



STATUS OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN MEDIA

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ABSTRACT: Indian media, both print and electronic, disseminates messages which are not always positive. Objectification of women is a major by-product of advertisements to promote the sales of products but it also constructs and promotes a negative perception of women in Indian society. In today's hyper globalized world, the mass media has appeared as a compelling and persuasive tool. Most of the people admit that they are not affected by advertisements and product promotions but a significant number of individuals especially children and youth are influenced by the glamourized and utopian world created by it. The effects of mass media are quick and wide which easily appeals and sweeps the masses in its fold and thus conveys the inherent misogyny of the thought and ideology embedded in the promotion and representations carried by it. This paper, therefore, tries to unravel the negative and stereotyped images of women through media and its consequences for women as well as society. In this pursuit analytical methods have been employed to understand data, facts, and information that are already published or the information available in the form of books, journals, or Magazines already available. The research explores important questions that i. How Indian media plays a key role in constructing a negative portrayal of women? and ii. How are women affected by the negative portrayal of them by the Indian Media? The secondary sources of data used for this particular study include books, journals, magazines, periodicals, and online websites. Italics have been used for Hindi words.

KEYWORDS: Women, Gender, Mass Media, Misogyny, Gender Stereotypes.

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INTRODUCTION

Media in general is the communication outlet or tool used to store and deliver information or data. The term refers to components of the mass media- the communication industry, such as print media, publishing, news media, photography, cinema, broadcasting (radio and television), digital media, and advertising. The perception, attitude, and behavior of people are impacted largely by the media. The reception and contribution of media, both print and electronic, have exponentially increased over the past decades. Looking at the rising growth of the industry, more and more women are considering a viable career option in the industry. As compared to other sectors of employment, media has given more opportunities to women to come out of the veil and four walls of the house, prove their mettle, and put their talent to use. Still, they have to go a long way as gender bias and stereotyping limit their progress as few women have been able to break the glass ceiling and acquire positions at the top level or be a board member of organizations. Jha (1992) in her book "Women and the Indian Print media", describes the portrayal of women in the media's patriarchal setup. She mentions that female journalists face problems while dealing with their male colleagues. These issues do not receive proper attention due to the negative role played by the male journalist in

objectifying the identity of their female colleagues and relegating the issues faced by them as unrealistic and therefore unimportant.

Today's media poses and promotes the idea of women having beauty, intellect, and kindness. Movies and television show constantly try to present this perception. Therefore, women these days have become conscious of looking presentable and beautiful and that is a major determinant of their confidence and self-worth over being intelligent. Intelligence and self-worth become secondary. It is largely shaped by the societal conception and stereotype of 'good' and 'beautiful' women.

Tantleff-Dunn (2010) has advocated that normally the decent and respectable characters, in movies and serials, are portrayed as beautiful, charming, and compassionate and the evil characters with cruel minds are made unattractive through make-up. By doing so, such media actually internalizes, rationalizes, and legitimizes the concept of beauty in the social fabric. And by doing this, women are simultaneously being jeopardized by the notion that they will be only valued if they are beautiful and attractive. The concept of being beautiful is very subjective in reality, but the media and advertisements construct such an illusion, that society upholds narrow standards in the evaluation of individual appearance. Women have, for centuries, strived and struggled to defeat the stigmatization and social inferiority of their male counterparts. So impactful is the social difference that exists between men and women that the fight for equality has been termed the 'emancipation of women by leading feminist leaders and philosophers. It sounds intriguing how from a highly dignified position in India's mythic history, woman in India has been relegated to a secondary position. It appears that inequality has modernized itself in the form of the advent of popular media in a way.

Apart from being a place of work for women, the media also represents and portrays women in particularly damaging, limiting, and demeaning ways. The character the media creates for women to be identified with is generally shown to be ideal housewives, mothers, wives, and homemakers as the only goal of their lives. Sharma (2005) in his writing "Depiction of women in Indian media-A case of introspection for media planners" condemns the different tactics used by the Indian media both electronic and print, in commodifying the image of women in name of modernity and globalization. The actual and the real problems faced by the common women have not been discussed properly rather the newspaper pages or the commercials are full of information or product portraying women as sex objects. The news regarding rape, crime against women, and physical abuse are overpowered by the columns of gossip, scandals, and erotic pictures of actresses of Bollywood and TV serials. Leaving a few exceptions, movies of recent times have hardly shown an 'ideal woman' doing anything but being a housewife. Even in those movies where a woman is shown to have more decision-making power than her husband, she is almost always portrayed and perceived in a bad light. As far as showing women in advertisements is concerned, things seem to have only worsened over time. In most of the advertisements, a woman is either washing clothes and/or utensils, cooking, serving food to family members, or trying to make her husband feel better who is at that time reading a newspaper or suffering from a cold. A woman does all this even when she has a headache or backache. These advertisements arguably encourage sexism. They reinforce the old belief that a woman is supposed to forgo her own comfort and keep on doing household chores without getting tired. The same has remained true for the soap operas of earlier times and of recent times. While in many of these soaps, some women have more decision power than their male counterparts, it is very difficult to come across such families in real life. Moreover, those women who wear modern clothes and appear very confident more often than not seem to have bad intentions than their conservative and not-so-modern counterparts. It is sexist typification and negative portrayal of women which leaves much to be desired to be more authentic and more real (Punwani 1988, Das 2000). Ironically, the media portrayal has strongly put women in certain roles repeatedly which downgrades them and makes them inferior in society by adopting a one-dimensional approach in the characterization of women.

As the tentacles of globalization have gripped the electronic and print media, the advertising industry has been swept by the market forces resulting in sexist displays depicting women in a demeaning manner as an accepted norm. Indeed, the level of active participation and decision-making capability of women in every aspect of social and political life in India has increased leaps and bounds, yet the overall conditions of women are not so good. The depiction of women in Indian media is simply shoddy and at times vulgar. With globalization and privatization, the overall mantra of running and marketing the business has changed totally. The private sector has been given more importance over the public sector and when a particular developing country like India becomes a breeding ground for many multinational companies. There is a cut-throat competition to become the best seller and earn the maximum profit in which the objectification of women becomes very common. They use the bodies and the faces of women even when their necessity is the same as men's or it is not required at all. The Indian Media is full of such advertisements (Both Print and Electronic) e.g., advertisements of Man's Briefs, Man's Shaving Creams, Bikes, Real Estate and many more where the presence of the women is just to induce the erotic quotient such that the sales rise no matter how the women and her body is the portrayal cheaply and disgustingly (Roy 2012). Nigam & Jha (2007) analysed the women's presentation in the media and stressed that women have been exploited by the advertisers for decades. They have frequently been stereotyped in the traditional roles of homemakers, or have been projected as 'visual prop' to enhance the appeal of an advertisement. However, since the early 2000s, the frequency and the number of such demeaning and exploitative advertisements in print and electronic media have reduced.

In films, the portrayal of women is full of sexism backed by making her a commodity to sell the commercial films. There has been much criticism of television advertising of some commercial products like cigarettes, laxatives,

or articles of intimate wearing apparel on moral grounds. Comments in newspaper articles have found some of them objectionable and violating the requirements of good taste and sometimes offensive, some objections have also been made to the appearance of scantily clad women in some commercials.

Apart from the movies, advertisements, news, and columns, the recent addition to the offensive portrayal of women is the Over-the-Top Platform (OTT) and social networking platforms available in India and abroad. Technology and the easy availability of the Internet on our mobile phones, television sets, and laptops have given us easy accessibility to the new form of entertainment. Now we can access the movies and series from around the world with the touch of a single button but the same convenience has garnered a new problem that the unethical representation of women has exponentially increased over the past few years. In India where patriarchy still exists in the backdrop of the Indian cultural, religious, and societal norms and the inherent violence against women perpetuate through rape, abuse, domestic violence, and verbal abuses still predominantly persist in the social fabric, the notion of such OTT films and series which are being played uncensored and easily available on the touch of the screen is really alarming and troubling not only to the women but also to people who are concerned regarding the empowerment of women.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to make a qualitative investigation about the caricature portrayal of women in the Indian print and the visual media and critically analyse the media's role in constructing the negative portrayal of women. In this pursuit analytical methods have been employed to understand data, facts, and information that are already published or the information available in the form of books, journals, or Magazines already available. The research explores important questions that i. How Indian media plays a key role in constructing a negative portrayal of women? and ii. How are women affected by the negative portrayal of them by the Indian Media? The secondary sources of data used for this particular study include books, journals, magazines, periodicals, and online websites. Italics have been used for Hindi words.

THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN INDIAN MEDIA

Usually, films and advertisements target every individual, but it often involves gender perception and relations. Most of the print and digital media messages are focused on women, objectifying them as a saleable entity. According to Kilbourne (1993), the usual body language of women is often portrayed as passive, vulnerable, and submissive in comparison to their male counterparts who are often showcased as strong, dignified, and courageous. The advertisements of male products are often highlighted as strong, purposeful towards the growth, while a larger section of advertisements is dominated by women-related products, still, females are portrayed as smaller, weak, and inferior. Media, both print and electronic, basically do not portray a balanced picture of the contribution of women in this changing world although the violent or pornographic representation of women is in much more demand which is negatively affecting the women's constructive participation in the society. In recent years, content based on "sex" and "crime" is becoming a rage among the audience, and therefore, more and more magazine reportage, films, and television serials are now based on depicting women as the scandalous, sensational, craving for lust, indulging in an extramarital affair, highly modern and culturally naïve.

THE BOLLYWOOD TRAGEDY

We have Bollywood, undisputedly the most consumed and flashy of all popular media with its blatant objectification and sexualization of women. From flashy "item songs" to the lack of female-centric writing, Bollywood has become the poster boy for all things misogynistic and outright disrespectful. It has systematized the subjugation of women by designing the role of women-only meant to focus more on the 'hero'. Everything a woman does, she does as an extension to the context of the man. Sure, there are certain exceptions but they are far and between the majority. Some only focus on women for the sole purpose of focusing on them as a way to make up for the others. The audience has been trained and ingrained with this idea so well that female-centric films struggle to find footing in the hyper-competitive space. Shabana Azmi, a very renowned Bollywood actress, and activist said, "A matter of grave concern is that, when it comes to films, women are shown to be completely dormant, totally subservient persons. It reinforces the notion that Indian women are supposed to be that. I think the only way in which we can counter these images is to portray a woman not just as a body but also an intelligent being" (Singh & Dissanayake 2009).

Richards (1995) mentions three categories of sexual objectification of women in Indian cinema: the tribal costume which is used for cabaret dances, through which women's body particularly pelvic region, and the other parts are shown; the wet sari and the behind the bush scene. In the film *Hum Apke Hain Koun* (1995), the leading female actress wore a deep-cut blouse, indicating the scopophilic nature of the camera. In another popular Indian cinema, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) actress Kajol enacted the modern version of the wet sari sequence, wearing not the sari but a more revealing white costume. In this film, the female character comes from such a conservative Indian family that she fears telling her father that she has fallen in love with someone. Given that conservative context, it seems unlikely that such a character would be dancing a rain dance.

Women have always been an important part of the television and film industry but unfortunately have always been underrepresented and significantly paid less in comparison to their male co-stars. Women have always been a part of the acting crew. They have not been trusted or have been given any opportunity with other responsibilities like

directing, cinematography, etc. A New York Times article by Pires (2017) stated that only 15% of the top films in 2013 had women for a lead acting role. The gender wage gap is defined as the difference between the amounts of money paid to women and men, often for doing the same work. The gender wage gap is a recurring financial issue in all aspects of the business world. Most career paths have had a wage gap between men and women. However, women today are still fighting to close the wage gap and work equally in all fields. In Bollywood, an unnecessary amount of vulgarity exists in songs. They are referred to as "item songs" which literally means a song that may or may not be even related to the plot but is seen as a sexually provocative song that attracts the attention of the audience to the movie. Women are visualized as eye candies in these songs and are subjected to the objectification of their body, which is both traumatizing and humiliating.

ILLUSIVE TELEVISION SERIALS

Most of us grew up watching daily soap operas with our mothers every day. Never did we realize that those stories somehow created a huge impact on the way we perceive women. Our judgment about them based on their attire and makeup is conditioned by the portrayal by a wealthy producer who decides that a woman who wears a pants suit is not an appropriate wife or a daughter-in-law or a mother for that matter! Identity is something that constructs an individual into a firm human being, when the identity is skewed or sabotaged the individual is stripped of his/her real worth and turns a human being into an object which can be found in the store, more or less like a saleable entity. The 1974 Report of the Committee on the Status of Women (Joshi Committee Report) found that 'women are represented as wives and mothers in most TV and other media programs. Although 36% of them are agricultural workers, women are predominantly projected as non-producers, with a decorative function, being marginal to national growth and development. The plural nature of Indian culture and the diverse roles women play is neither acknowledged nor communicated. These results in stereotyped images and role specifications of women in the unidimensional projection of their reality.

Serials have drastically evolved over a decade. The characters of women in 1980s serials like "*Udaan*", "*Rajini*" and "*Kalyani*" which impressed and empowered the entire society are very less to be found today. There is an overdose of misogynistic serials focusing on women as brutal, cunning, and ruthless. There is a deluge of serials that focuses on depicting women in the bad lights. The television serials follow a fully stereotypical approach where the men go to work and women remain at home, take care of the households, be the good wife and a good mother in case not represented by these roles devote her time in creating conspiracy and scandals in the family. Harm the people and crave lust and power. These incorrect practices are generating demeaning images of women, more or less making them inferior in terms of their body. "In place of representing women as independent and strong the Indian T.V serials now represent them as a commodity, a sellable piece of the object who can be "*Nagin*," "*Makhi*" or "*Dayaan*". This forceful projection of a woman into some extra-terrestrial being just because of the dipping TRP's is a threat to her intellectual mindset and a challenge to her sound upbringing. Merely reducing the women's image as more passive and turning her a merely dumb companion of their male counterparts is not bringing any good to society. In a society where the healthy and progressive upbringing of a girl child is quite a challenge, the easy amiability of television and serials can help the society in raising the girl child in a better manner if they can start portraying and launching such serials where the women are depicted not only valuable but also empowered and liberated.

FALSIFICATION OF ADVERTISEMENTS

Advertisements, both print and electronic, usually construct a false approach to what means to be beautiful and presentable. Women nowadays, through product choices and advertisement, are constantly challenged by the societal expectations to look beautiful and when women do not fit the standards of being beautiful, they are often ashamed, body-shamed, or made to feel inferior. The male characters are portrayed as dominating with stronger touch whereas the female touch is light and caressing and often seemed to be less purposeful (Gill 2015). Usually, such kind of illusive projection according to Theresa de Lauretis is a "technology of gender" which is further explained as what women are perceived through advertisements is not necessarily truthful and real. The false approach which perpetuates is more harmful to women than men since the females are wrongly projected to be perceived in this way only. (Mendible 2008)

Advertisements continuously devalued women, linking the various beauty and lifestyle products with women's happiness, creating a toxic environment which is surrounding our society with unhealthy images, and is constantly sacrificing the image of women for sake of profit.

Research conducted by Hatton & Trautner (2011) included a longitudinal content analysis of images of women and men on more than four decades of Rolling Stone magazine covers (1967–2009). It found out that sexualized images of men and women have increased, though the intensity of sexualization between men and women is severely different and that women are likely to be increasingly hypersexualized while men are not. Researchers argue that the simple presence of images of sexualized men does not signal equality in media representations of women and men. Sexualized images may legitimize or exacerbate violence against women and girls, sexual harassment, and anti-women attitudes among men. They concluded that similarly sexualized images can suggest victimization for women but confidence for men, considering the implications when women are sexualized at the same rate as men are not sexualized, as they were on the covers of Rolling Stone in the 2000s. Clothing designer

Calvin Klein was criticized for using images of young, sexualized girls and women in his ads, having said - "Jeans are about sex. The abundance of bare flesh is the last gasp of advertisers trying to give redundant products a new identity." (Wikipedia Contributors 2021). The BBC article "Sexualisation 'harms' young girls" explains how women, in modern times, are victims to print advertising in which they are portrayed negatively. The article discusses how women are now used to help sell products and are almost always shown in sexy outfits and are at least shown as being subordinate to men. (BBC News 2007) In India 70-75% of television advertisements commoditized women. Many advertisements related to fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) depict women as sexual objects, glamorous and shallow dressed females with lower I.Q. Whereas the depiction of the male counterparts is shown more progressive and successful whether they are advertising for cars, bikes, laptops, or even for job portal websites. Their representation is very bossy and dominating. Some advertisements selling cooking oil, home appliances, and kids products project women as utter homely and are very patriarchal in representation. The stereotypical projection of a woman is perceived as culturally driven. The media is the reflection of the kind of culture that persists in our society. What has been depicted as the "ideal" image is followed by people in the majority. The women learn to suppress their dreams and desires and replace them with this "ideal" image of the women portrayed in the visual representation. Most of the time, advertisements depict a desire for a perfect woman which appears more an illusion rather than a reality. The Insurance companies in India advertise the safety and security of a woman in such a manner that in case of the sudden demise of her husband the woman alone cannot take care of herself in the society and protect her from this vulnerable state, a policy is a must. Without that, she will not be able to survive in a society where the lonely widowed woman has no right to stand on her own. Instead of working on a dream career, thousands of teenage girls nowadays spend time beautifying themselves. Many cosmetic and fairness creams advertisements are compelling them to be fair and beautiful. Such messages are misguiding the adolescent girls, giving rise to many inferiority issues within them.

Advertisements in a very frequent manner eroticized the face, legs, body, and breast of women. There is constant pressure to look slim and skinny in the social circuits. Such a mindset is exploiting women's sexuality and is quite responsible for instituting sex and body stereotypes within the society.

GLOSSY PRINT MEDIA

According to Kumar & Pandey (1998), print media which includes newspapers, periodicals, newsletters is one of the oldest media and has been relied upon by the people as a credible source of information. Print media not only reflects the values prevailing in society but also provides a platform for dialogue and discussions on issues leading to social change. There is no doubt that the electronic media within a fraction of seconds deliver the news and the advertisements within the comfort of your home at any hour, but the print media though do not broadcast the news immediately still creates a more persistent and long-lasting impact on the audience once delivered at their doorsteps. It has been witnessed that women's issues generally do not get coverage unless cases of severe atrocities such as rape, crime, domestic abuse, and sexual harassment come up. On special occasions such as "Women's Day" and "Mother's Day" women's issues get momentary hype and publicity while on other days the news of sex, violence, scandals, and gossip tops the front pages. Besides, Sunday and Saturday special glossy editions on women's leisure, fashion, beauty, and other luxurious news items with erotic photographs are issued from time to time by daily newspapers which reduce women to be passive consumers and objects. The English press lodges special page 3 columns providing gossip, hiccups, and scandals related to celebrities supported by skinny, sexy, and erotic snaps of these celebrities. This is the only area of the newspaper where the colorful depiction of women is found followed by lots and lots of gossip and stimulating pictures.

Majorly the columns of Magazines, as well as newspapers for female readers, are confined to the special editions on fashion, jewellery, marriage season, cosmetics. There are fewer times that the personal, marital, or gynaecological issues of women are discussed. Thus, print media too, under commercial compulsions or otherwise, has acted and perpetuated a lower and downgrading image of women in society.

EFFECTS OF NEGATIVE PORTRAYAL BY INDIAN MEDIA ON WOMEN

Aforesaid analysis of the various segments of the mass media, the following observations can be made:

- Due to a lack of self-worth and self-confidence, women self-objectify their body and habitually monitor their own body appearances, and devote significant amounts of time and money to their body while neglecting their career aspirations and dreams to grow academically and professionally.
- The depiction of a falsified "ideal" homely image of the women leading to the construction of an unrealistic expectation in the society on how a woman should be perfect appears to be a utopia rather than the reality in this hyper globalized world where men and women together are working for their personal progress equally.
- Stereotyping women as "dumb", "uneducated", "inferior", and just a mere object or commodity meant for selling products is merely limiting them as sexualized objects.
- It restricts the career opportunities for educated and progressive women who do not fit perfectly in the stereotypical roles of a homemaker or female stereotype.
- It causes a threat of dysmorphic disorder, anorexia, and bulimia in women who are not able to fit in with the stereotypes created by the standards of mass media.

- Perpetual and repetitive use of women's bodies as a sensual commodity to sell male products which are of no concern to her excessively creates a coercive approach towards the women's body.

CONCLUSION

The outreach of the media is quick and vast. The messages spread by it are so attractive that they tend to affect the cultural fabric of society. It results in affecting the identity of the individual and societal expectations. The media industry relies on people, for the sake of generating revenue. But the actual problem lies in the way the people, especially women are used in the commercials. Media through discrimination, illogical objectification, and dehumanization of the women's bodies is generating a toxic social environment causing a rise in inferiority, low self-esteem, violence, or sometimes the acquisition of body modification surgeries which are harmful in their forms. The continued projection of negative and degrading images of women in media communications - electronic, print, visual and audio - must be gender-sensitive and change accordingly. It is a sad state that a society that designates the woman (*Naari*) to be the source of Power (*Shakti*) and yet subjugates them as the naturally inferior. Ever since Wollstonecraft's (1792) spoke of the importance of women's education in 18th century England, there has been a progressive change in the field that looks to level itself and make gender an irrelevant factor in its working. More than 200 years down the line, the issues that women face have modernized themselves in the way they interact with women but

the underlying mentality and social pressure have remained more or less the same. Ray (2008) addressing the Press council of India at the inauguration session of National Press Day, expressed that the most significant movement will be the movement for the emancipation of women. There should be respect for the women section in all fields; they should be given equal pay for equal work, there should be no gender gap between men and women. The most important medium through which the problems can be addressed in the media. Both print and electronic media should focus the gender inequalities and violence against women. It can be concluded that the overall effect of the portrayal of women in media is to reinforce rather than reduce prejudices and stereotypes. The way the exposure and exhibition of sexuality are portrayed on screen has an undercurrent, which carries messages to the audience, reinforcing further, the pre-existing stereotypes in society, adding strength to the vicious cycle of socio-cultural stereotypes.

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All authors contributed to the study conception and design. The first draft of the manuscript was written by [SHOKEEN] and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

