GENDER – ROLE PORTRAYAL IN INDIAN TELEVISION CARTOON

[1]**Rakhi Gauravam and** [2]**Anindya Deb**
[1]**Rakhi Gauravam** -ICSSR Doctoral Fellow, [2]**Anindya Deb** – Assistant Professor
1. Department of Mass Communication and Media, Central University of South Bihar, Gaya, Bihar, India.
2. Department of Mass Communication and Media, Central University of South Bihar, Gaya, Bihar, India.

Abstract

Children are fascinated to the animated cartoon programs. The thoughts, behaviour and ideas of children are being influenced by TV cartoons. Television cartoons are a medium of gender portrayal in its variety of content. The gender portrayal (stereotypical) by television cartoons influences the viewers by various means. When children are repeatedly exposed to stereotypical representation, they take it as the normal culture when they grow up. The present study is an attempt to investigate how gender is being portrayed in Indian television cartoon program. Content analysis was carried to find is there a stereotypical depiction of gender in Indian television cartoons. The lead male and female character of the selected cartoon program was tested for the gender stereotypes. It was found that male lead character is dominating the cartoon programs whereas the representation of female lead character is far below, which shows gender is stereotypically represented.

Keywords: Children, Television Cartoons, Gender role, portrayal, stereotypes

Introduction

The gender role is being realized, performed since childhood by both boys and girls and television is certainly an actor to play a role of catalyst in this process of gender performance (Fowler & Thomas 2015). Steering the child in a right direction especially in establishing their identity to occupy a very special space in terms of masculinity for boys and femininity for girls is an intensely debated statement. It is the television which has created an image for both the gender that femininity stands for beauty, domesticity, passivity and a more benign role to be played whereas masculinity echoes itself as very typical hard-core images of strong, robust and muscled indicating a stereotyped expected behaviour to be played.

Cartoon shows on television increasingly trying to perpetuate stereotypical role in their mediation. Children in their formative stages learned to know their gender role through the prism of multiple variables like books, toys, the cloths that they put on, television and through their Grandparents (Lemish 2010). Take the example of Kinder joy chocolate, how gendered it is, the colour pink is meant for girls and the blue meant for boys. Even toys available within the Kinder joy chocolate are gendered. Therefore, it can be deduced that studio manufactured gender role raises many questions especially in promoting and reaffirming patriarchy. Hence, one's sex is fabricated, determined and objectified by cartoon programs. The social repercussions are also very dangerous, the children are imitating these trends from television and which is visible through their acts, gestures and behaviours.

Children represent a special clientele when it comes to research as they are the future of the Nation. The growth and development of a child depends on many forces. These forces include things that they are exposed to, as a daily activity. Watching television is also a daily activity for children. The world of television has expanded to multiple channel and genre. The increasing number of kids channels along with the numbers of kid's programs are reinforcing that TV is a storyteller of recent era (Gerbner et al., 2002). Children get attracted to the TV cartoon programs because

of colourful images, animated characters and to the story and theme of the programme. Kids TV programmes are loaded with drama, fantasy, funny things, mystery, emotions and story that keeps viewers glued to TV (Rozario et al., 2017). Children being natural copycat imitate what they see in reality or on screen. The thoughts, behaviours and ideas of children are being influenced by kid's TV programmes.

Children take everything on the face value. The content of the TV cartoon program cannot be treated as harmless. The TV cartoon programmes (looks, dressings and actions of cartoon characters) leaves a long-lasting imprint on young minds (Emmers-Sommer & Allen, 1999). It is thus imperative to investigate the television cartoon content, which mostly produces and circulates different discourses about identity, society, culture, consumerism and other constructs. Children are a special class of television viewer; thus, special categories of programmes are produced for this category of viewer. They are sensitized by the content they view on the television. The sense of gender and gender roles are one of the many social constructs that children learn from television generally and from TV cartoons particularly. Several studies have been conducted on analysing the gender representation in different forms of media including television. This topic is of great interest among researchers in other disciplines as well, like psychology, sociology, political science, paediatrics and cultural studies. The objective of this research is -
1. to analyse the gender ratio of cartoon characters in Indian television cartoons and
2. to study the gender role portrayal in Indian Television cartoons.

Conceptual Framework

The theory of media Cultivation and the theory of social learning provided the foundation of the present study as children acquire behavioural traits from the social surroundings, media and human relations. The theory of media Cultivation explains the effect of long-term television viewing on the audience (Gerbner et al. 2002). This theory explains how the viewer's attitude and ideas change due to heavy television viewing. Here this theory says that the change in the people's attitude is a chronic process (gradual and cumulative). The Gerbner's cultivation theory is often used by many researchers while discussing about media violence or media stereotypes (Klein et al. 2005, Vickers 2007). Since the mid of the previous century researchers tried to find whether the contents presented in media influence the viewers behaviour. Bandura (2001) put forward the social learning theory which answered it. In simple words the social learning theory says, if a child watches any character (person) on TV being liked by the child, receive awards for the funny or aggressive behaviour, then the child would like to imitate the behaviour. The theory of social learning was extended in cartoon related studies by Klinger (2006), where it was observed that contents/characters of cartoon are also imitated by the children. Television act as super tutor for children as they learn what they watch in television (Bandura 2001). As per a study made by Ahmed and Wahab (2014), media together with television sponsor dominant ideologies thereby generating and maintaining social order. They also pointed out that the main cause of discrimination against women is patriarchal ideology, which is still a dominant ideology in Indian perspective. The portrayal of gender in TV cartoons can also influence the behavioural process of children regarding their concepts about gender and society. Martin el al. (2002) stated that according to social learning theory, the way TV cartoons portray gender may play an important role in influencing the children's ability to perceive and develop their concepts and ideas about gender and gender roles.

Baker & Raney (2007) in their study found that even in early age the children learn and copy the behaviour of TV programme characters like their own gender. Researchers have applied the social learning theory for cartoon related studies in recent past, like Zang et al. (2019) used to explain aggressive content of cartoons in China, Nwammuo (2015) worked on perception of viewers on a particular cartoon programme. Children spend a considerable time waiting television; thus, gender roles need focused researches (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995).

Review of literature

Television media is focusing at young generation through specific contents like cartoon series and films. Television cartoon may have their direct or indirect impacts on children. Researchers are paying attention to analyse the contents of television cartoon programme using the tool of content analysis. Habib and soliman (2015) pointed out "information received from television is used by the children to learn more about society and its functions". Media being mirror of the society, present the social narratives and discourses in similar fashion. Like, representation of women in media has been felt submissive and unequal (Jane 2015).
Baker & Raney (2004) tested gender role representation on the ground of personality traits, physical behaviours, communicative behaviours and superhero characters. The story of cartoon programme revolves around a superhero character, where a superhero accomplishes any mission, fights with enemies, take tough decisions. The traits of

superhero and its representation in animated TV programmes was studied by Baker (2007). The study revealed that male superheroes are out numbering female superheroes, male superheroes were portrayed as muscular while the female superheroes were presented in average body type, females were reported as more attractive, when compared to males. A male superhero show anger and threatens others while the female counterpart is more likely to seek advice and ask questions (Baker, 2007).

There is a sudden increase in the television channels, most of them are private and few are country/ state run (public television). A clear gender imbalance is present in both public and private television, in all formats of program including animated and non-animated (Gotz, 2008). Private television boom is also seen in India. Gender role representation in Indian television cartoon is lopped sided. Female characters are mostly helpers to the male lead in TV Cartoon programmes (Jaggi, 2015). Anderson and Cavallaro, (2002) said that gender stereotypes are prevalent as such to become a social norm. Male characters are dominating the screen so much so that they are shown doing almost everything more than female characters. The title of TV cartoon programmes is also gender bias (Rozario, 2018). Female and male genders are presented differently in cartoon programmes, female characters are shown doing household works, and they are inferior and not strong as male characters (Magotra, 2018).

Methodology

The aim of the present study is to analyse the representation (ratio) of male and female cartoon characters in TV cartoons programmes and to know about their role portrayal. The Content analysis method was applied to answer the research questions.

RQ1. What is the extent of gender ratio of cartoon characters in Indian television cartoons?
RQ2. How gender roles are being portrayed in Indian television cartoons?

The Content Analysis method has been adopted in similar studies (Chu & McIntyre, 1995; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). Sample selection: Five popular cartoon programs were selected as the sample for the data collection (Chhota Bheem, Doraemon, Motu Patlu, Sab Jhol Maal Hai, and Sinchan). The programmes were selected based on their TRP, their broadcasting on majority of DTH service providers (like Tata Sky or Airtel etc.) and language of the programme i.e., Hindi or dubbed in Hindi.

The sample was viewed by the researcher during prime time (17:00 to 22:00) for a period of one week (first week of June 2019). The gender ratio was estimated by dividing the total number of female characters by the total number of male characters of the viewed samples. The male and female characters of the selected cartoon program (sample) were tested for the gender stereotypes. The male and females cartoon characters are portrayed as heroes, who helps others and save them, the helpers are in-side roles to the heroes, female characters have also different roles. The roles of cartoon characters may be classified as protagonist, antagonist, helper of protagonist and helper of antagonist (Rozario et al., 2017). A matrix comprising names of male and female cartoon characters and allotted roles (protagonist, antagonist, helper of protagonist and helper of antagonist) was designed and adopted to study the gender role portrayal. The unit of analysis in the present study were the cartoon programs selected for the study and male and female characters in lead role in that cartoon programs.

Results and Discussion

The gender ratio of the lead charters of the Indian television cartoon is skewed. The sampled cartoon programmes reflect that the male characters are out numbering the female characters. The ratio of female: male is 0.33, means number of female characters are far below to male (fig 1). The female cartoon characters were stereotypically represented (week, attractive, never get angry, not discuss her grievances). Out of the 07 female characters only 1 show a sporty trait. The female lead character of Chhota Bheem was portrayed doing brave activities on screen that too in company of the lead male characters. The Indian TV cartoon programmes does not represent females as protagonist whereas males are portrayed as heroes, physically strong and saving females and others. Cartoon reflects the typical gender role that exists in the society. In TV cartoons boys do things which are regarded as masculine and girls are shown doing things regarded as feminine. Girls are mostly shown in domestic locations. Similar facts have been researched while studying children television programs in India by Jaggi and Reddy in the year 2017.
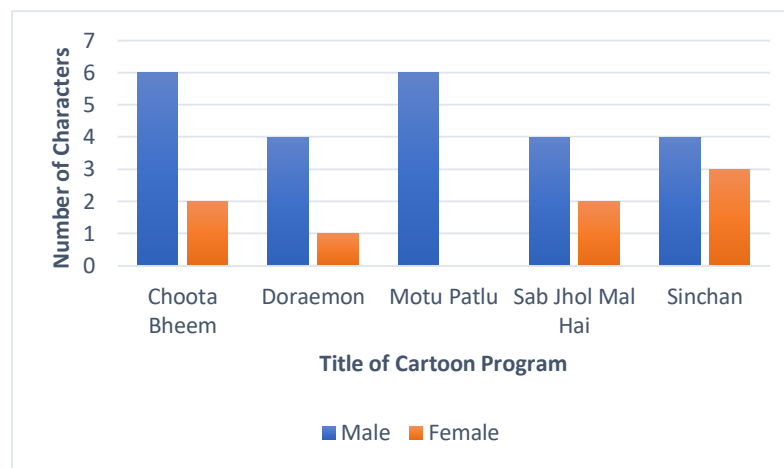
Fig 1. Gender representation in Indian Television Cartoons

The study reveals that the story lining and choice of portrayal of female characters are in line with the general social stigmas that female are confined to home, they cannot step forward without companionship of male and they are less smart and does not play role in decision making. Most of the television cartoons targeted to children have some or the other type of gender stereotypical representation. It can be clearly interpreted that male characters are dominating the Indian Television Cartoon. The representation of female character is far below. However, it was observed that female characters are used mostly for the decorative purpose and male characters are portrayed mainly in the role of protagonist. Out of total male and female lead characters (32), only male (12) were in the role of protagonist. The females are portrayed as the helper of the protagonist playing side roles (Fig 2).
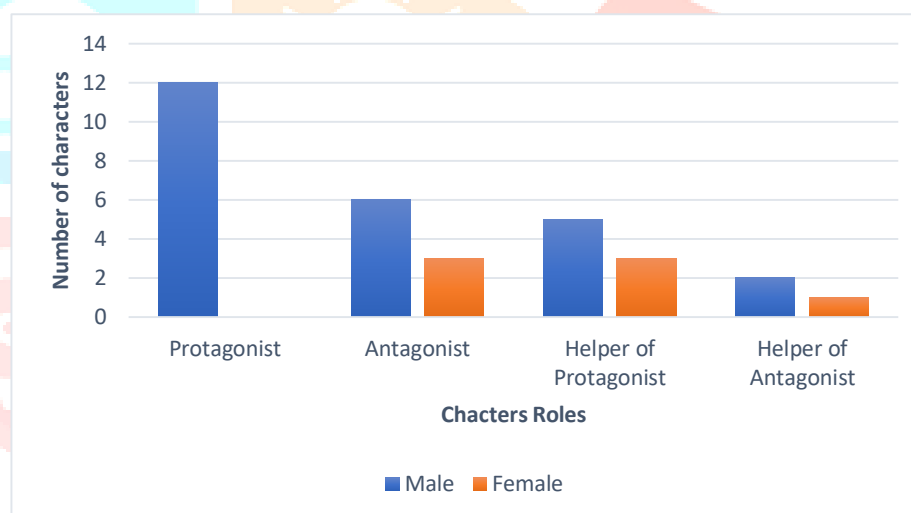

Fig 2. Gender role portrayal in Indian Television cartoons

The ratio of male to female portrayal in Indian cartoon programmes is not balanced. Gender stereotypes are widespread in Indian Television cartoon targeted at children. Male lead characters are portrayed as strong, brave, sporty and dominant whereas female characters are portrayed as passive, weak, emotional and attractive.

Conclusion

Children view cartoons as a daily activity, thus it is a matter of serious concern that how, why and what they are doing to the minds of the children. Children's programs are more likely to portray gender stereotype contents. Also, it contains contents full of fiction and fantasies. Children are very innocent also they are not the active audience; they take everything on the face value. The sense of role of male and female gender develops in the children from his/her day to day life activities. Kids fantasize about TV cartoons and imitate them in all possible manners including their way of talking, playing certain roles and way of behaving in day to day life. To conclude the recent study, it can be said that the kids are exposed to the traditional stereotypical content through Indian television Cartoon. There is stereotypical representation of both male and female characters. It was found that male lead character is dominating the cartoon programs whereas the representation of female lead character is far below. It has been said, media is the mirror of the society. The stereotypical portrayal of gender in media depicts the society's general thinking about men and women. Looking at the representation of gender, on can categorize it in two dimensions.

The first is the gender role related stereotypes which consist of pre-defined set of various roles and activities of male and female, as prevailed in society. The second being the gender-trait stereotypes which consist of behavioural and psychological characteristics which are supposed to characterize male and female. It is from the very early age children are being exposed to the gender stereotypical representation, which has a very strong effect on their thoughts and behaviour. They start believing that there are certain fixed roles for male and females and they should not behave differently. Furthermore, parents have an impression that television will always portray educational content and also assume that children programs are child-friendly which prohibits them to check their children television viewing habits against objectionable content and ultimately those unchecked habits creates a serious threat in building children's moral characters especially in their formative stages. Children mimic the social norm either from their parents or from their peers or directly from the television. Parents Television Council (2006) asserted that 'Children's television is no safe haven for children and parents must be vigilant as to what their children are watching'. It has been studied by several researchers that media, especially electronic media (television) influence the learning process of children (Gerbner et al, 2002; Grusec and Hastings, 2007). Children use television to engage and socialize (Shehab, 2008) and television makes them learn about surroundings and life. Children imitate what they watch on television (Rashid, 2015). It is, therefore, very essential to examine and monitor the contents of the media as children are especially susceptible to those messages.

References
Ahmed, S., & Wahab, J. A. (2014). Animation and socialization process: Gender role portrayal on cartoon network. Asian Social Science, 10(3), 44.

Anderson, K. J., & Cavallaro, D. (2002). Parents or pop culture? Children's heroes and role models. Childhood Education, 78(3), 161-168.

Baker, K., & Raney, A. A. (2004). Toons, they're not a-changin': Sex-role stereotyping on Saturday morning animated programs. In Conference of the International Communication Association (ICA) (Vol. 54)

Baker, K., & Raney, A. A. (2007). Equally super? Gender-role stereotyping of superheroes in children's animated programs. Mass Communication & Society, 10(1), 25-41.

Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G. V., & Pastorelli, C. (2001). Self-efficacy beliefs as shapers of children's aspirations and career trajectories. Child development, 72(1), 187-206.

Chu, D., & McIntyre, B. T. (1995). Sex role stereotypes on children's TV in Asia a content analysis of gender role portrayals in children's cartoons in Hong Kong. Communication Research Reports, 12(2), 206-219.

Emmers-Sommer, T. M., & Allen, M. (1999). Surveying the effect of media effects: A meta-analytic summary of the media effects research in Human Communication Research. Human communication research, 25(4), 478-497.

Fowler, K., & Thomas, V. (2015). A content analysis of male roles in television advertising: Do traditional roles still hold?. Journal of Marketing Communications, 21(5), 356-371.

Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., Signorielli, N., & Shanahan, J. (2002). Growing up with television: Cultivation processes. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), LEA's communication series. Media effects: Advances in theory and research (p. 43–67). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Götz, M., Hofmann, O., Brosius, H. B., Carter, C., Chan, K., Donald, S. H., & Lustyik, K. (2008). Gender in children's television worldwide. Televizion, 21(2008), 4-9.

Grusec, J. E., & Hasting, P. D. (2007). Handbook of Socialization: theory and research. The Guilford press, New York.

Habib, K., & Soliman, T. (2015). Cartoons' effect in changing children mental response and behavior. Open Journal of Social Sciences, 3, 248.

Jaggi, R. (2015). Deconstructing Gender in Cartoon Programming on Children's Television Channels in India–A Textual Analysis. IMS Manthan (The Journal of Innovations), 10(1).

JAGGI, R., & REDDY, R. M. (2017). Gender Representation in Animation: A Study on Children's Television Programming in India. Media Watch, 68.

Jane, E. A. (2015). "Gunter's a woman?!" – doing and undoing gender in Cartoon Network's adventure time. Journal of Children and Media, 9(2), 231–247.

Klein, H., & Shiffman, K. S. (2005). Thin is "in" and stout is "out": What animated cartoons tell viewers about body weight. Eating and Weight Disorders-Studies on Anorexia, Bulimia and Obesity, 10(2), 107-116.

Klinger, L. (2006). What are your children watching? a DPICS-II analysis of parent-child interactions in television cartoons (Doctoral dissertation).

Lemish, D. (2010). Screening gender on children's television: the views of producers around the world. Routledge.

Magotra, B., & Kaur, S. P. (2018). Visual Media and Communication: A Conundrum of Gender Disparity in Animated World. Global Media Journal, 16(30), 1-7.

Martin, C. L., Ruble, D. N., & Szkrybalo, J. (2002). Cognitive theories of early gender development. Psychological bulletin, 128(6), 903.

Nwammuo, A. N., & Amatu, C. (2015). Are cartoons beneficial to teenagers? Lion king viewers 'perception of the benefits of animated cartoon programmes. Global Journal of Applied, Management and Social Sciences, 9, 1-8.

Rashid, A. (2015). Impact of television cartoon channels on children in India. Journal of Indian Research, 3(2), 64–72.

Rozario, A. M., Masilamani, V., & Sriram, A. (2017). Kids' TV programming in India: A comparison of gender representation in imports versus locally produced programmes. Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications, 3(3), 207-227.

Rozario, A. M., Masilamani, V., & Arulchelvan, S. (2018). The case of the missing girls: distribution of gender roles in Indian children's television programming. Journal of Children and Media, 12(2), 125-142.

Shehab, A. J. A. (2008). Gender and racial representation in children's television programming in Kuwait: Implications for education. Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal, 36(1), 49–64.

Signorielli, N., & Bacue, A. (1999). Recognition and respect: A content analysis of prime-time television characters across three decades. Sex Roles, 40(7–8), 527–544.

Thompson, T. L., & Zerbinos, E. (1995). Gender roles in animated cartoons: Has the picture changed in 20 years? Sex roles, 32(9-10), 651-673.

Vickers, K. (2007). Aging and the Media. Californian Journal of Health Promotion, 5(3), 100-105.

Zhang, Q., Cao, Y., Gao, J., Yang, X., Rost, D. H., Cheng, G., & Espelage, D. L. (2019). Effects of cartoon violence on aggressive thoughts and aggressive behaviors. Aggressive behavior, 45(5), 489-497.