Content Analysis Report: Financial Literacy in Media Narratives on Black Homeownership

Jordan Wethington

Department of Public Relations, SUNY Buffalo State

COM 641: Research Methods in Public Relations

Professor Therese Fuerst

April 6, 2025

Abstract

This content analysis explores how traditional and social media portray financial literacy and systemic barriers to Black homeownership, with a focus on redlining and mortgage discrimination. Using examples from PBS, CBS, Instagram, and the ACLU, the analysis reveals how historical injustices persist through modern technologies like digital ad targeting. The findings support the need for community-based financial institutions, such as Canandaigua National Bank & Trust (CNB), to develop inclusive mortgage programs, promote digital literacy, and rebuild trust through outreach and policy advocacy. The research underscores the importance of media narratives in shaping institutional responses to economic inequality and housing access.

Introduction

      Canandaigua National Bank & Trust (CNB) is a community-based financial institution that I am currently employed with. I have proposed launching a semester-long initiative and research into supporting Black first-time homeowners, as well as a program to support the initiative. This project comes from the bank's broader commitment to fostering economic inclusion and equity, especially in light of the historical and contemporary obstacles that Black Americans face in accessing homeownership, and mortgage loans. The initiative aims to build both practical solutions and institutional awareness around the realities of mortgage access and financial education for underserved communities. At the core of this research project, is one defining question to answer: How is the concept of financial literacy represented in media and social media narratives about Black homeownership? The framing of this question is critical because it not only investigates how well media sources inform and educate but also explores whether these narratives reinforce or challenge systemic inequalities. This is especially critical in times when social media is as popular as it has ever been. The hypothesis is that both traditional and social media increasingly highlight the ongoing legacy of redlining and its impact on Black communities, thereby presenting an opportunity for institutions like CNB to respond with meaningful change. The primary objective of this content analysis is to examine how different media channels, specifically news outlets and social platforms, can address redlining, housing discrimination, and disparities in banking access. By understanding these narratives, CNB can better position itself to develop impactful programs and outreach initiatives tailored to historically marginalized groups.

Media Channel Review

Traditional Media

PBS News's report by Ryan Doan-Nguyenon focuses on discriminatory housing and climate inequality, and also how redlined neighborhoods historically are disinvested and often the majority of Black Americans are now more vulnerable to environmental hazards like extreme heat (Nguyenon, 2024). The article connects financial exclusion with real-world consequences such as health disparities and poor infrastructure. This piece supports the hypothesis by highlighting how systemic disadvantages in homeownership extend beyond finances to include long-term physical and social well-being (Nguyenon, 2024). This article also provides a comprehensive historical overview of redlining and its enduring impact on wealth accumulation and banking access. It points to discriminatory banking policies that continue to limit mortgage opportunities for Black families. This piece of media serves as a strong link between past injustices and present challenges, reinforcing the need for financial institutions to educate the public and develop more equitable systems (Nguyenon, 2024).

CBS News writer Khristopher J. Brooks, also uncovers the redlining as a historical housing discrimination that is a foundational barrier to Black homeownership and wealth accumulation. His article titled "*What is redlining? A look at the history of housing discrimination,*" shows that redlining is a federally sanctioned practice that systematically denied Black Americans access to fair mortgage lending and homeownership opportunities, reinforcing cycles of poverty and segregation (Brooks, 202). This narrative shows the lingering effects of discriminatory housing policies that continue to shape the economic realities of Black communities today. For example, the piece details how redlining maps, created by the Homeowners' Loan Corporation in the 1930s, directly influenced which neighborhoods received investment and which were neglected, primarily along racial lines (Brooks, 2025). These

decisions not only limited access to mortgages for Black families but also inhibited generational wealth building through home equity. Highlighting how these legacy practices persist through modern lending inequalities and racial wealth gaps, the article aligns with the hypothesis that media narratives increasingly acknowledge the long-term consequences of redlining. This heightened awareness offers a critical juncture for financial institutions such as Canandaigua National Bank to engage with these issues proactively. Through initiatives like equitable mortgage programs or targeted community investment, such institutions can not only address historical harm but also position themselves as leaders in dismantling systemic barriers to Black homeownership.

Social Media

On the Instagram page of blackmillionaires_, they present an infographic post on redlining that breaks down the concept in a visual format. This post shows the statistics that in 1981 the average homeowner age for black families was twenty-nine, now in 2025, it is thirty-eight years of age, almost ten years older than thirty years ago (blackmillionaires_, 2025). They also have posts showing It shows how areas marked "undesirable" in the past still correlate with underinvestment and economic disparity today. The post generated significant engagement, indicating a growing public interest in understanding systemic racism. As a form of media, it raises awareness and promotes financial literacy among younger, social media-savvy users.

I also analyzed the ACLU's Facebook article "*Holding Facebook Accountable for Digital Redlining*," by Linda Morris and Olga Akselrod, which introduces the concept of digital redlining, where algorithms on platforms like Facebook exclude users from housing ads based on race or location. This is a more modern twist on a historical injustice that demonstrates how discrimination evolves with technology. Social media has become one of, if not the main form of

communication in society, so presenting these discriminations on a new platform is staggering. The post aligns with the research hypothesis by showing that financial barriers are still reinforced through digital tools, despite growing awareness of equity. This article also highlights more discrimination in digital ad-based advertising by, showing a lawsuit the ACLU brought to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) for Facebook ads that were user excluding individuals from learning about job opportunities in stereotypical "male-dominated" sectors because of Facebook's gender-based ad-targeting practices.

Key Findings

I found several profound details within this content analysis that shocked me and are still around to this day, much less legal. First, I would say is Redlining, which was once explicitly sanctioned by federal policy and deeply influenced residential segregation, and as you have seen through analysis it is still an issue that is hidden among entities. These boundaries have created cycles of disinvestment, and data shows that formerly redlined areas are still under-resourced today. The second would be systemic barriers. These still persist for Black families seeking homeownership, from lower mortgage approval rates to undervalued property assessments. Finally, and probably the most shocking, these barriers are now compounded by digital tools that algorithmically exclude marginalized groups from seeing housing or lending opportunities online. We are evolving into a digital age where everything is online, and if marginalized communities are even kept off of web ads, or made unaware of their presence, redlining is continuing it just over a computer versus behind a door.

CNB has several opportunities to act on these findings. I feel it can develop mortgage products that directly serve communities impacted by historic redlining. Digital ad campaigns can be redesigned to promote inclusion and avoid algorithmic biases. Partnering with Black-led

housing organizations would help rebuild trust and ensure culturally informed outreach. In addition, if they have social media platforms for these housing organizations, they can create postings that can help defeat the algorithmic blocking techniques. Educational programs for digital ad management and navigation can empower first-time buyers with practical knowledge, and public awareness campaigns can position CNB as a leader in equitable housing finance.

Possible Solutions

 I feel there are several actionable solutions that emerge for CNB to handle the issues of redlining and homeowner discrepancies. The bank can partner with minority-owned real estate firms to ensure equal representation in housing markets and offer competent support for Black first-time homebuyers. Such collaborations can build community trust and increase visibility among underserved populations. CNB could explore alternative credit evaluation models that do not rely solely on traditional credit scores. These might include rent and utility payment histories or income stability metrics, thereby widening access for buyers who have historically been excluded from the financial system. Another solution could be, as social media continues to shape consumer awareness, CNB should invest in inclusive algorithm design for its digital marketing strategies. This includes ensuring housing-related ads on platforms like Facebook and Instagram reach diverse audiences without reinforcing racial or geographic exclusions. I would also say additionally, the bank can advocate for fair housing policy reforms at the state and federal levels, amplifying its role as not just a financial institution but a civic leader. Community grant programs or down-payment assistance for historically excluded buyers could also be viable options as well to provide financial support and symbolically acknowledge systemic inequities.

Challenges

Some challenges remain to be an issue for trying to initiate any solutions. As mentioned in previous parts of this research, probably one of the biggest roadblocks is corporate initiatives or community co-ops. Addressing social issues, especially with financial institutions at the helm, often faces skepticism from the black community, especially when trust has been eroded over generations with financial institutions having their best interests in mind. Legal compliance and regulatory scrutiny around targeted lending products also require careful navigation. Overcoming distrust within the Black community may take sustained and transparent engagement for quite some time.

Additional Research Needed

While national media coverage and online narratives provide valuable insights, additional localized research is essential for CNB to take precise and impactful action. Analyzing housing and lending data specific to the Rochester area could help identify neighborhoods most affected by past redlining and current disparities. This data would guide resource allocation and targeted product development. Conducting focus groups with Black first-time homebuyers could uncover personal stories, challenges, and perceptions about the mortgage process, offering qualitative depth to the bank's understanding. This would also create opportunities for direct community engagement.

Personal Thoughts & Insights

This content analysis was very eye-opening. It revealed just how persistent historical injustices remain within modern systems, even in seemingly neutral technologies like online advertising, and that redlining is still an issue to this very day. It's one thing to read about redlining as a chapter in history, it's another to realize it's still shaping lives today through

climate vulnerability, restricted financial access, and neighborhood disinvestment. Financial institutions like CNB, carry both responsibility and opportunity. It's not enough to simply provide mortgage products; institutions must actively dismantle the structural barriers that have excluded Black communities for generations. That means designing intentionally inclusive systems, listening to impacted communities, and being transparent about progress. Digital Media literacy has also emerged as a critical tool in this journey. The ability to recognize the connection between past and present forms of discrimination is key to understanding why reform is necessary not just for fairness, but for long-term economic sustainability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this content analysis highlights that both traditional and social media increasingly expose the enduring legacy of redlining and its influence on Black homeownership. These narratives not only educate the public but also emphasize the urgent need for institutions like CNB to take actionable steps toward financial equality. From discriminatory banking practices to modern algorithmic biases, the challenges are complex but not insurmountable. CNB can lead by developing inclusive lending programs, promoting digital literacy, and building authentic community partnerships. By addressing these systemic issues, CNB can help reshape the narrative and drive meaningful, lasting change in underserved communities.

Works Cited

Morris, L., & Akselrod, O. (2024, August 22). Holding Facebook accountable for digital redlining | ACLU. *American Civil Liberties Union*. https://www.aclu.org/news/privacy-technology/holding-facebook-accountable-for-digital-redlining.

Brooks, K. J. (2020, June 12). *What is redlining and is it still happening across the U.S.* CBS News. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/redlining-what-is-history-mike-bloomberg-comments/.

Nyguyen, R. D. (2024, July 8). How *discriminatory housing policies of the past are shaping heat waves today in minority and low-income neighborhoods*. PBS News. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/how-discriminatory-housing-policies-of-the-past-are-shaping-heat-waves-today-in-minority-and-low-income-neighborhoods.

Black Millionaires. (2025). *The Average Age For A First Time Homebuyer In 1981 Was 29. The Average Age In 2025 Is 38.* https://www.instagram.com/p/DFvMta0umyx/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.