

# Countering Media Bias: The Role of Social Media Influencers in Reframing African Realities: A Content Analysis of Wode Maya's Videos

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## Abstract

This study aims to examine how Ghanaian YouTuber Wode Maya counters mainstream media bias by reframing African realities through digital storytelling, thereby contributing to media democratization and the decolonization of African narratives. Anchored in Agenda-Setting and Framing Theories, the study employed qualitative content analysis of nine videos published between 2017 and 2025. The analysis focused on identifying dominant themes, framing techniques, and counter narratives within Wode Maya's content. The findings revealed three overarching themes: heritage and identity, everyday innovations, and natural assets, collectively framed as "Reclaiming African Pride and Potential." Wode Maya's use of cinematic visuals, affirming language, and participatory storytelling reorients Africa's image from dependency to agency. His framing techniques such as visual grandeur, dialogic framing, and participatory tasting challenge deficit-based portrayals, foreground local voices, and foster Pan-African consciousness. The study's originality lies in its integration of Agenda-Setting and Framing Theories within a digital influencer context. It demonstrates how social media creators function as alternative media actors and presents an innovative framework for understanding how digital storytelling enables cultural reclamation, promotes authentic African representation, and supports the democratization of global media discourse.

**Keywords:** social media influencers; framing theory; agenda-setting; media bias; digital storytelling; African representation

## Introduction

For many years, the story of Africa in mainstream media has been told through a narrow lens, (Arendt, 2015; Arendt, 2023). One that places emphasis on poverty, conflict, underdevelopment, wars and diseases while neglecting the cultural heritage, natural wealth, resilience from colonial legacies, economic growth as well as the growth in the Governance and Democracy of the continent. Such portrayals do more than misinform global audiences and also damage the mind sets of Africans by making them develop inferiority complex, lowered self-worth and their views of society (Arendt, 2015; Arendt, 2023). This one-sided narrative has contributed to prejudice

against Africans that are difficult to shake. The motive of this study lies in the need to challenge these persistent negative narratives and with the rise of digital platforms such as YouTube, X and Instagram, Africans have been handed the power to reclaim the narrative and challenge these long-standing biases to tell their story differently (Carlsson, 2019); Ajaegbu, 2024). Making it necessary to study how social media influencers like Wode Maya, contribute to reframing African realities in the face of persistent media bias by applying Agenda-Setting Theory as well as Framing Theory in telling the African story in a positive light. Indeed, this research is of value as it addresses a scholarly gap while offering insights that benefits Africans, global audience, policy makers and storytellers.

Agenda-Setting Theory, developed by McCombs (1972), explains how the media influences what people think about, rather than what they think. The central claim is that while media may not always tell people what to believe, it is highly effective at determining which issues are considered important by giving prominence to specific topics through frequent coverage. Similarly, Framing Theory which is closely related to the Agenda-Setting Theory focuses not only on what issues are highlighted but also on how they are presented. First introduced by Goffman (1974) and later expanded by (Entman, 1993), framing theory suggests that the media selects certain aspects of reality and emphasizes them through specific words, images and narratives thereby shaping interpretation (De Vreese, 2005; Lewis, 2018). Of course, the digital landscape is not free from bias. Algorithms and platform policies shape what content is seen by whom, sometimes reinforcing existing inequalities Mekanjuola (2024) but even so, social media has created a more open space for African creators to assert agency and influence how Africa is represented on the world stage (Asongu, 2019 ; Makura, 2024).

Moreover, whiles Agenda-Setting Theory McCombs (1972) and Iyengar (1987) and Framing Theory (Entman, 1991; Gamson, 1981) have been widely applied to traditional studies there is a growing need to adapt and test these frameworks within the digital influencer context. Studies such as McCombs (1972) Chapel Hill study on the 1968 US elections and (Iyengar, 1987) television news experiment demonstrated how traditional media set public agendas. Similarly, Framing research by Entman on international news coverage and Gamson and Modiglianis on nuclear power highlighted how media shape public interpretation. This study aims to address the theoretical and contextual gap of limited application of Agenda-Setting Theory and Framing

Theory to African social media influencers in reframing Africa's image against persistent media bias by conducting systematic content analysis of Wode Maya's YouTube videos to (1) examine the themes and issues prioritized in Wode Maya's video content as a means of countering negative media narratives about Africa, (2) to analyse framing techniques i.e. visuals, verbal and narrative employed in Wode Maya's videos to construct and promote positive African identities and (3) to evaluate how Wode Maya's reframing strategies challenge mainstream media bias and construct alternative representations of African realities. The study offers multiple contributions as it shows how social media influencers reshape African narratives, counter media bias and highlight authentic realities enriching scholarship on media framing, agenda-setting and digital storytelling (Anyanwu, 2021).

## **Literature Review**

### *Media Representations of Africa in Global Discourse*

The media representation of Africa is usually deficit-based narratives that highlight corruption, poverty, and war have frequently shaped how Africa is portrayed in Western media (Campbell, 2003; Franks, 2010). However, there is disagreement among academics regarding the origins of these depictions; some place more emphasis on the structural effects of colonialism and foreign exploitation Mamdani (1996) and Le Billon (2001) (), while others highlight regional issues like economic inequality and poor governance (Collier, 2004; Urdal, 2006). It is crucial to recognize how different viewpoints interact to perpetuate a cycle of unfavourable portrayal rather than seeing them as mutually exclusive. While internal flaws make it simpler for external actors to perpetuate stereotypical frames, external depictions magnify interior crises. However, a large portion of the literature still pays too much attention to causes rather than effects, and it pays too little attention to how African voices actually challenge these representations. A research gap is created by this oversight: it is necessary to look at how players in alternative media, especially digital influencers, not only question Western frames but also develop new ones based on lived experience and local agency.

There is the contention among scholars that historically, political and economic interests have benefited from Africa's inaccurate portrayal in the media (Kwahode, 2023; Wahutu, 2018). According to Allimadi (2003), derogatory depictions served as ideological instruments that

legitimized colonial invasion, exploitation, and African subjugation rather than being purely coincidental. According to this viewpoint, deficit-based images portrayed Africa as a weak and “empty” continent in need of external authority to govern them. However, other observers contend that rather than obscuring Africa, these representations unintentionally brought it into the public eye, making it a site of engagement (although on unfair terms) (Amin, 1997; Mbembe, 2001; Zeleza, 2006). These discussions are still ongoing, with some highlighting the long-lasting damage caused by colonial legacies and others acknowledging the significant ways that representation, though problematic, influenced Africa's integration into the world order.

Media narratives by Western reporters about Africa highlight economic difficulties and debt dependency and have frequently served to further the idea that Africa is a “failed continent” (Foundation, 2025). The legacy of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), which were first implemented by the World Bank and IMF in the 1980s, is heavily referenced in this discussion. Some academics contend that these externally imposed reforms increased dependency and debt (George, 1992; Stiglitz, 2002; Bond, 2006), but others emphasize that internal factors like fiscal mismanagement, corruption, and weak institutions played an equally important role (Iyoha, 1999; Mkandawire, 1999). A fairer interpretation shows that Africa’s debt vulnerabilities were shaped by a combination of internal governance shortcomings and foreign conditionalities. However, an emphasis on how these economic challenges is portrayed in media coverage is frequently absent from the literature. Reports usually ignore differences between states and settings, reducing complex structural processes to simplistic accounts of African reliance or ineptitude (Herbst, 2000; van de Walle, 2001). In addition to obscuring African agency, this reductionist framing reinforces stereotypes based on deficits that are consistent with broader depictions of Africa as a region that is prone to crises. Examining how alternative media voices, especially social media influencers, re-narrativize these same issues, not as signs of failure, but as chances for reform and resilience, is where the difference resides.

The propensity to portray Africa as a single, homogenous continent rather than as a collection of 54 different states with unique political structures, cultures, and histories is another recurrent theme in the literature (Fair, 1993; Franks, 2005). By giving external “experts” and NGO viewpoints precedence over indigenous knowledge and accomplishments, such homogenization silences African voices. Research on global media coverage, especially that of the BBC and CNN, shows

a strong dependence on Western institutional and governmental sources, with little representation of African academics, leaders, or individuals (Franks, 2010; Waisbord, 2015). This epistemic disparity reinforces universal crisis framing while silencing national narratives of success and innovation. The continuation of this practice highlights the reproduction of global power hierarchies in knowledge production as well as representational injustice.

Several attempts have evolved to recast Africa's worldwide image in spite of recurrent misrepresentations. For example, partnerships between African photographers and Western fashion stores showcase creativity, young culture, and innovation, while the African Union's attempt to redraw the world map aims to address geographic inaccuracies. Investigative initiatives like BBC Africa Eye have also introduced African-centered viewpoints to governance and accountability concerns. Although these programs mark slow progress toward more fair representations, their reach is still uneven, and they frequently clash with deeply ingrained deficit-based myths. Their importance is not so much in completely eliminating unfavorable portrayals as it is in showing that counter-narratives may become visible in international media arenas, thus upending ingrained preconceptions.

#### *Social Media Influencers as Alternative Media Producers*

Studies have demonstrated that social media utilization has expedited the shift mainstream media, equipping content creators with the means to engage global audiences through tales rooted in personal experience (Castells, 2012; Couldry, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015). Social media platforms have empowered African voices to challenge external representations that are frequently restricted, prejudiced, or focused on crises. Technological advancements allow social media influencers to do real-time reporting, cultural storytelling, and agenda-setting, free from the structural limitations encountered by traditional journalists (Mare, 2020). Scott (2017) characterizes social media influencers as individuals who generate content and set agendas, curating messages that connect with audiences through relatable and culturally rooted narratives. In contrast to traditional news organizations, their content frequently mirrors the nuances of local realities, customs, and ambitions, offering a more comprehensive view of African societies. This methodology fosters the development of digital communities founded on trust and authenticity, which can be more influential than formal journalism in shaping public perceptions (Banda, 2008).

Wode Maya, a Ghanaian YouTuber with a global following, exemplifies how digital influencers may reshape African narrative. His work highlights vibrant metropolitan areas, creative entrepreneurship, and cultural vibrancy themes that are frequently marginalized in mainstream reporting. This strategy supports the idea of “decolonizing digital media”, as defined by Nothias (2014) in which artists take charge of their own representations. Maya's work, however, poses significant issues in addition to offering a much-needed counterbalance to deficit-based representations. His emphasis on urban modernity and success stories runs the risk of overemphasizing a single story of “Africa rising,” which could marginalize ongoing structural disparities or challenges in rural areas (Bunce, 2017). Furthermore, contents produced by influencers is influenced by algorithmic visibility and audience demand in addition to local authenticity due to the commercial logic of platforms such as YouTube, which may favor spectacle over subtlety (Couldry, 2012). Influencers are not merely neutral counter-narrators, as these tensions show; rather, they use a type of strategic framing that simultaneously questions and selectively replicates elements of the prevailing discourse. This contradiction emphasizes the necessity of critically analyzing how the politics of representation are reshaped, but not completely avoided, by such digital storytelling.

### *Framing Theory*

This study is anchored in the framing principles. Entman (1993) defines framing as “selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in communicating a text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.” In a similar vein, Scheufele(199) characterizes framing as “a process of media influence by which certain elements of reality are organized to promote particular interpretations, shaping how individuals process and make sense of information.” The framing theory offers a significant framework for comprehending how media creators affect audience perceptions by emphasizing specific facets of reality while omitting others. Through this mechanism, media framing influences how audiences perceive events and issues, often steering public opinion in ways that are both subtle and impactful.

In the context of African media, conventional news reporting has frequently depended on narratives that emphasize conflict, poverty, or crises. These persistent representations reinforce negative stereotypes and fail to acknowledge the complexity and richness of local realities (Franks,

2010). Conversely, social media influencers like Wode Maya employ framing techniques to contest these prevailing narratives. Their efforts provide new viewpoints that underscore agency, progress, and cultural vibrancy, elements that are often absent in mainstream media. By thoughtfully selecting what to display, articulate, and highlight, these influencers craft alternative narratives that offer audiences a more profound and balanced comprehension of African societies (Bunce, 2017). This methodology signifies a conscious attempt to portray Africa beyond the restrictive stereotypes that have historically dominated coverage. Wode Maya's videos exemplify the application of framing theory. Visually, his work showcases lively urban landscapes, contemporary infrastructure, and engaged communities, presenting images that sharply contrast with the bleak depictions prevalent in much traditional reporting (Banda, 2008). Verbally, he features interviews with local entrepreneurs and policymakers who convey ideas of innovation and development. Narratively, the tales he shares focus on hope, opportunity, and resilience rather than crisis or victimization.

The significance of framing theory in this study is rooted in its capacity to elucidate how influencers actively mold public discourse and influence audience interpretation of content within the digital realm. By intentionally reframing African narratives, creators such as Wode Maya counteract prevailing media narratives and create opportunities for innovative storytelling that prioritizes authenticity and diversity. This approach resonates with scholars' calls to reframe Africa in media, allowing for the transition from one-dimensional representations to more empowering narratives (Banda, 2008; Bunce, 2017). Utilizing framing theory, as established in the works of Goffman, Entman, Scheufele, Chong, and Druckman, facilitates a more profound comprehension of the tactics employed by social media influencers as alternative media creators. It illustrates how digital content can serve as a mechanism for contesting dominant narratives and redefining identities through the selective emphasis of certain elements while omitting others. This viewpoint enriches broader conversations regarding media democratization, equitable representation, and the transformative impact of social media within African contexts (Entman, 1993; Chong, 2007).

### *Reframing African Realities Through Video Content*

Digital storytelling on social media platforms serves as a potent tool for presenting multifaceted representations of African realities, effectively countering the limited perspectives often propagated by mainstream media. Influencers are instrumental in shaping narratives that highlight

themes such as economic opportunity, cultural pride, and pan-African unity. These narratives aim to redefine Africa not merely as a continent characterized by crisis or dependency, but as one distinguished by resilience, innovation, and potential (Scott, 2017; Nyabola, 2018). The strategies utilized by influencers to reframe African narratives are both intentional and strategic. Filming on location situates progress within familiar and authentic settings, providing viewers with a concrete sense of place and context. Personal interviews with local entrepreneurs, community leaders, and ordinary citizens help to humanize abstract statistics and broad trends, rendering the stories more relatable and engaging. Additionally, narrative arcs frequently emphasize agency and self-determination, redirecting attention from depictions of dependency to those that underscore empowerment and growth (Mare, 2020).

Wode Maya's video content exemplifies this reframing effectively. His work confronts global misconceptions by highlighting flourishing cities, dynamic businesses, and vibrant cultures that are seldom represented in international media coverage. By prioritizing African voices and accomplishments, Wode Maya constructs a counter-narrative that enhances both external understanding and internal pride among Africans. This form of storytelling fosters a richer, more diverse portrayal of the continent (Filter., 2024). Influencer-driven content is increasingly influencing tangible results in addition to influencing discourse. A more favourable environment for international collaborations, more interest from the diaspora, and increased visibility for tourist campaigns have all been associated with positive representations of African cities, entrepreneurs, and cultural movements (Filter., 2024). It is still challenging to prove causation, even if these relationships imply that digital storytelling helps change attitudes with social and economic ramifications. Although narratives by themselves are unable to remove structural limitations, they are essential in changing how the world views and interacts with Africa. This emphasizes how crucial it is to examine digital reframing as a factor that concretely changes opportunities and goals in addition to being a symbolic intervention.

## **Methodology**

This research is a qualitative content analysis that made a systematic investigation of African narratives embedded in audiovisual data. Contrary to traditional content analysis which usually emphasizes quantification, qualitative content analysis presents interpretive framework that allows

the researcher to delve into latent meanings recurring patterns and deeper social implications (Kuckartz and Rädiker, 2023) Through this approach the study investigates the ways in which social media influencers for example Wode Maya construct, frame and communicate African realities on digital platforms (Flick, Maxwell and Chmiel, 2021) Video generated narratives were predominantly used as the dataset for this research. Wode Maya's YouTube Channel was chosen because it provided a rich body of visual storytelling about African migration, entrepreneurship, cultural identity and Pan-African solidarity (Pink, 2013). The study inclusion criteria were limited to videos published between 2017 and 2025 which had a duration of 30 to 35 minutes and it was ensured that a contemporary focus on these narratives were produced during a notable growth in digital media influence (Gauntlett, 2011). Videos that had no important narrative content or that served mainly as entertainment vlogs were excluded (Flick, 2018).

There are three main reasons why investigating Wode Maya's videos provides scholarly significance; firstly, social media influencers as seen in Wode Maya's videos reframes African realities by questioning the Western portrayal of Africa that has dominated the status quo and this is done by generating counter narratives that foreground agency, resilience, and innovation. Again, platforms like YouTube gives visibility to individuals and communities that are normally absent from the main stream media discourses which creates opportunity for inclusivity in knowledge production. Lastly, the narratives broadcasted by influencers like Wode Maya are paramount in shaping the cross-cultural understandings and global engagements in Africa's development.

A Boolean search strategy was used in identifying videos that were relevant for the analysis. Keywords and combinations such as "Africa and development" Wode Maya and Migration" "African Entrepreneurship OR culture" were used to refine the data. The systematic approach ensured that videos aligned with the research objectives.

Narrative analysis was employed as the analytical strategy. In comparison to thematic analysis, narrative analysis allowed for the rich exploration of the structure, intention and cultural significance of the stories told. Miles and Huberman's (1994) literature on coding schemes guided the coding scheme of this research. The coding scheme included categories like identity narratives, economic narratives, social narratives and cross-cultural narratives. In total 12 videos were originally selected through the Boolean search. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria 9 videos were retained. The final sample size is justified based on Saldaña (2021) which indicates

that video-based studies sample size should be between 5 to 30 to ensure rich exploration of narratives. This sample size seeks to capture the diverse and rich perspectives of the storytellers and not statistical generalization as reiterated by Parker (2013). Credibility was upheld through confirming the sources of the video's identity, cross checking the events demonstrated in the videos with an independent report and authenticating the originality of the footage that it was unaltered and also noting potential framing biases.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis was grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Agenda Setting and Framing Theories, which provided both the conceptual and analytical foundation for interpreting Wode Maya's video content. Drawing from McCombs and Shaw's (1972) notion of agenda setting, the analysis examined the themes and issues that were prioritized to challenge dominant media narratives about Africa. In parallel, Goffman's (1974) and Entman's (1993) conceptualizations of framing guided the exploration of how meaning was constructed and communicated through language, visuals, and narrative structure. This theoretical orientation enabled the researchers to move beyond descriptive analysis toward understanding how Wode Maya's storytelling functions as a mechanism of media influence and ideological reframing.

In accordance with qualitative content analysis principles outlined by Kuckartz and Rädiker (2023), the analytical process comprised three stages: data organization, coding, and interpretation. The nine selected videos were transcribed and segmented into meaningful units such as dialogue, scenes, and visual sequences. A theory-informed coding framework was then developed, where Agenda Setting Theory guided the identification of salient topics, including heritage, innovation, and natural assets, while Framing Theory informed the analysis of how these topics were represented through narrative techniques such as visual grandeur, dialogic framing, and participatory storytelling. This approach employed both inductive and deductive reasoning to capture and interpret recurring patterns of meaning.

The coded data were subsequently synthesized into two overarching themes, namely Reclaiming African Pride and Potential and Framing Africa through Immersive Storytelling, which collectively illustrate how influencer-driven media content contests deficit-based portrayals of Africa. Through iterative interpretation and cross-validation with existing theoretical literature, the study demonstrated that Wode Maya's digital narratives function simultaneously as acts of agenda

setting and framing. His video content reorients public discourse by foregrounding affirmative African realities and presenting them through empowering visual and linguistic strategies, thereby contributing to the redefinition of Africa's global image from one of dependency to one of agency and resilience.

## **Findings**

The study reveals that the digital storytelling of Wode Maya's has significantly contributed to reframing African realities in the sense that it challenges the misconstrued narratives that often characterize mainstream media representations of the African continent. With the use of the systematic qualitative content analysis, three overarching findings which correspond to the study's objectives and theoretical grounding in Agenda Setting and Framing Theories emerged. The results reveal that the influencer's content re-construct the perception of Africa's focusing on narrative of pride, agency, and authenticity across thematic, visual, and narrative dimensions.

### ***Countering negative narratives***

In the first place, the study illustrates that Wode Maya's videos strategically set alternative agendas to prioritize themes that celebrate African heritage, innovation, and natural assets which collectively form the meta-theme "Reclaiming African Pride and Potential." The videos therefore foregrounds issues such as cultural identity, women's entrepreneurship, and environmental richness and also highlight Africa's capacity for self-determination and development rather than dependency and crisis. Reclaiming African Pride and Potential as a theme aligns with the agenda-setting principle of salience, indicating that consistent emphasis on positive issues can shift public focus and reshape how Africa is perceived both locally and globally.

### ***Heritage and Identity***

Heritage and Identity as a subtheme captures how Wode Maya highlights Africa's deep cultural heritage and its enduring connections across the diaspora. Using storytelling, Wode Maya reclaims narratives of African identity that have been marginalized or distorted by external media. Also, Wode Maya's engagement with local expressions and diasporic ties emphasizes shared roots, pride, and belonging.

*"Actually, we don't call it Jollof here, we call it Ceebu Jën... Jollof is a kingdom" (Senegal)*

*"Caribbean is actually the south region of Africa... connect the dots" (Trinidad & Tobago)*

*“If I didn’t speak, you wouldn’t know I was from Ghana... that is why connection is important”*  
(Suriname)

### *Everyday Innovations*

Further, everyday innovations emerged as another subtheme that reflects how Wode Maya foregrounds the ingenuity and industrious spirit of Africans in their daily lives. The video contents of the influencer showcase local creativity, technological advancement, and economic empowerment, particularly through the roles of women and communities in driving development. These narratives portray Africans as agents of change who innovate within their own contexts rather than relying on external intervention.

*“Before they used to produce 10 liters a day, now with machines 20–40 liters”* (South Sudan shea butter)

*“When a woman makes money, most of it goes back to the family”* (South Sudan shea butter)

*“You cannot leave Tanzania without trying Chips Mayai”* (Tanzania)

### *Natural Assets*

The study also discovered natural assets as a subtheme that emphasizes Africa’s environmental wealth and its potential for sustainable development. The influencer’s visual and narrative focus on landscapes, natural resources, and ecological projects reveals a continent abundant in opportunity and vitality. In showcasing Africa’s natural beauty and resource management, Wode Maya subverts the long-standing media frames that portray Africa as barren or dependent on aid.

*“Over 3,000 meters above sea level... this is the peak point”* (Lesotho)

*“Africa is the most exciting continent in the whole world, Africa is the birthplace of humanity”*  
(Malawi wilderness)

*“The Lesotho Highlands Water Project... changes the livelihoods of citizens and stimulates economic growth”* (Lesotho)

### **Framing techniques**

The findings further reveal that that Wode Maya employs unique framing techniques to construct empowering representations of Africa. Through the use of cinematic visuals, affirming language, and participatory storytelling Wode Maya creates immersive narratives that contrast sharply with Western media depictions of poverty and instability. Techniques such as “visual grandeur,”

“dialogic framing,” and “participatory tasting” engage audiences emotionally and intellectually, inviting them to experience Africa as vibrant, dynamic, and multifaceted. These framing practices resonate with Goffman’s and Entman’s conceptualizations of framing as a selective process of meaning construction that influences interpretation and evaluation.

### *Visual Grandeur*

Wode Maya’s visual framing highlights the aesthetic richness and scenic allure of African landscapes as a means of reshaping global perceptions of the continent. Through panoramic shots, vibrant color palettes, and dramatic visual compositions, he evokes a sense of pride and awe that counters conventional stereotypes of deprivation. These visual strategies reimagine African spaces as realms of grandeur and beauty, reaffirming the continent’s identity as a place of natural elegance, vitality, and tranquility.

*“Majestic beautiful waterfall... horse ride to get here”* (Lesotho)

*“This is the most beautiful place on earth, hands down”* (Lesotho mountains)

*“Imagine seeing these beautiful luxury houses built on top of a hill... closer to God”* (Trinidad & Tobago)

### *Verbal Counter-Narratives*

Through deliberate linguistic framing, Wode Maya integrates affirming and redemptive language that asserts Africa’s agency and collective identity. His verbal choices reject narratives of victimhood and instead emphasize ownership, empowerment, and resilience. This rhetorical strategy functions as a discursive tool for redefining Africa’s image in global consciousness.

*“It’s all about Africa to the world, telling our own stories”* (Senegalese Got Talent)

*“Never again... slave trade”* (Senegal, Goree Island)

*“Africa is the best place to be... it’s about time Africans embrace this continent”* (Malawi wilderness)

### *Journey and Discovery*

Maya frequently adopts a journey-based narrative frame that depicts Africa as a landscape of exploration and rediscovery. This framing technique invites audiences to engage with Africa as a site of adventure, curiosity, and cultural connection. It also conveys the idea that discovering Africa is both a personal and collective act of reclaiming heritage and belonging.

*“The past five hours... still not there... crazy rapid... we made it”* (Suriname)

*“Whenever I come to a new country, I need to try the food before I leave”* (Tanzania)

*“I must confess... one of the best Jollof, but not the best”* (Senegal)

### *Dialogic Framing*

Dialogic framing is central to Wode Maya’s storytelling, as it amplifies local voices and fosters a participatory media experience. By allowing community members, entrepreneurs, and leaders to narrate their own stories, Maya disrupts the traditional media tendency to speak *about* Africa rather than *with* Africans. This framing style positions the influencer as a facilitator of authentic representation rather than an external interpreter.

*“My name is Carla Cupid, CEO of Tourism Trinidad... we are always in season”* (Trinidad)

*“These horses are owned by locals... someone is going to get paid today”* (Lesotho)

*“This restaurant started from home to a kiosk, now it is three years old”* (Mozambique, Rwandan entrepreneur)

### *Symbolic Props*

Maya’s use of symbolic imagery and cultural artifacts serves as an aesthetic and ideological framing device that reinforces African identity and heritage. Objects such as tattoos, bags, and traditional items are presented not merely as visuals but as markers of belonging and continuity across the African diaspora. These props embody shared cultural values and historical pride, creating visual metaphors of identity reclamation.

*“Do you carry Africa on your chest?... Sankofa tattoo, surname Kwame”* (Trinidad & Tobago)

*“This bag is called Ghana must go”* (Jamaica market)

*“This is our flair... my spoon is flair, my chair is flair”* (Liberia)

### *Participatory Tasting*

Participatory framing emerges prominently in scenes where Wode Maya engages directly with audiences through cultural experiences such as food tasting. This interactive approach transforms viewers from passive observers into active participants in African cultural life. By inviting commentary and comparison, Maya creates a dialogic space that celebrates cultural diversity while fostering continental and diasporic unity.

*“One of the best... not the best... let me know in the comments”* (Senegal Jollof)

*“Do you like tomato sauce? We need to get Pili Pili”* (Tanzania Chips Mayai)

*“If this tastes good, I will say it’s the best... if not, the worst ever”* (Senegal Jollof)

### **Reframing strategies vs mainstream bias**

The final analysis revealed that Wode Maya’s storytelling functions as an act of reframing against mainstream media bias, constructing counter-narratives that normalize African agency, celebrate diasporic continuity, and center local knowledge. Wode Maya’s content challenges stereotypes of dependency, illiteracy, and conflict by highlighting grassroots innovation, historical resilience, and cultural interconnectedness. With this approach, Africans and their diasporic counterparts are repositioned as narrators of their own realities rather than as subjects of external interpretation. As a result, Wode Maya’s work demonstrates the transformative potential of social media influencers as agents of media democratization and cultural reclamation, aligning with broader scholarly calls for decolonizing media narratives and promoting authentic representation.

#### *Challenging Stereotypes*

It was observed that Wode Maya’s content directly confronts the entrenched stereotypes that portray Africa as a continent of despair, dependency, and passivity. This is amplified through voices that reflect courage, creativity, and determination; the influencer redefines African identity through narratives of agency and resilience. These excerpts exemplify how his work challenges deficit-based representations by emphasizing empowerment and self-worth:

*“I said, I will go there. I will die for my country”* (Liberia peace activism)

*“I don’t know books... but I get talent... my knowledge works like a clock”* (Liberia, R.L.)

*“When a woman makes money, most goes back to the family”* (South Sudan)

#### *Normalizing Diaspora Presence*

Also discovered was the significant reframing strategy that involves redefining the relationship between the African continent and its diaspora. Wode Maya portrays diasporic communities as integral extensions of Africa’s identity rather than detached or foreign entities. Through this approach, he reinforces Pan-African unity and highlights the historical and cultural continuities that transcend geography. The following excerpts illustrate this narrative of shared heritage and belonging:

*“Caribbean is actually the south region of Africa... connect the dots”* (Trinidad)

*“If I didn’t speak, you wouldn’t know I was from Ghana”* (Suriname)

*“The similarities between Africa and the Caribbean are uncanny”* (Jamaica)

### *Centering Local Knowledge*

In contrast to mainstream media’s reliance on external “experts,” Wode Maya’s videos center the voices of local citizens as legitimate sources of knowledge and authority. By doing so, he validates indigenous expertise and everyday experience as credible and insightful. This approach dismantles the epistemic hierarchy that privileges foreign perspectives and recenters African voices in defining their realities. Examples of this strategy include:

*“My name is Carla Cupid, CEO of Tourism Trinidad... we are always in season”* (Trinidad)

*“Welcome to Lesotho... horses are owned by locals”* (Lesotho)

*“This art uses 16 types of sand... from Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Gambia”* (Senegal sand artist)

### *Rebutting Deficit Frames*

Wode Maya also counters the deficit-based frames that depict African life as characterized by scarcity and deprivation. Through everyday depictions of self-sufficiency, creativity, and interdependence, he reframes Africa as a space of abundance and normalcy. These narratives highlight pride in local food, culture, and infrastructure while challenging Western tropes of underdevelopment. Illustrative examples include:

*“Typical street food... will keep you full... do it at home”* (Tanzania Chips Mayai)

*“We are not foreigners in Africa, everywhere feels like home”* (Malawi)

*“Lesotho generates electricity and South Africa gets water”* (Lesotho dam project)

### *Historicizing Oppression with Agency*

Finally, Wode Maya reframes Africa’s historical experiences of colonization and slavery through a lens of endurance and agency rather than victimhood. By revisiting historical sites and stories of resistance, he connects past struggles to present empowerment. This strategy reclaims historical narratives from Eurocentric interpretations and situates Africans as active participants in shaping world history. The following excerpts capture this act of historical reclamation:

*“Never again... slave trade”* (Senegal, Goree Island)

*“Maroons... created their own community in the interior”* (Suriname)

*“180 years before Columbus, Africans arrived in the Caribbean”* (Trinidad history)

## **Discussion of Findings**

The discussion draws on framing theory; thematic, visual, and narrative dimensions of the representation of Africa along with the relevant literature to contextualise and interpret the results.

### *Themes prioritized in Wode Maya’s videos (Agenda Setting)*

Wode Maya consistently foregrounds African heritage, cultural pride, economic innovation, and natural assets as central themes. These priorities directly counter the deficit-based portrayals of Africa that dominate global media narratives. Scholars such as Campbell (2003) and Franks (2010) argue that Western media has historically emphasised corruption, conflict, and poverty, creating a monolithic and negative image of Africa. Allimadi (2003) further contends that such depictions served ideological purposes during colonialism, legitimising external exploitation. In contrast, Wode Maya’s emphasis on food heritage exemplified by his highlighting of Ceebu Jën in Senegal reclaims African culinary traditions as symbols of identity and continuity rather than exotic curiosities. This aligns with McAnany (2017), who note the growing importance of reasserting African agency through narratives of pride and innovation.

Furthermore, showcasing women entrepreneurs in South Sudan, Maya emphasises African women’s agency in economic development, challenging stereotypes of victimhood and dependency. Scott (2017) describes this as alternative agenda-setting, where influencers reshape what is considered important in public discourse. Similarly, Maya’s celebration of natural assets, such as the Lesotho Highlands or Malawian peaks, reframes African landscapes as sources of opportunity and beauty, countering the reductionist frames critiqued by Hawk (1992) and Tadros (2015). The agenda-setting effect is evident in audience engagement, with viewers expressing renewed appreciation for Africa’s diversity and potential. This finding supports Entman (1993) assertion that repeated salience in media content can shift public perceptions over time.

### *Framing Techniques in Wode Maya’s Videos*

Wode Maya reconstructs and promotes positive African identities using cinematic visuals, affirming language, immersive storytelling, and community voices to reframe Africa as vibrant, modern, and culturally rich continent. Framing theory, as outlined by Goffman (1974) and refined by Entman (1993) and Scheufele (1999), posits that frames shape how audiences interpret information. Maya's use of sweeping landscapes, bustling markets, and vibrant cityscapes directly challenges the crisis-oriented imagery identified by Franks (2010) and Fair (1993). Mare (2020) argues that digital influencers can democratise representation by offering locally grounded perspectives that mainstream media neglect. Maya's videos exemplify this democratization: his visual grandeur not only entertains but also reorients global audiences toward Africa's beauty and modernity.

Also, the use of verbal cues and narrative structures in Maya's contents function as a rebuttal especially in examples such as "Africa is the best place to be" to counter the deficit-based narratives. This aligns with Nothias (2014) assertion that such deliberate reframing is crucial for decolonising digital media. Maya's journey-and-discovery narratives invite viewers to explore Africa's diversity, positioning the continent as a destination of wonder rather than despair. His dialogic framing, in which local entrepreneurs, artisans, and community leaders speak for themselves, disrupts the epistemic imbalance described by Banda (2008), who critiques mainstream media for silencing African voices. These participatory techniques, including food debates with audiences, transform viewers from passive consumers to active participants in shaping meaning, an approach consistent with (Papacharissi, 2015) view of affective publics in digital communication.

### *Reframing Strategies Versus Mainstream Bias*

Wode Maya's reframing strategies challenge mainstream media bias and construct alternative representations of African realities. These strategies shift Africa's image from an "object of pity" to a subject of pride and agency. Audiences are invited not only to appreciate Africa's richness but also to recognize the continent and its diaspora as active participants in shaping global culture and history. Maya's strategies actively contest mainstream biases because his videos challenge stereotypes that depict Africa as conflict-ridden or backward by showcasing peace activism in Liberia and grassroots entrepreneurship in South Sudan. These narratives align with McAnany

(2017) critique of deficit framing and demonstrate how alternative media can recast Africa as resilient and resourceful. Maya's emphasis on diasporic connections illustrates the evidence in statements like "Caribbean is actually the south region of Africa". This fosters a Pan-African consciousness, echoing Zeleza (2006) call to recognise the diaspora as part of Africa's historical and cultural continuum. Indeed, Maya's contents normalises these links, and counters Western media's tendency to fragment African identities (Franks, 2005; Waisbord, 2015).

Maya also centres local knowledge by allowing Africans and diasporic voices to narrate their own stories. This practice resonates with Murithi (2020) advocacy for decolonising media narratives through indigenous perspectives. By featuring tourism CEOs, sand artists, and local farmers as experts, Maya challenges what Couldry (2012) describes as the commercial logics and structural biases of global platforms. However, scholars such as McAnany (2017) caution against over-reliance on "Africa rising" narratives, which may inadvertently marginalise ongoing structural inequities. This tension underscores the need for balanced storytelling that acknowledges both progress and persistent challenges.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined how the Ghanaian YouTuber Wode Maya reframes African realities through digital storytelling in order to counter mainstream media bias. Anchored in Agenda-Setting and Framing Theories, the research explored how his visual and narrative strategies redefine Africa's image by foregrounding themes of heritage and identity, everyday innovations, and natural assets. The findings reveal that Wode Maya's work transcends entertainment, functioning as an alternative agenda that foregrounds African agency, creativity, and pride. Through cinematic storytelling, dialogic framing, and participatory engagement, his content challenges persistent deficit-based narratives that have historically shaped Africa's representation in global media. The study concludes that social media influencers have become significant agents in the democratization of media and cultural production. They perform crucial roles in shaping global discourse by generating counter-narratives that promote authentic, diverse, and empowering representations of Africa. Wode Maya's storytelling demonstrates that digital media spaces can operate as arenas of epistemic resistance, allowing Africans to reclaim authorship over their stories and reposition the continent from dependency toward self-determination and resilience.

### *Theoretical Implications*

The study has proven the theoretical relevance of the theories used because it contributes to the expansion of Agenda-Setting and Framing Theories within the digital media environment. It illustrates that agenda-setting is no longer confined to institutional media actors but is co-constructed through the participatory dynamics between influencers and audiences. The concept of salience in the digital era becomes dialogical and interactive, shaped through ongoing engagement, algorithmic visibility, and affective connection.

In addition, the study extends Framing Theory by situating it within a decolonial and cultural reclamation context. It demonstrates how framing is not merely a process of emphasizing issues but also an act of reclaiming interpretive authority over African identity and experience. By highlighting how influencers like Wode Maya select, organize, and communicate meaning through visual and narrative codes, the research underscores that digital framing operates as a form of symbolic resistance against historical marginalization. The study therefore enriches existing theoretical discussions by showing how framing functions simultaneously as a cognitive and cultural process in postcolonial communication environments.

### *Practical Implications*

The study has implications in a number of ways, first, in terms of practicality, the study presents implications for policymakers, media educators, and development communication practitioners. In the case of policymakers and development agencies, the findings underscore the potential of influencer storytelling as a vehicle for promoting national image, tourism, and cultural diplomacy. Collaboration with digital influencers who produce authentic and contextually grounded narratives can enhance Africa's representation and global engagement.

Also, the study has implications for media educators, because, the findings point to the need to integrate influencer-based storytelling into curricula on media literacy and representation. Understanding how influencers frame and disseminate narratives can help students critically evaluate contemporary media dynamics and their role in shaping public perception.

In the case of communication practitioners, the study highlights the value of adopting participatory and community-centered storytelling approaches that echo local voices and knowledge systems.

Such practices can contribute to more equitable and credible media discourses that move beyond conventional journalistic hierarchies.

### *Limitations*

The study was limited by its focus on a single influencer and a relatively small sample of nine videos. This scope, while providing depth of qualitative insight, restricts the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of African digital influencers. The research also did not measure audience responses or the quantitative impact of the reframed narratives on perception, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of influence and reception. Furthermore, the analysis was confined to YouTube as a platform, excluding comparative exploration across other social media environments such as Instagram or TikTok. Lastly, as with all qualitative interpretations, there remains the possibility of researcher subjectivity in the thematic and narrative analysis of the audiovisual materials.

### *Future Research Directions*

Future research may expand the scope by examining multiple influencers from different African regions to capture variations in narrative framing across linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical contexts. Comparative studies between African and diasporic influencers would also be valuable for understanding how transnational digital storytelling contributes to Pan-African identity formation and solidarity. Also, employing mixed-methods approaches that combine content analysis with audience research could provide deeper insight into how viewers interpret and respond to reframed African narratives. Quantitative studies could assess engagement metrics, sentiment analysis, and behavioral outcomes associated with influencer content. In addition, investigation into the algorithmic and political economy of digital platforms would also be essential to understand how visibility, monetization, and platform biases shape the dissemination of African stories. Finally, future scholarship may examine the ethical dimensions of influencer-driven representation, exploring issues of authenticity, commodification, and sustainability in the long-term process of decolonizing digital media spaces.

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