Media representations of Young People in the UK Riots of 2011

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Abstract

This study is a discourse analysis of media representations of young people’s participation in the summer riots that spread across the UK in August 2011. Drawing on articles published in three UK newspapers The Guardian, The Daily Mail and The Sun this paper critically assesses the ways in which the media identified the behaviour of young people as symptomatic of a general moral decline in British society. Along with the media portrayal of children and young people during these events, the study also highlights the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a further way of questioning the reporting practices of mainstream media. Articles 2, 12 and 13 will have specific focus in the study, in order to evaluate the media’s recurrent misrepresentation of young people’s participation in decision making on matters concerning their own wellbeing.

Keywords

UK Riot, Moral Panic, Youth Participation, Media Representations, UNCRC
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Introduction

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations in November 1989, emphasizes the basic child’s rights for all parts of the world. Thus far all governments have signed up to the convention apart from the United States of America and Somalia. Article 13(UNCRC,1989,p4) of the convention reads “the child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice,” even if this article gives full right to the child as to gain free access to participate and gain any form of information in any form of media, Article 17(e) of(UNCRC,1989,p5) protects a child by stating “State parties shall encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of articles 13 and 18”.

Based on the rights of the child in relation to Article 13 of freedom of expression and article 17 of access to information, this paper will look into media portrayal of youth participation in UK riot 2011, which started in the vicinity of Ferry Lane Bridge, Tottenham, when a botched arrest on 4 August 2011 led to the fatal shooting of 29 year old Mark Duggan by the police. On 6 August, reports show that an estimated 300 people comprising the late Mr. Duggan’s family members, friends and sympathizers gathered outside the police station demanding "justice”.(The Sun 8 August,2011).

Indeed, questions surrounding the fatal shooting of Mr. Duggan – an employed citizen and father of four children – require clear answers from the police authorities. Sadly, the reality is that even if the police offered comments referring to the shooting incident, in the eyes of the disaffected and aggrieved, efforts by the police would have been considered to be inadequate and perhaps even self-serving. Consequently, a tense situation turned volatile, resulting in public outrage.

England’s Ministry of Justice Statistics bulletin published 24 October 2011, rioters comparisons by age showing that 26 per cent of those brought before the courts for the offences relating to the public disorder were aged between 10-17 (juveniles) and that a further 27 per cent were aged between 18-20 only five percent of those appearing before the courts for the disorder were over 40 years old (pg3). Therefore, according to the data the significance of the youth participation during the riot was very dynamic which brought the attention of this paper in giving emphasis to what extent does the media allow the children’s perspectives to be addressed, had they been given a chance to have a say in their own matter and has the media protected the children from further victimization and discrimination.
2. Literature review

2.1 UN convention on the rights of the child

“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

(Nelson Mandela, speaking on behalf of the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund, 1996)

This study aims to assess the media representations of children during the summer riots that spread across the UK in August 2011. Focusing on media portrayal of youth participation referring to broadsheet and tabloid newspapers published in UK namely *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun*. Along with the media portrayal, the study will highlight the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child articles that are in line with the specific focus of the study.

The UN convention on the rights of the child (hereafter: “UNCRC”) suggests, “Adult intervention on behalf of children should be guided by actions that promote the ‘best interests’ of the child or group of children. The UNCRC places children’s rights in the context of human rights and stresses the importance of rights for all children. The rights of children’s are outlined as a set of legally binding principles designed to protect and promote children’s welfare in areas such as health, education and the family. The UNCRC acknowledges the vulnerability of children and discusses their rights in relation to the ‘four Ps’: protection, provision, prevention, and participation”. (Kehily, 2004, p13).

Moreover, UNCRC under Article 13(UNCRC, 1989, p4) acknowledged children's freedom of expression, freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s voice. Thorgeirsdóttir, (2006) further adds, “Freedom of expression if properly protected will enable the child to develop its mind and its self in society with others and grow into a citizen participating in public life as such and not merely as a mindless consumer.” (Thorgeirsdóttir, 2006p.19) Without being informed about their environment, their society, their rights, and opportunities, they will be unable “to participate effectively and have an impact on their lives and futures. They are victims of a situation that excludes them and marginalizes and jeopardizes their future and chances for a better world.” (Thorgeirsdóttir, 2006 p.2) UNCRC in addition states in Article 17(UNCRC, 1989, p5) that, “States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of
national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.”

As mentioned in the above paragraph, children’s are entitled of free access to information especially of those encouraging his or her social and spiritual wellbeing to develop the feeling of being part of the society and in charge of the better future that await to all. With this in mind the following literature review will assess whether the youth has been promoted or misrepresented by the media referring back to previous research regarding youth participation in certain events that caught the attention of the media; To name a few the case of James Bulger, the ban of hoodies in public places and the “folk devils”. These are only few among the major events so far, The media showed interest in reporting the deviance of youth culture to that of the socially approved one. Hence, the literature review will essentially focus on the youth participation in such events and the media representation of children on the same.

Lansdown (2001,p5) discusses ”that it is through participation that children are empowered to take greater responsibility for the exercise of their own rights as they gain confidence and competence to make informed choices”. It is very important to make them feel they are contributing positively, affording them the space to decide about the issues that concern them. Lansdown further points out arguments often used to challenge child participation, such as Children lack the competence or experience to participate or how giving children’s rights will take away their childhood and child participation will lead to lack of respect for parents. (Lansdown, Ibid) The case below as discussed by (Kehily, 2004, p16) “illustrates the point that childhood innocence is an adult construct rather than an intrinsic and natural part of childhood. The cases also illustrate that there is no appropriate age or reasoning to describe a child. Children’s capacity to understand the consequences of their actions is dependent upon sociocultural context.”

On 12 February 1993 in England a boy named James Bulger at the age of two years was abducted and murdered by two ten year old boys; his body was discovered after two days in a railway line, cut in half by a train .The boys were found guilty and charged with abducting and killing James. (Smith & Sueda, 2008), as shocking as the news were to the society, the Media portrayal of the boys arose the fear of society crises and the nature of childhood. Lansdown, (2001, p17) mentions that “they were portrayed as monsters” one police was quoted as saying, “I truly believe they are just evil” another colleague “you should not compare these boys with other boys. They were evil” (Morrison 1998). The Sun’s headline read, “The Devil Himself Couldn’t Have Made a Better Job of Two Friends and The Daily Star said simply, ‘How do you feel now you little bustards?’(Davis & Bourhill 1997, p47 cited in Kehily, 2004, p17 ).
Blake Morrison wrote a best-selling book taking a stand of the boy’s innocence despite their crime. He takes a stand saying “…Can children, whose sense of right and wrong is newer but dimmer, fresher but fuzzier, act with the same clear moral sense? Do they grasp that hurting someone is much more wrong than stealing and truanting (which T & V had got away with for months)? Do they have a sense of the awful irreversibility of battering a child to death with bricks? Can death have the same meaning for them as it has for an adult? I submit your Honour, that the answer to these questions is no, no, no and no. (Morrison, 1998, p 99)

While Kehily, (2004, p21) further argues, “Their childhood is based around their innocence, whether that is defined as sexual, emotional or physical. Once their innocence has gone, so has their childhood, and once that has disappeared they are subject to the same pressures and difficulties as adults, whatever their age and whatever their understanding. They are entitled to no protection, no sympathy and no special pleading. They are no longer children.” To look at another event in UK according to the media that underscore the moral decline of the youth following is the Bluewater Ban.

On 11 May 2011, The Bluewater shopping center placed a ban code of dress excluding anyone who wears a hooded top. The media and the government had given much emphasis and discussed about the youth culture by encouraging certain modes of dress and behavior by supporting the ban of hooded tops at Bluewater shopping center. Succeeding the Bluewater ban, “Prime Minister Tony Blair and his deputy, John Prescott, laid claim to the problematic nature of youth behavior. Speaking in support of the ban, Blair argued that ‘People are rightly fed-up with street corner and shopping Centre thugs’ (Fagge & Chapman, 2005 cited in Heir, Lett, Walby & Smith, 2011, p263) further to intensify the ban and framing the hoodies as group of criminals who do not represent the majority of the society. “although it is important not to deny the seriousness of the real crimes and acts of violence reported by the media – which the term ‘amplification’ may appear to do – it is nevertheless justified to use the term amplification because of the array of unrelated crimes and offenses that are attributed to a singular subject position with little evidence” thugs’. (Fagge & Chapman, 2005 cited in Heir. Lett, Walby & Smith, 2011, p.268)

Thus far, regarding child crimes it appears that media respond to child offenders as a threat to society and as if they represent the whole youth culture. The tendency of reporting positive images of a child by media is beyond far from that of the everyday portrayal of child as social treat. Having a dominant role in influencing both the society and the government media should report issues concerning children at least as the way they are. Rather the media added further accusations and raising the question of family life, social inequality, school failure and government policies, in order to protect children from further negligent treatment. Article 40(1) (UNCRC,1989,p11) declares that “States Parties recognize the right of every child alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and
worth, which reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others and which takes into account the child's age and the desirability of promoting the child's reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society.” Hence, even if a child commits crime the case should get the formal conduct as per the law stated above and not as a general youth culture.

2.2 Media and Children

In view of the fact, that the study specifically focus on the newspaper portrayal of the UK riots in 2011 defining media will provide a clear picture of misrepresentation youth by the media and its consequences. Defining media comes with its own difficulties, given both its wide coverage and the various modes of transmitting information, O’Shaughnessy, (1999, p4) offers the following definition: "The media are technologically developed and economically profitable forms of human communication, held either in public or private ownership, which can transmit information and entertainment across time and space to large groups of people.”

Today information is a click away and easily accessible. Simultaneously, what needs to be noted is that, as easy as many seem to benefit from open and plural access to media output, the way one interprets and comprehends the messages transmitted by society’s media might matter the most. For instance, (Reiner, 2002, p318) states that the “media act as an open university for violence and crime”: people learn easily, sometimes as a performance for their peer groups. Moreover, Reiner adds that media is one of the many reasons behind understanding crime: the media might facilitate the road to violence and crime by contributing in the development of consumerist ethos which might target theft (Reiner, 2002, p318). But, at the same time, the media can also help to alter “routine activities”, especially in relation to the use of leisure time, which structure opportunities of offending (Cohen, & Felson, 1979). Now a day’s society’s routine activities especially children's primarily circulate around TVs, radio, video, mobile phones, Internet and so many other forms of information technologies which shapes the hobby of the youth culture and creates a significant gap for criminal opportunities as well as promote free access to information to the children.

Media is one of the means of which child rights can be implemented and experienced and where a child can get to know about his or her surroundings and the world at a large. According to O’Shaughnessy (1999, p3):”Satellite and cable communications, digital television, computers, video games, virtual reality, and the Internet are again changing our patterns of behavior, our modes of accessing knowledge, our entertainment, and our ways of seeing the world and interacting with one another. We truly live in a "media-world". Thus, in living in a “media-world” emphasis ought to be given to the circulating information as forms of media serve to construct and project ideas and images
of children, and invariably influence youth perspectives. In other words, the media should give more emphasis to youth perspectives in matters affecting their day-to-day experiences.

As a result to overcome the prevailing shortcomings of media, Guidelines and Principles for Reporting on Issues Involving Children (hereafter: journalist guideline) “were first adopted in draft by journalists’ organizations from 70 countries at the world’s first international consultative conference on journalism and child rights held in Recife, Brazil, on May 2nd 1998. After regional conferences and workshops, they were finally adopted at the Annual Congress of the International Federation of Journalists in Seoul in 2001. The guidelines were presented by the IFJ at the 2nd World Congress against Commercial Exploitation of Children held at Yokohama, Japan, in December 2001. (The international federation of journalists, 2002, p61)

McIntyre, (2002. p.4) argues, “The way the media portray children has a profound impact on society’s attitude to children and childhood, which also affects the way adults behave. Moreover, the images of sex and violence that children see influence their own expectations of their role in life.” He further adds, “Journalists need to be aware of the consequences of their reporting. The co-operation of media organizations and journalists and their orientation towards safeguarding the rights and the dignity of children and young adults is extremely important for all who strive for wider recognition of children’s rights.” Hence, this underlines the crucial contribution of journalists in reporting on child affairs by promoting their freedom of expression and participation in decisions that concern them.

Moreover, Thompson (1995) argues that the media are actively involved in constituting the social world. By making images and information available to individuals located in distant locales, the media shapes and influences the course of events, and indeed, creates events that would not have existed in their absence (117). The formative role that media has in constituting the social world has led to the desire to come up with more socially responsive news coverage, which stresses dangers in society, “with more reporters hunting for ’newer’ news on the story, which gains more momentum every day. In quick succession, events accumulate in the news, creating the impression that a situation has suddenly deteriorated into a real crisis. This, for instance, is the case when the media suddenly discover a ‘new’ type of crime, reporting new incidents every day, which in turn contributes to a growing anxiety among the public”. (Vasterman, 2005, p509).The anxiety created among the public regarding the youth culture is enlightened when thought “in relation to the primary mode of moralization-responsibilization.’ ‘Responsibilization presupposes rational, liberal subjectivity, which is a developmental rather than inherent characteristic of human beings. Long-term efforts to regulate British youth over the past decade have manifested in moral-legal regulatory apparatuses institutionalized to counteract ‘anti-social behavior’.“(Heir. Lett, Walby & Smith, 2011, p263).However ,the prevailing anti-social behavior is revisited whenever one event occurs the media
refer back to the previous tragedy in order to draw a link and reconstruct a new panic among the society.

From the point of view of the media, crimes associated with children and youth makes an ideal new story; it grabs the attention of society at large because apart from the strong bond existing between children and society, children are often perceived as vulnerable and endangered, requiring that special protection should be provided both from societal institutions and parents. Furthermore, "social ills such as poverty and racism are confined to certain social strata, but because parents of all strata send their children to school, the story of school crime is one to which all parents can relate, as can aunts, uncles, grandparents, and anyone else who cares about children." (Kupchik & Bracy 2009, p138). Further states, “the issue of media reporting about school violence is also important from a policy perspective. Over the past several decades, schools have implemented strict security measures and policies designed to prevent school crime, apprehend school offenders, and punish them severely. Some have suggested that media coverage of school violence has shaped decisions to implement some of these strict and punitive measures.” (Ibid, p152). Despite the fact that this highlights the media’s role as for shaping policy matters regarding school crime this goes not only for school crimes but to all issues concerning children, being privileged with such an influential power the media ought to give prior concerns to promoting children and clear out a stage for their view and voices to be heard rather than stressing on events that control the heartbeat of the society’s fear which is considering children's as outcasts.

2.3 Moral Panic and the Folk Devils

Going through the articles reported on the UK riot, moral panic was categorized as one of the many possible reasons that brought the peaceful demonstration in seek of justice to the late Mr. Duggan family in to a riot. Thus, this literature review will define and explore the emergence of Moral panic and the folk devils.

A British sociologist Stanly Cohen defined moral panic in 1972 in his book “Folk Devils and Moral panics”. He defines moral panic as

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but
suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folk-lore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself.’ Cohen 1972 (cited in Marsh & Melville, 2011, p2).

In summary moral panic has come to explicate any strange event or reaction to the socially accepted norms. Moreover, Thomas (2000) defines Moral panics as “often the result of adult reactions towards different youth cultural phenomena. Throughout modernity, new expressions in commercial culture and youth culture have often led to strong moral reactions. Moral panics are also intimately related to the development of the mass media.” (P24). He further discusses that there have been a number of analysis between the differences of youth culture and society. Thomas seeks to “distinguish between working class and middle class based youth cultures… working class kids’ use of ‘bad culture’ and their aggressive behavior, or to the increasing masculinization and feminization of certain parts of youth culture. Nevertheless, they may be primarily related to clashes between different ethnic groups and towards antidemocratic tendencies within youth culture”. (P25). Thomson, (1995, p33) concluded, “in this case, moral panics are no longer expressions of a narrow and restricted view on youth or culture, but a major force in the formulation of a moral boundary and a common political view on certain phenomena in society. Moral panics may thus become a major political weapon in the struggle for a more equal and less repressive society, an important contribution to the democratic discussion, taking place in the public sphere.”

The media renamed the youth in the UK riots as hoodies, copycat rioters, devils and so many others just the way the above literature review has covered certain similar events during the past and yet even today youth culture is depicted as in the same threatening way as it was before. Therefore, is media recreating moral panics or reporting on moral panics? Thus, the next chapter of the analysis section will discuss the reconstruction of moral panic by the media in responses to the youth culture during the disorder in UK 2011.
3. Methodology

The study undertake a critical media discourse analysis, in order to assess the newspapers’ portrayal of youth participation during the UK riots of 2011, doing so in light of the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child. Critical discourse analysis is a type of qualitative research pointing out the:

“Language use in speech and writing – as a form of ‘social practice’ Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it. Since discourse is so socially consequential, it gives rise to important issues of power. Discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people.” (Fairclough & Wodak 1997, p258).

Hence this paper will use critical discourse analysis method to assess the media representation of young people during the riot, and begin to critically evaluate the imbalance of power between media and youth. As defined in the literature review section of this study media is the most powerful and widest means of communication, addressing large groups of peoples. Unfortunately, the dominant image of young people in the media is often either of vulnerable beings or hooligans. Either way, young people are often described as incapable of decision making. Even though (UNCRC, 1989) empowers the child freedom of expression and free access to information along with others basic human rights the media can be said to contribute to the violation of their rights and the further marginalization of young peoples.

The study explores three major newspapers published in UK The Sun, The Daily Mail and The Guardian. The first two are tabloid newspapers while The Guardian is a famous broadsheet newspaper with daily circulation of 248,775 published in England. According to the Macmillan Dictionary, a broadsheet is “newspaper printed on large sheets of paper. Broadsheets are generally to contain serious news than tabloid newspapers, which are smaller, although many broadsheets are now printed in compact size.” According to Mondo Times which is the worldwide news media guide, The Sun is the highest circulation daily newspaper in the United Kingdom with
daily circulation of 2,821,618 copies likewise The Daily Mail is the second largest daily newspaper after The Sun with daily circulation of 2,050,132 copies. Moreover, the newspapers were chosen based on readership that refers to the number of people reading a title on an average day over the stated time period (January 11-june 11) Newspaper Marketing Agency (NRS) states The Sun’s daily circulation gets readership from All adults and aged 15-24 respectively 7,774,000 and 1,345,000. Whereas The Daily Mail gets readership from All adults and aged 15-24 respectively 4,538,000 and 441,000 and The Guardian’s readership from All adults and aged 15-24 respectively 1,198,000 and 210,000. All adults and those aged 15-24 were chosen because most of the young peoples involved during the riots fall in this age category. Hence the newspapers chosen have the highest circulation and read by a significant amount of society members.

The articles read and referred were dated between the 7th of August 2011 and 31 of August 2011. The riots began on the 6th of August hence the articles refereed start from the second day of the riot and during the riots, extending until the end of the month to cover dominant themes. In order to retrieve the relevant newspaper articles under investigation, LexisNexis database was used. Principally “UK riot” was used as a key search word in order to get familiarized with the concept. After a primary survey of the articles, this was followed by selecting recurrent themes present in the media’s portrayal of young people’s involvement in the riots and which in this study will constitute the subsections of my discourse analysis. In order to avoid any kind of discrimination based on the prevailing racial intense or economic background this paper only undertake articles concerning youth participation and both media’s and government officials responses after the riot in general. Articles written on the cause behind the riot and on policy implications are not included in this study.
4. Analysis and results

The UK riots that took place during the summer of 2011 began first around the vicinity of Tottenham, then spreading to all over England. Even if, According to England’s ministry of justice report, the riots were composed of all age ranges, the media focused on youth and teenagers. Some even defined the events as a youth riot, with some parts of the media even portraying the young as a threat to societal values. For instance *The Daily Mail*, dated on August 12, 2011 states: “years of liberal dogma have spawned a generation of amoral, uneducated, unparented, welfare dependent, brutalized youngsters”

In providing an analysis of media representations of the summer UK riots, with particular emphasis on the way in which newspapers sought to concentrate in the involvement of young people, this study will focus on the media portrayal of youth under three different headings. First it will address the connection between youth and consumerism, second the relationship between social networking and rioting and finally the theme of youth depolitisization shall be addressed. These three elements should be understood as contributing to the general media attempt of constructing a moral panic out of these events, with young people constructed as the principal perpetrators.

4.1 The Reconstruction of Moral Panic

A moral panic is an overstated response by the media or society as a whole, regarding a certain deviant subculture which is perceived as a threat to society (Marsh & Melville, 2011). Frequently the media focus on children’s deviant behavior as a possible threat to society. Issues associated with children are often said to address a society’s deepest concerns. As such, the way the media portrays child behaviors as deviant invariably influences a society’s point of view and reaction toward the young. Negative representations can, moreover, lead to the marginalization of young people and children from social decision-making on matters concerning their views.

During the summer riots in England, the media depicted the actions of some young people as a symptom of a wider moral decline in the United Kingdom. Even though youth participation was highly significant the media in particular focused almost exclusively on the deviance of youth culture, ignoring the fact that the rioters were composed of all age groups and not only those aged below 20. Besides, labeling the youth as ‘anarchic’ the media also offered possible explanations behind youth
deviance, such as high rates of unemployment, single parenting and racial tension. Thus, in *The Daily Mail, dated from the 12th August*, we read:

“David Cameron has shown great determination to tackle the root causes of the riots, which he rightly identifies as being family breakdown, ill-discipline in schools and the insidious culture of welfare dependency.” (*The Daily Mail*, 12 August 2011)

Likewise, quoted in *The Guardian*, the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, states the cause behind the riot “…citing poverty, unemployment, failings of the education system, police harassment, among other triggers – but he believes parents have become afraid to discipline their own children, and warns this is at least part of the problem that has erupted across cities this week” (*The Guardian* 10 August 2011).

In a more condemnatory tone, The Daily Mail dated 11 August, 2011 reports that “The causes of this sickness are many and complex. But three things can be said with certainty: every one of them is the fault of the liberal intelligentsia; every one of them was instituted or exacerbated by the Labor government; and at the very heart of these problems lies the breakdown of the family.”

In an attempt to offer certain explanations for the outbreaks of unrest, the media also drew a set of class distinctions, drawing a line between the upper and middle class and those from the working class, often constructing the rioters in terms of anarchic and criminal thugs with no concerns for the prevailing political system or the local communities. For instance, quoted in *The Sun*, Labour MP Diane Abbott, said that ”These young people, who seem to have no stake in society, are trashing their own communities. (*The Sun* 9 August, 2011). Nevertheless Categorizing the participants based on certain parameters by itself only further serves to marginalize those involved. Article 2 of the (UNCRC, 1989, p2) states:

Article 2 (Non-discrimination): The Convention applies to all children, whatever their race, religion or abilities; whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from. It doesn’t matter where children live, what language they speak, what their parents do, whether they are boys or girls, what their culture is, whether they have a disability or whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

The above article protects children from any kind of discrimination regardless of family background race or religion, regardless of their situation. However the media continuously depicted the young and youth culture as a source of trouble, especially those from the working classes. For instance describing the participants of the riots as deviants, *The Sun* dated on August 10 .2011 states that
“Irresponsible young hooligans with nothing apparently to lose have now acquired a taste for violence. They gloat at the images of blazing infernos.”

Likewise *The Daily Mail* dated on 11 August 2011 states as follows:-

“The Prime Minister made an impassioned attack on the feckless parents, failed education policies of the past and welfare handouts which led to the ‘sick and irresponsible’ behavior of young thugs. ‘There are pockets of our society that are not only broken, but frankly sick.’

Such bias and sweeping generalizations as above, raises the issue of how lower income neighborhoods become general symbols of wrong doings. As Cohen writes: ‘The media have long operated as agents of moral indignation in their own right: even if they are not self-consciously engaged in crusading or muck-raking, their very reporting of certain ‘facts’ can be sufficient to generate concern, anxiety, indignation or panic.’ (Cohen, 1972 citing Marsh and Melville, 2011) and reporting certain groups as a risk to society further creates a deviant group.

At the same time, when reporting on the riots, a slightly different note is struck by newspapers. Rather than labeling the rioters as part of a distinct socio-economic group, *The Sun*’s editorial states “while vandalism is mindless, it is also classless” (*August* 15). This phrase can be interpreted from two different points of view. On the one hand, as mindless acts of vandalism, it does not necessarily require a certain group to take part in it. Rather, it becomes associated more with the phenomena of a herd mentality, as if one were following the crowd in order to be part of something. *The Daily Mail* writes, “Nothing can excuse the behavior of the rioters, by no means all of whom came from the ranks of the underclass.” At the same time, however, the use of the idea ‘classless’ might be interpreted from a different angle, as if these acts of vandalism came only from the underclass.

4.2 Hoodie as A Cloaked symbol of Moral Panics.

Apart from the ways in which newspapers attempted to think the rioters in terms of economically marginalized groups, the media also introduced about hoodies as a way of symbolizing a public threat and menace. This was already discussed in the literature review part of this study. Commonly, the media revealed pictures of the rioters wearing hooded tops and bandanas, assumed to be a figure of mischief. “The UK media have become preoccupied with the youth fashion for wearing ‘hoodies’ (hooded sports tops), which are being associated with danger, criminality, threat and dispossessed, ‘ungovernable’ working-class youth. (Hollingworth & Halsall, 2007, p223). This association of an item of sports clothing with public threat has now reached the point where hooded tops perceived as a cloaked symbol of danger.
Although the ban had been effective since 2005, it had not done anything to prevent the current situation regarding crime and youth deviance. Could then the root of the cause of rioting be behind the dress code of the young and specifically the hooded top? The Guardian August 9, 2011 states that

“Feared, derided, misunderstood and still resolutely un-hugged, the utilitarian, hugely popular sportswear garment, the hoodie, has staged a comeback against a backdrop of pyromania and rioting. Worn by millions every day: a generation's default wardrobe choice was transformed into an instant criminal cloak for London's looting youth” meanwhile, On the 12th of August, 2011 The Sun commented on David Cameron’s “Hug a Hoodie” speech which he had given in 2006 “David Cameron went from hug a hoodie to strip them of their hoodies yesterday” stating that he finally become conscious that the excused he had made for the hoodies is wrong and today he is making a tough action.

The tabloid newspapers portrayed the youth code of dress as a symbol of threat and indicative of classlessness. Thus, in The Daily Mail, dated on august 10, it is reported that “A marauding gang of up to 200 youths, most of them masked or wearing hoodies, fought a running battle with police, kicking in windows of supermarkets, jewellery stores and mobile phone shops.” Further adding, on august 21, 2011, that “this is the chilling moment hooded thugs tried to shoot down a police helicopter as it filmed them on the rampage during the riots.”

But while the media perceives hooded tops as a symbol both of underclass and as a threat, according to one piece of research, “young people themselves use it as a site for generating value and worth. In other words, they use appearance as a means for generating capital.” (Archer, Hollingworth & Halsall 2007, p 223). In labeling the deviance of youth culture due to this by associating young people’s use of hoodies with either gang membership or drugs, hooded tops are no longer perceived as fashionable or comfortable garments, like any other item of clothing, but instead a cloaked symbol of danger.

4.3 Youth Consumerism

Today, we live in a consumption driven globalized world which, with ever updating technologies, goes beyond geographical demarcation, and with Culture influencing the day to day activities of society in general Hill writes: “Children, especially in the past two decades, have experienced a barrage of media encouraging purchasing behavior and consumption in the same way that adults have. In particular, children from the ages of 4 to 12 are increasingly defined and viewed by their spending capacity “(Hill, 2011 p 348). This further contributes to economic marginalization among those in society as it draws a line between those who can afford to consume as per their interest and those who cannot.
The media reported the summer disorder in UK as a shopping riot where groups of gangs and mindless teenagers were grabbing mobile phones, games consoles, clothes and flat screen TVs to achieve their targets. For instance, on *August 9 The Sun* reports that the Lambeth Council leader Steve Reed branded the riot as "opportunistic looting" and "thieving on a mass scale". He went on to add: "Somebody described it as gangs of kids doing Supermarket Sweep. It was Curry's where they were after plasma TVs, H&M and Foot Locker where it was clothes and trainers. I've heard stories of people actually trying on clothes and using wheelie bins to fill with goods.” The rioters were picking stores to smash in based on their own shopping wish-lists to get hold of the opportunity at hand.

Additionally, on the 13th of *August The Sun* states: "Trainers All across England this week we've seen hordes of cowards turn lives upside down just to get their hands on a new pair of trainers. Likewise *The Daily Mail* dated on 9 August, 2011 reports “Young looters were accused of an opportunistic supermarket sweep motivated by nothing other than greed.”

Further describing the rioters list of preferences as previously well-hidden desire for designer outfits *The Guardian* dated on 7 August, 2011 states that “At one stage a safe was dragged out of a bookmaker, while the Observer saw others with a television set and an electric guitar. Several arrived with shopping trollies to take away what they had stolen." Income inequality and spending cuts were assumed to be behind the youth behavior during the riot, along with high youth unemployment, which led many young people to spend their summer days wondering around the streets with no work to do: “That daily, hourly, incessantly enforces the egregious, deceitful message that you are what you wear, what you drive, what you watch and what you watch it on, in livid, neon pixels. The only light in their lives comes from these luminous corporate messages. No wonder they have their f***ing hoods up. (*The Guardian* 12 August, 2011)

Moreover, *The Guardian* dated on 10 August, 2011 argued that “If you're a left winger, the causes of the violence and looting are straightforward: they're the result of monstrous inequality and historic spending cuts; while the youth running amok through branches of JD Sports are what happens when you offer a generation plastic consumerism rather than meaningful jobs. " Further reinforcing the portrayal of youth culture as plastic consumerism *The Daily Mail*, from August 13, 2011 states “The carnage on the streets came after so-called boom years in which the moral economy of this country was eroded by casual, seemingly consequence free consumerism.”

To summarize, given that young people’s actions and attitudes are more influenced by their peer groups, the media can play a dominant role in intensifying the prevailing culture of consumerism through thousands of advertisements every day that draws a line between those who can afford consumables and those who cannot. On the other side the media demonizes youth culture during the
disorderly events of the summer, speaking of a greedy crowd driven by shopping lists. Hence the media is encouraging and facilitating the culture of consumerism at the same time that it marginalizes and demonizes the young and the consequences of consumer driven outcomes.

4.4 Social Networking and the Riot

Social networking is a way for people to connect and share information with each other online. Millions of people worldwide regularly access these types of services from mobile devices, applications, and websites. According to statistics published by some of the most well-known social networking services, there are more than 500 million active users on Facebook, 175 million registered users on Twitter, more than 100 million users on MySpace, and more than 80 million members on LinkedIn. (McDowell & Morda, 2011 p.1)

Social networking is so far a favorite environment for children where they can freely exercise participation and communicate with their peer groups. In fact it could be one of the best ways to promote children’s participation in decision and policy making activities. In contrast to that however, during the period of the riots, both the media and higher government authorities perceived social networking as adversely affecting the youth and ought to have been shut down for the wellbeing of society. Thus, regardless of the fact that in the UNCRC, under article 17, it is stated that ‘Children have the right to get information that is important to their health and well-being. Governments should encourage mass media – radio, television, newspapers and Internet content sources – to provide information that children can understand and to not promote materials that could harm children. Mass media should particularly be encouraged to supply information in languages that minority and indigenous children can understand. Children should also have access to children’s books.’ (UNCRC, 1989, p5)

Although not only media recommendations but even the article restricts the child’s right to further guidance over the use of certain information, children should get the best out of access to information and social networking provided that it’s the one place they can freely exercise their identity.

During the riot, the media reported that the rioters were using Facebook, Blackberry and Twitter to hijack the peaceful demonstration in to a greedy riot. They recommended that shutting down the social networking sites would make it harder for them to communicate with each other and might come to resolve the prevailing disorder portraying social networking as a threat. Thus we read:

“The violence was fuelled by social media as hundreds tweeted a picture of a police car on fire. …. A two-minute film of a police car being trashed by rioters was posted on YouTube to a rap soundtrack. (The Daily Mail, 8 August, 2011)
Additionally, The Sun’s headline read on 9 August, 2011: “Nail the twitter rioters; anarchy in the UK cyber yobs fuelling the violence cops: We'll find thugs who organize looting”

According to The Guardian dated on 12 August, 2011 Louise Mensch, the Conservative MP added on her Twitter feed: "Northamptonshire police advise me that much of their time and resources were wasted answering false alarms due to social media rumours. At the time, tweeted people should think hard before putting the phrase 'rumours of' into a tweet. Nonsense rumours about W'boro [Wellingborough] = 999 calls", and then going on to second David Cameron’s idea of temporarily banning social networks.

On 24 August 2011, The Guardian’s headline read” Facebook and twitter to oppose calls for social media blocks during riots”. In the same page, it was also reported that “Ministers are expected to row back on David Cameron's call for suspected rioters to be banned from social networks, such as Twitter and Facebook, following the riots and looting across England a fortnight ago.”

Beyond this negative press on new technologies, what is to be noted is that such technologies do not always adversely affect society; even during the riot the police used social networks to organize reports of those who participated in violent actions and moreover to correct rumors before they gathered momentum. Kevin Hoy, web manager at Greater Manchester Police said “Twitter had been an "overwhelmingly positive" and "vital" channel of communication as violence spread across the region. It has urged its 95,000 Twitter followers to "name and shame" suspected rioters in CCTV images it has posted online.” (The Guardian, 12 August 2011). Hence social media should not be merely considered as a way of fomenting riots at the expense of how such technologies might be have a possible positive role to play in the facilitating of youth participation in decision making through social networking. "Everyone watching these horrific actions will be struck by how they were organized via social media. Free flow of information can be used for good. But it can also be used for ill," said David Cameron (The Guardian 11 August, 2011) . As stated in the UNCRC, children and young people are empowered with free access to information and media; social networking and new technologies should not be perceived as a threat to the well-being of society, as a whole, and children and young people in particular, but rather might be used to facilitate child participation in decisions making concerning matters that affect them.

4.5 Youth Depolitization

In the course of the riots in the UK, the media have not been serving the youth’s voice. Rather, judging their reaction as nothing but a greedy crowd and looters running around to further their own agendas. Chief Constable Chris Sims said after Monday's rioting: This was not an angry crowd, this was a greedy crowd.' (The Daily Mail August 10, 2011) The rioters plainly portrayed as gang member or a
bunch of teenagers with no stake in the wider society and even more a disgrace to Britain despite the fact that it is stated in the (UNCRC,1989,p4) of article 12 that:-

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Even if a right to express his or her views freely in all matters affecting the child is acknowledged, to what extent did the media fully actualize this principle in their reporting? All the three newspapers referred in this stressed that the teenagers were crossing acceptable moral boundaries. The Sun’s editorial dated on 8 August, 2011 writes that the “The rioters who attacked police, burned homes and looted shops were not trying to right social wrongs.” Furthermore The Guardian reported on August 09 that “There was no doubting their aim: they wanted to fight the police: Masked men and women barricade Hackney estate in the largest confrontation yet as a third day of rioting sees violence spread to more boroughs across the capital”. The media had no doubt of the purpose of the rioters without the need of consulting the views of those involved. The children and the young involved are represented as if they were somehow only capable of making trouble and damage but not in expressing their opinions.

David Cameron said that the riots “were not about poverty”, but The Guardian's database of court cases raises the question that there may be, at the very least, a correlation between economic hardship and those accused of taking part in last week's violence and looting.(The Guardian, 19 August, 2011) besides “A wealth of programme documentation and research on childhood poverty indicates that children’s experiences of poverty are deeply shaped by their feelings of exclusion from decision making and not being recognized as equal citizens.”(Conrad, 2009) thus the situation had not been suitable enough for the children to develop a stake at the society while they have been considered as anarchy and economically marginalized.

On the contrary to the previous newspaper articles which portrayed the youth as vulnerable and mindless, David Cameron (prime minister of England) said that “And I have this very clear message to those people who are responsible for this wrongdoing and criminality: you will feel the full force of the law, and if you are old enough to commit these crimes you are old enough to face the punishment.” (The Guardian, August 09) He was referring that they were mature enough to take individual
responsibility for the damage that has been caused. But if they were aware of that, they may as well have been trying to make a point out of the riot. Long since marginalized from the system, perhaps their actions may have been a cry for help, or acts of frustration. The following are some of the articles that depicted the motive behind the riot as a mode of political demonstration rather than mere violent and senseless disorder.

*The Guardian* on 15 August 2011 reports that “They were looting, not shop-lifting, and challenging the police for control of the streets, not stealing coppers’ hubcaps. When a group of people join forces to flout both law and social convention, they are acting politically.”

On the same page youth reaction has been described as a general failure of the society since “In the absence of any community leadership, viable social movements or memory of collective struggle, the most these political orphans could hope to achieve was private acquisition and social chaos.” On the other hand *The Daily Mail* dated on August 10, 2011 portrayed the youth stating: “These are just some of the cowardly youths who brought shame to our capital in an orgy of looting.”

Whereas on 12 August, 2011 *The Guardian* described “the collective act… may not look political, but of course it is. It is a game-changer in that it will be used to usher in the most rightwing of polices. So we now have a coalition of the dazed and the confused, comprised of the left banging on about the cuts and supposed liberals who now want harsher prison sentences for the rioters. “

It should however be noted that both the media, in particular, and the society, as a whole, excluded the children’s full right to participate in political decision making. But, choosing a slightly different act, on 13th of August *The Guardian* recommends “that there should be a concerted effort to strengthen the emergence and functioning of a vibrant young civil society, which is important to increase children’s influence on and their active participation in political decision making and the systematic inclusion and association of children into established government processes. This becomes an even more important strategy for addressing children’s exclusion from decision making in democratically challenged states or in states with a weakly developed decentralized system or lack of decentralized representation of ministries in charge of child participation and protection.”

Hence this section assessed the inconsistent of media portrayal of youth participation in the UK disorder where in some articles they were portrayed as greedy crowds to further achieve their needs despite that other articles show recognition of political status of the young people.
5. Conclusion

Moral panics are no more the delegate of a certain group of youth culture, nor are they deeply rooted within a particular socio-economic background. Even though, due to the emergence of new technologies, youth culture cannot possibly be the same as it was before. Nevertheless, the media portrays the youth in the same manner and ways as it has been reported back in 1970’s during the emergence of the “Folk Devils”. Ignoring the voice of children and their role in participating in decisions concerning their affairs, even if, they are entitled in the UNCRC,1989 under Article 12 and 13 that they shall have the right to freedom of expression and participation, would further intensify the prevailing marginalized figure of the young peoples in the society. Emerging new technologies have opened up new possibilities and possible dangers. And while they were represented by the media and politicians as constituting a threat to societal values and norms, they could however be one of the best ways to promote children’s participation in decision and policy making activities, given that nowadays social networking’s and new technologies are young people’s favorite environments.

The media constructed a moral panic out of the summer disorder labeling the rioters as a greedy and not an angry crowd; politicians also gave a quick reply to the event saying it is a collective self-harm act of criminality which was facilitated by social networking and a group of gangs. Whereas their voice and right to participate in decision making had been undermined by their collective demonization by the media, Cushion states that ‘the way that young people are portrayed in the media is always the same, the media take a firm view that all young people are troublemakers. … the news media, according to much of the sample, seemed to work almost in opposition to the rights and status of young people” (2009, p133).The media somehow showed a consistent tendency to report on stories of young people involved in crime and anti-social activities which depicts negative images, and not on the possible explanations behind such events. Children are empowered by the UNCRC but practically these rights are over powered by the media. Unfortunately the media plays a double role in both protecting and the marginalization of young people. Labeling every deviant behavior of youths as a moral panic would only construct further marginalization and depolitization. Again, Cushion states that “citizens are increasingly facing new ‘political’ issues but political institutions are failing to respond to this new era of politics. This might partly explain why the young feel so disenfranchised” (2009, P140).Thus with the emergence of new technologies and new political issues the media should address issues concerning the wellbeing of young people in a way that breaks with representations of moral panics and youth demonization.

This paper assessed media misrepresentations of youth culture and the reconstruction of moral panic. Hence, further study should be addressed to facilitating youth participation both in political decision
making activities and on matters that concern their wellbeing through media with the help of new technologies so that children could develop sense of inclusiveness in the society.
References:


