Revisiting Television in Pakistan: A Case Study of Women Representation in Pakistani Television Drama "Zindagi Gulzar Hai

*Sohail Riaz, **Moneeba Iftikhar, ***Shahbaz Aslam

Abstract

Electronic media has a substantial role in influencing the perceptions of the individuals in society about the women's role and place through the representation it gives. It creates the content to depict the status of women in social setup and their role in contributing the "social capital". The most dominant role of women in media, specifically with reference to Pakistan, is that they are "passive, weak, dependent and oppressed" population of society. This study is intended to find how Television Serials of Pakistan configure the image of women. The pattern of the representation of women has been studied through analysis of the Drama Serial "Zindagi Gulzar Hai (2012)". The data was collected through interviews with the play writers and professionals from the entertainment media industry of Pakistan. The responses confirmed the stereotypical representation of women in Pakistani media where females are depicted as a homemaker, assistant to professionals and officers and labour rather than authoritative characters like doctors, officers, army, sportswomen and businesswomen that are also the realistic image of women in society. The study investigated the point of views of the media professionals, Pakistani drama creators and agencies who are involved in the cultural production by media.

Keywords

Women, Gender Roles, Dramas, Media Representation

Introduction:

The meanings of the term sex are associated with the biological nature of the beings that are predefined by nature whereas gender is the term that is described with special reference to the shared societal norms, values and culture (Basow, 1992). The gender has been classified into two categories i.e. male and female and the two are fairly apart in terms of their particulars and roles but somehow the characteristics overlap (Bem, 1993). When a particular group of people is associated with some set of specific professed characteristics, it is termed as a stereotype (Hibbard and Buhrmester, 1998; Schneider, 2004). The "stereotypical" views, ideas and activities directed to a particular group of people are initiated from the information by the secondary sources such as relations and family members, instructors, opinion leaders, religious and ideological leaders, and media professionals (Macrae, Stangor and Hewstone, 1996; Hibbard and Buhrmester, 1998). Among all the sources of establishing gender stereotypical ideas; media is the most influential and prevalent of all. The depiction of both genders' characters, male and female, is stereotypical in media that is usually negative (Basow, 1992). The traditional values and norms of Pakistani society declare femininity as obedience, passivity, sub-ordinance, managing households and children and being dependent. On the other side, masculinity is about being stung, authoritative, forceful, competent and successful. Television has given women such roles that established their identity as submissive, feeble, helpless and worried that is vital for determining the role of women in society. Zubair (2016) witnessed a significant change in the representation of women in Pakistani media that is a contrast of the traditional picture of the women in society.

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*Assistant Professor, COMSATS University, Lahore Campus
**Lecturer in Dept. of Mass Communication, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore
***COMSAT, Lahore Campus

The observed picture in media is related to the reconstruction and repositioning of the identity of women giving them empowerment financially and socially.

The study is intended at finding the framing of women identity in Pakistani TV dramas taking the case study of "*Zindagi Gulzar Hai*", a Hum TV drama. "*Zindagi Gulzar Hai*" was one of the best TV serials of the Pakistani TV channel HUM TV. It was based on the story of a girl from a middle-class family, named Kashaf, who later became a CSP officer (Mishra, 2014). The main lead girl of the story "*Zindagi Gulzar Hai*" (life is prolific) is not much pretty apparently but strong, intelligent, independent, has very low interest in males and high in self-respect. These qualities make her attractive and appeal others. This story tries to disrupt the conventional picture of women and presents some different elements like the struggle of a lady for honour, distinction and independence in her life for her decisions.

Philosophical Assumptions

Ontological stance

The Ontological standpoint claims that there is no singularity in defining the "reality" as there is nothing ultimate but there are many stances to understand the reality. There is diversity in the nature of human being and also their understanding about the society and the world. Individuals recognize the realities in diverse ways and hence the reality is different for each person. This study seeks to find and describe the portrayal of women in a specific ontological frame in the television medium. The research also explains the shift in the appearance of an ideal female that has converted from beautiful to bold with special reference to the setting of selected drama for analysis.

Epistemological Stance

The study is about the social construction of women identity that can be described in the social perspective that a particular phenomenon is set in native, conditional and societal terms (Bryman, 2008).

Literature Review

Characteristics of Female Representation in Drama/Film

People learn and make sense about their self and surroundings through the media images and cultural productions. This is done through the system of symbols that individuals create for the understanding of self. This cultural process of representation is for giving the meanings to the individual identities and also collective (ibid: 14). The depiction goes through the diction and the connotation that are the important elements of the process of production of ideas and exchanging them among the members of the society (Hall, 1997). The two methods of cultural production contain; the first "system of concepts" or intellectual images that are derived from the concepts and pictures developed in the mind and the other is "representation of the world" in the terms of meanings (Hall, 1997).

Woodward (1997) explained "representation" an "identity" as the major notions that help in understating the social matters and their relationships in a community between the individuals of society, their gender, class and sexuality. Stuart Hall considers media as the strongest ideological instrument to establish the meanings (Griffin, 2004, p. 361). Conferring to Ingham (2007) women are more engrossed in domestic roles in television dramas. A girl's life revolves around the marriage that is the major constituent of the drama plot as the journey of every single girl towards married life. The image of the

women depends on the way the character is presented (Lizarraga, 2005: 1). The gender stereotypical are created and strengthened by media that is the most persistent source of it with generally the negative depiction of both gender (Basow, 1992, p. 157).

Under-Representation of Women

According to Basow (1992), there are more men than women in the prime-time television program and also in kids TV programmes, and newscasts where only 16% newscasters are female and the stores are 10 times more about men. Trowler (1988) narrated that portrayal of women is more about family management and their role at home rather than the assorted contribution by advertisements where the advertisements with a female model were 75% about "bathroom and kitchen" and 56% about domestic works ("Study Reports Sex Bias," 1989). TV commercials hold the glamour for women rather than the traditional roles, representing women as a sex object. (Iftikhar, 2016)

Weak Women Means Weak Social, Cultural and Symbolic Capital

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) defined capital as "set of actually usable resources and powers" that is used to achieve the individuals' aims. It has an important role in gender discrimination where women are shown less economically powerful than men having less capital. Female journalists are considered more social and economically weak than male (Vu, Lee, Duong, & Barnett, 2017). The approach of discriminating women and men over capital has a direct impact on the nation as the nations who empower their genders are more progressive in comparison to those who discriminate.

Beauty or Character of Women in Pakistani Perspective

The media products are dominant with the themes of women as beautiful. The content has created an ideal image about beauty in the minds through the mainstream media advertising, movies and programs (Frith, Shaw & Cheng, 2006). The young generation gets the constant messages containing such images that cultivate their thoughts and influence them to accept the ideal and modern standards of beauty only (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008). Ideal representation in media even causes dissatisfaction among their women about their bodies (Mulgrew & Tiggemann, 2018).

Objectives

- To understand the meanings of women empowerment and its depiction in media
- To find the past, present and upcoming settings of media products for the representation of gender
- To explore the role of media in helping women taking non-traditional roles
- To investigate the pattern of the women representation in media and its impact on the society especially male for the perception of the role of women
- To identify any shift in the perceptions and preferences of men towards women as a life partner (from charming girl to average looking intelligent lady)

Theoretical Framework

Gerbner's Cultivation Theory

This is one of the media effect theories that propose that television holds the power to shape the thoughts of the viewers with the moulding of reality and images. It is the medium that can shape the perceptions and tell the people what and how to think about. The effect occurs after constant viewership

over a period of time and a time comes when the thoughts become accepted ideas among all those heavy viewers of television that is called the mainstreaming effect. The cultivation of thoughts generates an acceptable culture in society that according to Gerber; "the mass media cultivate attitudes and values which are already present in a culture: the media maintain and propagate these values amongst members of a culture, thus binding it together". This theory is about the media as a powerful agent to make the TV viewers believe in the created reality as they watch it on the television. It is relevant to the study as the researchers seek to find as the dramas also have some influence on the audience to believe in values and roles they depict.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory presented by Albert Bandura is also called observational learning and it is about behaviourism. It describes that "Future behaviours are then based on these observations as we learn from vicarious reinforcement and punishment" (Johnson, Sakamoto, & Director 2017). This theory is helpful to support the study as viewers gain understanding and knowledge about the women roles through the characters.

The Relevance of Theory to find the Objectives of the Study

There are significant researches around the world that have witnessed the shift to the construction and dissemination of a positive image of the women through media but the subject is yet to the discovered with respect to Pakistan. Consequently, the research has a focus on the viewership of the TV dramas, high or low, to understand the influence of the content and the messages on the perceptions of the audience. This study has an objective as "to understand the power of media in facilitating women's acceptance in leading roles in social fabric" to explore the extent of the effect of drama "*Zindagi Gulzar Hai*".

The study is driven to examine the shift in the representation of women that were beauty item before. The media is the agent of creating social reality and also transforming it. The theoretical framework of the study with the support of cultivation hypothesis and social learning the study holds the cultural and social context to find the influence of the messages on the audience's behaviour with the aim "to explore the concept of women empowerment and its reinforcement through women's media representation".

The basic aim of the study is to investigate how the females are being portrayed in media and what is the impact of those images on the perceptions of the audience.

Methodology and Approach

The researcher selected explanatory approach understanding the methodological perspective of the study to achieve the objective of finding the representation of women in Pakistan TV dramas and its influence on the perceptions of viewers about the identity of women. The qualitative design of the study was selected to analyse the historical perspective, cultural view and social consecution of women. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants with an objective to get an in-depth and detailed narrative over the subject.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with the personalities from media on the framing of the women identified in the Pakistani cultural production and its influence on the general viewers and particularly on the bachelor successful male members of the society who are the decision makers for the family as a balanced institution. The selected sample was based on the purposive technique and the

sample was sub-divided into three groups to get the insights of the subject. The first category of the sample is based on "unmarried successful professionals", the second category includes individuals from media and the third category includes people from entertainment media.

The questions were based on the facts related to the historical representation of women in media, the trends and impact on the society. The interviews were mainly conducted in the native language Urdu and also a few respondents were comfortable with the English language. Later the interviews were transcribed to present the findings. Both male and female were the participants from the total 8 interviews.

Findings and Analysis

The data was analysed through a systematic process divided into four phases. The first phase was about outlining a matrix in Microsoft Excel with rows expressing "cases" and columns expressing "key themes emerged". The second phase was summarisation of data in each cell and sub-categorization of data where a new theme emerge, so the new sub-columns were generated. The third phase was the plotting and explanation process of the data where related cases were merged together to compare the sub-themes on the basis of relevance and similarities can be identified in the answers. The fourth and the last phase was concluding the results in "narrative form" in the form of quotations from the words of the respondents directly to present the argument. The four phases were repeated till the researcher reach the conclusions extracted from the data. Pennames were given to the participants while presenting the results to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

Demographic Profile

	Experience in years with media	Age	Marital status	Gender	Viewership in hours	Preference to TV channel for watching drama	Favorite Themes
Respondent 1	7	29	Single	Male	10 hours	Hum TV	Social problems
Respondent 2	6	27	Single	Male	14 hours	HUM/GEO	Social Issues/Romance
Respondent 3	12	33	Married	Female	16 hours	HUM	Social Issues/Soap Opera
Respondent 4	9	35	Married	Female	8 hours	HUM/GEO	Social Issues
Respondent 5	8	29	Single	Male	14 Hours	HUM/GEO	Social Issues/Soap Opera

Respondent 6	8	34	Single	Male	12 Hours	HUM	Social Issues
Respondent 7	10	38	Married	Male	18 hours	HUM/GEO/ARY	Social Issues
Respondent 8	34	63	Married	Male	24 Hours	HUM/GEO	Social Issues/ Love Triangle

The demographic analysis of the respondents has been found that the participants of the study were all "reliable" and representative to provide the relevant information over the subjects and the probability is high. All of them have a background from the media industry to have their understanding of the women's role creation. They have a thorough analysis of the women identity in media as per their experience. As evident from the demographic profile of the participants they have spent at-least 6 years in media.

The participants of the study are strongly influenced by the TV dramas either directly or indirectly for shaping their opinions about the roles and identity of women so their responses are significant to extract useful knowledge. Their feedback has vital contribution in the existing knowledge about women identity in Pakistan. Most of them are interested in dramas based on social issues and their priority is Hum TV channel for drama watching. All of them have watched "*Zindagi Gulzar Hai*" the serial under study.

Watching Habits

Mr. Sohaib shared his views that:

"As I'm mostly busy with my job, but the drama's in which I am interested or which is being so popular somehow I manage to watch them in repeat or in any way I keep myself updated with the story". (Respondent1)

The first respondent acknowledged that in the busy routines the audience chooses the other sources and ways to reach the popular dramas. Mr. Osama also strengthens this response:

"If you talk about dramas I can't watch any drama regularly but I bring DVD's and watch some of them" (Respondent2)

The routines are busier for female and their representative, one of the participants, Miss Noren said:

"Actually it depends on my routine if I'm too busy I stick to 2 or 3 drama but it depends which is the most important for me is the script and the casts too, if that is good or the writer is goo I'll go for it, And I even go on the internet and watch it if I don't have time to watch on television, well I like Umaira Ahmed's writing so I like to watch her dramas." (Respondent4)

In the light of the replies by the individuals, it is concluded that the dramas that become popular among the public are one way or other watched by all the viewers at their convenience. They may go for

multiple sources like online watching at YouTube, DVD or other. It depicts a shift from the reliance on "conventional media" to the use of accessible contemporary mediums for their ease.

Media and Gender Perspective

Mr. Sohaib explained the relationship of media and gender in such a way:

"I think our media is portraying women very stereotypically, and if a women have been very successful the media shows her as if she has used wrong or illegal way for this or maybe she got this success just for the revenge whatever but character of women is still not shown positively by our media but eventually it is vanishing and now women are given leading characters in the dramas." (Respondent1)

The established pattern of the female as gender in media has been described by Miss Maham:

"Media should also realize it and show something besides these issues like love romance and friendship, marriages; media should show that there is big outer world for you that this is not the life but a part of our life. The roles of women are very confined, like if you have portrayed her positive she is shown as if she is too innocent that she is depending on others and she can't do anything and if she is portrayed as empowered she is shown as if she is the ultimate one she don't need to listen to anyone, she can take decisions herself." (Respondent4)

The comparison of international and national media of Pakistan with respect to gender; Mr. Ali said:

"America has made its image through movies they also show their culture as we do, I think this is the major tool through which you can bring change in our society" (Respondent5)

Mr. Ahmad Hammad further added to the argument:

"There was a time in 2001 when you couldn't differentiate between the Indian and Pakistani dramas as their omen get up late night at 2 with all that makeup and Jewellery even our dramas got exposure in Pedller theater of Iran the production lightning post production everything was appreciated, but from last 5 to 6 years the practice of revival of our dramas is being practiced by using those same techniques of 80's but not contents which were so mature" (Respondent7)

The findings on the subject of relationship of media and gender has found interesting facts as the participants supported that Pakistani entertainment industry has established men as "dominant" in society while women as fragile, helpless and troubled. If a girl is supported to get education that is to get a better match for her as life partner but not to get a role in society. The other major role of women as gender in media is being commodity in the advertisements where she is a "sex symbol", an attractive element and eye candy for the pleasure of men.

Pakistan dramas, movies and advertising industry has made the image of the women as dependent and want support. The shift in the cultural, social and religious context has only been observed in the interaction. The recent content has shown men are free to touch women like it was before in the Indian cultural products. This is the new practice in the Pakistani television programs that was not visible in the last decade. It has excluded the component of "family entertainment" due to the open interactions physically that is not yet acceptable in the society. This outcome drives the attention of the sensor board towards the issue to intervene and approve the content that is coherent with the social values.

Women Representation in Corporate Media

Mr. Osama raises his points:

"Are Indian media representing their real culture? That's same what exists here things have not so bad here as well but yeah may be there is a class which is involved in it but mostly things are not like as they are being represented amongst us!" (Respondent2)

Miss Noren opens up with her views about representation of women:

"I think it is the most difficult question! Mostly they are portrayed more towards glamour and the element of negativity still exists like women are being portrayed as evil mother in law, prostitute, starring up a controversy in household, cunning housewife who is always creating problems in house as compared to positive image of a woman." (Respondent3)

The critical and realistic view comes from Mr. Amir about women image in media in words:

"Women is an object of bad entertainment and a thing to use." (Respondent6)

An interesting information has been gathered by one of the respondents about the clothing of women that "foreign funding" has a role in the portrayal of women in fewer clothes in Indian movies and dramas. Civil society from India is active to raise voice against the demonstration of "foreign culture" rather than local that is even not coherent with their social values, morals and ethics. A common Indian woman in simple dress is far different from that in the drama. "Corporate media" is supported by the conglomerates and corporations of the world who instil their culture to the underdeveloped, third world areas (Lakshmi & Ravi 2018).

Media Representation Role in Women Empowerment

Miss Noren shares her views about women empowerment through media with special reference to the drama under study:

"I think "Zindagi Gulzaar Hai" is a very good effort for showing the struggle of women and concept of women empowerment. These kind of dramas can have a positive impact on our society, it would defiantly change the stereotypical thinking about women, and change the perceptions of people towards choosing intelligence over physical appearance and is very helpful for feminist movement also." (Respondent3)

Mr. Sohaib gives opinion as:

"Such representation of women in media is creating space. Previously women were not allowed to go out for studies but i guess only the elite class was in favour to send their daughters abroad for studies but now through media our society has changed now they think women education is much important as she can also get a good place in society through education." (Respondent1)

Media representation of women is the main contributor of the women identity in society as well as women empowerment in civilisation. Mass media has a significant part in making women active participant in society and earn her a reputable position rather than depicting her as a satisfactory element for male. The characters of female in TV dramas can create a big difference.

Female Portrayal in Media and Role of Producer

Miss Noren shares:

"I have an interesting quote to share "art may imitate life but life imitates TV" that means whatever someone watches on TV they imitate." (Respondent3)

When the TV viewers relate with the characters in dramas they start imaging them in the place of that character, as uses and gratification theory of media describes. Similarly, when housewives see a drama character like her she will relate and act like her. This argument was strengthened by Miss Maham:

"I think media is playing its role in changing like if I see in my family, people refer that yea this is reality which was also shown on media in that drama, so this issue is somewhere in subconscious of people. Our society and when they are on your media it becomes more authentic and people say yes this is our society!" (Respondent4)

In the creation of the content; writer, producers and directors are the key persons. They are required to embrace a balanced attitude towards gender assuming both positive and negative traits. The cultivation hypothesis of media studies approves that media has the power to cultivate the thoughts through the creation of reality so the audience perceive beauty, characters and traits largely as shown in media. The economic interests of the writers and producers have taken the content towards "commercialization" and the reality has taken a glamourized form.

Influence of Media on Men's Preference for Life Partner

"Sketch of life partner is that she should not be very pretty but should have a beautiful soul and should work with me." (Respondent1)

"I think people are not going for the conventional ways which were few years ago which were pretty face to marry but there is an awakening among people. They now think to marry a partner who is educated and has a strong character and is not a door mat as I said that a lot depends on your upbringing and social conditions as well and yes your economic background also have influence in decision making." (Respondent3)

"Yes absolutely media has a strong impact on the way people think and perceive things, and their perception about women comes from the images that are projected in media, if we show strong female characters then off course they think this is better than just a pretty face." (Respondent3)

"Unmarried youngster! Yes obviously I'm really conscious about my life too I also need a companion too but what matter is character like you can talk to everyone but you need time understand them and these drama let us understand those characters. We are too busy in our work that we don't have time to think over it but we need a support to create our ideal and I think these dramas help us in it." (Respondent5)

"Yes there is a change in current Pakistani dramas in the representation of women. Like in "zindagi gulzaar hai" the girl was portrayed as a hard working which shows that women are playing equal role." (Respondent2)

"If we talk about "Zindagi Gulzar Hai" Kashaf's character is very strong and also her mother's. Samina perzada (as mother of the main lead girl) is also very strong woman. She is separated from her husband but still working hard for her daughters instead of complaining and crying. She stood up and went out for job only for her daughters so I think these kinds of dramas present strong side of women." (Respondent3)

Boys are much advanced in making decision about their life-partner at younger age and prefer beautiful and modern girl to be in relationship with from their fellows, relatives and colleagues. They have serious concerns about their life partner giving considerations to their family, academic career, professional approach, wealth, loving and gentle, obedience along with good looks. Beautiful appearance attracts temporarily but the other parameters are traditional and necessary for men. Media is powerful to set those parameters for selecting life-partner. The content of the programs direct the audience to accept the parameters. In the case of "*Zindagi Gulzar hai"* the society has given a different scale to analyse the girl from glamour to realistic; beautiful to intelligent and from oppressed to independent.

Discussion

The representation of gender in media has been distorted as there is difference between the actual proportions and that being shown in media. The exaggeration or underrepresentation set the value of the gender (Kumari, & Joshi, 2015). Gallagher (1995) described that media generated image of the women that does not let her become equal to men is one among the ten major hindrance in the empowerment of women.

Media is powerful to create the realities for the society regarding women identity. The construction of Identities of women through TV commercials shape the audience's attitude and values towards women and their roles (Iftikhar & Islam, 2017). It arguments that women can get a leading role and respect in under-developed society breaking the stereotypes in the minds of people through the positive use of media. The male dominant mind-sets have ruled over the media and maintained the chauvinist approach. In Pakistan, modernization is mixed with Westernization and thus shaped a negative view that modern women are westernized so one should not accept the advancement.

The commercialization and economic interests of the media professionals have influenced the writings to produce the content that sells. The common issues are family clashes, love triangles and oppressiveness of women as weak segment of the society. The writers cannot write about the issues and hence do not highlight the revolutionary stories as that is not the interest of the corporate sector. Producers also do not want to invest in the stories based on the different themes as the sponsors won't accept that. They all have to go with the trend, glamour and entertainment.

The propagation of glamour spread negative of women that has serious consequences on the representation and identity. The girls residing securely and carefully at the hostels are never acknowledged in media but the one raped will be given high coverage. Such kind of representations are major hurdle in the women empowerment and positive image. It keeps fear and concerns alive for her.

Conclusion

Drama delivers different guidelines to believe and discrete drifts to follow consequences. Therefore, it can be determined that TV dramas effect the general construction pattern for viewers (Zia, Iftikhar & Raza 2017). The study of the framing of women identity and representation in media has found interesting facts that are important to add important information in the existing knowledge about the women image portrayed by Pakistani entertainment media. Female representation in media is still stereotypical as the review of existing literature shows, and women are shown as passive, weak and reliant on the other gender. It is opposite than the realist identity of women of Pakistan, today, she is an active participant in every walk of life, working equally to men. She is being the representative in all the professions, politics, public and private sectors of society. She has become an officer, gained positions in

armed forces, become successful sportswomen, sits in assembly and reached to other reputable positions that are seldom highlighted in dramas as leading roles.

The study has found after the analysis that men prefer their life-partner in the influence of media. The choices are driven and governed by the cultural products of media. Gender representation in media plays a major role in forming the view of the people towards a certain group or type of people (Jackson, 2018). There was no shift observed that was initiated by media to change the perceptions towards female and preferences for life-partner other than the beauty element. Male like to have a loyal, caring and intelligent girl as a wife rather than only a beautiful lady.

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