

# Are ethnic minorities still marginalised in contemporary media essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In the last decade there has been an enormous change in the nature of the media and the ways people interact with it.

For example, cable, terrestrial and satellite television channels plus widespread cheap access to the Internet and digital technology have spread rapidly from the USA to many other parts of the world. In addition audiences are now able to interact with the media to some extent, so they are able to exercise some control over the form and sometimes the content of the message they receive. For representation to be meaningful to audiences, there needs to be a shared recognition of people, situations and ideas. It is very difficult to generalise about representations of ethnicity in the media.

The main reason for this is that some sub-sections of broadcast, print and film media are oriented to and sensitive towards questions of ethnicity. For example programmes and even satellite channels are dedicated to Asian issues, magazines are made for those with Caribbean roots. These types of media represent minority ethnic groups in appropriate ways. There is much research evidence to suggest that the modern media in particular tend to stereotype the cultural values and norms of behaviours of some minority groups. New stories are often cast in terms of the threat posed by minority ethnic groups: by their increasing numbers, criminality or in some other way.

A classic example of this is a 27-year-old Algerian asylum seeker whose application had been refused. This refugee stabbed a police officer named Stephen Oake. “The Guardian” reported this incident on Thursday 16th January. The shadow Prime Minister Iain Duncan Smith was quoted as saying, “The priority for the government must be that no person should be allowed

to enter the country if they pose a risk to our security. Unfortunately this is easier said than done. Not every foreign person is a threat to the security of Britain as the newspaper have us believe.

The quote from the newspaper shows it's biased, this view is very stereotypical maybe because at the time this happened war was prominent. Van Dijk's (1991) study of European newspaper coverage indicates that black people are often portrayed as criminals. Another example of black people being portrayed as criminals is an article on the Nation of Islam, which reinforces stereotypes of black people being criminals, “..

. His (Louis Farrakhan) acolytes in their neat jackets and bow ties, selling the Nation of Islam's journal have always offered the black community a more inspiring role than the junkies and muggers who inhabit the same space. Television representation of ethnic minorities portrays a particularly restricted range of social roles for minority ethnic groups. In 1999 the broadcasting standard commission found that in terrestrial and satellite television, members of minority ethnic groups appeared in 42% of programmes, accounting for 7% of all people with a speaking role. They were best represented in children's programmes. Children's programmes such as “ Newsround”, “ CBBC” and “ Blue peter” all have had or have ethnic minorities taking a leading role.

There is no doubt television is the most popular medium amongst children. In England there are currently about 9 million 4 to 15 year olds at peak viewing times, they constitute to a third of the total audience. A group of 12-13 year old children in a London secondary school were asked about their

knowledge of the 3rd World. Among their responses were poverty; dying babies and Oxfam.

When they were asked where their information came from, they cited television programmes such as “ Blue Peter” and “ Newsround”, as well as news and “ special films” (Simpson 1985). The children’s programmes always have a dominant reading, hypodermic needle. The supposition is that a media text directly “ injects” a message into its audience, who have no power to resist it. Moscovici, an American researcher believes the have-nots, economically disadvantaged people, outsiders and the oppressed change society and not the ruling elites.

In the western world, ethnic people are in the minority. Media construct meaning about the world they represent and in doing so, help audiences to make sense of it. Gramsci an Italian sociologist believes the state places a dominant ideology on us; he calls this “ Hegemony”. Gramsci’s view of how hegemony could be maintained comes close to Marx’s view of false class-consciousness. Hegemony is the political leadership and ideological domination of society.

According to Gramsci, the State tends to be dominated by parts of the ruling class. They attempt to win support for their policies and ideas from other groups in society. Marxists have dedicated a section to this called “ Cultural hegemony”. This is the domination of one set of ideas over others. An example of this is the Michael Jackson interview “ living with Michael Jackson” hosted by Martin Bashir.

Jackson confessed to sleeping in his bed with children that were not related to him. Because the majority of people do not sleep in the same bed as children that are not related to them, this act is considered deviant. The day after this documentary was screened the “ Sun” newspaper’s headline was as follows, “ Michael Jackson sleeps with boys. The denotation is biased causing negative connotations, which causes a closed interpretation.

Researchers have argued that audiences used the media to satisfy certain basic psychological needs. These included the need for information, a personal identity, social, interaction and entertainment. For example, someone talking to their friends about a television show is using the media to make conversation. This is fulfilling a need for social interaction.

The line of argument in a documentary is called the exposition. An exposition is made up of description combined with commentary. The exposition is what the documentary is “ saying”. John Corner believes that the exposition in a documentary may be either planned directly or indirectly and hidden.

Relating this programme back to the question, Michael Jackson was originally a black man who has had extensive surgery to appear white.

These actions have not been supported by the media, which causes a lot of fuss over the “ King of Pop”. Across the world negative perceptions of Michael Jackson were increasing after this programme. In order to redeem himself and save his image a documentary hosted by Maury Povich named, “ The footage you were not meant to see” was made showing Michael Jackson’s version of what actually happened. This is another example of cultural hegemony because Michael Jackson felt he needed to redeem

himself. For example “ The Footage you were not meant to see” shows children from disadvantaged backgrounds going to visit “ Neverland” expenses paid, even though it costs Michael Jackson million of dollars to run each year. If he did not care what people think, as he made us believe in “ Living with Michael Jackson” this documentary would not have been made.

If we look at newspapers for example journalists genuinely act according to their beliefs, which are not necessarily determined by their class position although they are linked. The owners of the media protect their own interest. For instance we would never pick up “ The Sun” newspaper and see a negative article on Rupert Murdoch, “ The Sun’s” owner. However “ The Sun” is renowned for it’s sensational language and bias.

Neo-Marxists argue that the media make meanings and organize them into systems or codes, which help to make the role comprehensible to viewers and readers. They provide order and help us link together what would otherwise appear to be separate events. An example of this is the issues of Rising immigration and terrorism being raised. It might not be rising but just be more focused on by the media. The social world does involve struggles between ideologies and there are challenges to current social organisations. But the media has an important role to play.

Racism in European football has always been present but wasn’t reported until certain football players and managers spoke out about it. This created media frenzy. On October 4th 2002 Marcus Bent, a forward for English first division side Ipswich Town, says he was spat at during his side’s clash with

Yugoslav side Sartid Semderero in the first round of the UEFA cup. Bent, whose penalty sealed victory in the tie for Ipswich is quoted by “cnn.com” as saying, “It was a hostile crowd. There was a lot of racist abuse a lot of spitting when you went near the crowd. Bent’s claim was the fourth case of alleged racism, reported to UEFA, Europe’s footballing governing body, by English clubs playing in European competition. The Internet is a relatively new form of media. This type of media is extremely powerful, firstly because it is interactive and secondly because it reaches millions of people, all over the World. These events initiated the media frenzy.

Another example is David Blunkett, the Home Secretary has banned the nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan because he feels he is a threat to Black Britain’s dominant ideology. To avoid this ban, Farrakhan held a meeting via satellite. This meeting acted as an advert for the Nation of Islam because the media were interested in what he would be saying. “The Guardian” reported Louis Farrakhan as being a “separatist”. The audience are persuaded to find meaning within this text by journalists stating laws which he thinks Farrakhan is likely to break for example, “Our anti-racial incitement laws have also been strengthened. If Mr.

Farrakhan indulges in his old rhetoric, it would not be difficult to arrest and deport him.” This clearly shows the media’s power of influence. In contemporary media, advertising has represented black people with more dignity than other mediums within the media. In advertising stereotypes haven’t disappeared altogether they still remain but in more covert forms.

Ethnic minorities in contemporary mainstream advertising are seen as portraying greater sensuality and advocates sexual fantasies. One illustration is a major advertising campaign for a chocolate bar in the mid 1990s, with American model Tyra Banks. Tyra Banks is posing naked and is strategically covered with gold sheets. Her full body was represented in posters instead of just a facial view.

Maybe because the European population is predominantly Caucasian it made more commercial sense for the industry to explore the imaginary when portraying people of colour, rather than acknowledging them as a different group of people with similar lifestyles. Mass marketing campaigns are based on targeting a wide audience, with little or no emphasis on subpopulation such as ethnic minorities. Alvarado et al (1987) in their analysis of race and ethnic representation in the media, used the term “required construction” to refer to the concepts of racial differences and racism within the media. These constructions and social justifications are possibly seen at their most contorted in the situation where one culture tries to dominate another. They believe, black people have been represented as wondrous and strange by white Europeans, Americans and Australians. Their cultures are not understood but are extracted, exoticised and revered by naive western eyes.

Traditionally ethnic minorities have not been perceived as powerful by mainstream society. And since power intimidates, they have enjoyed little symbolic form of authority in advertising, leaving possibilities for fantasized images instead. Model Iman, illustrates this point perfectly. Fashion

photographer Peter Beard spotted her in Kenya.

<https://assignbuster.com/are-ethnic-minorities-still-marginalised-in-contemporary-media-essay/>



But although she was a student in political science, the agency that signed her created a fictitious story about her being an African goatherd. The agency recognises that the audience is important. Media products place primary emphasis on the consumers; the consumers are the people who would be buying into Iman. This is known as constructed reality. Members of the public and producers of media text have become very adept at manipulating the media for their own purposes.

It could be argued that, for many people, the “ World” that they perceive through the media is more real to them, and certainly a lot more exciting than the one in which they actually live in. Therefore in both reportage and drama there are problems centring on our perceptions of what the media reveals to us. Black men have been more often portrayed with authority, helped by the emergence of iconic sports stars such as Pele, Michael Jordan and Mumhammed Ali. There is a power struggle between men and women, which men often win because there are more of them in contemporary media. Iconic sports stars especially males represent male strength.

In economic context, sports stars are big money makers for videos with the likes of endorsements and interviews which pull in a bigger audience. In one notorious case, black men were not portrayed at all. The car makers Ford air-brushed several black faces out of a promotional photograph that had been taken of some of their staff in one of their factory plants. After complaints, the company had not been comfortable with the level of minority representation in the photograph, however much it might reflect the actual composition of their actual workforce. Ethnic minorities have not been

identified as separate big spending target audiences. Representation of people in advertising interact with society in many ways.

The first is by drawing in something desirable from the wider culture and attaching it to a product. They are seen as “ different” and powerless in western society. Ethnic minorities are seen as exotic, which is desirable. For example Caucasians go to exotic places to tan themselves.

So advertisers have made a link with wider culture being desirable. Hall (1990) argues that viewers see images from a white perspective, what he calls the “ white eye”. The “ white eye” assumes that the audience are predominantly white and that the dominant or preferred reading will be from the point of view of a white individual. 7% of the population of England and Wales are an ethnic minority, mainly concentrated in cities, with growing economic, social and political influence. Soap operas have an ability to influence maybe because people can relate to the character within them.

A new survey highlighted that one in ten Britons could not name a single world leader, but 63% could name a character in “ East Enders”, 43% could name five characters. “ Empire Road”, the first black British serial drama, chronicled the lives of people who were here to stay in the United Kingdom. Although it was not strictly a soap opera, it’s significant in chronicling the history and portrayal of black characters in television dramas. The show was set in 1970s Birmingham and was the only programmes at that time to give a picture of black families. The first black family in a real soap opera was in “ East Enders”, which was launched in 1985.

“Coronation Street” was launched 25 years earlier but did not have a black family. “Coronation Street” did not have a black family maybe because they, the producers thought it would not appeal to their audience or a black family was not representative of the culture they were trying to represent. The Carpenters were the first black family in “East Enders”, since its launch there has also been: The Taverniers, the Roberts’, the McFarlan’s and currently the Truman’s. Black families usually come into the series to highlight specifically black Caribbean issues like the impact of sickle cell within the “community” and street culture which exists in the east end of London. After making a specific racial point, Lloyd Tavernier left “East Enders” once the sickle-cell issue was raised.

Because there is usually one black family in the soap at a time, the script writers usually try to cover a range of storylines and cultures, for example the Trumans are of Trinidadian decent but are often seen eating Jamaican national dishes. Dr. Truman, a Doctor is not seen as having a middle-class but a working class life. Minority characters often have to stand for the whole of their population, as so few of them are given important roles.

I think the reason for this is so that negative stereotypes of black men being sexually promiscuous could be portrayed. Also the way he attained his degree was not legitimate, his brother, Paul raised money illegally. Plots and characters continue indefinitely. People identify with the characters and that encourages audience involvement.

For any programme to be successful, it has to have across the board appeal, for example to children to teenagers, young married and the older bracket.

People like to identify with their own peer group. In a political context it could be argued that soap opera do not give a true representation of life, especially in the East End of London where there is a mixed community. “East Enders” has yet to feature a family of African decent. “Coronation Street”, the longest running soap on television had it’s first major ethnic star in Anglea Griffin, who played hairdresser Fiona Middleton.

Fiona Middleton was one of the most popular characters in the soap, and her character was rarely racially specific. However when they introduced Marcus Wrigley, of Caribbean decent into the programme in 1998, “Coronation Street” was condemned because one of the first things it portrayed him doing was breaking into someone’s house. In a social context this storyline was bad for race relations because crime in the media is usually based on young black males. At the time, the makers of the soap, Granada TV denied the storyline was racist. However many critics argued otherwise: The show had very few ethnic characters and when one was introduced, he was involved in criminal activities, the motivations for which were unclear to the audience.

Michael Abbensetts argues that the issue with many ethnic minorities in soap operas is that they have to “fit in” with other characters and the audience, and television executives try to represent an ethnic group by using two characters often with disastrous and unrealistic consequences. Negative representation of ethnic minorities could lead to a dominant ideology, which is negative. When watching a soap the audience knows what to expect because it has characteristic features that are known and recognised by

audiences because the same formula is reproduced again and again. In this genre the audience tend to accept these characters with relative ease.

“ Brookside’s” Mick Johnson played by Louis Emerick, was a single father with a string of romances after breaking up with his wife Josie. Johnson and his family were a notable exception to common stereotypes. The dominant ideologies were refuted. The family was well integrated into the soap and had many gripping storylines.

His race was not ignored either- it was used to highlight how racism, like many other social issues, is significant and exists within society. According to a BBC news online survey, 78% of people polled thought that ethnic minorities are better represented on TV now than they were ten years ago. Fair and accurate representation of all communities is needed within contemporary media. We live in a multicultural society and there is a mosaic of different types of ethnic minorities who are constantly changing and redefining themselves. They need to be represented individually and not as a group.

TV executives and decision makers at all levels need to stop looking down from their glass ceiling and be aware of the shifts in society. Patrick Augustus, writer of series “ Baby Father” on BBC says many ethnic characters on television are “ written by white people for white people. ” And “ writers are lazy and have their own hidden agendas. ” Stereotypes, like genre can be said to exist, even if their elements shift over time as well as within and across particular media, and even though audiences understand them in often-ambiguous ways. Media representation of social groups vary

considerably. The treatment of minority ethnic groups is very different, for example, in popular newspapers to the treatment in television comedy and film.

Changes in social attitudes and awareness over the years have led in some cases to marked differences in the representation of particular social groups in the same media. No matter how old or challenging to contemporary views, many programmes are continuously recycled by cable and satellite companies. This diversity makes generalising about media representations of social groups both difficult and hazardous because with time attitudes change. After researching several mediums within the media, such as newspapers, television and advertising I have found that ethnic minorities are portrayed fairer than they have been in previous decades but are still not portrayed as fairly as they should be in contemporary media.

Therefore ethnic minorities are still marginalized.