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# A critical analysis of media discourse on black elite conspicuous consumption: The case of Kenny Kunene

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## Abstract

This study analyses the representations of the 'new' black elite's conspicuous consumption using Kenny Kunene as an exemplary case study. It examines how the media represents the black elite; whether it condemns or celebrates their consumption. Using the qualitative methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis, the research unpacks the themes relating to the representations of Kenny Kunene's conspicuous consumption patterns. The findings reveal that media representations present conflicted views on Kunene's tastes. His consumption is represented as empowering on the one hand and alienating on the other.

This research demonstrates how Kunene's consumption patterns have fundamentally informed contested reflections, meanings and questions about life in post-apartheid South Africa. Questions of whether the accretion of wealth and display of conspicuous consumption is symbolic of the "arrival" of blacks after an era of deprivation and oppression. Whether the black elite's conspicuous consumption patterns are representative of a morally perverted society or indicative of irresponsible and selfish disregard of the poor. The dissertation contributes to a body of literature on the black elite. It demonstrates how consumption of the black elite and in particular Kunene is fraught with ambivalence and is more complex than what the media discourse has illustrated.

Through Kunene, the research shows how the black elite face a tall order between two polarities of being successful and being moral. In so doing, it contributes to an understanding of the 'new' class of the black elite and what the meanings attached to their consumption by the media are. It also contributes to an understanding that black elites' consumption should not be reduced to simplistic binaries of empowerment or disempowerment. Rather it should be understood as involving both aspects of empowerment and disempowerment and not either-or.



**Key Words**: Black elite, Kenny Kunene, conspicuous consumption, South Africa