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ETHNIC DIVERSITY INCLUSION AND RACEBENDING IN GLOBAL FILM INDUSTRY: THE LITTLE MERMAID CASE

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ABSTRACT. Racebending aims at promoting diversity and representation of ethnic minorities in films. It involves casting a Black person for a role that was previously played by a White character, often in the context of a live remake of an existing movie. This approach has generated a range of perceptions among audiences, leading to controversies, particularly online, where people express their views on the matter. While some people favour Racebending, especially Black people who are generally underrepresented in films, others oppose it. This study employed a mixed methods approach, combining sentimental analysis and quantitative research (N=154 respondents), with a focus on the new live remake of Ariel: The Little Mermaid (2023). 2,800 comments have been analyzed. The findings of this study reveal that people generally perceive Racebending negatively. As such, the film industry should consider creating new films for underrepresented minorities rather than relying on live remakes of existing movies. The social media content analysis identified seven categories of people's perceptions, including loss of childhood memories, falsification of the original, inequality, need for new storylines, tokenism, equality, and excitement/enjoyment. Furthermore, the study found that psychological involvement has a significant positive impact on people's perception of racebending. On the other hand, film nostalgia has a significant negative impact on people's perception of racebending. Those who possess limited recollection of film contents and backdrops, and are not inclined to emulate the protagonist's conduct, tend to view racebending in a less unfavourable light.

Keywords: racebending, film nostalgia, psychological involvement, ethnic diversity inclusion, film industry, black representation

Introduction

Both diversity and ethnic inclusion are getting more and more attention. As globalization accelerates, businesses and industries - including media and entertainment - must navigate increasingly diverse markets, adapting their strategies to align with cultural

expectations and inclusivity demands (Wach & Głodowska, 2026; Wach & Głodowska, 2021). This increasing awareness is not only a societal trend but also a response to historical disparities in media representation. From an international business perspective, cultural adaptation and localization strategies emphasize the need for industries to reflect the diversity of their audiences to maintain competitiveness in a globalized economy (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Wach, 2021). This growing focus is closely linked to cultural dynamics and cross-cultural communication, as representation in media shapes societal perceptions and fosters intercultural understanding (Wach, 2016; Coutinho et al., 2023). Films portray modern culture (Nidasio, 2020). There is no denying the impact that movies have had on human society over the course of 125 years, both spiritually and culturally. They embody the aesthetics of entertainment and are critical to global economic growth in the twenty-first century (Li et al., 2020). As a form of visual art, this uses recorded or programmed moving images as well as sensory stimulation to simulate experiences that convey stories, perspectives, and emotions (Mughal, 2020). As a form of international business, the film industry relies on market expansion, localization, and cross-border collaborations to thrive in a competitive global landscape. This requires strategic decision-making regarding cultural adaptation and representation to appeal to diverse consumer bases (Wach, 2016). In this context, diversity and inclusion have become not only social imperatives but also economic factors shaping labour markets, consumer behaviour, and organisational performance (Alsyoof et al., 2025; Bal-Domańska et al., 2025; Mishchuk et al., 2021). Inclusive approaches enable firms to better understand heterogeneous audiences, foster innovation, and enhance competitiveness in the light of current changes on markets and in internal business environment (Hajduova et al., 2025; Kozová et al., 2024).

There is growing interest in diversity and inclusion in the film industry following the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent impact it had on the industry. However, key positions in the film industry are largely occupied by white people (Akser, 2021). Throughout the past few years, multinationals in the entertainment and media industries have been actively addressing systemic racism and promoting diversity, which is crucial because racism is still prevalent in society today. Over the past few years, tensions have developed throughout society's generally suppressed lives. The issue of racism has reached unprecedented levels, with movements like Black Lives Matter calling for an end to racial injustice and oppression (Crusto, 2020). Scholars like Smith and Yuen have noticed this trend and are focusing their attention on it. One of the research narratives in this area is racebending in the entertainment industry. From a business strategy perspective, racebending represents an attempt by studios to reposition existing intellectual property to align with diversity-driven market trends, a practice analogous to how international firms modify products to suit regional consumer preferences (Ghemawat, 2001). Racebending refers to the practice of casting actors in roles traditionally associated with a different racial or ethnic background (Paik, 2022). This often sparks discussions and debates regarding representation and diversity in the film industry (Paik, 2021). Underrepresentation of people from minority communities remains a reality (Chong, 2015). Nair (2023) argues that racebending can serve as both a mode of protest and a form of revolution, highlighting its complex role in societal change. This dual nature of racebending emphasizes the ongoing struggle for better representation and the potential for media to challenge entrenched racial norms (Nair, 2023). Given the significant influence of films on culture and society, it is crucial to examine how racebending impacts audience perceptions and experiences. Research shows that biased media portrayals shape public attitudes and reinforce stereotypes, affecting both personal identity and societal views on race (Yuen, 2020). Additionally, the impact of film and television on public perceptions extends to broader societal attitudes and justice perceptions, emphasizing the need for diverse representation (Epstein, 1998). This research is relevant due to past instances of racism, negative media portrayals of black individuals, and ongoing

experiences of racism (Crusto, 2020). Globalization further emphasizes the importance of this topic, as campaigns against stereotypes and racism strive for equality regardless of race. Racebending sparks controversy with clashing opinions. Consumers and the film industry are major stakeholders affected by this issue. Film nostalgia and psychological involvement play significant roles in its effects on the film audience. However, there is limited research on Racebending, and previous studies have not explored its perception in depth. Moreover, literature primarily focuses on the field of film tourism when it comes to Nostalgia and Involvement. This gap highlights the need for interdisciplinary research that integrates psychology, sociology, and media studies to provide a holistic understanding of racebending's impact. By applying concepts from international business, such as institutional pressures, cultural adaptation, and strategic repositioning, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how industries evolve in response to societal change. Therefore, this research fills the above-examined literature gap by answering these two research questions (Paik, 2021; Chong, 2015):

RQ1: What are people's perceptions of racebending?

RQ2: What is the impact of film nostalgia and psychological involvement on racebending perceptions?

Thus, this study aims to identify how racebending impacts audience perceptions, focusing on the role of film nostalgia and psychological involvement. By addressing gaps in research, it also aims to deepen understanding of diversity and representation debates in the film industry. Moreover, by incorporating insights from global perspectives, this study contributes to ongoing discussions on equitable media practices. Moreover, by drawing parallels to international business strategies, this study provides a new lens through which to examine racebending as part of a broader cultural adaptation process in global media markets. This study employed a mixed methods approach, combining sentimental analysis and quantitative research. The integration of both qualitative and quantitative methods ensures a comprehensive exploration of this complex issue, offering empirical insights that are not only relevant to media studies but also applicable to international business theory and global market dynamics.

1. Literature review

Diversity and inclusion are integral to everyday business practices (Wach, 2016; Gawel & Toikko, 2024; Głodowska et al., 2026). As industries evolve, the emphasis on equitable representation has gained momentum, with businesses increasingly recognizing the value of diversity not only as a moral imperative but also as a strategic advantage. In the entertainment industry, the concept of whitewashing has been raised as a significant issue, highlighting the erasure of authentic representation. This practice, deeply embedded in Hollywood's history, has long contributed to the marginalization of non-white actors, limiting opportunities for authentic storytelling. This phenomenon contrasts with efforts to diversify casts through practices like racebending, which aim to enhance inclusivity and representation on screen. Unlike blackwashing, which aims to diversify the cast, whitewashing erases authentic representation and often reinforces Eurocentric perspectives. While not necessarily a deliberate form of racism, instances such as Johnny Depp's portrayal of Tonto demonstrate this pattern in Hollywood, ignoring characters' ethnic identities. Whitewashing undermines the authenticity of diverse characters, going against the intent of inclusion and diminishing their cultural significance (Nidaso, 2020). This perpetuates stereotypes and limits representation, suggesting people of colour are relegated to supporting roles (Denham, 2015). Addressing Whitewashing

is essential to ensure genuine portrayal and enable underrepresented communities to see themselves as protagonists in cinematic narratives (Denham, 2015). Whitewashing and racebending highlight the ongoing struggle for authentic representation in media. While whitewashing often erases the cultural identity of characters, racebending attempts to broaden representation and diversify storytelling. However, true inclusivity in media requires more than just revisiting existing narratives; it demands a fundamental shift toward creating original, culturally diverse stories that celebrate rather than retrofit representation.

Diversity initiatives, such as "colour-blind" casting prioritizing talent over race, are generating varied reactions online (Nidasio, 2020). Cases like "The Witcher" and the character "Lieutenant Mattias" in *Frozen II* spark debates on forced diversity, raising questions about historical accuracy and political correctness (Quriroga, 2022). While Hollywood increases Black representation, deeper changes are needed to address perpetuated stereotypes catering to White audiences (Smith, 2021). Achieving equity demands substantial narrative and industry shifts.

Fu (2015) examined fan justifications of whiteness in American fictional heroes, focusing on the controversy over replacing Peter Parker with a Hispanic African character as Spider-Man. Negative reactions centred on Donald Glover's potential casting as Black Spider-Man, raising racial concerns (Fu, 2015, pp. 1-2). Internet discussions revealed fans claiming their preference for a white Spider-Man is not racist, rooted in character history and representation. Opposition to a black Spider-Man was based on retaining the character's established identity or fearing threats to white history (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Fu, 2015, p. 2).

The meaning of things in the world is created by humans, not pre-existing. People categorize and assign meaning to events for understanding. Typing is a way the human brain categorizes, extracting meaning from surroundings. In race, meanings are tied to history, culture, and power dynamics, leading to stereotypes. Stereotypes shape biased views of racial groups. Race's concept is socially constructed, not objective. Historical racial construction led to harmful stereotypes about Black people, perpetuating inequality. Whiteness symbolizes conformity, affecting diverse groups' ideas. Media reinforces perceptions. Recognizing and challenging stereotypes is crucial for inclusivity and equity. Whitewashing in Hollywood reinforced negative Black stereotypes, contributing to structural racism (Smith, 2021).

While there have been improvements in representation, challenges persist, especially regarding Disney, which has perpetuated racist stereotypes in its films. Princess Tiana from "The Princess and the Frog" exemplifies these issues, as she is positioned within working-class limitations. Such portrayals can influence self-perception and self-esteem, especially for young audiences of colour (Writer, 2022). The need for more authentic and diverse portrayals is evident in the film industry's financial impact. McKinsey estimates that greater black representation could lead to a 7% annual revenue increase, translating to approximately \$10 billion, as there is a growing demand for diverse storytelling. Despite this potential, the Oscars and other prestigious awards have historically underrepresented black talent, and the industry must address this disparity (McKinsey, 2021). To fully capitalize on diverse storytelling's economic and cultural potential, the industry must address its historical limitations and biases (Gitnux, 2023).

The term "nostalgia" comes from Greek words "nostos" (returning home) and "algos" (pain). Johannes Hofer first explored it in 1688, linking it to pleasurable and painful feelings. It originated as a medical concept for homesickness (Holak and Havlena, 1992) and influences buying behaviour (Holbrook and Schindler, 2003). Film tourism scholars like Caton and Santos (2007) studied how media connections shape memories and affect tourists' interactions. These include "memory of film contents and backdrops", "reminiscence of mimicking the behaviour of actors and desire to buy brand product", "memory of envying advanced society" and memory

of “Hong Kong culture and history” (Kim et al., 2017, p. 1,10). Relevant domains for this research are memories of film contents/backdrops and reminiscence of mimicking the behaviour of actors.

Audience participation refers to being highly interested or motivated by a product, activity, or object (Laurent & Kapferer 1985, p.42). Involvement is shaped by personal, material, and situational factors and leads to preferences, purchase decisions, and information search (Zaichkowsky, 1986, p.4f). Psychological Involvement is tied to recalling memories related to images and locations from films (Kim et al., 2017, p.4). Film-watching experiences become nostalgic memories, influencing emotions and involvement, following the symbolic communication theory. These nostalgic recollections generate a mix of emotions, impacting engagement with film elements like setting and characters (Kim et al., 2017, p.3). The level of involvement with film characters is pertinent to this research, excluding other film-related aspects. Kim et al. (2017) emphasizes nostalgia's role in film tourism, though its effect on involvement has not been explored in the current study.

Based on the theoretical framework, the following we hypothesize that:

H1: Psychological involvement has an impact on people’s perceptions of racebending.

H2: Film nostalgia 1 (memory of backdrops & contents) has an impact on people’s perceptions of Racebending.

H3: Film nostalgia 2 (reminiscence of mimicking behaviour) has an impact on people’s perceptions of Racebending.

Racebending perception serves as the dependent variable, while film nostalgia and psychological involvement are the two independent variables under empirical investigation (Figure 1).

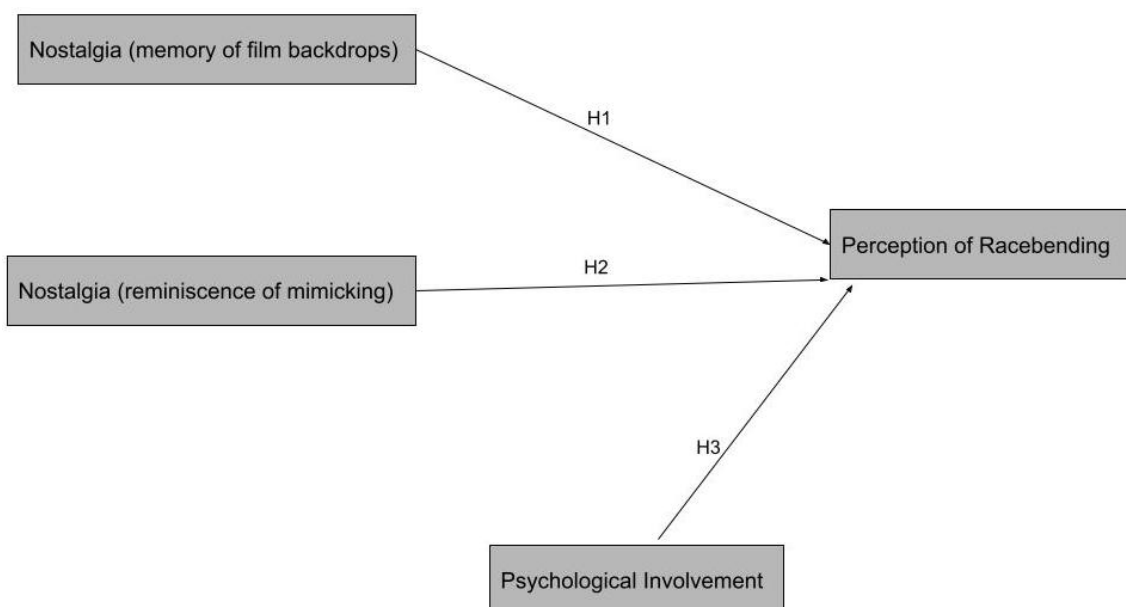


Figure 1. Research model

Source: own study.

2. Research methodology

A mixed-methods approach was selected to answer the research questions guiding this study consisting of: (1) Social media content analysis and (2) a survey questionnaire. The analysis is based on the case Ariel: The Little Mermaid (2023). The selected sample method for this research was a mixed sampling design: probability sampling for quantitative research and non-probability sampling for qualitative research. The related sampling techniques used were simple random sampling for social media content analysis and judgmental sampling for the questionnaire.

According to Statista Research Department (2022), Walt Disney generated around \$82.7 billion in revenue during fiscal year 2022. Approximately half of the 30 most successful films were produced by the Walt Disney Company or its subsidiaries. To conduct qualitative analysis, a random selection of participants who commented on Disney posts about the live remake was chosen. These participants were already aware of the remake, ensuring diverse perceptions and insights from engaged individuals. To measure film nostalgia and psychological involvement, only people who watched the old, animated Ariel: The Little Mermaid (1989) movie were eligible to participate in the questionnaire. This criterion was essential because the variables can only be effectively measured within the context of familiarity with the old movie. To gain a deeper understanding of people's perception of Racebending, online comments were coded and categorized according to Mayring (1994).

To test the hypotheses of this research, an online survey was conducted using SoSci Survey. The questionnaire was structured into four parts, comprising a total of 20 questions. The estimated completion time for the questionnaire was 5-7 minutes. A short trailer of The Little Mermaid (2023) was included in the questionnaire to offer participants a visual preview of the live remake. In line with the study conducted by Kim et al. (2017), the items used to measure film nostalgia and psychological involvement were adjusted to align with the context of the current research, as they were previously applied in the context of film tourism. To measure the dependent variable, Racebending perception, three categories formed in the qualitative content analysis were included into the questionnaire (Table 1): (A) Loss of childhood memories, (B) Falsification of the Original and (D) Need for new storylines. These categories were rephrased into questions. All items were measured using 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, and 5 = strongly agree).

Table 1. Coding table

Categories 1 st level code	Categories 2 nd level code	Definition	Anchor example	Number of comments
(A) Loss of childhood memory Keywords: “preservation”, “ruining”, “childhood”, “memories”		By casting a black Ariel, Disney is changing a beloved childhood movie that held a special place in the hearts of many who cherished and enjoyed the film during their younger years.	Why is she black? [...] you are destroying our childhood dreams with choosing the wrong characters. She is good for Tiara in Princess and the frog. 🐸	N=58
(B) Falsification of the Original Keywords: “unacceptable”, “no changes”, “unfamiliar”, “physical appearance”		The new portrayal of Ariel does not align with the original character, thereby defeating the purpose of a remake.	What’s the point of re-creating this movie if the characters are not going to look the same from the original.	N=64

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(C) Inequality Keywords: “disappointed”, “red-haired girls” “representation” “identify”	Representation has been achieved for Black individuals, but Red-haired individuals no longer have a character with whom they can identify.	Disney ruined Ariel, she was a redhead. Every little red headed girl that had one princess to look up to has been ruined.	N=45
(D) Need for new Storylines Keywords: “left-overs”, “lazy”, “history”, “new mermaid”, “plot”	Creating new movies with black characters is important for fostering inclusion. However, existing movies should remain in their original state.	WHY NOT CREATE NEW CHARACTERS? NEW STORIES FOR KIDS TO GROW UP WITH? NEW MEMORIES FOR THE BLACK COMMUNITY TO RELATE TO... is that too much to ask for?	N=69
(D1) Lack of creativity	Racebending serves as a clear indication that Disney is lacking the necessary creativity to venture into new and original storytelling.	The race swap is so lazy. You could create another character, but instead, you decided to do this. Lazy Disney[...].	N=15 Total: N=84
(E) Tokenism Keywords: “forced” “political” “pretend” “marketing”	Racebending can be viewed as a form of forced inclusion that fails to adequately address the issue of proper minority representation in the film industry.	[...] changing a pre-existing character to a black person is not representation, it's tokenism, princess stories, such as princess in the frog, [...] included some degree of their culture, [...], it's not giving us our own characters, it's Disney being lazy & changing characters that already exist.	N=41
(E1) Fan-Baiting	Racebending can be perceived as a marketing tactic employed by the film industry to generate excitement or provoke the fanbase, thereby garnering attention and media coverage.	Just a bad marketing strategy... putting voluntarily so much hate on a person for no reasons except to make noise& people talk about this movie...so sad	N=8 Total: N=49
(F) Equality Keywords: “development”, “achievement”, “happy” “justice”	Disney's commitment to creating representation for Black individuals, particularly Black children, contributes to fostering equality and inclusivity.	My Ariel!! ❤️👍🏻 Thank you Disney and Halle for creating this beautiful representation for little Black and Brown girls everywhere 🙏🏻.	N=39,
(G) Excitement/Enjoyment Keywords: “impatient”, “family”, “friends”, “crying”	The new remake has sparked overwhelming joy and excitement among people, who are eagerly counting down the days until they can watch the remake in cinemas.	I cried and I'm still crying. Disney you have done it again. Thank you soooo much for this experience! Congratulations HALLE I knew you would fit this role perfectly and so did Disney[...]	N=104

Source: own study based on social media content analysis.

Table 2. Frequency table

Categories 1 st level code+ 2 nd level code	Positive	Negative	Total
<i>Category (A):</i> Loss of Childhood memories (LCM)	-	58	58
<i>Category (B):</i> Falsification of the Original (FO)	-	64	64
<i>Category (C):</i> Inequality (IEQ)	-	45	45
<i>Category (D):</i> Need for new storylines (NST) (DI): Lack of creativity (LC)	-	69 15	84
<i>Category (E)</i> Tokenism (TOK) (EI): Fan-Baiting (FB)	-	41 8	49
<i>Category (F):</i> Equality (EQ)	39		39
<i>Category (G):</i> Excitement/Enjoyment (EE)	104		104
Altogether	143	300	443

Source: own study based on social media content analysis.

A total of 443 Instagram comments were analyzed. Out of 229 respondents who participated in the survey, 154 participants provided complete and usable responses. Out of the 154 respondents who completed the survey, approximately 82% (130 respondents) identified as female, while approximately 17% (23 respondents) identified as male as shown. In terms of age distribution, most respondents fell within the 18-24 age group, comprising approximately 68% (105 respondents). Regarding racial or ethnic identification, the survey predominantly gathered 67 responses (approximately 43%) from individuals identifying as White, followed by 45 respondents (approximately 29%).

3. Empirical findings

3.1. Validity and reliability

Data analysis in this study was performed using the partial least squares (PLS) method to examine the research model. Hair et al. (2013) suggests that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) score should be greater than 0.5. To assess convergent validity. All AVE values exceeded the threshold of 0.5, indicating satisfactory convergent validity (Table 5). Hair et al. (2014) suggests that indicator values above 0.7 are considered valid, while those below 0.7 are deemed invalid. Therefore, to achieve all items with a factor loading below 0.7 were removed. However, Henseler et al. (2009) proposed that manifest variables with loading values between 0.4 and 0.7 should be examined before being removed (Table 3). Moreover, according to Table 17, all composite reliability values were higher than the indicated value of 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). By evaluating the Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability values for each construct, the study confirmed that all constructs showed internal consistency which is shown in Table 5 (Rahimnia & Hassanzadeh, 2013, p. 243). Moreover, demonstrate discriminant validity, the indicators of a particular construct should show stronger correlations with their own construct compared to the indicators of other constructs. These criteria were fulfilled as illustrated in Table 6. Table 4 shows how the estimation of the square root of the AVE scores relates to the correlations of the other latent variables. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), each construct's square root AVE should be higher than its correlations with other constructs.

Table 3. Outer loading per items of constructs

Items	Inv-1	Nost-1	Nost-2	PERC-RB
PI01_01	0.835			
PI01_02	0.842			
PI02_01	0.907			
PI02_02	0.848			
BC01_01		0.633		
BC01_02		0.831		
BC01_03		0.809		
BC01_04		Removed		
BC02_01		Removed		
MB01_01			Removed	
MB02_01			0.627	
MB02_02			0.916	
MB02_03			0.638	
PR01_01				Removed
PR02_01				Removed
PR03_01				Removed
PR04_01				0.833
PR05_01				0.897
PR06_01				0.897

Source: own study based on SmartPLS4 results.

Table 4. Discriminant validity test (Fornell- Larcker criterion)

Items	Inv-1	Nost-1	Nost-2	PERC-RB
Inv-1	0.859			
Nost-1	0.235	0.763		
Nost-2	-0.048	0.253	0.739	
PERC-RB	0.231	-0.192	-0.375	0.876

Source: own study based on SmartPLS4 results.

Table 5. Result of convergent validity

Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Nost-1	0.643	0.804	0.582
Nost-2	0.603	0.778	0.546
Inv-1	0.893	0.918	0.737
PERC-RB	0.848	0.908	0.769

Source: own study based on SmartPLS4 results.

Table 6. Cross loadings per items

Items	BC01_01	BC01_02	BC01_03	MB02_01	MB02_02	MB02_03	PI01_01	PI01_02	PI02_01	PI02_02	PR04_01	PR05_01	PR06_01
BC01_01	1.000												
BC01_02	-0.469	1.000											
BC01_03	-0.377	-0.641	1.000										
MB02_01	0.066	-0.094	0.041	1.000									
MB02_02	0.022	-0.032	0.014	-0.720	1.000								
MB02_03	-0.116	0.166	-0.073	-0.327	-0.420	1.000							
PI01_01	-0.130	0.037	0.074	-0.198	0.105	0.115	1.000						
PI01_02	-0.043	-0.073	0.114	-0.202	0.094	0.137	0.558	1.000					
PI02_01	0.089	0.020	-0.099	0.120	-0.037	-0.106	-0.643	-0.689	1.000				
PI02_02	0.002	-0.003	0.001	0.131	-0.098	-0.038	-0.252	-0.180	-0.451	1.000			
PR04_01	-0.002	0.032	-0.031	0.064	-0.097	0.049	0.108	0.158	-0.050	-0.131	1.000		
PR05_01	0.012	-0.061	0.054	-0.087	0.117	-0.045	-0.134	-0.185	0.056	0.162	-0.605	1.000	
PR06_01	-0.009	0.019	-0.013	0.004	0.008	-0.017	-0.004	-0.018	0.007	0.006	-0.651	-0.211	1.000

Source: own study on SmartPLS4 result

3.2. Structural model assessment

The results in Table 7 show that all three relationships are significant since all values are above 1.96. Path coefficients were employed to assess the extent of association between variables, ranging from -1 to +1. A negative sign signifies a negative relationship between the variables, while a positive sign indicates a positive relationship between them (F. Hair et al., 2014, p.114). Therefore, the correlation between Involvement 1 and people's perception of Racebending was positive (0.256). This implies that if involvement increases, the impact on people's perceptions increases, and vice versa. Psychological Involvement positively influences people's perception of Racebending by 25.6%. However, the path coefficient between Nostalgia 1 people's perception of Racebending was negative (-0.171). Therefore, Nostalgia 1 negatively influences people's perception of Racebending by 17.1%. The path coefficient between Nostalgia 2 and people's perception of Racebending was also negative (-0.320), thus Nostalgia 2 has a negative influence of 32% on people's perception of Racebending. This implies that if Nostalgia 1 or Nostalgia 2 increases, the impact on people's perception decreases, and vice versa. Based on these findings, all hypotheses were confirmed (Table 8).

Table 7. Structural model statistics

Path Coefficients	Original sample (O)	Sample mean	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P-values
Inv-1 -> PERC-RB	0.256	0.259	0.095	2.682	0.004
Nost-1 -> PERC-RB	-0.171	-0.184	0.068	2.506	0.006
Nost-2 -> PERC-RB	-0.320	-0.322	0.073	4.351	0.000

Source: own study based on SmartPLS4 results.

Table 8. Hypotheses verification

Hypothesis	T-statistics	Verification status
H1: Psychological Involvement has an impact on people's perception of Racebending.	2.682	Confirmed
H2: Nostalgia 1 (memory of backdrops and contents) has an impact on people's perception of Racebending.	2.506	Confirmed
H3: Nostalgia 2 (reminiscence of mimick behavior) has an impact on people's perception of Racebending.	4.351	Confirmed

Source: own study based on SmartPLS4 results.

Checking the model fit is the next essential step in our research. The R-square value of 0.212 means that all three predictors have an effect of 21.2% on people's perception of racebending; in words, all three predictors have explained the impact on people's perception of racebending by 21.2%.

Conclusion

Racebending is predominantly perceived negatively, as evidenced by the classification into five distinct categories, with only two positive ones identified. This mirrors broader challenges in international business, where firms attempting market adaptation often face resistance from consumers attached to established brand identities (Ghemawat, 2001). This indicates a significant divide in audience reception, where resistance to racebending often outweighs acceptance. Individuals in category (FO) explicitly deny racist attitudes, echoing Fu's findings (2015) that fans justify their preference for a white Spider-Man as rooted in character history rather than race. Category (TOK) observes frequent switches between black and white characters for diversity, consistent with Nidasio's findings (2020) that many fans reject Racebending as forced diversity. This resistance is analogous to the liability of foreignness (Zaheer, 1995), where new entrants—whether businesses or alternative narratives—struggle to gain acceptance in established markets. Most categories link to (NST), with positive perceptions unrelated to negative ones. Just as multinational enterprises (MNEs) must consider local adaptation strategies to integrate into new cultural environments (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Wach, 2021), film studios must carefully approach racebending to align with audience expectations while fostering inclusivity. Negative perceptions could be mitigated if Disney created a new movie embracing Black culture and history, ensuring proper representation. Social media analysis underscores Racebending as an initial step in improving Black representation but recognizes its limitations in addressing systemic issues. Sustainable progress requires additional measures and systemic changes promoting equitable portrayals of Black individuals.

Film Nostalgia and Psychological Involvement significantly influence perceptions of racebending. Psychological Involvement positively correlates with negative perceptions of racebending, consistent with Zaichkowsky's (1986) findings on preferences. High psychological involvement is associated with a greater tendency to view racebending negatively and prefer unchanged character ethnicities in remakes. Kim et al. (2017) observed that psychologically involved individuals are more likely to engage in discussions about original movies, shedding light on the prevalence of online debates surrounding race-bent films. This heightened engagement underscores why racebending frequently becomes a focal point of online discourse, with passionate responses from both supporters and detractors.

Conversely, Nostalgia 1 and Nostalgia 2 exhibit negative correlations with perceptions of racebending. Retaining memories of the original movie's content leads to disagreement with negative perceptions of racebending. Similarly, a willingness to emulate the main character's behavior diminishes agreement with negative perceptions. Kamins & Gupta's (1994) research on the transfer of meaning aligns with these findings, indicating that heightened symbolic meanings associated with nostalgia reduce antipathy towards race-bent films, potentially increasing viewership willingness. High levels of Film Nostalgia mitigate antipathy towards race-bent movies, as individuals with strong nostalgia disagree with negative perceptions. This aligns with Kim et al.'s (2017) findings on the positive correlation between Film Nostalgia and favorable perceptions of movie filming locations. However, in the context of racebending perceptions, high levels of nostalgia yield lesser antipathy, as individuals tend to reject negative perceptions.

The casting debate over a Black Ariel underscore polarizing views on diversifying icons. It also illustrates the complexities of brand adaptation and consumer reception, a challenge frequently faced by multinational companies entering new markets with modified products. This study provides insights into the film industry, aiding market research and addressing criticisms by understanding societal values. The concept of glocalization (Robertson, 1995) is particularly relevant here—where companies (or film studios) must balance global appeal with local sensitivities to ensure acceptance. Psychological involvement and nostalgia are key when considering race-bent movies, ensuring they meet audience expectations. To promote diversity, the industry should ensure accurate portrayal of minority characters, create stories that authentically depict Black individuals, and challenge stereotypes. This involves not only casting decisions but also giving Black filmmakers, writers, and producers the creative autonomy to tell their own stories. Embracing these changes requires investment but is essential to cater to evolving audience interests and societal diversity. By fostering authentic inclusivity rather than surface-level representation, the film industry can contribute to a more equitable and culturally enriched media landscape. Much like successful multinational firms that integrate diversity as a core strategic advantage, the entertainment industry must recognize that meaningful representation is not just an ethical obligation - it is a business imperative that drives long-term audience engagement and global market relevance.

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