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Title :

The Relationship between Mass Media and Racial Stereotypes

Author(s): Denny Yong 楊小燕

Class: Department of Foreign Languages and Literature

Student ID: D9740360

Course: Writing (6)

Instructor: Dr. Wei-Wei Shen

Department: Department of Foreign Languages and Literature

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Abstract

This paper sets out to examine the relationship between mass media and racial stereotypes. It first reviews the background of media related to ratings, personal experience which become the motivation of this paper, and the stereotypes which exist in the society by showing the informal interview report of racial stereotypes in Taiwan. It then analyzes the media, particularly Taiwan news which trigger not only racial stereotypes, but also discrimination and other problems such as privacy problem and product placement. The analysis illustrates vividly in every term and image on the news about how Taiwan news lack of objectivity that cause the discrimination and stereotypes in Taiwan community. The purpose of this paper is to comprehend specific stereotypes and other problems by mass media. Finally, recognizing the weakness of mass media, the paper suggests that the relationship between media and audience is like the story of “the blinds and the elephant”. We are not able to realize the whole truth by only “touching” one part. Thus, audience should analyze the media and its authenticity to prevent the implantation of particular stereotypes.

Keywords : Media and Racial Stereotypes



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Introduction

Media has become an essential part in this modern society. Not only every house has at least one television, many traditional restaurants, fast-food restaurants, and even groceries have a connection with media, such as television, magazines, or newspapers. As for television programs, the choice is vary. This is the main reason why the competition among TV stations in Taiwan is so intense. In this fierce competition, they need to figure out the better way to make their news and TV programs welcomed by the audience. The purpose certainly is to increase their ratings. The higher the rating is, the more benefits they receive because many companies will ask them to broadcast advertisements about their companies and products in particular. As long as the programs in high ratings, the advertisement will also be in high price.

How to grab ratings? Take news for instance. It should be accurate with the original text/source, and be attractive enough to the audience. Therefore, there are many TV stations try to find out the “unusual” information such as news about foreign countries and foreigners. For those who never have any contact with neither foreigner nor foreign country, this kind of news surely “feed” their curiosity. Media will provide information about this matter for the audience. Here, the problem comes. It is said that dog bites man is not news; man bites dog is. The media will have the inclination to broadcast those “special” events which are usually not good matters, for example, news about Indonesia’s garbage mountain, Indonesian laborers who run away from

their employers or become prostitutes, and so on. As the result, this news unknowingly created the racial stereotype in the audience mind.

Motivation

I am an Indonesian student who came to Taiwan four years ago. Because my Chinese is not fluent enough, I used to be asked by Taiwanese, “Where did you come from?” Whenever I replied, “I came from Indonesia,” the first respond of them was “Why do you have light skin?” If I was asked outside the university, their other responses would be: “Do you come here to marry with a Taiwanese?”, or “Do you come here to work?” Many times I needed to explain that not every Indonesian has dark skin, and that I am a student, not a foreign bride, nor a foreign laborer.

Taiwanese have the inclination to connect Indonesian women with foreign brides or foreign laborers. After I interviewed many Taiwanese, I found out that the media gave them this kind of impression. Furthermore, my Taiwanese friends mentioned that many Taiwanese have the bad impression toward people from South-East Asia countries, including Indonesia. They even suggested me not to tell people about my nationality when I am outside the campus because I might be discriminated.

I admit I was influenced by the mass media. When I was living in Indonesia, I watched some news regarding to South African. At that time, I unconsciously had the stereotypes about South Africa, such as “Africa is a poor country”, “no technology”, “a jungle country”.

I ever had the stereotypes maybe because of the media emphasizes the characteristics of some information. For example, the information about Africans who wear no clothes, Indonesian people who come to Taiwan as foreign brides or foreign laborers, and so on. I think it is not totally media's fault. Media has its defect, which is it may bring some stereotypes. But the bottom line is that the audience must be able to analyze and confirm its authenticity of the information.

The Purpose of the Study

I interviewed about 100 Taiwanese people for four years by asking them their opinion about Indonesian people. I collected and sorted their answers. Beside the informal interview for the relation between media and racial discrimination research, I also analyze some media texts, especially on news. The purpose of this study is to comprehend specific stereotypes and other problems brought by mass media.

Informal Interview Analysis (Personal Research from 2006-2010)

What is your opinion about Indonesian?

Answer	Percentage (%)
1. dark skin	88
2. foreign bride	30
3. foreign laborer	35
4. Muslim (does not eat pork)	48
5. under-developed country	35
6. others	10

Taiwanese Interviewees (> 100 People)

Occupation	Percentage (%)
1. university student	40
2. catering business staff	20
3. catering business manager	15
4. teacher	10
5. employer of foreign laborer	10
5. agent of foreign laborer	2
5. bus or taxi driver	3

Analysis of the Problems

Racial Stereotypes

The mass media’s “role” in America has fostered a distorted public perception of African-Americans due to the over-whelming focus on the gang violence, drug use or other anti-social behavior among African-Americans (Taylor, 1995a). Research has disclosed that most serious crimes such as homicide, robbery, rape and assault in inner cities are committed by a very small proportion of African-American youth, some 8% by estimates (Taylor, 1995b). “Yet, the tendency to characterize all African-American males as criminals continues in our society.” (Balkaran, 1999).

Similar case is also happened in Taiwan. Though there is some minor news which is more objective, most of Taiwan news causes the racial stereotypes. For example, the media implant the concept that most of Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian and Thai women come to Taiwan for marriage. In PTS Evening News (00:00-00:10), it shows that new immigrants who came from China, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand mostly are foreign spouses. Another misconception which the news bring is: “if

she is not a foreign bride, she should be a foreign laborer.” Also, most of news triggers bad images that foreign laborers usually escape, as in FTV News: Indonesian laborer fled from 9th floor, stuck on 8th, and even commit prostitution, as in the ETTV News: Indonesian female laborer with E-cup being exploited for prostitution.

The most obvious stereotypes that Taiwan news implant about Indonesian is: “Indonesian has a dark skin.” For instance, FTV News “Unmarried Indonesia woman giving a birth, afraid of being repatriated, hiding for six years”, FTV News “Indonesian laborer fled from 9th floor, stuck on 8th”, and DaAi TV News “Indonesia Garbage Mountain”. The image of Indonesian people is broadcasted repeatedly. Therefore, these news reports unconsciously implant stereotypes about Indonesian with dark skin to the audience.

In addition to the stereotypes toward Indonesian people, media also give the impression that “Indonesia is a poor country.” Based on the scene on DaAi TV News “Indonesia Garbage Mountain”, the audience will have the stereotypes toward the country of Indonesia, since the news just has the close-up shot on the garbage mountain. The audience will think that Indonesia is a poor country with mountains of garbages. The fact is that Indonesia is the largest economy country in Southeast Asia with its \$542 billion of Gross Domestic Product in 2009 (BPA, 2010) and a member of the G-20 major economies.

Privacy Problem

Above news expose the faces of foreign laborers. The exagerrating part is that the ETTV news about prostitution has no mosaic on the face. The audience can see the faces and bodies clearly (01:17). If the one who commit prostitution is a Taiwanese, the news will use mosaic to hide their identity.

Everyone has a privacy right. Unless the reporter gets permission from the principal, they cannot expose his/her face nor name.

Discrimination Matter

Beside the racial stereotypes, media can trigger discrimination. For instance, the screen on ETTV News (see appendix for the image) shows the discrimination matter on foreign people and their children. The term “外籍子弟” implies that they are not Taiwanese. Their children were born in Taiwan, and the marriages are legal. However, the news used the term “soldier”, pointing them as the enemies. This kind of news discriminates people who come from South-East Asia countries.

Product Placement

In addition to racial stereotypes and discrimination matter, most Taiwan news has product placement. Take FTV News “Unmarried Indonesia woman giving a birth, afraid of being repatriated, hiding for six years” for example. At (01:01), the subtitle is “印尼女未婚生子留台 吃泡麵度日” (Indonesian woman with a child stays in

Taiwan, eats instant noodles for living), and the scene is the cover package of beef instant noodles. Also at (01:06), the scene is One More Cup instant noodles. The product placement is obviously displayed again at (01:14) which scene is Momy Pads diapers.

The point of this news is about an unmarried Indonesian woman who was afraid of being repatriated and hide for six years, not about the instant noodles she ate. The kind of cheap instant noodles which can support ones life is not important. Moreover, it is not necessary to zoom-in some particular brands. The main point of the news is not for advertisement. Furthermore, the kind of diapers that the immigration bureau officer gave the couple is not the point. The bottom line is on the action of concern.

Conclusion

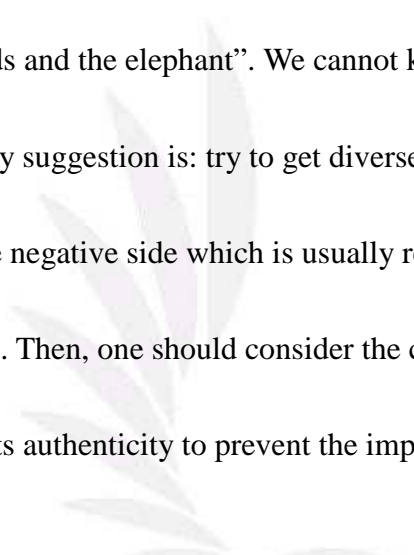
Stereotypes are common in media, especially in news and advertising industries, to attract the audience in order to increase the rating. Stereotypes give a quick general understanding of a group of people relating to their race, social role or occupation, and appearance. The problem is that stereotypes perpetuate social prejudice and inequality (MNet, 2010).

Media, especially the news, must be objective and impartial. But if the media fail to do that, it is our job as audience to analyze it; otherwise, we would be “controlled” by the media which attract us by its stereotypes. This will narrow our impression of

the world. For example, the news about Indonesia and its people. According to the informal interview, most Taiwanese think that Indonesia is a poor country and its people have dark skin. But the fact is that Indonesia is one of South-East Asia's strong economy countries. Furthermore, Indonesia has various race and ethics, which means that it is not necessarily that every Indonesian has dark skin.

Suggestion

Media only provide a part of an event. The relation between media and audience is like the story of “the blinds and the elephant”. We cannot know the whole truth by only “touching” one part. My suggestion is: try to get diverse information about particular news, not only the negative side which is usually reported on TV, but also the positive side of the news. Then, one should consider the credibility of the media, and analyze the media and its authenticity to prevent the implantation of some particular stereotypes.



Beside the suggestion above for the audience, this paper also triggers my interest in mass media's effects on children. I will start to collect some information and specific examples for my next research topic by finding some TV programs for children, for example, Walt Disney cartoons. Furthermore, I will analyze them by figuring out the stereotypes existing in cartoons and its influences on children.

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Appendix



(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_soGor-DOo)

