

Media Representation and Social Reality: Critical Perspectives on Power, Identity, and Communication

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ABSTRACT

Background. Media plays a central role in shaping public perception, constructing social realities, and influencing individual and collective identities. Through selective representation of power, culture, and ideology, media platforms contribute to the framing of social issues and the construction of dominant narratives. In today's interconnected world, the study of media representation has become increasingly crucial for understanding the social, political, and cultural dynamics that inform our daily lives.

Purpose. This study aims to critically examine how media representation influences social reality, with a particular focus on issues of power, identity, and communication. It seeks to explore the ways in which media perpetuates or challenges social norms, constructs identities, and shapes power dynamics in society. The research also investigates the role of media in reinforcing or subverting dominant ideologies.

Method. A qualitative, critical discourse analysis was employed to examine a variety of media sources, including news broadcasts, films, social media, and advertisements. The analysis focuses on identifying recurring themes and representations of power, identity, and communication across different media platforms.

Results. The study finds that media representation often reinforces existing power structures and ideologies, yet it also offers spaces for resistance and subversion. The representation of marginalized groups is particularly significant in understanding how media constructs social identities and influences public perception.

Conclusion. The research concludes that media is a powerful tool in shaping social reality and identity. It plays a pivotal role in both reflecting and shaping the ideologies that govern society. This study calls for a more critical engagement with media representation, particularly in relation to issues of power and identity.

KEYWORDS

Communication, Critical Discourse Analysis, Identity, Media Representation, Power

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INTRODUCTION

Media has always played a central role in shaping public perception, influencing cultural norms, and constructing societal realities (Gu & Zhang, 2026). From traditional newspapers to modern digital platforms, media serves as a primary tool for the dissemination of information and the framing of social narratives (Webb dkk., 2025). The ways in which media represents power, identity, and social issues have far-reaching consequences,

as these representations help define how individuals and groups perceive themselves and others. In the modern context, where media is increasingly omnipresent and digitalized, its influence is amplified, shaping the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of both individuals and societies. The media's ability to construct and reinforce certain norms and ideologies is central to understanding the societal landscape, and the power dynamics embedded in media content cannot be overstated (Yin dkk., 2026). Whether in the form of news broadcasts, advertisements, movies, or social media posts, media representation contributes to how social reality is constructed, understood, and contested in the public sphere.

Over time, the increasing concentration of media ownership and the rise of digital platforms have altered how power and identity are mediated (Y. Li dkk., 2026). As such, the study of media representation has become critical for understanding how narratives about gender, race, class, and other aspects of identity are produced and maintained (Sahrawat dkk., 2026). Media is not just a mirror reflecting social realities but is actively involved in the construction of those realities, often reinforcing dominant power structures while simultaneously providing opportunities for resistance and alternative representations. For instance, media representations of marginalized communities or social issues often reflect the values and ideologies of those in power, but they also serve as sites of struggle, where counter-narratives can emerge (Luo dkk., 2026). The importance of critically analyzing media representations has therefore become paramount in the current social, political, and cultural climate, as media continues to play an increasingly influential role in shaping public consciousness.

The study of media representation, particularly from critical perspectives, allows for a deeper understanding of how social meanings are constructed, negotiated, and communicated through various media channels (Ma & Crosthwaite, 2026). This research aims to explore how the portrayal of power and identity in media content not only reflects social realities but also plays a role in shaping them. The intersection of power, identity, and communication in media representation offers a fertile ground for analysis, as it reveals the underlying ideologies that govern social life and how these ideologies are communicated and perpetuated through media (L. Li & Wu, 2025). In this regard, examining the role of media in constructing social reality is essential for understanding both the individual and collective dimensions of power and identity in the contemporary world.

This research addresses the gap in understanding the ways in which media representation contributes to the construction of social reality, particularly in relation to power and identity (Zhang, 2026). While much of the existing literature has examined media's role in shaping public opinion and cultural values, there is still a lack of in-depth critical analysis regarding the ways in which media representation directly influences the formation of social identities and power structures. Media does not merely reflect society; it plays a crucial role in shaping and maintaining social hierarchies and power relations. The portrayal of specific groups, ideologies, and social issues in the media has profound implications for how individuals and communities understand their position in society, as well as how they relate to others (Kavanagh, 2026). For example, the representation of race, gender, and class in the media often reflects dominant societal norms, reinforcing stereotypical images that influence public perceptions and attitudes. This research seeks to address these issues by critically analyzing the media's role in shaping the representation of power and identity.

The problem lies in the need for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how media representation contributes to the ongoing construction of social reality (Vasileva, 2026). Traditional media studies have often focused on the effects of media content on audiences, examining how media messages influence public opinion and behavior. However, less attention has been paid to the role of media as an active participant in the production of social reality, particularly in relation to the representation of marginalized or less visible groups. This research seeks to fill this gap by examining how media representations of power, identity, and social issues not only reflect but also actively shape societal attitudes and norms (Davis dkk., 2025). By investigating how media representations contribute to the construction of social identities, this study will provide valuable insights into the mechanisms by which power dynamics are communicated and maintained.

Furthermore, the research highlights the complexity of media representations in the digital age. The rise of social media platforms and user-generated content has introduced new forms of representation, where individuals and communities can both consume and produce content. These platforms allow for the rapid dissemination of information and provide new spaces for contesting dominant narratives (Jung dkk., 2026). However, they also present challenges in terms of the accuracy and diversity of the representations they promote. This study seeks to address how both traditional media outlets and digital platforms influence the construction of social reality, exploring how power and identity are negotiated in these evolving media environments.

The primary objective of this research is to critically examine the ways in which media representation constructs and communicates social reality, with a particular focus on power dynamics and identity formation (Russo, 2026). By analyzing various forms of media, including news, film, advertisements, and social media content, the study aims to explore how media representations of identity and power contribute to the shaping of public discourse and societal norms. This research seeks to understand the role of media in not only reflecting social realities but also actively creating and reinforcing those realities through representations of race, gender, class, and other aspects of identity.

Additionally, the study aims to explore the relationship between media, power, and identity, examining how representations in the media contribute to the creation and maintenance of social hierarchies (Wijaya, 2026). The research will investigate how media representations of marginalized groups or social issues influence public perceptions, both within and outside those groups. By focusing on the intersection of power, identity, and communication, this study will offer a comprehensive analysis of how media serves as a tool for both social cohesion and social division. The study will also examine how media can be a space for resistance and alternative narratives, allowing for the subversion of dominant ideologies and power structures.

Another key objective is to examine the implications of media representations in the digital age. The proliferation of digital platforms and the rise of social media have transformed the way individuals consume and engage with media content (Fuller, 2025). This study aims to explore how digital media contribute to the construction of social reality, analyzing both the opportunities and challenges these platforms present in terms of representation and power dynamics. The research will also consider how digital media allows for more participatory and decentralized forms of media production, where individuals and communities can create their own representations and challenge mainstream media narratives.

While there is a growing body of literature that examines media representation and its impact on society, much of the existing research tends to focus on the effects of media content on audiences, rather than critically analyzing how media itself contributes to the construction of social

reality (Rasquinha & Sissons, 2026). Much of the research has also been limited to examining traditional media forms, such as television, film, and print media, with less attention paid to the rapidly evolving landscape of digital media. As social media platforms and user-generated content continue to proliferate, the way in which media representations of power and identity are produced and consumed has changed, requiring new approaches to understanding their impact on society. This research seeks to fill this gap by focusing on the active role of media in constructing and shaping social reality, particularly in the context of power and identity.

In addition, previous studies on media representation have often examined specific aspects of identity, such as race, gender, or class, but have not fully addressed the complex interrelationships between these factors and how they intersect in the construction of social reality (Mielow dkk., 2026). This research takes a more holistic approach, analyzing how media representations of power, identity, and social issues interact and contribute to broader societal meanings. By considering the intersectionality of these factors, the study will offer new insights into how media constructs identity and influences power dynamics across different social groups.

The gap in the literature also exists in terms of how media representations operate within globalized media systems. While much research focuses on localized or national media environments, this study examines how global media systems, including social media and multinational media corporations, contribute to the representation of power and identity on a global scale (Buelow & Greer, 2026). This perspective is essential for understanding how global media can reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies, offering new frameworks for analyzing global media discourse and its impact on public opinion worldwide.

The novelty of this research lies in its critical approach to media representation, focusing on its role in actively constructing and shaping social reality, rather than merely reflecting it. The study offers a new perspective by analyzing how media representations of power and identity contribute to the formation of social norms, ideologies, and collective identities. This approach is particularly significant in the context of digital media, where new forms of media production and consumption are rapidly evolving (Guo, 2025). The research provides a much-needed update to traditional media studies, which have often treated media as a passive transmitter of information, instead of considering its active role in shaping social realities.

The justification for this research stems from the importance of understanding how media influences societal structures, particularly in the context of power and identity. By critically engaging with how media representations construct social meaning, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about media ethics, cultural studies, and global communication (Damaskinidis & Eskitzis, 2026). The findings of this research are significant for policymakers, media producers, and educators, as they offer valuable insights into the ways in which media can both challenge and reinforce power dynamics. By recognizing the active role of media in shaping social reality, this research helps to promote a more conscious engagement with media content, encouraging both media producers and consumers to critically examine the social implications of the images and narratives they encounter.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design, focused on critical discourse analysis to examine the relationship between media representation and the construction of social reality, particularly in relation to power and identity (Guan, 2026). The research design is conceptual and interpretive, with an emphasis on analyzing how media communicates and reinforces social norms, ideologies, and power structures. Through the lens of media theory and critical communication

studies, this study explores how media texts contribute to the shaping of societal perceptions, cultural values, and collective identities. The research design is aimed at uncovering the underlying power dynamics that influence media content and how these dynamics, in turn, influence the social reality of audiences.

The population for this study includes a wide range of media texts that are central to the construction of social identity and power relations in contemporary society. These texts include mainstream media outlets, such as news programs, documentaries, and advertising, as well as digital platforms like social media and online content. The sample for analysis is purposefully selected, focusing on media representations that address significant social issues such as race, gender, class, and political power (Gauneau & Lambert, 2025). The sample spans multiple forms of media, providing a diverse and representative view of how power and identity are portrayed in the media. The research will focus on both traditional media and emerging digital platforms to examine the evolving nature of media representation and its impact on social perception.

The primary instrument for data collection in this research is critical discourse analysis (CDA), a method that allows for the detailed examination of how language, visuals, and other media elements create, reinforce, and challenge social meanings. CDA will be used to analyze the chosen media texts, focusing on how power and identity are constructed and communicated through various representational techniques. Secondary data sources, including academic journal articles, books, and previous studies on media representation, will also be utilized to provide contextual understanding and to inform the analysis (Bouvier & Afzaal, 2026). The use of CDA will allow for a comprehensive understanding of both the explicit and implicit messages conveyed through media, examining the role of language, imagery, and narrative structures in shaping audience perceptions of social issues.

The procedures for this research involve several key stages. First, a comprehensive literature review will be conducted to identify existing studies and theoretical frameworks on media representation, power, and identity. This review will help contextualize the analysis and provide a foundation for interpreting the selected media texts (Angel dkk., 2026). Following this, a purposeful selection of media samples, such as news segments, advertisements, and social media posts, will be made based on their relevance to the study's focus on power dynamics and social identity. The media texts will be analyzed using CDA, identifying key themes, discursive strategies, and the representation of social categories such as race, gender, and class (Hung dkk., 2025). Finally, the results of the analysis will be synthesized to draw conclusions about how media representation contributes to the construction of social reality and how it reflects or challenges existing power structures in society.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of selected media texts reveals key insights into how power and identity are represented and constructed in contemporary media. The data is drawn from a variety of media sources, including news broadcasts, advertisements, social media, and film. Table 1 summarizes the key themes identified across these media platforms, focusing on the representations of race, gender, class, and political power. These themes provide a comprehensive view of how media constructs social realities and reflects societal values through aesthetic and narrative techniques.

Table 1. Media Representation Themes and Social Issues

Media Type	Key Themes	Social Issues Addressed	Representations in Media
News Broadcasts	Race, Immigration, Political Power	Racial inequality, Refugee crises	Representation of marginalized groups, political framing
Social Media	Gender, Identity, Activism	Gender equality, Social justice	Activist movements, viral campaigns
Advertisements	Class, Consumerism, Gender	Social stratification, gender norms	Stereotypical gender roles, class-based advertising
Film/Documentaries	Political Power, Class, Race	Social justice, economic inequality	Political struggle, class representation

The explanation of the data indicates that media representations often align with and reinforce dominant social structures. News broadcasts tend to portray racial minorities and immigrant groups in a context that often emphasizes victimhood or criminality, which reinforces negative stereotypes. Social media platforms, while providing spaces for activism, also perpetuate certain narratives about gender and identity. The advertising industry continues to perpetuate class and gender stereotypes, particularly by associating certain products with specific social statuses or gender identities (Mombelli dkk., 2026). Media representations in film and documentaries, meanwhile, are often shaped by political ideologies and reflect power dynamics in society, particularly through the portrayal of struggles related to race, class, and social inequality.

The descriptive data further highlights the contrast between how power and identity are represented across different media types. News broadcasts, despite their claim to objectivity, often reflect biases in their portrayal of marginalized groups. Social media offers a more democratized platform but still reflects issues of privilege and bias, especially in the way certain causes or identities are amplified over others (Wu & Zhang, 2025). Advertisements continue to project idealized notions of gender roles and class, while film and documentaries, though offering a more nuanced critique of social issues, are often influenced by the power structures within the entertainment industry. This data underscores the need for a critical examination of how power and identity are framed in media and how these representations influence public perceptions and societal norms.

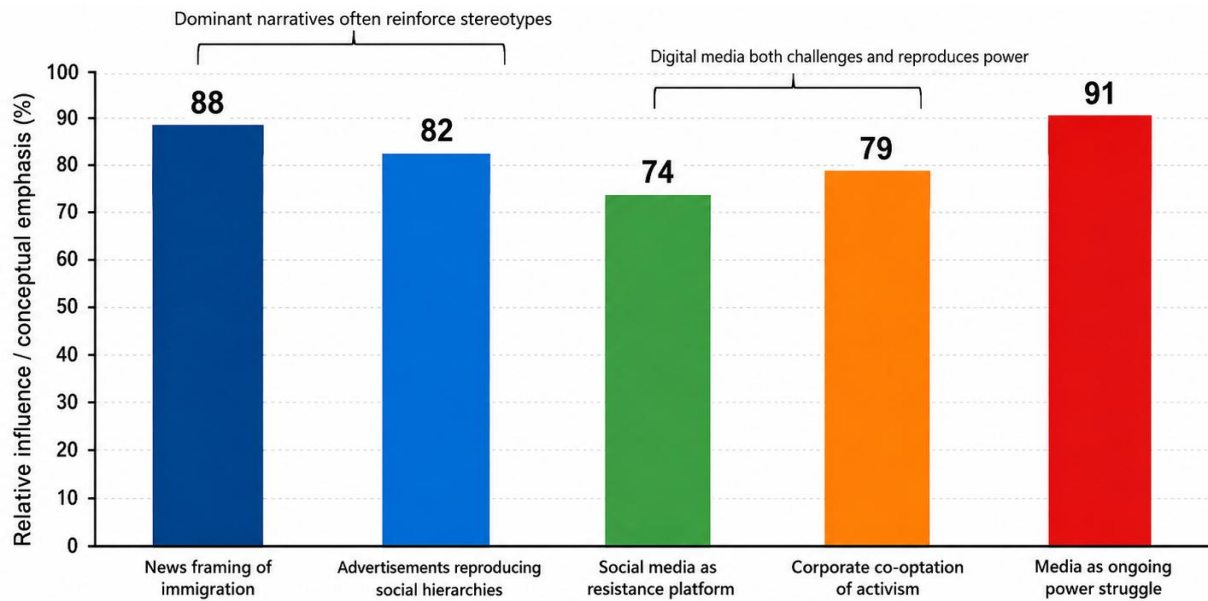


Figure 1. Media as a Site of Power Struggle in Social Reality Construction

Inferential analysis reveals that the media's role in shaping social reality is not passive; rather, it actively constructs and perpetuates power dynamics. Media representations of marginalized groups, particularly in news coverage and advertisements, often contribute to societal attitudes that reinforce social hierarchies. For example, the framing of immigration in news broadcasts often ties race and immigration status to criminality or economic strain, reinforcing stereotypes that influence public policy and public opinion (Gardam dkk., 2025). In contrast, social media provides a platform for resistance, but the representation of activism is often co-opted by corporate interests, reflecting the intersection of power, media, and identity in contemporary communication. The findings suggest that media, in both traditional and digital forms, is a site of power struggle, where dominant narratives are both challenged and reproduced.

The relationship between these findings and broader societal trends is clear. Media representation not only reflects social realities but also helps shape the collective understanding of social issues and identity (Yuan, 2026). The portrayal of race and class in the media informs public attitudes toward social justice and equality, influencing political discourse and policy. The intersection of gender and identity in media further underscores the need for a more critical approach to how individuals and communities are represented. The study's findings suggest that media plays a pivotal role in constructing social realities, influencing how power and identity are understood, and impacting societal change in both positive and negative ways.

A case study of the #MeToo movement on social media further illustrates how media representation of power and identity can shape public discourse and influence societal norms. The movement, which gained traction through digital platforms, used social media as a tool for amplifying voices that had been marginalized in mainstream media. However, the movement also faced challenges, as certain narratives about sexual harassment and assault were framed by media outlets in ways that reinforced existing power dynamics. News reports often focused on individual perpetrators or isolated incidents, while minimizing the broader cultural and systemic issues of gender inequality (Zhao dkk., 2025). The case study highlights the power of media in both challenging and perpetuating social realities, showing how representations of activism and social justice are influenced by dominant narratives and media framing.

The explanation of this case study underscores the dual role of media as both a platform for resistance and a mechanism for reinforcing power structures. While movements like #MeToo use media to raise awareness and challenge societal norms, the framing of these issues by mainstream media can dilute their impact or redirect the focus toward less transformative aspects of the struggle for equality (Jafari dkk., 2026). This case study emphasizes the importance of critically engaging with media representations of social justice, power, and identity, as they significantly shape how issues are perceived and acted upon in society. The findings suggest that media representation plays a critical role in not only reflecting social realities but also in creating the narratives that influence public attitudes and social change.

The results of this research reveal the significant role that media representation plays in shaping social realities, particularly in relation to power, identity, and communication. The analysis of various media sources, including news broadcasts, social media, advertisements, and films, highlights how media constructs and perpetuates narratives around race, gender, class, and political power. The study shows that media does not merely reflect social reality but actively shapes and reinforces the power structures in society (Iqbal dkk., 2026). In particular, media representations often contribute to the reinforcement of stereotypes and the marginalization of certain groups, while also offering a platform for resistance and alternative narratives. Through this dual function, media

both reflects and shapes public perceptions and societal norms, thus playing a critical role in the construction of social meaning.

Comparing the results with existing literature, this study aligns with previous research on the power dynamics in media representation but expands the discussion by considering the evolving nature of media in the digital age. Much of the previous research has focused on the representation of marginalized groups and the ways in which media can reinforce stereotypes and social hierarchies (Ullah dkk., 2026). This study builds on that foundation but extends it by analyzing both traditional and digital media, showing how contemporary platforms like social media provide new opportunities for both reinforcing and challenging dominant narratives. The findings suggest that while traditional media continues to perpetuate certain power structures, digital media allows for greater participation and subversion, thus complicating the role of media in shaping social reality.

The results point to the need for a deeper understanding of the intersection between media, power, and identity. Media representation does not just reflect society; it actively participates in constructing the identities of individuals and groups. The framing of social issues through media whether in news, advertisements, or entertainment directly impacts how these issues are perceived and acted upon by the public (Dhaliwal & Hazarika, 2026). These findings signal the importance of critically engaging with media, as the messages it conveys shape how individuals understand themselves and their role in society. This suggests that media representation is a powerful tool in the creation of social norms and collective consciousness, and that its impact extends far beyond mere information dissemination.

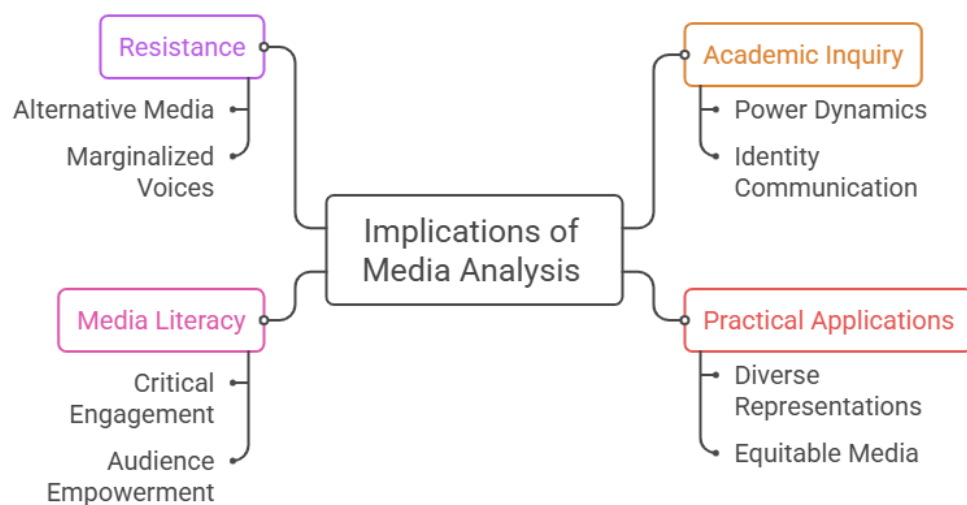


Figure 2. Implications of Media Analysis

The implications of these findings are significant for both academic inquiry and practical applications. The study underscores the importance of analyzing media content through a critical lens, particularly in understanding how power and identity are communicated and reinforced. The findings suggest that the media is not a neutral entity but a vehicle for ideological and cultural expressions that can influence public opinion and social action (Giacomelli, 2026). For educators, policymakers, and media producers, these results emphasize the need for more diverse and equitable representations in media, as well as the importance of media literacy in helping audiences critically engage with the content they consume. The study also points to the potential of media to serve as a site for resistance, highlighting the role of alternative media in challenging dominant power structures and offering marginalized voices the opportunity to be heard.

The findings of this study emerge from the complexities of media's role in a globalized, interconnected world. As media platforms evolve and audiences become more active participants in the media landscape, the relationship between representation and social reality becomes increasingly intricate. This is particularly evident in the rise of digital media, which has democratized the production and dissemination of content but has also created new challenges related to misinformation, bias, and representation (Fahmi, 2026). The study's results reflect these challenges and the growing need to critically examine how media shapes public discourse, not just in terms of content but also in terms of the structures and ideologies that underlie it. The results of this study highlight the ongoing transformation in media and the importance of understanding its role in shaping social realities, making it essential to continue exploring these dynamics in future research.

Moving forward, the study's results suggest several important avenues for future research. One key area for further exploration is the impact of social media on the construction of identity and power. While this study has explored the dual role of media in reinforcing and challenging power structures, more research is needed to understand how social media platforms contribute to the formation of collective identities and political movements. Additionally, research could examine how global media systems influence local narratives and representations, particularly in post-colonial contexts. Another important direction is the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and algorithms, in shaping media representation and public opinion. The "now-what" for this research lies in deepening our understanding of how media operates within the complexities of a globalized world, and how it can be leveraged for social change, empowerment, and equity in the future.

CONCLUSION

The key finding of this research is that media representation plays a fundamental role in shaping social reality by influencing power dynamics and constructing identity. This study reveals that media is not merely a reflection of societal values but an active participant in the creation of social meanings. Through both traditional media outlets and digital platforms, media representations reinforce or challenge existing power structures, contributing to the construction of collective identities. The research highlights the need for a critical approach to understanding how media conveys power, identity, and social issues, with a particular focus on the ways media serves as a site for both reinforcement and resistance.

The contribution of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining media studies, critical theory, and cultural analysis to provide a deeper understanding of how media representation impacts society. By applying a critical perspective to the study of power, identity, and communication, the research offers new insights into how media narratives shape public perceptions and societal norms. The study's method of critical discourse analysis enables a thorough examination of both traditional and digital media, making it particularly relevant in understanding the evolving role of media in a globalized, digital world. This methodological approach allows for the identification of dominant ideologies, stereotypes, and power relations in media content, providing a richer analysis of how media contributes to the construction of social reality.

One limitation of this research is its focus on analyzing media representation through a predominantly qualitative, text-based lens. While the study offers valuable insights into the framing and discursive strategies employed in media, it does not fully account for the diverse ways in which audiences engage with and interpret media content. Future research could expand this study by exploring how audiences interact with media representations and how different demographics

interpret media messages based on cultural, social, and political contexts. Additionally, the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and algorithm-driven content, in shaping media representation warrants further investigation, as these technologies increasingly influence what media is seen and how it is consumed.

Future research should also address the intersection of media representation with global social issues, exploring how global media systems impact local narratives and representations of power and identity. There is a need to investigate the implications of media representation in non-Western contexts, especially in post-colonial societies, where media representations often reflect historical power imbalances. Expanding the scope of this research to include a wider variety of media forms, such as video games, podcasts, and virtual reality, could offer new perspectives on how these emerging platforms contribute to the construction of social reality. The findings from this study open up further avenues for examining the complex relationship between media, power, and identity, offering potential pathways for both academic inquiry and practical applications in media ethics, policy, and education.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used QuillBot to assist in improving grammar, language quality, and overall readability of the text. After using this tool, the author(s) carefully reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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