their exploitation of Africa and Africans, and these stereotypes have been very difficult to diminish. The frequent misrepresentation of Africa and its people by the media sometimes is not done entirely intentionally.

Asante (2013) argues that the way Africa is presented by media agencies represents the perceptions of those in charge of those agencies. Asante (2013) says, “All media representations of Africa and Africans reflect the distinction between blacks and whites, in the minds of those who control the media in the West” (p. 109). The author also argues that falsification of Africa is a result of the constant repetition of untrue and ignorant stereotypes reported as facts by media organizations.

Another argument Asante (2013) makes is that Africa is being victimized by her lack of effective media outlets and control, which gives Western networks such as CNN and BBC the power to dominate news about the continent. He argues that the continent needs to find a way out of its challenges by reporting on issues that have context and issues that focus on the importance of Africa's values; and, by showing how the continent is emerging and establishing its own political structure and ethnicity. Mohammed (2013) supports this notion stating "the African media fraternity can affirm its responsibility and do a better job, based on the fact that they understand the continent better and so are better placed to portray objectivity" (p. 53). Africans need to demonstrate their continent is different from what their colonial masters had established.

In a rhetorical analysis on how the external and internal historical ideology of Africa has forced the continent to be viewed in a one-sided manner, Tsikata (2014) discusses how these historical ideologies of Africa have given a false unified African image to the continent. This ideology has led to the "one size fits all" (p. 34) impression U.S. media have succeeded in presenting to the world. It is no longer safe to assume that the shortcomings or failures of a few of the numerous countries in Africa are enough to generalize or represent the whole of Africa. A lot of African countries have tried, and are still trying, to make themselves stand out and bring even more positivity towards them as a country, before influencing attitudes about the continent in general. This has become possible through increased traditional and social media presence. Tsikata (2014) discussed countries beginning to write their own stories as a way of speaking back for themselves. Countries like "Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa are repositioning themselves through self-framing and representation. Ghana's media policy has enabled it



the ability to create its own media themes, and to frame and represent itself” (p. 41).

Nigeria, which is considered the giant of Africa, has the world’s third largest film industry know as Nollywood (Chowdhury et al., 2008; Tsikata, 2014). Nigeria is another country that generates revenue for itself and is repositioning itself globally. Tsikata (2014) also made reference to South Africa and its success in hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2010.

More African countries are rising and speaking for themselves, achieving goals which will help them reposition themselves and their continent. Tsikata (2014) further argues that if more African countries empower themselves with more new media infrastructure, they would be able to frame and represent themselves better, which will further determine how they will be perceived and framed by other countries. Narrative theory is used to give voice to African’s views on media representations of Africa.

### **Narrative Theory**

Walter Fisher’s Narrative paradigm theory was developed in 1984 as an addition to communication theory. Fisher posits that human beings are storytellers and therefore should view life as a series of narratives that are unfolding. This theory helps give more meaning to the way people perceive and respond to messages, in this case “narratives,” which they are exposed to on a daily basis (Fisher, 1984).

The narrative paradigm has what is known as the “rational world paradigm, which presupposes that humans are essentially rational beings, arguments are ruled by dictate of situations, people are rational based on their knowledge of an issue, and reason is the best application in solving and analyzing messages” (Fisher, 1984, p. 4). The theory talks

about how symbols can be used as stories to shape experiences of a person's life, and how it shapes their perceptions:

The idea of human beings as storytellers indicates the generic form of all symbol composition; it holds that symbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common. (Fisher, 1984, p. 6)

Fisher (1984) also states that people interpret stories by using good reason, thus his "logic of good reason" (p. 197), which is concerned with the values laden within a message and how those values affect decisions made by people.

Fisher (1984) also posits the paradigm of narrative rationality, which sees narrative as the foundation of all human communication. Narrative rationality will help people differentiate the authenticity of a story. Coherence and narrative fidelity are factors that determine rationality, which adds to good reason. Coherence is about consistency, how much sense a story makes, how much details the story carries, and how reliable the story is. While narrative fidelity is more about determining whether or not a story is true. If a story matches what people believe and experience, then it is welcomed. This study made use of these concepts to determine whether or not stories on Africa by U.S. media are consistent with what Africans believe.

Fisher's narrative paradigm theory can best help us understand what Africans feel about how their continent is portrayed by the U.S. media. As in the logic of good reason, people are only affected by what they believe is valuable within a message. It is like sifting through a message to separate what is important and what isn't. These negative stereotypes presented by Western news media about Africa are only as effective as the

“sense” their listeners attach to them. Most times these news media are the only connection between Africa and the Western nations, so many people are oblivious of the happenings in Africa.

Narrative theory has been used in a lot of different ways in the past by scholars. Even today the importance of narrative storytelling cannot be over-emphasized. More and more research is being carried out on a daily basis in the bid to get first-hand experiences from people, and how those experiences shape them. This research is not an exception, as Africans will be speaking up in defense of themselves, in their own words, and not assumed speculations of how they feel or what they think about the way they are being represented by the U.S. media.

In the health sector, the use of narrative storytelling has been adopted in aiding with the conveyance of health information (Baezconde-Garbanati, Chatterjee, Frank, Murphy, Moran, Werth, & O’Brien, 2014; Bandura, 2004; Larkey & Hecht, 2010). This style of information sharing has been seen and considered relevant because real-life people share real-life stories of their struggle with particular illnesses. These patients tell stories on what they are doing to combat the illness, how they survive, what they did wrong, what they wish they had done to prevent it, and advice they have for those struggling with the same illness. These narratives help those in the same condition identify with the characters on a level that the doctors cannot, which leads to change in important health aspects.

Frank, Murphy, Chatterjee, Moran, and Baezconde-Garbanati (2015) produced a narrative film centered on a young woman who was diagnosed with human papillomavirus (HPV) and had to educate her family on the availability of the HPV

vaccine. Frank et al. (2015) aimed to use identification with character as one of the bedrocks of their experiment. When people identify with a person, they tend to be more receptive to their message, which is similar to what this study is trying to achieve. The study aims at getting more Africans to speak up for their countries and continent, and to help educate the world on the Africa they believe their continent to be, particularly if it is any different from what is being represented by U.S. media.

The use of narratives has been employed in studies that concern Africa, in areas such as: culture and language (Iseke & Ndimande, 2014); quintessential African identity and culture (Prinsloo, 2012); self-identity through songs (Phafoli & Zulu, 2014); investigating literacy narratives among ethno-linguistically diverse South African students (Carstens, 2015); oppression of African women (Andima & Tjiramanga, 2014); among others. This is not an exhaustive list of topics as other diverse issues that concern Africa have been researched. What I have not seen are studies on responses of Africans to the negative journalism on their continent by U.S. and other Western media. Narratives have not been used to represent the achievements of African countries. Neither has it been used to give Africans an avenue to “sell” their countries, to brag about their achievements and to show the world “Africa” through their eyes. In the course of this study, a lot of literature was sought and it was no surprise that most of the narrative literature and others focused mainly on South Africa, with one or two on Kenya, Namibia, and Nigeria. Africa consists of 54 independent countries, but clearly, coverage lacks in almost all of Africa. It is not the same with other continents, such as Europe for example. If I decide to do a study on countries in Europe, there certainly will be a lot of literature that represent different European countries, but the same cannot be said for the

second largest continent in the world. This thesis will provide a platform for Africans to air their concerns and opinions of their thoughts on how they are being represented by the U.S. media, and to stand and speak up for their countries and continent.

### **Research Questions**

There has been a lot of research on the representation of Africa by U.S. media, and the perception of Americans towards Africa and Africans. But research and literature is lacking on the insight from the perspectives of Africans. This study seeks to find out what Africans think about how they are portrayed, and to hear their side of the story. Because studies have shown that Africa is presented in a bad light by U.S. media, new research will obtain narratives from Africans to hear the African perspective and their attitudes towards media representation of Africans. The following research questions are asked to determine the attitudes of Africans toward U.S. media portrayal of their continent:

RQ 1: What are African narratives about how their continent is portrayed by U.S. media sources?

RQ 2: What do Africans believe should be done to improve U.S. media representation of Africa and its people?

The studies addressed in this literature review helped in creating the survey guide, and interpreting the responses gathered from participants. There were similarities shared by the authors of this study, which gives us a clear picture of the representation of Africa by U.S. media. This study adds to the literature by specifically studying the responses of Africans on how their continent is portrayed by U.S. media, a study yet to be completed.

### **Summary**

Tsikata (2014) argues that African countries are already beginning to speak up for themselves by rewriting their stories and repositioning themselves positively to the world, stating that African countries have more work to do if they want the world to start seeing them differently. Colonialism is one of the factors responsible for the decades-long negative impression faced by the African continent, even as the memory of all that happened with Western colonial masters and African slaves is still somewhere fresh in the minds of people (Asante, 2013; Tsikata, 2014).

Studies have shown that there is quite a high percentage of bias by U.S. media and other Western media when it comes to reporting issues that come out of Africa; these reports tend to be unbalanced (Kunihira, 2007; Mohammed, 2013; Rothmyer, 2011). Other researchers argue that another reason for the rise in misrepresentation and misperception by Westerners is as a result of the agenda-setting function played by the media; the media serve as watchdogs to a society, and they also serve as links between their listeners and their source, which in turn goes further to shape the minds and opinions of their audience (Kogen, 2014; Tsikata, 2014; Wanta et al., 2014).

The next chapter discusses the method of data collection used in this study. The chapter discusses who the participants are and what qualifies them as participants, the procedures used in carrying out the study, the process of data analysis, and validation of the study. The chapter gives an in-depth description of each of the steps used in the data collection process.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Chapter Three gives descriptions of participants, survey procedures followed, and explains methods of data analysis. In order to explore what Africans have to say about how their continent is represented by U.S. media, narrative theory was used to analyze the narratives of Africans and their opinions on how they are represented in U.S. media.

The West Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board approved all data collection methods before participants were contacted for data collection, in accordance with the standard protocol set by the university. A copy of the IRB approval letter can be found in Appendix A.

#### **Participants**

Participants for this research were Africans from different African countries recruited through word of mouth, email, and social media. Snowball sampling was also used to identify participants for the study. Facebook, WhatsApp, and email messages with links to the survey explaining the nature of the study were created, and forwarded to people who had previously indicated their interest. Preliminary participants were recruited and asked to forward survey links to other interested people in their respective countries. Initially, 93 surveys were received with partial responses, dropping to 68 completed short-answer response.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 70. Of the 99 participants, one was under age 18 and removed from the survey. Of those remaining, 34 participants were between 18 and 25, 44 participants ranged in age between 26 and 40, 17 participants were between 41 and 60, and 2 participants were between 61 and 70 years of age. The wide age range allowed for different views from various generations of participants, providing a means for analyzing whether or not responses held similarities across generations. Of the participants, 42 were male (40.8%), 47 participants were female (45.6%), while 4 participants did not identify their gender (3.9%). Of the 93 participants who identified their country of origin, 49 were from Nigeria, 18 from South Africa, 7 from Congo DR, 4 from Zimbabwe, 3 from Ethiopia, 2 from Niger, 2 from Ghana, 2 from Zambia, 2 from Rwanda, 1 from Cameroon, 1 from Sierra Leone, 1 from Angola, and 1 from the USA. The response of the participant who identified as being from the United States was not used because the study only sought participants from Africa. When asked if participants have ever visited the United States before, 47 participants answered “yes,” while 44 participants answered “no.”

Table 1. Country of Origin and Number of Participants

Country of Participants	No. of Participants
Nigeria	49
South Africa	18
Congo DR	7
Zimbabwe	4
Ethiopia	3
Niger	2



Ghana	2
Zambia	2
Rwanda	2
Cameroon	1
Sierra Leone	1
Angola	1
USA	1

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A consent form (see Appendix B) was included at the beginning of the survey for participants. Participants who chose to participate in the survey after completing the consent form were allowed to proceed to the survey; participants who declined consent were exited out of the survey.

### **Procedure**

Questions for this thesis were asked using a qualitative narrative survey (see Appendix C) on Qualtrics where closed and open-ended questions were asked to help understand the perceptions of Africans on how their continent is portrayed by U.S. media. Snowball sampling was used in the recruiting process for participants, which was an effective way to find African participants, as initial participants shared the link with their friends, family, and acquaintances. In fact, Lindlof and Taylor (2011) have said “snowball sampling is well-suited to studying social networks, cultures, or people who have certain attributes in common” (p. 114). A skip logic process was administered on Qualtrics to make sure the survey was only taken by participants who met the criteria.

Participants were asked if they were at least 18 years of age to ascertain their eligibility to take the survey. If they did not fit the criteria, the skip logic sent them to a thank you page and they exited from the survey. A total of 18 questions were administered, with some closed-ended and several open-ended questions to allow for the inclusion of narrative experiences. Survey questions asked participants how they get their news, how much media they consume, the kinds of stories they see and hear about Africa in U.S. media, what their take is on those stories, and what they believe can be done to make the situation better.

Being an online survey, participants had to type their responses, so there was no need for transcription. This method gave participants the opportunity to fully express their own view and allowed undiluted insight into the mindset of participants about the topic. Data were collected through the months of September and October.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used in analyzing the short answer data collected from the survey. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method for “identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The first step of analysis was to thoroughly review each transcript; significant themes were then inductively analyzed. Those themes were then organized and put into categories, and exemplars were applied to give support to each theme. Exemplars are “specific illustrations of themes taken directly from the transcripts, and used by interpretive researchers to illustrate a connection between the data and findings and to establish an in-depth description”

(Harrigan & Braithwaite, 2010, p. 131). It is important for research to have themes emerge from the data collected, which makes it easier for the researcher to organize and the results.

Responses from participants were compared and portions of each response were separated into emergent themes. According to Braun and Clark (2006), “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 86). Emerging themes from the analyzed data were then collected based on the number of occurrences in responses from participants. These themes guided the result section of this research, and also aided in giving meaning to the responses from participants.

### **Validation**

Steps were taken to ensure validity in making sure data were interpreted correctly: “validity is the extent to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure” (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008, p. 2278), in this case, checking the accuracy of data analysis. Before preparing the survey, a pilot test of the survey questions was conducted by using a convenient sample of Nigerians while the author was visiting the country, this helped determine the validity of survey questions asked.

In the survey used for the study, a custom condition that must be met for a participant to continue taking the survey was designed. Ten preliminary participants I started with for snowball sampling were asked to review the conclusions drawn from the research and confirm that the author’s interpretation of their responses was similar to the message they hoped to convey. These preliminary participants after reviewing the

conclusions drawn, confirmed that the results adequately represented their thoughts, and the message they were trying to convey was properly represented.

### **Summary**

A total of 99 responses were recorded, of which 68 were completed through to the qualitative responses. Participants discussed their perceptions of how Africa is portrayed by U.S. media from their responses to the Qualtrics survey provided. Themes from participants' answers emerged, commonalities across subgroups were identified, and patterns were analyzed. The next chapter gives in-depth details of the significant themes that emerged and the conclusions drawn from the data gathered.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

Chapter Four offers an interpretation of this thesis, the discussion of commonalities among participants, and answers to survey questions. Using procedures stated in the previous chapter, data were collected and analyzed. To protect the privacy of participants, this chapter addresses participants with pseudonyms.

Research questions sought to explore Africans' perceptions about how their continent is portrayed by U.S. media sources, and what Africans believe should be done to improve U.S. media representation of Africa and its people. Participants were asked to describe their perceptions through an online survey, providing narratives of their experiences. Seven themes emerged after data analysis, six of which turned out as expected: Negative stories of Poverty, Hunger, War, and Corruption; Misconceptions; Ignorance; Fixed Perceptions and Stereotypes; Exaggerated Truths; and Take Ownership. There was one unexpected theme that seemed to stand out from the rest which was "Some Accuracy." Responses related to the theme seemed to agree with NPO's use of dire images.

These themes emerged after thorough analysis of the data, most of which are direct phrases inspired from participants' responses. Exemplars were applied to give support to each theme. Several participants had similar responses, and though not all the participants worded their responses the same way, the messages and ideas were similar.

Most participants admitted to seeing fewer than 50% of African news reported on U.S. media, with only one participant reporting a percentage of African news seen reported annually by U.S. media at 70%. In order to ascertain the sources of news consumed by participants, they were asked to rank the order of sources where they primarily get their news. The majority of participants chose the Internet (other than social media) as their primary news source, followed by television, Facebook, radio, newspaper/magazine, and Twitter which ranked the last. From their experiences with news sources, participants provided their narratives on their views of how U.S. media portray Africa. The first theme emerged with *Negative Stories*.

### **Negative Stories: Poverty, Hunger, War, and Corruption**

As discussed in Chapter Two, several studies have shown that Africa is seen as a dark continent, encumbered with war, diseases, hunger, and a lot of negativity (Asante, 2013; Danker-Dake, 2008; Ebo, 1992; Harth, 2012; Mahadeo & McKinney, 2007; Odine, 2013). This argument was supported by the responses from participants when they were asked to describe the types of news stories on Africa reported by U.S. media. Their responses focused on poverty, hunger, war, diseases, corruption, and other ills, stating that the majority of news stories they see reported on Africa are negative. Samuel responded by saying, “Most of the headlines relate to poverty in the continent, issues of bad leadership and recently the issue of terrorism.” Although some participants did not elaborate on their responses, they did list the kinds of news stories they see reported. The response from Nathan was: “hunger news, poverty, war, diseases, and homelessness.” Several participants gave similar responses to the question posed.

Not only did participants describe news on poverty and war, some participants talked about Africa's portrayal as an ancient remote desert with backward thinking, uneducated people living under the worst conditions possible. One female participant Esther, talked about how Africa is painted as a poor place with starving kids, crime, illiteracy, diseases, and as a continent with only black people, without acknowledging the white Africans:

I would have to say that poverty is the common picture that is painted of Africa. Malnourished kids with minimal clothing in mud huts. Second, the news makes it seem like there are only black people that live in Africa, never mind the white, mixed race, and Egyptian folk (just to name a few). Third, as a whole the news just makes Africa seem uneducated, unaccomplished, criminal, and corrupt. Now I will be honest, there is a lot of that, but the news rarely focusses on the accomplishments. Fourth, let's not forget. Any disease or illness that can in any way be linked to Africa will be hammered on! HIV! AIDS! Ebola! Just to name a few. Lastly, there is more to Africa than lions roaming the streets! Newsflash, we actually have cities, with cars, live in buildings with Wi-Fi. We don't all have pet lions. In fact that is something that is really rare.

Esther does not only address the fact that Africa is being misrepresented, she also addressed presenting Africa as a continent dominated by only black people, while there are indeed white Africans.

Sharing in a similar opinion, Peter talked about how he sees Africa portrayed as a continent in need of help in U.S. media, and expressed concern about positive stories from Africa not receiving media coverage:

The most common type of news is the one that's meant to show the world how Africa really is doing. Yes poverty exists at large scales but that is what is shown all the time. It makes people believe that Africa is a charity case and one big hut that people live in a big African forest while telling stories under the moonlight. USA media do not show the other qualities Africa has to offer. They fail to elaborate the fact that most African countries got their independence less than 50 years ago meaning that they are still growing. America has been independent for over 200 years and they want to tell African leaders how to run their countries. The media shows African leaders as corrupt people who have no love for their people.

Mary, Gladys, Andrew, Samuel, Stephanie and James seem to share similar opinions on how there is a lot of good in Africa that go unreported by U.S. media.

Elizabeth had something quite different to say and referenced racism as part of the kinds of reports she sees on U.S. media,

Thanks to Trevor Noah now hosting the Daily Show, we get a little more a realistic cover. Other than that it seems to always be something about our politics and racism. We got quite a lot of coverage [on] the Oscar Pistorius case, but I did not feel that it was always accurate or fair.

Another participant Zahra also made mention of the Oscar Pistorius case as being one of the stories that put Africa in the U.S. media spotlight as “mostly scandals (Oscar Pistorius, Caster Semenya, etc).” Zahra further stated that, such negative stories are more prominent on U.S. media, compared to other stories.



These responses show support for arguments in the literature review on how Africa has often been mislabeled and misrepresented (Asante, 2013; Danker-Dake, 2008; Kunihiro, 2007; Odine, 2015). These misrepresentations are argued to be as a result of misguided misconceptions the U.S. has of Africa.

### **Misconceptions: “We don’t live on trees”**

Almost all the participants seemed to think that U.S. media are driven by misconceptions of Africa, when asked about their perceptions of how Africa is portrayed by U.S. media. These misconceptions are seen as reasons which further affect the credibility of U.S. media when they report stories on Africa. Responses from participants align with Odine's (2013) argument that U.S. media uses selective reporting in choosing the kind of news stories that appeal to audiences. John seemed to think that the U.S. media report on negative stories while overlooking the positive sides: “I can say that most of U.S media only cover the unwelcome side of Africa like violence, disease and disaster, while they overlook Africa's many political, economic and social success stories.” Ruth responded in support as follows:

My perception of how Africa is portrayed by the U.S media is horrible. The U.S media only care to cover Africa if there is a disease that will affect any American going there. The U.S. don’t cover Africa doing good or even the clean part of Africa. They put the poorest part of Africa on the media. For example, feed the children and many more.

Besides participants like John and Ruth who believe U.S. media choose to report on and reinforce the negative sides of Africa, Abigail is bothered by the lack of knowledge exhibited by U.S. citizens on non-U.S. issues:

It makes me mad! When people ask me where I am from I always proudly respond with “South Africa.” Then we will address the three things everyone seems to know. First, they will say “You’re from Africa? But you’re white!” Then once I explain that to them, we go onto the second topic. We will talk about Nelson Mandela and how horrible apartheid was. Lastly, they will bring up the issue of Oscar Pistorius, a double amputee athlete that killed his girlfriend. I hate that people have such a negative view of our country, but I don’t think the news is the only thing to blame. I have no idea what the American schooling system teaches, but most Americans have very very little knowledge of anything outside US borders.

Abigail attributes the U.S. having little or no knowledge of Africa as part of the root cause of the misconceptions about Africa. Acquiring more knowledge on Africa will seem to go a long way in the way the U.S. views the continent, and might also help U.S. media in engaging in more balanced reporting.

Debby and Esther argued that Africans actually are a lot better than people think. Debby said, “We don't live on trees and we have perfect command of English language. A lot of times much better than Americans.” Additionally, Esther argued that:

Africa is portrayed by the West as a jungle that is filled with uneducated black people who have nothing to do but try come to America. Some of my friends in America tell me there are people, especially the youths, who believe we all walk around naked, live in mud huts, and ride elephants to school.

According to participants, these are all part of the misconceptions the U.S. has of Africa, which are possible reasons behind why the continent is viewed negatively. Participants

believed that these misconceptions are greatly outdated, and there is a need for enlightenment.

### **Ignorance**

When participants were asked about factors responsible for the negative portrayal of African countries by U.S. media, most responded with “ignorance.” They stated that U.S. media are ignorant of the happenings in Africa and therefore lack adequate information to report fairly. Eunice argued media are not the only ignorant ones, the whole country is too. She states: “I honestly think ignorance has a bit to do with it. Maybe it's not the media at fault but the nation who might be ignorant and had rather believe what they like.” Participants expressed concern with the lack of knowledge shown in reports on Africa by U.S. media.

Other participants, Hannah and Thomas believe that U.S. journalists are uninformed, and since a lot of these journalists have never been to any African country, their view of the continent is myopic. Matthew who believed that U.S. journalist are oblivious of the happening in Africa had this to say: “Most of the news outlets employ foreign journalists to cover Africa and so they are alien to our culture and happenings in the African community.” Ignorance on the part of the U.S. media was seen as a big contributing factor to the way Africa is portrayed. “I think ignorance is the biggest factor, and also papers sell more when the stories are sad. And also the government controls what the rest of the world sees” Simon argued. Simon explains why there is a general negative perception of Africa by the West:

Besides being remote in our unique tradition, Africa has got plenty of developed cities but most times the focus is on the impoverished parts which every country

has. But in this case, that little sample becomes the general perception. The average Western fellow thinks Africa has nothing beautiful. But probably just a zoo of monkeys and villagers who would speak requiring an interpreter. I have a few western friends who think this way.

Several participants felt that the U.S. media cannot adequately report on Africa because they cannot qualify or describe a people of whom they are not a part.

### **Lack of Interest: Too Big to Care**

Another point that stood out from the “Ignorance” theme was that of lack of interest. Participants believed that the U.S. is such a big country, and its citizens don’t seem to care about news emanating from Africa.

Elizabeth stated that in addition to being ignorant, the U.S. has a:

Lack of interest in the rest of the world (by the consumer of news). The U.S. is such a big country, and everyone is so busy living their lives that there's not much room for or interest in foreign news, especially not third-world news.

The U.S. is seen as this ginormous nation with so much to worry about itself, therefore, there is little time to pay attention in the happenings of other nations. Eunice, Paul, Grace, Simon, Mary, Naomi, and other participants further argued that the U.S. media need to widen their interests to happenings outside their region. Naomi stated that:

Until the U.S. is willing to stop their use of outdated information on Africa, and actually show genuine interest in Africa and Africans, I’m afraid those misrepresentations will only continue. They first of all need to have interest in Africa, then realize that the popular perception they have is outdated, then work towards having updated knowledge of the continent.

Participants like Naomi believe that changing the wrong perceptions the U.S. has of Africa has to start first with Americans developing an interest in Africa.

### **Africa is not a Country: Fixed Perceptions and Stereotypes**

“‘So and so happened in Africa.’ Like Africa is one big jungle. Where in Africa?”

This is a quote by Mary, talking about the U.S. media reports on Africa. Some participants talked about how Africa is always referred to homogeneously as just one place, without individually acknowledging the 54 countries that make up the continent. Thomas drove this point home by saying:

Most people in the West think Africa is a country and forget it is a continent made up of 54 countries. Whenever there is a problem in a particular country in Africa, most people in the West generalized it to the whole continent which create bad picture of what is going on there.

Nathan wants the media to be enlightened about Africa and stop their assumptions:

I would like those U.S medias to know that Africa is not just one country, poor or a disaster. It is also lovely, beautiful, rich and multicultural too. Moreover, African people are most hospitable, kind, smart, loving than any other countries.

Judith felt similarly: “Africa is a continent full of beautiful countries. By lumping us all as one, they can never correctly portray Africa or Africans.” Mary, Thomas, Nathan, and Judith are trying to reinforce the point that Africa is not a country but a continent.

The response from Joanna gave support to the theme of “colonialism” discussed in Chapter Two, stating that the impression the U.S. has of Africa harkens back to colonization and slave trade in Africa. “It stems right from when the Europeans first landed in [sic] the African shore. They see us as inferior, so they would do anything to

ensure that.” This perception, according to Mary is because U.S. media lack of knowledge and view of Africa as a country. She argued that lack of information, ignorance, and bias from unfounded news sources, has led to the proliferation of negative news about Africa. This also relates to the theme of “ignorance and lack of interest” mentioned earlier.

Other than Joanna and Mary who see colonialism and lack of knowledge about Africa by U.S. media as part of the fixed perception and stereotype towards Africa, Zahra felt that the U.S. entertains negative stories about Africa solely to massage its ego.

According to Zahra, Americans seem to be entitled:

People in the USA seem to feel very entitled, and therefore they love reading about the “poor little Africans” because then they can make a \$5 donation every month and feel like they just did something extraordinary. They think “look at me, and my beautiful heart” (At least that’s what I think). The media know this, they know the public loves feeling like they are better than others, Africa just happens to be an easy target because unlike America, we don’t have it all figured out yet.

In addition to the misconception surrounding Africa, Zahra seem to think that the people in the U.S. have placed themselves on a pedestal, where they think they are better than others.

### **Exaggerated Truths: Show the Positives**

Fifty participants agree that some reports on Africa by the U.S. are based in reality, but they are concerned that the positive sides of Africa are not shown. Participants stated that the positives far outweigh the negatives being portrayed daily, and adequate

research and balanced reporting will make a difference with African representation. Almost all participants seem to agree that Africa has a lot of achievements, and its potential is growing with each passing day. Paul said that though negativity exists, it is very important for the U.S. media to always report complete stories: “While it may be true that some of these conditions exist, it is also very important to always state the full story. State the efforts the government, civil society, local NGOs are making towards solving such issues.” Paul, Samuel, Esther, Mary, John, and other participants want the U.S. to be aware of the African culture, the ancient knowledge and wisdom of the African people, achievements by Africans, and development and anti-corruption efforts by various African governments.

Keturah argues that U.S. media should portray the good heart of Africans, and look past the negatives:

They have to tell the truth - not just the bad, but the good also. Don't talk about just the bad stuff. Talk about how people get along, how they help one another.

And don't make it look like Africans are 2nd rate citizens of this world.

Keturah went on to talk about the types of stories that should be reported, such as how South Africa handled the 2010 Olympic Games and the developments that are happening every day in Africa.

Naomi also gave specific examples of the kinds of stories that should be covered by the U.S. media:

Olumide Oresgun, a hyper realist artist is an example. Oresgun created several beautiful and jaw-dropping paintings that could be compared to that of Leonardo Da Vinci but such news do not find their way into the media in U.S. Although

there are poverty stricken places in Africa and some places are being attacked by terrorists, there's also so much beauty and serenity in a lot of other places as well. Naomi, Andrew, Esther, Matthew, Luke, and Joanna also talked about reporting stories like elections that were peaceful and fair, leaders who are not corrupt and care for their people, ordinary citizens who attempt to change the world, economic growth, working political systems, youth participation in the development of their countries, success in transportation, and working regional integration, among others.

Lois stated that Africans just need more time to prove to the world that they have a lot of things working well for them:

Africa as a whole is recovering from a lot of injustice it has had to deal with in the past, but today, there is progress, it's just taking some time. We have a lot of setbacks (American media loves that) but we also make positive strides. I hate that success is measured by wealth and material goods, because from that perspective the USA is rich . . . But if we measured wealth by culture, Africa would be considered much wealthier.

Lois, Eunice, Paul, Simon, Mark, and Hannah, argued that, a lot of pressure is mounted on Africans to meet up to the Western standards, without considering that no African country has had its independence for as long as the U.S. has. Therefore, it will take some time for Africa to meet up, but that doesn't mean that there are no record achievements coming out of Africa on a daily basis. Those achievements just aren't reported by the media.

Elizabeth believed that it is good to report not only the good, but also the bad: "Yes, crime that is out of hand, discrimination against minorities, corruption in



government should be portrayed, but also the good stories - economic success stories, gains in the fight against AIDS.” Elizabeth went further to say that reporting on the bad aspects of Africa might prompt leaders to work towards change:

Africa has problems, but the people are amazing! They have guts to live under difficult circumstances but still make the best of it. It is not all bad. But the bad need to come out so that pressure can be applied to get the African governments to do something about it.

Similarly, Mark, Timothy, Naomi, Judith, Joanna, and Samuel stated that Africa is just like any other continent with both good and bad. According to Joanna, “We have crime, but who doesn't. We have much to offer the world if only they would take note! We have world record holders in sport, and young people coming up with amazing inventions to help the poor.” Rachel summed it all up by saying “there are good and bad people, slums and mansions, honest people and swindlers, dumb and intelligent, thin and fat. Just like there are everywhere in the world.” Several participants called for U.S. media to do fair and balanced reporting when covering Africa.

Elizabeth and Zahra were concerned about the lack of representation of white Africans in U.S. media. When responding to the question of the type of reports participants would love to see portrayed by the U.S. media, Elizabeth and Zahra stated that they would like the U.S. media to report on the harassment of white Africans by black Africans, and how corrupt the government is. Elizabeth discussed what she expects from U.S. media:

How black people oppress white people. How corrupt the SA government is. The mass farm murders and the corruption and mismanagement of government

organizations. The mass death toll in state hospitals as a result of incompetent nurses and doctors.

According to Zahra:

Selective reporting, for example they only report on how bad the "white" people treated the blacks, but nobody reports anything about the thousands of farmers that are being murdered because most of them are white. It is not politically correct to report on how bad the black government is doing.

These responses were very different from that of other participants, given the unique circumstance surrounding Africans of both black and white skin color. Given earlier research, these themes discussed so far were generally expected, but there was one that was very much unexpected.

### **There is Some Accuracy**

Participants were shown an advertisement by a non-profit organization soliciting for funding. The advertisement had the picture of a sickly-looking starving black child, with all his ribs visible. They were asked about their thoughts on those kinds of images and videos used by non-profit/non-governmental (NPO/NGO) organizations to solicit support for their charity work in Africa. Though some participants felt that the use of images/videos like that by some NPOs are over-exaggerations and are part of what reinforce stereotypes against Africans and Africa, the majority of participants seemed to believe that those images/videos are actually a correct portrayal of some circumstances in Africa.

Sarah and Mark respectively, said they had no issue with such advertisements Sarah said: "These pictures portray the true situation so I have no issues with the pictures

used.” Mark stated: “I totally accept this one because it 100% describes what's really going on in East Africa today specially in Ethiopia.” Some participants stated that using such images are sometimes necessary in order to draw sympathy and appeal to the emotions of potential donors, and that the images/videos draws sympathy and support for their causes. Silas believed that: “This could be an honest representation of the situation which these children are going through. If this picture doesn't move one, nothing else probably would.” Becky said she is in support of that kind of advertising only if the funds raised from them are used for the purpose stated:

There are lots of that going around. The kids/adults/people in those photos are not exceptions, a lot of people are suffering in Africa. If images like that will get people to donate, and help the poor that is good. If the money raised is actually being used to help that specific child and family, then I guess I am fine with it.

But if that money is being used for anything other than that, then I start fuming.

Mark stated that he never used to think such situations were real, until he saw it firsthand:

My thoughts some years ago was that images like the one above is not a true representation of the condition of Africa, but with what I see, for example, in my nation, Nigeria, with the current I.D.P (Internally Displaced People) crisis and case of malnutrition due to mismanagement of resources by certain individuals . . . what can any of us say for ourselves. We need to take responsibility and address these issues seriously if we want such images like the one above to no longer be associated with Africa.

Some participants stated that while it may be true that parts of these conditions exist in Africa, it is important to always state the full story, to state the efforts the government, civil society, and local NPOs are making towards solving such issues.

Although the majority of the participants agree with the use of disturbing images/videos by NPOs to solicit support and funding from their potential donors, other participants do not agree with them. Daniel wants these NPOs to share their progress report/success stories: “Instead of showing those kinds of images they should show a picture of a child that has recovered because of their ‘help’ of foundation to show positive results.” Elias stated that the constant use of these disturbing images portrays stagnancy in Africa:

It's sad and so bizarre, because it creates a message to the donors that there is no level of economic growth that has been experienced in the region, even with the yearly publication from the World Economic Forum that has reported some positive economic growth about Africa.

Other participants stated that such happenings are not only peculiar to Africa, even as other countries are also faced with similar situations. Stephanie said she was shocked upon discovering that the U.S. also had underprivileged people:

Yes it's real such cases are there but that isn't what Africa is about! I don't get why we have to be associated with poverty all the time. Do you know how shocked I was when I found out there's poor people in America. Why can't that be the case with Africa?

A similar thought was shared by Eunice, “It drives the truth home, but it is not representative of the entire continent or country. I am sure if I go looking I can find

someone looking like that in the US or any other first world country too.” James believed that the funds gotten from these emotional advertisements are siphoned/diverted and used for other benefits: “These nonprofit organizations don’t even help these children. They use the money for their own business. They are using Africa to get donation for themselves.” Participants feel it is both good and bad for NPOs to use disturbing images/videos to seek support for their work of charity in Africa.

### **Take Ownership**

The “Take Ownership” theme answers the second research question which asks Africans what they believe should/could be done to improve U.S. media representations of Africa and its people. The survey question specifically asked participants what they suggest African nations and Africans can do to influence the impression the U.S. has about them. A majority of the participants stated that Africans need to rise up and take ownership of the way their nations are perceived, by developing their media outlets and also take charge of reporting the good side of Africa on a global scale. Thomas believes that Africa needs to develop dominant media outlets, “African nations shouldn’t be dependent on U.S media, instead, we Africans should have our own dominant media that we should tell about ourselves to the world.” More participants feel that Africans need to develop their own media outlets, use the local media to boost awareness of Africa, by making positive impressions and challenging the negativity.

Several participants suggested that Africans need to sing their own songs of praise by painting their own image in the media, which is further stated by Silas, “I think the media in Africa, if given a free hand, should be the ones to reflect to the world what is actually going on. The African countries can do more by showcasing what they have

internationally.” Silas continued by saying that Africans need to quit playing the victim card and take ownership of their image, “Reject the attitude of being victims, stand up for what is right, make deliberate efforts in changing all the negative reviews or stories, engage the U.S. Media in constructive dialogue.” Andrew also suggested a similar course of action “Increase the popularity of her citizens. Take over charge of the media, and control it from our own perspective. Improve infrastructure in our countries.” Other participants continued to suggest that Africans need to be more effective in putting the news from Africa out there for the West to consume, and reverse the trend of getting African news from Western media, adding that Africans need to tell their success stories and celebrate their achievements against all odds. They also suggested the use of social media as a helpful tool to promote the good in Africa.

Grace suggested that Africans need to stop asking for handouts from Western countries, because doing that reinforces the negative picture the West has of Africans. Nathan suggests to, “Take ownership, stop complaining about the problem, stop waiting for handouts and take our destiny into our hands.” He further makes suggestions on actions needed to be taken by Africans:

African countries should encourage local and indigenous entrepreneurs to go into international broadcasting in order to project [the] African image correctly.

Broadband penetration should also be encouraged to make Internet access cheap and affordable to the common citizen. Africans should sell more positive content, humanitarian services, technological advancements etc.

Nathan's response suggests that the African nations need to produce world-class journalists in order to be able to serve as ambassadors responsible for the positive representation of Africa.

Another issue that came up among participants was the issue of corruption. Participants argued that African leaders need to rid themselves of corrupt practices in order to rid Africa of stereotypes. Joanna noted:

Fight against corruption. Call out politicians who are enriching themselves at the expense of the people they should be representing. Don't call anyone who disagrees with the government (read ANC, particularly in South Africa) a racist. Don't blindly follow the party line.

Stephanie had this to say, "Well, if Africans can stop being corrupt and start living moral lives, there won't be bad stories for the media to focus on. One way to instill some morality in people is through education." More suggestions were given by participants, some of which include Africans insisting on verification of information before they are propagated, and also, to start projecting positive impressions of themselves by doing something good, and letting the world see it.

### **Summary**

There were two main research questions that guided this study. These questions were answered using the themes that emerged during the analysis of data. These themes were discussed in great details in this chapter, where participants discussed their perceptions of how they see their continent portrayed in the U.S. media. Most of the participants stated that the majority of the kind of news they see from U.S. media on Africa are those with negative messages, giving Africa the negative image it has been

struggling to overcome for a long time. Participants went on to say that the negative impressions the U.S. has of Africa are fueled by misguided misconceptions, ignorance, fixed perceptions and stereotypes, adding that the U.S. chooses to view and portray Africa negatively because of their lack of interest to carry out adequate research in order to report with fairness.

These factors were discussed by participants in great detail, stating that the U.S. is still holding onto the past, thereby allowing this history to dictate their view of Africa. As previous research indicated, these misconceptions, fixed perceptions and stereotypes originate partly from the era of slave trade and colonialism in Africa (Harth, 2012). This and other factors are mostly responsible for the misconceptions towards Africa and Africans.

Participants said that although some of the reports by U.S. media are accurate to a certain extent, they are mostly exaggerated and blown out of proportion by the media. Though I was not expecting to have the “Some Accuracy” theme, the majority of the participants stated their support for the use of disturbing images/videos by NPOs to solicit funding for their charity works in Africa, stating that if those images/videos will move people to donate in order to help, then it is for a good cause. Participants also suggested that Africans need to stand up and take ownership of their continent. It is their responsibility to try and correct the wrong impression the West has of them, adding that they need to develop their media outlets into broadcasting juggernauts to be reckoned with internationally.

The next chapter discusses the results and the themes that emerged from data analysis. It also discusses the relevance of the study to the academic world and beyond.



The limitations of the current study and possible areas in which further research would be beneficial are also discussed.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The central focus of this thesis is to explore firsthand insight into the perceptions of Africans, on how they see their continent portrayed by U.S. media. The study employed Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm as its theoretical framework. This chapter discusses the results, summarizes major findings, discusses limitations, and suggests areas of future research.

Research questions that guided this thesis were as follows:

RQ 1: What are African narratives about how their continent is portrayed by U.S. media sources?

RQ 2: What do Africans believe should be done to improve U.S. media representation of Africa and its people?

Responses from the online survey administered led to the emergence of six expected themes and one unexpected theme, which will be discussed in further detail. Responses showed participants, regardless of age, seemed to have similar responses to the survey questions. The young, middle-aged, and the older participants described the kinds of news they see reported by U.S. media about Africa as negative and uninformed.

There were also similar responses between participants from different countries. The only difference was in responses from some South Africa participants who seemed concerned with how U.S. media present Africa as a continent with only black people, not

acknowledging the fact that there are also white Africans. This misconception shows dissonance with how U.S. media portray South Africans. Similar to the arguments by other participants, there is some fidelity in the way U.S. media reports on Africa, which resonates with what participants believe to be true.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

As stated in Chapter One, the thesis sought to explore the truth behind stereotypes and the extent to which journalists are capturing the real Africa among other things. The themes that emerged provided answers to the research questions. Participants saw negative stories of poverty, hunger, war, and corruption, as the most consistent kind of stories reported by U.S. media. This was seen as a result of misconceptions of Africa and Africans, fixed perceptions and existing stereotypes of Africa. Additionally, ignorance on the part of media concerning issues about Africa played a role. Participants argued these factors stemmed from U.S. media's lack of interest in African affairs, which hinders them from doing the necessary research on the topics they report on. U.S. media are seen as oblivious to African traditions and cultures, thus, making them analyze African news events/stories from U.S./American perspectives. Therefore, this makes it difficult for U.S. media to understand a group of people with whom they are not familiar. This argument resonates with the argument made by Odine (2013) that, for news of conflict about Africa to be free of any form of bias, it must take a journalist who not only understands the conflict, but also understands the role in reporting it.

Results show that Africans have a lot of amazing things to share with the world if people are willing to put aside the negativity and give them the benefit of the doubt. Although most participants agree that there indeed lies some negativity in Africa, they

also argue that there is an abundance of good and positivity that media fail to report. The participants stated that, just as is the case in any nation, there is good and bad, but media, out of convenience, appear to prefer to report on mostly the negative. Results from this study provide support for research findings such as those from Ebo (1992), who posits the negative and misguided images of Africa by American media are responsible for the bad image that Americans have about the continent.

The results also provided support for the colonialism theme discussed in Chapter Two. A participant, Joanna, argued that fixed perceptions and stereotypes towards Africa and Africans have been in existence since the reign of Europeans in Africa. While some participants argued against the use of over-exaggerated images/videos used by NPOs to solicit for funds, others agreed that the use of those images/videos end up being for the greater good. Other participants argued that if the use of pictures or videos of malnourished and sick-looking kids will move people to donate to the cause, then it ends up serving and saving those children in need. But Daniel argued that “Instead of showing those kinds of images they should show a picture of a child that has recovered because of their ‘help’ of foundation to show positive results.” These NPOs need to show their progress in helping the children they advertise so people can see what their monies are used for, and they might be moved to give again. The “Some Accuracy” theme shows support for the testing of *Narrative Fidelity* argued by Fisher (1984) in his narrative paradigm theory. This notion argues that:

The narrative paradigm insists that human communication should be viewed as historical as well as situational, as stories competing with other stories constituted by good reasons, as being rational when they satisfy the demands of narrative

probability and narrative fidelity, and as inevitably moral inducements. (Fisher, 1984, p. 2)

The “Some Accuracy” theme gives fidelity to the stories told by a lot of the NPOs through the use of negative images/videos to solicit funds. Narrative theory posits that if there is a match between the story told and what people believe, it is then seen as true and believable. Those not in support of this idea are afraid of the possibility that the funds gathered might not be used to help the children as stated.

Whether the argument is for or against the use of disturbing images/videos to solicit funds, or whether or not U.S. citizens have misconceptions and fixed perceptions about Africa, participants all agreed that there is indeed more to Africa than the U.S. media are reporting. This unison has led participants to call on Africans to stand up and take charge of their reputation, stating that Africans also need to take ownership of these misrepresentations, as they are partly to blame for it. Participants noted that African nations need to work hard in developing formidable media outlets that will compete with Western media, once they have situated themselves firmly, then they can begin to globally spread the good news coming out of Africa. This argument answers the second research question of what Africans believe should be done to improve U.S. media representation of Africa and its people.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Fisher (1984) argued that coherence is about consistency, how much sense a story makes, how much details the story carries, and how reliable the story is. The coherence of U.S. media reports on Africa are reliant on factors of newsworthiness as argued by Túñez and Guevara (2009). According to Túñez and Guevara (2009) factors of newsworthiness include significance/impact of news,

proximity, human interest, prominence, conflict, and uniqueness of news. These factors end up determining negative news choices by U.S. media on Africa. Going by these factors, news reported by any media must have significance or some value to their audiences. If news coming out of Africa does not hold any significance to U.S. media audience, then that news might not be reported, or covered extensively. Likewise, events that happen near an audience determines its significance. Geographical proximity between African countries and the U.S. is a factor that determines how newsworthy happenings in Africa are to U.S. media. So also do human interest, prominence, conflict, and uniqueness of news affect the significance of African news to U.S. media. It could also be argued that these factors in themselves are somewhat biased, considering how globalization connects continents and nations, these factors need to be reconstructed to accommodate different occurrences. Stories from Africa have been known to follow the pattern of negativity, consistency in these kinds of reports might seem the most convenient rather than actually carrying out detailed investigation.

With today's technology, the suggestions given by participants that Africans need to sing their own songs and work towards portraying Africa in good light, is very much possible to achieve. With a lot of U.S. media active on social media and the internet, it has been made easy to make contact with them. Africans could take pictures of the amazing things they want the world to see happening in their countries and send to media outlets. This could be a way of educating and enlightening U.S. media on happenings in Africa. Another way Africans can speak up for themselves and make their voices heard, is if their narratives are produced and distributed globally. Doing this will make their

narratives irrefutable because there is not a lot of African stories in the news, therefore, it is not part of the conversation by U.S. media.

### **Limitations**

There are limitations in this study. One of the most challenging limitation was the absence of face-to-face interviews because of lack of proximity to the participants. Though there exists some advantages, conducting an online survey comes with a lot of disadvantages. Online surveys are inherently subjected to self-report of demographics and age restrictions, as well as the attitudes within the survey. Notwithstanding, administering an online survey was a good method of getting a wide range of participants considering time constraint and distance.

A second limitation to the study was that the sample size used for each country was not of equal proportion. There were two times more Nigerian participants than there were participants from other countries. A lot of other African countries were also not represented in the sample size. It isn't certain if the results would have differed with a more diverse and a more balanced number of participants, but it would have been more advantageous to have a more diverse sample size. The sample size gotten from each country was still a good representation, given the similarities in responses with those of varying countries.

Another limitation of this study was the use of the snowball technique during the recruitment process, though this technique was very useful and convenient in getting the desired number of participants. The research relied mainly on preliminary participants to help recruit more participants, who they may or may not know well. As a result, there is

the possibility that these participants might share the same ideologies and characteristics, which could possibly mean that the study had only a subsection of the whole population.

### **Areas for Further Research**

This research leaves room for future studies as it can be studied in a lot of different ways, considering the rarity of research on the African perspective. This thesis gathered responses from participants to help understand perceptions of how Africans see their continent portrayed by U.S. media. Another way this research can be studied is to carry out phenomenological research, which tries to comprehend the perception and perspectives of participants on a shared lived experience, trying to get at the “essence” of that experience.

Future research can include participants from all 54 countries in Africa. Having representatives from every country could provide better insights into the minds of Africans and set the stage for an assessment of similarities between that study and the present one. Researchers might want to carry out a mixed methods research considering the assumed high number of participants the research might have, using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Another area of research would be to study the experiences of Africans in the diaspora, by exploring how misrepresentation of Africa affects them when interacting with non-African U.S. citizens on a daily basis. It would be good to hear the experiences of Africans who live in the U.S. permanently, or for studies. To find out if the stereotypes and fixed perceptions U.S. citizens have of Africa/Africans affects the way they are treated and their interactions with others.

### **Conclusion**



In this chapter, the results, limitations, and areas for future research were discussed. Participants want the U.S. media to engage in unbiased and fair reporting when covering news stories that cover any part of Africa. This research could do with a more diverse and equally balanced sample size; more diverse in the sense that participants from more African countries could have been recruited and more equally balanced refers to the number of participants in every country. Conducting a face-to-face interview will help yield more data from observation, and would give opportunities for follow-up questions to be asked.

Future research could employ a phenomenological lens and methodology. Another opportunity for future study would be an examination of the perceptions of Africans who reside in Western countries to determine whether or not negative perceptions the West has of their continent affects the way in which they interact with others abroad.

This thesis will help people get a better understanding of the perceptions of Africans about how they're portrayed in U.S. media and whether they have any suggestions for improvement. The study can serve as an informational and educational work to inspire curiosity and interest in Westerners to know and understand the real Africa.

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Appendix A

August 29, 2016

Dear Sheba Many:

Your research proposal titled, “**U.S. Mass Media Portrayal of the African Continent: The African Perspective**” was submitted to the full membership of the West Texas A&M University IRB on **August 25, 2016** for an **expedited** review. The IRB may (i) approve, (ii) approve conditionally, or (iii) disapprove proposed protocols and consent forms. The decision of the IRB regarding your proposal was:

- |                          |                       |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Approve               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Approve Conditionally |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Disapprove            |

Approval is extended for one calendar year. Should data collection proceed past one year, or should you make changes in the methodology as it affects human subjects, you must resubmit the study to the IRB.

**Assuming all IRB training requirements have been met, procedures involving human subjects may now proceed.**

Upon verifying your successful completion of all training requirements, an official letter of approval from the Graduate School is forthcoming. Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well in your research project.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gary Bigham, IRB Chair

## Appendix B

### Consent Form

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. You are welcome to stop at any time or skip any questions you would prefer not to answer. Refusal to participate does not affect any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

In continuing your participation in this survey, you acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age and wish to participate in this study conducted by Sheba Many. In this study you will be asked a series of questions about the portrayal of Africa by U.S. mass media, what your thoughts are about this portrayal, and what whys you suggest this impression can be corrected. You will also be asked to discuss how you feel about this portrayal and what you feel is right, wrong or under-represented.

In this study you will be asked a series of questions about the kind of news and information you see being reported by U.S. mass media on Africa, the kind of images used, what you think more Westerners need to know about Africa, and ways in which African nations and Africans can correct the this impression. There is no right or wrong answer, and we have no interest in how a particular individual responds to these questions. There is no more risk to you than expressing your opinion in everyday conversation. There is no direct benefit to you, but your participation will benefit the field of communication, especially as it affects gaining more knowledge on the African continent. The survey should not take you more than 20 minutes to complete. This research seeks 100 responses from participants, but it remains open to getting more than the expected number of responses.

All information collected during this research will remain confidential and will be stored on a password-protected computer. Your responses will be reported, but your responses will not be identifiable. Feedback and observations recorded during the survey will be recorded on the data collection website, Qualtrics.

This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at West Texas A&M University. If you have any concerns about this study or your rights, you can contact the dean of the graduate school and research, Dr. Angela Spaulding, at 806-651-2732. Should you have any questions and/or wish to review summary findings, please contact Sheba Many at: 090.8411.8492. Thank you again for your participation.

I have read and understood the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Yes     No



## Appendix C

### Survey

Q1. What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Q2. Do you identify as African?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q3. Are you 18 years or older?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q4. What is your country of origin?

Q5. Have you been to the U. S. before?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q6. Where do you get your news from?

- Television (1)
- Radio (2)
- Internet (3)
- Newspaper/Magazines (4)
- Facebook (5)
- Twitter (6)
- Other (7) \_\_\_\_\_

Q7. How many hours do you spend on the following media?

	Internet (1)	Television (2)	Radio (3)	Facebook (4)	Twitter (5)	Newspaper/Magazine (6)	Other (7)
less than an hour (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
one hour (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
two hours (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
more than two hours (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8. What social media platform do you use more often for news?

- Facebook (1)
- Twitter (2)
- Google+ (3)
- Other (4) \_\_\_\_\_
- None (5)

Q9. Describe the kind of news about Africa you have seen reported by the U.S. media

Q10. What percentage of the news you watch has coverage about Africa?

Q11. What are your perspectives on how Africa is being portrayed by U.S. media?

Q12. Do you think there is more to Africa than the way it is portrayed? Explain your response

- Definitely yes (1) \_\_\_\_\_
- Probably yes (2) \_\_\_\_\_
- Might or might not (3) \_\_\_\_\_
- Probably not (4) \_\_\_\_\_
- Definitely not (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q13. What about Africa would you like to be seen portrayed more often by the U.S. media?

Q14. What factors do you think are responsible for the way African nations are portrayed by the U.S. media?

Q15. What are your thoughts on the kind of images and videos Non-Profit organizations use to solicit support for their charity works in Africa?

Q16. What about Africa do you wish more non-Africans know?

Q17. How do you suggest the U. S. get more exposure on Africa to better their knowledge when reporting on the continent and its people?

Q18. What do you suggest African nations and Africans can do to correct the impression the U.S. has of them?

## Appendix D

A list of all 54 African countries written in order of the region under which they fall.

### **Northern Africa**

Northern African region comprises of seven independent countries. Algeria which has its capital city as Algiers and official languages as Arabic and Berber. For the others, countries and their capital city will be separated by hyphens with a comma before the official language. Egypt, Cairo, Arabic. Libya, Tripoli, Arabic. Morocco, Rabat, Arabic and Berber. Sudan, Khartoum, Arabic and English. Tunisia – Tunis, Arabic. Western Sahara- El-Aaiun, Arabic, Berber and Spanish.

### **Western Africa**

The Western African region is made up of 15 independent countries. The countries, their capital city and official language are as follows; Benin – Port Novo/Cotonou, French. Burkina Faso – Ouagadougou, French. Gambia – Banjul, English. Ghana – Accra, English. Guinea-Bissau – Bissau, Portuguese. Guinea – Conakry, French. Cote d'Ivoire – Yamoussoukro/Abidjan, French. Liberia – Monrovia, English. Mali – Bamako, French. Mauritania – Nouakchott, Arabic. Nigeria – Abuja, English. Niger – Niamey, French. Senegal – Dakar, French. Sierra Leone – Freetown, English. Togo – Lomé, French.

### **Eastern Africa**

The Eastern African region is made up of 15 independent countries. The countries, their capital city and official language are as follows; Burundi – Bujumbura, French and Kirundi. Comoros – Moroni, Comorian, Arabic and French. Djibouti – Djibouti, French and Arabic. Eritrea –Asmara, there is no official language for Eritrea,

however, Tigrinya serves as De Facto language of national identity. Ethiopia – Addis Ababa, Amharic. Kenya – Nairobi, English and Kiswahili. Madagascar – Antananarivo, Malagasy and French. Malawi – Lilongwe, English. Mauritius – Port Louis, English. Mozambique – Maputo, Portuguese. Rwanda – Kigali, Kinyarwanda, English and French. Somalia- Mogadishu, Somali and Arabic. South Sudan – Juba, English. Seychelles –Victoria, English, French and Seychellois Creole. Tanzania – Dodoma, Swahili and English. Uganda – Kampala, Swahili and English. Zambia – Lusaka, English. And lastly, Zimbabwe – Harare, and they have English as their official language among 15 others.

### **Southern Africa**

The southern African region comprises of the following five countries with their capital cities and official spoken language. Botswana – Gaborone, Setswana and English. Lesotho – Maseru, Lesotho and English. Namibia – Windhoek, English. South Africa – Bloemfontein/Cape town/Pretoria, they have English as their language among 10 other languages. Swaziland – Mbabane/Lobamba, Swazi and English.

### **Central Africa**

In central Africa, nine of the 54 African countries come from there. Angola – Luanda, Portuguese. Cameroon – Yaoundé, French and English. Central African Republic – Bangui, Sango and French. Chad – N’Djamena, French and Arabic. Democratic Republic of the Congo – Kinshasa, French. Republic of the Congo – Brazzaville, French. Equatorial Guinea – Malabo, Spanish and French. Gabon – Libreville, French. And lastly, Sao Tome and Principe – Sao Tome, Portuguese.