



EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF FEMALE-CENTRIC MEDIA ON GENDER NORMS: AN ANALYSIS OF HINDI SOAP OPERAS

Sushmitha Kotian¹, Dr. Vidya N²

¹Research Scholar, Srinivas University, Mangalore, Karnataka, India.
OrcidID: 0000-0003-0085-7197

²Research Professor, Srinivas University, Mangalore, Karnataka, India.
OrcidID: 0000-0002-3390-567X

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: In today's world, media plays a vital role in conveying messages and information, serving as the easiest and quickest means to reach people within a short period. Soap operas, being the oldest and most straightforward method of storytelling, effectively communicate messages to the audience. Numerous soap operas run successfully, delivering social messages and providing daily entertainment. People are inevitably influenced by soap operas, as these shows are interconnected in a manner that makes viewers feel as if the events are unfolding in their own lives. Nowadays, there is a growing trend of women-oriented soap operas that not only entertain but also convey social messages. Especially in the realm of Hindi soap operas, this underscores the crucial need to recognize their potential impact on shaping cultural perspectives regarding gender roles. This study aims to explore the impact of women-oriented soap operas on societal and mental development. These shows have the potential to influence society with new ideas and experiments, contributing to its growth and evolution over time.

Methodology / Design / Approaches: It is an exploratory study with the help of secondary data where the researchers have conducted a content analysis of various magazines, articles, google scholar, data based and related websites.

Findings and results: Soap operas portray women characters in an inspiring manner, motivating society to take on challenges and strive for achievement. According to numerous studies, women-oriented motivational soap operas have a substantial audience, and their impact on society is significant. Viewers form emotional connections with these characters, especially women who find relatability in their daily routines. Challenging traditional stereotypes is a prominent theme in contemporary soap operas, appreciated by audiences, and contributing to societal acceptance of change.

Originality / value: It is a descriptive study, exploration and analysis, which synthesizes empirical research to reveal subtle insights into the transformative potential of collective virtual environments to contribute value to developing innovative and efficient learning methods.

Type of paper: Descriptive research with exploratory research design.

KEYWORDS: Soap Opera, Media, Audience, Television, Society, Women, Motivation, Achievements, Knowledge.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the television landscape in India has undergone significant changes, with widespread viewership of Hindi channels across the nation, reflecting the country's diverse linguistic offerings. Television now plays an integral role in people's lives, serving various purposes such as entertainment, information dissemination, knowledge acquisition, education, cultural representation, communication, connectivity, social cohesion, and crisis communication [1]. Both fiction and non-fiction contribute to the world of entertainment, with soap operas particularly influencing the daily lives of viewers. The increasing focus on women in the media aligns with the global movement for gender equality and women's empowerment [2].

Hindi soap operas, with their expansive storylines and broad viewership, play a distinctive role in this societal shift [3].

These television serials serve as mirrors and architects of societal norms, portraying the intricacies of women's lives in India. Recognizing the importance of understanding their influence lies in unravelling the complex relationship between media representation and the reinforcement or challenging of gender stereotypes [4]. As these stories unfold on the television screen, they resonate with and contribute to the broader conversation about the changing roles of women in a society undergoing rapid transformation [5].

Hindi soap operas not only observe but actively shape societal changes by depicting women navigating the intricate dynamics of familial expectations, professional ambitions, and personal relationships. Feminist media studies provide a critical perspective for analysing the portrayal of women in these shows, exploring the potential reinforcement or subversion of



traditional gender norms within Hindi soap opera narratives [6]. This theoretical framework serves as the basis for a subsequent investigation into the content, reception, and societal impact of these serials. The study focuses on the depiction of women in specific Hindi soap operas and aims to uncover how these portrayals influence viewers' perceptions of gender roles. Utilizing methods such as content analysis, surveys, and interviews, the research seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of how women-centric media contributes to the negotiation, reinforcement, or transformation of gender norms within Indian society.

2. SOAP OPERA

A soap opera is a type of serialised television or radio programme that revolves around the daily lives, relationships, and dramatic occurrences of a group of people. The phrase "soap opera" originates in the early days of radio broadcasting, when these programmes were sponsored by soap makers [7]. Normally now people call it as a serial. Soap operas are noted for their continuous storylines that span numerous episodes or seasons. Unlike traditional dramas, which frequently feature self-contained episodes, soap operas create complex, interconnected narratives that keep viewers interested over time [8]. Soap operas are often situated in ordinary situations such as homes, workplaces, and towns. Viewers can easily relate to the individuals and their problems as a result. A broad and diverse ensemble cast is common in soap operas [9]. Characters come from a variety of backgrounds and age groups, and their interactions and relationships constitute the centre of the plot. Television shows concentrate on the interpersonal connections of the characters. The plot is propelled forward by romantic entanglements, family dynamics, friendships, and conflicts [10]. Drama and strife are essential ingredients in soap operas. The genre relies on heightened emotions and emotional events to keep audiences interested, whether it's romantic misunderstandings, family secrets, or workplace conflicts [11]. Unlike many other television genres, soap operas frequently leave plots unresolved. This motivates fans to tune in on a frequent basis to follow the adventures of their favourite characters. Soap operas frequently have lengthy runs, with some series lasting decades. Because of the duration, rich and elaborate plot arcs can be developed, and characters can mature greatly over time [12]. Historically, many soap operas were broadcast throughout the day, with a female audience in mind. However, the introduction of cable and streaming services has broadened the audience for soap operas.

2.1 Hindi Soap Opera

Hindi soap operas, commonly known as "Hindi serials" or "Indian television dramas," wield substantial influence in India's entertainment industry, playing a central role in shaping the television landscape and reflecting societal norms. Covering diverse themes and cultural expressions, these serials portray various regions, cultures, and languages, showcasing India's rich diversity [13]. Family dramas, a prevalent genre, delve into the complexities of familial relationships, conflicts, and emotional intricacies, exploring themes like love, marriage, sibling rivalry, and generational divides. Some soap operas set

in historical contexts weave together facts and imagination, addressing crucial periods in Indian history. Addressing contemporary issues, many serials tackle topics such as women's empowerment, education, gender equality, and caste dynamics, serving as platforms for raising awareness and fostering discussions on societal concerns [14]. Love storylines are common, incorporating elements of tradition, social divisions, and societal expectations. Additionally, some serials focus on Indian mythology, narrating stories from ancient texts with grand visuals. With changing demographics, serials increasingly target a younger audience, addressing the lives of today's youth, including job goals, relationships, and societal expectations. Some introduce fantasy and supernatural elements, while others explore crime, mystery, and thriller genres with gripping plots [15]. Notably, women-oriented serials have significantly shaped Indian television, featuring strong female protagonists and resonating with women's challenges, aspirations, and successes across various backgrounds.

2.2 Women Oriented Soap

Women-centric Hindi soap operas serve as a potent medium for portraying diverse aspects of women's lives within the intricate fabric of Indian society. Airing on various television networks, these serials not only entertain but also stimulate discussions on crucial societal issues [16]. Empowering themes dominate these narratives, showcasing the strength, resilience, and uniqueness of female protagonists who defy gender norms.

Covering societal challenges, personal growth, family dynamics, professional struggles, and historical contexts, each serial speaks to the diverse experiences of women across age, background, and social settings. Confronting social issues head-on, these soap operas contribute to awareness and advocate for positive societal change, addressing topics like female empowerment, gender equality, domestic abuse, and discrimination.

Breaking stereotypes, the characters in these serials challenge cultural norms, urging viewers to reconsider traditional standards [17]. Strong and multi-dimensional female characters serve as role models, demonstrating brilliance, bravery, and resilience in navigating familial, professional, and societal demands.

With a broad audience appeal, these soap operas captivate both male and female viewers, influencing societal perceptions of gender roles [18]. Some delve into historical narratives, shedding light on the historical struggles and contributions of women. Others explore the complexities of balancing personal and professional lives, reflecting changing societal expectations.

Beyond entertainment, these soap operas convey meaningful messages, fostering empathy, social consciousness, and personal growth. Evolving with time, the landscape of women-oriented soap operas reflects a dynamic blend of tradition and modernity, encapsulating the changing roles of women in Indian society [19].



3. RELATED WORKS

Sl. No.	Focuses	Contribution	Reference
1	Genre and Gender	Mass Culture & Gendered Culture	Gledhill, C. (1997)[20]
2	Giving motivation	Viewing motivation & Cultivation Process	Carveth, R., & Alexander, A. (1985)[21]
3	Effect on story	Soap Opera effect on story recall	Owens, J., Bower, G. H., & Black, J. B. (1979). [22]
4.	Audience activity	Involvement & Effects Investigation	Rubin, A. M., & Perse, E. M. (1987). [23]
5.	Female subject	Femineity & Desire	Nochimson, M. (1992). [24]
6.	The feminist	Feminist Intellectual	Brunsdon, C. (2000).[25]
7.	Audience activity	Satisfaction with television	Perse, E. M., & Rubin, A. M. (1988). [26]
8.	Cultural object	Anthropological object	Das, V. (2003). [27]
9.	Television audience	Limits of Genre	Allen, R. (2013). [28]
10.	Television effect	Measuring happiness	Lu, L., & Argyle, M. (1993). [29]
11.	Audience awareness	Audience participation	Kielwasser, A. P., & Wolf, M. A. (1988). [30]
12.	Viewing Motivates to Cultivation	Perceived Realism	Perse, E. M. (1986). [31]

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is an exploratory study with the help of secondary data where the researchers have conducted a content analysis of various magazines, articles, google scholar, data-based and related websites.

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To investigate the role of women in Hindi soap opera in the intersections between empowerment and social issues.
- To examine and understand the portrayal and changing roles of women in Hindi soap operas, exploring their societal impact and influence on gender norms.
- To analyse how women's roles in Hindi soap operas contribute to themes of self-discovery and empowerment, influencing societal attitudes.
- To challenge stereotypes, examining how women's roles in Hindi soap operas either reinforce or subvert societal expectations.

5.1 Empowerment and Social Issues

Hindi soap operas dedicated to social justice and empowerment go beyond mere entertainment, actively addressing real-world challenges faced by women and marginalized communities. Through the portrayal of strong female characters and advocacy for societal change, these shows contribute significantly to vital discussions on gender equality, education, and empowerment. For example, "Balika Vadhu" on Colors Channel tackles the issue of child marriage, advocating for reform through education and empowerment initiatives. Similarly, "Udaan" on Colors Channel highlights Chakor's empowerment, emphasizing her resistance against societal norms such as child labor and injustice. "Pratigya" on Star Plus narrates the protagonist's stand against injustice and patriarchal norms,

addressing issues like dowry and women's rights to champion social equality and empowerment. Additionally, "Na Aana Is Des Laado" on Colors Channel sheds light on societal issues like female infanticide and discrimination in rural India, showcasing the courage of women standing against these cultural practices. Overall, these soap operas serve as powerful mediums for raising awareness and advocating positive societal transformations.

5.2 Fight Against Injustice

Hindi soap operas, which center around combating injustice, serve as impactful platforms for creating awareness about vital social issues. These narratives not only provide entertainment but also illuminate real-world challenges, prompting viewers to contemplate societal norms and actively support positive transformations. Through the portrayal of characters standing up against injustice, these shows actively contribute to the ongoing discourse on social justice, motivating viewers to become advocates for change within their communities. Take, for instance, 'Diya Aur Baati Hum' on Star Plus, a compelling storytelling medium addressing societal concerns. Through the character of Sandhya, the series emphasizes the significance of challenging norms and resisting injustice, encouraging viewers to reflect on their role in fostering positive change and cultivating a sense of justice in society. Similarly, 'Pratigya' on Star Plus follows the resolute journey of Pratigya, a strong-willed woman determined to combat injustice and patriarchal norms, addressing issues such as dowry and women's rights while advocating for social equality and empowerment. 'Udaan' on Colors focuses on the empowerment of its female lead, Chakor, as she confronts societal norms and battles challenges like child labor and oppression, highlighting the struggle for justice and freedom. Likewise, 'Balika Vadhu' on Colors delves into the issue of child marriage and its societal consequences, portraying the fight against injustice by depicting the challenges



faced by child brides and advocating for transformative social change.

5.3 Self- Discovery and Empowerment

Hindi soap operas delving into self-discovery and empowerment serve as reflections of real-life journeys, depicting individuals on a quest to discover their identity and purpose. These narratives transcend traditional storytelling by portraying characters who defy societal expectations, make choices for personal fulfillment, and embark on transformative paths. The overarching theme encourages viewers to introspect on their own journeys of self-discovery and empowerment, instilling a sense of inspiration and strength among the audience. For instance, "Tumhari Paakhi" on Life Ok narrates the story of Paakhi, who sacrifices for her family's happiness but later chooses to reclaim her life, exploring themes of self-discovery and empowerment. Meanwhile, "Yeh Hai Mohabbatein" on Star Plus, primarily a love story, showcases characters like Ishita undergoing significant self-discovery, emphasizing empowerment through relationships and personal growth amid challenges. The thriller "Ek Hasina Thi" on Star Plus follows the transformation of its protagonist, Durga, seeking justice and delving into themes of self-empowerment, vengeance, and truth. Similarly, "Silsila Badalte Rishton Ka" on Colors Channel explores the complexities of relationships, addressing themes of self-discovery, empowerment, and the defiance of societal norms as characters navigate their desires and identities.

5.4 Challenging Stereotypes

Hindi soap operas that defy stereotypes play a pivotal role in reshaping societal perspectives and moving away from traditional norms. Beyond providing entertainment, these narratives serve as a means to champion inclusivity, diversity, and acceptance. By presenting characters who challenge established stereotypes, these shows not only entertain but also motivate viewers to question preconceived notions, fostering a more open-minded and progressive societal outlook. The overarching theme encourages audiences to embrace individuality and appreciate the uniqueness of each person, regardless of societal expectations. For instance, "Ikyawann" on Star Plus challenges stereotypes as Susheel, the 51st child of the Parekh family, embarks on a journey to break societal norms and establish herself in a male-dominated society, prompting viewers to reconsider traditional expectations. Similarly, "Shakti" on Colors channel challenges gender stereotypes through the struggles of Soumya, a transgender character, addressing societal prejudices and promoting acceptance and understanding against conventional perceptions of gender roles. "Patiala Babes" on Sony Entertainment Channel challenges age-related stereotypes by portraying the unconventional relationship between a mother and her daughter-in-law, breaking free from societal norms regarding women's roles and expectations, and emphasizing individuality. Additionally, "Jassi Jaissi Koi Nahin" on Sony Entertainment Channel challenges stereotypes related to physical appearance and beauty standards. The protagonist, Jassi, challenges societal norms by showcasing that talent and intelligence outweigh

conventional beauty standards, encouraging viewers to embrace individuality.

5.5 SWOC analyses of Women oriented Hindi Soap Operas

SWOC analysis is an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges in Hindi Language Women oriented soap operas focusing on themes like social justice, empowerment, self-discovery, and challenging stereotype. It is the strategy used by channels to come up with new stories.

5.5.1 Strengths

- i. Relevance to Societal Issues: The research paper addresses critical societal issues, making it highly relevant and contributing to ongoing discussions on gender equality and empowerment.
- ii. Diversity of Themes: Encompasses a broad spectrum of themes, including social justice, empowerment, self-discovery, and challenging stereotypes, showcasing the diversity of content within women-oriented soap operas.
- iii. Impactful Medium: Soap operas are a widely watched and influential medium, providing the research with the potential to reach and influence a large audience.
- iv. Cultural Insight: The focus on Hindi women-oriented soap operas provides valuable cultural insights into the portrayal of women in Indian television, contributing to a nuanced understanding of societal dynamics.

5.5.2 Weaknesses

- i. Subjectivity in Analysis: Analysing soap operas may involve subjective interpretations, potentially leading to biases in the assessment of their societal impact.
- ii. Limited Generalizability: Focusing primarily on Hindi soap operas may limit the generalizability of findings to other cultural or linguistic contexts, reducing the universality of the research.

5.5.3 Opportunities

- i. Audience Engagement: The research paper could engage a broader audience by connecting academic insights with the interests of soap opera viewers, fostering dialogue on social issues.
- ii. Industry Impact: Findings could potentially influence the creation of future soap operas, encouraging the industry to produce content that aligns with social justice and empowerment themes.

5.5.4 Challenges

- i. Subjectivity and Interpretation: Analysing soap operas' societal impact involves subjective interpretation, necessitating researchers to navigate potential biases.
- ii. Limited Scope and Generalization: Focusing on Hindi soap operas may restrict findings' generalizability to other cultural or linguistic contexts, requiring a balance between depth and broader applicability.
- iii. Access to Comprehensive Data: Obtaining accurate data on viewership, audience reactions, and



- production details poses challenges, impacting the analysis's robustness.
- iv. **Dynamic Industry Nature:** The dynamic nature of the television and entertainment industry challenges researchers to stay current with evolving trends for research relevance.
- v. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Ensuring cultural sensitivity in analysing gender-related themes is crucial to avoid unintentional stereotyping or misinterpretation.
- vi. **Public Perception and Criticism:** Anticipating criticism from those questioning soap operas' societal influence or having diverse views on women's portrayal is a potential challenge.
- vii. **Resistance to Industry Change:** The soap opera industry's potential resistance to content changes, especially those advocating social justice and empowerment, may pose challenges.
- viii. **Ethical Considerations:** Addressing ethical concerns, including privacy and rights of individuals involved in soap operas, presents challenges in conducting responsible research.

- i. **Diversify Regional and Cultural Perspectives:** Consider expanding the scope of the research to include soap operas from various linguistic and cultural regions in India. This approach would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how women are portrayed in different cultural contexts.
- ii. **Longitudinal Analysis:** Explore the possibility of conducting a longitudinal analysis to track changes in the portrayal of women over time. This could offer insights into evolving societal norms and the soap opera industry's responsiveness to changing dynamics.
- iii. **Collaboration with Industry Stakeholders:** Seek collaboration with soap opera producers, writers, and industry experts to gain deeper insights into the creative process. This collaboration can foster a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities in incorporating empowering themes into storylines.
- iv. **Audience Reception and Impact Assessment:** Conduct audience reception studies to gauge how viewers interpret and respond to the portrayals of women in these soap operas. Understanding audience perceptions can provide valuable feedback for both the industry and future research.
- v. **Comparative Analysis with International Soap Operas:** Consider comparing the findings with portrayals of women in soap operas from other countries. This comparative analysis can offer a broader perspective on gender representation in television narratives.
- vi. **Educational Initiatives:** Propose educational initiatives based on the research findings. Work towards creating awareness campaigns or workshops that leverage the influence of soap operas to promote positive societal values, gender equality, and empowerment.
- vii. **Policy Advocacy:** Explore opportunities for policy advocacy based on the research. Engage with policymakers and advocacy groups to highlight the potential impact of media content on societal perceptions and promote positive changes in the industry.
- viii. **Ethical Guidelines for Content Creation:** Develop ethical guidelines for content creators in the soap opera industry. This could include recommendations for portraying women in a sensitive and empowering manner, avoiding stereotypes, and promoting social justice.
- ix. **Public Discourse Platforms:** Engage in public discourse by presenting the research findings at conferences, seminars, and through media channels. Actively participate in discussions on gender representation in media to contribute to societal awareness and dialogue.

SWOC analysis provides valuable insights for optimizing the research's strengths, addressing weaknesses, capitalizing on opportunities, and mitigating threats. This strategic approach can enhance the research's impact and contribute meaningfully to discussions on gender, empowerment, and societal norms within the realm of Hindi women-oriented soap operas.

6. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTION

The findings of this research paper on Hindi women-oriented soap operas centred around themes such as social justice, empowerment, self-discovery, and challenging stereotypes reveal a multifaceted portrayal of women within the dynamic landscape of Indian television. Through a comprehensive analysis of various soap operas, it becomes evident that these narratives play a pivotal role in addressing and reflecting upon critical societal issues. The research underscores the strength of this influential medium in shedding light on gender-related challenges and advocating for positive societal change. Moreover, the exploration of diverse themes within women-oriented soap operas illustrates the complexity and richness of storytelling, providing audiences with narratives that go beyond mere entertainment. However, the findings also highlight challenges, including the subjectivity inherent in analysing such content and the potential limitation of generalizability to other cultural contexts. Nevertheless, the opportunities presented by engaging a broader audience and influencing industry practices underscore the potential societal impact of this research. Overall, the findings contribute valuable insights into the intersection of media, culture, and gender dynamics, emphasizing the need for continued exploration and discourse on the representation of women in Hindi soap operas.

Hindi women-oriented soap operas focusing on themes like social justice, empowerment, self-discovery, and challenging stereotypes offers valuable insights into the portrayal of women in Indian television. Based on the findings, several suggestions can be made to enhance the impact and relevance of the research:

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