A "Hotbed" of Digital Empowerment?
Media Criticism in Kenya
Between Playful Engagement and Co-Option[1]

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Much has been written about the production and textual features of international media portrayals of Africa, but very little about how audiences on the continent perceive such coverage. This study fills this gap by investigating a campaign led by Kenyans on Twitter (KOT) to challenge CNN's portrayals of their country. Our analysis of the most prominent tweets, images, and users reveals the various strategies adopted by Kenyan audiences to criticize Western representations. This criticism, we argue, constitutes a form of metajournalistic discourse, which should not be reduced to a single story of digital empowerment. While contesting long-standing stereotypes and inequalities shaping global media narratives, this criticism recreates an image of Kenya aligned with a corporate project of nation branding that uplifts the voices and perspectives of digitally connected Nairobi-based elites. In response, we call for greater consideration of the interplay of global and local power relations in which such digital practices are embedded.

Keywords: digital empowerment, Kenya, media criticism, media representation, metajournalistic discourse, nation branding, Twitter

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"The hashtag I started #SomeoneTellCNN is now trending worldwide!!! Yes I AM A KENYAN WITH A VOICE!" (Kenduiywa, 2012). These are the words of Winnie Michelle Kenduiywa, a businesswoman from Nairobi (Tully & Ekdale, 2014, p. 72). Her statement followed CNN's decision to apologize for framing Kenya as a country in turmoil following an attack in Nairobi that killed six people. Kenduiywa's celebration and expression of vindication should be understood in the broader context and history of international media portrayals of Africa. For decades, Western institutions and voices have dominated the framing of African news in international media. Scholars and commentators have criticized the propensity of Western media to create reductive, negative, and stereotypical portrayals that reinforce narratives of Afro-pessimism. However, with the advent of social media, a wide range of individuals around the world can challenge such narratives in international media. Indeed, Kenduiywa's tweet is a triumphant example of how social media can allow populations long assumed to be at the global periphery to take center stage and thus challenge, in Spivak's terminology (1988), the silencing of the "subaltern." Beyond this individual case, many scholars present the regular criticism of CNN's coverage by Kenyans on Twitter (KOT) as exemplary of the empowering affordances of digital media for African audiences to challenge Western news narratives (Adeiza & Howard, 2016; Bunce, Franks, & Paterson, 2017; Kaigwa, 2017; Tully & Ekdale, 2014).

Our goal in this article is to add to this emerging literature in several ways. Although the discursive features and, to a lesser extent, the production of international news narratives about Africa have been routinely analyzed by scholars, there remains a remarkable gap in understanding of how these media texts are consumed and resisted by audiences on the continent. According to Scott's (2015) scoping review of the literature on the United States' and UK's media representations of Africa, only 3% of existing studies include research into the reception of media texts. In addition, existing data about the content of the #SomeoneTellCNN campaign in those previous studies are largely broad observations based on a few examples of tweets. This article aims to provide more solid empirical insights into the discursive and representational fabric (Hall, 1997) that makes up this social-media-led counterdiscourse. In doing so, we assess whether there is a contrast between the content of the campaign and the current understanding of the phenomenon in the literature. By answering those questions, the study reflects on the function of digital media criticism in Kenya in opposing misrepresentations and making space for voices that have been silenced historically. In addition, we are interested in how the dominant discourse around this media criticism is embedded in broader discourses about digital empowerment within the Kenyan society. Indeed, we argue that beyond a techno-optimist account of social media in Africa, the analysis of such phenomena should pay greater attention to the interplay of global and local power relations in which they are embedded.

The article starts by providing background to #SomeoneTellCNN and by locating existing studies of the phenomenon in a broader literature on social media empowerment and hashtags in Africa. We then introduce our approach to the phenomenon that blends two strands of communication scholarship: media criticism and media representation. Subsequently, we explain the processes of data gathering and methodology. The analysis is then structured in three parts: We look at the forms of media criticism that are at play through the campaign; the alternative representations of Kenya that social media users put forward; and the key voices that are most visible and influential in shaping the discourse of #SomeoneTellCNN. In conclusion, we argue that digital media criticism involves, on the one hand, empowering resistance to misrepresentations and stereotypes, and, on the other, a narrative of nation branding championed by Kenya's political and corporate elites.

Background: Emergence of #SomeoneTellCNN

In Kenya, the popular hashtag #SomeoneTellCNN is often attributed to Twitter users who have associated themselves with another hashtag, #KOT. Referring to Kenyans on Twitter, KOT appeared soon after Kenyans joined Twitter and mostly attracted users to make jokes and share opinions on politics (Tully & Ekdale, 2014). Since then, KOT has morphed into a movement of sorts, as users mobilize for attacks or "twars" on institutions, nations, or individuals ("Why Kenya 'Always Wins' Its Twitter Wars," 2015).

The first use of the #SomeoneTellCNN hashtag was in March 2012 when David McKenzie, CNN's East Africa correspondent, reported on a grenade attack in Nairobi. Six people died and more than 60 were injured. The story was presented on CNN with the headline "Violence in Kenya" appearing on an animated Kenyan flag. KOT used the hashtag to criticize this report, which, they argued, misrepresented the situation and exaggerated the scale of the violence. As KOT rallied behind #SomeoneTellCNN to ask for an apology from the network, the hashtag grew increasingly popular, eventually appearing on Twitter among the global trending topics. Very quickly, McKenzie apologized by tweeting, "Our reporting on last night was accurate, the banner used in the bulletin was not. I contacted CNN for future bulletins. Apologies to all" (McKenzie, 2012).

The hashtag #SomeoneTellCNN reappeared vigorously ahead of the 2013 Kenyan general election. Following fears of postelection violence similar to those following the 2007 general election, CNN international correspondent Nima Elbagir ran a story focused on a so-called tribal militia group in the Rift Valley region of Kenya training in preparation for conflict. Titled "Armed and Ready to Vote," the report showed men in a forest with homemade guns, although the country was experiencing a peaceful electoral process. A new Twitter storm followed, prompting a fresh apology from CNN (see Figure 1 in the section Research Questions and Methodology).

In July 2015, Barack Obama attended the Global Entrepreneurship Summit in Nairobi. Two days before his arrival, CNN ran an online story with the headline "Security Fears as Obama Heads to Terror Hotbed."[2] The news story—and several broadcasts that followed—warned that terrorists could embarrass the U.S. by staging an attack in Kenya during Obama's visit (see Starr, 2015). KOT, again, rallied behind #SomeoneTellCNN. They were outraged by CNN's reports, which portrayed Kenya as extremely dangerous (Tharoor, 2015), most notably with an interviewee claiming Kenya to be more dangerous than Iraq and Afghanistan (Karanja, 2015). This exasperation was further reinforced by Obama's visit being widely perceived in Kenya in celebratory terms as a homecoming tour given that his father was Kenyan. During the summit, Obama and President Uhuru Kenyatta implicitly addressed the report by describing Kenya as a "hotbed" of culture and innovation. Kenya's tourism board subsequently canceled an ad placement with CNN of about $1 million. A month after Obama's visit, Tony Maddox, CNN's vice president, flew to Kenya to apologize directly to President Kenyatta (Kaigwa, 2017).

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[2] The story, written by Pentagon correspondent Barbara Starr and published July 23, 2015, was edited again later with a new headline, "Obama's Trip Raises Security Concerns."

Social Media Empowerment and Hashtags in Africa

To observers and scholars interested in social media in Africa, #SomeoneTellCNN heralds potential for greater accountability in international reporting of Africa. One of the earliest people to articulate this view was Kenyan writer Nanjala Nyabola:

> The backlash on Twitter under the hashtag #SomeoneTellCNN is exemplary of the creation of an African-driven counter-narrative. . . . The powerless are able to speak out with less fear of repercussion; the powerful are forced to react and respond to maintain the appearance of egalitarianism and approachability. . . . This is a tremendously positive development. (Nyabola, 2017, p. 114–115)

This celebratory sentiment is echoed in the two existing studies of #SomeoneTellCNN by Tully and Ekdale (2014) and Adeiza and Howard (2016). For Tully and Ekdale, this constituted a site of "playful engagement." By playful engagement, they mean the interaction of playful form (such as humoristic and/or satirical tweets) and engagement with important issues of civic engagement—in this case, the issues of voice and stereotyping. Furthermore, they argue that Twitter sites of playful engagement should be of interest to information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D) research for several reasons: They advance a broader conversation about social and political development within the nation; they support bottom-up initiatives favored within participatory development; and they reflect the issues that resonate with local audiences.

More recent studies support the peculiar social and political relevance of Twitter across African contexts (Bosch, 2016; Bosch, Wasserman, & Chuma, 2018; Mutsvairo, 2016). These studies shed light on the platform's role in allowing citizens, primarily the young and educated, to circumvent repressive political regimes and government-controlled media; in shifting the oral public sphere to a virtual space; and in promoting activism on issues ranging from human rights and education, to gender equity, to public accountability. Twitter hashtags are creative elements of the platform and are effective in initiating and aggregating conversations about serious issues such as government corruption and social injustices, as well as more mundane and everyday matters. Notable hashtags that have received widespread appeal on the continent include #RhodesMustFall, following students' protest against the statue of British imperialist Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town in 2015 (Bosch, 2016), and the humorous #IfAfricaWasABar that inspired creative responses imagining the continent as a bar (Cheruiyot & Uppal, forthcoming).

Humor and satire constitute powerful discursive tools in the social and political use of the platform across the continent. Twitter users create and share content that employs devices such as parody, memes, sarcasm, and jokes, thus enabling a spreadability of tweets in which playful text, images, and hashtags are tailored to stir participation and various forms of expression in the "communication ecology" of the platform (boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). At the same time, humor lies at the heart of cultural expressions across numerous African communities. From gossip, rumors, and *radio trottoir*/pavement radio (Ellis, 1989) to newspaper columns (Ogola, 2017) and political cartoons (Nyamnjoh, 2009), humor plays an integral role in the cultural, social, and political life of ordinary citizens. In oppressive regimes, humor often emerges as a coping instrument, a source of emotional empowerment, while also revealing despair over

failure to turn the tide against social injustices, humanitarian disasters, economic strife, or political repression (Obadare, 2010; Taiwo, 2016; Willems, 2011).

In their assessment of the use of #SomeoneTellCNN through the theoretical lens of "soft power," Adeiza and Howard (2016, p. 228) argue that humor was central to the campaign. Building on Nye's (2004) conceptualization, they coin the concept of "social media soft power" to describe "the concerted international attention and buy-in into an issue or sympathy towards a course generated by the savvy use of social media either by state or non-state actors" (p. 219). Their analysis suggests an increase in positive reporting of Kenya in international news following #SomeoneTellCNN. In raising the question of soft power, their study opens the way to further consider issues of state interests and nation branding raised by #SomeoneTellCNN. According to Smart (2018), the Kenyan government in the 1960s and 1970s put tourism at the center of the country's economic future and created a "delicately-curated package of ideas (that) enticed tourists (from the West) to spend their discretionary income on a trip to Kenya" (p. 137). Among those were naturalist tropes epitomized by the safari, the savannah, and the wildlife, but also, in contrast, "an idea of Kenya as the center of African postcolonial modernity" (p. 146), particularly through the modern urbanity of Nairobi.

Since then, tourism has remained key to the Kenyan economy, and those tropes have carried into the formation and sense of national identity. Similarly, the national pride surrounding a broader techno-optimist discourse about the tech and digital sector in Kenya—often referred to as "Silicon Savannah"—can be understood in continuity with the modernity side of the dual "idea of Kenya" (Smart, 2018). Such discursive constructions appear in both state-supported and corporate projects. The case of Safaricom—the leading mobile phone operator in Kenya—is telling in that regard. Tuwei and Tully (2017) examined the company's promotional materials between 2010 and 2014 and found that Safaricom's marketing strategies were implicated in promoting both the company and the country through a form of commercial nationalism. By this, they refer to a mundane nationalism that links "Kenyan identity and distinctiveness to consumerism, commercial success, profit, upward mobility and economic development" (p. 22), ultimately "creating an image of Kenya as a place where nature and industry, tradition and modernity can and do co-exist" (p. 33). Although touched on by Adeiza and Howard (2016), the connections between those discourses and processes of nation branding, and the #SomeoneTellCNN campaign remain largely unexplored. To critically unpack those links, this article examines the content of the campaign at the intersection of two analytical perspectives, namely media criticism and media representation.

Theorizing Counternarratives of African Audiences as Metajournalistic Discourse

Through social media infrastructure and its affordances, criticism of the international news media has become more visible. The frequency and magnitude of shared text, images, and multimedia have increased tremendously. In social media studies today, there is contention over the shift from "audiences" to "users" because they engage in both production and consumption (or prosumption) of the media. Willems and Mano (2017) argue that in the digital age, "prosumers" still retain their nature as audiences because users of digital platforms remain consumers of mainstream media organizations' online content in Africa. In our case, Twitter users can be understood as audiences of CNN who also produced a counternarrative against the channel's coverage.

In light of the constant engagement of citizens, scholars, politicians, and journalists online, there are at least four reasons that greater consideration of the criticism of international media is warranted. First, digital media criticism represents a significant period in the history of media. Narratives *about* journalism are produced constantly, from a variety of social actors across the globe, and play a significant role in questioning the authority of journalism (Carlson, 2017)—in this case, that of international news media in Africa. This phenomenon can be understood as a form of what Carlson (2016) terms "metajournalistic discourse"—that is, an ensemble of discursive practices about journalism that includes conversation or commentaries about the news. Second, media criticism can be considered a form of journalistic accountability and collective action against journalistic inadequacies, with the potential to affect the conduct and practice of journalism (cf. Cheruiyot, 2018; Holt & von Krogh, 2010; Joseph, 2011; Reese & Dai, 2009). Third, this digital audience criticism represents an "African-driven counter-narrative" (Nyabola, 2017, p. 114) with implications for the long-standing misunderstanding of African audiences as passive subjects of Western-dominated cultural production. Fourth, and related to the third, is how audiences reframe the coverage globally by imposing their self-image (Gallagher, 2015) and offering alternative representations.

This study proposes that through media criticism as a form of metajournalistic discourse of global news media, audiences in the Global South not only evaluate and assess the journalistic practices of Western media but also impose a self-image of how they should be represented. In doing so, these audiences position themselves as key external actors in the production of content by news organizations that claim legitimacy as global media. In that sense, our study treats this media criticism as "conversations" or "narratives" through which news journalism is "rethought, circulated, and contested" (Carlson, 2016, p. 363), a perspective that seeks to broaden the discursive framework through which news audiences understand international news.

Media criticism, shaped by social media discussions, spotlights international news production by showing how Western news media may fail to abide by the journalistic norms and values through which they legitimize themselves. In his study of media-critical blogs, Cooper (2006), argues that media critics "often point out what they see as deficiencies in the factual accuracy of mainstream media reporting, and that the viewpoints of these journalistic outsiders can be of value to the reasoned and constructive public discussion of issues and events" (p. 22). Cooper therefore proposes a typology for assessing media criticism (see Table 1) based on normative journalistic principles.

His typology has four categories of media criticism: accuracy, framing, agenda setting/gatekeeping, and journalistic practices (Cooper, 2006). The typology is useful in assessing whether media criticism corresponds to key issues that shape and define journalistic practice and therefore can be helpful in understanding what "good journalism" means to audiences (cf. Cheruiyot, 2018).

Contextualization, for instance, is largely a matter of news framing whereby facts or events are interpreted to fit into a normative framework of news reporting. In their analysis of the criticism of CNN by Chinese netizens through blogs such as anti-CNN.com, Reese and Dai (2009) conclude that the main issues motivating audiences were the decontextualization of coverage, resulting in a biased view of China. The issue of lack of context or "deculturalization" of news events in the non-Western world by international media is recurrent in studies of international news coverage (see Bunce et al., 2017; Moyo, 2011; Rane, Ewart, & Martinkus, 2014; Reese & Dai, 2009). Although they also point to other faults that

fall in the categories of accuracy, agenda-setting, and journalistic practices, the bulk of the scholarly criticism of Africa's coverage seems to focus on poor framing.

Table 1. Cooper's Genres of Media Criticism in the Blogosphere.

Categories of criticism	Description
Accuracy	Fact-Checking Descriptions
	Fidelity to Quotations
	Authenticity of Documents
	Interpretation of Statistics or Scientific Studies
	Trustworthiness of Memes
Framing	Disputing the Frame
	Reframing a Set of Facts
	Contextualizing
Agenda-Setting/Gatekeeping	Questioning News Judgement
	Setting an Alternative Agenda
Journalistic Practices	Newsgathering
	Writing and Editing
	Error Correction

Ample media-critical discourses surround the representation of Africa in Western news media (Brookes, 1995; Gallagher, 2015; Hawk, 1992; Kalyango, 2011; Nothias, 2016). These criticisms have provided numerous tools and findings to understand misrepresentations of Africa even though research has tended to focus on U.S. and UK media and mainly broadsheet newspapers (Scott, 2015). However, research has largely focused on academic criticism, which is mostly metacriticism that "deals with conflicts, structural inequities, ideological implications and negative moral consequences of media, as a part of modern culture and society" (Holt & von Krogh, 2010, p. 288). As a result, the literature has often failed to identify criticism of international news from other perspectives, most significantly everyday audiences.

Numerous studies argue that Western media coverage of disasters, conflicts, and crises perpetuates a framing of the continent as hopeless (see Scott, 2015). Whether a consequence of racism (Fair, 1993), the cultural reproduction of tropes and stereotypes (Hawk, 1992), parachute journalism (Wolter, 2006), a lack of cultural nuances on the part of journalists (Ebo, 1992), and/or the interplay of editorial choices and production constraints, this framing has largely been denounced both within and outside academia (see, for example, Adichie, 2009; Wainaina, 2006). One of the consequences of this coverage is the reproduction of Afro-pessimism, that is, a racist discourse with colonial roots that negatively impacts the dignity and humanity of Africans, local and international policy responses to political and humanitarian crises, and the economic development of the continent (Bunce et al., 2017; de B'béri & Louw, 2011; Nothias, 2014; Schorr, 2011).

The role of Western media has been the subject of numerous studies in relation to global news flows and cultural globalization (see among others, Chouliaraki, 2008; Schorr, 2011). Here, scholars understand Western news networks such as CNN and the BBC as constituting "dominant media flows" (Thussu, 2007). These networks are further involved in promoting national images (Hawk, 1992)—whether through news and advertising—and their coverage matters to the extent that some African governments spend millions of dollars on public relations firms to counteract or reinforce the image portrayed by these media. Although Western global news has increasingly been challenged by contra-flows such as Al-Jazeera and China's CCTV (Bunce et al., 2017; Figenschou, 2014), Western news organizations remain significantly influential on the continent (Anke & Marie-Soleil, 2016).

Against this backdrop, a new wave of research has started to shed light on the emergence and establishment of more "positive" representations of Africa in international media. From the "constructive journalism" of Chinese media (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2018) and the decline of negative news (Bunce, 2017), to the neoliberal discourse of Africa Rising in news magazines (Nothias, 2014) and positive humanitarian communication (Wright, 2018), these studies signal that a broader range of representations are currently at play in international media. In addition to inscribing the analysis in this call for scholars to focus critically on newer representational phenomena, our study also seeks to follow the lead of Willems and Mano (2017), Flamenbaum (2017), and Wahutu (2017) in foregrounding the question of African agency in those processes.

In sum, three main points underpin our approach:

1. It is paramount to pay attention to African media critics and audiences. They are part of the conversations and narratives about journalism and international news that simultaneously construct counter-representations and a "self-image" (Gallagher, 2015).

2. Through media criticism on social media, there can be a sense of real or imagined power, whereby audiences in the Global South collectively challenge narratives from historically dominant centers of cultural productions.

3. It is important to consider *how* the criticism is done—its discursive strategies, the issues it criticizes, and voices it represents.

By analyzing digital media criticism rigorously, we aim to understand how the cultural practice of media criticism is shaped by peculiar social, historical, political, and economic contexts and how it can be entangled in both the exercise of power and resistance to it.

Research Questions and Methodology

Our empirical analysis seeks to answer the following three questions:

RQ1:   What forms does digital media criticism of international media take?

RQ2:   What alternative representations are constructed through the criticism?

RQ3:   What voices are uplifted and most visible in the process?

Our analysis focuses on the third wave of #SomeoneTellCNN following CNN's report ahead of Obama's visit, which Figure 1 suggests was the most significant in terms of global visibility.
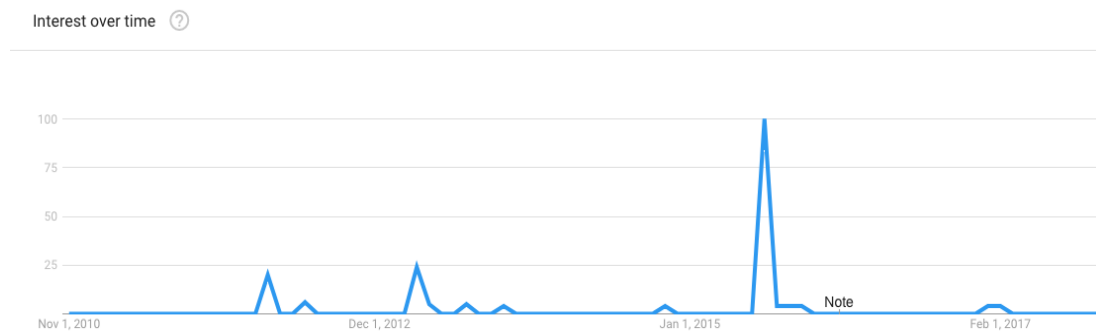

Figure 1. Popularity of the search term "SomeoneTellCNN" (2010–2017; Google Trends).

To retrieve the tweets, we used Mecodify, an open source tool developed as part of the Mecodem project ("Media, Conflict, and Democratisation"). Al-Saqaf (2016) offers a detailed explanation of how the platform retrieves Twitter data using both Twitter's Application Programming Interface (API) for results less than 7 days old and the web search method for older results. We conducted a search for all tweets that included #SomeoneTellCNN between July 21 and July 25, 2015. Accounting for all tweets and retweets, there was a total of 193,402 items; without accounting for retweets, the total was 51,208.

To develop a sample manageable for qualitative analysis, we focused on the most retweeted tweets. Retweets constitute a significant part of Twitter's "conversational ecology" and can provide an apt prediction of the reach of the feeds (boyd et al., 2010, p. 1). It is also the most popular form of engagement on the platform, before "Reply" and "Favorite." An initial sample that included the top 100 most retweeted tweets was created. In comparison with the overall number of tweets, this may seem small. However, when accounting for the retweets, those top 100 tweets constitute 56,693 posts (tweets and retweets), that is, 29% of the overall number of tweets and retweets (193,402). Our second sample included the top 100 most retweeted images. These accounted for 43,979 posts (tweets and retweets), which together represent 50% of all tweets and retweets with images (88,490). To put it plainly, both samples provide insights on the most popular content: The first

sample represents 29% of all the tweets circulating on the platform in the time frame using #SomeoneTellCNN, and the second sample represents 50% of all the tweets that included images.

The study employed a detailed textual analysis in examining and interpreting the samples. The development of coding categories was a multilayered process. We started with categories derived from the research questions. We then immersed ourselves in the data independently to see what categories worked and what discursive aspects of the tweets were not captured by these categories. In the end, we settled for an approach that was relatively flexible and aimed to balance prior questions with information emerging from the data. Some categories were largely unambiguous, whereas others were open ended. The latter led to more qualitative observations about discursive trends. Throughout the subsequent analysis section, we provide more information about these categories.

Figure 2 provides an overview of the unfolding of the Twitter conversation over time. In light blue is the total number of tweets and retweets per minute, reaching its peak of 4,209 tweets and retweets in one minute. In contrast, the deep green shows the total number of tweets (without counting retweets), which peaked at 124 tweets in one minute. The chart shows that it is the retweeting that gave the campaign its momentum and global visibility. In other words, the power of KOT to make #SomeoneTellCNN so visible worldwide relied on a critical mass of Twitter accounts retweeting, rather than a massive amount of original tweeting.
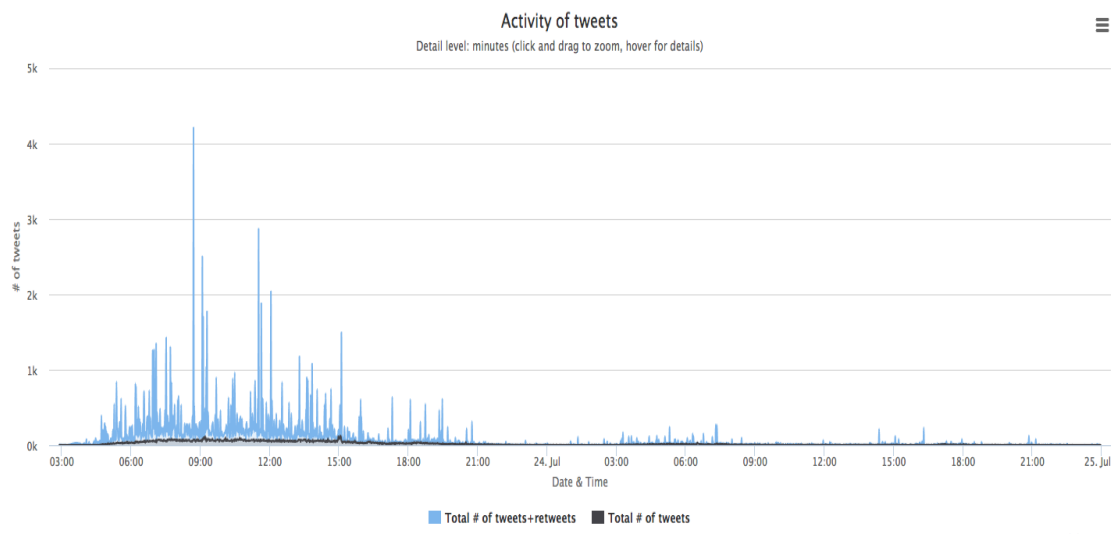

Figure 2. Activity of tweets using #SomeoneTellCNN (July 23–25, 2015).

Findings

Media Criticism

Our analysis starts by looking at the nature of the media criticism at play: What exactly did KOT oppose? What criticism strategies did they use? What was their call to action?

First, we were interested in assessing if the campaign broadened criticism of CNN to Western media more generally in our first sample (Table 2). In addition to the reference to CNN in the initial hashtag, CNN and its reporters or anchors were mentioned in 87 tweets. The BBC and "global media" appeared thrice and twice, respectively, in our sample, whereas "Western media" and local media (Daily Nation, Capital FM, and Kiss 100) were referenced once.

Table 2. Number of Mentions of Groups of Media or Outlets.

Group mentioned	No. of mentions
CNN	87
BBC	3
Global media	2
Western media	1
Daily Nation	1
Capital FM	1
Kiss 100	1

To analyze the media criticism manifested here, we used Cooper's (2006) typology of criticisms of news journalism. Of a total of 100 tweets coded, criticism (where a form of judgment or evaluation was made in relation to CNN reports) was existent in 93 tweets. The remaining seven tweets did not contain any critical content, but mostly news about the use of #SomeoneTellCNN. A broad qualitative appreciation of the most retweeted tweets suggests that the main issue at stake was one of framing. The most prominent issues seemed to emphasize a lack of contextualization, bias, negativity, and sensationalistic approach to news. In contrast, issues of accuracy, journalistic practices, and gatekeeping seemed much less prominent. This tendency aligns with academic criticism of Western journalism for decontextualization or deculturalization in coverage of Africa (Hawk, 1992).

A variety of strategies were used, including reverse rhetoric, humor, taunts, mockery, direct condemnations, corrections, counterstatements, and threats (see Table 3 for a typology). Humor and sarcasm were certainly a part of the response to CNN. For instance, the channel was routinely described with the playful pun "hotbed of errors" in response to the initial "terror hotbed" headline. But the typology implies that humor was one of several rhetorical devices through which KOT expressed their exasperation.

A total of 11% of the tweets contained demands in response to CNN reports. More precisely, those asked CNN to apologize for its reporting, change the headline, address the questions and criticisms raised by KOT, and/or, more generally, for the channel to improve its journalistic standards:

> #SomeoneTellCNN they need to change their strapline. Poor in storytelling..extremely poor in Geography! (July 23, 2015)

> Dear #KOT RT this until @CNNAfrica apologises for this stupid /ratchet headline about Kenya. (July 23, 2015)

Overall, Twitter critics employed a variety of strategies to point out journalistic deficiencies in the network's coverage. Their media criticism contained relatively few generalizations to other Western media, relied only partly on humor, primarily challenged CNN's framing of Kenya, and, in several cases, called for some form of response from the network.

Table 3. Typology of Criticism Strategies Used With #SomeoneTellCNN.

Strategy	Example of tweet
Condemnation	#SomeoneTellCNN they have their own agenda in bringing Africa down. If you have nothing to report we'll help you. You won't derail our vision. (July 23, 2015)
Correction	Dear CNN, It would be prudent to note that we are not a backward banana republic but a highly informed & analytical nation. #SomeoneTellCNN. (July 23, 2015)
Counterstatement	#SomeoneTellCNN that Kenya is a blessed land and is the cradle of mankind. #MagicalKenya #GES2015Kenya #KaribuKenya. (July 23, 2015)
Humor	#SomeoneTellCNN that the last time a Kenyan made a bed hot, it produced a U.S. president. (July 23, 2015).
Mockery	#SomeoneTellCNN Here is the real terrorist that has 'terrorised' you for decades, our heroes! The athletics. (July 23, 2015)
Questions	#SomeoneTellCNN OPINION—MURIMI: Is CNN's Barbara Starr a 'hotbed of ignorance'? (July 23, 2015)
Reverse rhetoric	As a black man, Obama is statistically more likely to be shot at in the U.S. than in Kenya #SomeoneTellCNN @CNN. (July 23, 2015)
Sarcasm	RT @A_Musungu: #SomeoneTellCNN the only hot things we have in our beds are our women. (July 23, 2015)
Taunt	#SomeoneTellCNN Our wild animals are friendlier than them. (July 23, 2015)
Threat/ultimatum	Dear CNN, You are accountable to a wide global audience & sensational/irresponsible headlines will be called out. #KOT #SomeoneTellCNN. (July 23, 2015)

Media Representations

We now approach the data in relation to questions of media representations by first assessing the connections between criticisms of media portrayals of Kenya and other African countries. The focus will then shift to the kinds of alternative representations the campaign constructed. Of the 100 most retweeted tweets, eight made references to "Africa" more generally or to other African countries. These links had three functions:

1. *Criticize the negativity in covering Kenya in connection to Africa's coverage more broadly*. Most of those (four tweets) linked the focus on negativity in covering Kenya to a broader pattern in media coverage Africa. For instance, Kenyan businessman Chris Kirubi (@CKirubi), in the third most popular tweet, writes, "SomeoneTellCNN they have their own agenda in bringing Africa down. If you have nothing to report we'll help you. You won't derail our vision."

2. *Remind audiences of past gaffes committed by CNN in covering Africa*. Three of the eight tweets referred to CNN's past mistakes in reporting Africa. For instance, the leading Kenyan newspaper *Daily Nation* tweeted, "MISINFORMED! Six times that CNN has goofed while reporting about Africa" and linked to an article that listed several past blunders from CNN, including a report that confused Tanzania for Uganda on a map.

3. *Showcase a positive image of Kenya and Africa*. One tweet shared various images of beautiful natural landscapes and stated "the Kenya western media will never show you!" while proclaiming "#SomeoneTellCNN that we love Africa." In that sense, this tweet was part of an effort to reclaim and reframe Kenya's image in relation to Africa's image by echoing a campaign that trended a few weeks before under the hashtag #TheAfricaTheMediaNeverShowYou (Steeves, 2016).

Generally, however, the Twitter conversation was concerned with the specific Kenyan context more than it was explicitly engaged in a Pan-African discussion over representations. Throughout, a significant discursive dynamic at stake involved promoting alternative representations of Kenya. A total of 31% of the 100 most retweeted tweets and 48% of the 100 most retweeted images put forward alternative representation of Kenya. Here, we identified three clusters of themes: (1) Kenya as a place of wonderful wilderness, landscapes, and wildlife; (2) Kenya as a place of modernity; and (3) national identity defined by values of success, solidarity, and peace.

Kenya as a Place of Wonderful Wilderness, Landscapes, and Wildlife

From pictures of giraffes in front of the Kilimanjaro,[3] to White tourists in Jeeps encountering leopards, to luxury resorts, these tweets reproduced a well-known image of the country as a tourist

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[3] Although Kilimanjaro is in Tanzania, it can be seen from Kenya's Amboseli National Park.

destination, most notably for safaris (see Figure 3). Pictures of or references to wildlife were found in 17 of the 100 most retweeted tweets and in 20 of the 100 most retweeted images.
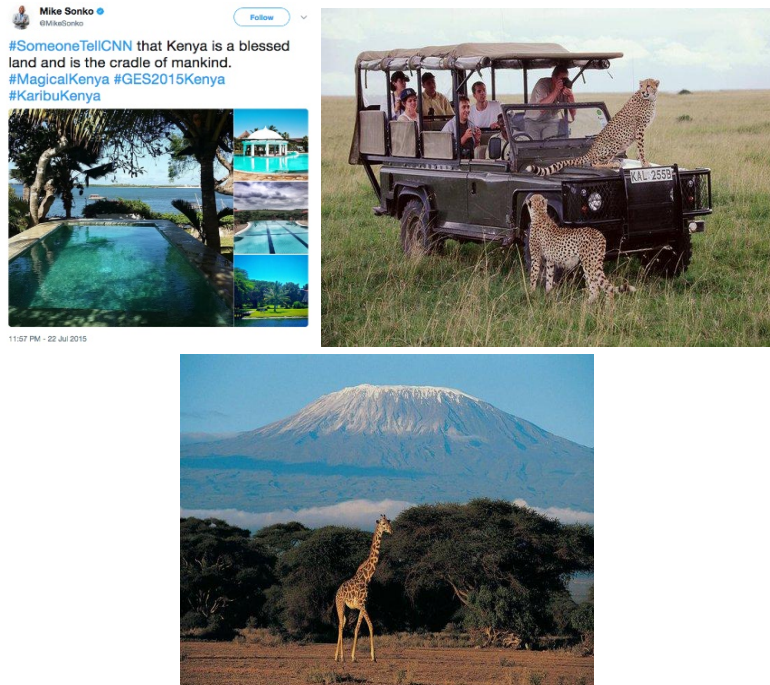

Figure 3. Popular images showcasing Kenya as a tourism destination.

Kenya as a Place of Modernity

This second cluster was communicated through a range of references to Kenya as the "Silicon Valley of Africa" and as a "hotbed of investment opportunities"—a linguistic subversion of the "hotbed" expression initiated by Chris Kirubi and subsequently reused by President Kenyatta and Obama, who described Kenya in their speeches as a hotbed "of vibrant culture, spectacular natural beauty and wonderful people" and "of innovation"—and through images of urban landscapes, including new roads, suburban housing, and airports. References to KOT and their ability to call out CNN publicly in social media also contributed to this theme, for instance, through a widely shared map showing Kenya as a hub of connectivity (see Figure 4).
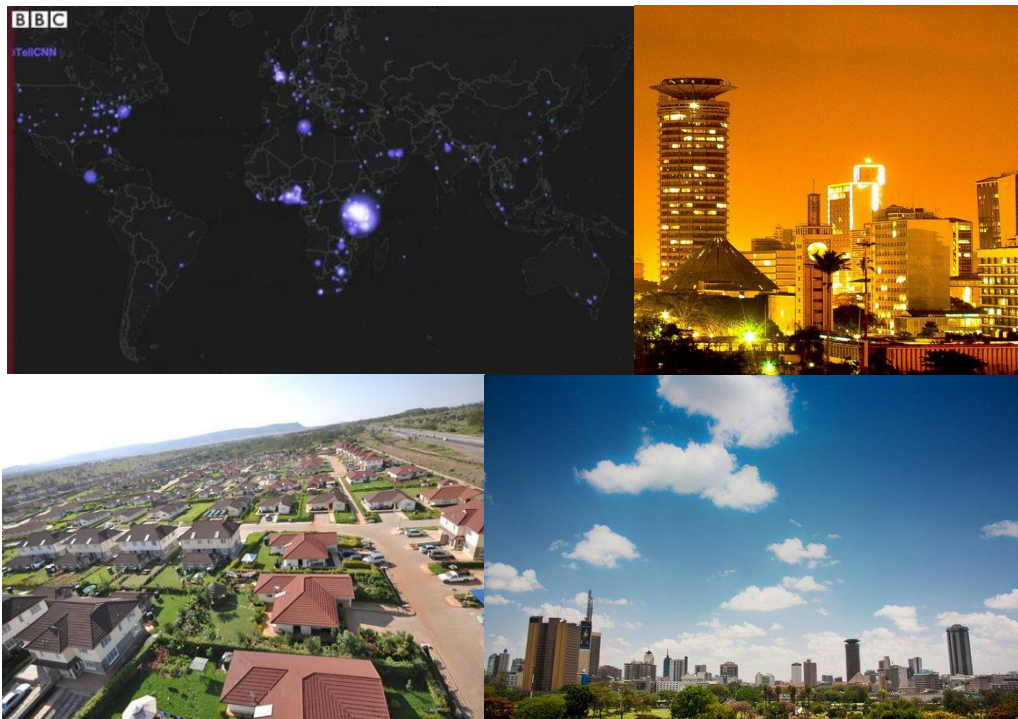
Figure 4. Popular images showcasing Kenya as place of modernity.

National Identity Defined by Values of Success, Solidarity, and Peace

This last cluster includes, for instance, references to Kenya's success in athletics, as communicated through photos of athletes or TV screenshots of athletics competition ranking (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Popular images showcasing Kenya's athletic success and highlighting a national culture of kindness.

The third most retweeted image showed a Kenyan runner helping a disabled Chinese runner to drink water, an action that led her to slow down and lose first position and a $10,000 cash prize (see Figure 5). Various tweets used this picture to showcase Kenya as a nation that favors solidarity and "kindness in midst of competition." This notion of a charitable nation was further reinforced by references to Kenya as a "Nest of God," "God's chosen nation," and "blessed land." The Kenyan flag was also a recurring signifier in communicating a sense of nationhood, such as in pictures of models wearing Kenya-branded clothing (see Figure 6). Against CNN's description of the country as a hotbed of terror, various users argued that Kenya was peaceful, as could be seen with its 2013 presidential election.

Figure 6. Popular images communicating passion for the Kenyan flag.

Overall, in terms of representation, the impact of the Twitter conversation was to denounce CNN's coverage and counter it with those positive images of the country as a place of wonderful nature, modernity, success, solidarity and peace.

Voices

Finally, we turn to the digital actors and voices that shaped the campaign. We sought to understand which voices were most influential and publicly elevated through and by the campaign. This simple question relates to the broader issues of the politics of voice and power—who is being heard, who isn't, and why?—that are central to scholarly debates about digital empowerment and to the postcolonial critique of Africa's media image.

We were interested in contributions by the most popular participants to the pool of text and images that served as a response to CNN. To examine this influence, we employed the Mecodify analytical tool for data related to users whose tweets were retweeted the most—that is, users who were the most visible and influential in shaping the discursive terrain of #SomeoneTellCNN.

These users were prominent Nairobi-based personalities and institutions with known influence in politics, media, business, and Kenyan society (Figure 7). Taken together, these users were retweeted

32,397 times—which amounts to about 16% of the overall content. The most retweeted user was Kenyan media owner Chris Kirubi, with 7,007 retweets, followed by former celebrity news anchor and corporate executive Julie Gichuru (5,295). Other influential individuals in Kenyan media, business, and/or politics were Gina Din, who owns a leading PR company (retweeted 2,120 times); Christopher Kirwa (2,356), a corporate leader; Kenyan bloggers Thee Trend Setter (retweeted 4,483 times) and Cyprian, Is Nyakundi (2,874 times); and Nairobi City County's Senator Mike Sonko (1,677 times). Last, a leading local radio (Nation FM, 2,516) and an international media outlet (BBC Africa, 2,231) were also among those most retweeted.
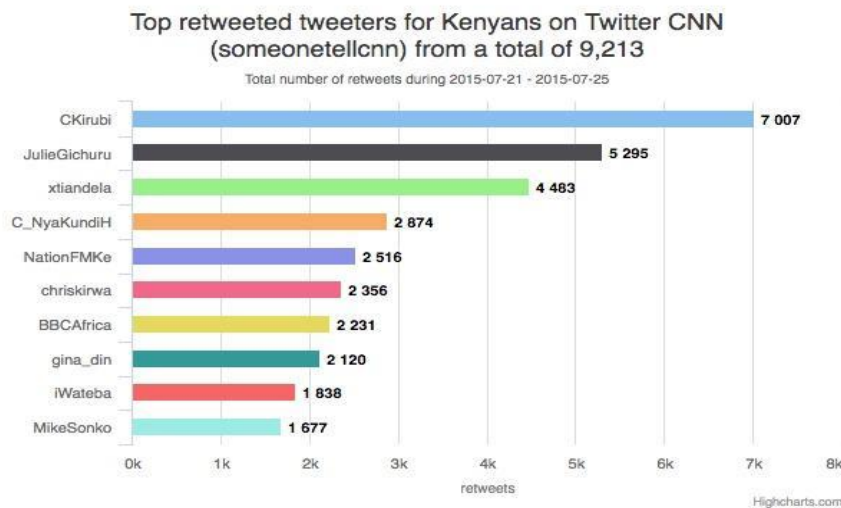

Figure 7. Distribution of retweets of the top 10 most retweeted Twitter users.
(Source: Mecodify)

With the exception of BBC Africa, the most retweeted users (Figure 7) had Nairobi as their self-reported geolocation. Although only partially reliable, the self-reported geolocation here nonetheless suggests the centrality of Nairobi for the campaign. Of the 100 most retweeted tweets, we found that 54 users reported being based in "Nairobi," five in other parts of the country (Busia, Hola, Mombasa, Nakuru, and Kericho), and seven in "Kenya."

Finally, we checked for bots in our first sample of 100 most retweeted tweets. We used a machine-learning algorithm—Botometer—created by researchers at Indiana University and the University of Southern California. Botometer extracts more than 1,000 features about an account to determine how it scores on a scale from 0 to 5. The closer to 5, the more likely the account is automated. In our sample, the highest scores we found were 3.2 (1 account), 2.3 (1 account), 1.8 (1 account), and 1.3 (2 accounts). All the other accounts scored below 1. Although this suggests a low level of bot activity, this finding is limited to the sample of 100 most retweeted tweets. An analysis of all the data would likely yield different results, in light of recent findings estimating that around two-thirds of tweeted links to popular websites on Twitter are posted by bots (Wojcik, Messing, Smith, Rainie, & Hitlin, 2018).

Overall, the Twitter conversation contributed to frontload and uplift Kenyan voices, and the overwhelming majority of those were media savvy, socially and economically privileged, Nairobi-based Kenyan elites. It should be noted here that the total population in Kenya is around 50 million, and the metropolitan area of Nairobi is around 6.5 million, so there is a clear discrepancy in online representation and visibility. From businessmen and journalists to bloggers and politicians, these actors who had a discursive influence in challenging CNN belonged to a social group representing a specific part of Kenyan society.

Discussion

This article aimed to fill a gap in the literature on international media representations of Africa: how audiences within the continent react to global media narratives that involve them. The analysis reveals the range of discursive strategies used by KOT to express their discontent with CNN's framing of Kenya. We argued that scholars should understand these strategies as constituting a metajournalistic discourse through which nonjournalistic actors construct and challenge norms of journalistic practices and values. As highlighted by the nascent literature on KOT, this phenomenon is enabled on a global scale through social media. Moreover, it is starting to affect norms and practices of international journalists and news organizations that are increasingly attentive to globalizing audiences (Franks, 2010; Nothias, 2017)—in this case, to the point of flying a senior executive to apologize to state representatives.

The analysis also challenges a reductive and one-sided optimistic account of social media empowerment. In fact, our analysis of the tweets revealed a significantly more complex and ambivalent picture. Although humor was part of the discursive strategies used for this media criticism, KOT also expressed their dissatisfaction using anger, exasperation, and condemnation. In addition, a significant part of the content sought to create an alternative image of Kenya. This positive image presented Kenya as a place of wonderful landscapes and wildlife; as a place of modernity, entrepreneurship, and innovation; and as a place with a strong sense of national identity characterized by moral values of resilience, solidarity, and peace.

These dual representations of nature and modernity resemble an image of Kenya championed by the country's political and corporate elites. It is telling, for instance, that the hashtag most widely used in conjunction with #SomeoneTellCNN and #KOT was #MagicalKenya (4,803 occurrences), the official tagline of Kenya's Tourism Board. In that sense, our analysis finds digital media criticism to be entangled with the commercial nationalism observed by Tuwei and Tully (2017). Indeed, the images promoted by Safaricom are in many ways similar to those we found in #SomeoneTellCNN: Kenya as peaceful and safe for tourism, culturally vibrant, digitally connected, economically growing, and conducive to investment (Tuwei & Tully, 2017). Through this discursive alignment, these representations are involved in a process of nation branding aimed largely at attracting foreign investors and tourists, and thus entangled in a neoliberal logic of global competitiveness related to a broader discourse of Africa Rising (Nothias, 2014).

Seen in this light, the results about the voices are less surprising: Those that were uplifted and that set the discursive agenda were those of digitally connected and economically advantaged Nairobians. Although #SomeoneTellCNN can be seen as a contra-flow from the Global South, we must also question whether CNN's international relevance might have been reinforced in the process. By calling on CNN to be

a beacon of fair reporting for Kenya and by leading to welcome in the country an executive from the network like an official from a foreign state delegation, the campaign held CNN as a legitimate actor in constructing national narratives more than it called, for instance, for the growth of Kenyan or pan-African news networks able to challenge those representations globally.

In sum, such digital media criticism has two sides that ought to be understood dialectically. On the one hand, it contributes to challenging the unequal distribution of power in global media narratives. On the other hand, this criticism is implicated in broader discourses of nation branding, consumerism, and nationalism that cement peculiar political and economic hegemonies within the Kenyan context. Such a dialectic is reminiscent of Willems' (2015) analysis of Zimbabwe and British media, whereby the stereotypical reporting of Zimbabwe in British media would serve as a basis for former President Mugabe to both demonize British media on the global scale and reinforce his hegemonic position nationally. In any case, the entanglement of these two aspects calls for reconsidering narratives of digital empowerment that have become fashionable vis-à-vis the African context. Echoing the arguments emerging from more recent studies of social media in Africa (Bosch, 2016; Bosch et al., 2018; Willems & Mano, 2017), we hope this research will inspire future studies to engage more deeply with the dialectics of digital empowerment and to examine more rigorously the interplay of global and local power relations in which digital practices are embedded.

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