

American Media, American Mind: Media Impact on Nigerians' Perceptions

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Global media effects and audience reception scholarship has dismissed African populations as valuable to knowledge building and theoretical development in the study of media impact. Through a neocolonial lens of cultural imperialism, this study examines the perceived influence of American media on shaping Nigerians' views of America and their own nation. In addition, this study considers the potential impact of developing Nigerian transnational media industries on how Nigerians see themselves in relation to the United States. Findings reveal a bias toward American media and derision of their own nation comparatively regardless of Nigeria's transnational success or social media's presentations of U.S. realities.

Keywords: Globalization, neocolonialism, cultural imperialism, media effects, Nigeria

Much of the literature on the impact of media on non-American audiences published in the United States has focused primarily on the Middle Eastern (Cohen, 2008; Wheeler, 2000) and Asian communities (Shen & Guo, 2013; Yang, Ramasubramanian, & Oliver, 2008). Comparatively, little attention has been given to the potential impact of Western mediated messages on African communities. Consequently, it would appear that African populations are not as valued in media effects or media studies research. Furthermore, when considering the increasing growth of transnational media in which cultural content is shared with diasporic communities abroad and subsequently integrated into Western culture, it seems valuable to examine a potential two-way flow of influence.

Whereas researchers have explored the transnational influence of telenovelas (Mayer, 2003), K-pop (Jin & Yoon, 2014; Oh, 2017), or Desi films (Ramasubramanian & Doshi, 2017; Sharma, 2011), African-produced content is overlooked by American media scholars. For example, Nigeria's film industry ranks among the highest in production rate and has garnered enough market appeal that Netflix has partnered with prominent Nigerian filmmakers to distribute direct-to-video films (Pratt, 2015). Moreover, the current boom of Nigeria's music industry (Afrobeats), is transcending boundaries across the globe (Salm, 2010). In the past five years, Nigerian musicians have either been nominated or won Grammys and have collaborated with American artists (High, 2019). Presuming a two-way flow of shared media, the growing popularity of Nigeria's media industry may have some influence on how Nigerian citizens respond to American media

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Date submitted: 2021-07-27

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Nonetheless, power plays a significant role in the degree to which one nation's media messaging is impacted by another. Postcolonial frameworks identify the imbalances in geopolitical power and how developing (i.e., overexploited) nations, those on the African continent, for example, are harmed by Western media. On the one hand, seeing media products as value-laden cultural texts, scholars anticipate an acceptance and internalization of Western cultural values (e.g., individualism, personal freedoms, capitalism). On the other hand, some scholarship has revealed citizens' preferences for local cultures and minimizes the potential of cultural domination (Prince, 2003; Wang, 2008). However, little to no research has examined the role that having a transnational media presence could play in the potential impact of American media on citizens of underdeveloped nations. The purpose of this study is to examine how the consumption of U.S. media impacts the way Nigerians view themselves and view the United States in the context of the global success of Nigerian media by raising the following research questions:

RQ1: How does exposure to American media impact Nigerians' perception of the United States and their nation?

RQ2: How does the context of Nigeria's growing global presence mitigate the potential influence of American media on Nigerian citizens, if at all?

American Media and African Nations: A Postcolonial Perspective

Western influence has been present in African countries since colonial rule. Arguably, though many countries have established political independence, they are still economically dependent on the West through the neocolonial practice of globalization. The importation of American and British media products inadvertently serves as colonial conduits as it reinforces Western ideologies and values. Many scholars have historically explored the impact of American media on overexploited nations directly through the lens of globalization.

Globalization describes the development of interconnectedness between nations and the crossing of national borders through many means, including trade and technology. Such interconnectedness results in economic interdependence and an exchange of ideas and cultures. The advancement of communication technologies was thought to create a "global village"—an integration of multiple communities into one hybrid culture (Tremblay, 2012); however, a nation's power status is critical to the direction of transnational flow. Wealthier countries are more likely to benefit not only economically, but also in the dissemination of their ideas. Critics of this supposition have noted that imbalances in power and the centralization of production play a significant role in the potential for dominant nations to erode a developing nations' culture. Ugbam, Chukwu, and Ogbo (2014) identify the assumption of universality as critical to the connotation of globalization stating, "globalization entails universalization whereby the objective, practices or even values transcend geopolitical boundaries, penetrating the hitherto sovereign nation-state and impacting the orientation and value system of the people" (p. 63) suggesting an inherent aim to not form hybrid cultures, but a *homogenous* one. For some scholars, globalization is merely a contemporary form of colonialism.

The imbalance of power between nations alongside the growing economic dependence on the West has resulted in what some refer to as cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism explains how American media's pervasiveness in developing countries may impact locals' culture, the way they see themselves, and how favorably they view the West (Schiller, 1971). More than sculpting developing countries' values, Wang (2008) articulates that "global communication is a vehicle which aims at controlling, invading, or undermining other cultures" (p. 205). While scholars agree that globalization speaks more to an exchange of ideas, uneven though it may be, postcolonial theorists would frame this debate within the lens of neo-colonialism. Rahaman, Yeazdani, and Mahmud (2017) describe neocolonialism as "the final stage of imperialism," emphasizing the role that previous colonial governments continue to play in the politics, regulations, and economics of previous colonies.

Western values embedded in programming or systems of education in Africa have been notable to African scholars and critics. The anticipated benefits of economic interdependence in globalization have arguably created devastating economic problems for Africa, cultivating economic dependence instead (Ugbam, Chukwu, & Ogbo, 2014). There have been growing concerns among African scholars that consumption of American media is essentially eradicating the culture (Oni, 2009).

Findings in support of a bias toward America as it relates to developing nations' exposure to U.S. entertainment are both indisputable and inconclusive. Lemish and colleagues' (1998) seminal work on the integration of American media into the lives of a cross-cultural sample (i.e., Western Europe and the Middle East) revealed a tendency for children and teens to internalize Western values even when attempting to maintain their own culture. In fact, further research also revealed that exposure to American entertainment impacted children's creative ability such that American images were prevailing (Gotz, Lemish, Moon, & Aidman, 2014). In a survey, Naeem, Khan, and Kaliq (2020) discovered that Pakistani students exposed to Hollywood films were able to identify American actors, had preferences for American food, and internalized American moral values. Hetsroni, Elphariach, Kapuza, and Tsfonti's (2007) work discovered a positive correlation between Israeli's exposure to American programming and their estimation of occupation opportunities in America as displayed on television. Other studies have even pointed to the potential of American television to increase positive attitudes toward Americans (Shim, 2010), cultivate perceptions of positive friendships (Rodríguez, 2018; Woo & Dominick, 2001), and even exacerbate their views of crime in America (Lee & Park, 2014). Terracciano and McCrae (2007) suggest that the media and interpersonal interactions work in tandem to cultivate global beliefs that Americans are on the positive side, hard-working, innovative, and competent. On the negative side, they are cold, materialistic, and violent.

On the contrary, other work has revealed a resistance to cultural influence challenging the presumption of a passive audience (Ekeanyawu, 2009). In his focus group study of Moroccan viewers of U.S. international news, Douai (2014) found that audiences were much more critical of perceived media influence and actively resisted being influenced by American news sources. In the same vein, Chivandikwa's (2010) exploration of American soap operas' impact on Zimbabwean women revealed an active rejection of media influence by way of selective retention. That is, the researcher argues that the women allowed their cultural values and practices to guide how they interacted with counter-cultural content within American soap operas. Scholars have explained this phenomenon as "cultural proximity," whereby audiences appreciate the value that local productions bring to their sense of tradition and

identity (Ugochukwu, 2008). Taking another postcolonial approach, Tindi and Ayiku (2018) use hybridity theory to explain how Ghanaian women negotiated their identities when watching a globalized Mexican telenovela. Although these studies examined audience perceptions in Africa, there has been very little empirical data gathered on Nigeria specifically.

Nigeria Audience Reception and Effects

For context, it is important to note that governing bodies such as the Nigerian Television Authority and the National Broadcasting Commission developed in response to the growing privatization and deregulation of Nigeria's broadcast industry alongside concerns about potential foreign influence on Nigerian cultural expression (Ugochukwu, 2008). As a result, regulatory policies require up to 60% of local programming. Acholonu (2011) notes, however, that compared to other developing countries surrounding Nigeria, more than half of Nigerian television programs are from America or England. Moreover, Omoera and Ibaere (2010) contend that the Nigerian television industry exemplifies imperialism's impact on insufficient resources to invest in the technologies needed to broadcast quality programming. To add to this, Patrick (2014) claims that Nigerian audiences are demanding the integration of foreign aesthetics into local programming.

According to Adesina (2012) and Ajakah (2021), Nigerian youth are becoming "alienated" from their traditional roots. Adesina (2012) writes, "Mode of dressing expressed through the exposure of various parts of the body is now a common occurrence among the youth" (p. 195). Ajakah (2021) identifies Western culture's impact on Nigerians' wedding ceremonies, fashion trends, and orientations toward community, where he observes a shift from valuing community as family to distinguishing between core and extended family members. Moreover, Ajakah (2021) recognizes the imbalance by suggesting that the West protects their values while encroaching on other nation's values. Such articulations allude to a possible negative correlation between the increasing permeation of American media systems and products into the culture and African nations' waning national pride. Yet, empirical studies in communication research addressing the potential influence of imperialism on Nigerians is underdeveloped.

Sampling students from the Northern, Southeastern, and Southwestern regions of Nigeria, Ugochukwu (2008) found that while exposure to American media increased knowledge about American politics and pop culture, Nigerians' sense of group value was unshaken. However, Patrick's (2014) semistructured interview of Nigerian youth revealed a growing disdain for Nigerian art and culture as a result of American media consumption. In line with this finding, Mabelle's (2016) survey revealed that young Nigerians reported that exposure to Western films greatly affected their lifestyle preferences and deference to native culture. Moreover, Terracciano and McCrae (2007) note that Nigerians esteemed Americans more favorably in terms of their trustworthiness, generosity, and cooperation, in contrast to the stereotypes of Nigerians as corrupt and dishonest (Acholonu, 2011). We contend that it is important for communication scholars to explore how citizens of developing nations (e.g., Nigeria) make sense of their identity and global positionality when consuming American media, as well as how this consumption propagates such deleterious beliefs. Even more interesting is an inquiry into the role that growing global success might play in mitigating these negative impacts in light of a nation's neocolonial media history.

Africans in American and African Media

Exported U.S. media products can cultivate shame, especially when Nigerians are aware of how they are portrayed in American media and thus seen in the global sphere. Images of Africans in American media serve to reinforce ideologies about Africans, which further foster negative self-views. Whereas this study focuses more on entertainment, much of the literature on the portrayals of Africa in the media has been centered on international news coverage and examined through agenda-setting theory. Earliest African media representations portray Africa as one big continent, ignoring cultural distinctions as independent African nations are structurally amalgamated (Haynes, 1958). Dominant media representations of Africa are often sparse, and when such attention exists, they are inundated in negative terms that continue a long-standing narrative of Africa's woes (Haynes, 1958). Awokoya (2012) classifies this portrayal as a systemic and intentional act by the media that seeks to sustain American-news selection biases. Subsequently, this imagery is adopted by Americans in their relations with Africans. Specifically, in a report showing the progression of African news coverage between 1994 and 2013, Bunce (2017) found that while the tone of coverage has generally become more inclusive and positive, there is also a rise in the reporting of conflicts and crises. The more negative coverage a country receives in the American press or online, the more negative perception of the country rises (Himelboim, Chang, & McCreery, 2010; Wu, 2007). Adegbola, Skarda-Mitchell, and Gearhart's (2018) content analysis revealed the prevalence of negative news coverage of Nigeria specifically, which has implications for how Nigerians view themselves through an American lens.

Employing journalistic objectivity in the reporting of African news can reinforce neocolonialism, effectively choosing conflict over empathy that undermines and misrepresents the African culture (Skjerdal, 2012), subjugates the continent (Asante, Sun, & Long, 2013), and leaves no room for the exploration of African communitarian thinking. Local journalists contracted to report news to western media houses struggle to find stories that fit the requirements for western media and draw attention to the continent. Findings from a city of London report show that commissioned journalists in Africa are often pressured to report sellable news from Africa, which is largely bad news, pushing and propagating western narratives on African news reporting (Belachew, 2016).

This reality also persists in American television production and viewership. In their review of over 700,000 programs, Blakley, Rodgers, Watson-Currie, and Jung (2019) argued that

African media coverage is overwhelmingly focused on negative stories such as Boko Haram, corruptions, poverty, electoral crises, migrants and terrorism, while putting far too little emphasis on subjects and stories that provide a counterpoint showing success, diversity, opportunity and vibrancy of Africa—its emerging middle class; technology and innovation; solutions-driven culture; growing economies and democracies; and talent in the areas of the arts and entertainment, technologies, business and government. (p. 4)

The image of Africa in the American mind is one of devastation, debt, and disaster (Bayeck, Asino, & Young, 2018). Subsequently, these portrayals become especially worrisome when considering the global

reach of U.S. media and the media's role in constructing reality, though digital platforms have the potential to combat these representations.

Globalization and immigration have opened new avenues for what Lobato (2019) describes as the emergence of a "digital distribution revolution" (p. 2) in television and entertainment content, which shifts the delivery of content to online and on-demand formats. Although there is no way to describe a point of change for television content delivery, Lotz (2017) attributes the turning point for media distribution evolution to 2010 where she argues that the Internet fueled the progress of distribution technologies. The ease of television distribution creates implications for international television product consumption. Consequently, new discourses investigate the formation of transnational identities within the rising television global culture (Asante & Daniels, 2018; Pindi, 2018). With the recognition and reconceptualization of these emerging identities, new media is increasingly seeking to "include" divergent narratives in its production; the question remains on how much success such relationships may bring.

Jenner (2018) credits Netflix as one key player at the forefront of this media evolution. Netflix officially extended its streaming service to Africa in 2016; however, it was not until 2020 that the platform began to express interest in creating original African content. The "Made by Africans and Watched by the World" campaign (Jenner, 2018) signaled the intent of the conglomerate to emphasize the global distribution of creative content from the continent. In the beginning of the video, Genevieve Nnaji (Nigerian actress and producer) asks, "Have you ever had someone tell your story, take your voice and replace your face, until no one else can see or hear you?" ("Africa on Netflix," 2020). Such statements allude to the inequity that shroud the creation and distribution of African stories in Western media. Though negative outcomes result from these portrayals, the presence of Netflix in these smaller countries gives access to affordable foreign content that may start a conversation on the equality of foreign versus national content. When comparing the availability of American film content to African content on Netflix, there are rising concerns about low remuneration and licensing fees paid to Nigerian Netflix creators (Dayo, 2020). As the road to transnational production increases, it can become impactful and transformative only if these pathways promote equality in content conceptualization, creation, and distribution.

It is important to note that although Netflix may seem to be acclaimed as one way to transport media across borders, Netflix's aim of expansion in Africa is only an addition, not a supplantation, to an already existent and thriving industry. For example, Nollywood (Nigeria's film industry) was created to introduce Nigerian voices to Nigerian entertainment. Although cinema and entertainment products have been featured in Nigeria postindependence, Nigerian voices were excluded in both production and distribution. After the first set of productions in 1994, the industry kicked off and expanded to become the second-largest movie industry in the world in terms of output (Haynes, 2016). Netflix's objectives were met with the initial excitement from content creators and audiences over the anticipation of a global audience (e.g., Nigerian diasporans). Nwabara (2017) notes that the two-way transmission of national products can significantly improve the formation of diasporans' distinct cultural identities, yet its impact on native Nigerians is inconclusive.

Methods

To gain insight into Nigerians' engagement with American media and its potential impact on how they see themselves and Americans, we conducted a focus group. The interpretive process of constant comparison analysis allows the focus group themes to emerge inductively from the discussion (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The analysis used the key stages of Ritchie and Spencer's (1994) framework analysis. The analysis included raw data, descriptive statements, and an interpretation of the data, and it involved five stages: (1) familiarization, (2) identifying a thematic framework, (3) indexing, (4) charting, and (5) mapping and interpretation.

During familiarization, the research team repeatedly reviewed the transcripts and took notes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Recurrent concepts that were directly stated or inferred during the interviews were coded. The codes and in-process memos were gathered from notes and transferred to a coding sheet. After completing the open coding, the team generated categories through the abstraction process (Lindlorf & Taylor, 2002). The categories were grouped and then collapsed accordingly. We identified a thematic framework by reviewing the transcripts for each group through Google Docs. The researchers discussed the meaning and significance of the statements made in the interviews and created categories in which the statements could be placed. To ensure clarity, we spent additional time reviewing the transcripts and statements through repeated Webex meetings.

During Indexing, we found areas of overlapping content and condensed the original categories. We reached an agreement about what text belonged in each category and then developed categories related to perceptions. In the charting stage, we focused on dominant themes that emerged from the text. When areas of disagreement arose throughout the process, we revisited the audio recording and transcript for clarification. Afterward, we continued to code according to mutual satisfaction (Lindlorf & Taylor, 2002). In the mapping and interpretation step, the prevailing themes related to Nigerian perceptions were discussed in the findings.

Group Characteristics: Portrait of Participants

To achieve a range of perspectives (Halcomb, Gholizadeh, DiGiacomo, Phillips, & Davidson, 2007), we drew participants from two different cities in Northern Nigeria (Abuja and Keffi). Abuja, a metropolitan city, is the capital of Nigeria with a growing diverse population (Oxford Business Group, 2019). Keffi is a rural city with developing infrastructure just outside of Nassarawa State with a literacy rate of 41.9% (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2012). Although both cities lie within the northern part of the country, these populations were selected should outstanding differences emerge related to education, exposure, and experience.

To be selected, participants were required to be Nigerians who were at least 15 years old (the youngest starting age for an undergraduate student in Nigeria). Group sessions were held between October and December 2020. The focus groups included four student groups, four community groups, and one group of influencers. Student groups represented a younger sample, the community group was representative of indigenous town dwellers while the influencer group constituted a more educated participant set. A total of

54 people participated in nine focus group sessions (6–7 people per group) with the recruitment of participants from online advertisements and snowball sampling. Fifty-nine percent (32) of participants were males, whereas females accounted for 41% (22) of the sample. Based on the demographic data collected from participants, the youngest participants were between 15–17 years old to 29 and above.

Focus group sessions were conducted in English, and participants were guided by the moderator, who was a Nigerian native. When necessary, the moderator was able to communicate with them in pidgin English, an English dialect. Before each session, the moderator provided consent forms that participants read and signed. Participants chose pseudonyms to provide confidentiality and mask their identities. The moderator proceeded with the interview using the focus group guide, centered on three categories of questioning: power and media influence, the impact of American media on social perception, and the perceived reach of Nigerian entertainment. Each session was, on average, 45 minutes long, and participants were compensated for their time with airtime vouchers. All sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed by a local transcriptionist, and then reviewed by the researchers for thematic analysis.

Findings

Most participants shared that they watch more American programming than Nigerian because they are more “realistic” and “complex.” Moreover, participants across all groups seemed to believe that no one group was impervious to media influence or that those with more access to technology (i.e., Yoruba, Lagosians) were more susceptible to media influence.

Four prevailing themes emerged that explained how Nigerians’ interactions with American media indicated their views of Americans and their culture even within the context of Nigeria’s growing transnational success. Overall, the findings reveal an enforcement of Western superiority as well as an identification with an inferior position in relation to America. Furthermore, the context of racial tension in the United States along with social media consumption played a meaningful role in participants’ views of the West. The following themes: surfacing supremacy and internalized inferiority, barbarized views of Africans, social media realism, and Black burden, Black joy are discussed below.

Surfacing Supremacy and Internalized Inferiority

An American consciousness has been difficult to find with some scholarship identifying traces of favorability toward the West and others seeing a cultural resistance. However, an assertion of neocolonial thought is that underdeveloped nations will always be beholden to former colonial masters, and biases toward the West should be interrogated. The *surfacing supremacy and internalized inferiority* theme describe the extent to which participants judged America as superior in contrast to Nigeria based on the production value of American media. When asked about their preferences for either American or Nigerian entertainment, most of the participants across the nine focus groups expressed an affinity for American entertainment and an admiration for American culture. Consequently, some of the participants compared the quality of Nigerian entertainment judging it as subpar, and drew inferences about the value of the country based on these comparisons. For example, one of the participants expressed:

I'll go for American films because the graphics, audio sounds and actions compared to Nigerian films is a wide gap. I think the resources to fund really good movies are there for us, so I believe they're trying to manage things. We all watched the series —*Game of Thrones* and saw how everything went. Then, I was introduced to a Nigerian movie series—*Idemili*—and when I watched the movie, I was ashamed of being a Nigerian. They should go back to the drawing board and learn the art of entertainment. (Tope, Group 2)

Regardless of Nigeria's rich history and wide distribution of Nollywood films, Tope's disdain for Nigeria's filmmaking is in sharp contrast to what he views as superior storytelling by American television. Tope also references the impact that resource disparity has on Nigeria's potential to compete with American production.

Another participant's response reflects her agreement with the widespread belief in the superiority of Americans as well as a recognition of where Nigeria stands in comparison saying:

I'd just say generally, Americans feel they're more superior to us, which is not a lie in some aspects, but that's how I feel; I feel they just see us as less superior human beings, we depend on other countries, we do. That's how they see us—as less superior. Advancement, technology, way of life, beliefs, development—every aspect, we're still backward. And then, America's development has skyrocketed to (if possible) 1000 (times) ahead of us, and we are still there. So, they're definitely superior. (Doris, Group 9)

The predisposition to American favoritism was obvious as many of the participants expressed similar sentiments when comparing Nigerian entertainment to American entertainment. Similar to Patrick's (2014) findings, many participants expressed a desire for local programming to be like American programming. The question of entertainment alone invoked expressions of disappointment and shame that seemed to amplify their reverence of and perhaps envy of the West's resources.

For example, demonstrating a bias toward America and a disdain for their own media, Ephraim (Group 1) stated, "Based on the American movies I've seen, they act well and give detailed description of events, unlike ours here that things are not properly done." In the same vein, Bukola (Group 1) also shared, "I've learnt that Americans always stand up for each other unlike many of us here who are always tribalistic," citing her impressions of America based on American entertainment.

One participant even identified the notoriety of Nigeria's media industry within the global economy and minimized it, stating:

Nollywood is ranked second in the world movie industry and my view is that the ranking does not do justice to what is actually portrayed in Nigerian films. Because in terms of viewing content, I don't really do Nollywood. I do Hollywood and enjoy all of them. You get to learn new words, vocabulary, grammar and all by downloading the subtitles. It improves people. In contrast, Nollywood don't do that. I don't know their target; they just do rubbish. (Mary, Group 2)

Mary's remarks capture self-hatred as a byproduct of neocolonialism. Despite Nigeria's ranking success, she degrades the industry because she feels she can't learn anything. In other words, she presumes that what American entertainment has to offer her is of more value than stories produced by her own country. Undoubtedly, America seemed like a land of milk and honey of some sorts. As such, participants also seemed to downwardly compare themselves to Nigerians who live in America, at times expressing envy or admiration toward them. Some participants referenced news and social media as a source of information about their perceptions of Nigerians' well-being and ability to thrive in America, furthering the perception of American superiority. Jaykings, an Abuja community member, took pride in Nigerians abroad and shared that his impression of them was generally positive, associating them with professional success.

Altogether, most of the participants seem to esteem American media, and thus possess low esteem for Nigeria. Their expression of disappointment and disgust at their own media system and products yield some insight into a diminishing pride and a cultivated preference for Western goods, if not Western culture. Not only did participants compare themselves to Americans generally, but to Nigerians in America. Furthermore, news coverage of accomplishments by Nigerians in the United States seems to exacerbate their views of America as a superior culture and society.

Barbarized Views of Africans

Another emerging theme, barbarized views of Africans, describes the ways in which participants felt Americans perceived Africans based on representation in American entertainment. When asked about American perceptions of them within the context of representations in entertainment, participants felt that Americans did not hold Nigerians in high esteem. Many expressed that Americans viewed Africans as "dirty," incompetent, sexually promiscuous, and uncivilized specifically, calling them "Black monkeys." One participant who was a community member in the capital Abuja explains the extent to which Americans view Africans as animalistic, stating:

To me, the Americans view us as black animals, because sometime ago in Lagos, in a school the White girls called some Nigerians "Black Monkeys." So, I think they view us as animals who don't have a part to play in World development. They also view us as terrorists. (Mayowa, Group 5)

In alignment with the research on news bias in coverage of Nigeria, participants also expressed concern that Americans viewed Nigerians as fraudsters and scammers based on news media. Damaris, an influencer, spoke to the prevailing stereotype of Nigerians as corrupt in particular stating:

I don't know how true it is *sha*, but they actually believe we're monkeys and then they believe everybody in Nigeria . . . they believe we all do fraud. They believe we are lazy people that don't want to work for money; we just want to dupe people and get money. (Damaris, Group 9)

Some of the participants noted the imbalance in perspective with Marvelous (Group 7), saying that, "From my point of view, the Americans look down on us, while Nigerians envy them." Marvelous's

observation speaks to the inadvertent internalization of inferiority many Nigerians experience as they compare themselves to Americans based on American film and television.

Identifying traces of neocolonialism, McDonald (Group 9), a participant in the group of influencers connects the imbalance in perspective and internalized shame to the impact of colonialism. Unlike the other groups, he recognizes the way in which Nigerians participate in their own global disenfranchisement that propagates negative views of Africans, saying:

The problem has gone back to the days of colonial rule and all that. So, that thing has affected us in such a way that when we leave this country, to places like America, the only thing we have in our mind is just to [have] whatever they have and leave. It's so unfortunate that so many Americans have been victims of Internet fraud and all sort of things, most especially from Nigerians . . . The whole thing is very complicated . . . once they see Nigerian Blacks; we're financial hoodlums. (McDonald, Group 9).

McDonald seems to suggest that the negative predispositions of the West carry over into how Nigerians are covered and seen. In addressing the colonial historical impact on Nigeria, he also seems to suggest that the corruption both experienced and portrayed are neocolonial outcomes. Overall participants were aware of the prevailing negative portrayals of Africans propagated by American media. Though the participants did not directly put themselves down, many of the participants did express a general consensus that Nigerians are so preoccupied with America and its technological advancements that they do not actively resist the barbaric representations of Africans in American film and television.

Social Media Realism

Media theories like perceived realism often suggest that entertainment media have the potential to shape our perceptions of reality. This claim suggests that entertainment media create a false reality that consumers internalize as actual. Social media, however, breaks through the barriers of production and assumes actual reality upon which others can identify something closer to reality than what is scripted on television or film. In contrast to the presentation of American superiority in entertainment media, participants identified social media as a source of information that countered this narrative. Recent events like the 2016 election and issues of police brutality have brought American cultural vices to light. For example, Ephraim (Group 1), an Abuja student shared that coverage of the 2016 election revealed that corruption was not unique to Nigeria.

An Abuja student, William references social media as the source through which he ascertained the universality of these social inequities stating:

I've discovered through social media that America is not as rosy as we hear from people. There are actually a few underdeveloped regions and poor people. There's a movie I watched that was set in California; there was this certain area that looked so bad. I've been aspiring to go to America and California especially. But after that movie, I decided it wasn't worth it. (Williams, Group 2)

Among the group of influencers, one participant articulated a negotiated reading whereby America's strengths are highlighted along with the country's weaknesses. This participant's experience is not only based on social media but film. When asked what American media conveys about what it means to be American, one participant expressed

I think being there, whether as a citizen or resident just means having to deal with lots of sh!t you know. Like it's a country of two extremes, like the worst and then the best. You have the best brains and then the crime rate there is also high—but maybe that's what the films portray . . . Being American means having to deal with lots of troubles and that's what the films portray to me. (Chinedu, Group 9)

Whereas it is clear that there was an obvious bias toward Americans and an esteem of Americans based on participants' exposure to film and television, it is also clear that exposure to social media like Instagram and Twitter offer counter portrayals of reality—one that is more sobering and perhaps less shame-inducing.

Black Burden, Black Joy

In addition to identifying the ways in which America seems superior, participants identified film and social media as sources for their insight into racial discrimination in the United States. Even more interesting is how participants reference Black American entertainment as empowering. Aware of the recent protests in response to the murder of Black civilians by law enforcement, many of the participants expressed an understanding of the impact of systemic racism on Black Americans lived experiences, identifying media as a source of insight. As a result of prominent social media coverage of slain victims of police brutality and national protests, participants seemed to identify Black Americans as strong, resilient, and having a "fighting spirit." A few participants even referenced Black-centered films and television shows as offering insight into African Americans' ability to rebound, recover, rejoice, and reclaim power.

McDonald notes that his conception of racial tensions between Black and White Americans in the United States is based on American entertainment. However, he also recognizes the power minoritized creatives can exhibit behind the scenes citing an increase in Black production as a sign of shifting power, McDonald states:

[I]t boils down to the producers or the directors of each movie. Like I can give you a very good example like the *Black Panther*. Chadwick Boseman (God rest his soul) is a Black American and you'd agree with me that almost 90% of the actors in that particular movie were also Blacks. So, for entertainment, it boils down to the directors; the production crew behind the movie in question. (McDonald, Group 9)

Frederick, an Abuja student, celebrated African Americans and identifies the ways in which Black storytellers use film to challenge the depictions of African Americans in American films, a saying:

Black is beautiful! Black lives matter! . . . Black entertainment always tries to tell people there's hope no matter the circumstance. I don't like Barack Obama's regime and the way he ruled, but I still believe the Black people are one, at the end of the day. Based on [Hollywood] movies, Black people are always portrayed as drug dealers, armed robbers while the White people are painted as saints. (Frederick, Group 2)

In concordance with this view, John, an Abuja community member describes Black Americans as cultural trendsetters and notes their resilience in light of systemic racism.

What I feel is that the Whites are more . . . they live a life of superiority against the blacks, but against all odds, I'd want to say or I'd want to believe that the Blacks still make more waves to the Whites as regards media, as regards being popular; being known everywhere. Most people even enjoy going to America because of the Blacks you know? (John, Group 6)

Together, it would seem that the participants in this sample were becoming more aware of the struggles African Americans face in the United States through social media, American film, and television. Perhaps because of social media and Black entertainment, the participants also seemed to have cultivated compassion and admiration for the ways in which Black people in America used their resources to counter disparaging narratives. Nonetheless, participants did not report such admiration for their own group.

Discussion

Much of the media effects/studies scholarship that has examined the impact of globalization on non-Western audiences has primarily focused on European, Asian, or Middle Eastern populations. This study, however, examines the impact of American media on African populations and Nigerians specifically. A potential problem of globalization is its neocolonial tendency to propagate American superiority and reinforces Western (White) supremacy.

African scholars and critics have been sounding the alarm about the potential negative effects of media globalization on Nigerians, though insufficient empirical evidence remains. The present study attempts to explore the assumptions of cultural imperialism through qualitative methods and provides focus group data that explore claims that exposure and consumption of American media is possibly associated with Nigerians' views of America and themselves.

In support of cultural imperialism, the findings revealed an indisputable bias toward America via American media. Participants used the quality and content of media production to draw comparisons between their nation and America and mostly reported disparaging thoughts about being Nigerian. Participants also noted the stereotypes and beliefs about Africans embedded within American media. Though participants identified these stereotypes, it should be noted they didn't seem to challenge them. Instead, the participants in the sample expressed low opinions of their culture and society in contrast.

Furthermore, when comparing themselves to Nigerians in America, the participants expressed beliefs that Nigerians abroad were fortunate and thriving. However, it should be noted that though sub-

Saharan Africans are a significant part of the labor force in America, they are also the most impoverished compared to other immigrants in the United States. (Echeverria-Estrada & Batalova, 2019). It is likely that exposure to American media coupled with the accounts of their personal networks paints a rose-colored view of America, one that overlooks structural inequities and policies that can make it hard for people of color to thrive. For example, because of visa restrictions, some Nigerian immigrants who are professionals in their home country may need to take low-wage jobs in the United States. Though the Nigerians abroad may look richer, the economic realities and compromises in quality of life that many immigrants face are not typically portrayed as blatantly in American entertainment (Frederick, Banjo, & Nwachukwu, 2021).

The findings also revealed that in addition to news, film, and television, social media played a significant role in their perceptions. Unlike traditional media, social media's affordances allowed for a deconstruction of the facade of perfection presented by scripted entertainment. Participants noted how social media drew their attention to the inequities, political, and civil unrest in America, which was not unlike those they faced in their own country. Moreover, participants seem to reference Black-centered films as sources upon which they developed understanding of Black American struggles and cultivated appreciation for the way they use entertainment to uplift Black people around the world.

That said, this study also inquired about the extent to which Nigeria's growing transnational presence may impact their susceptibility to American media. Although Nigeria is a leader in the creative arts when it comes to film and music, the findings of this study seem to suggest the notoriety of Nigerian musicians and filmmakers' partnership with Netflix is inconsequential for this sample. The lack of resources in developing better quality and competitive entertainment is likely the cause for this sample's disappointment in Nigerian media productions. Undoubtedly, the everyday harsh economic realities of Nigeria have more of a significant impact on Nigerians' attitudes about the nation. Arguably, though, the findings in this study suggest that if the Nigerian government were to invest in its entertainment sector, it would seem Nigerians' sense of esteem about their nation in contrast to America would be less disparaging than what emerged in these focus groups.

Some participants shared an appreciation for Nigerian-produced content when wanting to connect with their heritage. Some even expressed a preference for Nigerian media because of language barriers. Nonetheless, there was no clear active resistance to American media influence. In fact, similar to Lee and Park's (2014) finding, where Koreans' view of America was moderated by either personal experience or experiences of people in their networks, participants in this study also relied on stories they have heard from their family or friends abroad that served to validate their views of America based on American media. Findings of this focus group study lend support for the argument that globalization is merely a conduit of colonialism, whereby developed countries wield power and influence over developing countries that are economically dependent on them. Perhaps postcolonial theorists should consider the role that networks play in cultivation, perceived realism, or potential cultural erosion effects.

This study centers on the potential for cultural imperialism via American programming and film. However, Ekeanyanwu (2009) notes a shift in power relations, whereby China and Japan may hold greater economic dominance. Considering the increasing interdependence between Nigeria and China, future research should also examine to what extent Western compared to Chinese globalization impacts Nigerians' views of their

nation. Considering the colonial history between the West and Nigeria, it would be interesting to see if scholars can isolate this relationship in identifying the potential effects of foreign media. For example, Gabore (2020) found that during the rise of COVID-19, Chinese media promoted and positively covered Africans in their media to maintain and secure their economic relationship with Africa. Lacking this relationship, the United States may be less concerned about their relationship with Africans and how they portray them.

Though this group's responses are sobering, we believe they offer insight into the relationship between American media exposure and Nigerians' perceptions about their nation. We hope that by drawing attention to these problematic comparisons, American media storytellers would be compelled to present more favorable portrayals of Nigerians to counter the negative narratives that Nigerians could internalize. Whereas the economic inequality present in the country certainly has more of an impact on Nigerians' quality of life, we contend that Nigerians seem to be targeted more than any other African country (Adegbola et al., 2018) and the unfavorable associations of Nigerians with Internet fraud, e-mail scams, and romance fraud in American media is still damaging. We hope that the nation's economic development, including its entertainment sector, has the potential to shift Nigerians' views of their nation and themselves in relation to America.

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