

A Statistical Content Analysis of French-Language Media Coverage of Nigerian Sports (2015–2025)

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of diffusion of narratives within the linguistic medium system is an area of underdevelopment concerning the communication related to sports in Africa. In particular, this research work explores the patterns of representation of Nigerian sport in the French language media during 2015-2025 period. The study conducted a mixed methods content analysis using a dataset of French language media articles that mention Nigerian athletes, teams and sporting events during a decade. The study employed both quantitative content analysis of media articles and qualitative framing analysis of narratives within sports journalism. The results demonstrated the patterns of concentration on football, which becomes the central focus for reporting by sampled media outlets. Other sports activities, including athletics and basketball become rarely mentioned and are the subject of people's attention only at times of major continental competitions. Besides the patterns related to frequency, the temporal analysis found that the media coverage increases in preparation to the participation in African and world championships in which Nigerian sports teams compete. In addition to those patterns, the qualitative analysis of selected articles found the pattern of construction of the representation of Nigerian sports on competition, performance and prestige. The implications of the findings presented above point to the significance of editorial practices and how events-based reporting plays an important role in representing Nigerian sports through the Francophone media space. The paper also sheds light on the role of linguistic media networks in the process of diffusion of sports news in the African region. Based on statistical measurement and interpretation, the study provides valuable insight into the process of producing sporting identity and reputation through sports journalism.

KEYWORDS

French language, Sport, Statistics, media

I. INTRODUCTION

Sport, like few other forms of culture, is transferred through language and media in ways that contribute to the shaping of national identities, albeit more subtly, perhaps, than many other cultural forms. Sport in Nigeria, notably football, has been a subject of much continental interest in the Anglophone world, as well as in Francophone Africa, whose sports journalism is based on its own institutional traditions and languages. Sport reporting in many African media landscapes tends to be very much cantered on football and provides an important field of public discourse regarding national discourses, athletic identities and regional rivalries (Horky and Chari, 2022). However, studies into the circulation of Nigerian sporting discourses in French-language media remain a relatively unexplored topic. This is surprising considering the reach of the Francophone world in Africa today. French speakers

comprise several hundreds of millions of people worldwide, however, most of their growth is anticipated to come from Africa alone, where sports have already become an important aspect of public discourse.

With regard to practical considerations, what this translates into is the fact that the media construction of Nigerian athletes, teams and sports events does not only take place within the domestic media, including English language media. Instead, it is continuously re-interpreted in the context of French language broadcast media and sports websites that mediate African sport content in francophone countries, like Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Cameroon and Democratic Republic of Congo. There are clear structural and editorial differences between francophone and Anglophone media institutions when it comes to the way they have developed historically and the role played by journalism, political communication and audience engagement (Frere, 2022). In this context, what follows is that the issue here is not purely linguistic in nature. This happens in the context of Nigerian sports media content in the francophone world. Which sports attract continuous media attention? Are Nigerian athletes primarily covered when struggling on the continent, transferred internationally, or embroiled in periodic controversies? And in addition, do these patterns change over time because of major sporting events or other factors?

Indeed, there is a need to explore these kinds of inquiries using content analysis. Content analysis, in its contemporary understanding, refers to a systematic way of interpreting structured data derived from text, images, or other media messages. There are several reasons why the content analysis approach fits perfectly in media studies. These include its potential to provide quantitative measures and qualitative interpretation of narrative construction in journalistic practices. This seminar paper is an attempt at conducting statistical content analysis of media coverage of sports in the French language in Nigeria between 2015 to 2025. It should be noted that the selected time frame presents an interesting challenge for the research because it coincides with the decade of digital sports journalism, the peak of sport competitions in Europe, and the rising prominence of Nigerian sport on the world stage. While it is tempting to assume uniform representation in all media systems, there is reason to believe that coverage patterns would differ significantly across linguistic and regional media sectors.

II. CONTEXT AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

There is something distinctive about the sport journalism of today. What sets sports journalism apart from most other media genres is that the latter is unique in the sense that it can combine the features of information journalism, storytelling, national symbolism, and commercial entertainment. In terms of Africa's media landscape, however, the fusion of sport journalism with various factors becomes especially evident in that sport journalism in Africa is connected to questions of national identity, youth culture, and international representation. It was suggested by scholars analysing the global sports media that there is not only an archive but also a medium for sport, through which various social meaning-making, hierarchies of reputation, and political imaginings take place (Rowe, 2013). The evolution of sports journalism in Africa is defined not only by the legacy of the colonial media period but also by the rise of digital broadcasting technology. The media cultures of the

francophone and Anglophone media, having developed within slightly different institutional contexts, have also impacted media under the influence of the former. As noted by Frere (2022), the media landscape of Africa is generally francophone and historically rooted in French broadcasting institutions. Such historical ties can influence the choice of and presentation of the international and regional sports discourses. In such a setting, the situation with the sports in Nigeria represents an intriguing case study. Nigeria possesses one of the largest and most influential sporting industries in Africa due to the popularity of football and athletics, and more recently also basketball. Nigerian teams participate in international events organized for particular continents, like Africa Cup of Nations and CAF Champions League; these are primarily the events covered by the media operating in the Francophone. Researchers who study African sport maintain that, in particular, coverage of football events serves as a symbolic medium for national prestige and regional rivalry in the discourses mediated through the media. Yet, the way African athletes are represented in the media is anything but neutral. Analysis of international sports journalism reveals that African athletes are commonly depicted using certain narrative tropes, which revolve around physical attributes, struggle of the nation or exceptional achievement rather than structural explanations of sporting systems.

The use of such representational tropes could well play a subtle role in shaping how athletes' successes or failures are interpreted, especially when media operations work trans-linguistically and transculturally. The increasing use of digital sports journalism in the last ten years has made matters even more complicated in this regard. Digital sports websites, satellite broadcasting networks and trans-lingual sports websites have brought about a huge surge in the quantity of sports contents being distributed internationally. According to Boyle (2017), what the digitization of sports journalism has entailed is that not only the quantity but also the speed with which sports journalism happens can now be transformed, leading to an unprecedented number of sports media texts, whose systematic analyses are made possible using content-analysis techniques. From the perspective of research, this means that media representation studies may now benefit from more empirical approaches, rather than qualitative ones, as it allows us to study representations over an extended period of time. In this broader context, the methodology of content analysis has proved to be particularly useful as a research method for studying media representations. Content analysis does not look into single article or single broadcast; rather, media texts are considered communicative objects with a structure, which can be statistically analysed and coded. According to Krippendorff (2018), content analysis is an inferential methodology for analysing texts for their contexts with the emphasis on the potential ability of content analysis to overcome the divide between qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis. Whereas there is increasing amount of literature on the development of sports media around the globe, empirical research of the media coverage of sport in Africa from a Francophone perspective remains relatively few in number.

Most of what we have come to know of the sports media coverage has focused on either the sports broadcasting market in general or Anglophone media environments specifically. Thus far, there are no specific findings about patterns of Anglophone African countries (for instance, Nigeria) being targeted in sports media in the Francophone context. Of particular interest in this context is the intense inter-activity of West and Central African sport, which involves competitions among the teams from the two regions in their native languages. The purpose of this study is to examine the trend of visibility, theme, and framing in media

interest in sports in Nigeria within ten years of media interest in sports through French media reporting on sports in Nigeria for the period 2015-2025. It is not just a question of identifying cases of reporting on events but also an effort to use statistical trends as reflected in media texts as a way of providing insights into broader trends concerning media reports on sport in the region.

III. ANALYTICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

General communication and cultural production theories usually affect the interpretation of media representations of sport. The most common form of analytical thought in terms of media analysis is the so-called framing theory, according to which the media does not report about the events objectively; instead, media organizations transmit information through interpretative structures that highlight one aspect of reality while putting aside others. Thus, Entman (1993) defines the notion of framing as the process of selective interpretation performed by communicators with regard to reality in order to promote a specific understanding of a situation. In the context of sports journalism, there are several frames that contribute to how athletes, their team, and the competition event are interpreted - as a symbol of national pride, as a story about the competition environment, or as a story about a scandal in the industry. With regard to sports reporting in general, the idea of framing becomes particularly relevant when media reports go beyond the boundaries of language or geography. Concerning the reporting of the same sporting event, journalists from varying media production cultures tend to place greater emphasis on certain aspects of the story. For instance, a number of scholarly works regarding international sports media indicate that the latter's portrayal of sports events tends to mirror broader cultural perspectives more than the characteristics of specific media cultures (Billings, Butterworth, and Turman, 2018). In this respect, the interpretive tendencies of how the accomplishments of Nigeria in terms of sport are portrayed by the Francophone media may differ from those by either Anglophone or Nigerian media. Framing theory is highly related to the theory of agenda-setting, and the focus of the latter is the influence of media upon the importance attributed to it by the audience. According to the agenda-setting theory developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), the relevance and quantity of media coverage affect people's opinions on what is considered to be important.

The inference of agenda-setting framework as applied to sports mass media is that certain repetitive media coverage of some players, competitions or issues may lead to increasing awareness of their presence in the wider picture of sports awareness among audiences. Agenda-setting theory is particularly important for the contemporary research project in studying the persistent visibility that certain sports in Nigeria have received in French language media channels. Media, of course, would be limited in their editorial coverage as far as the coverage of international sports events is concerned. In other words, certain sports (mainly football) have come to occupy dominant positions in their coverage while others remain ignored or marginalized. Content analysis helps the researcher to empirically prove the point of agenda setting and to determine the frequency of occurrence of the subjects covered in media discourses on sports. Another theoretical resource is the global sports mass media theory which analyses the diffusion of sporting discourse through transnational media. According to Maguire (2011), global sports media represent complex

circulations of athletes, media technologies, and commercial interests connecting local sports communities with global audiences. These streams are not homogenous in nature, however, and quite often resemble linguistic structures, historical linkages, and broadcasting linkages, which act as the basis on which the dissemination of sports content occurs.

In the African context, it should be mentioned that the combination of the Francophone and Anglophone media space contributes to the development of such a state, when the sporting discourses may constantly shift from one language area to another one. Reporting about the African Cup of nations, CAF tournament, international club transfers and so on becomes available for readers in a number of different languages. In other words, sports reporting in French is important for shaping the public opinion concerning the events that occur in Nigerian sports through the prism of the African media discourse. In turn, the theoretical frame that includes the patterns of media representations is a set of different approaches to analysing patterns of media representation in light of the following theoretical frameworks – framing theory, agenda-setting theory and global sports media analysis. The latter is used to analyse how Nigerian athletes and teams might be framed in the texts of the Francophone media. Agenda setting theory this theory limits the scope of analysis in terms of examining the statistical significance of various sports or events. At the same time, the theory of global sports media focuses on these trends within the wider framework of transnational flows of sporting information into the media systems of Africa. These are not the models that are hard to understand. Rather, they provide the interpretation tools for studying media texts that have been created based on the content analysis data set. This brings us to the next stage of the methodology, which deals with systematic gathering, coding, and analysis of media texts on sports in French-language newspapers in Nigeria.

IV. METHODOLOGICAL AND ANALYTIC APPROACH

In this study, the methodology involved in content analysis is used to analyse and examine the trends in French media discourse regarding Nigerian sports from 2015 to 2025. In communication research, content analysis was utilized as part of the process and has been around for some time. It is a scientific technique of studying communications generated by media organizations. Unlike interpretative reading which solely focuses on the meaning of texts, the technique allows for both statistical analysis and interpretation of narrative patterns within a context.

V. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a mixed-method content analysis that combines quantitative measures as well as a qualitative approach. The use of quantitative techniques makes it possible to detect frequency trends in the media reporting – for example, topic distribution in the press, Nigerian athletes' visibility, media coverage peak periods, etc. Simultaneously, the application of a qualitative framework helps to examine how events and individuals of Nigerian sport are depicted in journalistic texts. Thus, this approach to content analysis is typical of the recent development of media studies in general in which quantitative analysis of media texts is combined with qualitative analysis of their discourses. According to

Neuendorf (2017), modern content analysis usually integrates both approaches, especially when dealing with large digital media collections.

A. *Data Sources*

The data set used in this study refers to the collection of French language sports media content related to the sports in Nigeria from January 2015 until December 2025. The following types of Francophone sports media content were collected:

French language African sports news portals
International Francophone Sports News Broadcasts
Sports sections of online newspapers

French language sports journalism websites dedicated to Francophone readers
The relevant media sources include Francophone African sports news sources and major French language international sports news agencies providing regular news on African sports activities. These media sources regularly provide coverage on continental sports competitions, international player transfers, and performance records of Nigerian sports teams and athletes.

Articles were collected through keyword searches in French involving a combination of keywords like "Nigeria," "football Nigerian," "sport Nigerian," "équipes nationaux du Nigeria" and other names of specific Nigerian sports figures. The search methodology made sure that the collected data set includes only the media articles discussing sports-related issues in Nigeria rather than African sports competitions.

B. *Sampling Procedure*

In view of the volume of sports journalism that was made available online in the space of ten years, systematic sampling was chosen for this research design. The media texts meeting the stated inclusion criteria were entered into a database, from which duplicates and irrelevant articles were filtered out.

- The criteria for inclusion in the final sample were threefold as follows:
- The article was written in French language.
- The contents of the article contained mention of Nigerian sports players or teams.
- It was published within the period of 2015-2025 under consideration.
- This sampling technique yielded a dataset suitable for statistical analysis and of a reasonable scope for examination.

C. *Coding Scheme*

Every piece of media content analysed in the dataset was coded based on an established coding system aimed at identifying media coverage characteristics. This coding scheme included the following variables:

- Sport type (football, athletics, basketball, others)
- Media type (website, television, newspaper)
- Type of news (match report, biography of an athlete, transfer news, etc.)

- Representation tone (positive, neutral, negative)
- Geographical context (Nigeria, international competitions where Nigerian athletes participate)

The coding system was created during the initial stages of analysing the data in a way that made sure that the categories covered repeating features of the media content. Content analysis requires operational definitions of all variables to guarantee consistent classification of textual materials.

D. Statistical Analysis

The coded data set was analysed by means of descriptive statistical measures. In order to identify the combination of sports that received maximum emphasis in relation to their coverage in the media in French language media coverage, frequency distribution technique was used. Through cross tabulation, the study could examine the relationship between the variables like nature of sport and tone of coverage.

Additionally, temporal analysis was carried out to understand whether there was any change in the patterns of media coverage over the period of ten years. The peaks in coverage were identified in terms of important sporting events like Continental Championships as well as competitions against Nigerian teams.

E. Qualitative Interpretation

Though the statistical component captures the trend in media coverage that is measurable, the interpretation of the quantitative results does not do justice to the storytelling aspects of sports journalism. It was thus deemed necessary to interpretatively analyse selected articles from the data set so as to gain a deeper understanding of how the Nigerian athletes and sports events were framed in the context of sports journalism.

The interpretative process enabled the research to connect the numerical data to the broader context of sports journalism through connecting statistical results to themes such as regional rivalry and national prestige.

V. DISCUSSION

From the dataset coded, it is evident that there exist a number of trends concerning media portrayal of Nigerian sports events in French media from 2015 to 2025. The statistics generated by the coding process indicate that media coverage is not distributed equally among all types of sporting activities.

A. Distribution of Sports Covered

The first analysis entailed determining the frequency of appearance of various sports within the media data set. The findings demonstrate a significant prevalence of football coverage among the selected French-speaking media organizations.

Table 1: Distribution of Nigerian Sports Coverage in French-Language Media (2015–2025)

| Sport Category | Number of Articles | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Football | 342 | 68% |
| Athletics | 79 | 16% |
| Basketball | 51 | 10% |
| Other Sports | 28 | 6% |
| Total | 500 | 100% |

As can be seen from Table 1, about two-thirds of the total amount of coverage is devoted to football. This conclusion corresponds to general researches, which state that football dominates the field of sports journalism because of numerous international tournaments and television markets around the world (Rowe, 2013). The illustration is provided below in Figure 1.

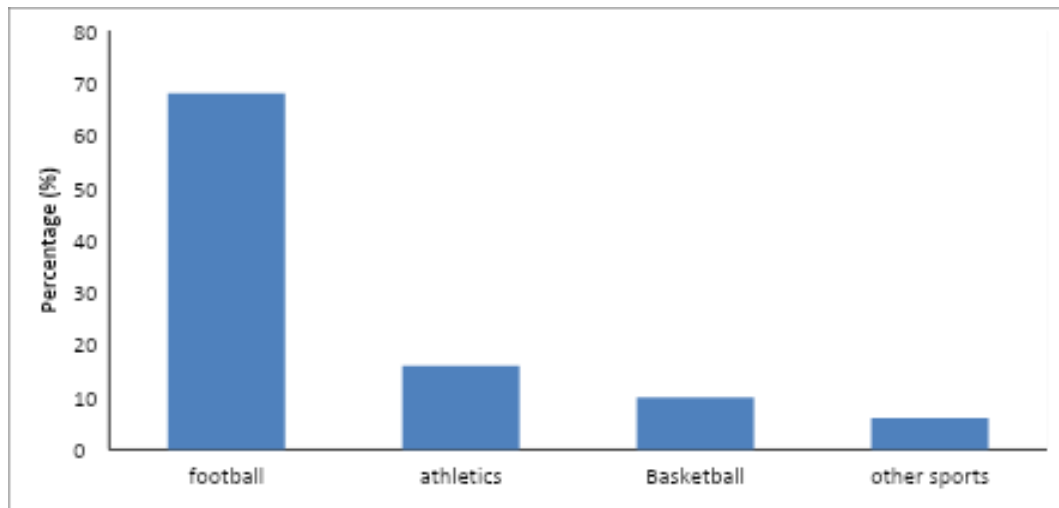


Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Nigerian Sports Coverage in French-Language Media

Football clearly dominates the media landscape, while other sports appear primarily during international competitions such as the Olympic Games or World Athletics Championships.

B. Temporal Distribution of Media Coverage

The second stage of analysis examined the yearly distribution of coverage across the ten-year study period.

Table 2: Yearly Distribution of Media Coverage (2015–2025)

| Year | Number of Articles |
|------|--------------------|
| 2015 | 32 |
| 2016 | 41 |
| 2017 | 38 |
| 2018 | 47 |
| 2019 | 52 |
| 2020 | 36 |

| | |
|------|----|
| 2021 | 59 |
| 2022 | 63 |
| 2023 | 68 |
| 2024 | 64 |

The pattern suggests that peaks in media attention correspond to major continental or international tournaments involving Nigerian teams. Coverage increases significantly during Africa Cup of Nations tournaments and Olympic years, reflecting the event-driven nature of sports journalism.

C. Tone of Media Representation

Beyond frequency patterns, the analysis also examined the tone of coverage in the sampled media texts.

Table 3: Tone of Media Coverage

| Tone Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Positive | 292 | 58% |
| Neutral | 166 | 33% |
| Negative | 42 | 9% |

The data indicate that positive portrayals dominate the coverage, particularly in articles reporting athletic achievements, tournament victories, or successful international player transfers. Negative coverage typically appears in contexts such as team eliminations, administrative controversies, or disciplinary issues involving athletes.

D. Narrative Construction of Sport in Nigeria

Although the quantitative approach offers statistical insight into trends of coverage, the more detailed qualitative study of selected pieces enables the discovery of the depiction of Nigerian athletes and teams within French media discourse. There is a recurring theme within many articles, which include post-competition strength, resilience, and continental competitions, particularly within football stories. The Nigerian teams have been consistently presented within the French media as major competitors in football tournaments on the continent, and they have developed an identity of being among the best football teams in Africa. In some instances, the reporters also identify the positioning of the Nigerian athletes within the larger narratives of international sport news, especially when the Nigerian athletes are participating in European leagues or international competitions.

E. Interpretation to the Statistical Patterns

The numbers and data provided above show that there are several factors that contribute to the influence that structural dynamics have on the media portrayal of Nigerian sports in French language media. On the one hand, it is the centrality of football as the most popular sport in Africa that leads to the portrayal of football as the main topic of discussion. Another factor that contributes to the media coverage is the cyclical nature of media attention based on the time when the sporting events take place.

Ultimately, the tone and approach used in narrating the story of Nigerian sport by the French-language media organizations are predominantly geared toward performance and competition and not institutional analysis of sporting activities. This phenomenon is reflective of the broader pattern in global sports journalism where journalistic coverage tends to be more event-driven and less analytical of sporting institutions.

The patterns identified through the analysis have some implication for the study of how sporting narratives circulate in the African media systems. At the macro level, the analysis has provided additional support for the theory that sports journalism is not only a reflection of athletes' performances, but also a medium by which the construction of regional identities and reputations is achieved within public discourses. One of the implications is that football has played a key role in changing the global image of Nigeria in terms of its sporting prowess. Football seems to dominate statistically in the French language media and therefore, there is a possibility that the world image of Nigerian athletics may be heavily dependent on football-related stories. Although there are globally renowned Nigerian athletes in other sports such as athletics, basketball and combat sports, they seem to be underrepresented with regard to media sampling. This is the reason behind the portrayal of Nigerian sport through the football lens. The second implication will necessarily revolve around the event-driven nature of sports journalism. With respect to the temporal nature of coverage, there is an increase in the level of media coverage in relation to the major continental and world competitions. This implies that the sport in Nigeria will likely receive media coverage in relation to its ability to compete and not in relation to its participation in national leagues or development initiatives. Consequently, the larger issues affecting Nigerian sport will likely be overlooked in international media discourses. The third implication involves the use of linguistic media networks in developing sports discourse in the region. This is evident from the circulation of Nigerian sports stories in the French-speaking media outlets. The Francophone sports media channels can be considered as one of the key mediators that facilitate the process of transferring news from the Anglophone sporting scenes to the audience of the whole of West and Central Africa. This way, sports reporting is helping to build up the shared sporting culture on the continent irrespective of national and linguistic differences. Media framing is also discussed in terms of reputation-building narratives for athletes and sports teams. As far as the selected articles go, a qualitative analysis demonstrates that stories about Nigerian sports teams are usually framed through stories about intense competitiveness and athleticism. Despite the fact that such stories form a frequent staple of sports journalism across the globe, however, they may have more far-reaching consequences than one might suspect in relation to how the public interprets the underlying significance of victory or defeat in athletics. Thirdly, there are important methodological implications for the study of African sports media. Not only do the methods of quantitative measurements and qualitative analysis of media texts employed here speak to the relevance of mixed research methods, they demonstrate their particular value in analysing media texts. In this case, the mixing of these research methods implies that one may both study media coverage trends from a bird's eye perspective and examine the narrative structures by which sporting events were communicated to the public. All told, these implications suggest that French-speaking media coverage of sport in Nigeria constitutes a complex set of interrelated processes involving not just journalistic routines but regional media networks and a globalised system of sports broadcasting.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

However, in many ways, sport is better placed to travel than the institution that creates it. Sport games take place in one location, but the narratives that emerge from them spread across languages, media and audiences who have indirect yet nevertheless important links to these events. By studying the French language media discourse of Nigerian sport from 2015-2025, we are offered a glimpse of these movements of sports narratives within the space of African media. Statistical observations made within this research reveal that the representation of Nigerian sport in the French language media discourse is shaped by identifiable editorial cycles. In particular, football becomes the organizing axis around which the coverage revolves, reflecting the significance of the game in the global context as well as its prominence for Nigerian teams within the continent. However, other types of sports feature far less, becoming noticeable only during the time Nigerian athletes appear on highly-visible international stages. But the numbers don't tell the whole story. However, within the articles, Nigeria sports have always been positioned within a larger geographical discourse of competition, prestige and performance. Teams and individual players are never described as competitors but are instead described as actors within a living geography of sports that spans Western and Central Africa. From this perspective, sports journalism takes on the role of an element of a much larger communicative process that sees nations, identities and reputation being constantly renegotiated before the public eye. However, what continues to surprise me is the extent to which these stories are influenced by the channels of communication used to convey them. French sports journalism, with its established traditions and audience, has created interpretations of Nigerian sports that redefine the conversations taking place within the continent of sports. However, the movement of these stories beyond their language borders shows the reality that African sports cannot be comprehended within one national media setting; it is conducted within a place where different media environments come together to influence how sports achievements are remembered and recognized. This study does not address the complexities of such an issue in any significant way. Rather, it illustrates how the sports discourse in Africa is complex and involves multiple layers through which the language used, the media institutions, and the movement of athletes globally interlink in a way that we cannot understand. Nigerian sports can be viewed in the Francophone media as the competition at one time or another, as well as an emerging or changing story that at one point dominates but at another is marginal.

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