Exploring Media Racial Portrayal: Awareness, Sensitivity, and Implications

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Abstract. This study critically examines the intricate dynamics of media racial portrayal and its profound impact on individual perceptions and societal attitudes. With a focus on understanding the implications of heightened sensitivity to racial representation, the study delves into the ways in which media content can shape audience engagement and responses to racial biases and discrimination. Drawing on a comprehensive survey that gathered insights from a diverse range of participants, the study highlights key findings that underscore the prevalent awareness of racial portrayal in the media. Additionally, it emphasizes the substantial acknowledgment of the sensitivity surrounding media racial portrayal, suggesting a critical need to explore the multifaceted influence of this awareness on individual behaviors and societal attitudes. This paper employed a quantitative method of an online survey on Instagram and was utilized to collect the responses from 30 Malaysian young adults aged from 18 to 25 years old. The findings found that most of the respondents are against the idea of racism portrayed in the media and racism could be related to many types of crime such as cyberbullying, mockery, and slander that could lead to bickering in the mass media furthermore can form a negative sense in society.

Keywords: Race, media portrayal, media representation, sensitivity, knowledge management.

1   Introduction

This study delves into an examination of the profound impact of media racial portrayal on individuals' perspectives. Notably, media portrayal has the potential to alter viewers' perceptions of individuals belonging to diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. The influence of media stereotypes becomes particularly pronounced when there is limited real-life interaction between different racial groups, leading people to rely on these stereotypes to form their perceptions. Appiah (2004) highlighted the significance of ethnic identification as a cultural variable affecting media usage, emphasizing the role of source similarity in influencing individuals' responses to media content. Further supporting this notion, a study on the politics of race in Malaysia revealed that students often referred to physical appearance, particularly skin color, when discussing different ethnic groups, while another investigation on the misrepresentations of Middle Eastern cultures in media underscored the tendency of Hollywood to depict Muslims and Arabs in a negative light, often portraying them as billionaires, bombers, and belly dancers (Kozlovic, 2007).

The study aims to fill the existing gap in the understanding of the ways in which media influences people's perceptions of racial and ethnic groups. While previous studies have shed light on the subject, there remains a lack of concrete evidence demonstrating the direct influence of media on individuals' perspectives. Addressing this gap is essential to develop a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted impact of media racial portrayal on contemporary society. The complexities involved in the formation of racial perceptions within the context of media representation require a nuanced and comprehensive approach that considers various sociocultural factors at play. Additionally, the role of media portrayal in shaping individuals' perspectives about diversity and racial inclusion remains a crucial aspect to explore, given the increasing importance of creating an inclusive and harmonious social environment. Understanding the intricate interplay between media representation and the audience's perception can help to develop effective strategies for fostering a more inclusive and empathetic society.

Despite previous study shedding light on the influence of media racial representation, there remains a dearth of concrete evidence that definitively proves the direct impact of media on people's perceptions of individuals or social groups from different races. Consequently, the aim of this study is to bring awareness to individuals regarding their perspectives when the media represents communities based on their race. The study seeks to investigate the extent to which media accurately portrays individuals based on their race and whether media content perpetuates discriminatory and racist behavior. Additionally, the study aims to explore how media's racial representation fosters a sense of identification with diversity, with Richardson (2005) proposing a reframing of affirmative action to highlight its benefits for all groups, emphasizing the importance of increased diversity across all sectors to facilitate national integration. Richardson's study on the impact of editorial framing on White and African American opinions regarding affirmative action for African Americans revealed the significant effect of media framing on individuals' perceptions and attitudes.

2   Literature Review

2.1 Genetic Distinctiveness and Geographical Constraints

In contemporary nonhuman evolutionary literature, the term "race" has become a seldom-utilized term due to its intricate and ambiguous connotations. Often used interchangeably with "subspecies," it lacks a precise definition, leading to debates about its accurate classification (Futuyma, 1986). The classic understanding of a subspecies defines it as a genetically distinct population confined within a specific geographical region, yet this definition poses challenges when considering the independent spatial variations observed in various traits and underlying polymorphic genes (Smith et al. 1997; Futuyma 1986). Consequently, delineating distinct races based on these criteria becomes increasingly complex, blurring the boundaries between what defines a race and a local population. For the general populace, the concept of race predominantly revolves around visible attributes such as skin color and other physical features, further reinforced by biological race theories that categorize races, like Caucasoid, Negroid, and Mongoloid, based on external phenotypic characteristics like skin color, hair texture, facial features, and body proportions (Buttner & Lowe, 2010). Although historical biological classifications have rejected rigid categorizations, the acknowledgment of basic human divisions by the public and governing bodies has perpetuated and sustained these commonly held beliefs.

2.2 Role of Social Construction in Shaping Racial Categories

Race, one of the most debated sociological concepts of our time, has spurred diverse interpretations and understandings. Wilkinson & King (1987) have highlighted the significant misunderstandings surrounding the notion of race in contemporary discourse, emphasizing the intricacies involved in its sociological and biological categorization. Proponents of the biological categorization of race argue that it serves as a fundamental classification based on shared genetic features and gene distributions. They contend that these classifications provide a scientific basis for understanding human differences. However, the evidence for a concrete biological basis for racial classification remains sparse and often contradictory, raising questions about the reliability of biologically determined racial categories in different social, political, and economic contexts and the potential influence of prejudicial biases in shaping racial taxonomies.

In contrast, some scholars are cautious about adopting a strictly biologically oriented concept of race, preferring instead to conceive of race as a socially constructed category rooted in observable phenotypic expressions of underlying genetic differences (Schaefer, 1990). This perspective suggests that race gains significance primarily through its social implications, particularly in relation to ascriptive characteristics such as skin color. They argue that racial identities and distinctions are products of historical, cultural, and social processes, rather than inherent biological realities. In contemporary American society, racial classifications such as White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, and American Indian persist as the most commonly recognized categories, underlining the complexity and fluidity of race as a social construct. This intricate interplay between

the biological and social constructions of race underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of race and its implications in various societal contexts, urging scholars and researchers to critically examine the multifaceted nature of race as both a biological and sociological concept.

2.3 Stereotypes and Media Representations of Racial Minorities

Sex differences have biological underpinnings, while the understanding and enactment of gender roles are shaped by cultural influences, as highlighted by Gray (2013) depiction of it as an ongoing process of negotiating and interpreting our social experiences and relations. Similarly, race is better understood as a social construct rather than a biological category, with characteristics like hair and skin color serving as imperfect indicators. These social categories, adapted to meet dynamic social, political, and economic demands, underscore the pivotal roles of race and gender as social constructs in shaping our human reality, necessitating an understanding of the intricate influence of social institutions such as the media in shaping our increasingly gendered perceptions.

Intergroup research reveals how people engage in social categorization, often utilizing stereotypes to negatively evaluate those outside their social group, reinforcing existing societal norms and maintaining positive group identities (Goff, 2008). Racial stereotypes, frequently employed to justify social hierarchies and regulations, are widely disseminated through mass media, which has historically marginalized, stereotyped, and at times erased minorities from the media landscape in the United States. Although these portrayals have evolved with changing sociocultural dynamics, racial minorities continue to face inequities and negative characterizations. Despite gaining increased representation in entertainment television, some minority groups remain stigmatized in news coverage and are notably absent from newer media formats like video games.

3   Methodology

The data for this study was gathered through an Instagram survey that was conducted by three different people on three different Instagram accounts, but all of them focused on the same finding by using one instrument that was used and analysed qualitatively to better understand the impact of media on racial portrayal. Also, because racism is strongly held against oppressed races in our everyday media consumption, this method permits evaluation of how individuals think about a topic and understand why it is vital to raise awareness about racism in the media. The graph shows that most people who responded to our poll are acclimated to racism on social media. They're used to seeing people debate about prejudice on social media, especially when it comes to minorities. After 30 responses, the data from the questionnaire was analysed, and several respondents refused to answer certain questions.

3.1 Participant

Our survey participants primarily consist of the Instagram followers of our team members, predominantly within the 18-25 age bracket, denoting a young adult demographic. Engaging with this age group facilitates a more robust and insightful analysis, considering the active involvement of youthful minds in addressing issues concerning racism and stereotypes. This focus on young adults offers a prompt and comprehensive understanding of the survey results, highlighting the crucial perspectives of a demographic deeply invested in combating such societal challenges.

3.2 Procedure

During our initial topic selection phase, we collaboratively brainstormed and curated the survey questions, drawing inspiration from various academic journals and research insights focusing on the portrayal of racism in media. The survey questions primarily centered around participants' perspectives on how racism is depicted in social media. The sequence of questions was meticulously designed to maintain a seamless flow, gradually delving deeper into the nuanced aspects of the topic. Commencing with queries aimed at gauging their baseline understanding of racism in media portrayal, we progressed to probing whether participants perceived a biased representation of racism in the prevalent online media landscape. As the survey advanced, we sought to ascertain the extent to which our audience comprehended the intricate dynamics of media's role in shaping cultural perceptions and behaviors concerning racism. Furthermore, we provided an open-ended question format, allowing respondents to freely articulate their thoughts and perspectives within the provided response box. The structure of the survey ensured alignment with our research study goals, fostering an environment conducive to candid and meaningful responses without any potential bias or undue influence.

3.3 Measures

The study methodology involved the preparation of a series of Google Forms on various social media platforms, aiming to gauge the audience's perceptions of media racial portrayal. Our decision to utilize Google Forms was based on its user-friendly interface and widespread familiarity among social media users, facilitating efficient survey analysis. Beginning with basic demographic inquiries, such as age, allowed us to understand our target audience better, streamlining the process of collecting insights on racial issues. Furthermore, the survey questions were carefully crafted to elicit responses that primarily relied on participants' opinions and reflections, ensuring accessibility and ease of comprehension for all respondents.

According to the audience responses to the questions, many people are aware of the racial representation in the media. For example, in Table 1, 63.3% of those polled said they are aware of the racial portrayal in the media. Furthermore, in Table 2 shown about the topic of whether the media has used its power to highlight the negative aspects of other races. There were 73.3 % who replied yes, 16.7 %t who said maybe, and the

remaining 10% who said no. Apart from that, in Table 3, 90% of the individuals who answered the questions agreed that media racial portrayal is a sensitive issue in this country. Next, the individuals who took the surveys in Figure 4 suggested that media racial portrayal from this country that they have seen come from social media with 73.3% votes. The rest goes to film as it controls 16.7% of the votes. Lastly, there have been 93.3% of votes in Figure 5 that are up which says that they have seen people getting bullied on social media.

Table 1: Awareness of Racial Portrayal in Media

Do you know what is media racial portrayal?	Percentage (%)
Yes	63.3
No	36.7

Table 2: Perceived Media's Focus on Negative Aspects

Do you think the media has been using its influence to show the negativities of other races?	Percentage (%)
Yes	73.3
No	10.0
Maybe	16.7

Table 3: Sensitivity of Media Racial Portrayal

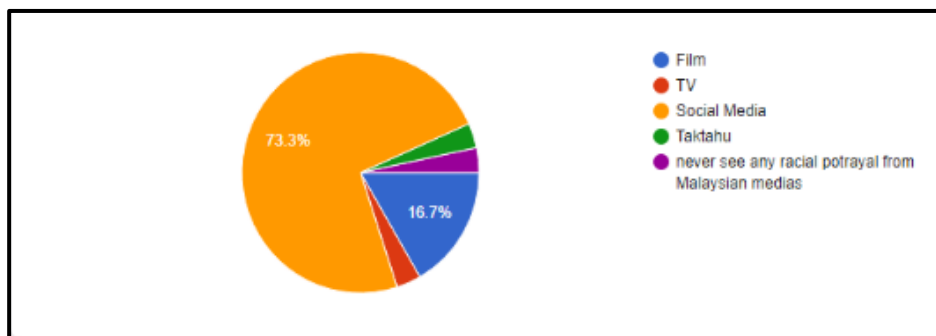| Do you think media racial portrayal is a sensitive issue in this country?	Percentage (%)
Yes	90.0
No	7.0
Maybe	3.0

Figure 4: Primary Source of Media Racial Portrayal
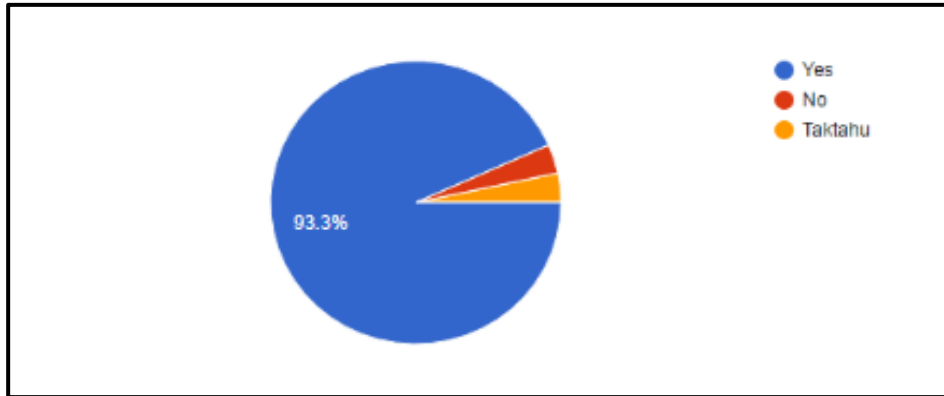
Figure 5: Social Media Bullying

4   Results and Discussion

Table 1 highlights a substantial 63.3% awareness rate among participants regarding the presence of racial portrayal in the media. This finding underscores the increasing consciousness among individuals of the influence wielded by media representations, particularly those related to race. It suggests a growing sensitivity to the potential impact of these portrayals on societal perceptions and intergroup dynamics, reflecting a heightened need for critical engagement with media content and its implications.

In Table 2, a significant 73.3% majority indicated that the media often amplifies the negative aspects of other races. This trend reflects the perpetuation of racial stereotypes and biases in media representations, potentially contributing to the reinforcement of harmful prejudices and discriminatory attitudes. The presence of an uncertain 16.7% indicates a nuanced perspective, suggesting a need for deeper exploration of the complexities involved in media portrayal and its effect on viewers' perceptions.

The overwhelming acknowledgment of the sensitivity of media racial portrayal in the country, as revealed in Table 3, further emphasizes the critical role of responsible media practices in fostering a more inclusive and equitable societal discourse. With 90% of participants recognizing the delicate nature of racial representations, there is a clear impetus for media stakeholders to prioritize ethical and culturally sensitive content creation, considering the significant influence media wield in shaping public attitudes and beliefs.

Additionally, Figure 4 insights on the prevalence of media racial portrayal on social media, indicated by 73.3% of respondents, underscore the need for heightened vigilance and regulation of online platforms. The dominance of social media as a source of racial representation highlights the potential for both positive and negative impacts, emphasizing the importance of fostering a respectful and inclusive online environment that promotes constructive dialogue and mutual understanding among diverse communities.

Finally, Figure 5 revelation of a substantial 93.3% of participants reporting instances of racial bullying on social media accentuates the urgent necessity for robust measures to combat online discrimination and harassment. This finding underscores the detrimental impact of racial hostility within digital spaces and underscores the critical role of comprehensive and effective policies that safeguard the online well-being and security of individuals from diverse racial backgrounds.

5   Conclusions

Based on the survey findings, it is evident that the awareness of racial portrayal in the media is increasingly prevalent among the respondents. The acknowledgment of the media's tendency to amplify negative racial aspects underscores the critical need for more responsible and culturally sensitive media practices. The significant recognition of the sensitivity surrounding media racial portrayal further emphasizes the importance of fostering an inclusive and equitable societal discourse. The dominance of social media as a platform for racial representation highlights the urgency for effective regulation and measures to cultivate a respectful and constructive online environment. Moreover, the prevalence of racial bullying incidents on social media emphasizes the pressing need for comprehensive strategies to combat online discrimination and harassment. These findings collectively emphasize the significance of promoting critical engagement with media content and fostering a more inclusive and respectful portrayal of diverse communities.

Furthermore, recognizing the substantial acknowledgment of the sensitivity concerning media racial portrayal, there is an evident necessity to delve deeper into the implications of this awareness on individual attitudes and behaviors. Researching how this heightened sensitivity to racial representation influences audience interaction with media content and their reactions to instances of racial bias or discrimination could offer valuable insights. Such an inquiry has the potential to illuminate the effectiveness of media literacy programs and diversity awareness campaigns in fostering a more inclusive and equitable media environment. Understanding the intricate ways in which heightened awareness shapes individual perceptions and responses would be pivotal in formulating targeted strategies to address racial biases and promote a more empathetic and culturally sensitive media landscape.

Acknowledgments

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