

Displaced by Words: How Does Media Impact Gentrification?

Linxiang Sheng¹ and Chyng Sun[#]

¹Shanghai High School International Division

[#]Advisor

ABSTRACT

To put it simply, gentrification is a process where capital investment in a previously neglected area leads to the influx and eventual takeover of middle-class groups, displacing the original working-class residents in the area during the process. This research paper is a literature review that discusses the background of gentrification, how it is portrayed and facilitated by the media, and how it could be countered through media. I specifically examined different forms of media that can either facilitate or counteract gentrification, while closely relating these examinations with societal factors of class and race. Overall, the media has an affirmative role in gentrification, with some forms more so than others. This can be largely attributed to the fact that mainstream media typically supports the stance of the middle class, which is the primary gentrifier in the process of gentrification. The media can also be used to combat gentrification, both for promoting anti-gentrification movements and for identifying gentrification. However, there are significant challenges in these methods that are yet to be fully overcome.

Introduction

Generally speaking, gentrification is understood as the process of the displacement of working-class inhabitants from their living communities and the influx of higher-class inhabitants, usually in correlation to capital investment (Barton, 2016). A term that originated in the 1980s when the open market economic policies encouraged re-investments in previously ignored communities, gentrification has grown to be a significant force in the process of urban development. In the following decades, we have witnessed multiple waves of gentrification in the United States of America, and correspondingly, multiple changes in the portrayal of gentrification in the media. In the early 1990s, gentrification declined for a while before once again emerging in the 2000s, and the process is continuing its expansion stretching into the 2010s. This means that even middle-class residents are being displaced and pushed to the outskirts of cities due to gentrification (Tolfo & Doucet, 2021).

Gentrification is often deeply intertwined with race, especially in the context of the United States. Policies of racial segregation has significantly contributed to the current situations regarding housing and residential communities, hence connecting with gentrification (Fallon, 2020). In some cases, gentrification can also target sexual minorities by removing LGBT communities and their activities from public spaces due to concerns of public image (Gallegos, 2020).

Media, due to its ubiquitous nature in societal trends, have formed major connections with gentrification, but the media's perspective on gentrification does differ and evolve over time. This research paper will aim to answer two main research questions, corresponding to the two main aspects of media's role in gentrification:

- a) How does the media portrayal of gentrification contribute to the process of gentrification?
- b) How can the media be used as a method of combatting gentrification?

Specific subtopics will be further explored under the general question of media contribution to gentrification. One of the most significant aspects of media contribution to gentrification is socioeconomic class, as well as race, which is highly related to class. Whether media portrays gentrification positively or negatively, it is typically through a middle-class perspective, and the voices of the working classes are often ignored (Tolfo & Doucet, 2021). Similar situations can be found for communities of racial minorities, whose perspectives are especially absent in mainstream media (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2018). Two major forms of media, news and social media, are both largely facilitative of gentrification, although in somewhat different ways. Finally, tourist-oriented media has been especially contributive to the process of gentrification, as it often promotes skewed images of “authenticity” that results in the increase of living costs and the destruction of existing orders in communities (Jansson, 2019).

Likewise, this research paper will also discuss the different specific ways that media can be utilized in the struggle against gentrification. Currently, there exists two major purposes that media can serve in such struggles: promoting anti-gentrification struggles and identifying gentrifying trends. The former has a long history - past anti-gentrification movements have used news and other forms of media exposure as a way of pushing their agenda forward (Gin, J., & Taylor, D. E., 2010). On the other hand, the latter is usually dependent on social media and/or geolocate media data collection, which is a very recent development (Walters & Smith, 2022).

Definition and Background

The origin of the term “gentrification” is somewhat ambiguous. One source has cited its first appearance as early as 1964 (Gin & Taylor, 2010), while others have referenced its usage in a 1980 issue of the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail* as the public’s first exposure to the term (Tolfo & Doucet, 2021). Much like the term’s origin, the definition of gentrification is also a contentious one. Many disputes have occurred in academic circles over the proper meaning of the term. One of the main divergences is whether gentrification should be defined from a sociological perspective or economic perspective. Those who advocate for a sociological perspective would define gentrification as the displacement of working-class residents by the entrance of middle-class or upper-class members. On the other hand, a definition based on a more economic perspective tends to cite capital investment in previously neglected property as the primary identifier of gentrification. This divergence has been identified as early as 1986 in the research paper “Urban Gentrification: Evaluating Alternative Indicators,” which states that “the basic definitional dichotomy is distinguished between a focus either on property or people” (Galster and Peacock, 1986). Nevertheless, modern research on gentrification continues to retain this divergence. Considering that the definition and scope of the term “gentrification” is not a focus of this research paper, I will accept both definitions as valid in my analysis.

Various trends can be analyzed to identify gentrification. In Neil Smith’s 1986 research paper, gentrification is described as a process of restructuring urban space, and five main characteristics of gentrification were identified: “(a) suburbanization and the emergence of the rent gap; (b) the deindustrialization of advanced capitalist economies and the growth of white-collar employment; (c) the spatial centralization and simultaneous decentralization of capital; (d) the falling rate of profit and the cyclical movement of capital; and (e) demographic changes and changes in consumption patterns” (Smith, 1986). These five factors of gentrification remain largely relevant in the contemporary context of the topic.

However, it should be noted that the gentrification of an area, especially in the contemporary era, cannot be understood as a simple, singular process with multiple horizontal aspects. Rather, it is often done in multiple waves, each with its own unique conditions. “Gentrification does not take a linear path to displacement”, a recent study by Peter Walters and Naomi Smith states. Instead, processes of gentrification are layered, and the advent of every new layer inflicts more damage to the original neighborhood. This study explained one common way that multiple waves can occur - the first layer of gentrification is typically comprised of renters,

who are drawn to the neighborhood for its cheap rent. These renter groups, however, may be comprised of people with unique backgrounds that can increase the desirability of the neighborhood, such as artists and students. Subsequently, more people from these backgrounds will enter, but they may have more economic power - in this case, they may begin ownership of the neighborhood's property and transform them to meet their own class interests. This causes an increase in the land value of the neighborhood, which leads to the final (and typically most well-known) layer of gentrification - large investments by major property developers are made, and the entire neighborhood is completely restructured (Walters & Smith, 2022). This example is, however, only one of many ways that gentrification can be comprised of multiple layers. Other phenomena that are also multi-layered, such as tourist gentrification, will be explained in later sections of this paper.

On a similar note, the scope of gentrification is also constantly changing and evolving. A recent study done on gentrification across decades found out that there was a sharp increase in gentrifying patterns in the 2000s, as opposed to the relatively slow expansion rate of the processes in the 1990s (Ellen & Ding, 2016). Thus, on the temporal scale, gentrification as an intricate process is both layered in theory and evolving in reality.

A central, unavoidable subject of gentrification is the social groups involved in gentrifying processes. Typically, gentrification describes the process where middle class groups replace working class groups. In recent years, there have been trends where middle class groups are displaced as well, due to the continued expansion of gentrification over time (Tolfo & Doucet, 2021). Hence, class dynamics are essential to our understanding of gentrification, and vital to any examination or analysis of the topic. In the context of the United States of America, a significant aspect that must be discussed, alongside class, is race. Due to segregational policies, communities of racial minorities, typically located in inner cities, are placed in highly disadvantaged conditions and neglected by investment, which means that residents are often living in poverty. Overall, this resulted in a highly segregated housing landscape on city-wide scales for a few decades, before gentrifying re-development programs of inner cities, starting from the 1970s, leading to more demographic changes. Thus, a common indicator of gentrification in an area is the declining population of racial minorities and increasing population of whites (Fallon, 2020). This is because race itself has a class-based nature, so to a certain extent, changes in racial demographics can indicate the replacement of one class by another in a selected area.

Racial factors are not the only aspect to consider, however. Gentrification has also been proven to cause damage towards other forms of minority groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community. A case study focused on New York's Greenwich Village, a neighborhood with a notable LGBTQ+ culture, analyzed how new developments in the neighborhood has led to a decrease of said culture. Using police removal of young LGBTQ+ people as an exemplar event, the study identified how the advent capital erases scenes that do not fit into the dominant upper-class environment, which includes the LGBTQ+ culture in Greenwich Village (Gallegos, 2020). Due to the displacing nature of Greenwich Village's recent developments, it can thus be considered a representative example of minority-targeting gentrification.

Media Portrayal of Gentrification

Broadly speaking, the media portrayal of gentrification pertains to all ways and forms that the media can influence common perception on varying aspects of gentrification, including the physical place being gentrified, the social groups involved in gentrification, and the larger economic causes behind gentrification. Often, the media has been connected to urban spaces to such an extent that it becomes inseparable from the spaces' identity and function, which indicates a process of "mediatization." During this process, the everyday interactions and social activities of an urban area becomes increasingly affiliated to the media representation of said area. (Tornberg and Uitermark, 2022) Thus, it is crucial to understand and analyze the media portrayal of gentrification not only as a cause-effect relationship between two different entities, but also as different components of the same core process.

Overall, the media has an affirmative role in the processes of gentrification. However, different forms of media tend to have their unique expressions and mechanisms as to how they affirm (or, in some cases, criticize and reject) gentrification. This research paper will first explain the class and racial nature of gentrification's media portrayal, and then examine both news and social media to identify their respective facilitation of gentrification, with consideration to the unique situation of tourism.

In Relation to Class and Race

The media's portrayal of gentrification is inextricably tied to class dynamics. "In the media, gentrification is now squarely viewed through the perspective of mainstream, middle-class consumption, lifestyles, and challenges", a recent study by Giuseppe Tolfo and Brian Doucet states. Even negative portrayals of gentrification found in some cases can be attributed to the fact that gentrification has expanded to such an extent that even middle-class residents are starting to be displaced. In this case, the middle-class residents (and by extension the mainstream media, some who are initial gentrifiers themselves), criticize even more affluent groups in second or third waves of gentrification without much reflection on the role they themselves may have taken (Tolfo & Doucet, 2021). Overall, because the mainstream media itself, as a significant component of our class society, have a distinct perspective tied to the middle class, its representation of gentrification is also overwhelmingly done through such class perspectives.

Alongside class perspectives, racial factors must also be considered regarding the media portrayal of gentrification. Brown-Saracino's 2011 case study of seven American cities found that news articles on gentrification that mention the gentrifiers' race is only slightly over 10% of total articles examined (Brown-Saracino, 2011). This shows that mainstream media often ignores racial perspectives in their depiction of gentrification. Although, in situations where the gentrifiers' race is mentioned, 89.1% of the mentions were of the white race, which is a correct identification that accurately reflects the social reality of gentrification in the United States. Overall, while media sources do occasionally accurately identify the role of different racial groups in gentrification, discussion of racial minorities is more or less missing in mainstream outlets.

Moreover, the way that the media tends to depict gentrification is directly dependent on the racial composition of the area in question. Results from Zawadi Rucks-Adihiana's examination of race in news portrayal of gentrification revealed that gentrification of black (typically also impoverished) neighborhoods are typically presented less negatively than gentrification of white working-class neighborhoods (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2018). In other words, the media is more affirmative of displacing black groups than white working-class groups, which is reflective of the racial inequality found in the United States.

In the News

Several features of gentrification's portrayal in mainstream news outlets can be found. Frequently, media sources tend to report on gentrifying movements from the perspective of "development", which serves business interests rather than the residents of the gentrifying neighborhood (Gin & Taylor, 2010). In a case study done on Rainey Street, Austin, TX, a content analysis was done on the newspaper coverage of the impacts of gentrification from 2000 to 2014. In most years, articles that describe the impact as related to "development", a positive term, outnumbered all of the other identified impacts. The only notable exception is 2011, in which "resentment and conflict" dominated the discourse presumably due to the ongoing Occupy Wall Street protests during that year (Lavy, et al.). This shows that the media often takes the perspective of the gentrifiers, actively facilitating gentrification, which is reflective of mainstream media's middle-class nature.

Another intriguing phenomenon is the portrayal of gentrification as a natural, irresistible phenomenon that seemingly has no propeller. According to a case study done by Gabriella Modan and Katie Wells on the media of Washington, D.C., "Throughout the stories in the Washington Post and the City Paper, writers frame

gentrification as a simple, natural, cultural, and agent-less phenomenon” (Modan & Wells, 2015). This erroneous representation of gentrification as “coming out of nowhere” may cause incorrect understanding of the topic from the general public. Furthermore, it shifts blame away from the policymakers and gentrifying groups that facilitate the process, which neutralizes the portrayal of gentrification and makes accurately combatting gentrification even more difficult. To put it more simply, it displays how the media caters to the gentrifying classes.

Arguably, a somewhat different view was expressed in Brown-Saracino’s case study of seven American cities and their respective media imagery of gentrification. The study claims that since 1995, appearances of negative or mixed portrayals of gentrification in newspapers have consistently outnumbered positive or neutral portrayals. This means that to a certain extent, the media is critical of gentrification, especially in time periods where it is the most prominent. That being said, the paper did identify a divergence within articles that portray gentrification in a negative light - some were genuinely critical of the displacement of working-class residents that gentrification causes, but others instead criticize gentrification for the perceived loss of “authenticity”, often from the perspective of gentrifiers and journalists to express their decreased attractions to the area. (Brown-Saracino, 2011) The latter perspective is not a meaningful criticism of gentrification because it is not critical of gentrification itself, but only a specific type of gentrification that does not seek to retain authenticity. In other words, it can be inferred that the media outlets that criticize gentrification based on “the loss of authenticity” would gladly praise manufactured authenticity traps that only serve to expand gentrification.

Therefore, it is fair to say that news coverage overall is largely mixed on its portrayal of gentrification - some sources may facilitate it while others may criticize it. However, there are multiple ways that the media can distort the depiction of gentrification - whether it is the causes of gentrification or the predominant effects of gentrification. In some situations, supposedly neutral or critical perspectives on gentrification may have an affirmative role on it, as exemplified by the case of critical pieces that focus on the loss of “authenticity”. Hence, the true percentage of critical perspectives in mainstream news is lower than what we may find on the surface.

In Social Media and Geolocative Media

Unlike its complex situation in the news, representation of gentrification in social media almost leans completely affirmative of the process. In a 2021 case study by Irene Broonsvort, a sample street named Javastraat in Amsterdam, Netherlands was selected for examination. The research found that gentrifiers exert their influence on the local environment of the street by their Instagram posts. These posts overwhelmingly present Javastraat as a hub for high-end consumption with a positive light, whereas, in reality, its demographics are economically mixed. The positive portrayal of the street panders to discursive investment, and hence facilitates gentrification. In other words, the commodification of the cultural content found in social media posts transforms into commodification of the physical space, which is naturally followed by gentrification (Broonsvort, 2021). In this example, social media clearly plays a facilitative role in the process of gentrification.

Another form of social media that strongly impacts gentrification is geolocative media (sometimes shortened to the portmanteau “geomedia”), which can be broadly defined as emergent social media networks that specifically focus on locational interactions. Four distinct identifiers of geolocative media are established: ubiquity, real-time feedback, locational awareness, and convergence (Jansson, 2019). In order to correctly understand the effects of geolocative media, a distinction between material space and immaterial space must first be established. Material space describes the physical place, i.e., a neighborhood. On the other hand, immaterial space, also known as relational space, describes the social relations that are extensions from the physical place. (Walters & Smith, 2022) This distinction is significant for understanding geolocative media because geolocative media can only portray material spaces, but through its portrayal of material spaces, it directly constructs immaterial spaces, a feature that is mostly unique to it.

Joseph Gibbons, et. al.’s 2018 case study on Washington, D.C. used geotagged tweets to examine the impact of social media on gentrification. The study results revealed that not only was tweet frequency higher

in gentrifying neighborhoods in comparison to non-gentrifying ones, but their content is also often more focused on middle class interests associated with gentrifying processes, such as trendy restaurants and bars. Moreover, interactions between users were also much higher in gentrifying communities (Gibbons, et. al., 2018). This indicates that gentrifiers often form communities among themselves through geolocative media more than non-gentrifiers do, and frequently promote gentrifying activities within such communities, which in turn displays the affirmative role that geolocative media plays in gentrification. Another case study was done on the West End of Brisbane, Australia, arriving at rather similar conclusions. Through geolocative social media, a sophisticated image of the neighborhood was constructed, attracting middle class aspirations. Due to the emergence of geolocative media, images can be constructed without much involvement from the physical place. (Walters & Smith, 2022).

Applying the distinctive framework of material and immaterial spaces previously explained, construction of immaterial spaces through social media, especially geolocative media, can directly influence construction of material spaces, as these studies have shown. Hence, social media's facilitation of gentrification is often especially effective because they can render the role of the physical place in the construction of its own image to be increasingly useless.

In Tourist-Oriented Media

A significant aspect of geolocative media's contribution to gentrification pertains to tourism. While many past studies of gentrification mostly focus on residential or local-consumptive changes, tourism is, in fact, one of the most significant propellers of gentrification in some areas. Andre Jansson's 2019 study analyzed alternative tourism apps as a representative example. Tourists, predominantly middle-class ones, tend to seek out places that are considered authentic. Alternative tourism apps were able to cater to this demand by facilitating interactions between locals and tourists. Over time, however, as the geolocative alternative tourism apps expand its network with more and more tourists sharing their experiences in certain locations, these places will go through "aestheticization, exploitation, and - ultimately - gentrification" (Jansson, 2019). This example shows how geolocative media can form distinct interactions based on a common interest in one place, and therefore strengthen the extent of gentrification. The material space in this example is the gentrified place considered to be "authentic" to attract tourists, while the immaterial space is the scope of social interactions formed on alternative tourist apps, based on the image that these interactions are authentic. To put it another way, tourism, much like residential and local-consumptive interactions, can construct immaterial spaces through geolocative media and hence gentrify material spaces.

An even more extreme sub-phenomenon tourism's facilitation of gentrification is slum tourism gentrification. Slum tourism gentrification describes situations where areas of extreme poverty are portrayed as desirable destinations for tourists, often through a process known as "othering". Originating in gender studies, the term "othering" has since expanded to generally refer to representation of a social entity as different from the dominant entity, through the perspective of said dominant entity. In an examination of the slum-tourist hotspot Vidigal, Rio de Janeiro, researchers concluded that slum tourism gentrification emerges due to a common desire of tourism and gentrification to seek for places that are unique and exotic. This resulted in the media portrayal of Vidigal as an exotic space that is desirable for open-minded middle-class groups, hence setting the space as the "other" (Tornberg & Uitermark, 2022). In essence, the "othering" does not only apply to the gentrified communities, but the broader lower class as well, reinforcing phenomena of class society.

Using Media to Combat Gentrification

The second half of this research paper will focus on how media-oriented approaches can be used to combat gentrification. Due to the internal contradictions within class society, struggles against gentrification (a process

typically of one class replacing another) are highly common. Most residents displaced in processes of gentrification have made attempts to fight back, sometimes forming cohesive movements and causing significant conflict. Various studies have noted how these areas involved higher presence of the police (Gallegos, 2020; Rojas, 2013; Tornberg & Uitermark, 2022), indicating the contentious nature of gentrification and the dire circumstances of the displaced residents.

Unlike the relatively abundant research done on media portrayal of gentrification, existing studies on the media's role on combatting gentrification is rather limited. Several reports focusing on anti-gentrification strategies were examined, but none of them mentioned social media data-based identification of gentrification as a way of bolstering such resistance movements. For example, in the article "Fighting Gentrification and Displacement: Emerging Best Practices" by Juliana Broad, various strategies focused on financial and land use policies were examined. However, there were no mention of how media statistics can be used to combat gentrification. Considering the ubiquitous and omnipresent nature of media, such an omission can be considered to be rather problematic in academic research.

Nevertheless, there has been some research done on the topic, especially in relatively recent years. Two main ways that media can be used against gentrification can be identified:

- a) to promote, advocate, or bring exposure to anti-gentrification movements
- b) to identify cases of gentrification

Using Media to Promote Anti-Gentrification Movements

The media, as a way of spreading information, can be theoretically used to undermine gentrification by conveying messages that criticize the process. Indeed, some past anti-gentrification struggles have extensively used media exposure as a method of raising awareness and promoting their cause. Focusing on two gentrifying districts in the San Francisco Bay Area, Mission District and West Oakland, a 2010 study examined these two districts' respective anti-gentrification struggles and media coverage. The study established three core components of media coverage: frequency, positivity, and accuracy, which serves as a basic framework for evaluating media portrayal of social movements. Then, newspaper reports on each of these districts' movements were examined, quantified, and compared. In the results, Mission District received more exposure, but the mainstream media's reporting accuracy was lower, whereas West Oakland received less exposure, but the few reports done by the media were relatively more accurate (Gin & Taylor, 2010). We can see a negative correlation between frequency (and hence impact) and accuracy - a contradiction that will be an obstacle towards the full potential of media usage by anti-gentrification advocates.

This contradiction is difficult to overcome because it is highly connected to the class perspective of mainstream media. Past research has theorized that mainstream media, hosting perspectives from the dominant classes, will only report social movements if they are either too significant to be swept under the rug, or too threatening to the status quo. Thus, whenever mainstream news outlets cover anti-gentrification movements, even when it tries to be objective, it will unavoidably distort their true goals, making accurate exposure of such movements rather challenging to obtain.

Due to such difficulties in getting accurate and relevant exposure in mainstream media, anti-gentrification movements may turn to alternative methods. "Resistance can come in counterintuitive ways," states Joseph Gallegos in his aforementioned case study of the gentrification of Greenwich Village and the displacement of its LGBTQ+ community. Gallegos's study focused on the use of "outlaw media", or pieces of media that do not attempt to appeal to larger society, in the anti-gentrification struggle of the LGBTQ+ community. The study selected two pieces of outlaw media, both produced in grassroots social movements, and analyzed how they attempt to change the discourse on the gentrification of their local community. The research results show that outlaw media can "serve the purpose of providing a voice to those who are voiceless", but it is unable to be widely recognized or spread among mainstream society (Gallegos, 2020). Hence, outlaw media is a valid

form of expression that can genuinely and accurately spread the messages of anti-gentrification struggles. However, due to its lack of recognition from the mainstream society, the amount of change that outlaw media can cause may be rather limited. Once again, a trade-off between accuracy and exposure is observed.

Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that only using media-oriented approaches to promote anti-gentrification struggles is often insufficient. Rather, anti-gentrification movements should consider integrating media-oriented approaches with direct action in real life, which is still highly relevant in the modern age. Miura's 2021 study on Shimokitazawa, Tokyo examines the neighborhood's gentrification and corresponding anti-gentrification movement. Here, the anti-gentrification movement is mainly focused on local-level community action through establishing the Kitazawa PR strategy council, a forum for residents to discuss with urban planners, and hence use their influence to mitigate gentrification. After experiencing moderate success, the Kitazawa PR strategy council is currently in the process of expanding its networks outside of the region (Miura, 2021). It is reasonable to suggest that as a next step, the forum can include media-based approaches to facilitate the expansion process. However, as the case of Shimokitazawa's success has shown, it is ultimately essential to recognize that community-level resistance is typically the cornerstone of anti-gentrification struggles.

Using Media to Identify Gentrification

Another significant purpose that the media could serve to combat gentrification is in regard to identification. Recent research has utilized social media databases as an analytical tool for spotting gentrifying areas, in which several distinct methods have been outlined. In the 2021 study by Cheng-Chia Huang, et. al, relevant text messages from Instagram were selected, compiled, and analyzed. Focusing on Salt Lake City, the researchers selected several locations and grouped key words from the text messages sent from each of those locations into respective clusters. Then, the research analyzed the meanings of the key words and the frequency they occur to show primary propelling forces of gentrification. To examine the validity of this approach, the results of this study was compared to a separate qualitative study of the gentrifying areas in question. Although some of the results deviated from the qualitative study, most were affirmative, which means that this approach to identifying gentrification can be considered somewhat valid (Huang, et. al, 2021).

A perhaps more well-rounded approach was found in a 2021 study by Ate Poorthuis, et. al., in which geotagged tweets from Lexington, Kentucky were selected for analysis as a case. The researchers then identified the most significant location for all users as the profile location, which will then be analyzed based on a multitude of factors including racial composition, median income, and educational background. Uniquely, this study also identified the locations that these users visit (i.e., ones that are not their profile location) to analyze gentrification through a more spatially relational lens, which is essential to fully understand gentrification as a social process. This sum of data is then analyzed on a temporal scale to reflect potentially ongoing trends of gentrification. (Poorthuis et. al., 2021) Under this study, identifications of gentrification were made, in which these identifications can then be used by anti-gentrification movements to direct their attention. That being said, unlike the Instagram text message study, this study did not make a comparison to the real conditions of the gentrifying areas, which means that the accuracy of this approach is left in question.

Moreover, a study done on urban development in an African city also used similar methods of social media data analysis (Shao et. al., 2021). While this study does not focus on gentrification but rather urban sprawl (which can be either considered an indirect result of gentrification or a direct response to it), the methodology of the study is relevant and applicable to future studies of gentrification. This is largely because it also uses large databases from social media (in this case, Twitter), like the previous two studies that were examined. It connects the social media data with both demographic changes and land use changes, a significant connection that can be useful for analyzing gentrification as well.

Through the examination of three studies that use media-based data to identify urban changes, two common components can be recognized. Firstly, they are all highly time aware; indeed, a significant feature of

social media is the rapid updating of information. Thus, social media database analysis is effective at sensing gentrification due to its acute awareness of the temporal scale. Furthermore, they all involved large scale sampling of information, as opposed to specifically examining key pieces of media. This is once again facilitated by the nature of social media, which, as a whole, is highly comprehensive, but the individual social media post is often skewed, regardless of how influential they are. It should be noted however that big data analysis is a rather recent form of media usage in combatting gentrification, due to its technical basis in social media data collection, which is relatively new itself. All three studies examined above were done in 2021, for example. Furthermore, ethical concerns regarding user privacy were raised, which does draw the validity of the method into question (Poorthuis, 2021). Due to these reasons, the application of this method beyond academic research is currently quite limited. Nevertheless, anti-gentrification movements can potentially adopt social media data analysis as a practical method of identifying gentrification in the future.

Conclusion

Gentrification, as a recent yet significant social trend in the urban environment, is deeply intertwined with media influence. As gentrification describes a process of an incoming higher class displacing the original residents from a lower class, it is to no surprise that media portrayal of gentrification is highly dependent on class perspective. Generally, the mainstream media has shown to be facilitative of gentrification in its portrayal. In the news, gentrification is often directly supported as a form of “development” and indirectly supported by dismissing the role of its perpetrators. In some cases, criticisms of gentrification do outnumber praises, but these criticisms are often either directed towards the loss of authenticity, or only limited to recent waves of gentrification, which means that they are ultimately criticisms from a middle-class perspective. Furthermore, perspectives from racial minorities are absent, which is correlated to the media’s higher rate of approval for the gentrification of racial minority communities compared to white working-class communities.

As for social media, differentiating frameworks between material and immaterial spaces can explain how recent developments of social media (i.e., its geolocate nature) can lead to gentrification. The construction of immaterial spaces, as exemplified by social media interactions, can cause a change in material spaces without necessarily reconstructing them from the local level, which further erases the power of local working-class residents. A very similar conclusion can be made about tourist-oriented media, which encourages the collective fetishization of places viewed as “authentic”, eventually overtaking such places as hotspots for higher class tourists. In a sense, the rapid, pervasive quality of social media opens another direct channel for gentrifying classes to change neighborhoods for their own class interest, indicating that social media has developed a class perspective of its own.

This paper also analyzed two major uses of media for combating gentrification. Anti-gentrification movements may use the media as a channel of spreading their message and goals, yet the class perspective of mainstream media would inevitably distort the message, which is a significant challenge. If anti-gentrification movements want to avoid such distortion, they may use outlaw media forms that does not appeal to mainstream society, but that will lower the exposure of these movements. Mainstream society, as ruled by the dominant class, dictates media discourse and hence creates a contradiction between accuracy and exposure for anti-gentrification media. Hence, anti-gentrification movements should not solely rely on media-oriented approaches to spread their message, and the significance of local-level community resistance through direct action cannot be ignored. The media, specifically social media data, can also be analyzed to identify gentrification. Multiple studies have used geolocate social media messages to recognize social phenomena of specific areas that could indicate gentrification. This approach has two main prerequisites: a wide temporal scale and a larger number of information, to ensure that the identification is as accurate as possible.

Yet, the complex and multi-layered nature of gentrification must be considered when evaluating the validity of past studies. Recent expansion of gentrification has begun to negatively impact the middle class,

leading to new “resistance” movements that are primarily led by middle class residents. For example, a movement called YIMBY (abbreviation for Yes in My Backyard), does advocate for the construction of denser more affordable housing, but their advocacy is still done through a development-oriented perspective found in most gentrifiers (Tolfo & Doucet, 2021). These emerging intricacies may potentially challenge our current scope of understanding towards the topic. While this research paper does provide an overview on the expansion of gentrification to displace middle class residents, direct quantitative research on this phenomenon is highly limited. Hence, further quantitative research should be done to examine the continued expansion and evolution of gentrification and how it may correlate to an emerging shift of gentrification’s media portrayal.

Another factor to consider when discussing further research is the advancement of media-related technology and the evolution of media formats. For example, in the last few years, platforms such as TikTok have completely changed the state of digital media by popularizing the format of short videos, further promoting rapid consumption of media content. This novel trend of digital media may form unique intersections with geolocative social media and thus impact processes of gentrification. Hence, future researchers should be attentive to the continuous changes of digital media when analyzing the connections between media and gentrification, and they should acknowledge deficiencies of past research when necessary. On the other hand, as current research has shown, big data analysis of social media networks can help researchers identify ongoing trends of gentrification. Yet, the data itself is mostly restrained to time, location, and message content, all of which could potentially be inaccurate or misleading in some cases. If social media technology continues to develop and expand, future studies may be able to unlock more information from social media data, hence creating more thorough and complete identifications of gentrification.

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