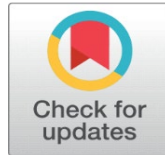
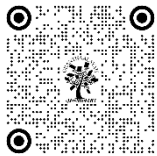


MEDIA AND GENDER STEREOTYPES: A RATIONAL DISCUSSION

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ABSTRACT

Gender Stereotyping has deepened its roots in society and is needed to be dealt with as early as possible. The media has a greater influence on the views of Gender. Media plays a vital role in the process of gendering by exposing male and female children to stereotypical masculine and feminine activities. The images of sexes many of which eternalize unrealistic, stereotypical, and limiting perceptions are being communicated by all the forms of media. This research paper provides an overview of how media leads to the under-representation of women, and how both men and women are being constantly sexualized on various media platforms.

Keywords: Gender Stereotypes, Gendering, Objectification, Sexualism, Gender Portrayal

1. INTRODUCTION

We live in a world immersed in media, making it fair to say that no one can avoid the influence of mass media. In our daily lives, media exercise massive influence and power in unexampled ways. Media do inject its message straight into the minds of a passive audience, that's why the media's role in inculcating gender stereotyping in society cannot be ignored. Different types of media show men and women in typical roles, supporting and continuing society's common ideas about gender. Marshal McLuhan, in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* uses historical quotes and anecdotes to study how these new forms of media have changed the insight of society, with a clear-cut focus on the effects of each medium contrary to the content that is delivered by media.

Print and visual media, particularly television, can be seen as spaces where the social construction of gender rests upon a process of stereotypical representation. The set of social pictures about gender offered through the means of media has changed the society in profound ways. In such context, the expectations of the gender a society has, are formed and sustained through such media. About the stereotype, it would be of great help in the cause of women's emancipation in India. In order to be fair towards women and their evolving position in society, the media must allow for more pro-feminist versions of women.

Advertisement is the most common communication tool used by advertisers for communication with society. To expand their reach to different kinds of target spectators, advertisers commonly use various forms of media platforms i.e. Print, Broadcast (Radio, TV), Digital & Outdoor.

Advertisers are the biggest perpetrators of gender stereotypes. Most of the time, women are depicted in the ad as a subject of sexual attraction. They wear and advertise cosmetics, household items more frequently whereas most of the time men are dominated by cars, businesses-oriented items and insurance plans. Women are also over sexualized in these ads while at the same time multi tasking for instance; MTR, Moov and many other off the line commerce. Male models/actors are chosen for ads demonstrating action sequences (eg: Thumps Up), while female models/actresses are chosen for ads of spices and are seen in the kitchen or seen as a home-maker (ex: Vim dishwasher bar). Some studies have brought light to the fact that the majority of men are chosen for the role of the protagonist or prominent characters in television advertisements in the current scenario. Around the focal point of a particular advertising campaign that focuses on a major life insurance company is placed a woman painting her hair with vermilion sindoor even as it morphs into the life insurance logo itself. Most of the ads of the insurance companies depict the image of a woman who is left all alone, defenseless and prone to all forms of abuse especially when her spouse has no insurance.

These advertisements are promoting the traditional patriarchal system by focusing on the fact that insurance is more important for men than women. Fair, complexion, tall, slim, and beautiful looking women are the ideal ones and dark complexion is propagated as a major hindrance for self-development and even marriage. Utmost care is taken to reinforce the idea that overweight bodies and dark complexion are a disqualification for the self-development of young women. Creams and soaps (Glow & lovely, lux, etc) are promising them the fairness, glow, and ideal beauty whose definition has been set up by society. Aiming to keep in shape or hide one's true age, diets have been proposed. All these beauty creams and soaps are meant to create and tell a new value system, a normative system, a social discourse that supports some class of people and marginalizes others. The responsibility of manufacturers and advertisers is such, that it is made into common sense, a discourse of all Indians.

2. DAILY SOAPS, FILMS AND GENDER STEREOTYPES

TV programs and movies that adolescents watch reinforce stereotypical gender roles, from ideal behavior to aspirations of career to assumptions about sex and romantic relationships. Most of the daily soaps revolve around the concept of "The ideal woman (Sarvagunna Sampann) V/s The Vamp." In daily soaps like Yeh Rishta Kya kehlatahai and Chootibahu, the bahu (daughter-in-law) is portrayed as soft-spoken, obedient and submissive. While the men in daily soaps are shown as strong guys whose ultimate motive is to save her love of the life from goons or to protect her from evil eyes of the society, women are depicted as weak, and as ones who religiously adorns the symbols of marriage - Bindi, mangalsutra, chudhi and traditional ethnic attire. The protagonist always needs a hero to fight for her rights, to save her from goons and other obstacles of her life.

In contrast to these bahus, the vamp is seen in western dresses, not being so much polite and often as outspoken and more confident. Such serials have inculcated a feeling in the minds of people that such women are vamps. Shows like Molkki and Mere Angne Main started with the aim of delivering a strong message but failed to do so. Talking about Mere Angne Main, the promo was about a modern girl with independent views and how she would be going to change the mindset of her traditional-in-laws but in the show, the same Saas-Bahu drama was shown where the protagonist of the show, Riya accepted all the terms and conditions of her mother-in-law and started dancing on her tunes. She accepted to adorn those symbols of marriage and even left her job in order to look after her family.

Where women rule television, men rule the cinematic screen. In films men are shown as energetic and the one who confronts danger with a high degree of recklessness. The women are portrayed as gullible and feeble empress who needs a male protagonist to save her from dangers while in action films they don't have any major role rather been seen as a burden to the central character. Dialogues like "MardKo Dard NhiHota" from the film Mard, "Tumhi mere mandir, tum hi meri pooja, tum hi devta ho" from the film Khandan putting a man of family in place of God and "Akeli ladki ek khuli tijoori ki tarah hoti hai" from the film Jab We Met played a very important role in the gendering of males and females.

Patriarchy is so deeply embedded into Indian society and its people that it is quite evident in its cinema and television serials. Many changes have to be made and greater understanding and sensitivity should be practiced in the portrayal of actual males and females and the issues they face.

3. CONTRIBUTION OF NEWS READERS IN INCULCATING GENDER STEREOTYPING IN SOCIETY

News reading and anchoring have become quite popular. People not only watch news channels but also admire and follow their favorite news readers and anchors. The depiction of gender is very patriarchal and bureaucratic, especially in Doordarshan. In Doordarshan, female news anchors can be seen in sarees while the male presenters in Western formal clothes. The scenario is completely different in the case of other news channels like R.Bharat, India Today, Zee News, or NDTV 24x7, for instance, these channels do not present their newsreaders in the same pattern as Doordarshan. Rather, female newsreaders are shown in western formals and other Indian ethnic garments. The colors of clothes previously very subdued also changed to include brighter hues.

Nowadays, the distribution of male and female newsreaders is almost equal in news channels. However, gender stereotyping can be noticed in the type of news assigned to male and female reporters and anchors, for example, sports news is dominated by male reporters and anchors while fashion and entertainment news is dominated by female news anchors and newsreaders. In much the same way, there is a predominance of male, especially in Prime time news. Most of the channels have male news anchors or news readers and very few have female news readers. But slowly, the picture is changing and now female news anchors are not only limited to presenting news but are also engaging with hosting debate shows.

4. HOW SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES HAVE CONTRIBUTED IN SOCIAL CONSTRUCT OF GENDER?

With the addiction of social networking sites comes the trend of selfies. Selfies are nowadays a new form of visual communication. The selfies by the digital influencers, be them celebrities or vloggers have contributed to the process of gendering. Females display themselves in selfies more often in postures depicting seduction (making a pout), weakness, and even self-objectification while males often showcase their physical strength by standing in erect posture or showing off their biceps and triceps. Influenced by them, teenagers adopt gender stereotypical roles in their self-representation on social networking sites. The social networking sites have contributed to the development of hyper-masculinity and hyper-femininity among teenagers. Moreover, comments on the selfies can be described as those Verbal Appellations giving birth to the process of gendering.

5. MEMES AND GENDER STEREOTYPING

Memes can be described as a short piece of humorous text, sent by social networking site users. The memes are usually images containing funny texts and are not meant for hurting the sentiments of people. But this fact cannot be ignored that the content of memes has long-lasting effects on us. Most of the memes communicate sexist remarks and memes can now be described as an object contributing to the process of canalization. Memes are still drawing and displaying the images of both men and women in the respective ways as the gender roles are still being carried out in social networking sites.

6. ERADICATING GENDER STEREOTYPING FROM THE SOCIETY

1. By unlearning the stereotypical definitions of gender which have assigned the roles to males and females, so that some space can be created in the brains to adopt a new definition that will talk about equal representation in society.
2. Training and workshops of content-creators of media.
3. Providing equal screen space to males and females in ads, films and television.
4. Not giving tags of male and female to tasks and products (advertisements)
5. Equal representation of women in the media and their proactive role as media people in change.
6. Advertisements encouraging females to take part in traditionally male-dominated fields and males to enter into traditionally female-dominated fields.
7. Restructuring the content shown in television soap operas and films, complete abolishment of concept of patriarchy and matriarchy from the shows and films.

8. Limiting the self-objectification from social networking sites.

7. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Indian media has remained a topic of discussion regarding the graphical representation of gender and the consequent impact, for the last several decades. Scholars have also focused on the fact that Bollywood, which is the biggest film industry in India, has played a significant role in promoting gender stereotypes. The films usually project the men as the protagonists while women are more objectified and restricted to the roles of ideal wives or self-sacrificing mothers. Even in action films, male characters are portrayed as protectors, while women are passive recipients of their actions (Kumar, 2014).
2. From that, Indian Culture and Values in the Cinema and Television serials also adhere to the established conservative view of gender roles. For instance, family dramas, which are quite common in Indian households, show women being subordinate to husbands and in-laws. Such images reinforce the patriarchal system of society which is dominant in India (Rajagopal, 2017).
3. Social media and other forms of digital media provide a more diverse and dynamic platform to encourage a break from existing gender roles. Hashtags like #MeToo, #LikeAGirl and other feminist campaigns have reached India and enabled women and other marginalized genders to speak up and resist oppression (Basu, 2019). Yet, such digital platforms also have their problems, for instance the prevalent online hostility and misogynistic material targeted at women.

8. OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse the role of media in gender stereotyping
2. To explore how gender is represented in media
3. To examine the role of social media in gender construction

9. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a qualitative approach as it focused on understanding different types of media, like Indian films, TV shows, ads, and online campaigns, to see how they show men and women. The study involved reading academic articles, carefully analyzing selected media content to find common patterns in gender portrayal, and speaking with media professionals and experts in gender studies. It also examined examples of successful media efforts in India that have worked to break down traditional gender stereotypes and promote more equal portrayals of men and women.

10. FINDINGS

1. GENDER STEREOTYPES IN INDIAN FILMS

Bollywood has long portrayed men as strong, dominant figures, while women are often shown as love interests or needing help. Recently though there has been an increase in the number of movies centered on female characters such as *Queen* (2013) and *Piku* (2015), they are still the minority in a male-driven narrative industry. Although there are strong female lead characters in the movies, objectification and male gaze dominates the representation of women in mass media in most cases reducing them to their looks than their brains and capabilities (Sharma, 2020).

2. TV SERIALS AND GENDER ISSUES

Similar to the films, for instance, the Indian serials particularly the daily soap operas, have also extensively spread the ideas of the traditional family structure and the patriarchal society. Women, for instance, are often characterized as faithful wives or devoted mothers with men portrayed as dominators. Family dramas, which are the most common genres on Indian television, also show a male dominating family nativity wherein head of the family considered to be the male takes the key decisions whereas women are subservient (Chopra, 2018). But of late, series like *Patiala Babes* and *Anupamaa* have focused on themes such as women empowerment and overcoming gender stereotypes, signaling that the siege is nearly over.

3. GENDER REPRESENTATION IN INDIAN ADVERTISEMENTS

Advertisements in India, especially those targeted at middle-class audiences, have traditionally reinforced gender stereotypes by showcasing women in caregiving roles. For example, advertisements of laundry detergents or cooking oils often show women as homemakers which in turn portrays a message that domestic activities are to be undertaken by women. Nevertheless, campaigns launched by some brands, for instance, Ariel's #ShareTheLoad and Dove's

#RealBeauty in campaigns have been endeavored towards changing this narrative by propagating equal gender rights and body positive campaigns (Gupta & Singh, 2019)

4. THE INFLUENCE OF INTERNET ON GENDER NORMS

Gender discourse has recently taken new shapes predominantly, the Indian digital platforms has offered a more inclusive and richer space. Feminism in India and Indian women campaigns like #MeToo have raised fundamental issues about gender, sexual harassment, and patriarchy. Such platforms empower women and marginalized genders, giving them room to contest rigid notions of femininity and masculinity (Patel, 2020). Nonetheless, aspects of the 'real world' sometimes intrude into the digital space as well and this has contributed to the maintenance of the traditional views about the gender, since most of the digital content created by influencers and content creators tends to lean towards the conventional understandings of gender for business purposes.

11. CONCLUSION

The portrayal of genders in the Indian media plays a crucial role in maintaining the prevailing customs and even the behaviors of the individuals. Gender roles have been a subject that has been fought against and redefined in the society in some aspects and in contemporarily more within digital inclusion and advertising, although Indian media still largely upholds the conventional identities of men and women. Indian films, soap operas, and advertisements are indeed arch villains in the construction and outlook of the gender structures, most of the time, they are indeed promoting the patriarchal society. However, with the rise of female-led narratives and social media activism, there is hope for more balanced and diverse gender representation in Indian media.

To make real change, media professionals need to stop promoting gender stereotypes and create content that shows a wider range of gender roles. Public campaigns, education, and new policies are also needed to encourage media creators to think about gender equality when making content.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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