# Racism in the film The Little Mermaid: Assessing its impact on social media

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## **ABSTRACT**

The controversy surrounding the casting of Halle Bailey, a black actress, as Ariel in the live-action adaptation of "The Little Mermaid" has sparked discussions about racism and representation in the media. Some people have rejected the idea of a black actress playing the role of a character who was initially depicted as white. The controversy highlights the ongoing struggle for representation and diversity in the entertainment industry. This research aims to see how people respond to the film The Little Mermaid in real life with a black main character. The Little Mermaid, a Disney classic, has been controversial due to the casting of a Black actress, Halle Bailey, as Ariel in the upcoming live-action remake. Some people have refused to accept a Black actress like Ariel, which illustrates how a white-centric perspective requires a more profound understanding. The backlash against the movie has led to abysmal box office numbers in China and South Korea, showing the global reach of anti-Blackness. However, the importance of representation in media has been highlighted, and casting a Black actress as Ariel is seen as a positive step towards diversity and acceptance. The negative attention on The Little Mermaid has fueled a groundswell of support from other fans who view such anger as founded in racism.

## Introduction

Discrimination is a systemic arrangement that molds opportunities and assigns value depending on the societal interpretation of physical appearance, which is frequently referred to as "race." (Jones CP, 2023)Certain individuals and communities are unfairly disadvantaged by this system, while others are unfairly benefited by it. As a result, the strength of the entire community is ultimately depleted as a result of the inefficient utilization of human resources. In order to promote talks, it is helpful to define racism as a systemic issue rather than an individual weakness, personal moral shortcoming, or psychiatric disease. This shift away from the contentious notion of categorizing individuals as either racist or not constitutes a significant step toward achieving this goal. It emphasizes that everyone has a stake in destroying this system and replacing it with one that enables all individuals to fulfill and develop their full potentials by recognizing that racism weakens the strength of the entire society. This is done by realizing that racism undermines the strength of the entire society (Miller et al., 2019).



For example, my novel Gardener's Tale depicts three layers of racism: institutionalized, personally mediated, and internalized(Jones CP, 2000). It also places a significant emphasis on the necessity of addressing institutionalized or structural racism in order to repair flaws that are present in our society's "garden." Additionally, the relevance of addressing the ways in which racism shapes possibilities and the ways in which it assigns worth is brought to light by this narrative. Even if the gardener were required to enhance the poor, rocky soil to equal the richness of fertile soil, the preference for red blooms over pink blossoms would continue to exist if the issue was not addressed. In the context of our attempts to combat racism, this narrative highlights the significance of addressing both opportunity structures (the unequal access to social goods, services, and opportunities that are based on "race") and value assignments (the ideology of white supremacists) (Jones CP, 2000).

The impact of racism on social media is quite substantial and has a variety of complex implications in today's day and age society. The use of social media platforms offers a wide range of opportunities for social contact; but, in certain instances, these platforms have become a medium through which racist attitudes are disseminated, reinforced, and maintained. Social media platforms have the potential to serve as a venue for the propagation of hate speech and racial prejudice. Numerous users of social media sites make advantage of these channels in order to publicly express their racist beliefs, so creating an environment that is both unsafe and destructive for minority groups. During the same time period, this phenomenon has the potential to generate polarization as well as wider social conflicts. The use of social media platforms can be a tool for the perpetuation of racial prejudices and stereotypes(Chetty &Alathur, 2019). Through the transmission of photos, memes, and other content, these platforms have the potential to reinforce limiting beliefs about particular groups, so establishing perceptions of those groups that are shallow and negative.

The problem of "hate algorithms" operating on certain platforms might result in the construction of information bubbles, in which people are largely exposed to viewpoints that are congruent with their own ideas. A greater understanding between groups can be hampered as a result of this, which can also exacerbate social division. On the other hand, social media platforms can also serve as a means of resistance and activism against white supremacy. Through the use of these platforms, campaigns, protests, and civil rights movements are frequently coordinated and documented (Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021). This provides a voice to underrepresented groups and raises awareness about racial concerns. Therefore, the impact of racism on social media generates a number of complex challenges that must be overcome in order to achieve an online environment that is inclusive and equitable. It is necessary for platforms, users, and politicians to work together in order to reduce the negative effects of social media and make the most of its potential as a constructive instrument in the fight against racism and the promotion of mutual understanding among various groups.

Social media serves as a powerful arena for public discourse, offering a dynamic space where individuals from diverse backgrounds can voice their opinions and engage in discussions about the cultural implications of films like "The Little Mermaid." Through hashtags, tweets, and posts, users amplify their voices, sparking a digital dialogue that critically assesses the film's representation of race. This essay aims to explore how these discussions unfold, examining the various perspectives that emerge on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok(Chetty &Alathur, 2019).

Humans are created with various physical forms. Starting from face shape, body, hair color, skin color and others. We will discuss skin color, human skin color is very diverse, ranging from white, olive, brown and black. On various continents in the world, people have different skin colors. For example, on the European continent, the population there is predominantly white, whereas on the African continent the majority of the population has dark skin. Well, this is one of the differences between each continent throughout the world. Each country has its own beauty standards, such as in Asia the standard of beauty is having white skin, in Japan having crooked teeth, in America having dark



skin, in Mindanao the Philippines having sharp teeth, and many more, because of this. there is a lot of racism when we visit other countries. Actually, not in all countries this can happen. However, there have been many incidents such as cases of people with dark skin that have occurred in several countries such as America and China. As happened this year when the film was released with the title The Little Mermaid. This American film has caused a lot of controversy because the main actor has dark skin color. Especially in China and South Korea, their lack of interest in the film The Little Mermaid is because, as is known, Ariel is known to have pure white skin. However, the reality is that the player who plays Ariel has dark skin color. Apart from that, they thought that the film had damaged their imagination about the figure of Ariel, who they knew had white skin. We will discuss this in more depth.

In this paper, we can see the impact of racism in The Little Mermaid on society by using Wolfgang Iser's literary theory approach. Iser's theory of reading activities includes the concept of meaning mining and the role of the reader as an active constructor in understanding literary works. By applying this theory, we can analyze how the messages of racism in this film can affect our interpretation and perception of racial and ethnic differences. sIn an era where inclusion and awareness of cultural diversity are increasingly important, movies, as one of its popular forms, have the power to shape people's opinions and attitudes. For this reason, it is important to examine how racist messages in films such as The Little Mermaid are widely received and perceived, especially by younger audiences, who are the main target audience of this animated film. Iser's theory introduces a useful tool to examine how audiences interact with film narratives and how they contribute to constructing the meaning of the film. In the context of racism in The Little Mermaid, Iser's theory can help us understand how audiences interact with elements of racism hidden in the film, both consciously and unconsciously. Through an in-depth analysis of stereotypical representations, the portrayal of certain characters, and the narrative as a whole, we can gain a greater understanding of how these influences can create negative and detrimental impressions of certain groups in society. By considering Iser's theory, we will also look at how individual interpretations play a role in influencing our perceptions and attitudes towards the heightened racial and ethnic issues in the movie. In addition to looking at the consequences of racism in The Little Mermaid on an individual level, we will also look at how screenings of this movie can influence children's mindsets and the long-term impact in creating an inclusive culture or reinforcing harmful stereotypes. Then, by considering Iser's theory, we can see how the role of the audience, especially children, contributes to shaping their own understanding of racial and ethnic issues. Throughout this paper, we will discuss and critically evaluate racism in The Little Mermaid using Wolfgang Iser's theoretical approach. Through in-depth understanding and analysis, we will understand the impact it may have on society. In addition, we can also reflect on how the handling of racism in this movie can provide opportunities for better teaching and understanding of racial and ethnic issues that exist in and around us. By using Iser's theory as a framework, we can dig deeper to gain a broader and more objective perspective on racism in The Little Mermaid and its implications on our society.

The film "The Little Mermaid," a beloved classic from the Disney canon, has been a source of fascination and critique from various points of view, particularly in its portrayal of black people. This iconic animated tale, initially released in 1989, has recently come under scrutiny for its casting choices and representation, sparking discussions about diversity and inclusion in the world of entertainment. "The Little Mermaid" follows the journey of Ariel, a curious and adventurous young mermaid who dreams of experiencing life on land. While the film's narrative primarily centers on Ariel's pursuit of love and independence, it has also been examined through a lens that highlights the lack of racial diversity and representation in its characters. One notable point of view centers around the casting of the main character, Ariel. In 2019, Disney announced that Halle Bailey, a talented African-American actress and singer, would be portraying Ariel in an upcoming live-action adaptation of the film. This casting decision was met with both enthusiastic support and backlash, shining a spotlight on the



Volume 2 Number 1 2024

broader conversation surrounding racial representation in the entertainment industry. Critics argue that the rejection of the world community, in this context, reflects a historical pattern of underrepresentation and exclusion of black people in mainstream media, including animated films. The discussion extends beyond "The Little Mermaid" to encompass the larger issue of diversity in Hollywood and the importance of offering more inclusive narratives that reflect the diverse makeup of our global society. In this introduction, we will explore various perspectives on the rejection of the world community's views toward black people within the context of "The Little Mermaid," shedding light on the film's impact and its role in the ongoing conversation about representation in the entertainment industry.

## Discussion

Researchers and academics utilize a complicated set of criteria to identify and assess the multifaceted nature of racism, which is a social problem that has been around for a long time and has deep historical roots(Banaji et al., 2021). The fact that racism is a systemic phenomenon, meaning that it goes beyond individual prejudices and encompasses institutional and structural inequities, is one of the most important categories of criteria. One of the most important indicators of systemic racism, according to the arguments of academics, is the fact that racial inequities continue to exist inside a variety of society institutions, such as the criminal justice system, healthcare, and education. For the purpose of comprehending the pervasive influence that racism has on a societal level, it is essential to investigate policies and behaviors that disproportionately affect specific ethnic groups(York, 2018).

In the academic discourse on racism, implicit bias is another criterion that is regularly covered and investigated. This idea acknowledges the fact that racial biases can arise unconsciously, so affecting the decision-making process and contributing to the perpetuation of discriminatory behavior(Banaji et al., 2021). The psychological aspects of racism are investigated by researchers, who analyze the ways in which deeply ingrained prejudices and stereotypes can influence the attitudes of individuals and lead to larger-scale institutional disparities. When it comes to understanding the subtle yet significant ways in which racism manifests itself in a variety of aspects of life, it is vital to unravel the nuances of implicit bias(Sophia &Kulaszewicz, 2015).

One of the most important criteria for comprehending racism is the historical background. The historical legacies of colonization, slavery, and structural oppression are believed to be necessary in order to comprehend the modern expressions of racism, according to the arguments of academics. In order to establish comprehensive solutions to address and repair systemic racism, it is necessary to investigate the ways in which systemic racism continues to resonate in the power structures and societal dynamics of the current day. One of the criteria that emphasizes the connectivity of different forms of oppression and social identities is called intersectionality. It is the contention of researchers that racism does not exist in a vacuum but rather interacts with other types of discrimination, such as biases based on classification and gender (Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021). A more nuanced understanding of the various manifestations of racism can be gained by first acknowledging the complicated ways in which individuals experience several layers of oppression.

The identification of racism in everyday interactions can be accomplished through the use of microaggressions, which are small but significant criteria. Derogatory messages are communicated through these brief, often inadvertent, verbal or behavioral slights, which lead to an environment that is hostile toward people of different races. When it comes to understanding the varied ways in which racism presents itself on an interpersonal level, academics stress the need of recognizing and resolving microaggressions. Through the appropriation or denigration of cultural practices and symbols that are linked with particular racial or ethnic groups, cultural racism develops as a criterion that investigates how racial biases present themselves in the world. The media and popular culture are responsible for



the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes, the reinforcement of racial hierarchies, and the formation of biased perspectives, as this criterion sheds light on (Shiao & Woody, 2021).

Certain regions might become racist as a result of structural disadvantages or discriminatory behaviors, and racialized spaces and place-based discrimination are two criteria that bring attention to this phenomenon. The geographical elements of racism and the unequal distribution of resources are brought to light by the research conducted by academics who explore the ways in which individuals may be confronted with exclusive issues as a result of the racist environments in which they reside(York, 2018).

Walt Disney Pictures created the animated feature The Little Mermaid. The film is based on the beloved tale by Hans Christian Andersen about Ariel, a mermaid who longs to be a human. The following elements can be taken into account while analyzing this movie. First, narrative the movie has a compelling plot with a distinct beginning, middle, and finish. Ariel's ambition to travel and find her true love are the primary sources of tension in the story. Characterization: This movie has welldeveloped characters. Ariel is characterized as a bold and adventurous mermaid with a strong personality. Ursula and other antagonistic characters possess powerful traits as well. Images and Animation, this movie has strange and magical animation. Beautiful visual elements abound, particularly when illustrating the undersea environment and well-known musical moments like "Under the Sea" and "Part of Your World." Music, this movie has a number of well-known and memorable tunes. Alan Menken's music and Howard Ashman's words combine to provide the audience a fully immersive experience. Tema, this film explores themes of self-identity and searching, selfeducation, and cinning with tulus. King Triton, the head of the duchy, and Ariel's sahabat, Flounder, were also Ariel's neighbors and benefactors. Moral lesson, the Little Mermaid emphasizes the need of accepting oneself and forgiving oneself. Ariel accepts the consequences of her actions and learns to understand what is, in all honesty, important in her life. This is a summary of the Little Mermaid movie analysis. Every film analysis might vary depending on the background information and advice provided by writers.

According to Iser literary texts can only produce a response when read. Therefore, it is impossible to describe the (reader's) response without analyzing the reading process. The analysis carried out was on social media, where the search for comments on social media related to the film The Little Mermaid. Below are some of the comments found.

## **Data Presentation**

# a. Table

This research is based on negative comments for the film on Instagram, where several comments we took as 'screenshot' evidence prove that many people still criticize the black main character in this film. Because it's mostly Disney. Princess has white skin according to Brownmiller (2013, 145) indeedconsidered feminine and often complimented. In terms of the pros and cons of the main actors, there are still many people who think straight that each actor or character cannot be seen physically, especially skin color, because basically, the remake of this film will be judged based on the quality of the actor's acting. The following are some comments regarding the Little Mermaid film:

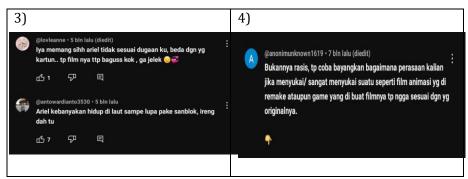




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Volume 2 Number 1 2024



From the data table, several comments were found which were more towards hate comments, but there were also some positive comments. This explains that the little mermaid film is actually a good film, but it goes back to the beginning because the main character has a very different skin color from the Ariel in the cartoon. This makes many assumptions of negative comments. This data was taken from several social media such as Instagram, YouTube and Twitter.

## A. Comments 1

In comment one as we saw in the initial comment he mentioned that stop blackwashing because he hasn't seen the film. Some people may not have watched the film because after seeing the trailer, the main character turns out to have different skin, so maybe they are too lazy to watch the film. But in the second comment, it is actually the opposite of the first comment, in the second comment it actually leads to a worse comment because there are black putrid words.

## **B**. Comments 2

The second comment is in the form of an opinion that expresses someone's disappointment with the film The Little Mermaid. He probably had more hopes for the film because the Ariel cartoon was his favorite cartoon. But what can I do just because the main character causes him to have an opinion like that?

## C. Comments 3

Comment 3 in the first comment said that it was not as expected but he still said that the film was still good. The second comment is more insulting or mocking because it says that the main character lives mostly at sea and forgets to wear sunblock so his skin burns.

## **D.** Comments 4

In comment 4 it is almost the same, in this comment they also express their disappointment with the film which was later released but did not meet their expectations.

These comments are a sign that the main problem is about the main character. Even though in fact there is nothing wrong with the main character just because of the color of his skin, this has caused a lot of controversy.

## Conclusion

The controversy surrounding the casting of Halle Bailey, a black actress, as Ariel in the live-action adaptation of "The Little Mermaid" has sparked discussions about racism and representation in the media. Some people have rejected the idea of a black actress playing the role of a character who was originally depicted as white. The controversy highlights the ongoing struggle for representation and diversity in the entertainment industry. The purpose of this research is to see how people respond to the film The Little Mermaid in real life with a black main character. The Little Mermaid, a Disney classic, has been the subject of controversy due to the casting of a Black actress, Halle Bailey, as Ariel in the



upcoming live-action remake. Some people have refused to accept a Black actress in the role of Ariel, which illustrates how a white-centric perspective requires deeper understanding. The backlash against the movie has led to abysmal box office numbers in China and South Korea, showing the global reach of anti-Blackness. However, the importance of representation in media has been highlighted, and the casting of a Black actress as Ariel is seen as a positive step towards diversity and acceptance. The negative attention on The Little Mermaid has fueled a groundswell of support from other fans who view such anger as founded in racism.

Humans are created with various physical forms, including diverse skin colors. Each country has its own beauty standards, leading to racism when visiting other countries. The film "The Little Mermaid" has caused controversy due to the main actor having dark skin color, leading to lack of interest in China and South Korea. This paper aims to analyze the impact of racism in The Little Mermaid on society using Wolfgang Iser's literary theory approach, focusing on how the messages of racism in the film can affect interpretation and perception of racial and ethnic differences. In an era where inclusion and awareness of cultural diversity are increasingly important, it is important to examine how racist messages in films are widely received and perceived, especially by younger audiences.

The film "The Little Mermaid" has been a source of fascination and critique, particularly in its portrayal of black people. The casting of Halle Bailey, an African-American actress, as Ariel in an upcoming live-action adaptation of the film, has sparked discussions about diversity and inclusion in the entertainment industry. Critics argue that the rejection of the world community's views toward black people reflects a historical pattern of underrepresentation and exclusion of black people in mainstream media, including animated films. The discussion extends beyond "The Little Mermaid" to encompass the larger issue of diversity in Hollywood and the importance of offering more inclusive narratives that reflect the diverse makeup of our global society.

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