

## **The Power of the Lens: Media Influence on Public Perceptions of Racial Inequality**

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### **Abstract**

Information passed on through people, different form of media, technological platforms, and books influences the way different cultures, religions, and ethnic groups are perceived in a way which may sometimes appear to be wrong. As long as we have gained knowledge of the society and world around us, we are bombarded with media. Messages that explain what it means to be a member of a social group, such as a gender, caste, or race. These media portrayals influence how we perceive ourselves and our environment. Content analysis is one of the most important tools for understanding media representations. Stereotypes and preconceived images of others are derivatives of the process. A critical understanding of the functions of digital, media, and information systems is therefore indispensable in countering prejudice and discrimination, and promoting tolerance, social inclusion, and dialogue. While many people get accustomed to a highly digitalized daily routine, various forms of racism burgeon in online spaces. They often take shape in disinformation and hate speech targeting diverse population segments. The root causes are intricate. Whereas, the lack of critical thinking about information, media content, and purposeful use of technology as a key factor is evident. Racism experience sharing (disclosure) can potentially draw attention to the issue of discrimination and kindle meaningful discussions on race. Sharing experiences with racism through social media can incite a diverse reaction in users. Racism is

expressed through discriminatory or exclusionary practices, on the one hand, and prejudiced beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and ideologies, on the other. It is a phenomenon expressed at the dimension of society, groups, individuals, and institutions, and is hence not to be analyzed as an attribute of the individual person or agency, but rather as a more complex, structural phenomenon.

**Key words:** social change, racism in media, Black and White binary system in society, social Discrimination, racial hatred, social media

### **Introduction**

The media play a central role in informing the public about what happens in the world, particularly in those areas in which audiences do not possess direct knowledge or experience. The media – television, the press and online – are pivotal in communicating to the public what is happening in the world. In those cases in which audiences do not have first-hand knowledge or experience of what is going on, they become particularly reliant upon the media to inform them. It is not, however, that the media tell us what to think – people do not absorb media messages uncritically. But they are key to the setting of agendas and focusing public interest on particular subjects, which operates to limit the range of arguments and perspectives that inform public debate. Drawing on a multidimensional model of the communications process, this article examines the role of the media in the construction of public belief and attitudes and its relationship to social change.

Characters on television and in other media are often simple and stereotyped; this makes it easier for producers to explain their stories and for audiences to understand them, but these images promote and sustain preconceptions. Mass media is no longer traditional; it has crossed time and space, and with the advent of the internet and digital arena, it has reached even the most remote locations through its amorphous and ubiquitous reach. Mass media has become ubiquitous with the advent of the internet and plays a significant role in the socialization process. Although the media exercises a strong

position in society and a large number of researches have revealed that it still perpetuates racial and ethnic stereotypes, sometimes with destructive consequences, it acts as a basic as well as the oldest lens through which people learn about each other. The oldest and most prevalent misconception is that women are undervalued and underrepresented. Ethnic minority communities are also often overlooked by the media, such as news, theater, and video games.

### *Racism in media and its stereotypes*

Mass media has evolved beyond traditional boundaries with the emergence of internet and digital arena that cut across space and time. It has reached out to the remotest corners of places with its omnipresent and amorphous reach. Mass media plays a very important role in the process of socialization. The easiest example of understanding the study is looking at how media influences our view of the world through maintaining and reinforcing stereotypes. Characters on television and in other media are often clichéd and stereotypical. Easy character profiles enable producers to communicate their tales better and for audiences to understand them. But such images foster and perpetuate misconceptions. The study of stereotypes offers a point of confluence between quantitative and qualitative research, between sociological science and humanities perspectives, and between administrative and cultural. Assumptions about stereotyping influence how we view media outcomes, uses, and gratifications as well as how we ideologically evaluate television and movies. While its content was being assessed. In spite of its vast reach in society, several studies show that these media continue to perpetuate racial and ethnic stereotypes, with frequently unfavorable outcomes, and are a basic filter through which individuals learn about one another. The foremost and the oldest stereotype is the underrated, under-representation of women. Also, the media, including news, theatre, and gaming, regularly ignores and disregards ethnic minority communities.

Stereotypical portrayals are very common in all media formats and types, which can be attributed in part to

complex media production procedures, cultural norms and values, selfish financial interests, and a dearth of ethnic minority media companies. Still, even though very difficult to quantify, their power has tremendous potential. Collective identity and inter group attitudes are determined by mass media, and the perceptions of the audience towards different groups are distorted due to stereotyping of some groups. It has been proven again and again that these biased media representations not only promote racial hatred and animosity in general but also affect the ethnic minority peoples' self-perceptions negatively. Thus, research into ways for challenging stereotypes and creating more positive media portrayals is critical.

It is assumed that racism is communicated through the media in the form of social representations. This means that the image of immigrants and the interpretation of ethnic relations in the media is not deliberately distorted and not by individuals, but rather that media are an influential part of a larger process of (re) production of social representations in the public sphere. Journalists and media institutions often reproduce forms of ethnic inequality 'by default'; i.e. they do not consciously perpetrate, but unknowingly, as an aspect of the professional habit and limitations specific to news work. Racism by the mass media is typically not open or explicit: just the insidiously stereotyped portrayal, generalising or apologizing rhetoric or even just a 'silence' over

the missing 'voices' from ethnic minority group perspectives within stories about themselves lead to the spreading of widespread racist beliefs and validation of discrimination as well as other hostile treatments.

In media reporting on racism, ideologies of right-wing extremism, report on racist acts and practices ranging from racist harassment, physical aggressions and even murder, reporting as an acts of discrimination, either institutional or individual is the practices of 'everyday racism'. The political mobilisation of anti-immigrant sentiment by extreme right or populist parties may, to a certain extent, be acknowledged by

the media as racism and xenophobia in practice. Likewise, popular protests against the presence of migrants or minorities in specific areas can be reported as racist or xenophobic protests. On the level of attitudes and opinions, media report results of surveys or can they themselves conduct phone-in programmes etc. to measure (and shape) the public opinion on ethnic issues.

We now live in a culture where hate crimes and acceptable discrimination amongst people of color have become common but it is the media who does criminalization and stereotyping of African American women and men in United States. Though in U.S. population is now become more diverse than it has ever been, but people there still remain in a white and Black binary society that draws strict social lines. In 2020, some spaces cannot be occupied freely without discrimination and bias by people of color. If people of color start occupying the areas which are surrounded with whiteness, they get judged by the skin color in which people apply some preconceived ideas and racial stereotypes on them. This is why the lack of accurate and diverse representation in media affects how we perceive people of color to be and how we interact with them as a whole. The vast amounts of negative media based around one race-particularly Black people-have divided our society into a predator versus prey society. In U.S. the criminal justice system today is a modern adaptation during the Jim Crow era that aided in the maintenance of racial order keeping Blacks in their place. From slavery and throughout this hierarchical structure of systems has often found Black people judged and presumed guilty of they committed the crimes they were accused of. There was this false common need to know why people of color are living in these spaces and shopping in those places and simply holding onto their autonomy. Under the impression that all black people are common criminals, under such a misconception, white people went about racial profiling that can lead into serious consequences that emerged for the innocent. This type of racism then leads to internalized racism and forces many people of color

This is to feel the need to justify their identity or adjust it in a way that is comfortable or non-threatening to white society.

Understanding how racism in the media creates a fearful and discriminatory society is beneficial in recognizing how media fuels racial profiling and increases internalized racism.

*Discrimination and racism through social media platform*

A number of psychologists and theorists have tried to describe this relationship between hate crimes and racist behavior across the globe. According to them, the intentional design of social media websites, based on algorithms which adapt to the beliefs and thoughts people currently hold onto, polarize and bias users and drive them into preexisting perceptions. While racist behavior is primarily driven by bias, social media can foster such bias. However, though under the theory of confirmation bias this assertion seems theoretically sound and justifiable; very few studies have attempted to validate it empirically.

The Internet and social media have become very common, leading to a number of positive developmental outcomes in societies around the world. However, these technologies also have negative societal and cultural impacts. The rise of hate crimes and racist behavior as a consequence of the diffusion of these technologies. It is very well documented that several racially motivated crimes around the world have been associated with the use of the Internet and social media. For instance, in 2016, a racist crime occurred in Jordan where the killer and the victim did not know each other personally; instead, social media mediated the crime entirely.

A gunman shot dead a Jordanian writer with a Christian background outside a court where he was facing charges for sharing on Facebook a cartoon deemed offensive to Islam, which had sparked outrage among Muslims. The killer had apparently seen the cartoon on Facebook and other social media, the investigation showed. He had also gathered all the information he needed to carry out his crime over the Internet.

A well-known example comes through Benjamin Nathaniel Smith, who in 1999 committed a shooting spree targeting racial and ethnic groups. The executioner reported that “it wasn’t really until [he] got on the Internet, read some literature of these groups that ... it really all came together”.

In Bangladesh, religious extremists have taken responsibility for the killing of a blogger and the founder of an LGBTI magazine, which has been inspired by a community of online supporters.

Such features as “hate speech,” advocacy of national, racial and religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination and violence as well as racism on social media platforms are not issues for Twitter but also for social media giants, such as Meta. Although it claims to forbid hate speech on its platforms, there is an apparent gap between the commitments a company makes in their policies and the actuality of enforcing on social media platforms. This is particularly salient in the approval of inflammatory ads, electoral disinformation on Facebook, and content that talks of conspiracy theories.

Social media has emerged to be among the largest media platforms for keeping the world connected to people, such as family and friends. In 2011, 1.2 billion users worldwide-82 percent of the world’s internet population over the age of

fifteen - logged onto a social media site, up from six percent in 2007.

Currently, there are 7.7 billion people in the world, and at least 3.5 billion use online platforms. Facebook is the largest social media platform in the world, with 2.4 billion users. Other social media platforms such as YouTube and Whats app also have more than one billion users each. Major platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snap chat, and Instagram all serve as a world within themselves.

That have their own distinct identities. Every social media platform has a unique way of interaction among its users, and what is allowed and not allowed on the platform. Social media platforms serve as a free speech platform for people to say what they want, when they want.

Although social media was meant for society to connect people virtually, it was never meant to provide a breeding ground for racism. Added to that over the web people have anonymity as a layer of cover, creating an environment where individual writers and large groups of people are abused because of their race or religion.

Racism thrives on social media by presenting itself in subtle re tweets or images that are often seen largely as simple comedy with no ill intent behind it. Subtle racism is often presented as a joke or the questioning of things that are simply understood. For instance, subtle

It will take the shape of racism against social media that involves calling a Black person with a made-up name based on what they perceive it should be. It will keep being represented through trending exploitative news clips of the educational gaps among people who come from poverty

Communities of color. Social media overt racism refers to open racism that finds its roots in the hatred for Black people expressed through posts saying “go back to Africa”, “go rob a bank”, or comparing pictures of Black people with monkeys.

## **Conclusion**

The media can play an important role in shaping of public perception on racial inequality, and perhaps it is the only platform which helps to make a difference in the way people think and behave. Media is a mirror that reflects the reality of society and an instrument for transformative action. However, its role is double-edged; media can challenge stereotypes and foster empathy, but it can also perpetuate harmful biases and oversimplify complex issues. The rise of digital platforms and social media has democratized information, allowing underrepresented communities to reclaim their narratives and expose racial inequities globally. Movements like #BlackLivesMatter demonstrate how media can galvanize collective action and hold institutions accountable. Challenges persist: the spread of misinformation, the sensationalization of racial issues, and unequal representation in mainstream media. The perpetuation and promotion of negative racial stereotypes, a tendency towards conflictual and sensationalist reporting on race issues and an insensitivity towards and often ignorance of minority cultures can all contribute to creating a social climate which is tolerant of racist violence. As a significant player in the public arena, it is inevitable that some complaints under the legislation will be directed towards the media. The media therefore, while having a

right and even a mandate to report on race issues, also has a responsibility to exercise impartiality, accuracy, and balance in reporting.

In a nutshell, it can be said that first, that racism, hate speech, and extremist ideologies are spread through social media; second that the media as medium and place for discourse have radically changed; and third, that companies that own or operate social media are inert in regulating and mediating said racism and hate speech or otherwise holding their users accountable, at least partly out of economic and external interests. This fourth and final point is that current laws and regulations do not hold social media companies or users accountable. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a need for some form of regulation in main steam media as well as social media which can create a imaginary line of restrictions and limits.

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