YOUTUBE CONTENT CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES: CASE STUDY ON INDIAN YOUTUBE VIDEOS

Samiksha Jain[1], Dr. Kamaljeet Kaur[2]
[1]Research Scholar, UIMS, Chandigarh University, Punjab, India
[2]Associate Professor, UIMS, Chandigarh University, Punjab, India

Abstract

Social Media, a part of Digital Media helps its users to communicate and interact with each other globally with the help of user-generated content across various platforms. YouTube is one such platform with millions of monthly active users in India in which more than 1200 creators is having more than 1 million Subscribers. In India, YouTube has emerged as platform of free speech & realistic notions wherein the two-way communication is possible unlike traditional forms of media. Stereotyping of Sex is extremely palpable in TV portrayal of male and female characters in their prearranged roles. Unendingly male personality qualities are highlighted on television. While, women in the planet of TV are portrayed as weaker sex as a maid disguised in the form of a wife, a mother etc. and presented as dutiful and gripped in common family care and responsibilities, on the other hand men are portrayed as office going and intelligent. With all these issues getting attention, more and more content is being shared on YouTube that can be accessed for Free of Cost, though the basic requirement is Internet and a Smartphone only. Web Series like Permanent Roommates talking about Live In Relationships, The Period Song for breaking Menstruation Myths, Honest Indian Weddings by AIB targeting is over Big Fat Indian Weddings, Unfair and Lovely Campaign is talking about the beauty of Dusky Complexion, Feminism is a Problem by Vitamin Stree is talking about the literal meaning of Feminism and many more are available on YouTube and has received a varied response from the viewer's end. Therefore, the paper explores to identify and analyze the content created by Indian YouTubers of YouTube in context of challenging Indian Stereotypes focusing on all genders of the society. Futuristic approach would be to understand the impact of these Indian YouTube videos challenging Indian Stereotypes irrespective of gender on the lives of People.

Introduction

Social Media is considered as an integral part of Digital Media which has completely changed an individual's life and has become a trendsetter in various aspects of shopping, interactivity, exchange of ideas & information, entertainment and many more. Some of the widely used social media platforms in India are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube & Instagram. According to Digital Report 2019 by Hootsuite, India has seen growth of 24 per cent in active usage of social media from January 2018 to January 2019 and YouTube is one of the (3rd) most website that is being search after Google with 1,354,100,000 monthly traffic. Moreover, YouTube ranks first amongst all the social networking sites that are being widely used in India ("Digital 2019 India (January 2019) v01", 2020). YouTube since its inception in 2005 has been a user generated platform with an idea of ability to upload videos and share it with a community (McFadden, McFadden, McFadden & Engineering, 2020). Therefore, it has emerged as a great platform for more relatable and realistic content that is being generated by the user itself, which allows the two-way communication between the content creators and content consumers unlike traditional forms of media.

Traditional forms of media have restricted the freedom of content consumers in terms of their opinion and qualitative feedback. Traditional forms of Media have always been subjected to some mainstream stereotypes, which were prevalent in the society and were running ever since. In a study of thirty TV Serials (broadcasted between 1990 to 2016) and fourteen new and old TV Advertisements, the analysis illustrate that mostly women are decked up in saris and are confined to household chores only whereas men are the earning member of the family promoting gender inequality (Jain, Ruby and Pareek Surbhi, 2018). "Kyuki Saas bhi kabhi Bahu thi" to "Ye Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai", all these daily soaps have been portraying gender inequality, idolized body and complexion, superstitions, women drowned up in heavy makeup and designer outfits, and various other norms which are no more relatable to the majority of the audience. Also, in various aspects women are depicted as sex objects which is another major concern (Singh & Sandhu, 2011). In India, talking about sexuality, live in relationships, defining gender roles, unfair skin complexion, menstruation is still considered as a taboo.

On the other hand, YouTube has become prominent source of entertainment and information consumption. It's audio visual elements are being used by 265 million monthly active users in India with more than 1200 Content Creators having more than 1 Million Subscribers (Laghate, G. 2019). Because of its ability of content generated by user-, it acts as a great place for freedom of speech & expression by creating a virtual relationship. Another great feature about YouTube is its feature of Like, Share, Comment, Subscribe, Notifications which not only notifies the content creator about the reactions of its audience but also gives the liberty to the viewer as well to interact, engage, view, collaborate or share their opinion about the kind of content they are currently watching and the kind of content they would like to watch (Gill, Arlitt, Li, Z. & Mahanti, A. 2007)

Series like Little Things which talks about Live In Relationships & Women

earning more than a man has received more than 16 Million Views, Series like AIB: Honest Indian Weddings talks about the dowry & lavish money that families spend in order to get their girl child married has received more than 15 Million Views, Series like TVF Pictures which talks about quitting 9 to 5 Corporate Job and taking risk in life by doing a startup has received a tremendous response from its audience.

Looking at the need of hour, YouTube has wide variety of content available on demand. From music to news, from series to movies, from educational to empowering content, most of it is available free of cost but the primary need is to have an internet connection over a desktop, laptop or a smartphone. With the advancement in technology, Media Convergence is another trend that has taken a place in our every day's life since its conception of Computer Screens in 1970s. It is also one of the major factors responsible for the more shifts that have been happening from traditional forms of media to smartphone for content consumption (Campbell, Martin & Fabos, 2012).

As a result, the audience became interested and even started loving those kind of content. Though there is not a very pellucid way where one can document the audience's reaction or feedback for traditional media, it is evident that a huge set of the masses drifted away from traditional media to new media which was as evident in the huge number of views received by the new media content.

YouTube content Challenging Indian Stereotypes

Little Things – Season 1

Little Things (Season 1) featuring Mithila Palkar & Dhruv Sehgal is an Indian Web Series by Pocket Aces' channel Dice Media which was released on YouTube in October 2016 with five episodes of 15 minutes each. Both as a couple are being shown playing the role of Dhruv Vats, an almost Mid 20s Men from Delhi settled in Mumbai and Kavya Kulkarni, an almost mid 20s Women working in corporate sector. Though Dhruv's profession is not clearly shown but somewhat related to mathematics and statistics and is willing to pursue his Doctoral Research Programme.

The non-dramatic and realistic love story revolves around every small but equally important moments and challenges faced by the couple on an everyday basis. It is a story of two individuals in a live-in relationship where Kavya is on a better pay scale than Dhruv. The story subtly traps the everyday routine of the couple from going to work, sharing responsibilities of household chores; binge watching movies to exploring food joints. Dialogue delivery is very much relatable and the language is Hinglish that is used on everyday basis. Overall, the story uses slight humor with relatable content with an idea of long-term relationship, love, loyalty and the small sacrifices that you make for each other.

AIB Honest Weddings Part 1 & Part 2

AIB abbreviation of All India Bakchod has made two videos in context of Big Fat

Indian Wedding featuring Gopal Dutt, Max Fernandes, Naveen Polishetty, Juby Devasia, Geetika Chumble, Vandana in May 2015. Titled as Honest Indian Weddings, the content is presented sarcastically showing what actually goes in the minds of India Families while arranging a match followed by challenging cultural norms of Hindu religion. Dialogue delivery also includes sarcasm and depiction of what goes in the minds of people while being in a particular situation.

Part 1 shows how Indian families meet and arrange a suitable match. It also shows as in how girls and their families in India sacrifices certain things in order to get the marriage fixed as a part of societal norm. Part 2 shows the actual series of events that takes place on a wedding day including the type of guest and their set of behavior, wedding gifts till the vidai part challenging the wedding customs that one goes through during Big Fat Indian Wedding. Both the parts show the real picture that goes behind the glitzy drama of Indian Wedding.

TVF Pitchers

The Viral Fever created the web series 'TVF Pitchers' which consists of five episodes started in June 2015. The story revolves around the four friends Naveen Kasturia named as Naveen Bansal, Jitendra Kumar named as Jitu Maheshwari. While Arunabh Kumar as Yogendra Kumar and Abhay Mahajan named as Saurabh Mandal. The crux of the story is Naveen initiates the idea of a start up while rest of his friends are trying to cope up with their regular corporate job In order to attain stability in career.

The whole story is build upon one question " Tu kya hai? (What are you?)" Questioning the life and career choices of a middle class man/ woman. The story free flows like a glass of beer where the four friends struggle with managing the funds for their startup idea. Encouraged by NASSCOMM product conclave, these friends decides to resign from their highly paid jobs and takes a risk which turns out to be fruitful for them. Dialogue delivery and content is very much relatable to the actual situations that take place in the life of a middle class man. Even after the roller coaster journey in case of managing funds, men in this scenario had lost all hope but females in their respective lives have played a major role by supporting them.

Unfair & Lovely feat. Khushbu Baid & Jizzy

Girliyapa created Unfair & Lovely in January 2019 featuring Khushbu Baid & Jizzy. The Webisode is presented in a satirical way talking about India's obsession with fair skin tone. The 5 Minute 32 Seconds video shows the mean jokes, societal pressure, low confidence and almost negligible self esteem that a woman goes through on an every day basis. The story is running quickly by making its audience familiar with the everyday issues that are being faced by women multiple times in a humorous way but with a powerful message that Skin color doesn't define an individual's beauty, talent and achievements. Dialogue delivery is majorly done as a voiceover as an act of how society reacts towards a dark skin girl. Using home made remedies to get fair flowing skin; not able to find a date for a party to unnecessary suggestions on every choice by the society is

being showcased in this Webisodes clearly showing the India's obsession with fair skin.

How to be a Perfect Bride

How to be a perfect bride is a webisode created by Girliyapa in February 2019 more like a follow-up story of Unfair & Lovely. The webisode talks about the pre conceived notions that an Indian society has for a woman to act like a perfect bride. The story starts with ignoring the achievements by a woman in her career, there are few aspects that an Indian woman needs to take care of in order to get married which includes clean social media, round chapatis, meeting endless men and the list goes on ensuing the demands of a traditional daughter in law to be met. Dialogue Delivery is majorly done with the help of voiceover, which clearly depicts about what is going in the mind of that woman. The content is very much relatable in current scenario and is presented in a humorous manner in almost 8 minutes.

The Barbie Effect - Dolls, Beauty Standards and Body Image Issues

Popular Webisode 'The Barbie Effect' is created by Vitamin Stree. The 2 minute 27 seconds video comes up with a powerful message of how setting unrealistic beauty standards and body image goals harms a woman's mental and physical health. The content is presented with the help of Barbie as props and images combined a video showcasing a powerful message. English language is being used to address the issue of unrealistic, Incorrect, Unhealthy and Unachievable goals of beauty and body image. The video tries to make people convince that the actual beauty lies in your achievements and a healthy body is beautiful irrespective of its size.

Review of Literature

From the literature in television media, Bharadwaj & Mehta (2017) talks about Indian TV Advertisements and how they are portraying gender specific roles. Only 2 per cent of the advertisements on television show women as an intelligent subject whereas for rest of them, their roles are depending upon the male chauvinism. The study also explains about the gender politics, which is always an issue for development. It suggests that television depiction plays a strong role in deciding the future course in terms of shaping gender perceptions and gender behavior.

Kaul, S., & Sahni, S. (2010) examines that in TV, male character qualities are being highlighted and female are confined to the planet of TV playing the character of powerless homemaker helper as a spouse or a nurse etc. with its pre conceived beauty and body shaming standards.

Schroeder & Zwick (2004) states that 'Despite Social activism undertaken to destroy rigid gender roles, queering, and gender neutrality, sexual characteristics are considered as a primary social, and cultural group.' According to them, Stereotype is meant to describe the unique qualities of masculine or feminine sex.

In a research by Sandhu (2018) explains that earlier in 2012 women were shown in reliant roles where their individuality was described as per their association with males. People used to desire to perceive females in sexy role. However, the scenario is slowly changing and the preference of women roles is changing with time. People prefer to watch independent women but the biggest limitation still stays with the concept of joint and extended families, which makes the depiction of empowered women role embarrassing when viewed with elders and children.

According to McFadden, C. & Engineering, I. (2020), the word "You" in YouTube represents that the content is generated by its users and to be uploaded on the site itself and "Tube" is a term referring to the age old term used for television.
Lindner (2004) provides a gap in research, which tries to address in Indian context , that there exists a change wave that is taking place due to the advent of westernization. On an everyday basis, women have started working and the number is increasing which is resulting in change of social scenario. Though the traditional patriarchy still exist which may be problematic but both the aspects can counter with each other.

Margaret Holland (2016) states that YouTube's development has transformed the entire scenario. The study examines that YouTubers have created their own successful brand and they have their own sort of influence, branding and appeal towards its audience. The study also reveals that the younger audience prefers to watch content online as they find it more relatable.

Haridakis & Hanson (2009) is of the view that two different type of the activities of user that take place on the YouTube is Sharing of Content and Consumption of Content . Along with, Convenience based entertainment, information seeking, co-viewing pattern and with a motive of social interaction are a part of Content Seeing. Seeking experience is suspected to be a futuristic step at this hour.

Burgess and Green (2009) elaborated in the scholarly work, YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture, "YouTube was meant to eradicate the technical limitations of the extensive sharing of videos online. YouTube offered an easy and user friendly platform where users can upload, publish, and view streaming videos without any technical knowledge". YouTube was not comparable to other video-start ups after Google acquired the site for $1.65 billion in October 2006 (Burgess & Green, 2009)

Therefore, enormous researches have been already done over the gender portrayal, Indian stereotypes and traditional media. A lot of work has already been done over the digital media and

how is it growing tremendously in past few years and its usage. This study focuses on the presentation of content on YouTube that are challenging Indian Stereotypes.

● , C., & Engineering, I. (2020). A Brief History of the Internet Giant YouTube. Retrieved 3 February 2020, from https://interestingengineering.com/youtube-its-history-and-impact-on-the-internet

- M.L. Khan, "Social Media Engagement: What motivates user participation and consumption on YouTube?", Computers in human behavior, vol.66, pp.236-247,2017

Möller, A., Kühne, R., Baumgartner, SResearch Methodology

The study focuses on understanding the type of content that YouTube user in India produce and the way it is being presented adhering to the content challenging Indian Stereotypes. Indian Stereotypes would include Live in Relationship, Gender Specific Roles, Marital Rapes, Feminism, Portrayal of Different Genders, racism against caste & color, Gender Behavior, Sexuality and many more**.**

Selection of Series

Three complete Web Series and three Webisodes are being selected based upon the different stereotypes they are talking about. The authors have used qualitative analysis by performing content analysis of all the selected web series along with Webisodes based on different parameters. These Webisodes are being selected on the basis of Concept, Popularity & Search Engine Optimization.

Procedure

The scholars analyzed the Web content based upon certain parameters. Based on the parameters, web content is being broadly analyzed and is presented. The parameters includes –

- Narrative Analysis
- Contextual Analysis
- Semiotic Analysis
- Mise-en-scene Analysis

Based on Narrative Analysis, web content is being analyzed on the plot structure & overall theme whereas in Semiotic analysis, Web content is being analyzed on the basis of various metaphors, symbols and signs that are being presented by the producer. Contextual Analysis includes the time of its release and in case if it is targeting any particular socio-cultural norm of the society. Lastly, Web content is being analyzed on the arrangement of its overall elements.

Findings

The rise of Digital Media has drastically changed the way information is being consumed and delivered. With its ease in accessibility and availability, the method and concept of content creation has been enhanced. On the one side, one talks about the user generated content and on the other side it gives an additional benefit of engagement and choice of content availability on demand. Traditional Media have been into the scenario from a long run and the timely content delivery is done in a formal way in comparison to Digital Media.

YouTube has emerged as a great platform for audio-visual content, which is available, free of cost with a wide variety of content depending upon an individual's requirement and mood. Khan (2017) identified 2 uses of YouTube. The first one is dynamic Participation of the user and the other is inactive Consumption. Dynamic Participation deals with the engagement in webisode in the appearance of comments and dislikes to share their opinions. Passive Consumption would relate to their experience post consumption of the content.

Therefore, the content that is being created by its users and consumed by its audience only where interactivity plays a major role. The content on YouTube is more realistic and relatable. YouTube is the third largest social media platform that is being used globally (M.L. Khan, 2017). Issue like body shaming, LGBT Community, Gender specific roles, Feminism, Sex Education and many more which are being considered problematic as well as taboo in the society are being discussed and presented on YouTube to create awareness. This could be in the form of Series or multiple Webisodes. Series like Little Things talks about Live in Relationship and a woman earning more than man where as AIB Honest Indian Weddings talks about the judgmental societal norms and the pressure that a family goes through in order to get their daughter married. TVF Pitchers shows the reality of what middle class people goes through to start a business of their own where everyone demotivates them and some Webisodes show the real picture of Indian Society in terms of their obsession with fair skin women, body shaming, judgmental attitude of Indian Society.

On the contrary, most of the content on traditional media including television shows the biased content in terms of objectifying women and supporting patriarchy system of the society. Serials like Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata hai, Naagin, Saath Nibhana Sathiya and many more are producing unrealistic content on an everyday basis and idolizing society in a traditional manner which is not only depicting a blurry image but also acting as a barrier in changing the mindsets of people resulting into supporting of various stereotypes that prevails in Indian society.

On one side, Videos on YouTube that are challenging Indian Stereotypes have received a huge response on YouTube with their views reaching in millions but on the other side the question is, the society really changing?

According to Möller, Kühne, Baumgartner & Peter (2018), The distinctiveness of media material could persuade the quantity and the flow of social messages. When audience responds to such content, they also refer in context of the content that was previously available.

Limitations of the Study

There are certain limitations based on this research. First and the foremost is the Technology Acceptance. With the advancement in technology, elder people are slightly reluctant in the adaptation of the smartphones. This was one of the major concern found out by the research scholars after conversation with few elder people that they are not very much technology friendly and search ability becomes difficult.

Secondary is the language barrier. Most of the content is available either in English or Hindi. Non- availability of quality content either in completely hindi or regional language is making it difficult for some people to understand the entire concept and the story line.

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