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The Potrayal of women in Indian media in the era of globalization: A review of concepts, operationalization and key findings

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Abstract

A key concept in research on the portrayal of women in media is a sexual object or stereotype. As Objectification theory provides an important framework for understanding, researching, and intervening to improve women's lives in a socio cultural context that sexually objectifies the female body and equates a woman's worth with her body's appearance and sexual functions. Whereas Stereotypical theory of Media suggest that women are helpless and they are inferior, subordinate and amenable and only are the housewives lacking all qualities of decision making. The pervasiveness of such portrayal is, however, disputed since (1) the way in which the portrayal are conceptualized and its operationalized differs significantly; and (2) while some use terms such as 'sexual object' and 'stereotyping' as Characteristics of women, others argue that there is a conceptual difference between them. Against this background, this article reviews research on the media's portrayal of women as a Sexual object, what concepts have been used, and how they have been operationalized; and suggests a synthesis and ways of improving conceptual clarity and comparability in research on the media's portrayal of women as a sexual object or a typical stereotype.

Keywords: Women, Media, Globalization, Concepts, Sexual Objectification, Stereotyping, Operationalization

Introduction

Globalization comes in this world as a new wave. It touches and changes life of each and every person of this world. As in the broadest sense, globalization refers to the economic, social, cultural, and political processes of integration that result from the expansion of transnational economic production, migration, communications, and technologies. With this way of expansion, Globalization provides women unprecedented opportunities, but equally new and unique challenges.

The current wave of globalization has greatly improved the lives of women worldwide, particularly the lives of those women in the developing world. Nevertheless, women remain disadvantaged in many areas of life, including education, employment, health, and civil rights. According to the U.S. Agency for International Development and the World Bank, 57 percent of the 72 million primary school aged children who do not attend school are females. Additionally, girls are four percent less likely than boys to complete primary school.

In this scenario the representation of women in the society became a big question for the society and also one of the most important concepts in research on the media's representation of women in general, and during the women empowerment and protection in particular, is the portrayal of women as a sexual object. Broadly defined, the portrayal of women as a stereotype or sexual object is characterized by focus on question related to who is portraying, how media utilizes its space and time in representation, and what are the effects of globalization on the image formulation of women.

There are several reasons why the concept of portrayal of women in the age of globalization has become so popular. One is that a number of studies demonstrated that media have a great impact on people. It can portray women as a stereotype or a sexual object and people get that in the same manner. Another is evidence suggesting that this type of news coverage has increased over time. A third reason is that some studies have demonstrated that this particular portrayal of women, in a developing country like India which have a patriarchal society, has a negative effect on the women's psychology.

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The growing literature about the portrayal of women in Indian Media in the era of globalization as a stereotype or sexual object typically shares a theoretical framework which comprises the different conceptualization of researcher about the concept of stereotyping as well as the sexual Objectification Theory proposed by the Fredrickson and Robert. In terms of, how the portrayal of women are conceptualized and operationalized in the age of globalization by the Indian media industry and in what way the same representation of women has been done by the media in a new form or something has been changed in the passage of the globalization era. Because of this, there is also little base on which to reconcile or interpret the conflicting evidence about the effects of such portrayal.

Against this background, the purpose of this research paper is to review research on the media's portrayal of women as a stereotype or sexual object, including how the concept has been used, conceptualized and operationalized. First I have presented the theoretical foundation behind the concept of a stereotype as well as a sexual object representation. In the next section I have reviewed how the concept has been defined and operationalized. The following section focuses on the main findings from previous research, before – towards the end of the article – I have suggested a synthesis and how the portrayal of women as a stereotype or sexual object should be conceptualized and operationalized to increase conceptual clarity as well as greater comparability across studies and cumulatively of findings.

Statement of the problem

The mass media in the era of globalization is established as a corporate organization. These organizations are still dominated by male. We can see that mostly in all higher posts are filled by male and they are working as a controller of the whole system of media. They are trying to depict a picture of women which possess a characteristic of stereotyping and as a sexual object in front of the society by their representation through the channels of media. In initial time, media have long been worked as a watchdog of the society and this tradition devote them the responsibility to inform, to educate and to entertain the society. But in the era of globalization, Indian media industry faces various pressures by the corporate world. They are failed to fulfill their responsibility towards the society and especially in the case of women portrayal. So, the portrayal of women in Indian media like in films, television programs, advertisements or newspaper and magazines are opening up an arena of great concern to the people having interest in social research and studies. There is an on-going trend has been seen in today's media, both electronic and print as well as in social media, to portray women as commodity, sex objects and sometimes as victims. It is a fact of the Indian society that it is a patriarchal society; patriarchy is present in everywhere and every aspects of life, and unfortunately media is not exception to that. So, it becomes necessary to analyze the media's representation of women that they are portraying women as a sexual object or promoting a stereotypical image of her in what concepts and how they operationalized these concepts.

Review of related literature

Sharma K., Dr. Sanjeev, (2005) ^[8], "Depiction of women in Indian media-A case of introspection for media planners"

Samaj bigyan shodh Patrica, Amroha, Vol.1, no.1 April-Sept. pp.32-36

In this article Dr. Sanjeev Kumar Sharma criticizes the portrayal of women in media by the print and electronic media in the age of globalization. He pointed out that the issues which are related to the problems of women are not discussed by the media rather they used this platform for the portrayal of women as a commodity and sex object. Newspapers have no space for news related to rape, crime, politics, scandals, serious debates and discussions but they have space for publishing gossips and scandals.

The author also focuses that that magazines as well as newspapers have sections for females or some may also have supplements for them but that were full of personal some personal gynecological problems of married women or personal love hick-ups of young girls. Women have no option for reading something serious stuff.

In the television shows also women are shown to get involved in conspiracy, premarital, extra-marital affairs, wearing costly, heavy golden and diamond. Show producers shows that they have little care about anything else than the individual matters. Besides this, the author also mentions about the advertisements where women are used to show their body parts. In most of the advertisements they don't even mentioned a word about the real problem faced by women. In most of the advertisements in India be it newspapers or television or magazines, women is portrayed as a sexual object, vulgar and cheap.

Roy, S.S., (2012) ^[7] "Portrayal of women in Indian Media- In the era of neo-liberal economy", *Global Media journal*, June, Vol.3, No.1. Journal of Education & Social Policy Vol. 1 No. 1; June 2014

In this article the author S.S. Roy said that today globalization has worked as a very important factor for changing India. As the era of Globalization has passing on the arena of economic, cultural, social and politics has been changing. In economic system public sector has been diminishes and private sector has been boomed. Open market system and privatization have become the key factors behind the development of a developing country like India. The author also pointed out that the power of regulation has been shifted in the hands of private empires. In between of this, competition creates new challenges for the producers of different goods. Each of them is manipulating purchasers through different means.

So, they are busy with various manipulating activities to sale their products. For this, they mainly utilize advertisements.

According to the researcher, for been in the competition the companies are using the faces and bodies of beautiful women to popularize their products. Market is full of companies and products in this case the competition is in its highest peak. So, for making them as a best seller they uses advertisements. In these advertisements, they try to sale their products by portraying women in cheap manner without thinking about, whether it is necessary or not. For example, they are using women in the advertisements of cigarette, bike, cold drinks, man's shaving cream, etc. So, they portray women in wrong manner for fulfilling their own needs and desires.

Haripriya, M. (2005) ^[3]. Women in Advertisement on Television in Kiran Prasad (ed.) Women and media-challenging feminist discourse, The women's press, New Delhi.

Here the writer states that liberalization and privatization have definitely invaded the today's consumer market in India. Our urban India is slowly transforming into a western society. The concept of global village and information revolution has led the markets to target the world with one message. The writer also says that in this process, western culture is being imbibed into our veins. The advertisers have not succeeded in the just and true portrayal of women. There is surely a renaissance going on for the Indian women. But this renaissance is not being captured correctly by the advertisers. There is a need to voice out for a change in advertising content.

Theoretical Perspective

Stereotype Theory

In the critically acclaimed book "Public opinion" (1922), Walter Lippmann first time used the term "Stereotype". In this, he argued about how an individual pertains an image about any specific situation in his mind. He has taken the idea of a concept stereotype from the printing press. As the paper passes through the press, the press produces exact copies according to what the press manager has specified the print should look like. Much like powerful players in society, the media directors can determine how society views specific groups within that society (DeFleur & Dennis, 1998) [1]. He stated that, "In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture" (Kanahara, 2006, p. 306) [4].

The concept of Stereotype is defined in many ways by different scholars. Some time the term "stereotype" has been taken as a 'belief' and sometime it is based on 'group'. As Jones defined, "the stereotype as a set of expectations or beliefs held of people based solely on their group membership." This acceptance may relate to the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups. On the other hand, defined "stereotype are a perception of beliefs we hold about groups or individuals based on previously formed opinions and attitudes.....when this happens, people often take the easy path and invoke stereotypes. It is both effortless and comfortable to say quickly, "All Jews are...." Or "He is Mexican; therefore he must....."."

Defined stereotype as the tendency to attribute generalized and simplified the characteristics to group of people in the form of verbal labels, and to act towards the members of those groups in terms of those labels. So, besides belief and group, one more component which is important for defining the term stereotype is 'generalization'. As in cognitive psychology, stereotypes are simply generalizations about group of people. But it is not necessary that those generalizations should have a negative aspect.

But most often, social scientists defined a stereotype as a negative idea or image thought to be true of every member of a specific group. Stored schemas in the minds of citizens provided by media and governmental messages facilitate these images. These beliefs become shared knowledge between members of the same society and culture. In general, "stereotypes function to keep minority people in positions of low power and prestige (DeFleur & Dennis, 1998, p. 482) [1]."

Stated that "...traits which differentiate a social group from people in general are more likely to be judged as more

stereotypical than traits which are less differentiating" (p. 373). This explains that the assertive group generates the traits or characteristics of another group, which stands out unique, as stereotypic of a particular group. So, Stereotypes characteristics of a group tend to divide individuals into different subgroups within society which is based on the observation of a particular group of the society.

Thus, one might conclude that society, itself, is partially responsible for forming the group concept of a stereotype. In society, stereotypes become convenient and smooth ways for those in the power to refer to those in the weak situation. They are unbelievable at times, but they are also unreliable generalizations that give rise to negative thoughts and associations of negative characteristics with certain groups. For this reason, misconceptions often dissolved into the society through stereotypes (Kanahara, 2006) [4]. On the other hand, the very need of the dominant group to achieve self-esteem enhancement can affect the stereotype formation of a particular subordinate or minority group drastically. This means that those members of the dominant group may often put down on members of another group in order to make themselves look better to society. The dominant group needs to believe that it is better than those that are different from them.

Sexual Objectification Theory

In 1977, Fredrickson and Robert propose the theory of Sexual Objectification. In this theory, they discussed about the sexually objectified treatment of women. As women are treated like an object to be priced for its use by others. Sexual Objectification happens when a women's body or body parts are left out and parted from her as a human being and she is perceived as a physical object of male desire.

The objectification theory postulate that the sexual objectification of female is worked as a reason for mental health problems like eating disorders, depression, and sexual dysfunction. These mental problems immensely affect women by two ways. First way involves direct and hard sexual objectification experiences. Second way is indirect and soft which involves women's internal senses in sexual objectification.

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) [2] proclaim that women after a certain stage internalize the external opinions and start to self objectify by consider themselves as an object to be stared at and judged on the basis of looks and personality. Self objectification theory reveals that women intensify more on their appearance attributes and felt about her body on the basis of how she looked. Objectification theory also postulates a mediation model that may focuses how self-objectification starts women's mental health risks because of psychological outcomes.

More particularly, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) [2] hypothesizes that self objectification increases women's restlessness towards their physical characteristics. This decreases their self confidence and diminishes awareness about their internal bodily sensations which leads them towards the mental stress, disordered eating, depression, and sexual dysfunction.

Research Methodology

Aim

The research is made for making an analytical investigation about the concepts like stereotyping and sexual objectification used by media for portrayals of women in the era of globalization.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are as following:

1. To analyze the way in which the different concepts of portrayal are conceptualized and operationalized.
2. To critically analyze the media's role in constructing the portrayal of women as a sexual object or she have a stereotyped characteristic in the era of globalization.

Research Design

In order to fulfill the objectives of the study the researcher will employ the Analytical Method. An analytical method is that where a researcher has to use facts or information which are already available and analyze these to make a critical evaluation of the material. In the present study the available data on the media's portrayal of women in the era of globalization will be critically analyzed.

Data Collection

Data for this study collected from the secondary sources of data. The secondary data includes books, magazines, journals, periodicals and different websites.

Analysis: Conceptualization of women's portrayal in Indian Media in the era of Globalization

A review of literature reveals a change in the portrayal of women in the Indian Media, especially in the era of globalization. As research indicates that the media often depicts a narrow and often unattainable standard of women's physical beauty and links this standard with a woman's sexiness and worth (APA, 2007b). So, the original debate about the portrayal of women started with the creation of stereotyped image of women by the Indian Media which is later on discussed as a sexual objectification of women. As before the era of globalization, the initial literature, however, did not use the term like "sexual object" for the portrayal of women in Indian Media, instead of this they only focused on the stereotyped image of women.

According to a United Nations Research Report (1975) on Advertising and the Portrayal of Women, advertisements have been held responsible for projecting women in a derogatory light, and as inferior class of beings (National Advertising Review Board, 1975). Shrivastava's research on the Indian media has shown that the dominant negative stereotypes in connection to the portrayal of women are:

1. A woman's place is in the home.
2. The most important and valuable asset of a women is physical beauty.
3. A woman's energies and intellect must be directed toward finding the right man.
4. Women are dependent coy and submissive; they are masochistic in their response to indignities humiliations, and even to physical violence inflicted upon them.
5. The good woman is the traditional house wife long suffering, pious and submissive; the modern woman who asserts herself and her independence is undesirable and can never bring happiness to anybody nor find happiness for herself.
6. Women are women's worst enemies.
7. The working woman is the undesirable exception who must be brought in to the marriage fold and made to conform to traditional social norms.

Besides this, the 1974 Report of the Committee on the Status of Women (Joshi Committee Report) reported 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. Plural nature of Indian culture and the diverse roles women play is neither acknowledged nor communicated. These result in stereotyped images and role specifications of women in uni-dimensional projection of their reality'.

But after the arrival of Globalization Era the scenario of representing women has been changed. As Y L R Moorthi, S. Roy and Anita Pansari research on "The Changing Roles Portrayed by Women in Indian Advertisements: A Longitudinal Content Analysis" has mentioned that the results shows a major differences in the portrayal of woman from 1980s to 2010. In the 1980s and the 1990s women were portrayed either as a home maker or as a professional. But this situation has been changed in the 2000. In 2000, 13.34% of advertisements portrayed woman in the role of both a professional and home maker. There are many such changes in the television advertisement over the decades.

They also mentioned in this research that "although, woman in India, are portrayed as traditional and stereo typical over the decades, there is a difference in product categories advertised by them. Advertisers in the decade 2000 are willing to portray woman in male dominated advertisements as compared to advertisers of 1990s. The findings of the study are in sync with those found by. He states that the portrayal of women has changed, but only slightly. However, some variables have not changed over the years like the portrayal of woman as a product user or presenter."

Besides the advertisements, Films are also called as a mirror of society. Especially, Indian Cinema always depicted the real picture of the Indian society in every millennium. And as it is the cheapest visual medium of entertainment in contemporary India, it is very popular among the Indian. But, regrettably the commercial film industry of India, which is fully a profit based on industry, least bothered about the representation of women which they portrayed through the cinema. Mainstream cinema has followed a set pattern of women imitation to the viewers wherein women are portrayed as a sex bomb, a sexual object and only used as a glamorous body. However women are still portraying as dependent Mother/ Wife/ house wife on son, and husband. Still women are responsible to show parenthood there is less responsibility of men.

Said by quoting that "he mention 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 an another popular Indian cinema Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge(1995) actress Kajol enacting 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 to tell 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. "

So, if I can say that globalization plays an important role in the portrayal of women in Indian Media. Then it would be not wrong. As Archana Kumari Concluded in her research paper on “Representation of women in Media after Globalization” that “It is true that after globalization and liberalization, the economy of media has converted women as a commodity to sell with each product.”

Conclusion

On the basis of above presented data and discussion it can be conclude that still there is a problem in portrayal of women in this modern Globalized Indian Society. Media, which is worked as fourth pillar of society, have the responsibility to depict the real picture of society. But, it somewhat fail in its work. As the analysis indicates that the portrayal of women in Indian Media has changed over the period of time. Although, women in Indian Media, are portrayed as stereotypical way but after the globalization it started to showcase an ultra modern image of the women as a sexual object. Because of the competition and commercialization of media, the other half of the society, women became an object and they are portrayed for the benefit of the producers not the consumers. Sometimes they sold in form of a sober wife or some time as a sexual body. Media is responsible towards the society, so how it portrays Women is an important and with this it is a vulnerable part of society which not only builds the image of that particular segment but also invokes people’s action and reaction towards that part of the society. Hence, the major responsibility of media is to publish or broadcast issues and problems related to women and to focus on the improvement of women status in society. So, that people has come across the positive image of the women.

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