

Abstract

Media scholars have long concluded that the coverage of Africa as a continent of disease, war and poverty stereotyped Africa and examples include the denigration of the continent with regards to diseases such as HIV-AIDS and Ebola, on frequent cases of famines and low levels of economic development. Against this historically problematic media representation, the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020 opened up a new avenue for academic debate about Africa's image in the international media. As fear about the virus grew, so too was the concern about Africa's representation. At the initial stage of the virus, predictions were that the pandemic would spiral out of control and wreak serious havoc in Africa. But, as time progressed, these predictions have not played out as expected and Africa seemed to have fared relatively well in comparison with its Western counterparts. But, what were the motivations behind these predictions? Could they have emanated from past tropes of international media representation of the continent? Covid-19 pandemic therefore provided an interesting opportunity to re-examine evidence that scholars have alluded to that Africa has been under-represented and mis-represented by the international media. To respond to these issues, this study used the theories of media representation and global flows and contra flows to find out if Africa was underrepresented and mis-represented in two international media platforms--the BBC and Aljazeera-- with regards to the coronavirus. Data was collected from April, May, September and October 2020, and subjected to discourse analysis to arrive at what pattern of representation of Africa emerged during this pandemic.

A major finding in this study was that different subjects have emerged as interest areas for different media platforms depending on the country under review. What is an issue for one country or media platform, could not be an issue for another. Therefore, it has been impossible to find an intersection point where two or three countries could dominate the headlines on any given subject. Overall, our finding suggests that international media coverage of Africa have not entirely been negative or, indeed, entirely free from past tropes of representation particularly during the early stages of the pandemic.