

# Critical Discourse Analysis of CNN International's Coverage of Africa

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*This study compared the newsgathering goals of gatekeepers with public attitudes regarding the coverage of Africa by CNN International (CNNI). A critical discourse analysis was based on interviews with CNNI news producers and executives, and 6 focus groups of Ugandan viewers that were conducted in 2004 and 2008. Results show not only dissonance, but also a disconnection between CNNI news producers and Ugandan viewers' perceptions of the network and of their 2 major local stations. The network was the main source of international news in 2004 in Uganda but its appeal diminished by 2008. Viewers considered its coverage largely biased and ill-motivated towards Africa. CNNI was regarded more favorably than local television (UBC and WBS) news in quality and depth of news content in 2004 than in 2008. This love-hate relationship for CNNI and the other local television networks is discussed in detail.*

Uganda is an excellent case study of the relationship between international news coverage and its intended audience. Uganda generated global journalistic attention because it was considered one of the most troubled spots in East Africa for more than two decades, experiencing both civil and interstate conflicts (Kalyango Jr., 2009; Kalyango Jr. & Eckler, 2010). Further, CNNI is available free of charge to anyone who owns a television set in Uganda, unlike most other African countries. The divide between global newsgathering and audience reception generated a wide range of literature on the impact of television news on audiences and public opinion (Iyengar, 1990; Strobel, 1997; Wu, 2000). Several communications scholars demonstrated that viewers in many societies complain about the lack of positive coverage (Gilboa, 2005; Holbert, Kwak, & Shah, 2003; Jakobsen, 1996), although gatekeepers say they promote an impartial approach to the news.

Recent scholarship investigated the responsible coverage of conflicts and other critical international issues on television (Fox & Park, 2006; Semetko & Valkenburg,

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2000). Pike (2005) suggests that international television news coverage impacts and mobilizes the conscience of national elites and public institutions; and compels Western governments to take humanitarian actions to assist the conflicted and deprived citizens of the third world, particularly in Africa. That assumption was supported by several scholars in the past decade (Gilliam, Jr. & Iyengar, 2000; Mermin, 1997), yet no known studies compared the goals of the news gatekeeper's coverage of sub-Saharan Africa with audience reaction to such coverage. Thus, this study fills an important void in international television news literature.

In the past 2 decades, Uganda attracted CNNI coverage due to its prolonged civil and interstate conflicts with neighboring Sudan, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The central question in this study revolves around the news gatekeepers' intent when producing CNNI news about Africa, and audience perception of the news as distributed to African audiences, particularly in Uganda. How do gatekeepers at CNNI, and the Ugandan viewers, talk about the way African news is presented in television newscasts? How does the presentation of local news on UBC and WBS, and on CNNI, reveal different attitudes about local and international news organizations? To answer these questions, a critical discourse analysis was conducted, based on interviews conducted in 2004 and again in 2008 with CNNI news gatekeepers, as well as six focus groups of Ugandan viewers who watch CNNI, UBC, and WBS.

## Public Attitudes

The definition of *attitude* has a long history in philosophy and psychology (Olson & Maio, 2003). Since the early nineteenth century, sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, and lately communication scholars, studied attitudes in order to explain the relationship between events and the people's responses (Crespi, 1997; DeFleur & Westie, 1958; Gronke & Cook, 2007; Leff, Protes & Brook, 1986; Zaller, 1992). From Allport (1935), to Katz (1972), to Crespi (1997), most social scientists define *attitude* as the specific organization of feelings and beliefs that an individual uses to positively or negatively evaluate objects or symbols, texts, and messages.

Attitudes provide a frame of reference for indulging in discourse that stimulates an emotional reaction concerning certain objects or events (Petty, Wegener, & Fabrigar, 1997). Attitudes also cause a predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner, and aid in the interpretation and assimilation of life events into a person's belief system. Shavitt & Nelson (2000), and Greenwald et al. (2002), proposed that attitudes provide three functional attributes: need satisfaction, ego-defense, and value expression. Need satisfaction attitudes help people reach their goals by adjusting their needs to life situations (Blumler, 1985; Greenwald et al., 2002). Value expressive attitudes function as a platform for social identity, as individuals express basic values through their preferences or likes (Shavitt & Nelson, 2000). Ego-defensive attitudes help people to enhance their self-esteem, and to defend themselves against insecurities or deep internal conflicts (Oskamp & Schultz, 2005).

This study engages in a discursive construction of attitudes about the news content on CNNI, on the basis of viewers' cultural self-esteem, their emotions, their sense of personal power, and their perceptions. These attitudes toward television coverage of Africa provide clues to how audiences perceive the news, based on their interests and their social identities.

## **CNN International**

CNN International (CNNI), one of the top three global 24-hour news networks, was launched on September 30, 1985. The Cable News Network (CNN USA), headquartered in Atlanta, GA, is the flagship network of CNNI. By 2004, CNN had more than 4,000 foreign correspondents and production staff operating from 41 news bureaus worldwide, with more than 900 affiliates (Volkmer, 2004). By 2005, the news network was seen in more than 182 million households and hotel rooms in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide, via a network of 38 satellites (Pike, 2005).

By September 1997, CNNI established regional news coverage in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and other regions (Pike, 2005). The global revolution led by CNNI was bolstered by its coverage of the collapse and change of governments worldwide; the fall of the Berlin Wall; and the images of Bernard Shaw reporting from under a hotel bed during the Gulf War in 1991. CNNI's primary goal—the coverage of international, live, breaking news events—put the network at the forefront as it captured the devastating catastrophes of humankind; and world leaders took notice (Pike, 2005). According to Seib (2002), the effects of CNN's live news coverage illustrated the dynamic tension between real-time television newsgathering and government policymaking, with news having the greater influence. As CNNI spread globally and was labeled the world's cable news leader, other news organizations labeled Ted Turner, its creator, a cultural imperialist (Volkmer, 2004). Thus, it is important to understand the impact that CNNI global news coverage has on audiences in a volatile country like Uganda; a nation that is occasionally featured on CNNI when it is engulfed in, or surrounded by, conflict.

News media researchers examined media issues regarding CNN since its coverage of Operation Desert Storm (Fox & Park, 2006; Kavoori, 1998). In their recent assessment of CNN's coverage of the Iraq war, Fox and Park (2006) argued that journalists and media scholars should examine whether reality is best depicted by a mixture of interpretational and observational styles of reporting. The argument they made is that CNN foreign correspondents, especially those who accompanied U.S. troops during the offensive in Iraq, used a variety of reporting styles under unusual circumstances, in order to appear objective. The authors suggested that the evaluation and conceptualization of objectivity, particularly in international news coverage, was misunderstood.

Audience reception also was the focus of news research. Kavoori (1998) used focus groups to investigate the commonalities of media reception across cultures;

studying the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, Germany, and France. Kavoori analyzed the cultural function of foreign news and found that audiences perceived CNN to be an American network that speaks largely to American interests. In that study, younger respondents aged 20–25 in the United Kingdom, France, and Israel, preferred the American-style coverage of news by CNN as opposed to the more formal style of British programs like *World View* and the BBC's *World Tonight*. Previous studies also described audience reaction to television content as dependent on knowledge, perceptions of social reality, and attitudes (Kvale, 1987; Lewis, 1991; Silverstone, 1991). However, Lewis (1991) suggested that television news fails to interest people, because viewers often cannot understand it, and argued that television news lacks a narrative structure that would capture viewer interest, and thus motivate viewing. Thomson (1990) also showed that the international news media significantly misrepresent local political and cultural realities around the world.

Jensen (1999) found that audiences were motivated to watch news that covers social events and political affairs, and also were influenced by the way media messages relate to their cultural situation. Jensen argued that it was necessary to assess how media organizations select and present items of information. Jensen (1999) observed that audiences across Western cultures perceive news about global issues differently, and therefore circulate different interpretations of its meaning within society. This study advances inquiry into audience reception by an African television audience.

## Method

There are various ways of doing discourse analysis. The discourse method that one adopts for research can provide insight on either the attitudes or the goals of various groups within society (van Dijk, 1996). A critical discourse analysis (CDA) explores how news gatekeepers, who are elite members within media organizations, use discursive strategies which may push their own agenda to show dominance or impact in their news coverage of Africa. van Dijk defines elites as members of dominant groups who have privileged access to discourse, and whose power is measured by the "extent of their discursive and communicative scope and resources" (1993, p. 255). CDA in this context offers understanding of the news gatekeepers' intent when producing CNNI news about Africa, as well as perceptions of the news distributed to African audiences, especially in Uganda.

Interviews are the preferred sources of data for CDA (van Dijk, 1992, 1996; Yates, Taylor, & Wetherell, 2001). van Dijk (1992) argued that in modern cultures, both news broadcasters and their audiences tend to overlook the implicit discursive strategies embedded in talk. News editors and journalists exercise power by controlling the messages and images that circulate in society, thereby constructing representations of an African identity which may not necessarily reflect African reality. Interviews and focus groups were used in this CDA. Uganda was chosen for

the focus groups because CNNI is viewed free of charge. In most African countries, a satellite or cable connection is required. Therefore, anyone who owns a television set in Uganda has access to CNNI. Moreover, Uganda makes a suitable study because it has attracted a lot of international news coverage in the last two decades.

The focus group approach was employed here because of the technique's potential to provide a deeper understanding of the viewer's attitudes toward television news coverage of Uganda and Africa in general. In the developing multiethnic Uganda, focus groups also help to explore and elicit diverse responses in one setting, but from individuals who watch television news from different regions and varied professional, social, economic, and political backgrounds.

## Interviews

The first interviews with six CNNI news producers and executives were conducted in January 2004 before the focus groups, and the second round in October 2008. The six CNNI journalists were interviewed separately, on different dates, within a 1-week period. The interviews and focus groups questions were funnel-based, conducted with a broad, open beginning, and a narrow, more tightly controlled ending (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The CNNI news producers illuminated their global newsgathering goals, and perceived successes, in their news coverage of Africa.

The first interview was with Maggie Eales, Vice President for Europe and Africa, who directs African coverage at CNNI headquarters in London (CNNI coordinates most of Africa's coverage from London.) The interview with Eales was conducted during CNNI's 25th anniversary celebrations in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. The second interview was with CNNI Vice President for Global Newsgathering, Eric Ludgood, whose office is responsible for managing CNNI's foreign news productions worldwide. At the time of this interview, Ludgood managed international assignment editors, foreign news producers, and *World Report* contributors at CNN's global headquarters in Atlanta. The third CNNI interview was with Eason Jordan, the President of Global News Operations, also directly responsible for Africa. Finally, three mid-level producers of CNNI specials and regular show about Africa also were interviewed: Kari Mans-Leewood and Diane Hodges, in Atlanta, and Maria Ebrahimji in Johannesburg, South Africa.

## Focus Groups

Three focus groups were conducted in 2004 from all major regions in Uganda that have access to television, and another round from the same focus group members in 2008, to gather information on public attitudes towards CNNI *World News* telecasts, as well as broadcasts by the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation and Wavah Broadcasting Services. Morley and Silverstone (1991) advocated that the triangulation of focus groups for qualitative research was an effective way to collect data when studying television audiences. Therefore, three different focus groups were held

in Kampala, the Ugandan capital, and consisted of participants from across the country between the ages of 19 and 43.<sup>1</sup> Two focus group moderators were hired that moderated both the 2004 and the 2008 discussions.<sup>2</sup>

Three major non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as the two moderators, assisted in the recruitment of participants. NGO representatives from the Uganda Transport Operators and Drivers' Association (UTODA), the Uganda Farmers' Association (UFA), and the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NCCI), mobilized interested citizens through their internal networks; using leaflets and word of mouth. The mobilization of participants for this study was voluntary.

A screening questionnaire provided an accurate sense of who should be selected and in what group to place them. Only non-specialized viewers were used.<sup>3</sup> Of the 316 people who were screened in 2004, only 12 participants were selected for each group. A random sampling method first employed by Singletary (1993) was used to purposefully select the participants.<sup>4</sup> Of the 36 participants selected, 28 attended for the 2004 exercise. The same 28 people again participated in 2008 for the second round of data collection, in addition to 8 new participants, for a total of 36 in 2008. Transport refund for a round trip and snacks were offered to those who participated.<sup>5</sup> Participants were asked to come 30 minutes prior to the starting time.

Thus, two rounds of focus groups were used. The first round, conducted in 2004, contained 3 focus groups (FG). FG 1 consisted of 8 women; FG 2 consisted of 10 men; FG 3 consisted of 10 participants of mixed gender. In total, there were 14 men and 14 women participants in the 2004 focus groups. In 2008, each focus group consisted of 12 participants. FG 1 was all women; FG 2 was all men; and FG 3 was mixed gender. In total, the 2008 focus groups comprised 18 men and 18 women. In Uganda, men and the elite tend to dominate discourse. In order to make them feel at ease, participants in each group first had casual conversations or informal small talks and jokes for about 10 minutes with each other, which provided comfort in their shared environment (Carey, 1995; Thorne & Henley, 1975). This "grouping" technique helped participants feel more comfortable, and to freely express themselves in a friendly atmosphere. The segmentation also provided an effective dialogue that allowed for more free-flowing discussions that tapped the diversity of views.

All six focus groups consisted of civil servants, members of the business community, teachers, college students, laborers, unemployed workers, and farmers in Uganda. The members of the female focus group were recruited based on diversity in occupation. The job titles and occupations of the participants were self-described. Although some of these job descriptions were not professions, and did not necessarily provide participants with monetary income, each group member insisted that they were to be addressed and described as such. The participants were a housewife, a hairstylist, a beauty contestant, a businesswoman, a nurse, a defense lawyer, a hotel receptionist, and a student. The female focus groups in 2004 and 2008, and the mixed-gender focus groups in both years, consisted of the same age bracket (20–35). Participants in the male focus groups in both years were between the ages of 26 and 40.

The male focus groups also had an equally diverse mix of people, both in education and ethnicity. There were university lecturers, lawyers, teachers, school administrators, four high school and college dropouts, and four unemployed college graduates. The ethnic composition of the male groups consisted of four northerners, four from the central region, three easterners, three westerners, and three southerners. The third mixed-gender focus group was put together based on occupation and age. For example, they included a 26-year-old journalism graduate, a 29-year-old single mother, a marketing executive aged 27, a researcher aged 33, a driver/private security officer aged 32, a 35-year-old electrical installation technician, a 31-year-old farmer, a 35-year-old member of the clergy, a police officer aged 39, and a 27-year-old teacher, among others (Table 1).

Each focus group watched a compilation of CNNI *World News* prime telecasts prior to the discourse, which were recorded for 7 consecutive work days: from Monday to Thursday in one week and Monday to Wednesday the following week. News segments in each newscast were compiled and the commercials, sports, and weather were edited out.<sup>6</sup> The focus group interviews consisted of more than 10 questions, each related to those posed to the CNNI executives. Moderators advanced the interaction by engaging discussants in some depth, and took into account their personal attributes on the subject matter. The focus group discussions were conducted in English, and averaged 105 minutes.

### Intent of CNNI News Gatekeepers

CNNI news gatekeepers discredit public assumptions that the coverage of international stories by the American media is slanted from a Western perspective. The contention is that networks such as CNNI pay little attention to world matters that do not directly involve their countries and others with economic conditions. However, CNNI Vice President Ludgood and Producer Hodges said that on *World News*, *Inside Africa*, and *World Report*, CNNI gives voice to issues that affect Africa's troubled communities.

CNN's coverage of distant and isolated wars and famines in the third world has played a part in making this world a smaller place for the privileged societies, and a better place for the suffering. We are deeply invested in covering Africa so that global citizens help the suffering in that troubled region. (Ludgood, Vice President, CNNI).

There is no dispute that CNN changed the nature of 24-hour news forever when it launched in 1980. The comfort of only focusing on the daily evening news cycle was broken by two things: a cable television infrastructure of sufficient breadth to allow for the possibility of a national and international audience, and an entrepreneur willing to bet that enough television viewers in the United States and a global audience wanted 24-hour live breaking news. News producer Hodges reiterated that CNNI built its reputation through its dependable coverage of live breaking

**Table 1**  
**2004/2008 Ugandan Participants in Focus Groups**

Middle/First Name	Age	Region	Occupation	Favorite Newscasts
*Mirembe	34	Buganda	Housewife	1) WBS 2) CNN
*Miria	23	Busoga	Hairstylist	1) WBS 2) CNN
*Musoka	20	Bugisu	Miss Uganda	1) CNN 2) WBS
*Zajati	35	Nebbi	Business woman	1) MNET 2) —
*Vickie	29	Ankole	Nurse	1) UTV 2) CNN
*Hamida	38	Soroti	Defense lawyer	1) CNN 2) MNET
*Nyankyi	20	Masindi	Student	1) WBS 2) CNN
*Araali	25	Tooro	Hotel receptionist	1) CNN 2) UTV
**Salim	40	Kamuli	Businessman	1) WBS 2) CNN
**Jackson	31	Kotido	Sales executive	1) WBS 2) CNN
**Ssali	26	Nakasongola	Public transport tout	1) WBS 2) UTV
**Musoke	30	Sembabule	Teacher	1) UTV 2) WBS
**Karim	26	Rakai	Unemployed worker	1) UTV 2) —
**Agad	28	Pader	Mechanic	1) UTV 2) CNN
**Jake	39	Soroti	University lecturer	1) CNN 2) WBS
**Ouma	35	Apac	Traffic police officer	1) UTV 2) CNN
**Kamadi	27	Busia	Street vendor	1) WBS 2) CNN
**Gideon	33	Wakiso	Lawyer	1) MNET 2) CNN
***Kyankya	26	Kalangala	Unemployed journalist	1) WBS 2) UTV
***Nambi	27	Buganda	Marketing executive	1) WBS 2) CNN
***Emma	33	Kumi	Marketing researcher	1) WBS 2) CNN
***Okot	35	Lira	Electrical engineer	1) CNN 2) MNET
***Sabiiti	35	Luweero	Clergy	1) WBS 2) UTV
***Iyamureme	32	Bundibugyo	Transit officer	1) WBS 2) UTV
***Kankunda	31	Rukungiri	Farmer	1) UTV 2) —
***Kisa	21	Pallisa	Student	1) CNN 2) WBS
***Ekedu	29	Arua	Single mom	1) CNN 2) WBS
***Kamiyat	27	Yumbe	Teacher	1) UTV 2) CNN

\*stands for focus group 1; \*\*stands for focus group 2; \*\*\*stands for focus group 3.

- The ages shown in Table 1 were for the first round of research in 2004.
- Only the middle names of participants are disclosed here to protect their anonymity.
- Participants without middle names are anonymously identified with their first names.

news, with the unique journalistic objective of “selling news content relevant to each region,” from everywhere in the world.

Fair coverage and in-depth reporting by our correspondents, while advocating for the powerless to get the needed aid, are some of the most important elements in attracting and retaining African viewers. (Hodges, CNNI News Producer)

Ludgood and Hodges (Producer) said CNNI's international assignment editors and correspondents were not merely experienced journalists, but also were proficient and creative artists. Ludgood pointed out that the newscasts produced for Africa did not mix together bloody wars, murders, natural and manmade calamities, and political turmoil, in one endless parade of stories to declare a state of emergency.

To us, that isn't what CNN stands for . . . The impact of CNN in Africa was also borne out of our commitment to the continent. CNNI has four fully fledged bureaus in Africa and one mobile studio. (Ludgood, Vice President, CNNI)

These assertions contrast with what the viewers said about CNNI. The argument is that media executives, when depicted in the harshest light, simply pay less attention to the plight and fate of third world citizens. The gatekeepers gave their reaction to what they considered the goals that drive their news coverage in Africa.

We have brought world attention to Africa's daunting challenges like the HIV and AIDS pandemic, political and ethnic clashes, the genocide in Rwanda, and the refugee crises. We not only expose the evils in Africa but we also report about its abundant potential in the areas of natural resources, economic growth, elections, and poverty alleviation stories. (Ebrahimji, Producer, *Inside Africa*)

From the viewers' point of view, this is not to say that CNNI, or the Western media in general, ignore the broader world completely. In fact, when a major multinational conflict or disaster erupts, CNNI will cover it. The depth and continuity of the coverage depends on access to compelling visuals and the perceived impact on the American audience. However, few U.S. media outlets can afford to expend dwindling resources on investigating and uncovering the plight of people not in their core audience.

Our correspondents, politicians, and even the competitors know very well the mission of CNNI as a catalyst for action in both Western society and around the world. Our goal is to make the world a safer place by advocating for peace, responsibility, and understanding through news coverage that sensitizes policy makers in Africa and the viewing public. (Ludgood, vice president, CNNI)

Eason Jordan, President, Global News Operations, said that the interaction of CNNI producers, anchors, and correspondents all over the world were based on principles of good presentation, fair reporting, and sound journalistic and public relations values. The executives countered criticism that the network is just like other U.S. television networks, whose primary concern in the first decade of the twenty-first century remained Western-centered, and focused on domestic political conflict, weather, and sports.

We specialize in investigating the causes, challenges, conflicts, and aspirations of the disadvantaged peoples in communities around the world. We cover Africa on CNNI more and better than any other American media, since the early eighties. That's what CNN is all about. (Jordan, President of Global News Operations)

Jordan suggested a very important strategy to producers who want to take charge: "As producers, it's our job to come up with story ideas that show some benefit to our target audience, and to present these stories in a fair and accurate manner in our newscasts." In the current market-driven media, it is unclear whether CNNI is not yet captive of the media economic model that demands audiences with purchasing power.

While some organizations ignore Africa's stories when reporting the world's major crises, our unmatched Africa program called *Inside Africa* offers a deeper glimpse of what really happens. Hey, in fact, we avoid any traps to pass on unsubstantiated claims and overarching judgment like you find in some novels and books. They stereotype and stigmatize all Africans as backward, incompetent, and combatant. Our International desk offers the most comprehensive, dynamic reporting of cultures, politics, and business from this fascinating region. (Mans-Leewood, Producer, *Your World Today*)

CNNI's Eales explained how CNN correspondents view their role to the viewers and to the policy makers in relation to the touted "CNN effect." She asserted that international correspondents have demonstrated their attachment and regional expertise in Europe and Africa, where they alert policy makers on matters of international concern.

We have witnessed diplomats and state leaders in Europe and Africa answer to events and quoting CNN, but we do not control how they respond to the events we cover. Our job is to cover these events and we do a good job at making leaders accountable. European leaders have to answer to their citizens about the suffering and conflicts in the neighboring states. (Maggie Eales, CNN Europe and Africa vice president, CNNI Vice President)

Eales said the public should be made aware that policy makers cannot do without CNNI coverage on matters of international interest, because they know its imposition and presence into people's homes, and that it reports global events and other foreign affairs in a timely and responsible manner. According to Hodges, CNNI "has become a subject of very close scrutiny by world leaders and other news networks. CNNI is arguably responsible for changing live global newsgathering and international war coverage."

The executives concurred that CNNI uses dramatic and compelling images to attract audiences, but they could not clarify how this dramatization was relevant to the stories of conflict and human suffering in Africa. Could it be that such coverage is intended to attract the American audience who are hypothetically ignorant of international affairs? Both Ludgood and Jordan did not respond when asked about the lack of international knowledge by the American public, outside the scope of conflict-breaking-news in other parts of the world. The knowledge of the world to many Africans who rely on television for international news is filtered through CNNI's perspective. The question remains as to whether CNNI leaves their global audiences ignorant of important third world trends and gains made particularly in Africa in both its economic development and its delivery of basic social services.

## Local Coverage of Africa

In 2004, most focus group participants said that they watch and depend on CNNI to cover African news more than the local news; yet they regard local stations as their favorite in reporting news about Uganda and Africa. Timeliness was one of the factors why viewers sought CNNI news. It is not surprising that Ugandan viewers were disappointed with the scheduling of locally produced programs because many factors, including power load shedding, low power grid, poor roads networks, and weak transmitters, impact the timely coverage and delivery of local news.

The Uganda television newscasts do not provide us with first hand information about other countries in Africa on their evening newscasts. Even with local news about Uganda, we never watch reporters cover stories live on the scene. Instead, we see reporters giving us stale news we heard on radio without any update. We get the details and an update on all the stories in newspapers the following day. (Ugandan lecturer, 2004 mixed focus group)

In the 2004 and 2008 focus groups, several participants criticized UTV (now UBC) and WBS for their inability to present major local news events live, as breaking news, the way CNNI presents Africa news.<sup>7</sup> Participants argued that because CNNI covers some African news live, so should the local stations, since UBC is publicly funded and WBS has a live mobile unit van. From a comparative standpoint, this is too much to ask of the local stations given their market share of the advertising revenue. Most, if not all Ugandan local stations lack the same kind of profits in advertising that CNNI *World News* enjoys to invest in technology and thrive in its coverage and delivery of news.

Besides timeliness, "technical difficulties" was another source of displeasure regarding favorite local stations, and a reason for viewers to seek out CNNI *World News*. This concern was voiced in the 2004 and 2008 discourse. The stations evidently lack advanced broadcasting systems. For instance, WBS and UBC still use the 1980s analog production and studio equipment, while CNNI periodically replenishes its equipment and updates its studios with High Definition Digital technology. In Uganda,

The reporters and the pictures still disappear from the screen like ghosts for about five minutes while news is showing. Then, all of a sudden, the presenter reappears abruptly while applying make-up on the news desk! So, such things are still happening . . . and I remember pointing this out last time." (Lawyer, 2008 men's focus group)

Signal clarity was another common theme why participants held CNNI more reliable and dependable than the local networks. In 2004, participants from all three focus groups said that television signals were poor, and that local stations displayed apologies. "'We shall be back in a minute, we apologize for the interference,' such things turn me off, that's why I switch to CNN," said a housewife in the 2008 women's focus group.

Despite the outcry against the two major local stations, Ugandan viewers continue to be loyal to local networks. The explanation for this could be that local stations present stories from a positive and superfluous outlook that promotes long held traditions, which have become engrained in their identity as a nation. For example, in a 2004 focus group, participants pointed out that they had a love-hate relationship with the local stations, because they mostly reported state "propaganda." They said that local television news was biased in favor of government officials.

Every news bulletin on UTV begins with His Excellency, the president of the Republic of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni' has said this and that. Our local stations tell us issues that do not help us with our poverty and lack of drugs and clean water. (Unemployed journalist, 2004 mixed focus group)

Participants talked about how local television stations neglect some regions within Uganda, in favor of others. Those concerns about the failures of local TV led participants to satisfy their viewing needs with CNNI *World News*. But in 2008, participants also lamented that CNNI neglects emerging African democracies, and African countries with positive economic development, in favor of Africa's mineral-rich powers and oil-producing nations such as South Africa, Libya, and Nigeria. Most participants in all three focus groups in 2008 said Somalia was the exception to CNNI's imbalanced coverage.

## CNNI Coverage of Africa

Much scholarship, some of which is presented in this study, suggests that television networks treat the vexing problems in the developing world in such a way that consistently reinforce the American ideals (and policies), which circuitously serve to continue U.S. identity. This is somewhat reflected in the Ugandan viewers' attitudes towards CNNI. Participants in 2004 and 2008 in the men's and in the mixed focus groups described CNNI's coverage of different regions of the world as "preferential treatment." Some said that when CNNI reports on Africa, coverage "depends on where Americans have a stake." Others said that "Uganda is not an attractive country to the West." Most participants in 2004 and 2008 said that CNNI does not show positive news from Africa.

Africa on the whole cannot be portrayed positively on CNNI, regardless of our economic progress. Africa is a magnet for negative news coverage from CNNI. Kony<sup>8</sup> has more news coverage in international news magazines and on CNN *World News* than public health stories, universal education, and our economy. (Hair stylist and teacher, 2008 female focus group)

In the previous gatekeepers' discourse, CNNI was presented as leading the international media dialogue about global citizenship, focused on issues such as social justice, universal education, healthcare, and a host of other issues. However,

participants in 2004 said that there is a lot of good news happening in Africa as a whole, which they have not seen on CNNI *World News*. In 2008, participants said that CNN had not covered the major discovery of oil deposits in western Uganda.

When CNN International compares the small number of viewers it has in Africa with other regions around the world, the managers do not feel obliged to give adequate and favorable coverage. I know this because I am a sales professional. (Businesswoman, 2004 women's focus group)

Once Uganda produces the first barrel of oil in five years, a lot of attention will be paid to our region. CNN might even open an office here, similar to the one they have in Egypt or South Africa. (Teacher, 2008 mixed focus group)

CNNI built a successful global campaign in the 1990s and 2000s on a platform of promoting world peace and journalistic excellence to the world community. The result of the campaign was the "CNN effect" rhetoric, which translated into international debates over the proper world role of global media. Accordingly in 2004 and 2008, Ugandan participants said that CNNI is "a good source of world news" with the exception of Ugandan news. They said that CNNI underreported major events in East Africa, and that several stories on Uganda had been reported out of context.

As a consequence, the world perceives us to be some cold-blooded killers who murder each other, and the response to humanitarian crises becomes commensurate with pity and disgrace. (Lawyer, 2004 men's focus group)

Some participants in the 2008 focus groups lamented that "there was no positive response and intervention as a result of coverage of Africa," only indignity and humiliation. However, the traffic police officer from the men's focus group was in support of how CNNI covers Africa.

Why is everybody against CNN news? Yet we all agree that we are happy they show us all the foreign news. I don't agree with any of you. Isn't Africa in chaos right now? We should all admit our predicament. I don't blame CNN for showing the Somali situation every month. These Somalis always have something bad going for them every year. They are now in a drought; on the verge of famine again. Were they cursed by God? Come on guys, what would you report if you were on CNN? (Traffic police officer, 2004 men's focus group)

He also said that participants were too critical of CNNI news coverage even where the criticism was not warranted.

I said it last time and I will repeat it this time around. We are partly responsible for this negative news. What CNN and the BBC radio report is the truth. They don't tell lies. Even our soldiers [Uganda's army] are in Somalia to keep peace. We need to know from CNN and BBC how our men are doing there in Somalia. (Traffic police officer, 2008 men's focus group)

Another participant disagreed.

Can you imagine how these chaps represent us in the world? They show images of rubble, starvation, and mud houses when Uganda has better scenic views and cities, where these reporters rest and enjoy good weather and food in ultimate comfort. (University lecturer, 2004 men's focus group)

That dialogue from the 2004 men's focus group and again in 2008 between the traffic police officer and other participants went on, back and forth, in this way. Such arguments get to the questions of whether CNNI gatekeepers recognize the identities, needs, and global expectations from people they cover in regions such as Africa.

## Analysis/Discussion

This study sought to understand the intent of CNNI news gatekeepers when producing CNNI news about Africa, and the attitudes of their audiences about the news, as reported in Uganda by two local television networks and CNNI. The CNNI gatekeepers stated that their agenda and goals were based on principles of advancing peace, advocating for the deprived, fair reporting, and other sound journalistic values. The gatekeepers position CNNI as the best network in global news coverage.

However, this attitude by the CNNI gatekeepers can be seen as egoistic self-ranking (Oskamp & Schultz, 2005). These researchers state that policy makers cannot do without CNNI coverage on matters of international interest, and they even tout CNNI's imposition into the homes of their audiences in their reporting of global events. This is reminiscent of an ego-defensive attitude, which allows people of influence to exert their authority, and to enhance their self-worth and self-esteem. Besides that, CNNI gatekeepers do not recognize how their coverage is seen by viewers in Uganda. Ugandan audiences see CNNI as playing a role in what van Dijk (1988, 1992) calls the social production of inequality: specifically, egoistic Western power and ideology that may misrepresent information about others, in their own interest.

CNNI gatekeepers also take pride in allowing some third world countries like Uganda free access to 24-hour news. They argue that their commitment to Africa, deploying correspondents who live and are based on the continent, must elicit some latitude of acceptance and positive attitudes from Africans. This argument also reflects what Fairclough and Wodak (2004) term discursive hegemony, which occurs when one discourse, whether it be scientific or political, holds sway over the way one talks about or the way one understands a given reality, due to its perceived authority or popularity (see also Reeves, 2005). Recall that CNNI gatekeepers construct themselves as empowering the powerless, giving voice to the voiceless, and assuming for themselves the power to remedy social wrongs in Africa. These attitudes

reveal an important discursive construction: CNNI's ability to place itself as a media power with significant authority to change lives in Africa through its messages.

However, CNNI's self-proclaimed good intent cannot be traced in the viewers' perception of their coverage in Africa, and particularly with Ugandan viewers. Ugandan viewers stated that CNNI coverage depends on where Americans have a stake or have been affected; and that Africa is so much taken for granted by the network that it hardly provides positive coverage. The criticism from some participants that CNNI depicts Africans as "cold-blooded killers who just murder each other," explains how such hegemonic discourse stimulates unfavorable emotional reactions, and dissatisfaction, from CNNI audiences. This also reveals what van Dijk (1988, 1992) refers to as dichotomic, culturally specific conditions formed by social identities which may be consciously or unconsciously guided by political ideology.

As stated by van Dijk (1988), this analysis outlines the complexities and constraints within which Ugandan viewers compose meaning from messages and texts that are essentially driven by structural identities. The primary structural identity that this study uncovered can be stated as: "The African struggle and renaissance versus the Western world's dominance and influence." This structural identity runs through all of the focus group discourse. The focus group results also support Shavitt and Nelson (2000), who demonstrated how social identity manifests in the discursive construction of an individual's attitudes and cultural values.

Here is how these structural identities are represented by the audience and the gatekeepers. First of all, it is fair to argue that some journalists who cover international news for global audiences do not consider what constitutes structural identity from the perspective of the people they cover. A large part of the reason for this is the institutional nature of the news business. Journalists tend to talk generally to those in power for their sources of information. Those in power sometimes do not reflect the true social identity of their people, but rather what they want the rest of the world to perceive as the social identity.

When CNNI executives said that news produced about Africa does not flaunt bloody wars and political turmoil "in one endless parade of stories to declare a state of emergency," the focus group participants in contrast claimed the network does exactly that. This kind of discursive constructions among Ugandan viewers about CNNI coverage of Africa increased between 2004 and 2008. For example, CNNI largely ignored the abuses of apartheid in South Africa until the administration in Washington, D.C. focused on it as a major foreign policy issue. Before 1990, South Africa was portrayed predominantly from a White perspective until the rise of Nelson Mandela as "hero" figure. In other words, the majority identity of Black South Africans was suppressed in favor of another, until a figure of sufficient weight came along to change the focus.

According to the participants, the global impact of CNNI on Ugandans relies on other attributes such as need satisfaction and value expression, raising issues in the minds of Ugandan audiences about the quality of news production. Content quality and consistency of presentation by CNNI was a motivating factor that stimulated positive reactions. The analysis showed that public attitudes in Uganda did

not reflect similar outcomes as those posited by previous works (Jakobsen, 1996; Reese, 2005) concerning the influence and impact of international television news coverage.

The statements from the focus groups participants do not entirely support the premise that real-time coverage creates an immediate response to humanitarian crises, as Seib (2002) and Pike (2005) found in other cases outside Africa. Viewers of African news in Uganda say that humanitarian intervention resulting from CNNI coverage is timely and effective, but also argue that it has not been useful in representing the true cultural values and identities of Africa, and its sociopolitical renaissance. Participants said that the responses to news coverage of humanitarian crises are, for the most part, pity and disgrace. What this analysis reveals is that there seems to be a power dynamic between the gatekeepers of news about Africa, and the viewers who are the subject of that coverage.

Although discourse analysis reveals different attitudes about UBC and WBS (local news) and CNNI (international news), Ugandan viewers continue to be loyal to local networks. Participants said pointedly that they have a love-hate relationship with the local stations because they mostly reported state propaganda. On the contrary, CNNI satisfied the information needs of Ugandan viewers with quality and timely foreign news from other parts of the world, and it remained the most sought-after network in 2004, albeit with slightly declining interest in 2008. The declining interest may be due to CNNI's disengagement from the depth of coverage of Africa because they eliminated all but one Africa bureau. The solution likely will not come from CNNI's sworn interest in Africa, because it continues to downsize its international reach in Africa for breaking news and in-depth stories in the wake of increasing economic pressure.

What is new here is the love-hate relationship between the Ugandan viewers who watch CNNI avidly, yet dislike the network's news depiction of Africa as a whole; as well as their loyalty to the local networks despite their disparagement of UBC and WBS which, they say, produce African news that is filled with propaganda. This could possibly be explained by Jensen's (1999) thesis that audiences are not driven by news that covers sociopolitical events alone, but also by the surveillance function of media messages related to their cultural milieu. The passion about CNNI coverage stems from divergent practices, such as the network's ability to connect Africa to the rest of the world with its live breaking news coverage. That is precisely what both UBC and WBS lack in their coverage of African news.

Participants who watch CNNI reflect Gilboa's (2005) conclusion that CNN exaggerates its impact and hence deflects attention from other ways through which global television affects mass communication. Consistent with the assessment by Thomson (1990), the discourse indicated that CNNI misrepresents local polity and cultural realities in Uganda, and Africa in general, by emphasizing calamities and disasters. It reveals contradictions that can be interpreted as a reverse effect. That reverse effect is Africa's indignity as perceived by Ugandan viewers. There is, however, a dimension of ego-defensive attitudes from Ugandan viewers, as they argue that the negative impact of CNNI global news stems from its coverage composed largely of

depressing stories of indignity and humiliation about Uganda, as well as Africa in general.

This exploratory analysis reveals what is unfavorable, unacceptable, and preferable in news coverage of a region like Africa, by the people who are the subject of such coverage. Most focus group participants were satisfied with CNN *World News* as a better alternative, after decades of poor quality and biased content from UBC news and WBS news. Even so, most of the participants said their preference for CNNI was limited to breaking news about "other foreign" conflicts, natural disasters, and entertainment beyond Africa. The overriding discourse and attitude was that coverage of Africa is biased and ill-motivated. These sentiments increased between 2004 and 2008. This finding is contrary to CNNI's stated newsgathering intent, posited by its gatekeepers.

This analysis provides some new areas of further inquiry into Western press coverage of Africa. Other than CNNI's *Inside Africa* weekly program, programs such as *Your World Today* were, by late 2009, swiftly moving away from CNNI's core broadcasting standards: providing international news coverage without editorial opinions. The anecdotal observation is that CNNI is slowly replicating its parent network in the United States, which invites international experts to give their opinions about Africa's problems. This new development demands further assessment. Future research should examine the "CNN effect" concept on policy makers, the public and civil society in several African countries. Given the fact that the United States has no colonial legacy in Africa, further research should examine how this affects public attitudes toward CNNI, and how it is different from the BBC's presence. Another new area that deserves scholarly attention is the impact of the internet in diminishing CNNI's dominance of African news delivery to Africa.

## Conclusion

This study reveals that CNNI's self-proclaimed good intentions to empower the powerless, give voice to the voiceless, and to remedy social wrongs in Africa, was not evident in the perception of Ugandan viewers of that coverage. The study also outlines the complexities and constraints within which the Ugandan viewers derive meaning from news coverage that is essentially driven by their structural, political, and cultural identity, which may be stated as "the African struggle and renaissance versus the Western world's dominance and influence." It supports previous assertions (Gilboa, 2005; Picard, 1993) that there are other means through which global television affects mass communication and public attitudes.

It also advances van Dijk's (1988, 1992) thesis that media construction of events may reflect power relationships in discourse and in social interaction, and that these relationships produce social inequality in CNNI news coverage, replicating egoistic Western power and ideology that misrepresents information about Africa, in CNNI's own interest. Even though CNNI's appeal to Ugandans is undeniable, the

gatekeeper's stated good intent has a totally unintended and negative discursive effect on Ugandan viewers of their news coverage. CNNI's appeal in Uganda includes its capacity to immediately cover breaking news, its global reach, and the quality of its news. Nevertheless, displeasure with CNNI is increasing because of a lack of positive coverage of emerging African democracies, and African economic development.

CNNI's global newsgathering appeal to Ugandan audiences relies on other attributes such as need satisfaction. Ugandan viewers want to feel globally connected, and CNNI has the ability to deliver content about Africa and the world. CNNI enables Ugandan viewers to create identity patterns with others outside their national boundaries, and they see that the rest of the world is also conflicted, just like some regions of Africa. Moreover, CNNI's presence engages viewers and diverts them from the poor quality of Uganda's local UBC and WBS networks.

The challenge to news gatekeepers and to their intended goals is that national identities matter and public attitudes towards the traditional international media such as CNNI are in constant flux. Even in the most restrictive regimes, Africans still have access and regularly consume global news and information. They debate meanings and underlying scope of international news coverage of Africa and demand changes in media representation in favor of what they are—and what they advocate for—in their national struggles. In this era of globalization, the groundwork has been laid here for even more critical research on how volatile regions are presented in the news on global media.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The life expectancy for Ugandans is less than 46 years. Before the 2000 National Census, less than 4% of Ugandans were older than 50.

<sup>2</sup>The moderator's role was to orient the participants and help guide their discussion. Diana Akech from Makerere University in Kampala moderated the female focus group, while Samuel Gummah, a veteran journalist, moderated the male-only, and the mixed gender focus groups.

<sup>3</sup>Non-specialized viewers are those who do not have any media-related educational background or experience. They must not have any media affiliation, or have a family member who works for CNNI or its affiliates, or for any Ugandan media.

<sup>4</sup>Based on responses from a screening questionnaire, participants who were not ardent television news seekers and avid CNNI viewers were eliminated. Selected participants indicated that they had access to CNNI in their homes.

<sup>5</sup>A flat fee of about \$50 and \$100 was paid to the research assistants for moderation in 2004 and 2008 respectively. Other monetary expenses included a two hour rental of the research sites (conference rooms) at \$75 in 2004, and \$100 in 2008.

<sup>6</sup>The same newscasts were shown to all focus groups within five days in the same week. All five-day newscasts were compiled on one tape, and shown in one 75 minute session.

<sup>7</sup>UTV is Uganda Television, a state-owned news corporation. It changed its name to Ugandan Broadcasting Corporation (UBC) in early 2006. WBS is Wavah Broadcasting Services, and is privately-owned.

<sup>8</sup>Joseph Kony is a spiritual rebel leader of the Lord's Resistance Army. His men have raped women and abducted children in northern Uganda. He has maintained an insurgency in northern Uganda for 18 years, and now operates from the DRC.

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