

Entry

Media-Based Cultural Diversity Education: Television as an Informal Actor in the Construction of Cultural Difference

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Definition

Media-based cultural diversity education is approached here as an analytical synthesis that brings together established research traditions in media and communication studies, including mediatization, representation, and framing. It refers to the process through which media are understood to function as informal educational environments that shape how audiences learn about and interpret cultural differences. In contemporary mediatized societies, media institutions, including television and digital platforms, are understood to shape public understandings of diversity through the selection, framing, and visual representation of minority groups. Television is widely regarded as a particularly influential medium because of its wide reach and its institutional role in producing authoritative narratives about social reality. Through news reporting, documentaries, and other factual programming, television has been shown to circulate meanings about cultural diversity and provide audiences with interpretive frameworks through which minority groups are publicly understood. These communicative practices have been shown to influence how audiences perceive cultural difference, interpret social issues, and negotiate questions of belonging within society. By organizing narratives, frames, and visual repertoires through which cultural groups are portrayed, television has been shown to contribute to the formation of shared social knowledge about diversity and about relationships between majority and minority communities. In this sense, television can be understood not only as a channel of information but also as a cultural institution that shapes symbolic boundaries between social groups and influences perceptions of inclusion and exclusion. As an illustrative context, this entry also refers to representations of Roma communities in Central European media environments, where antigypsyism may be understood as a mediated cultural process embedded in everyday media communication.

Keywords: media representation; cultural diversity; television; symbolic inequality; mediated exclusion; Roma representation; antigypsyism



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1. Definition: Media-Based Cultural Diversity Education

Building on this definition, *media-based cultural diversity education* can be seen as a heuristic framework that brings together insights from research on media representation, mediatization, and cultural difference. Rather than representing a distinct field of inquiry, it offers a way of understanding how media communication contributes to public learning about cultural diversity.

Within this perspective, *cultural diversity* is approached as a media-mediated process of meaning-making through which social differences are constructed and interpreted in mediated communication. Unlike formal diversity education, which takes place in institutional settings

such as schools or universities, this form of learning unfolds through everyday exposure to media content. This distinction reflects broader discussions in media education research, which conceptualize learning not only as institutional instruction but also as an outcome of mediated experience [1]. In this sense, mass media can be seen as *informal educational actors* that shape how audiences interpret cultural identities, intergroup relations, and social boundaries between majority and minority communities, a process closely linked to how audiences acquire knowledge through everyday media use and interaction [2].

Among different media forms, *television* has historically played a particularly influential role in shaping public understandings of cultural diversity because of its wide reach and its ability to combine narrative, visual, and emotional modes of representation [3,4]. Research in media sociology and communication studies has further shown that contemporary societies are increasingly characterized by processes of *mediatization*, understood as the process through which media increasingly shape social communication and the circulation of social knowledge [5,6], in which media infrastructures and communicative practices become central to the production and circulation of social knowledge [5,7]. Within such environments, audiences are repeatedly exposed to representations of social groups that shape collective understandings of cultural diversity.

A central concept for understanding these dynamics is *representation*. In media and cultural studies, representation denotes the process through which meaning about social groups, identities, and social reality is produced and circulated through language, images, and symbolic systems [8–11]. Media representations, therefore, do not merely reflect social reality; rather, they actively participate in its symbolic construction by selecting, organizing, and prioritizing particular interpretations of social life.

Within this perspective, *cultural difference* is understood not as a fixed attribute of social groups but as a socially constructed category that acquires meaning through cultural and communicative practices. Cultural identities and group boundaries are continuously articulated through discourse, representation, and public communication [8,12–14]. Media communication, therefore, plays a crucial role in making cultural differences visible and socially meaningful within mediated communication and broader public discourse.

In this context, it is analytically useful to distinguish between the related concepts of cultural diversity and cultural difference, which are sometimes used interchangeably but carry distinct meanings within media and cultural studies. *Cultural diversity* typically refers to the coexistence of multiple cultural or ethnic communities within a society and is often discussed in relation to social pluralism, multicultural policy, or educational contexts. By contrast, cultural difference emphasizes the communicative processes through which distinctions between social groups are constructed, represented, and interpreted within media discourse and mediated communication.

For example, discussions of cultural diversity may address the presence of multiple cultural communities within a national society, whereas analyses of cultural difference focus on how media representations structure public interpretations of these communities within media discourse and the broader public sphere [8,15,16].

2. Media as Informal Educational Actors

In media and communication studies, media are frequently conceptualized as *informal educational actors*, meaning that they participate in processes through which audiences acquire knowledge about society, cultural identities, and relations between social groups [6,10,17]. Mass media, therefore, are understood to operate not only as channels of information and entertainment but also as communicative environments in which social knowledge about culture, identities, and public life is produced, circulated, and interpreted.

Unlike formal education systems, which rely on structured curricula and institutional instruction, *media-based learning* emerges through routine exposure to mediated narratives, images, and discourses encountered in everyday communication [1,2,18]. Through these processes, audiences gradually develop interpretive frameworks that shape how social reality, cultural identities, and relations between social groups are understood.

Research in media and communication studies has long emphasized the role of media environments in processes of *socialization*, particularly in situations where individuals have limited or no direct experience with particular social groups. In such contexts, media representations frequently become an important source of knowledge about cultural difference and minority communities [19,20]. For many audiences, encounters with minority groups therefore occur primarily through mediated images, stories, and narratives rather than through direct interpersonal interaction.

Media narratives thus function as interpretive resources that help audiences organize social meanings and make sense of social identities [3]. They provide shared interpretive frameworks through which audiences understand social roles, relationships, and group distinctions within mediated communication [5,8]. In contexts of limited direct experience, such narratives may also shape expectations about minority communities by repeatedly associating them with specific themes or social issues [4,21,22]. Over time, these patterns contribute to the formation of taken-for-granted assumptions about cultural difference and social belonging in everyday public discourse [6,10,23].

In contexts where audiences have limited direct contact with minority communities, media representations may become a primary source of knowledge about cultural difference, shaping whether groups are perceived as familiar or distant, integrated or marginalized [4,21]. In this sense, media can be understood as informal educational actors that shape how audiences interpret cultural identities, intergroup relations, and social boundaries between majority and minority communities [1,2].

Understanding media as informal educational actors, therefore, draws attention to the broader cultural significance of media communication in shaping public knowledge about cultural difference. Media environments function as important sites in which societies learn about cultural diversity and negotiate the symbolic meanings associated with social identities and intergroup relations [6]. For this reason, particular attention in media research has been devoted to television, which has historically played a central role in shaping mediated understandings of social identities and cultural difference [3,4,24].

3. Television and the Construction of Cultural Difference

Television can be understood as a key informal educational actor through which societies encounter and interpret representations of social groups and cultural differences. Through its wide reach, audiovisual form, and strong presence in everyday life, television provides recurring narratives and visual representations that shape how audiences learn about cultural identities and social relations [3,24]. For this reason, television, particularly television news, has been widely examined in media research as an important site where representations of minority communities become publicly visible and socially interpreted.

In particular, television news frequently functions as one of the primary arenas in which audiences encounter mediated portrayals of minority communities and social diversity. Through news broadcasts, documentaries, and entertainment formats, television is understood to contribute to the public construction of cultural difference by circulating images and narratives that organize how social groups are interpreted within public communication [4,21].

Television's influence is closely linked to its institutional role in producing widely shared representations of social reality. Because of its broad reach and cultural authority,

television has long served as a central arena in which societies negotiate public meanings of identity, difference, and social belonging [4,23,25].

Television representations of minority groups, therefore, contribute not only to the circulation of information but also to the formation of cultural narratives through which audiences interpret diversity. News reports, documentaries, and entertainment formats regularly provide recurring images and storylines about particular communities, shaping the interpretive frameworks through which cultural difference becomes intelligible within public discourse [4,21,26]. These mediated narratives may reproduce dominant stereotypes and social hierarchies, but they can also create space for alternative or more complex representations of cultural diversity [11,16,23,25].

Through such representational patterns, media contribute to the construction and stabilization of *symbolic boundaries*, understood as conceptual distinctions through which social groups are categorized and differentiated in public discourse, that differentiate social groups and structure perceptions of belonging and exclusion within public discourse [12].

Media scholars have shown that television representations of minority groups often become central reference points through which audiences interpret *social diversity*. When viewers repeatedly encounter similar portrayals of particular communities, these representations may contribute to the formation of shared cultural narratives about social groups and minority communities [15,21,26]. Television news reporting, in particular, plays a significant role in shaping such narratives, as news institutions frequently present minority communities within recurring thematic contexts, such as migration, social problems, or public policy debates [21,26,27].

At the same time, television representations are embedded within broader processes of media production and public discourse. News institutions, editorial practices, and dominant narrative conventions influence how social groups are portrayed and how cultural difference is discursively constructed in media communication [4,14,28]. As a result, television does not merely transmit information about diversity; it also participates in structuring the symbolic boundaries that differentiate social groups within public communication.

Understanding television as a key site in the construction of cultural difference, therefore, draws attention to its broader role in shaping public interpretations of diversity. Through recurring images, storylines, and patterns of representation, television contributes to the circulation of cultural meanings that influence how societies perceive minority communities and interpret relations between social groups. These mediated portrayals do not emerge randomly; rather, they follow recognizable patterns through which media organize and structure the representation of cultural diversity.

Such patterns are examined in greater detail through analytical concepts presented in the following section.

4. Media Frames, Narratives, and Visual Repertoires of Diversity

Media representations of cultural diversity are not random reflections of social reality; rather, they are structured through recurring interpretive patterns that shape how audiences understand social groups and cultural difference. In media and communication research, these patterns are commonly examined through three interrelated analytical concepts: *media frames*, *narrative structures*, and *visual repertoires*. Together, these mechanisms help explain how media organize the representation of social groups and how cultural difference becomes intelligible within public communication.

The concept of *media framing* refers to the process through which media select, emphasize, and organize particular aspects of social reality when presenting news and other forms of public communication. By highlighting certain themes, actors, and causal interpretations while omitting others, media frames influence how audiences interpret social events and

social groups [27,29]. In the context of cultural diversity, framing processes shape how minority communities are positioned within public discourse, for example, whether they are represented primarily in relation to social problems, political debates, or cultural difference [4,21,30]. Recent studies further show that such framing patterns continue to shape public understandings of migration and cultural diversity across contemporary European media systems [31,32].

While framing emphasizes the interpretive structure of media discourse, *narrative structures* highlight the role of storytelling in the representation of social groups. Media texts frequently organize social reality through recurring narrative formats that define actors, conflicts, and moral interpretations of social events. These narratives contribute to the construction of shared meanings about identity, belonging, and difference within mediated communication [3,8]. Through such narrative structures, media representations may repeatedly position minority groups within specific roles, for instance, as victims, social problems, or cultural outsiders, thereby shaping the symbolic boundaries through which audiences interpret cultural diversity [26]. Recent research similarly demonstrates how narrative patterns structure the representation of cultural difference in contemporary European public communication [33,34].

A third analytical dimension concerns *visual repertoires*, which refer to recurring visual conventions and representational patterns through which media repeatedly depict particular social groups. In audiovisual media, images play a central role in shaping public perceptions because visual representations often communicate social meanings rapidly and emotionally [25]. Repeated visual portrayals, such as stereotypical imagery associated with poverty, marginalization, or social disorder, may contribute to stabilizing particular interpretations of minority communities within public discourse [15]. Within contemporary processes of *deep mediatization*, visual communication increasingly circulates across interconnected media platforms, which further amplifies the influence of recurring visual representations on perceptions of cultural difference [7].

Although these analytical concepts are often studied separately, they typically operate together within media communication. Media frames organize the interpretation of social issues, narrative structures provide the storyline through which social actors are positioned, and visual repertoires reinforce these interpretations through recurring imagery. Together, these mechanisms contribute to the stabilization of interpretive frameworks through which audiences make sense of cultural diversity and relations between social groups.

Understanding the interaction of frames, narratives, and visual repertoires, therefore, provides an important analytical foundation for examining how media representations shape public perceptions of minority communities. At the same time, these mechanisms reveal how media communication may contribute to the reproduction of symbolic boundaries and inequalities within public discourse. This perspective also connects to broader research on symbolic inequality and mediated exclusion, discussed in the following section.

5. Symbolic Inequality and Mediated Exclusion

Symbolic inequality refers to the unequal distribution of visibility, legitimacy, and cultural recognition among social groups within mediated communication. From this perspective, symbolic inequality is closely linked to the formation of symbolic boundaries, through which media discourse differentiates between socially recognized identities and groups positioned at the margins of public representation [12]. In media and cultural studies, this concept is used to analyze how processes of representation contribute to the symbolic organization of social hierarchies within public discourse [5,10]. Media institutions, therefore, play a crucial role in shaping which identities become publicly recognized, how social groups are interpreted, and how boundaries between majority and minority

communities are symbolically constructed within mediated environments. Scholarship on media power further emphasizes that patterns of representation influence how social issues and social groups are publicly interpreted, thereby shaping the distribution of symbolic power within public communication [22,35]. These dynamics become particularly visible in media representations of minority communities, where recurring patterns of framing, narration, and visual representation may reinforce symbolic inequalities in the recognition and interpretation of cultural difference [15,16,21].

These symbolic hierarchies are not produced solely through explicit statements about social groups; they also emerge through recurring patterns of representation that gradually stabilize cultural expectations regarding who belongs within the social mainstream and who is positioned at its margins. Such processes have been widely discussed in research on representation and discourse, which emphasizes how media communication contributes to the cultural production of social meaning and difference [8,9,16].

Symbolic inequality in media communication often arises through patterns of representation that differentiate between socially valued and socially marginalized groups. When certain communities are repeatedly portrayed in limited or stereotypical ways, these portrayals may stabilize symbolic boundaries that separate socially legitimate identities from those perceived as culturally distant or socially problematic [8,12,15]. Such boundaries do not arise solely from explicit discrimination; they are frequently reproduced through routine communicative practices, including news selection, narrative framing, and visual representation in news and entertainment media [4,28].

Research on media discourse shows that representations of Roma communities frequently appear in narratives of *social exclusion*, migration, or public policy debates, shaping how these communities are interpreted in public communication [23,36]. Comparable patterns have also been identified in monitoring and advocacy reports, such as the Roma Civil Monitor [37], which document how Roma communities are represented within broader public and policy discourse. Recent scholarship on media racism and mediated marginalization has similarly demonstrated how these patterns contribute to the reproduction of racialized interpretations of social difference within contemporary media environments [16,22]. Studies of contemporary media discourse have also shown that portrayals of migration and minority groups are often structured through narratives of uncertainty and perceived social threat, which may contribute to processes of symbolic exclusion and the dehumanization of minority populations within public communication [23,38,39].

The concept of *mediated exclusion* highlights how inequalities in representation influence broader processes of social perception. Media discourses do not simply circulate information about minority communities; they shape the symbolic conditions under which these communities are recognized, interpreted, and evaluated within society. In this sense, the visibility of social groups in media communication does not automatically imply inclusion. Rather, how groups are represented, whether through stereotypical narratives, problem-oriented framing, or limited perspectives, may reproduce patterns of *symbolic marginalization*, that is, forms of reduced visibility, limited recognition, or exclusion from dominant frameworks of representation, within public discourse [10,11,16,18].

Critical scholarship has further demonstrated that such representational patterns are embedded within broader ideological structures that influence how societies interpret difference and inequality. *Processes of racialization*, understood as the process through which social groups are constructed as culturally or biologically distinct and positioned within hierarchies of difference [40], and ethnic categorization [41], referring to the classification of social groups based on perceived cultural or ethnic characteristics within public discourse [42,43], are often reproduced through media discourse, contributing to the construction of hierarchical interpretations of social groups [40,41]. Recent scholarship has

also highlighted how contemporary media debates about cultural diversity frequently intersect with broader political controversies surrounding multiculturalism, migration, and national identity, shaping how minority groups are discursively positioned within public communication [44]. Through these discursive processes, media representations participate in shaping public understandings of who belongs within the social mainstream and who is positioned as socially or culturally “other”.

Media representations may also influence how audiences interpret responsibility, causality, and moral evaluation regarding social groups. Research on *media framing* demonstrates that the narrative structuring of social issues can significantly influence public interpretations of inequality and group relations [29,35]. When minority communities are repeatedly framed within narratives of crisis, deviance, or social conflict, such framing may contribute to the normalization of unequal symbolic hierarchies within public discourse.

At the same time, media representations do not operate in a strictly deterministic manner. Media environments also provide spaces in which dominant representations may be contested, reinterpreted, or challenged by alternative voices and perspectives. Journalistic practices, documentary storytelling, and cultural media production can contribute to more complex portrayals of social groups that emphasize diversity, agency, and everyday social experience [5,7,25]. These dynamics illustrate that media communication simultaneously reproduces and negotiates symbolic inequalities within public discourse.

Understanding *symbolic inequality* and *mediated exclusion*, therefore, provides an essential analytical framework for examining how media representations influence the cultural recognition of minority communities. By shaping visibility, legitimacy, and narrative positioning within public communication, media institutions participate in broader cultural processes through which societies define belonging, difference, and social hierarchy. These dynamics become particularly visible in media representations of ethnic minorities within national media systems, where recurring patterns of framing, narration, and visual representation structure how specific communities are publicly understood.

6. Illustrative Context: Roma Representations in Central European Media

Media representations of ethnic minorities provide an important context in which the dynamics of symbolic inequality and mediated exclusion become visible. Across many European media environments, minority communities are frequently represented through recurring narrative and visual patterns that shape public interpretations of cultural difference and social belonging [4,15]. As an illustrative context, the case of Roma representations in Central European media demonstrates how the analytical concepts introduced in previous sections—media frames, narrative structures, and visual repertoires—operate in practice, particularly within television-based news environments. Within Central European media systems, particularly in countries such as Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania, these dynamics have been especially evident in the representation of *Roma communities*.

Their portrayal in news and public discourse has often been associated with broader processes of *racialization*, *stereotyping*, and *antigypsyism*, understood as a specific form of racialized prejudice and structural discrimination directed against Roma populations [45,46], also referred to as anti-Roma discrimination [47], as well as *symbolic marginalization* [48,49], a pattern also documented in recent media research [23].

Research on media discourse shows that representations of Roma communities frequently emerge within narratives of social exclusion, migration, or public policy debates, shaping how these communities are interpreted within public communication [23,36,37].

These patterns can be understood in terms of media frames that structure how Roma communities are positioned within public discourse, often in relation to social problems or policy debates. Studies of news discourse have demonstrated that television news,

alongside press coverage, often represents Roma communities within specific thematic contexts such as poverty, criminality, social conflict, or public policy debates concerning minority integration [21,23,26]. Such recurring thematic structuring reflects framing processes through which particular interpretations of cultural difference become stabilized within mediated communication.

At the level of narrative structures, media representations frequently position Roma communities within recurring storylines that emphasize conflict, exclusion, or social tension. *Media narratives* contribute to the construction of collective understandings of identity, belonging, and national community by defining which groups are perceived as part of the social mainstream and which are positioned as culturally or socially “other” [8,15]. Within this discursive framework, representations of Roma communities often reflect wider historical and political debates about minority inclusion, migration, and cultural difference across Central Europe [48,50].

Visual repertoires further reinforce these interpretations through recurring imagery that is particularly prominent in television news and documentary formats. Scholars examining the role of media in the reproduction of ethnic hierarchies have also emphasized the importance of *visual representation* in shaping public perceptions of Roma communities. In television news and documentary formats, images of segregated settlements, collective portrayals of Roma populations, or visual associations with poverty may contribute to stabilizing particular interpretations of Roma identity within public discourse [4,21,23]. Recent research on visual news discourse has further demonstrated that European television coverage of migration and minority groups often follows recognizable visual typologies that shape how audiences interpret vulnerability, responsibility, and social distance regarding marginalized communities [23,31].

However, media representations are neither uniform nor entirely static. Alongside stereotypical portrayals, media environments may also provide opportunities for more diverse and complex representations of Roma communities. Documentary journalism, investigative reporting, and cultural media production have occasionally contributed to narratives that highlight everyday social experiences, community initiatives, or the voices of Roma individuals themselves. Such alternative representations illustrate how dominant patterns of representation may be challenged or reconfigured within media communication [5,25,50].

Overall, this illustrative context shows how these representational processes contribute to the construction and negotiation of cultural difference and symbolic inequality within mediated public communication, as discussed in the preceding sections, while also highlighting the role of television as a key medium through which these dynamics become publicly visible.

7. Summary

Media-based cultural diversity education is approached in existing scholarship as highlighting the role of media environments as important sites where societies encounter, interpret, and negotiate cultural difference. Unlike formal educational settings, research has shown that media communication shapes public knowledge about diversity through routine exposure to narratives, images, and discursive representations circulating across news, entertainment, and other media formats [1,2,10]. Within this perspective, media can be seen as informal educational actors through which audiences develop interpretive frameworks for understanding social identities, minority communities, and intergroup relations.

Rather than functioning as isolated processes, media representations operate through interconnected mechanisms that together have been shown to shape how cultural difference becomes meaningful in public communication. Media frames organize the thematic

interpretation of social issues, narrative structures provide storylines through which social groups are positioned within public discourse, and visual repertoires shape how audiences encounter and interpret representations of minority communities [3,8,29]. Together, these mechanisms have been shown to contribute to the stabilization of shared interpretive patterns through which cultural diversity is understood.

Media representations are also embedded within broader dynamics of *symbolic power*. Studies have demonstrated that media discourse contributes to the organization of symbolic hierarchies by shaping which groups become visible, how they are portrayed, and how their identities are interpreted within dominant cultural narratives [9,10,12]. In this sense, media communication can be seen as participating in the construction of *symbolic boundaries* that differentiate social groups and influence perceptions of belonging, legitimacy, and social inclusion.

The illustrative discussion of Roma representations in Central European media contexts shows how these mechanisms operate in specific social and historical settings. Recurring narrative and visual patterns in media portrayals have been shown to reinforce stereotypes and symbolic inequalities, while media environments may also enable the emergence of alternative narratives that challenge dominant representations of minority communities [4,15,16,25].

Overall, the entry synthesizes existing research by showing how media-based processes of representation contribute to the formation, stabilization, and potential transformation of public understandings of cultural difference and social belonging. It also situates these dynamics within broader research on Roma representations in Central European media environments.

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