

## Global News: Examining the Determinants and Imbalance in News Flow in the Global North and South

Christian Uzoma Igwe<sup>1</sup>, Nyerhovwo Muoboghare<sup>2</sup>, Lilian Chidinma Mokwunye<sup>3</sup>, Emmanuel John Abah<sup>4</sup>, Moses Chukwudi Ihiaeme<sup>5</sup>, Cordelia Omonigho Okpodu-Philip<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Delta State University of Science and Technology, Ozoro, Delta State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Mass Communication, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

<sup>3</sup>Department of Creative Arts, Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria

<sup>4</sup>Department of Computer Science, Margaret Lawrence University, Abuja, Nigeria

<sup>5</sup>Department of Mass Communication, Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku, Delta State, Nigeria

<sup>6</sup>Department of Library and Information Science, Delta State University of Science and Technology, Ozoro, Delta State, Nigeria

### Abstract

Concerned by the uneven flow of global news, scholars wonder why some countries or regions are more prominent in global news flow than others. This constant representation of a country, or group of countries, in global news reportage has significantly put them on a higher pedestal when compared to other countries in relation to news worthiness. This study examined the lopsidedness in global news flow from the developed to developing countries and how it portrays African countries and other developing countries before the world. The study adopted Content Analysis method as research tool for quantifying and analysing the various areas reported by six electronic media stations namely: CNN, BBC, Euronews, Aljazeera, Channels TV (Nigeria) and SABC (South Africa), which were presented in tables. Aside the last two, the others are America, Europe and Qatar based cable satellite television stations respectively. Key determinants of news worthiness such as economic, political, military, violence, natural disaster, religion and population which account for over 80% of the variance of a country's prominence in global news, and how they frame the image and identity of countries as positive, negative or neutral by focusing on specific events, were examined. The study also examined the attempt by Africa, Asia and Latin America to counter the imbalance in global news flow through the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) and the resistance to NWICO by the United States and Britain. Findings revealed that conflicts and regional instability are characteristic of the reportage on the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Africa by foreign television stations, and this make them negatively prominent in the global news stage. The study recommends among others the prioritization of technological development among African States specifically in the media sector so as to counter the narrative being churned out by Western media.

### Keywords

Global News, News Flow, News Worthiness, News Determinants, Globalization



### I. Introduction

Global news flows is also referred to as international news flows which is a field of study that concerns itself with news coverage of activities around the world. It deals with how news is transmitted from one country to the other. This is because international news is a major way to learn about the out-side world, hence it is referred to as international

communication, which can also be referred to as global communication. Nwabueze (as cited in Guanah, 2018) avows that it remains communication across frontiers, which involves the exchange of information and ideas between and across nations; it is the dissemination of and access to information across countries.

The study of global news sometimes examines why certain regions or countries are more news worthy than the others and also why a particular type of news information is prominent in certain areas and less of prominence in other regions. For instance wars, diseases, poverty, political instability, corruption etc are sometimes the dominant news items reported by Western media about Africa, Latin American and the Middle East which are referred in this study as the Peripheries.

In the study of global news flow, it is sometimes the case that economic and military dominance play a leading role in the news worthiness of a country. Added to this, is political stability due to sound democratic process. Media activities thrive more effectively in stable democracies than in totalitarian regimes and this accounts for why there are more international news agencies in advanced democracies than in countries that are totalitarian. Population size is also a determinant as it creates opportunity for commercial activities (Guanah, 2020).

Western countries, which are referred in this study as Core especially the United States and the European Union are the dominant forces in global news flow because of the advance media technology and economic prominence in the world. To Guanah (2018):

the conventional mass media and the Internet are the vehicles with which global communication are conveyed, however, at present, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are the major and most effective and liberal means of engaging in international communication, and for the perpetuation of globalisation (p. 23).

Scholars of African, Asian and Latin American extractions have had to agitate for equal representation in global news flow around the world as against the dominance of Western news outlets in content dissemination which they perceived as media imperialism. This agitation gave rise to New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in 1970s and (1980s) espoused by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Despite the effort by NWICO in trying to achieve a global media balance, African leaders must embrace the initiative to develop their communication technology particularly in a globally competitive environment.

## **II. Review of Literature**

### **2.1 The Free Flow of Information Model**

The study has two major proponents with each advancing his argument for the position they hold. The Core, that is, Western countries are of the view that information must not be restricted. The Free Flow of Information model is concerned with the unrestricted exchange of ideas and knowledge across regional and international boundaries, ensuring the availability of information without obstruction or censorship (Guanah, 2024).

It is an attempt to account for the degree of access to information as well as the independence of media outlet from any interference in the process of and distribution of information. Employing the Free flow of information model, Pludowsky (2005) sited in Alao et. al, (2013 p.23) says that the free flow of information doctrine assisted the West in

advertising and marketing their goods in foreign markets, and ensuring continuing influence of Western media on global markets, and in strengthening the West in its ideological battle with the Soviet Union (Russia). Igwe (2022), notes that the free flow of information theory was put forward as a reaction, from the West on the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO).

Free flow of information is viewed by some scholars particularly of the developing countries as machinery for capitalist expansion and they further contend that the free flow of information theory was supported by the media-rich nations in order to dissuade others from erecting barriers which will in turn obstruct news gathering in a free market economy. Opponents of free flow of information argue that it helps to ensure the never-ending and, unreciprocated influence of western media on global market (Guanah, 2022).

Again, since, media contents originate more from media-rich nations, the information structure and intent are likely to be defined according to the needs and ideologies of these media-rich nations (Western countries). The Core hinged their position on the free flow of information arguing that there should be no restriction to freedom of speech. On the contrary, African and Latin American scholars are of the view that global news flow is one-sided and what that amounts to is domination by the Western countries through their media outlets. In a nutshell, African scholars maintained that this process only amounts to media imperialism by Western nations (Guanah, 2024). This model is relevant to the study because it is the bedrock upon which the liberty for content distribution by the Core (West) is hinged on.

## **2.2 Representation and Ideology in News**

Representation is the manner in which the media portray a particular person, a group of people, country, a community, event, experience, product, idea or topic. Underneath such news item or media content is the particular ideology that underscore the intention of the content creator or who they represent. Ideology is produced when the media consistently frames an idea in a manner that connotes bias in its narrative about an experience, a person or a group of people (Guanah, 2022). Representation of dominant cultures, military might, and economic strength of some western countries by the media in media-rich countries, no doubt creates a sense of prominence in the comity of nations. When such narrative is also repeatedly transmitted over and over again through the media, it is capable of forming a permanent impression in the minds of viewers about the group, event or person (Nwafor et al., 2024).

On the other hand, ideology is denoted as a belief system or world view held by a person or a group about a particular thing, event or people. For instance, the United States of America and the United Kingdom pride themselves as the beacon of democracy and as such they strongly believe that the spread of democracy across the world is largely hinged on a free flow of information. Framing is a critical aspect in ideology formation process (Guanah et al., 2023). In today's media saturated environment, ideology is created through the media through different frames, for example sanctioning autocratic governments, military invasion of weak states by powerful countries like the United States, under the pretext of restoring democracy and world order can be described as subliminal attempt to frame such powerful nations as defenders of world peace.

Furthermore Roger Tatarian, former vice-president of United Press International (UPI), avers that the imbalance inherent in international information and news flow is traceable to the military, economic and political power at play in media-rich regions like the western world. As events unfold, It becomes more evident to the developing world (periphery) that the western domination of the system of control of information is not

beneficial but later unhealthy to their growth given that this one-way flow of information inevitably reflects only the point of view, mentality, values and interests of these developed nations (Ochs, 1986; Aondover et al., 2025).

Most notably, they saw also repressive act of the western world where the major western media elevate and treat the cultures of the industrialized nations as superior and position them at the zenith of this imaginary hierarchy, while the cultures of the developing nations are considered uncivilized; thus rated low and placed at the bottom of the hierarchy (Einer, 1965). For instance, western journalists see Africa as one country without recourse to the different units (Countries) which make up the African continent.

Western writers view the continent of Africa as a crocodile-infested dark continent where jungle life has perpetually eluded civilization (Tokunbo, 2000, Onwutalobi, 2011). Such misrepresentations and imbalance in the inter-national news flow became a huge debate for African and Latin American scholars in developing countries hence, there was a burning desire for a radical overhaul of the present international information system to a new information order where free flow of information will be equitable and balanced (Onwutalobi, 2011; Aondover et al., 2025). Researchers in the developing countries needed a system of world communication which impartially reflects and embraces the diversity and equality of all human races in a just and more beneficial way to the whole community of mankind. It was against this backdrop that the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) debate was born in the 1970s and 1980s (Tokunbo, 2000)

### **2.3 New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO)**

In a bid to stem the growing imbalance in global news flow from developed countries to developing countries, and the persistent Western media coverage of negative events such as hunger, conflicts, military coup d'états and disasters in the African continent, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) set up a commission chaired by Nobel laureate, Sean Mcbride in the 1970s and early 1980s. The body which was later known as the Mcbride Commission was to recommend a solution to the global news flow imbalance and misrepresentation of the developing world like Africa (Aondover et al., 2023). The NWICO raised the following issues:

- (a) Global news which reflects news agencies priorities.  
Most of the media products are but a reflection of the Western media agencies and such global news is disseminated based on the priorities of these powerful media products creators which are based in developed countries.
- (b) To curtail the imbalance in the flow of media product from the developed world to the developing countries.
- (c) The impropriety among advertising agencies which indirectly portrays developing countries as less equal to the developed world.
- (d) To address satellite broadcasting of television signals into developing countries without permission. Most developed countries broadcast events and other media product which may constitute security, and cultural risks to sovereign developing countries.

However, “the outcome of the NWICO debate did not go without stiff resistance from the West led by the United States and Britain who accused UNESCO of encouraging censorship, State control of the Press, licensing of journalists by the State and an obstruction of free flow of global news”.

## 2.4 Globalisation and National Media Culture

Researchers particular of African extraction have always worried about the influence of media expansion on national cultures. This worry is further heightened given the role that technology plays in advancing the communication media ecosystem (Igwe, 2022). The fear of cultural erosion, unfair competition in content creation and distribution among nation states and the stifling of local media among others are some of the “legitimate” fears that opponents of media globalization constantly churn out in defence of their position (Aliyu et al., 2023). They also argue that media globalization can undermine the political configurations of some weaker states in the international community (Aondover, 2024).

The underlying notion of this argument is the concept of the hypodermic needle model which is based on the assumption that media content creates enormous effects on audiences and that the latter only consume passively whatever is churn out to them (Yar’Adua et al., 2023). However, there are some who argue against the assumption that media globalization, technologies and media texts have effect on people’s behaviour, so it is also claimed that they (media technologies) determine how people behave (Hollows, 2016).

National media culture particularly as portrayed by Nollywood contents in Nigeria and across regional boundaries challenges the assumption that media globalization is leading to the collapse of individual and national media culture (Aondover et al., 2024). Nollywood has been in the forefront in promoting local cultures through contents that evoke traditional African values, beliefs and local ethos (Aondover & Aondover, 2023). Furthermore, advocates of media globalization are of the view that most foreign cultures being transmitted through the media are being “domesticated” in the Nigerian movie industry; thus, acting as linkage between Nigeria culture and foreign culture. The question that arises is: if the so-called foreign movies/cultures are eroding the Nigeria culture, how is it possible that Nigerian movies and music with local contents are popular in other (Hile et al., 2023).

African countries and beyond the shores of the African continent as many have observed? The answer to this question is somewhat articulated by Ekeanyanwu, et al. (2009), as they observe that one of the positive effects of globalization is the cross reference of culture that it promotes around the world. Notwithstanding, some scholars equally hold that media globalization and the international culture flows may come with some attendant consequences particularly on national culture (Idris & Msughter, 2022).

## 2.5 Media and Cultural Imperialism

Cultural imperialism and its implications must not be overlooked in a hurry as the potential for culture erosion due to contact with a more influential media-rich nations is real. This is why Schiller (1976) notes that the sum process by which a society is brought into the modern ( U.S.– cantered) world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centres of the system (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019).

The public media are the foremost example of operating enterprises that are used in the penetrative process. For penetration on a significant scale the media themselves must be captured by the dominating/penetrating power (Yar’Adua et al., 2023). This occurs largely through the commercialisation of broadcasting. This position is further amplified by Boyd-Barrett (1977) as he defines media imperialism as a process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution or content of the media in any one country are singly or

together subject to substantial pressure from the media interests of any other country or countries without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022).

Among scholars, there appears to be a common position that media globalisation does impact cultures and further still, lead to media imperialism. Guanah (2024) opines that, even with the ‘independence’ most initially colonised countries got from their colonial masters decades back, the sign of colonialism still exists, especially in the imitation of the lifestyles of the latter who did everything within their power, when the colonialism lasted, to demonise, denigrate, and discard the culture and life styles of their colonised territories, and replace them with their ‘superior’ culture. In their study, Guanah and Dalung (2018) found that the erosion of our culture is being aided and perpetrated by the foreign media (social media inclusive), hence:

The media play a significant role in ensuring that culture is not only known, publicised, harnessed, understood and preserved for future generations but that it is used to foster unity among communities or nations since it is the holistic way of life of a people. The impact of the mass media on contemporary culture are so enormous because they have the ability to penetrate the homes and everyday lives of people anywhere in the world (p 225).

## **2.6 Global News Flow in the Core, Semi-Peripheries and Peripheries**

In this study, the Core refers to Western Industrialized countries like the United States and Western Europe. Semi-Peripheries refer to Eastern European countries and some Asia Countries while the Peripheries refer to Africa and other developing countries of the global South.

Herman and Mcchesney (1997) maintain that “in the postwar period the United States championed the notion of the ‘free flow of information’ as a universal principle... and used as an aggressive trade position on behalf of US media interests” (p. 17). The technological advancement of the Core gives them, especially the United States greater advantage over the Semi-Peripheries and the Peripheries as news flow becomes unidirectional - flowing from the Core to the peripheries. The Peripheries do not have the sophistication in digital and satellite broadcasting and this put them in a situation where they are not able to compete favourably with the Core in terms of global news coverage and dissemination (Msughter, 2019).

African and indeed Nigerian communication Scholars like Onwutolabi (2011) argues that “what has come to be known as the free flow of information at the present time is often, in fact one way rather than a true exchange of information.” This explains why most scholars of Nigeria extraction and other developing countries have attempted to engage the Core (Western nations) through different channels to address the issue of global news flow inequality. In retaliation, according to (Legum & Cornwell, 1978) cited in Onwutolabi (2011) the Core “has equally charged the developing world of seeking to obstruct the free flow of global news and insist to make no change in the information flow which they regard as a threat to the freedom to report, to print, and to broadcast news.”

It became obvious, that Western domination of global news flow and control by the core is not beneficial to the growth of the peripheries given the one-way flow of global news which inevitably reflects only the point of view, values and social assumptions of these developed nations (Vitalis et al., 2025). These gross misrepresentations and imbalance in the inter-national news flow was a big concern to the developing countries, therefore there was a burning desire for a radical overhaul of the present international

information system to a new information order where free flow of information will be equitable and balanced (Msughter & Pate, 2021). They wanted the world communication system to reflect the diversity and equality of all human races more just and more beneficial to the whole community of mankind. It was on this background that the New World Information and communication order (NWICO) debate was born. It was the greatest debates in the field of international communication in the 1970s and 1980s (Tokunbo, 2000). This inequality and imbalance in global news flow gave rise to the agitation for equitable and balanced information flow by the peripheries. It was on this backdrop that the NWICO emerged in 1970s and 1980s.

## **2.7 Global News Agencies and Determinants of Global News Flow**

With the spread of globalization, the international communication process has become one of “relatedness” that is, countries are becoming what they are today because of their interconnection and interdependence on each other for information, trade and cultural exchanges. The spread of globalization and the advancement in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have led to the creation of giant media agencies. These news agencies account for over 80% of the global news which are transmitted to the media houses that subscribe to them (Owens-Ibie & Aondover, 2024).

The five largest global news agencies are Agence France –Presse, (AFP) which was founded in 1835 by Louis Havas. The Associated Press (AP) was founded in 1848 by ten men representing six Newspapers in New York. The Reuter News Agency was founded by a German immigrant in London by the name Paul Julius Freiherr Von Reuter in 1851. In 1907, Scripps established the United Press International (UPI). The Information Telegraph Agency of Russia (ITAR) is another news agency which was established in 1904. According to Agba, (as cited in Asemah, 2011, p.164) “...all the transnational and international news agencies are located in the developed nations and this is in disfavor of Africa and other developing countries.”

The question that comes to mind is why are some countries more news worthy than others? According to Segev (2011) “it is widely accepted that the prominence of a foreign country in the news is attributed to variables like economic strength, political influence, religion, disaster/violence, military might, and so on. The US and Russia are the two biggest global military powers and this account for why they are always in the news wherever there is war in a region that may require military intervention or arms sales and who dominates in the geopolitics of the region (Msughter et al., 2023).

The study observed the different ways in which global news was reported by Cable News Network (CNN), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Euronews, Aljazeera, Channels TV and South Africa Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Each of these Stations’ contents was observed for about six hours every day within the space of six days while they broadcast between July 24<sup>th</sup> and November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The researchers observed that news was broadcast at the top of each hour and thirty minutes after the hour including “breaking news” (where necessary) and intermittent recap of headlines.

### III. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

The data gathered within the period of observation are presented in tabular form as seen below:

**Table 1.** Observation of CNN content carried out between 24<sup>th</sup> July - 24<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2024\*

News House	Duration of observation (hrs./day)	Event/ content Reported	Frequency in Percentage (100%)	Countries of events
CNN	6	Politics	50	Core-America, Europe, China
		Economy/Stock market	20	Core-America, Europe, China, Japan
		Technology	5	Core-America, Europe, China, Japan
		Violence in the mid-East/Africa, Eastern Europe	25	Israel, Palestine, Ukraine/Russia, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa
			100	

Source: Field Study, 2024

**Table 2.** Observation of BBC

News House	Duration of observation (hrs./day)	Event/content reported	Frequency in Percentage (100%)	Countries of Events
BBC	6	Politics	55	Core-UK, America Europe, China
		Economy/Stock market	25	Core-America, UK, Europe, China, Japan
		Technology	5	Core-America, UK, Europe, China, Japan
		Violence in the mid-East/Africa & Eastern Europe	15	Israel, Palestine, Ukraine/Russia, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa
			100	

Source: Field Study, 2024

**Table 3.** Observation of Euronews

News House	Duration of observation (hrs./day)	Event/content reported	Frequency in percentage (100%)	Countries of Events
Euronews	6	Politics	50	Core-UK, Europe, America, China
		Economy/Stock market	25	Core-America, UK, Europe, China, Japan
		Technology	10	Core-America, UK, Europe, China, Japan



		Violence in the mid-East/Africa, Eastern Europe	15	Israel, Palestine, Ukraine/Russia, Syria, Iraq, Afganistan, Africa
			100	

Source: Field Study, 2024

**Table 4.** Observation of Aljazeera

News House	Duration of observation (hrs./day)	Event/content reported	Frequency in percentage (100%)	Countries of Events
Aljazeera	6	Politics	50	Mid East, Core-America, Europe, China
		Economy/Stock market	10	Core-America, Europe, China, Japan
		Technology	5	Core-America, Europe, China, Japan
		Violence in the mid-East/Africa, Eastern Europe	35	Israel, Palestine, Ukraine/Russia, Syria, Iraq, Israel, Afganistan, Africa
			100	

Source: Field Study, 2024

**Table 5.** Observation of Channels TV

News House	Duration of observation (hrs./day)	Event/content reported	Frequency in percentage (100%)	Countries of Events
Channel Television	6	Politics	55	Nigeria, Core-America, Europe, China
		Economy/Stock market	10	Nigeria, Core-America, Europe, China,
		Technology	10	Nigeria, Core-America, Europe, China, Japan
		Violence in the mid-East/Africa, Eastern Europe	25	Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, Israel, Afganistan, Africa
			100	

Source: Field Study, 2024

**Table 6.** Observation of SABC

News House	Duration of observation (hrs./day)	Event/content reported	Frequency in percentage (100%)	Countries of Events
		Politics	50	South Africa, Core-

SABC	6			America, Europe, China
		Economy/Stock market	20	South Africa, Nigeria, America, Europe, China,
		Technology	10	South Africa, America, Europe, China, Japan
		Violence in the mid-East/Africa, Eastern Europe	20	Ukraine, South Africa, Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, Israel, Afghanistan,
			100	

**Source:** Field Study, 2024

### 3.2 Discussion of Findings

Table 1 above shows that in CNN broadcast, political matters which represents 50% of the total duration of the period in question, dominates both local and global news and the countries that are frequently mentioned are from the Northern hemisphere ( America, Europe) and great economic powers like China and Japan. On the economic front, 20% of the broadcast of CNN focuses on America, Europe and some Asian countries with the exception of African television stations prioritizing their own political news above that of the Core.

Global economy and market activities reportage are mainly from the Core and other leading economies like China and Japan, and not much is said of the African economy in Western media. In the area of violence reportage, the Middle East, African and Asia are prominent in the international media thus portraying Africa and some of the Mid-Eastern countries as violence ridden area.

The information obtained from Table 2 show that ‘politics’ dominates the reportage of the BBC with 55% when compared to other activities. The reportage on economy/stock market and technology has 25% and 5% respective. The areas where these events are reported from are mainly Europe, America and other economic power house like China and Japan. For Africa, Middle East, South East Asia, the reportage on violence, disease and other forms of unrest constitutes 15% of the entire broadcast for the period of observation. This is a reflection of the imbalance in news flow across the world.

Again, Table 3 reveals a lopsidedness of Western media coverage of events across the world. For the period of observation, the information obtained is as contained in the table and showed that 50% of the news on the Hour is on politics centred on United Kingdom, America, Europe, China, Japan and this is indicative of how Western Powers and media-rich nations are portrayed by the media. On issues of economy and stock market, Euronews has a coverage of 25% and 10% on technology. On the issue of violence, instability, Euronews was more focused on Israel, Palestine, Eastern Europe particularly on Russia/Ukraine.

Although Aljazeera is sometimes referred as the “Voice of the Middle East,” the information on Table 4 reveals that Aljazeera which is a Qatar - based international media outlet focuses more on the Middle East as expected hence, the high percentage of 50. The reportage on violence from the Middle East, particularly on Israel, Palestine, Africa, Russia/ Ukraine is also relatively high with about 35%.

Tables 5 and 6 are specifically African media outfits which focused more on local issues. For instance, the reportage on politics by Channels Television and SABC is 55% and 50% percent respectively. This is indicative of the desire to promote local content. On

the area of economy/stock market and technology, Channels Tv in Table 5 has coverage of 10% and 10% respectively and 25%. The findings and analyses reveal the imbalance in global news flow and this is as a result of a combination of several factors, which includes strong and developed media system, strong economy and stable political system in the global north, strong military, and which to a large extent are determinant of news worthiness.

#### IV. Conclusion

Global news flow has been a one-sided affair largely because of the powerful media agencies and media content creators. It is also due to technological advancement in media broadcasting in the Core, that is, the western countries and some advanced countries in Asia like China, Japan. The study also revealed that economic strength, political influence and stability, military might, religion and violence, social security play a leading role in the news worthiness of a country of region. The global news imbalance generated the NWICO debate which was geared toward establishing a new world order of “media equality” has made African and especially Nigerian scholars to agitating for a more equitable distribution between the Core and Peripheries. Finally, African governments must give priority to technology because in this modern and digital era no nation can develop without technology especially in the media sphere.

#### Recommendations

It is obvious from the stiff resistance by the Core to the proposal of NWICO, that Africa has a long way to go in terms of countering the imbalance in global news flow, precisely because of their (Core) technological advancement and satellite broadcasting. If African leaders and wealthy people could invest massively in information and communication technologies and in the human capital development on their people, it will go a long way in reducing the imbalance in news flow. This is what Qatar did and today Aljazeera is a global network. African scholars, political elites those in media advocacy could revisit the NWICO proposal and bring it up once again to the international community for fresh debate on it.

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