



Research Article

DOI: 10.58966/JCM20232413

New Waves, New Women: A Content Analysis of Indian Web Series and their Impact on Gender Representations

Neha Sharma*, Neha Sarin

IIS (Deemed to be) University, Jaipur

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 18 November, 2023
Revised: 10 December, 2023
Accepted: 19 December, 2023
Published: 21 December, 2023

Keywords:

Indian web shows, basic habits, how women are portrayed, and social identity are all keywords.

ABSTRACT

People are interested in online streaming services, making the cash boxes ring like never before. TV content has stayed the same, but now they are changing things and making room for richer, higher-quality programming. TV shows with too much drama are being replaced by online streaming services that offer new, more relatable stories. These services bring new life to the entertainment business. Based on facts and numbers, the COVID-19 wiped out almost every industry. However, it did cause Over The Top (OTT) platforms to become famous and see a rise in payments. Because everyone was stuck inside their homes and could not find fun things to do, people turned to web shows to escape their boring lives. People also thought that the web series broke the mould for how women are portrayed and changed how women are portrayed in popular media. The researcher aimed to look into this new portrayal, and a poll was given to the audience. Researchers can use the poll results to determine why OTT platforms are so popular and how people feel about how women are portrayed in mainstream media, changing over time.

INTRODUCTION

Young people today have loved web shows that they can watch online on services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, and Hoi Choi for a long time. India's technological progress is also helping Indian movies proliferate. Indian movies and TV shows are quickly changing thanks to technology, especially the Internet and smartphones. The new ways that Indian viewers watch movies, documentaries, and other video shows are through social networking sites, new digital platforms, and Wi-Fi sticks. (Singh, 2018) The web series' material is more fun for young people to watch. The other pros are the natural material and the fact that you can watch at your own pace. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, these online video services have grown faster and sold more. Online streaming services are doing everything they can to get more users and doing a great job. This is especially true since movie theatres must stay closed because of lockdowns and social distancing. Digital fun is no longer

just a trend; it is what we will need in the future. The way women are portrayed in web shows has changed to fit the times, another significant trend. People think that the media has much power to create, spread, and remove different kinds of images or stereotypes of women. The web series challenges the stereotypical view of women often shown in popular media. They show women as real people, making their identities without needing men to help them. The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown have been a blessing in disguise for over-the-top (OTT) platforms in India (Bhattacharyya, 2020), including Netflix, Amazon Prime, ALT Balaji, Zee5, MX Player, and Hoichi, to name a few. They have made TV channels and movie theatres less critical as places to get entertainment. India's lockdown and stay-at-home rules have made people turn to online pleasure. It has sped up a trend since the biggest platforms spent billions to get people to watch movies online (The Hindu, 2020).

New media is making the world a different place and altering the way we live. The Internet is quickly changing

*Corresponding Author: Neha Sharma

Address: IIS (Deemed to be) University, Jaipur

Email ✉: nehakhandal32@gmail.com

Relevant conflicts of interest/financial disclosures: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

© 2023, Neha Sharma, This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

Indian movies (Singh, 2019). People mainly use Over The Top (OTT) apps for fun. The ability to move devices around is the second most important reason people use this service. The third is watching material whenever you want (Singh, 2019). In India, traffic coming from mobile devices has already topped traffic from desktop computers. Most people now use their phones to connect to the Internet. So, producers and directors knew it would take much work to get a theatre to show their movie for a long time, even after the lockdown. Before the lockdown, digital shows were familiar (Salih, 2020). However, since cinemas have been closed for more than four months, there has been a considerable change. Shortly, OTT platforms will rule the entertainment business, thanks to the growing number of movies available on these platforms (Salih, 2020). Several movies are almost finished, and many are already finished. Along with *Gulabo Sitabo*, *Dil Bechara*, and *Shakuntala Devi*, dozens of new Bollywood movies are set to go straight to OTT. The types of movies going this route range from scary comedies to historical war movies (Mitra, 2020).

The Bollywood movie *Gulabo Sitabo*, which stars Amitabh Bachchan, was meant to bring in millions of moviegoers. However, it opened on Amazon.com Inc.'s Prime streaming service instead because the coronavirus kept Indians home (The Hindu, 2020). Amazon Prime does not say how many people watch *Shakuntala Devi*, but it is thought to have 20 million paid users in India, and at least 20% of those people would watch the movie. That means at least 4-5 million people should watch this movie on Amazon Prime. If it were sold to Amazon Prime for 35 Crores, which would have been a profit of 10 Crores, the movie would have made 25 Crores (Bollywoodmoviesreviewz, 2020).

Review of literature

Web series do not have to follow strict time frames or deal with censorship problems (Nanda, 2018). They also have a way to keep viewers interested and coming back for more (Kumar, 2019). Outlook magazine calls it a "bracing antidote to repression" in one of its articles. Every main character in "Made in Heaven" is ready to break free from some guilt or shame ("Outlook, 2019). It exposes the shiny lies of big fat Indian weddings, according to Soumya Shrivastava, who calls it "the best desi original by Amazon Prime" (Shrivastava, 2019). He also says, "Unlike many other shows and movies being made today, *Made in Heaven* directly addresses and foregrounds current socio-political realities, especially those that do not normally fit into mainstream narratives" (Pathak, 2019).

India watches more videos in Hindi and other regional languages, which gives these streaming services a chance to make material for a specific group of people. People will be surprised by the language and content of shows streamed on OTT platforms. These shows are very different from what is currently shown on TV regarding

what is said and how it is presented (Pandit, 2020). The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's Indian Telecom Services Performance Indicators 2020 report says that 96.68% of all Internet users access the Internet through their phones. By September 2019, 3.24% of all Internet users will be connected to the Internet through wires.

A 2019 report from the McKinsey Global Institute called "Digital India: Technology to Transform a Connection Nation" says that by 2023, the number of smartphones will double, and the number of people using the Internet will rise by about 40%. It also says that India has more than 550 million internet users, making it the second-largest country in the world. This number could reach over 800 million by 2023 as high-speed Internet and smartphones become more common and cheaper. Indians used more than 54 times as much data in 2018 as they did in mid-2016. It is because of the government's Digital India Initiative and the attractive packages private telecom companies give internet users. According to the report, India is digitizing faster than all but one of the countries studied. That country was Indonesia. India is also the most digitally engaged country in the study regarding calling, tweeting, shopping, and streaming. Now that mobile phones can connect to the Internet on a large scale and cheaply, people in Internet "dark zones," especially those in semi-urban and rural areas, can receive content. The Indian OTT Platforms Report 2019 by Mudra Institute of Communication Ahmedabad and Communication Crafts says many of these users are the first to watch OTT material. Smartphones and the Internet are necessities and new ways to have fun, moving people from watching TV to watching videos on their phones. The new realistic innovation themes of the web shows get many viewers because they are aimed at young people. Companies are putting their money into this brand-new platform, and brands are changing their branding strategies to be able to fight in the digital world (Nanda, 2018).

How women are portrayed in web series.

Research shows that women are primarily respected in movies based on their roles as mothers, wives, or lovers (Lang, 2015). Bussey and Bandura (1999) say that women are shown to be needy, overly sensitive, and stuck in low-status jobs, while men are shown to be independent and driven. There has been a return to formulaic portrayals in modern prime-time stories, which some critics have called a "backlash." Independent women are shown to need to be controlled, and by the end of the story, they are back to being doormats or shadows. These stories praise the "traditional" Indian woman, whose duties are confined to the home, and her activities are centred on them (Sujata Moorti, 2007). "Strong women taking the lead and being honest about their flaws and wants is always a good thing, but it should not compromise the flow of the story." The show wants us to think that the characters are driven, but

they do not do much to support that. A story on News18.com says, “At some point, their stubbornness, badass personalities, and unwillingness to apologize start to seem forced and lacking in any real foundation.” News18: With the rise of streaming services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, and others, along with their own original material, web series are seen as a new way for women in India to tell their stories and show how their lives are (Wardhan, 2020). In contrast to the traditional sanskari characters of TV soap operas (Pandit, 2020), characters like Poroma Sarkar in Love Lust and Confusion and Megha in Lust Stories come across as strong women on film.

Many web shows that have become very famous have strong female characters who got great reviews for how they played those roles. Examples include Sacred Games, Mirzapur, Pitchers, Permanent Roommates, and Lust Stories. Even though these stories are primarily about the male leads, female leads like Kubra Sait, Radhika Apte, Shweta Tripathi, Riska Duggal, Maanvi Gagroo, and Nidhi Singh were able to make a name for themselves, creating a persona that is very different from the stereotypical role’s women play in TV shows. People think these figures are modern, forward-thinking, and easy to relate to (Wardhan, 2020). Tara from Made in Heaven shows everyone that a woman who wants a job can still be as girly as she wants while also chasing her dreams with all her might. One of the few positive portrayals of a trans woman in film is Cuckoo in Sacred Games. On the other hand, IPS Officer Vartika Chaturvedi in Delhi Crime showed us that women are strong, brave, good leaders who support each other (Wardhan, 2020). There is a vital lesson in TVF Pitchers because the main character, Shreya, puts her love for her career ahead of her relationship.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The paper aims to look at the web series critically to look at how women are portrayed and how these portrayals differ from how women are usually portrayed in popular media. This new representation, which is more accurate to life, gives the material new life. The other objective of the paper is to investigate how widespread the Indian web series is among young adults.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An online survey and a quantitative method were used to determine how popular the web series was in India. The poll was done using Google Forms, and the answers were looked at to find out why the Indian web series was so popular and how people felt about women’s new identities, as shown in the web series. Also, secondary sources were gathered to help with the paper’s research questions, which were to find out what effect the way women are portrayed in changing roles in Indian web shows are having on society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics

The age range of respondents who answered the online survey was 18 to 45, but most were between 18 and 25. It means that millennials answered the survey the most.

Genre of Web Series

Figure 1 shows the types of web series that individuals who watch most often choose. The Figure 1 shows that Action and Adventure (63.7%), Drama (58.4%), Comedy (72.6%), Romance (66.4%), and Crime (61.9%) are the most popular types of movies. They are also more likely to get good reviews. Many people who answered were also told they like family-friendly and thriller-type books. The survey results show that 20.2% want to watch horror or thriller-themed material. Also, 30.1% of those who answered liked watching stories about family life.

Popularity of OTT platforms

When asked which OTT platforms they use to watch material, 45.1% said they like Hoi Choi, 51.3% said they like Hotstar, and 53.1% said they like Amazon. 62.8% liked Netflix, 21.2% liked Voot, and 15.9% liked Zed 5 (Figure 2).

Only 9% of those who answered thought that the way women are portrayed in web series had changed. On the other hand, 91% said that the way women are portrayed in web series is changing, and this vast group of viewers is open to this because they think it will bring about a significant

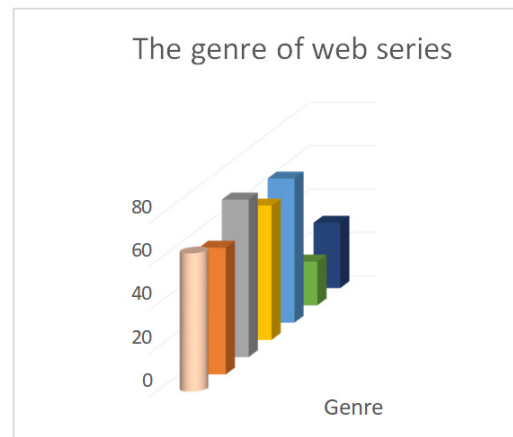


Figure 1: The genre which audiences prefer on OTT platforms.

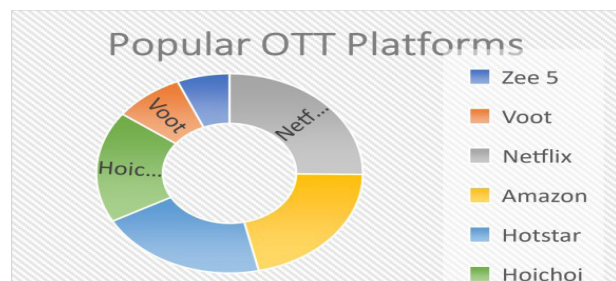


Figure 2: The most-used OTT services

shift in society's culture and way of thinking. Someone who answered whether there has been a significant change in how women are portrayed in Indian web shows said, "Yes, they are redefining what it means to be an Indian woman." A young media student said, "Women have always been the backbone of every country in the world; what they do for society is very positive." We have a wide range of audiences in India. Web series are famous among youngsters, and that is why uplifting the subject of women empowerment through different series helps to educate people about the safety of women and not discriminating against gender or caste. Women are equally capable or, in fact, more capable than men." Another respondent opined, "Yes, it has opened various chances to showcase and portray one's ability through the script." However, another confirmed the transformation by saying, "Yes, of course.

For example, take Delhi crimes or Jamtara". A teen criticizing the television serials discoursed, "Yes. Finally, Indian web shows are taking the portrayal of women out of the typical Saas-Bahu image. E.g., Kavya from Little Things, Meera-girl in the City, Damini, Siddhi, Anjana- Four More Shots Please, Chanchal- Tripling, and many More. The list is endless." While discussing the changing gender roles, the representation of the LGBTQ community cannot be ignored. A person raising this issue said, "Since the general content consumers are young adults and teenagers, exploring women's sexuality or sexuality of people, in general, is not considered as "risque" as it is for TV channels. The taboo nature of women's sexuality, including elements like LGBTQ, polyamory, and control, is well showcased by the web series".

The data was collected, and the web series that the respondents enjoyed mainly were Sacred Games, Byomkesh, Kota Factory, Little Things, Girl in the City, Mirzapur, Stories by Tagore, A Family Man, and Ghost Stories. These were the shows that were the most favourite among the respondents. However, some of them said about Kota Factory, Made in Heaven, Charitraheen, Permanent roommates, etc. Commenting on the choice of costumes and make-up of the female protagonists of the web series, a respondent said, "First of all, there has been a significant shift in the way that female protagonists have experimented with their looks. Less focus on skin colour/looks and more on the characters' personality and the elevated status of female protagonists in the storyline." A big admirer of web series thought that many web series focus on women's empowerment and women play the protagonist role, too. However, a millennial believed that web series creators should try making different content instead of sticking to the same old plot.

CONCLUSION

Cinema and web series are compelling mediums of communication. Researchers believe that communication

contributes to maintaining, modifying, and creating cultures. A society can advance only when it tries to break the age-old traditions and thinking, which often serve as a bottleneck and restrict the growth and advancement of the society. The changing portrayal of women in the web series also breaks the bias in gender roles, which are deeply rooted in the minds of the people. These are influential and transcendent and can positively develop people's behaviour and change their outlook.

REFERENCES

1. Bollywoodmoviesreviewz. (2020, July 31). Bollywoodmoviesreviewz.com. Retrieved September 15, 2020, from Shakuntali Devi budget and box office collection: <https://www.bollymoviereviewz.com/2020/07/hakuntala-devi-budget-box-office-collection-profit-loss.html>.
2. Bhattacharyya, M. (2020). Growth-of-OTT-in-India-The-Covid-Factor, E-CineIndia.
3. Kumar M, Dwivedi S. (2020). Impact of Coronavirus Imposed Lockdown on Indian Population and Habits, International Journal of Science and Healthcare Research.
4. Mitra, S. (2020, August 23). Streaming soon: After 'Dil Bechara' 'Shakuntala Devi', here are 18 Bollywood films set to release digitally. Retrieved September 25, 2020, from The New Indian Express: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/magazine/2020/aug/23/streaming-soon-after-dil-bechara-shakuntala-devi-here-are-18-Bollywood-films-set-to-release-digitally-2186174.html>
5. Mishra, D. (2015). Portrayal of women in media. Journal of Higher education and research society.
6. News18. (n.d.). Retrieved from newss18.com: <https://www.news18.com/news/movies/four-more-shots-please-review-a-mess-that-struggles-to-find-its-central-theme-2016789.html>.
7. Outlook. (2019, 03 08). Retrieved 02 06, 2020, from outlookindia.com: <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/entertainment-news-made-in-heaven-possibly-the-best-web-series-India-has-produced/326661>
8. Pandit, M. (2020). Beyond Television and Cinema: Audience Evolution In The Streaming Age.
9. Pathak, A. (2019, 03 12). Huffingtonpost. Retrieved 02 5, 2020, from https://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/made-in-heaven-review-Zoya-Akhtar-show-exposes-our-vulgar-obsession-with-social-perceptions_in_5c81327ae4b06ff26ba665a7.
10. Shrivastava, S. (2019, March 22). Retrieved 02 05, 2020, from Hindustantimes.com: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/tv/made-in-heaven-review-zoya-akhtar-does-it-again-gives-amazon-prime-its-best-desi-original-yet/story-YONq0QxcOSwHiLx7ftjB2J.html>.
11. Srivastav S. (2018) Metanarratives of Identity in Web-series: A Narrative Analysis of Netflix's Ghoul.
12. Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. Journal of Business Research. doi: doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039
13. The Hindu. (2020, July 22). Retrieved September 25, 2020, from Covid-19 impact: Netflix, Amazon winning the battle for Bollywood eyeballs: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/info-tech/covid-19-impact-netflix-amazon-winning-battle-for-bollywood-eyeballs/article32156541.ECE>
14. Tranfield, D., Denyer, D., & Smart, P. (2003). Towards a Methodology for Developing Evidence-Informed Management Knowledge using Systematic Review. British Journal of Management, Vol. 14. doi: doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039
15. Wardhan, P. (2020, July). Retrieved from Voice of Margins: <https://voiceofmargin.com/female-representation-in-Indian-web-series-myth-or-reality/>

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE: Sharma, N., Sarin, N. (2023). New Waves, New Women: A Content Analysis of Indian Web Series and their Impact on Gender Representations. *Journal of Communication and Management*, 2(4), 293-296. DOI: 10.58966/JCM20232413

