

GENDER STEREOTYPES IN POPULAR HINDI COMEDY SHOWS: A SERIOUS CONCERN OR JUST A JOKE?

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Abstract

This study delves into the pervasive presence of gender stereotypes in Indian media, focusing on popular television serials like 'Taarak Mehta Ka Oolta Chashmah' and 'The Kapil Sharma Show.' Gender stereotypes, deeply ingrained in cultural beliefs, influence societal expectations and behaviours. These stereotypes, reflected in traditional gender roles, reinforce inequality and contribute to discrimination. The sitcoms, while entertaining, exhibit instances of reinforcing regional and gender stereotypes, drawing criticism for lacking diversity and perpetuating harmful norms. 'Taarak Mehta Ka Oolta Chashmah' faces scrutiny for portraying traditional gender roles, authority figures, and instances of body shaming. Similarly, 'The Kapil Sharma Show' is criticized for humour relying on stereotypes and degrading females. Critics argue that such portrayals may contribute to a culture that objectifies and disrespects women. The study aims to explore people's perceptions of the seriousness of these stereotypes and their impact on behaviour.

Keywords

Gender stereotypes, Indian media, Television serials, Cultural norms, Societal perceptions

Introduction

Gender stereotyping refers to the widely held and oversimplified beliefs or expectations about the characteristics, roles, and behaviours deemed appropriate for individuals based on their perceived gender. These stereotypes often reinforce traditional and culturally ingrained notions of masculinity and femininity, influencing how people are expected to behave, express themselves, and pursue certain roles in society.

Gender stereotypes can be harmful as they limit individual potential, perpetuate inequality, and contribute to discrimination. For example, common stereotypes might associate certain traits like assertiveness and leadership with males, while nurturing and caregiving roles are often associated with females. These expectations can lead to biased judgments, unequal opportunities, and social pressures that individuals may feel compelled to conform to, even if those expectations do not align with their true preferences or abilities.

Efforts to challenge and break down gender stereotypes aim to promote greater equality, diversity, and individual freedom by recognizing and valuing the diversity of talents, interests, and capabilities across genders.

Gender stereotypes are prevalent in various forms of Indian media, including television shows, movies, advertisements, and even news media. These stereotypes often reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations, contributing to the perpetuation of gender inequality. Many Indian media portray traditional gender roles where men are often shown as dominant, assertive, and the primary breadwinners, while women are depicted as submissive, nurturing, and primarily responsible for household chores. This reinforces stereotypical expectations about the roles of men and women in society. Advertisements and movies in Indian media have sometimes been criticized for the objectification of women. Women are frequently portrayed in hypersexualized ways, emphasizing physical appearance over their abilities or achievements. This can contribute to harmful beauty

standards and reinforce the idea that a woman's worth is tied to her looks. Women are often portrayed in certain professions and career choices, reinforcing stereotypes about suitable occupations for each gender. This can influence societal perceptions and expectations regarding women's career choices. Many Indian comedy shows tend to reinforce gender stereotypes, portraying women in stereotypical roles and using humour that sometimes perpetuate gender biases. Two of the most popular Hindi comedy serials are 'Taarak Mehta ka Oolta Chashma' and 'The Kapil Sharma Show' as suggested by their TRP ratings (etimes.in, 2023).

While the show 'Taarak Mehta ka Oolta Chasma' has been well-received for its entertainment value, it is not entirely free from gender stereotypes. The show often portrays traditional gender roles, with male characters like Jethalal, Taarak Mehta and Sodhi working outside the home, while female characters like Daya, Anjali are Sodhi's wife Roshan, primarily shown managing household responsibilities. This reflects conventional gender norms that associate men with work outside the home and women with domestic duties. Not only are there gender stereotypes but characters' mannerism and accent depict regional stereotypes too. For instance, the specific regional accents of Daya, Iyer and Roshan Sodhi (both the wife- a Parsi lady and the husband- a Sardar) are very typical. 'Taarak Mehta Ka Oolta Chashmah,' has faced criticism for portraying certain stereotypes and potentially problematic ideas. Some viewers have expressed concerns about the representation of gender roles, where there seems to be a lack of female characters in professional roles and an emphasis on traditional gender norms. Additionally, there have been instances where authority figures, like Champaklal Gada, are portrayed with a high level of authority, and the characters of Jethalal and Popatlal engage in behaviours that may be perceived as flirtatious.

The show has also been criticized for its portrayal of Iyer's complexion and instances of body shaming, particularly related to the character Dr. Hathi. These aspects raise questions about the impact of such depictions on societal perceptions and reinforce stereotypes.

On the same lines, 'The Kapil Sharma Show,' known for its light-hearted entertainment and celebrity interviews, has faced criticism for incorporating humour that relies on stereotypes and potentially degrades females. Some viewers have pointed out instances of body shaming, portraying females as constantly seeking male attention, and the use of double-meaning jokes and flirtatious behaviour. The show too relies heavily on humour that draws from gender stereotypes, body shaming and jokes on appearance specially of female characters. There have been many instances of objectification and reinforcement of traditional beauty standards.

Critics argue that such humour may perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to a culture that objectifies and disrespects women. While comedy is subjective, and different individuals may have varying tolerance levels for certain types of humour, it is essential to recognize the potential impact of these portrayals on societal attitudes.

It is crucial for media and entertainment platforms to strike a balance between providing entertainment and avoiding content that may reinforce harmful stereotypes or contribute to the marginalization of any gender. Discussions around these concerns prompt a reflection on the responsibility of content creators to be mindful of the messages they convey and the potential consequences of their choices in the name of humour.

It is important to note that the views on these issues may vary, and while some viewers may find them disturbing, others may see them as harmless entertainment. However, discussions around these concerns highlight the need for media to be conscious of the messages they convey and their potential impact on shaping societal attitudes and perceptions.

The present study aims at finding out people's perception about how seriously are the gender stereotypes prevalent in these popular sitcoms taken. Whether the representation has any memorable and noticeable impact on their behaviour or it is absorbed in a lighter vein and is forgotten after a few laughs.

Review of Literature

There have been many studies that have explored the representation of women in various media in Indian context. Gender stereotypes are clearly visible in many forms whether in television serials, movies or advertisements.

In a research study conducted in Jaipur city (Archana Kumari, 2015), it is observed that portrayal of women in various media is taken seriously by adolescents and they feel the need for more effective regulations to monitor and control the content on media. In another study that deals with the concept of identity construction in popular Hindi television serials, it is mentioned that the TV serials have immense capability of reinforcing images in the minds of the viewers (Shilpa Nandi, 2019) and thus must strive to present a positive image of contemporary women whereas in reality the image drawn from a number of television sitcoms is that women are mostly interested in trivial issues.

It has also been observed in a few studies that the representation of women in various media is changing towards the better- strong and self-sufficient. One such study is about the web series 'Four more shots please' (Dr Meenakshi Singh, 2021). The series depicts women as responsible yet carefree, ready to admit and take responsibility for their mistakes.

According to a study titled 'Women in Indian TV Serials: Issues of character, representation and acceptance', television has the capacity to overshadow the educational and social backgrounds of its viewers (Kumar, 2020). This implies that there must be a careful and conscious effort to represent various characters in the manner that does more good than harm to the society in general. Gender representation has been stereotypical and it has the power to reinforce subconsciously the behaviours that have long been seen.

Research Objectives

The present study is based on the perception of audience of two of the most popular comedy television serials, 'Taarak Mehta ka Oolta Chashma' and 'The Kapil Sharma Show' about the prevalence of gender stereotypes and their impact on the behaviours and attitude formation in them. The study has been carried out in view of the following objectives:

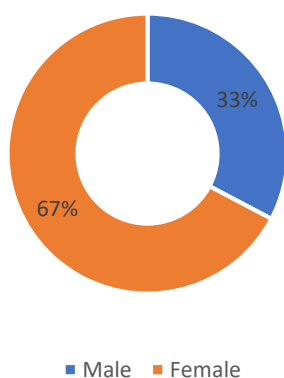
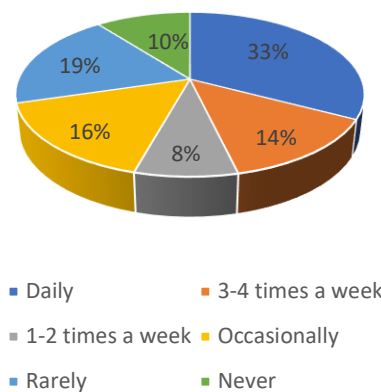
- To assess whether gender roles portrayed in the comedy serials represent real life dynamics
- To examine whether the gender representation in the comedy serials contribute positively or negatively to breaking gender stereotypes in society
- To evaluate if there is any difference in gender on how seriously the gender stereotypes are taken by audience

Research Methodology

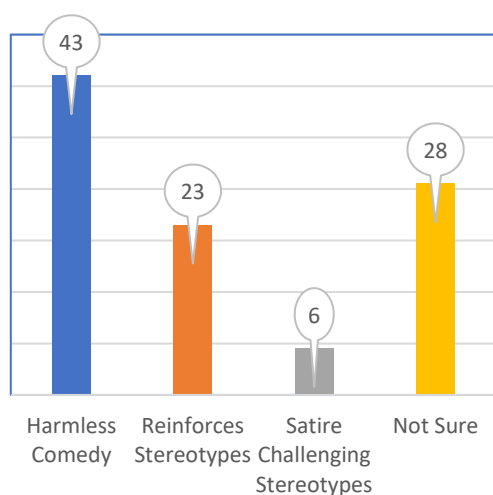
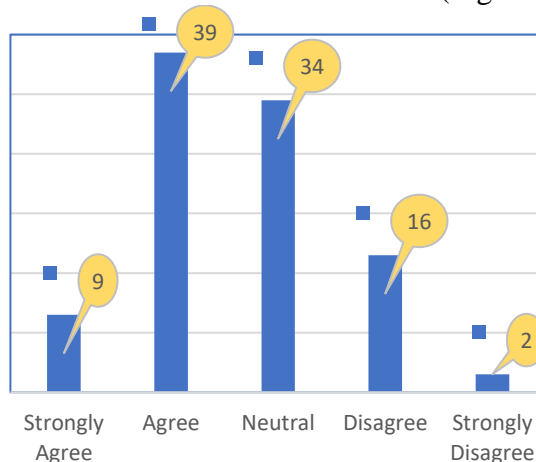
The present study is a descriptive research based on quantitative data collected through a structured questionnaire. The sample size is 162 and the sampling technique is convenient sampling. The method for data collection is a self-constructed questionnaire with 15 directed questions focussed on finding out the perception regarding gender stereotyping in two of the most popular television serials, 'Taarak Mehta ka Oolta Chashma' and 'The Kapil Sharma Show'. Data collection is done through a google form circulated in various groups and to various individuals. Data analysis is purely descriptive and the findings are represented through various charts to make it clearer and easier to interpret.

Data Analysis and Discussion

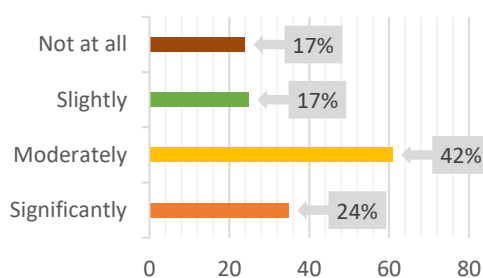
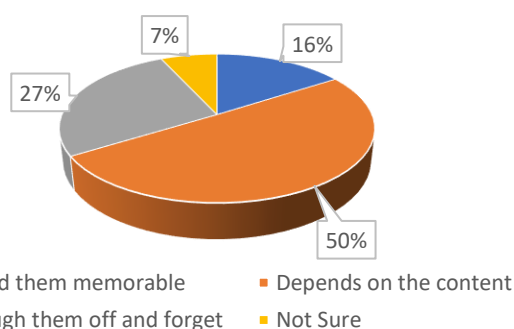
The sample consisted of audiences of all age groups and belonging to both the genders. The responses are presented in the graphs that follow.

**Figure1: Gender wise Distribution****Figure2: Frequency of watching comedy shows**

The sample consisted of almost two-thirds of females(Figure1). One in every three respondents watches the comedy shows Taarak Mehta ka Oolta Chashma and The Kapil Sharma Show daily or whenever these are broadcast.10% of the respondents do not watch these shows(Figure2).

**Figure3: Perception of Gender based Humour****Figure4: Gender Roles represent Real Life Dynamics**

When enquired about how do they perceive the humour related to gender in these shows maximum respondents (43%) found these shows to be harmless comedy, the others(23%) found the shows to reinforce stereotypes and very few(6%) found them to be satirical challenging stereotypes. Almost 28% respondents haven't framed a clear perception of the shows in relation to gender stereotypes (Figure3). Almost 48% of the respondents felt that the gender roles depicted in these shows represent real life dynamics. 34% are unsure of how well these roles are representative of the real scenarios (Figure4).

**Figure5: Influence on societal perceptions of gender roles****Figure6: Lingering Impact of gender stereotyped portrayed in comedy shows**

The respondents were asked about the extent to which they believe these shows influence societal perceptions of gender roles. Almost a quarter of respondents assume that the shows lend a significant influence on societal perceptions regarding gender roles and another 42% believe a moderate impact is there on forming the perceptions (Figure5). A whopping half the sample feels that the impact of the shows depends on the content whereas 27% are of the opinion that they do not take the shows seriously, laugh it out and forget the content. About 16% of the respondents feel that they remember the content shown in these shows for long (Figure6).

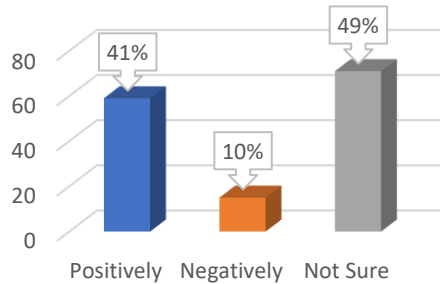


Figure7: Contribute towards breaking gender stereotypes in society

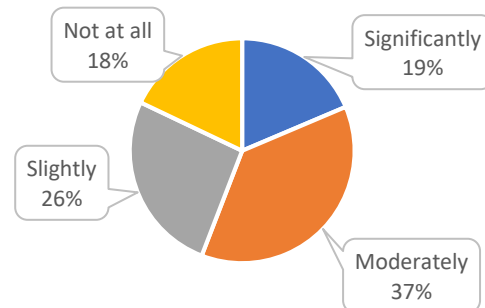


Figure8: Humour based on gender stereotypes contributes to perpetuating these stereotypes in society

Another interesting find of the study is that a big number of respondents (41%) feel that the shows impact positively towards breaking gender stereotypes and only 10% are of the opinion that there is a negative impact of these shows on the society in terms of contributing towards breaking gender stereotypes. Almost half are not sure if the impact is there, and if it is there, is it positive or negative (Figure7). When asked if the humour that makes use of gender stereotyping actually creates a society that has more defined set of gender rules and roles, about 19% feel that these shows significantly perpetuate stereotypes in society, 37% feel that there is a moderate impact. There are about one fifth of the respondents who feel that the shows do not spread gender stereotypes in the society (Figure8).

By testing the hypothesis through chi-square test regarding any association between gender and varying perceptions regarding the gender stereotypical humour depicted in the two shows ‘Taarak Mehta ka Oolta Chashma’ and ‘The Kapil Sharma Show’, there is no association between gender and the perception that the gender roles portrayed in these shows accurately represent real-life dynamics. The p-value is 0.982 which suggests no association of gender with the studied perception.

Conclusion

The findings reveal a significant viewership of the two shows - ‘Taarak Mehta ka Oolta Chashma’ and ‘The Kapil Sharma Show’, with a majority of respondents being female. While these shows are appreciated for their entertainment value, perceptions regarding their handling of gender stereotypes varied among the audience.

A considerable portion of respondents perceived the gender-related humour in these shows as harmless comedy, while others saw it as reinforcing stereotypes or presenting a satirical challenge. Interestingly, almost half of the respondents believed that the gender roles portrayed in the shows represent real-life dynamics to some extent. This suggests a nuanced understanding among the audience, recognizing the blend of fiction and reality in these portrayals.

The study also explored the societal impact of these sitcoms on gender perceptions. A substantial number of respondents felt that these shows have a moderate to significant influence on societal views of gender roles. However, opinions diverged on the lasting impact of the content, with a sizable proportion noting that they do not take the shows seriously and tend to forget the content after a few laughs.

In terms of contributing to breaking gender stereotypes, a substantial percentage of respondents believed that these shows have a positive impact. This finding indicates that despite potential

shortcomings, the television serials are perceived by some as agents for positive change in societal attitudes toward gender roles.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the diverse opinions within the audience, as a significant portion remained unsure about the impact and perceived both positive and negative influences. The study also found no significant association between gender and perceptions about the accuracy of gender roles depicted in the programs.

The way forward is that content creators should strive for more diverse and inclusive representations of gender roles in the serials, reflecting the reality of varied experiences and breaking away from traditional stereotypes. Initiatives to educate the audience about the potential impact of media content on shaping societal attitudes could enhance critical viewing. This could involve discussions on the consequences of perpetuating stereotypes. Periodic audits and evaluations of popular shows could be conducted to assess their adherence to responsible content creation standards. This would encourage creators to stay mindful of societal impact.

In conclusion, while these television programs contribute to the cultural landscape and provide entertainment, there is room for improvement in terms of gender portrayals. By adopting more inclusive and thoughtful approaches, media can play a constructive role in challenging stereotypes and fostering a more egalitarian society.

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