

## Africa Rising: An Analysis of Emergent Africa-Focused Mass Communication Scholarship From 2004 to 2014

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This study adopts David Edeani's seminal work on the methodology used in Africa-focused mass communication research to content-analyze the same within works published between 2004 and 2014. The study improves on Edeani's work by analyzing a wider and more recent spectrum of articles regardless of topic, publication, or geographical region and by using updated parameters derived from contemporary studies. Results indicate that Africa-focused scholarship is in an emergent mode and developing robustly. Africa-focused scholars uniquely focus on newspaper rather than television content, and case study is the favorite method of inquiry. Confluence with research in other regions includes the preponderance of atheoretical approaches, the use of qualitative research methods, and the use of nonempirical approaches. Pertinent implications are discussed.

*Keywords: Africa, research methods, mass communication in Africa, David O. Edeani, meta-analysis*

"The volume, scope, and quality of research and theory development in any academic discipline are among the important yardsticks for the assessment of the status of the discipline" (Edeani, 1995, p. 26). These words appear in David O. Edeani's article, "Role of Africa Media Review in the Sustainable Development of African Communication Research," a seminal analysis of articles published in the journal *Africa Media Review* between 1986 and 1994 (then a totality of all articles published in that journal). Edeani's study was the first comprehensive and longitudinal examination of research and theoretical patterns in African communication research, and it provides an apt springboard for a contemporary analysis of the same. Therefore, the current study endeavors to enhance his work by (1) examining trends within a wider and newer spectrum of emergent Africa-focused mass communication research and (2) adopting newer measurement parameters derived from contemporary research.

Specifically, this study analyzes Africa-focused scholarship in mass communication within a decade's time frame (2004–2014) regarding the following parameters: use of *theory*; use of *empirical* methods; *qualitative* or *quantitative* approaches; *orientation* in terms of focus on the media, audience, industry, or academic practices; the specific *medium* examined; and the *data collection* methods used.

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Additionally, the study examines such demographic factors such as the *rank* of the journals the articles were published in; the number of *peer citations* the articles elicited; *authorship* in terms of the rate of collaboration between scholars; and overall scholarly *productivity* over time.

### Rationale

One reason compelling a study such as this is that most analyses of pertinent Africa-focused research trends since Edeani's study have taken a piecemeal approach. Scholars have mostly examined narrowly defined aspects and sometimes have focused only on select regions of the continent. For instance, M'Bayo, Sunday, and Amobi (2012) examined the application of theory within African research, but only on three conference proceedings. Obonyo (2011) dissected the state of African theoretical paradigms and their applicability to the continent's communication dynamics, but as a generalized critical analysis with a single case study focusing on Kenya. Likewise, Fourie's (2010) critical discourse on the applicability of new theoretical paradigms regarding new media research focused only on South Africa. Even Edeani's study only analyzed articles published in one journal, *Africa Media Review*.

Second, mass communication research on Africa, especially outside of the more established practice in the Republic of South Africa, is still in a developmental stage (Fourie, 2010; Lugalambi, 2009). This is why I use the phrase "emergent scholarship" to describe the state of Africa-focused research, currently and in the near past. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines *emergent* as referring to an entity that arises unexpectedly, is newly formed, or that gains new prominence. I postulate that a similar trend is happening in Africa-focused mass communication research, where the continent is gaining new prominence in terms of scholarly interest and output. Case in point is the advent of several academic journals addressing issues on the continent: *Journal of African Media Studies* (established 2009); *Global Media Journal—Africa Edition* (established 2007); *African Communication Research* (established 2008), and recently the *African Journal of Communication*. It is prudent to analyze trends within such an emergent phenomenon.

Third, a recent study in two major journals (*Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* and *Journalism Studies*) indicated that Africa-focused mass communication research hardly registers on the mainstream research radar. Between 2000 and 2007, Cushion (2008) found that Africa-focused research appeared in only 9 of the 429 articles analyzed, a measly 2%. Miller et al. (2013) found that Africa-focused research appeared in less than 1% of major communication journals between 2004 and 2010. However, Cushion's study examined only two of the many journals in the field, and Miller et al. examined only the top 18 journals in communication. To put the performance of Africa-focused research in a better perspective, the current study examines a decade's worth of scholarship in a wide variety of publications. The lack of representation of African scholars in major publications does not mean that they have been sitting idly by. Several regional journals are published throughout Africa, and these include the newer ones mentioned previously and the more established publications such as South Africa-based *African Journalism Studies*. Additionally, African scholars have been concerned and critical of the research trends within the continent from as far back as 1987, and an example is Ugboajah's (1987) criticism of African scholarly methods that largely mirrored Western frameworks. Recently, scholars including Kane (2014), Ndlela (2007), and Obonyo (2011) have also critically dissected Africa-focused scholarship.

## **Theoretical Framework: Applying and Updating Edeani's Study**

### ***Use of Theory***

According to Edeani (1995), theoretical work qualifies as such if it uses "a full-blown theory or theoretical model specifying some important variables or concepts that are said to be related" (p. 30). He also discusses the five criteria that determine whether an article is theoretical: (1) specifies, defines, and operationalizes the theoretical concepts; (2) explains how the concepts are related; (3) justifies the conceptual relationships in regard to existing theory, extant literature, and/or current dynamics; (4) elaborates the problem-solving capacity of the conceptual model; and (5) demonstrates the tenability of the conceptual model by providing supporting data analysis via hypothesis and/or research question testing.

Of the 153 articles analyzed in his study, only 7 qualified as theoretical. In terms of hypothesis testing, even fewer (six) did that, and even then the conceptual modeling was weak. Edeani concluded that Africa-focused research at that point was mostly devoid of theoretical underpinnings. Contemporary Africa-focused research shows varied use of theory. For example, 56% of conference papers analyzed in M'Bayo et al. (2012) were theoretical. Additionally, the review of literature for the current study did not unveil any comprehensive contemporary studies examining the application of theory in Africa-focused research. Most such analyses have applied qualitative critical discourse, and even those have not been laudatory on the use of theory in present-day Africa-focused research. Case in point is Obonyo's (2011) critique of the lack of theoretical work within the continent's scholarship. This is a problem he attributes to such handicapping factors as financial constraints at African academic institutions, shortages of qualified communication faculty, and the general lack of resources.

Research on comparably emergent regions such as China raises similar concerns about the use of theory. For instance, in a study analyzing trends in China-focused research published in 20 major mainstream journals between 2000 and 2009, Li and Tang (2012) found that about half of the articles were grounded in theory. Wei (2009) found that theory was a rare occurrence in an analysis of China-focused research on new media technologies (from 2000 to 2007). Wei found that only 5 of the 69 articles examined were theoretically grounded. However, Kwangmi Ko and Hong (2010) found that Chinese advertising research articles published in the *Asian Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Communication*, and *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* were mostly theoretical, with 76% of them using one theory or another. Baohua's (2006) study of audience research in Mainland China found that only 12% of the articles analyzed used theory.

In mainstream mass communication research, studies also show varied use of theory in scholarship. Kamhawi and Weaver's (2003) oft-cited study indicates that only 39% of mass communication articles published between 1980 and 1999 used theory. Another highly cited study is Riffe and Freitag's (1997) analysis of content analysis articles published in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, where only 28% were theoretical. Likewise, health communication scholars were also not very likely to use theory (38%), as indicated in Manganello and Blake's (2010) study of quantitative research published between 1985 and 2005. This stands in contrast to a high of 72% for theory use within works

appearing in communication journals in general (Manganello & Blake, 2010). Given that emergent scholarship theory use is still low and is varied even in mainstream scholarship, research question 1a seeks to determine where Africa-focused research stands in this regard. Additionally, as per Criterion 5 of Edeani's theory, research question 1b seeks to find out how many articles used confirmatory testing.

*RQ1a: To what extent did Africa-focused research published between 2004 and 2014 use theory?*

*RQ1b: To what extent did Africa-focused research published between 2004 and 2014 use hypothesis testing?*

### **Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods**

Edeani also examined the extent to which articles published in *Africa Media Review* were qualitative or quantitative. Most of the articles analyzed in his study (73%) were qualitative, whereas statistical tests appeared in 33% of all articles examined. The most common statistical tests were percentages (25%) with the chi-square test coming in a distant second at 8% and analysis of variance at 3%. Regression analysis and correlations registered at 2% and 1%, respectively. In Kamhawi and Weaver's (2003) study, 67% of the articles were quantitative, 27% were qualitative, and 6% used both approaches. Overall, descriptive statistics were the most common in Riffe and Freitag's (1997) study (40%). However, Riffe and Freitag also found that the use of more complex statistical tests increased over time, and the use of descriptive statistics had dropped to 32% by 1995.

The rise in the use of quantitative methods and statistical tests in mainstream research stands in contrast to trends within emergent scholarship in Africa and China. In China-focused research, for example, Baohua's (2006) study determined that only 25% of studies used a quantitative approach. Likewise, Li and Tang's (2012) study found that China-focused scholarship is heavily dependent on qualitative data collection methods such as textual analysis, reviews, and interviews. Such methods were used in 53% of the articles examined in their study. Similar approaches were used in Wei's (2009) study, where 72% of articles examined were qualitative. In M'Bayo et al.'s (2012) analysis of conference proceedings, most Africa-focused papers presented were also qualitative (84%). Additionally, most other Africa-focused analyses of methodological trends have been mostly qualitative—for example, Amadi (2011), Fourie (2010), and Obonyo (2011). Because none of the existing Africa-focused research has comprehensively examined the qualitative/quantitative divide, a definite answer regarding scholarship oriented toward this continent is pending further analysis—thus, research question 2.

*RQ2: To what extent did Africa-focused scholarship between 2004 and 2014 use either qualitative or quantitative approaches?*

### **Data Collection Methods**

The type of data collection methods used in a study usually determines whether the study is qualitative or quantitative, and this, too, is another factor Edeani examined. Because most of the articles in his study were qualitative (73%), it follows that most data collection methods in the articles published

in *Africa Media Review* were qualitative in nature, too. The most commonly used methods were essay/commentary (57%) and descriptive analysis (38%). The other less used methods were secondary research, historical research, focus groups, and legal analysis. In terms of quantitative methods, which Edeani also calls administrative methods, surveys were the most popular (21%), followed by content analysis (18%). Experiments and secondary data analysis registered at 1% each.

Contemporary research shows changing trends regarding data collection methods. Riffe and Freitag (1997) discussed the increase in the use of content analysis in mass communication research with rising popularity within graduate student research. However, as shown in Kamhawi and Weaver's (2003) study, by 2003, surveys were still the most commonly used methods (33%), followed by content analysis (30%). Experiments were the next most popular at 13%, and qualitative methods (not counting mixed methods) tallied at about 15%.

In emergent scholarship, a few patterns can be discerned. To begin with, most research in this sphere is qualitative, be it Africa-focused or China-focused. In Li and Tang's (2012) study, content analysis accounted for over half of the quantitative data collection methods used, with surveys at a distant 25%. Secondary data and experiments came in at 9% and 7%, respectively. The most popular qualitative methods were textual analysis (24%), reviews (24%), legal analysis (15%), interviews (7%), and ethnography (2%). However, in a study of articles published in the journal *China Media Research*, Po-Lin and Juan (2011) found that scholars there favored surveys (57%) over content analysis (7.5%). Additionally, critical analysis was the most popular qualitative method (45%), followed by case studies (23%) and in-depth interviews (10%). The next research question seeks to find out which data collection methods were most commonly used in Africa-focused research.

*RQ3: What were the most common data collection methods in Africa-focused research between 2004 and 2014?*

### ***Empirical Research***

When discussing this parameter, Edeani (1995) emphasizes that empirical work refers to any work that is "carefully conceptualized, is executed systematically with the necessary definitions and controls applied, and the needed assumptions and techniques for the production of the required objective evidence (data) are all applied" (p. 38). He argues further that, although most empirical studies tend to be quantitative, these types of studies do not hold an automatic purview to this classification because well-conceptualized qualitative work counts as empirical, too. Inversely, quantitative work that is not systematic and not well conceptualized is not necessarily empirical. Edeani found that 27% of the articles published in *Africa Media Review* were empirical.

Pardun (2000) echoes Edeani's definition of what makes work empirical in her analysis of qualitative research published in the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* (1978-1998). She discusses two qualitative studies that qualify as empirical. One is Bielby, Harrington, and Bielby's (1999) examination of soap opera fans via triangulated methods. The other is Massey's (1995) analysis of student experiences in the aftermath of a crisis—a study that conceptualized two theoretical models: uses and

gratifications and Levy and Windahl's (1984) typology of audience activity. In a rare contemporary study that specifically examined the extent of the use of empirical methods in communication research, van Osch and Coursaris's (2014) analysis of social media research in both conference and journal articles since 2004 found that a majority (56%) of articles used empirical methods. Furthermore, 44% of these empirical articles were qualitative, a testament to Edeani's and Pardun's assertions that quantitative does not automatically mean empirical.

In fact, during the data collection process, I came across many instances of qualitative work that was empirical. An example is Botma's (2013) use of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) cultural capital concept in a critical analysis of the role that art journalism published in South African newspaper *Die Burger* played during the post-apartheid era. Another example is how Wekesa (2013) conceptualized historical factors, diplomacy, and geopolitics in a discussion of Sino-African media dynamics, where he delineates the four patterns of this new relationship: support and engagement, partnership with African media, use of African media as a platform for Chinese diplomacy, and competition with African media. Similarly, Buiten (2013) used the liberal-inclusive and progressive feminist approaches in a critical discourse on how South African journalists conceptualize and comprehend feminism within the industry. Research question 4 seeks to find the extent to which Africa-focused research is empirical.

*RQ4: To what extent was Africa-focused scholarship published between 2004 and 2014 empirical?*

#### **Media Genres and Analysis Focus**

Contemporary scholars have also examined the specific media genre studied in mass communication research. For instance, Kamhawi and Weaver (2003) found that broadcast was the most analyzed media type (42%), followed by print (28.75%) and the Internet a distant 1.9%. Unsurprisingly, Riffe and Freitag (1997) found that print media dominated content analysis articles published in *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (46.7%), with television and magazines at 24% and 14%, respectively. On a narrower perspective, magazines (35%) seem to be the favorite media type among health communication scholars, with television (31%) and newspapers (29%) in tow (Manganello & Blake, 2010).

Within emergent scholarship, broadcast media seems to be a favorite target of analysis. In Baohua's (2006) study, for example, broadcast media was the most studied (30%), with print at 9% and Internet-based media at 5.6%. Similarly, Li and Tang's (2012) study indicated that television (22%) was examined more than newspapers (16%), with new media on an almost equal footing at 15%. Television was an overwhelming favorite for scholars in Kwangmi Ko and Hong's (2010) analysis of Asian advertising research, accounting for over 37% of all articles analyzed. Magazines and newspapers came in at 8.7% and 3.3%, respectively, with new media at 5.4%. In analyzing new media technology in general and as a stand-alone media format, Wei (2009) found that mobile phones were the most studied (38%), followed by the Internet (20%), with blogs at 5.8%. New media as a collective genre appeared in 17% of articles analyzed in that study.

Scholars have also examined, in a broader sense, the focus that researchers take in terms of analyzing the media industry as whole or audiences as a group. For instance, Li and Tang (2012) used Lasswell's communication model to determine whether articles focused on three broad perspectives: producer, content, and audience. They found that most studies analyzed media content, with fewer examining the audience (18%) and 21% analyzing the media industry as a whole. Research question 5a seeks to find out which specific media genre was most analyzed, and research question 5b examines the broader perspective Africa-focused scholars took in their analyses.

*RQ5a: What were the most common media genres analyzed in Africa-focused research between 2004 and 2014?*

*RQ5b: What was the most common analysis focus within Africa-focused scholarship between 2004 and 2014?*

### **Scholarly Demographics**

There is, albeit limited, research on scholarly demographics such as *authorship*, *journal ranking*, *peer citation*, and *scholarly production* over time. Kamhawi and Weaver (2003) indirectly analyzed journal ranking by examining the acceptance rate of the articles analyzed in their study. They found that *Communication Research* had the lowest acceptance rate (5%), and *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* had the second lowest acceptance rate (10%). On average, all the 10 major journals in their study had a collective 13.25% acceptance rate. Li and Tang also analyzed journal clusters to reveal that most China-focused research was published in second- and lower tier journals. The study also indicated that over half of the articles analyzed were single-authored, with two-author publications at 30% and the rest written by multiple authors. In their analysis of social media research, van Osch and Coursaris (2014) found more collaboration, with 63% of the articles averaging two or more authors in both published work and conference papers.

In terms of peer citation, Li and Tang (2012) found that, in China-focused research, it was unlikely for scholars to cite one another's work, with an average of 1.3 peer citations per article. Peer citation is an important parameter, given that it is the primary component of the impact factor, one of the popular methods used to compute journal rankings (Garfield, 2005). Peer citations are also used to calculate the h-index, a factor used to determine both the impact of individual scholars in their field of expertise and journal ranking. Research question 6a seeks to find out how the three demographic parameters—peer citation, authorship, and journals ranking—played out in Africa-focused scholarship. Last, research question 6b examines how productivity changed over time.

*RQ6a: What were the scholarly demographic patterns (peer citations, journal ranking, and authorship) in Africa-focused research between 2004 and 2014?*

*RQ6b: What was the overall productivity among Africa-focused scholars between 2004 and 2014?*

## **Method**

### ***Sampling***

The unit of analysis was a single peer-reviewed scholarly article that primarily focused on African mass communication research. Only articles published in English were analyzed. Conference papers and book reviews were excluded. Traditional sampling techniques for articles were not a viable option for this exploratory study because there was no previous benchmark on which to predict an approximate number or even the likelihood or prevalence of Africa-focused research. It would have been unwise to pick, for example, 20% of pertinent articles published without a general baseline of how many Africa-focused publications are out there to begin with. Therefore, I used a comprehensive keyword search method to capture the maximum number of pertinent articles published in journals housed under the *Communication and Mass Media Complete* database within *EBSCO Host* database, one of the most comprehensive databases for scholarly work and beyond. Data were collected between February and March 2015.

The main keyword used was "Africa," with no other keywords, again to capture the largest number of articles in the database that had to do with Africa. A single keyword is also favorable because a combination of multiple keywords during searches tends to narrow results and produce fewer returns. That would have been counterproductive to the wide perspective this study adopted. I then narrowed the search to include only scholarly peer-reviewed articles published between 2004 and 2015, with 2015 included in order to capture articles published in late 2014. This was done to exclude newspaper, magazine, and trade journal articles that were not the target for analysis. To target only mass communication scholarship, I used customized search delineators, including *mass media, communication, journalism, journalists, newspapers, advertising, public relations, communication research, and broadcast*.

Because *Africa Media Review* is not hosted in *EBSCO Host*, I accessed the hosting organization's website, CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa), for relevant articles. Additionally, I accessed both the *SAGE Journals* and *Taylor & Francis Online* databases for online-first articles published in the latter part of 2014. This search method returned more than 1,400 articles, and I went through each entry to capture only those articles that were related to mass communication. This resulted in a total of 388 qualifying articles. Although not all Africa-focused journals are indexed in *EBSCO Host*, the comprehensive nature of the search method used here likely captured a reasonable representation of pertinent works.

### ***Data Collection***

Content analysis was the data collection method. A pilot study indicated that the coding parameters required little or no personal judgment; therefore, I performed the content analysis. An example of a low-judgment category would be the quantitative/qualitative parameter where the presence or absence of statistics was a good indicator. The media genre category is another example of a coding decision that requires little personal judgment, as is the confirmatory test parameter, which required only the presence or absence of hypotheses. The use of theory criteria was also mostly straightforward, given that such works clearly state the theoretical concepts used. The only criterion that required a level of

personal judgment was the use of empirical methods, and even then it was not difficult to discern a well-conceptualized and systematic execution.

Author-driven or even single-coder content analysis is not uncommon. Examples include Pardun's (2000) meta-analysis of research trends among qualitative works appearing in the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, Handley's (2010) analysis of news articles in a study of presidential framing patterns in regard to diplomatic conflict, and Kamhawi and Weaver (2003).

### ***Coding Parameters***

Although most categories tested here were coded as dichotomous, I took care to read entire articles to determine the extent to which they met any given criterion. For instance, a thorough reading of an article can determine whether a theory or any discernible conceptual articulation was meaningfully applied or infused. This means that articles that registered as nontheoretical lacked both a specific theory and/or a literature review that supported the propositions and conclusions within.

#### *Use of Theory*

Articles under this category used a specific theory or a general theoretical framework. This, however, was not the sole determinant; articles that articulated concepts by reviewing extant literature were also coded as theoretical. In general, any discernible articulation of ideas, concepts, and/or existing works was deemed theoretical.

#### *Empirical Methods*

While most quantitative works might fit this criterion, qualitative work that used strong conceptual frameworks and systematically articulated concepts and/propositions whether discursive or critical was deemed empirical. Markers also included problem statements, objectives, data collection methods, findings, contributions to knowledge, and so forth.

#### *Quantitative/Qualitative*

Articles that used statistical tests such as *t* tests, chi-square, analysis of variance, and regression analysis were coded as quantitative. Work that included no numerical data or made minimal use of descriptive data such as percentages and frequencies was deemed qualitative.

#### *Data Collection Methods*

This parameter included all the data collection methods deployed in any one study. Coding was done open-endedly without the constraints of an a priori list in order to capture the widest variety of methods deployed.

### *Analysis Focus*

This parameter was adopted from Li and Tang (2012), and it measured four different foci in any one study:

1. *Media content*: This category examined articles that primarily analyzed media content.
2. *Audience*: This subcategory examined whether the study primarily analyzed audiences and media users.
3. *Industry*: This category examined whether the study primarily analyzed the media industry in terms of media practices, ethics, trends, and so on.
4. *Academic*: This category refers to articles that examined purely pedagogical and academic issues within mass communication practice.

### *Media Genre*

This category simply identified the specific medium or combination of media that were analyzed in any one article and was adopted from both the Edeani study and several contemporary studies. The categories included newspaper, broadcast (for radio and television), new media (encompassing the Internet and all new media technologies), advertising and public relations, magazine, and film.

### *Scholarly Demographics*

These were *peer citations*, *authorship*, and *journal ranking*. The *EBSCO Host* database lists the instances an article has been peer-cited within the database, and this was used to measure peer citation. Authorship was determined by the number of author names listed in an article, and journal ranking was a dichotomous variable categorizing top journals from the rest. This parameter was adopted from Li and Tang (2012), but it was modified to define a top journal as one appearing in the top 50 of the 2013 *Thomson Reuters's Scientific Journal Ranking* for communication journals, the latest listing at the time of data collection (SCImago, 2014). Note that these rankings lag by a year, so the 2013 ranking appears in 2014.

## **Results**

A total of 388 articles were analyzed. It is indisputable that not all pertinent published work was captured, but the comprehensive search method within the *EBSCO Host* database and the additional searches on the *SAGE Journals* and *Taylor & Francis Online* databases and the CODESRIA website suggests that the 388 articles analyzed here represent more than a random sample. Therefore, I assume a fairly comprehensive set of Africa-focused articles published during the years of interest was analyzed. This means that the numbers reported in this article approach true population parameters and are not mere descriptive tallies of the variables measured.

*RQ1a: To what extent did Africa-focused research published between 2004 and 2014 use theory?*

*RQ1b: To what extent did Africa-focused research published between 2004 and 2014 use hypothesis testing?*

Of all 388 articles, 237 (or 61%) were atheoretical. Additionally, a majority of the articles analyzed were explanatory (56.2%), meaning that they either used research questions or other nonpredictive postulations. This also means that confirmatory studies, or those that used hypotheses, made up 43% of all articles analyzed. Only 3 studies were both exploratory and confirmatory.

*RQ2: To what extent did Africa-focused scholarship between 2004 and 2014 use either qualitative or quantitative approaches?*

The data indicated that an overwhelming majority of Africa-focused research was qualitative (81%). A smaller number of studies (2.6%) were both quantitative and qualitative.

*RQ3: What were the most common data collection methods in Africa-focused research between 2004 and 2014?*

As shown in Table 1, Africa-focused articles mostly deployed the case study method (41%) as a means of collecting data, with content analysis (22%) being the second most popular method. Textual analysis, focus groups, ethnography, and experiments were the least used methods.

**Table 1. Data Collection Methods.**

	<i>n</i>	%
Case study	160	41.2
Content analysis	85	21.9
Survey	38	9.8
Mixed methods	27	7.0
Archival	19	4.9
Reviews	17	4.4
In-depth interviews	15	3.9
Secondary data	9	2.3
Other methods	6	1.5
Experiment	5	1.3
Ethnography	4	1.0
Focus groups	2	0.5
Textual analysis	1	0.3
Total	388	100.0

*RQ4: To what extent was Africa-focused scholarship published between 2004 and 2014 empirical?*

As discussed earlier, although most quantitative studies tend to be empirical, this does not translate into automatic exclusivity for such studies in reference to the use of empirical methods. Qualitative studies that are well conceptualized and systematically executed can also be empirical. The data here support this contention. Overall, 149 (or 38%) of the articles were empirical, and within this cluster a majority of them (63%) were qualitative. Of the 10 studies that combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches, only 2 were empirical.

*RQ5a: What were the most common media genres analyzed in Africa-focused research between 2004 and 2014?*

As shown in Table 2, Africa-focused research analyzes newspapers (20%) more than any other medium. New media and broadcast were at a near tie. Magazines and film were the least studied media genres. Notable was that about 42% of the scholars did not define the exact media type analyzed, using the general term "media" in their articles.

**Table 2. Media Type.**

	<i>n</i>	%
Newspaper	79	20.4
New media	45	11.6
Broadcast	44	11.3
Advertising/PR	37	9.5
Magazine	9	2.3
Film	9	2.3
General/undefined	165	42.5
Total	388	100.0

*RQ5b: What was the most common analysis focus within Africa-focused scholarship between 2004 and 2014?*

Most articles primarily focused on different media formats (70%), with fewer analyzing the media industry as whole (19%). Even fewer articles focused on academic issues (11%), and only one article specifically analyzed the audience.

*RQ6a: What were the scholarly demographic patterns (peer citations, journal ranking, and authorship) in Africa-focused research between 2004 and 2014?*

On average, Africa-focused publications elicited 0.72 ( $SD = 1.8$ ) citations per article. However, this number does not include 57 articles (for the *South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research* and *African Journalism Studies*) published between 2013 and 2014 because *EBSCO Host* did not include the peer citation numbers for these years. Additionally, the number could be an understatement because newer articles were yet to be cited by the time data were collected and analyzed. Also, articles cited in research-oriented arenas such as *Research Gate*, *Google Scholar*, and *Mendeley* do not appear on *EBSCO*. In regard to journal ranking, 22% of the articles analyzed were published in journals ranked in the top 50 of the 2013 *Thomson Reuters Scientific Journal Ranking* for communication. In the top-ranked journals, the peer citation average is higher, at 1.2 ( $SD = 2.59$ ). Last, most articles (71%) were single-authored.

*RQ6b: What was the overall productivity among Africa-focused scholars between 2004 and 2014?*

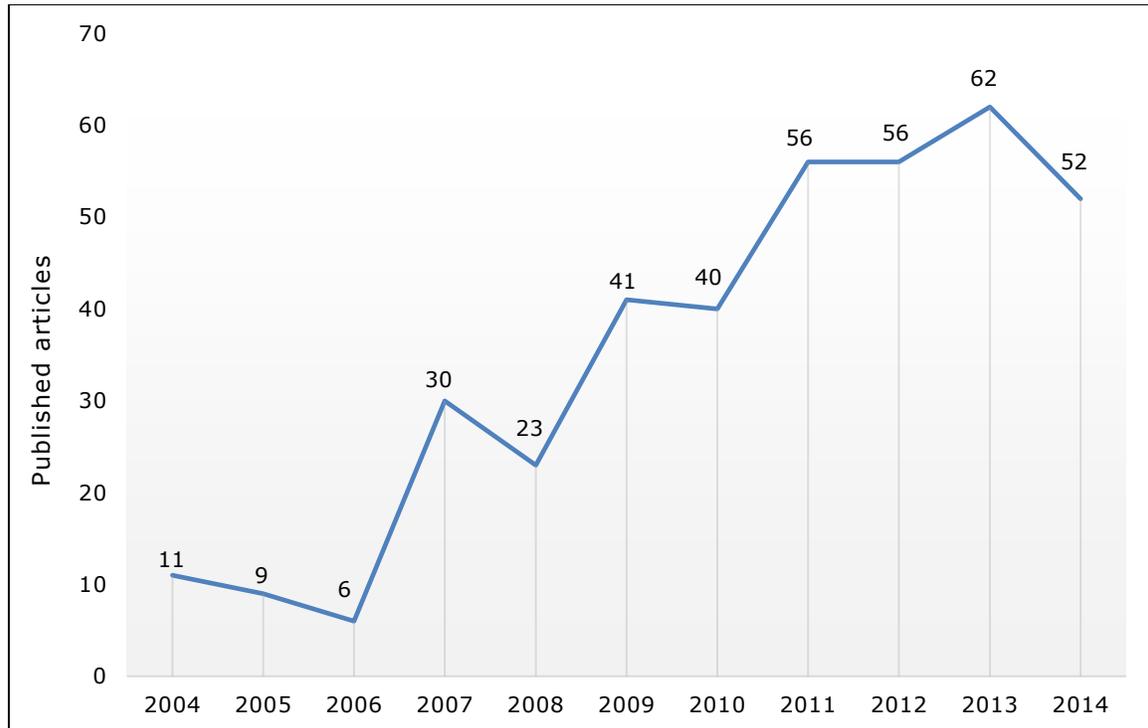
Africa-focused mass communication research showed remarkable growth in the decade under study. With only 11 articles published in 2004, productivity peaked at 62 in 2013 and stood at 52 in 2014. Additionally, the 2014 number could be understated for two reasons. First, because it takes awhile for published articles to be indexed into databases, it is possible that some 2014 articles were yet to appear in the *EBSCO Host* database at the time analysis was done in early 2015. Second, *CODESRIA*, which publishes *Africa Media Review*, only lists articles up to 2011. Regardless, Figure 1 shows a remarkable upward trend in productivity. This translates into a fourfold increase, or a 463% jump, in productivity between 2004 and 2013, with an average of 35 articles published annually.

## Discussion

This exploratory study provides a comprehensive and longitudinal analysis of Africa-focused mass communication research based on Edeani's 1995 seminal study of the same. It improves his work (and other similar, but narrowly focused studies) in two main ways: (1) by analyzing a wider and more recent spectrum of published articles regardless of topic, publication, or geographical region and (2) by using a combination of measurement parameters used in his study alongside those used in contemporary studies. Most important, this study found several critical issues on Africa-focused research.

### **Emergent Scholarship**

With a four-fold, 463% increase in productivity between years 2004 and 2013, Africa is indeed experiencing emergent scholarship within mass communication research. Additionally, the annual productivity is comparable to other regions of emergent scholarship such as China. The average of 35 articles published annually compares favorably with that in various China-focused studies such as: Baohua's (13), Li and Tang's (14.45), Po-Lin and Juan's (45), and Wei's (13.25). In terms of peer citation, Africa-focused scholars ranked slightly higher than their China-focused counterparts with 33% of their articles cited elsewhere compared to 23% in Li and Tang's study. The caveat here is that these China-focused studies took a narrower approach in terms of their sampling frame. However, they still provide a good point for comparison.



**Figure 1. Africa-focused mass communication research articles published between 2004 and 2014.**

### ***Newspaper as a Favorite Medium for Analysis***

Another key finding is that, unlike both mainstream and China-focused researchers, Africa-focused scholars examine newspaper content more than other media types. This is a departure from the more popular broadcast media-based research focus found elsewhere. The results also indicate that Africa-focused scholars examined more new media content than they did television, which came in third in the hierarchy of the media types analyzed. The low emphasis on broadcast media (defined as radio and/or television) is notable in two ways. First, the lack of television-oriented research could be a matter of circumstance rather than choice, given that, on average, television penetration rates in the continent are quite low. As of 2012, only 35% of households in sub-Saharan Africa had digital TV access. But given penetration projections of up to 95% by 2018, there is a high possibility that Africa-focused scholars might match mainstream patterns soon (Statistica, 2016). This means that the deemphasis of television-related research is understandable.

Second, the lack of radio-related research is problematic. The preponderance of radio in Africa points to a significant vacuum in pertinent scholarship. Even in 2000, almost every household in sub-Saharan Africa (not counting South Africa) possessed a radio receiver. As da Costa (2012) reports in a study of community radio in the continent, the overall ratio of 20 radio receivers for every 100 people is quite impressive. According to a 2013 UNESCO report, by 2011, radio was already the primary source for news and information for most Africans, with numbers as high 83% of all Tanzanians and an 85% penetration rate in Zambia. The same report also notes that radio listening is popular among those who use mobile phones. The lack of radio-related scholarship might be an issue for now, but it is also a potential opportunity for future Africa-focused mass communication research.

Another important finding had to do with scholarship focused on new media. As mentioned, this study found that new media was the second most analyzed type, at 11.6%. This development is laudable, given the importance of new media in any continent. This rate of new media scholarship also compares well with China-focused research, where new media scored 15% in Li and Tang (2012); and the 69 new media articles in Wei (2009) are not far removed from the 45 in the current one. Second, the fact that new media was the second most analyzed media type here could be explained partly by the dramatic penetration of the Internet and mobile phones in Africa, despite the poor television penetration rates. For example, mobile phone penetration leapt from 1% in 2000 to 54% in 2012 in Kenya. Countries such as Ghana, Morocco, and Tunisia all have penetration rates of over 100%, meaning that people own more than one device (Macharia, 2014). This is not to mention the role that social media played in North Africa during the Arab Spring.

### ***Emphasis on the Case Study Method***

Another key finding is the dominance of the case study method among Africa-focused scholars. Case studies made up over 41% of all data collection methods, with content analysis and surveys at a distant second and third with 21.9% and 9.8%, respectively. This differs from both mainstream and China-focused research. The 1995 Edeani study found that scholars then relied heavily on qualitative data collection methods (73%) such as essays, commentary, and descriptive analysis. This seems to not have changed much in the 20 years between Edeani's study and the current study. Most articles were qualitative (81%).

Second, even though this study did not examine the specific topics and themes in the articles, the content analysis process revealed articles that were very critical and prescriptive in their case study approach. Such articles decried current practices within the journalism industry in certain countries—a trend that could be explained by the circumstances on the ground. For example, the articles criticized practices but also prescribed proper methods for media practitioners to navigate an industry that is in flux and usually operating in a corrupt sociopolitical system. An example would be “brown envelope journalism,” an Africanized version of payola defined as “a practice that involves news sources granting monetary incentives to journalists” (Kasoma, 2009, p. 1). This practice is quite widespread within the continent and has various localized monikers: It is called *Kitu kidogo* (a little something) in Kenya and Tanzania; *Gatu* in Liberia; *Soli* in Ghana; and *Keske* in Nigeria (Lodamo & Skjerdal, 2009).

### ***Confluence With Mainstream and China-Focused Research***

Even though Africa-focused scholarship might differ from mainstream or China-focused research in the manner described earlier, there is confluence in terms of use of theory, qualitative methods, hypothesis testing, and coauthorship. Similar to China-focused research, Africa-focused scholarship is mostly atheoretical, which, at 61%, is a drop from Edeani's high of 95%. About 50% of the articles in Li and Tang (2012), 93% in Wei (2009), and 88% in Baohua (2006) were atheoretical. Although Kwangmi Ko and Hong's (2010) study found that 76% of the articles were theoretical, that study analyzed articles only within advertising research. Within mainstream research, 61% of the articles in Kamhawi and Weaver (2003) were atheoretical, as were 72% of articles in Riffe and Freitag (1997).

Another area of confluence is the preponderance of qualitative research methods, which represent 81% of the articles analyzed here. Articles in Edeani's study also were mostly qualitative (73%), as were the conference papers analyzed in M'Bayo et al. (2012), at 84%. In China-focused research, Li and Tang (2012) found that 53% of studies were qualitative, as were a majority (73%) in Baohua (2006). Although Riffe and Freitag (1997) did not directly examine this variable, over 41% of articles mostly used descriptive statistics, and these could have counted as qualitative in the current study. Confluence also occurs regarding the use of hypothesis testing. The results here have Africa-focused scholars using confirmatory methods in 43% of their work, compared with the 46% in Riffe and Freitag. Last, coauthorship rates nearly match those of China-focused researchers. The results reported here have coauthorship at about 29% of the articles, a near perfect match with the 30% in Li and Tang.

### **Methodological Recommendations for Africa-Focused Scholarship**

Africa-focused scholars need a more balanced approach that ensures that qualitative and quantitative works reach parity. Although parity has improved since 1995, there is still work to be done. Likewise, the use of empirical methods has to improve. Whether conducting qualitative or quantitative research, empirical studies simply provide a better framework for systematic analysis of phenomena from the problem definition stage to the analysis and interpretation stages. Although the emphasis on new media currently looks promising, this is an angle that might also need improvement, given the digital revolution sweeping the African continent. This also calls for more statistical testing, given the complex nature of the conditions on the ground for both scholars and media practitioners. In such an emergent situation as Africa-focused scholarship is in, it is imperative to systematically test different situational and sometimes uniquely African variables that affect media use, practice, inquiry, and pedagogy. Hypothesis testing would be useful in such situations as a means of delineating the true and measurable effect of various factors, enabling scholars, practitioners, and educators to better understand the media's role on the continent and beyond.

Another area in need of improvement is the lack of audience-centered scholarship. The current research found only one study that analyzed the audience. Most articles focused on different media types or examined the media in general. It is a good thing that scholars are examining media practices in the continent, but studies that deal with new media technologies such as social media will have to take a narrower and more audience-oriented approach, given the egalitarian and personalized nature of the

social mediasphere. Here, theories such as uses and gratifications, selective exposure, social network theory, social presence theory, and parasocial interaction could be used to determine the more nuanced social media dynamics within Africa's ongoing digital revolution.

### **Structural Recommendations for Africa-Focused Scholarship**

The above recommendations address specific and narrow methodological issues. However, these cannot occur in the absence of a broader framework that promotes research across the continent. One such recommendation is to increase the international visibility of Africa-focused scholarship. Although the number of locally published journals has increased, the presence of Africa-focused scholars in major mainstream journals is still minimal. As mentioned earlier, Cushion (2008) found that Africa-focused articles accounted for only 2% of the articles published in *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* and *Journalism Studies*. Miller et al. (2013) found less than 1% of similar work in major communication journals. In their study, Miller et al. call for more collaboration with foreign scholars, but on topics that are of interest to the continent, given the uniqueness of media practices in Africa (Bosch, 2015). This is the synergy that Mabweazara (2015b) delineates in his argument that Africa-focused researchers need not de-Westernize their scholarship, but should instead appropriate existing frameworks and customize them to the unique African experience.

Miller et al. (2013) also found that African scholars largely focused on health communication at the expense of topics that could receive wider readership, such as the use and wide dissemination of cell phones. Their study found that most of the health communication literature is focused on an important issue, HIV/AIDS. They also suggest a drive toward increasing doctoral programs in the continent alongside new communication associations. This topic is echoed in Salawu, Oyero, Moyo, and Moyo's (2016) study, which found an underrepresentation of doctoral dissertations compared with master's theses written between 2004 and 2013 in South African communication programs (27 and 214, respectively). These findings reveal a trend where master's programs are not adequately nourishing and feeding into doctoral programs. The authors emphasized the importance of trained academicians who will sustain the field in the future.

Absent a quick shift in scholarly practices, circumstances may soon overtake scholars as the African media landscape shifts in response to the digital revolution that has wrought changes to the status quo as it disrupts old media practices (Mabweazara, 2015a). Scholars cannot afford to be caught unaware as these winds of change blow across the continent. Some action is already afoot, and that is commendable. The recent change in title, aim, and scope of *African Journalism Studies* (formerly *Equid Novi: African Journalism Studies*) from a regional to an international focus is well captured by the editor: "It aspires to provide a platform from which scholars can engage with global debates in the area of journalism studies from the vantage point of Africa" (Wasserman, 2015, p. 1). Last, these changes should not undermine those who have proposed the de-Westernization of communication studies (Gunaratne, 2010; Murthy, 2012; Obonyo, 2011; Takahashi, 2007; Ugboajah, 1987; Wang, 2011). A broad approach to regional issues begets a bigger audience and thus more visibility. Waisbord (2015) aptly invokes this dual perspective by stressing that research "should be based, not burrowed, in a region" (p. 33).

### Limitations

This study assumes that a sizable proportion of Africa-focused research articles were analyzed; however, only a perfect keyword search combination can equivocally ensure that an article was not skipped, and I do not claim otherwise. Additionally, not all pertinent journals are indexed in *EBSCO Host*. For instance, *Africa Media Review* is independently hosted on the CODESRIA website, and only articles from 2004 to 2011 were available. Third, regional publications such as *African Communication Research* and *African Journal of Communication* (published in East Africa) are not housed within *EBSCO Host* and were not analyzed. Last, this study is limited to mass communication scholarship and does not examine communication in general. Readers should interpret the findings within this spectrum.

These limitations should, however, not take away from the article's important findings and the generally sound findings about this sector of mass communication scholarship. The limitations also provide grounds for further exploration of scholarly activities in Africa, just as this study did with Edeani's work. Researchers can go beyond purely methodological paradigms and investigate the themes, areas of concentration, specific theories, and concepts that drive Africa-focused scholarship. Researchers could also use data visualization to spatially portray scholarly production. This is a relatively new method in mass communication where data are plotted in the form of color-coded geographical maps indicating the exact location of each scholar. These are similar to the well-known population density maps, but would instead depict scholars. This technique would present the geographical distribution and concentration of the scholars and provide a realistic picture of the geographical spread of Africa-focused scholarship. It would also indicate how much of the pertinent literature emanates from within the continent and how much is from without. We can correctly assume that African scholars in the diaspora—for example, this article's author—examine continental dynamics. While it is true that South Africa publishes a larger number of pertinent journals, it could be true, too, that most of the authors are not from there, and such a visualization of their locations could provide a clearer picture.

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