

EMERGING GENDER ROLE REPRESENTATION IN INDIAN MEDIA- THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF FOUR MORE SHOTS PLEASE WEB SERIES

Vandna Kanwar

Ph.D Research Scholar, G. D. Goenka University, School of Communication, Gurugram, Haryana,
India Corresponding Author: vandnakanwar88@gmail.com

Dr. Meenakshi Singh

Assistant Professor, G. D. Goenka University,
School of Communication, Gurugram, Haryana, India

ABSTRACT

Media is a vital part of everyday life in India. The effects of media can be understood because the vast majority of people worldwide rely on various media platforms to obtain information for entertainment, raise consciousness and awareness about many other events happening worldwide. According to Denis McQuail (2000), the media is responsible for enlightening and cultivating systematic exposure and shaping the beliefs and values. Moreover, as per the BARC (Broadcast Audience Research Council) Report, 2019, web series are termed popular shows with good viewership which have a broad scope of touching different socio-cultural aspects of lives in the society. There are different kinds of Over the Top (OTT) platforms for entertainment that broadcast for 24 hours. This paper seeks to assess web series in Indian society's context. Indian media have represented the stereotypical image of women and have been oppressing women in many ways by portraying them as feeble, docile and victims. The present study aims to unpack how the patriarchal structure still influences gender representation in contemporary and digital platforms. The researcher will conduct qualitative thematic analysis to study the emerging feminine traits of leading female characters in the web series *Four More Shots Please*, Season 1 and 2, based on the problem statement.

Keywords: Media, Representation, Gender Roles, Web Series, Qualitative Thematic Analysis

INTRODUCTION

We live in a digital world where numerous web series and other shows are watched by viewers online. The audience of the shows is people of all age groups, ranging from a child to an older person. Many Over the Top (OTT) platforms act as a digital medium that provides their audience with numerous genres to watch. OTT refers to any streaming service that provides its content over the internet. There are many OTT platforms for entertainment in India that broadcast their content online for 24 hours. For instance, Voot, Zee5, Sony Liv, Amazon Prime Video, Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar, MX Player, Alt Balaji and many more are available in India where different viewers can watch other shows. According to FICCI EY 2019 report- „A Billion Screens of Opportunities, " the OTT sector grew by 59% in FY2019 at INR 17 billion, and it is expected to reach Rs. 24 billion by the year 2021. In modern life, when media and communication have become central elements of life, gender and sexuality remain at the core of how an identity is

perceived by society (Gauntlett, 2005). Media plays a pivotal role in constructing gender identities. Furthermore, the media portrays numerous images of women and men, along with messages about their sexuality. These images sculpt the ideas about one's sexuality, gender and lifestyle they adopt. In contrast, media has been of utmost importance for awakening women to know their potential to be society's change-makers (Kumari & Joshi, 2015). Different genres of online web series and shows represent and portray the images of women differently; what remains universally similar across all the genres is that images of women represented in them are far from the real world and the real lives. Henceforth, most of the time, media presents desires rather than reality (Kumari & Joshi, 2015). The images represented in the content of media have always been gender-stereotyped. Most of the time, stereotypical portrayals of men, women and transgender have been described in different media content. However, the intervention of the

internet changes can be observed regarding the representation of men and women (Dasgupta, 2018).

Four More Shots Please is an Indian web series that streamed on Amazon Prime Video. The series revolves around four contemporary times women (two in their 30s and two in their early 20s) residing in a metropolitan city; this is the first all-women-protagonist series of the Amazon Prime Video. Two of its seasons has been already streamed in the year 2019 and 2020. The web series tries to show four women's metropolitan issues and, despite having primarily privileged lifestyles, these characters face conflicts in their personal and professional lives. The show beautifully tries to show body shaming issues, the stigma around single mother and her struggles being a divorced woman. The web series also represents strong, ambitious and career-headed women and what discrimination women have to face. The show tries to speak about LGBTQ rights and stresses breaking the societal norms. This show smashing the stereotypical images of women tries to discover diverse characters of women. This research attempts to evaluate web series from the perspective of Indian society. Therefore, to add to the literature, the paper attempts to see how gender is represented in the web series *Four More shots Please*, Season 1 and Season 2. It has been found that there are various shows and web series which portrays the issues regarding gender inequality and discrimination like body shaming, different sexual identities, Feminism and others. However, the significant gap observed is that for such shows. Hence, the paper employs a qualitative thematic analysis method; this method has been the most important in this research paper to understand the gender representation and the emerging feminine traits of the main protagonists of the stated web series.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of media cannot be ignored in today's era. Media is known to be the fourth pillar of democracy. Mass media help in spreading information concerning numerous issues like development, climate change, sustainable development, gender discrimination, political and economic problems, etc., to a larger audience. Many socio-political problems are being shown on television and OTT platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime India, Zee5, etc. Different platforms portray

different gender images and roles. Hence, different images are represented through media (Lata). The portrayal of these gender roles can have a major impact on the understanding of gender in society. The media can also impact how some social issues are seen more in link and sync with females than males. For instance, issues like body shaming, gender-based discrimination and others are primarily portrayed in sync with female characters.

Body Shaming

Living in today's world without worrying about your appearance, looks, personality, and body are next to impossible. It is almost unmanageable to avoid repetitive images of men, women and human beings shown in media nowadays. Men and women's beauty are decided not by their virtue of acts but by their fair and clear skin tone and ideal body figure.

According to Keerthana & Sreelakshmi (2019), body shaming is a modern term but an old phenomenon and is practiced for a long time. For instance, fat-shaming a person and making a joke is an age-old process that can still be seen on screens in a sarcastic and dramatic style. Gaffney (2017), in her study, defined body shaming as shaming a person for their body type or based on their looks. Correspondingly, Moardi, Driks & Matteson (2005) defined body shame as an emotion resulting from evaluating oneself against some standard and missing the mark (as cited in Evans, 2010).

The idea of beauty and ugliness is defined by the society we live in, and it depends upon the colour, shape and size of one's body. Different cultures have different body-shaming meanings in their perspective (Harsha, Joseph, Devassy&Sreena, 2020). Women and men face the pressure to fit in the ideal body images offered by advertisements, TV serials and movies in society as media are vital in establishing the body image as „ideal“ (Keerthana & Sreelakshmi, 2019). Brown (2017), in her study, argued that women suffered more from poor body image. In support of the statement, she mentioned Morgan's (1993) statement that women suffered more from poor body images as their bodies are frequently epitomized in the media than the male body. Further, in the research done by Sun (2018), it was found that body shame was discovered to assist the integration of thoughts and contribute to body dissatisfaction.

Body shame influences individuals in many ways. For instance, women who feel they do not match the beauty standard of the media, i.e., skinny and clear skin, are often found to have low self-worth (Brown, 2017). Currently, many young individuals, irrespective of their gender, struggle in the gyms and spend time in the beauty salons to achieve the goal of an ideal and perfect body (Brown, 2017). Media is a significant source of strongly and frequently showing the ideal body to be thin (Borzekowski& Bayer, 2005).

On the contrary, there are many series on OTT platforms that break the stereotypes and prejudices prevailing in society. These series are portraying the heavy models who are fighting and dealing with body shame boldly. Also, Gaffney (2017) found in her study that social media often affects women's views and perceptions about their bodies and body imaging. Further, she also stated that society has always made it hard for individuals to accept their bodies, especially those who struggle with their bodies" negative body imaging.

Interestingly, peers (Borzekowski& Bayer, 2005), social media (Gaffney, 2017) and family, all are essential socializing agents in the lives of people that affect the people's opinions and perceptions about their own bodies and put pressure on individuals to fit into those beauty standards that a society portray as perfect and beautiful. These influences led to eating disorders and health issues. People struggle with body image issues (Jackson et al., 2015, as cited in Sun, 2018) and eating disorder (Mehak et al., 2018, as Sun, 2018) cited because of body shame.

According to Keerthana & Sreelakshmi (2019) research, there are many influences of body shaming on an individual. From mental stress to eating disorders, body shame can cause numerous problems for an individual. Additionally, we live in a society that only applauds and provides the chances to slim and thin people. Because of this, many young adults and teenagers see themselves as inferior as they have heavy body structures. Hence, it becomes onerous for individuals to accept their bodies.

In the modern world of fitness and fashion, people are often trapped in the cycle of looking good and matching society's ideal beauty standards. But it has been said perfectly that everyone is beautiful, and one needs to accept one body to be truly empowered.

Sexual Orientation

With the advancement in time, people with different gender identities have started coming forward, and in today's time, these people form a large community throughout the world. This community of people is commonly referred to as the LGBT community. People with different sexual orientations may be identified differently. As stated by the American Psychological Association, 2012, sexual orientation is not a definable category; rather, it occurs on a continuum (as cited in Molerio& Pinto, 2015).

In general terms, sexual orientation can be understood as the sexual and romantic attraction felt by someone for somebody. Those who feel attracted to the opposite sex are known as heterosexual, and individuals who feel drawn to more than one gender are known as bisexuals. Queer are people who are attracted to others of the same gender.

In the detailed research done by Bailey et al. (2016) on sexual orientation, it has been found that more than men, the more significant number of women experience same-sex orientation and their sexual attraction exhibit changes over time. Simultaneously, the sexual orientation of men is determined by their sexual attraction to males versus female erotic stimuli. Further, it has been found that the relationship between homosexual attraction, identity and behavior varies from culture to culture. They also argued that suppressing homosexual behavior lead to burden and stress among homosexually oriented people.

The number of homosexually oriented people is relatively meagre as compared to the world's population. The queer theory has likewise extended approaches to gain sexual orientation and called for the need to break the heteronormative matrix (Amaya & Gonzalez, 2019). Despite their small numbers in the population, their occurrence in media has outgrown appreciably. Although historically, all the minority groups, including queers, are stereotyped and underrepresented in media. They are mostly given negative roles, and their identity is solely used for the audience's humour (Gonta, Hansen, Fagin & Fong, 2017; Sanifel, Villa & Ibiti, 2014).

According to Gonta, Hansen, Fagin & Fong (2017), some of the stereotypes related to homosexuals comprise lacking stable relationships, being humorous, being

preoccupied with their sexuality and one-dimensional figures. Media, since its existence, has impacted the lives of people in many ways. And with this type of representation, the media create and represent the undesirable images of homosexuals. Gays and lesbians are frequently depicted as sexually dissatisfied, promiscuous, and HIV-positive. (Sanifel, Villa & Ibiti, 2014). According to McRobbie, even with the improved representation of homosexually oriented people, lesbians, as a term, adhere to the traditional paradigm of femininity in which a woman is an object of desire. (as cited in Sanifel, Villa & Ibiti, 2014).

A media agenda released by UNESCO in 2014 reported that the portrayal of homosexuals in media is unacceptably rigid, offensive, sensational and dangerous. Appropriate coverage and openness to media depictions of homosexually oriented people, i.e., representation of gay and lesbian characters in media, is altogether linked with an abatement in bias among specific groups of individuals. Explicitly in the case of lesbians, it has been expressed that the representation of an unwavering lesbian character, who acknowledges her personality and is happy with her sentimental connections and life, improves the watcher's perspectives on homosexuality (Sanifel, Villa & Ibiti, 2014).

Likewise, with the advancement in time and the emergence of the internet, affirmative changes can be observed slowly and steadily in the portrayal of homosexually oriented characters. The entertainment content has enhanced significantly in many ways throughout the years. The content has become more delegated to homosexually oriented people and mostly contributes to the positive attitudes towards homosexuality. This kind of acceptance is explicitly seen from the start of 21st-century media (Gonta, Hansen, Fagin & Fong, 2017). Many countries have declared homosexuality is not a crime, but acceptance is the biggest fear most LGBTQ people struggle for.

Gender-based Discrimination

The fight for equality is real and has been a significant issue for females all over the world. Based on gender, women have faced numerous kinds of discrimination, be it for their dignity and rights, labour and mobility. Gender-based discrimination is a worldwide phenomenon, and it has many consequences. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, gender discrimination

means unfair treatment of an individual based on their sex, especially the unfair treatment of women compared to men. Individuals discriminate against women based on work, food and nutrition, their fertility choices and healthcare (Tiwari, Mathur&Awasthi, 2018).

Gender-based discrimination initiates from birth and follows throughout the lifecycle of a woman (Pokharel, 2008). In this world of fast social progress, the absence of gender equality forces women to be more vulnerable. Further, it limits their opportunities and resources and also jeopardizes future generations (Sumanjeet, 2016). Also, these gender differences widen the gap between men and women in society. For instance, in his study, Raju (2014) found that gender differences are even found in the access and control of resources. The gender differences in access and control over resources further diminish the women's access to them.

Gender discrimination can also be seen at schools and even religious places like temples, mosques and churches. For instance, women cannot become priests or fathers; in some temples, priests do not allow women to enter; women cannot pray in the mosque. Arguably, she claimed that our cultural customs, which women have embraced and applied by males as a societal value, are prejudiced. (Pokharel, 2008). Discrimination exists in various settings, including income disparities, compensation disparities, promotion disparities, and decision-making disparities, among others (Tiwari, Mathur & Awasthi, 2018). For the same kind of work, ladies are paid fewer wages as compared to their male counterparts. It was also founded in the study that male colleagues consider female colleagues' weak employees, and hence, they are not given the decision-making jobs but the clerical jobs. Strong, opinionated and determined women are often not given the proper opportunity to work and utilise their skills, knowledge and passion. Even in the worst scenarios, they are judged on their character if they perform well and get promoted. Although work provides them with confidence, development, and self-esteem, they are still not permitted to take training and go out for work (Kachru, 2019). The division of labour and the patriarchal notions of society always have limited the work of women to domestic chores, which has restricted their participation in social, economic, and political decision-making (Sumanjeet, 2016).

For the longest time, women are ignorant of their rights because they were not sent to schools for education and other severe resolutions (Kachru, 2019). Gender-based discrimination in education brings more gender inequality in society (Pulugurtha, 2008, as cited in Sumanjeet, 2016).

In India, women are at the receiving end and males at the decision-making front because of patriarchy. One of India's leading cause of gender inequality is the patriarchy, which allows men to have authority and control over females. The unequal opportunities for women add-on to the gender gap. Hence, the only solution to reduce gender inequality is to provide equal opportunities to women (Sumanjeet, 2016) regarding water resources, electricity, internet access, health care infrastructure, sanitation, banking services, among others.

Although, after its independence, India has made significant progress in addressing gender discrimination (Amutha, 2017), particularly in politics, legal rights, and education, there is still a very long way to achieve gender equality.

Feminism in Indian scenario

Feminism, with its dynamic nature, has been given many words in different aspects to describe its meaning. Feminism can be different for every person. However, many definitions specifically mention women as victims and men to be the oppressors. Feminism has developed itself to recognize the oppression faced by all genders and advocate their rights, hence broadening its horizons.

Feminism means the advocacy of women's rights against gendered oppression, discrimination and violence. However, Feminism, over time, has faced its timely evolution. When seen as an ideology today, it refers to the transformation of any forms of social power relations that marginalize, persecute, or exploit any group of people based on their sexuality, youth, sexual orientation, capability, race, creed, nationality, region, status, caste, or heritage. (Batiwala & Friedman, 2014). In different parts of the world, Feminism can be different and dynamic. It is affected by all the factors mentioned above. (Bhasin & Khan, 2004, p., 04).

In his work, Moi (1999) suggested that women are on par with males in terms of intellectual

aptitude. Still, it is also necessary to emphasize the difference to resist a patriarchal culture that undermines and derides women as women or attempts to implode them into an emblematic patriarchal reason.

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, the suffragette movement gave rise to the first wave of Feminism, emphasizing women's freedom and equality. The second wave of Feminism focused on their oppression and struggle for freedom, focusing on women's portrayal in advertisements and beauty contests. The third wave stressed individual empowerment.

According to Human Development Report 2020, India's Gender Development Index stands at 0.820, and the Gender Inequality Index of India is 0.488. This data clearly shows that gender equality seems to be a far-fetched dream in India. Females in India earn 66% of what the males earn for the same kind and amount of work (Saxena, 2019). Moreover, the 17th Lok Sabha of India constitutes only 14% of female members (Saxena, 2019). It has become devastatingly common to see crimes against women being reported now and then in the newspapers; the 2017 Global Peace Index reported that India ranked four in being the most dangerous country for women. India needs Feminism more than ever, with the rise in rape culture on the streets and casual sexism being faced by every female in their homes.

Feminists face a tremendous amount of bashing all over for being man-hating, and hence, it has become challenging to be a feminist in India now more than ever (Shaji, 2020). However, Indian history is evident to have seen men sparking the idea of Feminism, in the pre-independence period, with feminists like Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, who took a stand for women and marched against evil social practices like Sati (Zafar, 2016). Only later, women joined in, and we saw feminists like Savitri Bai Phule, Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant and so on.

Feminists in the Indian scenario, just like all others in the world, seek complete gender equality. To understand the History of Feminism in India, we can divide it into three phases, the first one being in the mid-19th century, which came about when reformists talked in favor of women's rights in terms of education and cultural practices Sati and so on.

Furthermore, in the second phase from 1915, movements like Quit India Movement by M.K. Gandhi incorporated women's organization's "emergence. Finally, post-independence, the movement focuses on the fair and just treatment of women in their homes, work, and politics in the third phase.

However, in concern of the progress made, women in Modern India continue to face many issues related to discrimination and violence, the fight for which is always a struggle which is going on in the Indian society.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Hegemony

The Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci revived the concept of hegemony as a theory. Hegemony, he claims, is a form of political, social, and ideological dominance. According to Artz (2013), Gramsci saw capitalists' ability to win the approval of the middle and working classes in the developed West and other social changes. Artz (2013) went on to say that consent is an essential factor in any hegemony. Hegemony is defined as the direction of mutually beneficial relationships between groups or classes, and it cannot be reduced to dominance or coercion. Hegemony is characterized as a group or institution's supremacy over another for a specific period. According to Gramsci (2010), the relationship between power and legitimacy is the central pillar of the theory of hegemony (as cited in Artz, 2013) and this means that hegemony can only be achieved by bribery and agreement. Gramsci grasped the hegemony as an ideology, which explains how social groups control society without violence.

Cultivation Theory

George Gerber first developed cultivation as a macro-level explanation for the mainstream media (Potter, 2014). The cultivation theory given by Gerbner suggests that exposure to media, particularly television, cultivates the perception of reality in the minds of viewers if exposed for a longer duration. He called this „mean world syndrome“ (Jaggi, 2013). Gerbner proposed that images propagated by television serials, advertisements, magazines, etc., repeatedly over a long period can overpower and cultivate normative notions on social constructs like gender roles, body image and various stereotypes. According to Anand & Suman (2016), the cultivation theory explains the television's influence on the people's notion of social reality and exposure and the impacts of

television on the people (p. 244). Conclusively, the cultivation theory has a pivotal role in understanding television's influence and impact even today.

Social Representation Theory

Instead of focusing on Durkheim's concept of collective and individual representation, Serge Moscovici 1961 introduced the theory of social representation to fit contemporary societies (Wagner et al., 1999; Sammut & Howarth, 2014; Hoiyor, 2011). Social representation theory is social-psychological anthropology applied to contemporary societies. Individuals in modern cultures have some autonomy and adopting social representations can change them simultaneously (Hoiyor, 2011). This theory also explains the discourse and understanding of psychoanalysis in everyday life (Wagner et al., 1999). A social representation is an aggregate wonder relating to a community co-developed by people daily by day talk and activity. (Wagner et al., 1999). Collective meaning processes arise in common cognitions, forming social relationships that bind societies, organization's, and groups together. This theory changes the collective thinking in society by focusing on phenomena like debates, conflicts, strong feelings and ideological struggle. Individuals are constantly identified with social, cultural or potentially emblematic items, i.e., representations of something. (Hoiyor, 2011). When social representation theory is applied to communication, it connects individuals, media and the larger public.

AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

Aims & Objectives

This research paper aims to apply different theories and qualitative thematic analysis to examine how gender is represented in the Indian web series- *Four More Shots Please!*

The following are the specific objectives of this paper:

- To explore the emerging feminine traits of leading female characters on Indian OTT platforms.
- To examine the representation of various patterns and themes portrayed in the web series viz-a-viz gender performativity.

Research Questions:

This paper tries to answer the following research questions:

- What are the emerging feminine traits portrayed on OTT platforms like amazon Prime Videos?

- What are the various patterns and themes portrayed in the web series viz-a-viz gender performativity?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Literature Review showed that the most common methods used for analyzing gender-related subjects and parameters were qualitative thematic analysis and discourse analysis. In this research paper, the theories of gender representation have been tested by using qualitative thematic analysis.

The thematic analysis is originally defined by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke for psychology research. This analysis has utmost importance in this research paper in analyzing the gender representation in the web series *Four More Shots Please*, Season 1 and Season 2.

Braun and Clarke (2012) define thematic analysis (TA) as systematically identifying a research problem and then organizing it to provide insights into the patterns of the meaning of themes. The investigator thoroughly examines the datasets to identify common themes, ideas and patterns of meaning that arise recurrently. With TA, a researcher can focus mainly on analyzing meaning across the whole dataset or examines a specific facet of a phenomenon intensely (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

TA is a phase of six-step analysis. The six faces of the approach are as follows: Familiarization, Code generation, Looking for Themes, Reviewing Themes, Defining Themes and Writing Report. Braun and Clarke suggest this mode of TV in 2006 (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

The same methodology has been followed to research this paper. Firstly, the familiarization has been done by watching all the web series episodes *Four More Shots Please*, season 1 and season 2. This followed by generating a table of code based on the character traits shown in the web series. And for the next phase of identifying themes, the cluster of codes were done in order to search for the themes emerging from the dataset, i.e. all episodes of *Four More Shots Please*. Majorly, four common patterns were observed. And then, four themes were identified and defined to do the literature review. Moreover, the last phase of the TA is completed by examining and presenting the analysis based on four themes by identifying dialogues and relationships that the four main protagonists have with other characters in the web series.

Hence, this paper will use qualitative thematic analysis to understand the gender representation and the emerging feminine traits of the main protagonists of the web series *Four More Shots Please*, Season 1 and Season 2.

Based on the characters shown in the web series, the below coding table has been put together for various character traits shown in the web series.

Female Traits
Bisexual
Self-dependent
Vulnerable
Emotionally Weak
Physically Strong
Headstrong
Ambitious
Passionate
Fearless
Dependent on parents
Sweet and diminutive
Lacking self-confident
Single wealthy child
Quirky and eccentric
Victim of body shaming
Divorced
Single Mother
Independent
Focused for career
Helpful and Nurturing

Table No. 1: Feminine traits to analyse the characters

This table will be used as codes to do the qualitative thematic analysis of the four main female characters shown in the web series. The table will broadly be used to answer the research questions and look at women's representation and how different gender-specific traits have been portrayed in the web series.

THE RATIONALE FOR CODING THEMES

With the increase of OTT platforms, the consumption of online content such as web series is spurring. Over the past few years, the online media industry has been growing exponentially. With the novel and contemporary representation of the media content on the OTT platform, the representation of gender has also altered. Hence, this study will try to understand the representation of female characters in the web series *Four More Shots Please*, Season 1 and Season 2.

For this research, a pattern was noticed after watching all the episodes of both the series seasons and a thematic pattern was observed, which were then coded structurally. The common coding themes that were undertaken for this study try to cover all the major events, subject matter and the character traits of the female characters shown in the web series. Moreover, the coding themes were acknowledged that were arising persistently in the web series and were in accordance with the objectives and research questions of the study. Therefore, the aforementioned coding themes were recognized to approach the datasets certainly and analyze the evolving female traits of the lead female characters of the show.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The media and its content influence and shape the understanding of various subjects that are shown. The representation of gender in media affects how people see themselves and gender roles in reality. Hence, a qualitative thematic analysis of media content delivered on various OTT platforms is of utmost importance to understand society's perception and views on gender and related issues.

The show introduces four protagonists. The first protagonist is Damini Rizvi Roy, a strong-headed journalist and in her early 30s dealing with the board of directors of the company she works with. The second protagonist is Anjana Menon, who is a single mother and a willful lawyer. She got divorced when her daughter was a year old, and she has been shown to manage her work and responsibilities satisfactorily. The third protagonist shown is Siddhi Patel. She is a young girl in her early 20s and a single wealthy child; her life is being controlled by her mother, whose mother always insists that her one sole purpose of life is to get a perfect groom and get married. The fourth protagonist in the web series is Umang Singh, who is in her early 20s and a bisexual gym trainer. She belongs to a small town in Punjab and shifted to the millennial city of Mumbai to fulfil her dreams.

Qualitative Thematic Analysis

In this thematic analysis, four female protagonists' overall representation will be discussed based on the four themes identified in the literature review. Therefore, the following table of traits will analyze the different characters to see how females are represented in the web series on OTT platforms visually

through their behavior and orally through the dialogues.

Table No. 2: Feminine traits of the characters

Umang Singh- Gym Trainer Bisexual Self-dependent Vulnerable Emotionally weak Physically strong	Damini Rizvi Roy- Journalist Headstrong Ambitious Passionate Fearless
Siddhi Patel Dependent on parents Sweet and Diminutive Lacking self-confident Single wealthy child Quirky and eccentric Victim of Body Shaming	Anjana Menon-Lawyer Divorced Single Mother Independent Focused for career Helpful and Nurturing

Body Shaming

Siddhi Patel is one of the four protagonists shown in the web series. Siddhi is a single girl child and belongs to a wealthy family wherein her father supports her, and her mother insists that she look after her body to get an ideal boy to get married. She is dependent on her parents as she is not professionally settled. Siddhi is a sweet, adorable and diminutive daughter of her parents. She was a victim of body shaming in the series, and numerous scenes and dialogues narrate this. As the series progresses and Siddhi struggles to prove herself and find a best-suited career, she ends up doing stand-up comedy shows. Siddhi's stand-up comic scenes portray how she has been the victim of body shaming as she says:

Siddhi: "*I tried fat-free filters.*"

Siddhi: "*I was an eight-year-old girl on a diet.*"

Siddhi: "*No one called me fat, busty, buffalo, fat so, when I used to strip on the internet.*"

Siddhi: "*All I wanted was some love and validation.*"
(*Four More Shots Please, Season 2*)

Her characters' discourse is how being a victim of body shame, her character grows and learned body positivity. The literature review also provided us with evidence that fat-shaming a person is being used as a joke in various scenes on screen. In many instances in the series, it has been shown that people around her, her friends and even her mother always force her to get in shape either by putting her on a Keto diet or forcing her to enroll in Ballet Dance. It is evident from these scenes that issues like body shaming, ideal image, perfect daughter, and others initiate from the family. Family is the first and closest

social institution that pushes one into such issues. All of this made her body-conscious and a victim of body shaming.

Further, this impacted the relationship between mother and daughter. There is bitterness in Sidhi's relationship with her mother in the first season, but she became close to her nanny. This shows how body shaming can affect a child's psychology as Sidhi's developed a close relationship with her nanny because she never forces her the way her mother used to force her for diet plans and other physical activities. Also, her nanny supported her emotionally and hence, Sidhi became close to her.

Even though Sidhi's character is not ashamed of her body and neither wants to lose her weight, her mom's constant pressure since childhood made her vulnerable to body shaming. And this leads her to strip on the internet for half a million subscribers online for a website. With the progress in her character, she gained self-confidence and started accepting herself, which is evident in her dialogue.

Sidhi: "On that semi-porn site shockingly I learned how to love myself and how to accept myself." (*Four More Shots Please*, Season 2).

Sexual Orientation

From the very beginning of the web series, it can be seen that the other three protagonists are aware of the sexuality of the Umang, and they open-mindedly accepted her identity. For instance, in a scene, Damini supported Umang by telling her about the photos that the media have in compromising position with Samara Kapoor, her love. However, Umang is physically strong as she is a gym trainer, but emotionally, she is fragile. This is evident in a scene where all four girls are hanging in Truck Bar, and Anjana asked her not to avoid her problems but to deal with them. Umang's character shows the contrast in the series. The central discourse about her characters is that she is a lesbian with masculine traits, and the show has tried to normalize different sexual identities by emphasizing small details of her character like a tomboy, masculine traits but creating contrast with her emotional side.

In a scene where Umang went out with her family members for dinner to meet a family of a boy whom her mother chooses for her to marry, she loses her temper when they force her to marry a man, and after this, her family disowns

her. Being a middle-class family, it was challenging for her family to understand her sexuality. From this, it can be analyzed that income class plays a vital role in understanding and accepting different gender identities, as it was not difficult for Samara (a rich and renowned actress) to reveal her identity, but it was challenging for Umang to reveal her identity in front of her family. Hence, acceptance of sexuality differs with your class and income. In Indian society, not many people are ready to accept the different gender identities. LGBTQ community and especially homosexuals are still facing the stigma around their identity and acceptance in family and society. Some of the dialogue of Umang's character also reinforces this situation:

Umang: "*I am a lesbian, and Lesbian is not a disease.*" (*Four More Shots Please*, Season 2)

Even the literature review suggested that the portrayal of homosexuals in the media is rigid. On the contrary, this web series has tried to break the stigma around sexuality by showcasing the real problems that a homosexual couple faces and their acceptance in society.

Gender-Based Discrimination

Anjana is a woman who struggles to balance her life between work and her responsibilities as a single mother. Anjana's character is layered with various characters traits and this can be bifurcated as; she is rich, corporate woman, educated and living her life without any guilt, but her ex-husband infuse this guilt factor when she was drunk and drive the car with their daughter and met an accident; Contrary to this, Anjana's character strongly portrays the idea of a single and responsible mother.

Another layering given to her character is that she has shown a very confident woman despite being afraid in her personal life. Her characters faced most of the instances related to gender-based discrimination. However, her firm focused, and career-minded character dealt with every issue smartly in the web series. This is evident in Season 1 when Anjana fought for a case in court for Damini against the state government. The judge ignored what Anjana was trying to say instead made fun of her language and without listening to her side of the case, pass the judgment. And the discrimination based on gender became more evident by Damini's dialogue in conversation with Anjana;

Damini: "If you were a man, the judge wouldn't have been condescending." (*Four More shots Please*, Season 1)

These kinds of scenarios portray well how deep-rooted the patriarchy is in India. Especially on the career front, women are paid unequal wages for the same work, which was evident in numerous web series scenes. In a heated argument with her misogynistic boss Vinyl, Anjana was discriminated against her gender when he said, "women are such bleeding hearts, and probably that is why most CEOs are men." In another scene, one of the juniors of Ms Anjana Menon, working in the same law firm, got promoted despite being a junior associate. In contrast, Anjana was asked to work with different and small clients, even being the senior associate and having more work experience. Her misogynistic boss stated that the junior had got the potential, and this firm does not have time to deal with the domestic issues of Anjana. There are many other instances where protagonists have faced gender-based discrimination. One of Umang's clients in the gym sexually harassed her, and when she tries to teach him a lesson, the management fired her from the job as she took a step against their client. All these scenes and the dialogues in the web series discoursed appropriately how women face the glass ceiling and discrimination at all levels of their lives.

Feminism in Indian scenario

Indian is a male-dominated society, which has been portrayed in the web series by creating numerous scenes between boss Vinyl and female employee and lawyer Anjana. In a scene when Anjana was speaking for her rights, she rightfully asked her boss,

Anjana: "Since when is standing up for oneself considered desperate?" (*Four More Shots Please*, Season 2)

There are many scenes in the web series where all the four protagonists have been shown raising their voices against the wrong in society. For instance, Sidhi, in one of her stand-up comedy sessions, rightfully said that,

Sidhi: "For 1000 of years, the men have been closing all the doors on women, but in the name of chivalry opening one door gives them feminist burns." (*Four More Shots Please*, Season 2)

Even when Sidhi's mother pressures her for marriage, her friends give her the advice to build her career and become independent before taking this huge decision of her life. There are

other instances where the fight for equal rights can be seen in the web series. When Anajna's boss belittled her, she argued with all the valid answers and her dialogues powerfully portray the same.

Anjana: "No one in this firm has to deal with my domestic issues, and I am not going to stand here and get humiliated for all my hard work. You will have my resignation tomorrow." (*Four More Shots Please*, Season 2)

This implies that web series has shown women's vulnerability and that one should always fight for their rights.

KEY FINDINGS

The following are the major key finding of the research paper:

- The popularity of the digital platform is increasing among the viewers in India, and hence its content has a vital role in shaping people's perception regarding gender. The way gender is portrayed in the media has an impact on how people perceive gender roles. Gender roles portrayed in contemporary media on OTT platforms are diverse from traditional media platforms' portrayal. The OTT platform has been more valiant and progressive than traditional media platforms in portraying diverse gender roles. Hence, gender representation in the contemporary media has a sturdy influence on the way one interprets themselves and gender roles in the modern world as the contemporary web series represent the virtual reality of our modern lives and have more relatable storylines.
- Patriarchy is deep-rooted in Indian society, and it influences the representation of gender on digital media platforms even in contemporary times. Moreover, patriarchy became of the reasons for portraying specific gender stereotypically. Considering the patriarchal supremacy, men are always portrayed in audacious, aggressive, leading, powerful and resilient roles, whereas women are portrayed as docile, submissive, meek and vulnerable. Hence, this shows that the representation of varied genders on the OTT platform is influenced by the patriarchal dynamics prevailing in Indian society.
- The gender representation on OTT platforms is steadily becoming more inclusive, but its acceptance is low among

- the viewers in Indian society. Although, the inclusive and comprehensive representation can act as a spur to bring progressive changes in the mindset of people and the way they perceive different gender roles. In terms of gender inclusivity, OTT media platforms are experimenting and attempting to smash misconceptions associated with the LGBTQ community by providing equal and just representation. Nonetheless, the Indian OTT platforms are sluggish while keeping the pace of becoming inclusive media platforms. Moreover, the popularity of gender-inclusive content and its audience is still limited, and hence people pay lesser attention to such shows and its "content.
- While representing strong and progressing women, the media is still lagging in challenging the stereotypical gender roles and the better representation of gender equality. The Indian media, while trying to portray the strong, independent, and powerful women, somehow land up portraying the same age-old stereotypical images of women. Such representation of women on various media platforms further impacts the images of women in the audience's minds and, hence, highlights women's conservative image. Women are often shown as compromising and liable character. Although portraying positive and forward-thinking women, the media has yet to reevaluate traditional gender stereotypes to reflect the enhanced and contemporary Indian women.

CONCLUSION

Various instances from the web series showed that somehow series has tried to portray the carefree, responsible, liberating and free-spirited women who take all the responsibilities for their mistakes. An instance where Sidhi's mother forces her to look beautiful and get married implies that women still require marriage and affection from men to complete their lives despite their independence and strength. The study's findings also concluded that representation of gender in media influences people's perception regarding various gender roles that society has set for the individuals. However, contemporary media platforms can act as a catalyst of change by devastating the prejudices and norms regarding many social issues. Inclusive, equal and vindicated representation of different genders can better shape the understanding of gender among the viewers in a society. The web series builds a

discourse on women's equal rights, their sexuality and discrimination at different stages in their lives. By providing different layers to the different characters shown in the web series, the series has tried its best to portray the microscopic details of women's difficulties in Indian society. It can be concluded from the thematic analysis that strong and independent women are challenging the preconceived notions of gender and sexuality. The concluding discussion about the women's representation in the web series is that the series has shown characteristics and the problems a woman faces in a society where patriarchy is deep-rooted.

LIMITATIONS

The study only focuses on the gender representation of the female characters and their traits, but it does not account for and discusses the representation of male characters and their traits.

REFERENCES

- Gauntlett, D. (2005). *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*. Retrieved from <http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/52602/1/19.pdf.pdf>
- Kumari, A., & Joshi, H. (2015). Gender Stereotyped Portrayal of Women in the Media: Perception and Impact on Adolescent. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 20(4), 44-52. DOI: [10.9790/0837-20424452](https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-20424452)
- Sarikakis, K. (2013). Media and the Image of Women: Report of the 1st Conference of the Council of Europe Network of National Focal Points on Gender Equality. Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/1680590587>
- Dasgupta, D. (2018). Gender Portrayal in Age of Social Networking Sites: An Analytical Discussion. *Amity Journal of Media & Communication Studies*, 8(1), 42-48. Retrieved from https://amity.edu/UserFiles/ascos/journal/ISSUE66_5_Debastuti - AJMCS Vol 8 No 1.pdf
- Anand, S. & Suman, S. (2016). Media for Mass communication. In S. Anand & A. Kumar (Eds.), *Dynamics of Human Communication* (pp. 234-254). New Delhi, India: Orient Blackswan.
- Artz, L. (2013). Media Hegemony. In M. Danesi (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Media and Communication* (pp.336-339). Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

- Hoijer, B. (2011). Social Representations Theory: A New Theory for Media Research. *Nordicom Review*, 32, 3-16. Retrieved from https://scholar.google.co.in/scholar?q=Social+Representations+Theory+A+New+Theory+for+Media+Research+&hl=en&as_sdt=0&as_vis=1&oi=scholar
- Jaggi, R. (2013). Representation of women in Indian Television Advertising: Situating the „Discourse“ in the „Fair & Lovely Ad Campaign“. *IMS Manthan (The Journal of Innovations)*, 8(2), 181-184. DOI: [10.18701/imsmanthan.v8i2.5141](https://imsmanthan.v8i2.5141)
- Potter, W. J. (2014). A Critical Analysis of Cultivation Theory. *Journal of Communication*, 64(6), 1015-1036. DOI: [10.1111/jcom.12128](https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12128)
- Sammut, G., & Howarth, C. (2014). Social Representations. In T. Teo (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology* (pp. 1799-1802). New York, USA: Springer New York. Retrieved from https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-1-4614-5583-7_292
- Wagner, W., Duveen, G., Farr R., Jovchelovitch, S., Cioldio, F. L., Markova, I. & Rose, D. (1999). Theory and method of social representation. *Asia Journal of Social Psychology*, 2(1), 95-125. DOI: [10.1111/1467-839X.00028](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-839X.00028)
- Borzekowski, D. L. G., & Bayer, A. (2005). Body Image and Media Use Among Adolescents. *Adolescents Medicine Clinics*, 16(2), 289-313. DOI: [10.1016/j.admecli.2005.02.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.admecli.2005.02.010)
- Brown, T. (2017). Examining the influence of Social Media on Body Image: Miss Perfection, a Misperception (Master's Thesis, Colorado State University, Colorado, USA). Retrieved from https://mountainscholar.org/bitstream/handle/10217/183897/Brown_colostate_0053N_14260.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- Evans, M. A. (2010). Unattainable Beauty: An Analysis of the Role of Body Shame and Self-Objectification in Hopelessness Depression among College-Age Women (Doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Boston, USA). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.bing.com/&https_redir=1&article=1007&context=doctoral_dissertations
- Gaffney, K. J. (2017). Negative affects that Social Media causes on Body Imaging (Undergraduate Honors College Thesis, Long Island University, New York, USA). Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.liu.edu/post_honors_theses/13
- Harsha, H., Joseph, K., Devassy, M., & Sreena. (2020). Body Shaming in Movies: A Case Study on Selected Movies. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 24(8), 10258-10264. DOI: [10.37200/IJPR/V24I8/PR281020](https://doi.org/10.37200/IJPR/V24I8/PR281020)
- Keerthana, V. P., & Sreelakshmi, N. (2019). Study on body Shaming in Movies. *SMART MOVES JOURNAL International Journal of English Language, Literature in humanities*. 7(6), 385-394. Retrieved from <https://ijellh.com/OJS/index.php/OJS/article/view/8794>
- Sun, Q. (30th October, 2018). *Materialism, Body Surveillance, Body Shame, and Body Dissatisfaction: Testing a Mediational Model* (Brief Research Report). *Frontiers in Psychology*. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02088/full>
- Amaya, J. F. S., & Gonzalez, O. R. (2019). Introduction to the Special Issue: Challenges of LGBT research in the 21st century. *International Sociology*, 34(4), 371-381. DOI: [10.1177/0268580919856490](https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580919856490)
- Bailey, M. J., Vasey, P. L., Diamond, L. M., Breedlove, S. M., Vilian, E., & Eppecht, M. (2016). Sexual Orientation, Controversy, and Science. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 17(2), 45-101. DOI: [10.1177/1529100616637616](https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100616637616)
- Dasgupta, D. (2018). Gender Portrayal in Age of Social Networking Sites: An Analytical Discussion. *Amity Journal of Media & Communication Studies*, 8(1), 42-48. Retrieved from https://amity.edu/User_Files/ascj/journal/ISSUE66_5_Debastuti-AJMCS_Vol_8_No_1.pdf
- Gonta, G., Hansen, S., Fagin, C., & Fong, J. (2017). Changing Media and Changing Minds: Media Exposure and Viewer Attitudes Toward Homosexuality. *Pepperdine Journal of Communication Research*, 5(5), 22-34. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/pjcr/vol5/iss1/5>
- Molerio, C., & Pinto, N. (2015). Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Reviews of Concepts, controversies and their

- relation to psychopathology classification systems. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 1511-1156. DOI: [10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01511](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01511)
- Sanfiel, M. T. S., Villa, R. M. P., & Ibiti, A. (2014). The Role of Sexual Orientation and Gender in the Appreciation of Lesbian Narratives. InMedia: The French Journal of Media Studies, 5, 1-28. DOI: [10.4000/inmedia.775](https://doi.org/10.4000/inmedia.775)
- Sarikakis, K. (2013). Media and the Image of Women: Report of the 1st Conference of the Council of Europe Network of National Focal Points on Gender Equality. Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/1680590587>
- Sell, R. L. (1997). Defining and Measuring Sexual Orientation: A Review. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 26(6), 643-658. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024528427013>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2014). Media and Gender: A Scholarly Agenda for the Global Alliance on Media and Gender. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284722186_Media_and_Gender_A_Scholarly_Agenda_for_the_Global_Alliance_on_Media_and_Gender
- Amutha, D. (2017). The Roots of Gender Inequality in India. Available at SSRN: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2906950>
- Kachru, S. W. (2019). Gender inequality & workplace harassment of women in India. *Art Human Open Access Journal*, 3(6), 270-273. DOI: [10.15406/ahoaj.2019.03.00140](https://doi.org/10.15406/ahoaj.2019.03.00140)
- Pokharel, S. (2008). Gender Discrimination: Women Perspective. *Nepalese Journal of Development and Rural studies*, 5(2), 80-87. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/215457309_Gender_Disrimination_Women_Perspective
- Raju, E. (2014). Gender Discrimination in India. *IOSR Journal of Economics and Finance (IOSR-JEF)*, 2(5), 55-65. Retrieved from <http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jef/papers/vol2-issue5/H0255565.pdf>
- Sumanjeet, S. (2016). The State of Gender Inequality in India. *Gender Studies*, 15(1), 139-157. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315060336_The_State_of_Gender_Inequality_in_India
- Tiwari, M., Mathur, G., & Awasthi, S. (2018). Gender- Based discrimination Faced by Females at Workplace: A Perceptual study of Working Females. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Education*, 21(3), 1-7. Retrieved from <https://www.abacademies.org/articles/Gender-based-discrimination-faced-by-females-at-workplace-1528-2651-21-3-202.pdf>
- Fairclough, N. (2001). Critical Discourse Analysis. *International Advance Engineering and Technology*, 7, 452-487. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281506450_Critical_Discourse_Analysis
- Therese, O. & Cheng, X. (2012). *The representation of gender roles in the media - An analysis of gender discourse in sex and the City movies* (Bachelor's Thesis, University West, Trollhattan, Sweden). Retrieved from <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:533504/fulltext02>
- Batliwala, S., & Friedman, M. (2014). Achieving Transformative Feminist Leadership: a toolkit for organisations and Movements. CREA.
- Bhasin, K., & Khan, N. S. (2004). *Feminism and its relevance in South Asia*.
- Moi, T. (1999). *What is a Woman? And Other Essays*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press.
- Saxena, S. (2019, November 30). *7 reasons why Feminism is so crucial for a country like India. Youth Ki Awaaz*. <https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2019/11/are-you-a-feminist/>
- Zafar, M. (2016). Social reform in colonial Bengal: Revisiting Vidyasagar. *Philosophy and Progress*, 109-124. <https://doi.org/10.3329/pp.v55i1-2.26395>
- Lata, K. (n.d.). *Module 32: Gender, Image, representation* [Handout]. India: e-Pathshala. Retrieved from <http://epgp.in/libnet.ac.in/Home/ViewSubject?catid=24>
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2012) Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology*, Vol. 2: *Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 57-71). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
