Semiconductor Optoelectronics

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN MASS MEDIA

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Abstract

Despite increasing criticism and attempts towards improvement in recent years, the representation of women in mass media-along with media's portrayal of women remain the reinforcing of stereotype for women and society. Mass media, in its various form have become an integral part of our lives. It plays the unique role of mirror in society. At the same time it is responsible for shaping a society where men and women enjoy equal rights. Feminity as well as masculinity are not a biological, but rather a cultural construct which vary with time, society and culture, constructed by family, education and to a large extent the mass media.

Mass media provides a multipoint references to members of society with which to learn or regulate social life and behavior patterns towards females of society.   Reports and coverage's by Mass media are reflections to the happening in the society.

Unfortunately the contemporary mass media is still representing women in stereotype and continues to have a discriminatory biased attitude in representing them. In light of these facts, the present paper focuses on representation of women by Mass media and role of Mass media in sensitizing the society about various issues related to women.

Key words : Society, Mass Media, Women, Representation, Feminity.

Introduction

The overriding concern of ever increasing authors who identify themselves as feminist is the implication of media's projection of women. This centres mostly on the portrayal, performance and participation of females in various activities. The feminists have voiced a distinct objection to various kinds of representation of women in media. Feminist writers such as Shulamith Firestone, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet have raised their concerns on Mass Media reinforcing stereo typed images of women, as secondary status, of subordinate and submissive on one side and their objectification on the other side. In India, feminist authors such as Kamla Bhasin, Kiran prasad, Anita Desai, Ritu Menon have questioned the role of mass media in regards to women's concerns and how they portray them in an inaccurate way.

Feminist writers have centred their attention on the issues that media in all its aspects is representing the male dominance in the society. Women have been underrepresented and misrepresented in stereotypical roles within mainstream media. Which has been rightly called as their symbolic annihilation.

Though, ideally the role of media is to raise awareness and sensitize the society regarding issues related to women and promote creation of an egalitarian society, as media can promote and speed up reforms in progress, or, on the contrary it can hamper their

implementation, Mass media, however, continue to reproduce discriminatory stereotypes about women and portray them in sexist way.

Where media can vitally play significant role in shaping social values, attitudes, norms, perception and behaviour so that the gender gap may be bridged, however it caters to the male gaze. Thus dehumanizing a women reducing her from a person to an object, being considered for her beauty, physique, sex appeal capable to become a male fantasy, or purpetuation of image of relagating to role of home maker without any right to participate in decision making.

The Mass Media

Conceptually, the media are those technological agencies, which are engaged in creation, selection, processing and distribution of messages among people. It contributes towards emergence of mass society and mass culture. It is a means of communication where small group can reach its message to larger number of people in short time, through variety of outlets eg. Broad Cast media, digital media, out-door media, print media. The three major functions of media being to entertain, to inform and to persuade.

The significance of media in portrayal of women

In today's contemporary circumstances mass media is capable of taking myriad shapes. Media has become a part of life, it is all around us, to the extent that it dominates the mental life of modern society indeed the influence is direct and powerful and has "hypodermic" influence. It reaches out significantly to large audience which sociologists rightly call as "mediated culture". This can help accomplish the society to transition, to accept new values and norms for a gender neutral society. Media has the power to pressurise and criticize. In this context media has a significant role to play, to generate conciousness in women about their rights to live with dignity. It can furnish women with adequate settings in which they may amplify their voices in opposition to the pervasive inequities and gender gap observed in patriarchal societies. It can provide platform to increase their voices against disparities and gender gaps. It is the most effective way to improve the quality to life and improve her status in the society. It is within the power of media to foster an environment that is conducive to democracy where women are encouraged to participate and defend their right to be seen as empowered women exerting their rights in making decisions and thus represented in favourable manner. It is not beyond the realm of possibility for mass media to place greater focus on coverage of concerns and challenges experienced by women. A positive representation of women in media is an essential part of achieving these goals of women welfare, participation development or empowerment. Therefore both the academic area of gender studies and media studies place significant emphasis on subjects that pertain to identities and gender roles in connection to media. In the present days online media digital media, internet, social media comparison to traditional media hugely influence our perception. It can create gender mature transformative content Challenge the perpetuating stereotype and objectification and equip society for inclusion of women in content, work place and management. Instead of online harassment and cyber abuse, It can be used to represent women in progressive way, used positively by making women digitally active.

Objectives :

1. To conduct an in depth analysis of part played by mass-media in representation of women as stereotypical images.
2. To conduct an in depth analysis of the manner in which media raises concerns and challenges faced by women.

Review of Literature :

Bhavana H.C. and Dr. Shiv Kumar Kanasogi, Digital Media Strategies for Marketing Campaign : A review. Kanpur Philosophers, ISSN 2348-8301, Vol. 8, Issue 12, 2021

Betty Friedan "The Feminine Mestique" (1963), New York, Norton (1963).

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Mass Media and Women: An Analysis

During the past decade, advances in information technology has facilitated a global communication network that transcends national boundaries and has an impact on public policy, private attitude and behaviour, specially of childrens, women and young adults. Every where potential exists for media to make greater contribution to advancement of women. Women ae increasingly getting involved in careers of communication sector, but few have attained position at the decision making level and even lesser asserted at the decision making level. The lack of gender sensitivity in the media is evidenced by failure to eliminate gender based stereotyping that can be found at public, private, local, national and international media organization. The mass media in most countries do not provide a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contribution to society in changing world rather violent degrading or pornographic media products are negatively affecting women and their participation in society. The world wide trend towards consumerism has created a climate of consumerism in which advertisement and commercial messages portray women and girls of all ages as consumers and target them inappropriately. Instead of concentrating on issues of women like female foeticide, domestic violence, health issues and poor nourishment, illiteracy, and education dropouts, mass media portrays them in sexist way. Their physical attraction has been used as a whole, or in part to market things form brassiers, male undergarments to automobiles. These ubiquitous images encourage people to think of sex and women as commodity. While liberal feminists consider media perpetuation of sex role stereotypes reflecting the dominant social values and

also because male media producers are influenced by these stereotypes. The Radical feminist media assumptions focus on mass media in the hands of male owners and producers, so they well operate for the benefit of patriarchal society. Recently socialist feminism has attempted incorporate other social aspects along lines of ethnicity, sexual preference, age and physical ability.

Construction of Feminity: Consequential of Social and Media Representation

Feminity as well as masculinity is not biological but rather cultural construct. Representation and manifestation of feminity differ across culture times, societies as it is culturally and socially constructed by family, education, public and to a large extent by media. The long term change in women's images in media could change the perception and stereotype women's face in a society. The media images of men and women are tailored to men's preference or to the preferences of one particular segment of society. Often women's images are distorted and unrealistic, the dual way of representation either as decorative object or passive dependent on men for all kind of supports (Betty Friedan (1963) The happy house wife heroine). Despite the tendency of increasing representation of feminity in association with independence and power but still qualities informed by sexuality continue to play a dominate role in shaping of feminity. Fragmental display of female body and fragmentation of women's body promote objectification.

It gets difficult to perceive that body holistically and as possessing personality. The female characters influenced by beauty myths more so of standard of beauty due to globlization are impossible to achieve since the model image have been transformed due to numerous technical means. This standard of beauty are due to patriarchal creation for patriarchy and for patriarchal taste. Never before in history mass media has been the key factor of sociolization of kids and adolescents as of today, it starts effecting their thoughts, feelings and behaviours, perpetuate deviant behaviour and young girls internalising their self worth as nothing more than mere objects and worry on how others perceive their physical appearance, making them more vulnerable.

Media Representation of Women

Media have historically under-represented women, what Tuchman referred to as 'Symbolic Annihilation'. Women have been misrepresented through stereotyping and subject to the male gaze (Laura Mulvey). Though in recent years it has been towards positive. According to Tuchman (1978) women achievements are often trivialised. Women are often represented in roles linked to gender stereotypes, the traditional expression of feminity based on values of caring for others and concern for appearance. What ever representation is there it is to impress "him", tendency is to trivialise, sexualise, and devalue her roles. As Laura Mulvey's 'The Male Gaze' explains the camera lens eye women character for sexual viewing pleasure of men. Therefore women are objectified as sex objects rather than being represented as a whole individual person. David Gaunlett in Media, Gender and Identity (2002) argues that there has been increase in diversity of representation and roles of women in media since 1970s and corresponding decrease in stereotypical representation reflecting wider social change.

In the action films still like Terminator-2, Tomb Raider, Kill Bill, The Hunger Games, despite female actors featuring in lead they perpetuate traditional beauty myths. Women

represented as strong individuals are strong because of adoption of male characters and male violence that wins. Similarly representation of women in news show that by GMMP in its key finding reveals that the representation and participation of women make up only 24% of person heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio exactly as they did in 2010. Media representation about beauty myth as Kilbourne has spoken about eating disorders regarding image of women, representation in advertising of women fragmented body or fragmentalisation makes it difficult understand it as person as a whole.

Even in news programmes limited number news programme have women as main actors or experts. Even in the smaller number the existing number of women are under represented compared to their male counterparts and they too have have language representing patriarchal values.

The 'modern' social media is also not untouched from the hegemonic attitude the online social media provides a platform where people gather around a common webspace to discuss socialise, or request support. Internet is a place for all, everyone has the right to voice opinion and express identity without feeling threatened. It is a prominent part in everyone's daily life with women making up significantly as users. Unfortunately even this modern version of public is also gender biased.

Sensible Representation of Women : A Media Responsibility

Freedom of expression is often invoked when society targets media over representation of women and girls in their content. Debates stifle when media, journalist freedom of expression demands for change towards equitable treatment of women. But when the phenomenon of 'Symbolic Annihilation' of women (Tuchman 1978) involving practice of omission and trivialization of women's skill, speech, experience and condemnation of women who do not comply with expected patriarchal norms of sexuality, marriage, image which results in violation of freedom of expression of women as group. Stereotyping of human beings effectively silences and 'annihilates' them by depriving them of opportunity to express diverse ideas, different life styles and application of various skills and knowledges. It covers their social and private life with unjust and harmful expectations.

Mass Media as the fourth pillar of democracy needs to balance its ways in portrayal and correct representation of women.

Some Suggestions

Media should be encouraged to adopt self regulatory, measures and develop standard in media coverage that promote gender equality.

- Equal access to and representation in media work for women and men including in areas where women are underrepresented.
- Balanced participation of women and men in management posts, in advisory bodies, regulatory or internal supervisory role and generally in decision making process.
- A non-stereotyped image, role and visibility of women and men, avoidance of sexist advertising, language and contents which could lead to discrimination of grounds of sex incitement to hatered and gender based violence.

- Avoid beautifying, glamorising, obscuring and relativising terms to describe abuses. Promote conscious and systematic effort to strengthen good and appropriate language that should be accurate and sensitive to gender specific violence.
- Ensuring balanced group of media workers to provide coverage of diverse topic, experts thereby producing better gender representation.
- Proactively address the effects of stereotyping by educating and raising awareness in society by covering issues such as gendered violence against women.

Conclusion

Media is the cause and effect of development process, it can help accomplish society to transition to accept new practices, different social relationship, change in attitude, belief, skill, norms and values. Despite tremendous changes taken place in sphere of media due to feminist criticism, the contemporary media is still no where close to the standards they claim despite increasing criticism and attempts towards improvement in recent years the representation of women in media along with their portrayal remains biased reinforcing traditional patriarchal standards and far from ideal. Media today is extremely powerful in reaching out to millions of people. Though here is no "one-size-fits-all solution that could be used for improving balanced representation, healthy environment and gender representation. In spite of various hurdles, women, through their own strength, collective struggles, support of sensitive human right activists and policies have moved towards equality in their representation but at the end of the day representation of women in media remains short of ideals."

Both keeping up with the news and drawing people's attention in persistent manner to the benefits and draw back situation are crucial acts that must be made in order to bring about change that is desired.

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