

MEDIA IMAGE OF ROMA IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Aleksandra Penjišević

Union – Nikola Tesla University, Belgrade, Serbia, aleksandra.penjisevic@gmail.com

Branislav Sančanin

Union – Nikola Tesla University, Belgrade, Serbia, sancanin.branislav@gmail.com

Abstract: The identity of the Roma community is significantly disproportionate to its material and intangible cultural heritage, often resulting in a perception that their ethnic image is not grounded in sociological or anthropological reality, but rather shaped by oversimplified and subjective viewpoints. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the clarification of whether, and to what extent, the media are responsible for the negative portrayal of the Roma, or whether they merely reinforce already existing public perceptions and amplify images rooted in the minds of media consumers. The concept of inclusive and responsible journalism should acknowledge the Roma as a distinct ethnic group and recognize the multifaceted importance of Roma media - from ensuring the fundamental right of access to information about Roma culture, language, traditions, and customs, to facilitating broader relevant public debates and shaping a positive identity of the community. The key issue lies in the lack of social cohesion and the erosion of political culture, which continues to be shaped by stereotypes and prejudices about the Roma, leading to their marginalization and media-based discrimination.

Keywords: Roma, media discourse, artificial intelligence, stereotype, discrimination

1. INTRODUCTION

The analysis of media representation of the Roma population is one of the most important topics concerning this transnational minority, given that the role of the media extends beyond mere mediation to increasingly include the creation of social reality. The media-constructed reality, through the manner in which it represents the Roma, significantly influences how the majority population perceives them and shapes their attitudes. At the same time, it influences the identity formation within the minority group itself, as well as the pace and comprehensiveness of the inclusion process.

The media play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion through the images they construct. However, as Jovanović (2022) observes, media professionals are also citizens embedded within a specific societal context, and thus often adopt the dominant narratives of that society. Any form of generalization contributes to the construction of negative attitudes toward an entire group based on isolated cases. Due to limited knowledge of the subject and entrenched prejudices, journalists sometimes, albeit unintentionally, create an unfavorable image of the Roma.

Zhou et al. (2024) emphasize that the inherent limitations of large language models are directly reflected in the outcomes produced by Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI), which relies on machine learning to mimic human behavior and generate content. Generative AI, reliant on training over existing data corpora, often reproduces already present systemic biases, value conflicts, hegemonic cultural patterns, and inaccurate or stereotypical content. In this context, the representation of Roma in GAI-generated news becomes ethically problematic, given that such systems lack the commonsense reasoning humans typically apply in specific situations.

Building upon this concern, Shi and Sun (2024) argue that the value frameworks embedded in GAI shape how news is adapted and disseminated, hindering the understanding of events, narrowing perspectives, intensifying polarized discourse, and undermining the quality of public dialogue.

Figure 1. Application of GAI in news production and the associated ethical challenges



Source: Shi and Sun (2024)

Throughout history, the relationship toward the Roma has been characterized either by punishment or by paternalistic pity. Yet both extremes, rooted in entrenched stereotypes and widespread prejudice, have fundamentally served to distance the Roma community from the realization of basic human rights. Historically shaped by insufficient visibility of marginalized communities, a persistent narrative has been created regarding the Roma as impoverished, poorly educated, and culturally distinct in a manner that is often misinterpreted as incompatible with contemporary society. These are among the key reasons why public policies, without exception, bear the obligation to continuously promote equality, the richness of diversity, tolerance, and inclusion, along with other democratic values. This is particularly true in the case of Roma, who possess a distinct identity, culture, and tradition.

A study examining the 2022/2023 academic year assessed how Roma-related content is represented in school curricula. The analysis revealed that none of the reviewed subjects, Serbian Language, The World Around Us, Nature and Society, Music Education, and Civic Education, explicitly mention the term "Roma" or the "Roma people," despite clearly promoting positive values. These findings underscore the need for textbooks to include specific content on Roma, which should be integrated into the official curriculum. Such inclusion could support Roma students by helping them feel less excluded and more empowered to participate equally in educational settings. (Trbojević et al., 2023)

The media industry is expected to contribute to the development of a strong narrative that can play a concrete role in dismantling the still-significant barriers that hinder social inclusion. A necessary precondition, and the currently missing link, for realizing rational and just solutions to the identified challenges could lie in an honest and responsible dialogue between the government, the media, civil society organizations, and representatives of the Roma community. The role of the media is indispensable, as they possess the power to mobilize collective action among readers, listeners, and viewers, while also encouraging individuals to recognize stereotypes and prejudices, and to critically reflect on their own attitudes.

The purpose and potential impact of fostering dialogue both within and outside the Roma community, and of enabling coordinated, full-capacity engagement, can only be achieved through Roma media. This axiom will, over time, become increasingly evident and indispensable in all collective efforts to combat poverty, illiteracy, and prejudice.

Despite estimates suggesting that up to 600,000 Roma reside in the Republic of Serbia, data from the 2022 census show that Roma constituted the third largest national minority, with 131,936 individuals (1.98% of the total population) identifying as Roma. Compared to the 2011 census, this reflects a 10.6% decrease in the number of individuals self-identifying as Roma. The discrepancy between estimated and recorded numbers is due to several factors, including the voluntary nature of declaring national identity during the census, the practical difficulties in enumerating individuals living in informal settlements, and the fact that a number of Roma do not possess personal identification documents (Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, 2024).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Until 2007, when Romania became a member of the European Union, the press was regarded as an active source of stereotypes about Roma. Reporting on issues related to this minority population primarily focused on elements with negative connotations, such as violence, crime, and illegal activities. The effects of cognitive differentiation

associated with categorization create room for “illusory correlation” and the exaggeration of descriptive attributes to construct complete stereotypes. Media, in this context, serve as one of the primary sources of simplified and pervasive messages, producing characterizations and singling out groups that do not conform to the dominant societal model (Crețu, 2014).

In their article on Hungarian Roma communities, *Disempowered by the media: Causes and consequences of the lack of media voice of Roma communities*, Vera Messing and Gábor Bernáth (2017) argue that media representation of Roma has changed only marginally over the past two decades. They claim that the distorted image of Roma, alongside historically rooted prejudice and social exclusion, is largely a consequence of power imbalances, particularly the limited influence Roma have over media content production and access to media platforms, as well as the weakness of their self-representation. The authors emphasize that integrating Roma into mainstream newsrooms would contribute to a more equitable portrayal of the Roma community and enhance awareness and knowledge of alternative approaches to reporting on minority issues.

In the *Global Report on Roma in Slovakia*, the authors agree that (Vašečka, 2003):

- The Roma issue represents a combination of ethnic and social problems, all of which must be taken into account when formulating public policy;
- The Roma issue is extremely complex but can be resolved;
- The approach to Roma in Slovakia should be based on their desegregation;
- The Roma population is highly heterogeneous and must be addressed as such;
- Coordination and mutual awareness are key elements in the preparation of any public policy;
- All solutions concerning Roma issues must target both groups: the Roma and the majority population;
- Given the growing awareness among Roma, it is necessary to begin speaking of the Roma as a *nation*, not merely as an ethnic group.

To uncover the historical construction of the image of Roma in Turkey, Tunç, Cox, and Uştuk (2019) examined audiovisual materials dating from the 1960s and conducted a descriptive-interpretative analysis of how cultural and artistic narratives have contributed to and/or reflected, and thereby reproduced, the dominant knowledge and imagination about Roma in Turkish society. This long-marginalized subcultural group is generally perceived as an “othered” community, incapable of speaking for itself, and its public representation largely depends on narratives not produced by Roma themselves.

Using a detailed analysis of a single image and reconstructing its various interpretive contexts and semantics, End (2017) identifies the mechanisms employed in stereotypical media reporting on Roma. The author explores the powerful stereotypical media discourse that shapes and reproduces a particular racialized and prejudiced perception of Roma in Germany. This qualitative study, based on media analysis of anti-Gypsyism and the investigation of the photographic construction of the “Gypsy,” examines the contemporary visual regime of Roma in Germany. As it portrays Roma as fundamentally different and socially deviant, the analysis demonstrates that this visual stereotype is an integral component of a persistent anti-Roma ideology deeply embedded in German society.

Although Italy is among the European countries with the smallest proportion of Roma population, levels of anti-Gypsyism are above the European average. This phenomenon is not a result of demographic factors but rather of inclusion policies and the challenges of social interaction between Roma and non-Roma. In this regard, Pasta (2019) emphasizes that in the “post-truth” era, the internet and social media have become the most significant tools for the diversification and dissemination of racist messages.

Using GPT-4, Breazu et al. (2024) analyzed 474 YouTube comments related to the media representation of Roma in Sweden, with a focus on identifying instances of Romophobia. Through the synergy of human and machine capabilities in detecting hate speech, the authors employed artificial intelligence to automate thematic clustering, while human researchers were tasked with enriching the interpretative depth. While GPT-4 demonstrates scalability in processing large datasets, its reliance on broad, neutral classifications tends to overlook culturally embedded and ideologically charged dimensions of discourse. Drawing on perspectives that emphasize the situational nature of communication, the authors argue that the synergy between human insight and AI offers valuable methodological advancement, though it necessitates critical human oversight to ensure contextual depth and analytical precision.

Kroon et al. (2016) analyzed the content of 825 newspaper articles published between 2010 and 2012 in the Netherlands, Germany, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and the United Kingdom. The findings revealed that media framing of Roma commonly oscillates between portraying them as both victims and perpetrators, with media attention centered on key events that vary significantly across national contexts.

In the study *The politics of representation of Roma minority in Slovak and Serbian press: political narratives in a comparative perspective*, Simenunović Bajić (2022) compares Roma representation in Serbian and Slovak print media by examining political narratives and micro-framing, analyzing changes in media frames from 1989 to 2019.

Based on a historical background and a comparative approach, the research demonstrates how specific political frames, themes, and discursive statements regarding the Roma minority have evolved over time, and highlights the role of the press in shaping these representations.

Milošević and Stojić Atanasov (2003) conducted an analysis of one year of reporting in two leading Serbian daily newspapers, *Politika* and *Blic*. The study focused on how the media report on national minorities, including the Roma population, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. During the observed period, 32 articles related to Roma were published, primarily within the domains of politics and culture. The most prominent themes included measures aimed at improving the status and rights of Roma, particularly in the field of education, followed by issues concerning skinhead violence against Roma, as well as articles about Roma lifestyles, holidays, and traditions.

Regarding the social inclusion of Roma in Serbia, as a critical indicator of social cohesion, Cvejić (2019) argues that since 2000, progress has been made in integrating Roma into key areas such as education, employment, economic empowerment, housing, and anti-discrimination policies. However, the overall situation remains unsatisfactory. The core issue lies in the political culture, characterized by persistent stereotypes and prejudices toward Roma, which form the basis for their marginalization and occasional discrimination, factors that continue to undermine efforts to strengthen social cohesion.

Labeling in the media remains an essential topic that generates numerous misunderstandings. Some Roma organizations have requested not to be referred to as “Gypsies,” arguing that the term carries a negative connotation. In this context, the issue is not merely linguistic but rather semantic, rooted in the negative implications of the term. Therefore, it is advisable to focus media attention on affirmative topics and representations of the Roma population.

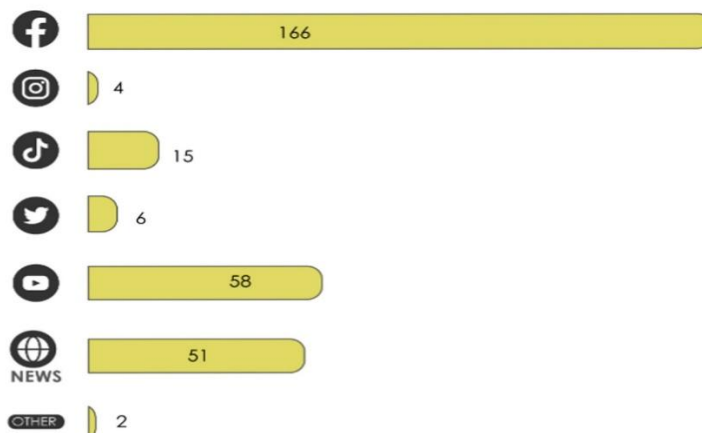
The rapid advancement and implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) pose significant challenges for the Roma population. While the potential benefits of AI are evident, the risks associated with its daily exploitation, as well as technical hazards that remain insufficiently understood, point to the urgent need for an appropriate legal framework to minimize potential harm (Zaidan & Ibrahim, 2024). In the context of the Roma community and their media representation, the application of AI remains largely unknown, with its progression unpredictable and difficult to control. A strategic orientation must lead to the establishment of trust and the assurance of effective AI governance through oversight, comprehension, and ethical reflection (Mialhe & Hodes, 2017).

3. MEDIA DISCOURSE ABOUT ROMA IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Print media in Serbia have increased both the frequency and accuracy of their reporting on the challenges faced by Roma men and women. However, they tend to focus on factual transmission of information without engaging with the broader context of events. With few exceptions, these outlets rarely engage in critical examination of the position of Roma in Serbian society or the effectiveness of state policies aimed at Roma inclusion (Jakobi, n.d.).

In the document *Challenges of Digital Anti-Roma Behavior*, it is reported that between November 2020 and August 2021, 302 cases of online hate speech targeting Roma were detected in Serbia. Most of these instances occurred on Facebook (166 cases) and online news portals (51 cases). The majority of the reported content appeared as comments (252) and posts (45), while three cases involved Facebook pages and two involved personal profiles (European Roma Rights Center, 2023).

Figure 2. Online hate speech directed against Roma



Source: European Roma Rights Center (2023)

Media affirmation of the Roma population should not be simplified or considered solely as an issue of a single ethnic group, but rather as a key indicator of the democratization of society as a whole, one that demonstrates sufficient sensitivity to all forms of social inclusion challenges. These are latent and complex processes, full of institutional obstacles, for which effective systemic responses are still lacking. As a result, society as a whole continues to perform poorly on the test of social cohesion.

Work in the media sector requires adequate education, which remains one of the greatest barriers. The Republic of Serbia records the largest gap between Roma and non-Roma populations in terms of educational attainment compared to all other Western Balkan countries: the completion rate of higher education among Roma is only 1%, compared to 23% among the non-Roma population. Despite notable improvements, more than one-third of Roma aged 18 to 21 lack primary education, and one in six Roma children of compulsory school age remains outside the education system (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 23/2022).

Among the most frequent issues faced by Roma in education, Simić and Vranješević (2022) identify low preschool enrollment rates, an increased risk of segregated schooling accompanied by prejudice and discrimination, and a high dropout rate from secondary education. It has been shown that psychological and educational support from parents and teachers, and in some cases from peers and Roma NGOs, along with scholarships and affirmative measures in enrollment, have been important factors for success.

Everyday exposure, whether explicit or implicit, to media violence contributes to real-life violence, shaping long-term attitudes, values, and behaviors. In the context of the Roma community, it can be argued that media digitalization and the mass use of social networks, coupled with eroded credibility and undefined legal and ethical standards, have acted as catalysts for the spread of hate speech, creating an environment of fear, division, and exclusion. In this context, efforts to transform digital environments into positive outcomes should be understood as a pursuit of the principle that safety in virtual space should not be treated as a privilege, but as a universal global norm (Sančanin et al., 2025).

The Roma, as a globalized minority, are dispersed across the world and lack a standardized language due to the absence of a nation-state, which makes it impossible to establish a sustainable and standardized linguistic norm. The most significant contribution to the standardization of the Romani language in Serbia was made by Trifun Dimić, who identified three key challenges in his work: the development of orthography, dictionaries, and basic textbooks and manuals for early childhood education, as well as for training Roma teachers to conduct classroom instruction in their mother tongue (Dolovac, 2009).

In this context, Ćirković (2023) emphasizes the importance of using the Romani language in the public sphere in Serbia, noting that studying its presence in public spaces enables the assessment of its status, patterns of use, and the identification of both its vitality and vulnerability. The analysis focuses on top-down language use, language guaranteed by institutions and public and local policies, highlighting the advantages and shortcomings of such use, along with violations of linguistic rights.

According to Biljana Ratković Njegovan (2011), the Roma population faces significantly more challenges than other groups. She notes that the state institutions of the Republic of Serbia have been actively engaged in promoting the social integration of Roma through numerous actions and affirmative measures, one of which includes the development and support of Romani-language media.

Todorović and Đorđević (2010) outline a series of steps that could improve the media promotion of the Roma minority:

- Developing greater sensitivity within mainstream media toward accurate reporting on cultural differences, along with the need to educate editors and journalists on how to present minority-related issues in a high-quality and appropriate manner to the public;
- Introducing the general public to Roma traditions and cultural creativity through relevant programming on national and local public broadcasters during prime time;
- Launching campaigns aimed at promoting literacy among illiterate individuals and raising awareness about the importance of including Roma children in the educational system;
- Encouraging bilingual and multilingual programming in electronic media to support language acquisition and integration into the broader linguistic environment;
- Providing translations of programs into the Romani language for broader audiences who use the majority language as a common means of communication;
- Expanding Romani-language programming on the national broadcaster RTS;
- Employing journalists of Roma origin in national and local news services;
- Organizing journalism and media technology training for media collaborators from the Roma community;
- Encouraging media outlets to establish local Roma editorial teams;

- Establishing and strengthening independent and professional Roma media;
- Promoting an ethical stance that rejects reporting on individual incidents in ways that stigmatize the entire Roma community;
- Calling out and criticizing overt racist incidents, including within the Roma community itself when such behavior goes unaddressed;
- Highlighting affirmative stories instead of focusing predominantly on negative news about Roma;
- Publishing investigative media reports on the various dimensions of Roma marginalization.
- Marginalization and hate speech in the media can have far-reaching consequences for the Roma community, given that they are frequently the target of disproportionate stigmatization and violations of basic human rights. Timely detection of harmful narratives, particularly in digital media, where the path from malignant rhetoric to acts of aggression is significantly shorter than in traditional media, must serve as a catalyst for content creators to take greater responsibility. By fostering a positive editorial environment, media professionals can play a crucial role in raising awareness and countering hate-driven discourse.

4.CONCLUSION

In most countries, the Roma community has faced decades-long experiences of multidimensional exclusion, within which the media often act as a powerful tool that reinforces entrenched stereotypes. The entire society, and especially the media industry, must make additional efforts and demonstrate political will to address the Roma issue through concrete responses to social exclusion and marginalization. One of the key preconditions for resolving the complex "Roma question" is the provision of comprehensive and timely information on issues that require immediate attention, thereby fostering a transparent and equitable state policy toward Roma. In a strategic approach to addressing social inclusion, high-priority areas should include reforms in healthcare, education, employment, and housing conditions. This process of change must be holistic and simultaneous, as the improvement of only one or a few sectors will not eliminate social inequality. Despite numerous efforts, the Roma community's participation in the media remains limited, which can partly be attributed to poverty and lack of education, factors that hinder the community's capacity to invest in the development of their own media. In the long term, a qualitative shift can be achieved by transforming the media consumer identity encapsulated in the phrase "*Roma in the media*" into that of an active agent, owner and creator of media content, expressed through "*Roma media*." The right to information in one's mother tongue is a fundamental human right, and when this right is denied, the consequences extend not only to the first but to several subsequent generations. Persistence in highlighting the positive aspects of Roma identity is imperative in countering racist ideologies and transforming simplistic and generalized stereotypical portrayals of Roma.

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