

Nairobi Reputation Ranking

Cheryl long desired to visit Sub-Saharan Africa. She craved to experience a mix of culture and nature. She researched extensively and decided to travel to Kenya along with her oldest son. The two ended up loving Kenya and its people and returned to tell their friends about their positive experiences.

Thereafter, CNN showed an unflattering picture of Nairobi, unlike gratifying pictures for comparative cities, and highlighted that Nairobi held a dismal global reputation ranking. Cheryl felt hurt at the misrepresentation and felt fed up with global media.

Thousands of foreigners travel to Kenya each year and leave as strong ambassadors for our nation. However, Kenya faces an uphill battle when supposedly reputable news organisations frequently slander both Nairobi and Kenya in both subtle and direct ways. Many outside Africa already hold unconscious bias against our continent, so media misrepresentation feeds into their fears and negative perceptions that hurt our global trading prospects.

Kenyans on Twitter on local media frequently highlight mistaken global opinions about us. However, surely CNN would have learned its lesson following the thrashing that Kenyans and our supporters around the world unleashed with the “hotbed of terror” taglines before President Obama’s visit? No, not at all. CNN last week quoted a questionably non-rigorous survey.

The Reputation Institute put out its annual City RepTrak report. CNN stated that the firm surveyed 19,000 people to rate 101 cities across the globe. Baghdad stood as the city in the world with the world’s worst reputation, according to the firm, at 101st. CNN continued with the next worst city, Tehran, followed by Moscow, Nairobi at 98th, then Bogata. Forebodingly, Nairobi represented a 7.1% decrease over last year, the largest year-over-year decline of the 101 cities tracked.

As an innocent CNN viewer living in San Francisco, Strasbourg, Seoul, Sydney, or Santiago, one could be forgiven for taking the “facts” presented by the respected news outlet at face value: thousands of people all around the world see Nairobi as bad, so Nairobi is indeed horrible, therefore I will avoid Nairobi, avoid its people, and avoid business with Kenya. However, CNN should have said about the “study”: a consulting firm selling services surveyed people from the world’s eight richest nations about how they viewed their own cities versus foreign far away metropolises.

Let us put it in context. If a doctor put out a seemingly academic research report on the life saving qualities of a particular medicine urging people to purchase it, but simultaneously owned the drug patent, her research would get widely discredited as biased with a massive conflict of interest large

enough to drive the Rhino Charge through it. Similarly, the Reputation Institute seems to provide training, consulting, and sells its “Reputation Academy” and “Reputation Leaders Network”, among other services, for over US\$35,000 to civic and corporate leaders on why reputation is important and how to boost emotional reputation ratings about their corporations and cities. The firm seems to convince city leaders about a problem, make it look academically rigorous, then sells a solution. One would think that if CNN reported it, the source might be credible and come from rigorous testing without apparent conflicts of interest.

Further, the sample population would stun any observer. It appears like a non-statistically random sample with negligible methodology details, apparently an online survey, which notoriously holds self-selection bias. Then only residents living in G8 countries, including the United Kingdom, United States, Japan, Italy, Canada, Germany, France, and Russia could fill out the survey about both their own cities as well as cities far beyond their borders. A researcher could easily argue that a rigorous annual longitudinal study would take samples from residents in every nation appearing in the ranking. In fact, among the bottom 35 ranked cities, only citizens in one country containing one city actually could participate in the survey.

Obviously, if you ask individuals to compare the reputations of their own cities or the cities of foreign nations far away, those individuals would rank their own urban areas more highly. Ironically, less than 10% of respondents even claimed familiarity with Nairobi at all. The lack of familiarity of non-Western cities shows the bias and ignorance of the respondent sample. While mildly useful if targeting G8 citizen opinions on cities, depending on the deeper methodology, such stunning sample bias discredits the entire “study” as not global survey that formed the seeming basis of CNN’s report.

Even the amazing city state of Singapore only ranks 34th, because, again, the survey takers targeted were almost exclusively from Western countries. If the survey included large proportions of East Asian citizens, then Singapore would rank highly. In fact, no East Asian cities ranked in the top ten despite incredible cities like Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Seoul. Only three Asian cities appeared among the whole top 35 municipalities.

No African cities even feature in the top 75, not even widely acclaimed Cape Town. Also, the “study” claims linkages between peace in a nation and its reputation, quoting the Institute for Economics and Peace. While a seemingly logical correlation, but according to both the United Nations and the World Bank, countries in the Caribbean, Southern Africa, Central America, South America, and Eastern Europe have higher homicide rates per 100,000 people than Kenya. The before mentioned statistics only cover nations that report on their statistics. Since Kenya exists as more advanced than many other nations, we actually report statistics on homicides and crimes to the United Nations, unlike roughly half of Africa and parts of Asia. However, Kenya fairs worse in the City RepTrak report.

Poor representations hurt our export options, global labour possibilities, and tourism potential. Do not get accustomed and complacent to misalignment. We must fight misrepresentations masquerading as researched opinions. Demand international media show the whole picture, not biased snippets. Fight back with facts, not merely emotions. Discuss Kenya's perception in the world through #KOT on Twitter.

Professor Scott serves as the Director of the New Economy Venture Accelerator (NEVA) and Chair of the Faculty Senate at USIU-Africa, www.ScottProfessor.com, and may be reached on: info@scottprofessor.com or follow on Twitter: @ScottProfessor .

In next week's edition of Business Talk, we explore "Securities Exchange Efficient Market Theory". Read current and prior Business Talk articles on our website at <http://www.usiu.ac.ke/on-campus/blog>

0