



# GENDER IMAGERIES, ENTERTAINMENT, AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE ONLINE NEWS PORTALS OF BANGLADESH

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**Abstract:** One of the major roles of media is “to entertain”. In the current media scenario; television, newspaper, radio, and online media have created a special beat called “entertainment beat”. In this segment, most of the news is associated with celebrities from films to fashion, drama, music, and other arenas of the arts and aesthetics. Similar trends are observed on the Bangladeshi online news portals where a huge portion of entertainment news is uploaded on a daily basis. On this beat, “sexual appeal” is created to attract the mass audience, this appeal is largely been represented by the womenfolk. The socio-cultural scenario of women in Bangladesh and their representation in the entertainment beat is totally different and non-symbiotic. Besides, the photographs used in the entertainment news are not at all related to the story, yet these are used to create “sensation”. In recent discourse, photos are somehow made compulsory for the online news portals and are being used as the “clickbait” and to garner individual presence in reading news from the social media. It is also been observed that the representation (either good or bad) of women in the entertainment beat depends on the selection of news, photos, words, and overall treatment of the news. In this research paper, an attempt is made to understand the imageries of women and their representation on the online news portals of Bangladesh in regard to entertainment beat. The research is based on content analysis where five major online news portals of Bangladesh have been considered as the research population sample. Representation theory, Foucauldian discourse analysis, and Framing theory have greatly administered in the study.

*Index Terms:* Gender, media, entertainment, representation, online, Bangladesh

## I. INTRODUCTION

“Online News Portal” is a digital platform of the specialized website where news, information, opinion are the main elements (Rahman & Nayak, 2018). Due to the extreme popularity of digital media, people now like information with entertainment popularly referred to as “Infotainment”. This is why audio-visual contents have added impact as compared to the written contents. To cope up with the popularity of digital media in Bangladesh, the online news portals are now using a good amount of images to attract their audience. Sometimes, an image can carry more impact than a whole article; however, online news portals have created a discourse that using pictures is “compulsory” for entertainment beat.

A picture is one of the major weapons to attract the audience, so, online news portals try to provide as many images as they can. It could be a possibility that a virtual image is more appealing than written words for entertainment beat. Due to recent technological development, and easy access and availability of the internet in Bangladesh, dependency on digital platforms is increasing among the young and adolescents (Uddin, et al., 2016), which is also creating psychological modification (Islam & Sikder, 2020). People are inclined towards online news portals for getting real-time news and information to save their time, however, online news portals as well as entertainment beats are using this opportunity to attract the audience by providing “sexual content” and creating “sexual appeal”. Technological development has added to the existing negative representation of women in media as a sexual product on these online news portals, which is unethical as a media profession.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on content analysis where all the online news portals of Bangladesh form the research population sample. According to onlinenewspapers.com, there are 270 registered online news portals in Bangladesh.<sup>1</sup> In the sample, only registered news portals recognised by onlinenewspapers.com were included. Among these 270 online news portals, 5 portals were taken through a random purposive sampling method. These are—

*www.prothomalo.com*  
*www.samakal.com*  
*www.banglanews24.com*  
*www.banglatribune.com* and  
*www.ntvbd.com*

As per the requirement of content analysis, six, twelve, eighteen, or twenty-four issues of newspapers need to be analysed to make it a representative sample (Stemple, 1952). To make this research representative, from each five news portals, six day's news was counted (from 2<sup>nd</sup> March to 7<sup>th</sup> March 2018) as the final data. In this study, visual representation and constructive approach of representation theory (Hall, 1997), Foucauldian discourse analysis (Given, 2008), and Framing theory (Goffman, 1974) have been administered to present in-depth understanding.

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

**Table-1: Six day's entertainment reports (2<sup>nd</sup> March to 7<sup>th</sup> March 2018)**

Name of the news portals	Total uploaded news	Entertainment news
Prothomalo.com	712	67
Samakal.com	1194	52
Banglanews24.com	1132	52
Banglatribune.com	892	57
Ntvbd.com	425	32
Total	4,355	260

Source: Author

Five online news portals were analysed for 6 days (from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2018) while a total of 4355 news was uploaded on these online news portals and total of 260 news is related to entertainment beat. This almost constitutes 5.97 percent of overall news coverage which is quite high as an average. As per the Table-1, every online news portal covers more about 9 reports daily which are related with entertainment beat.

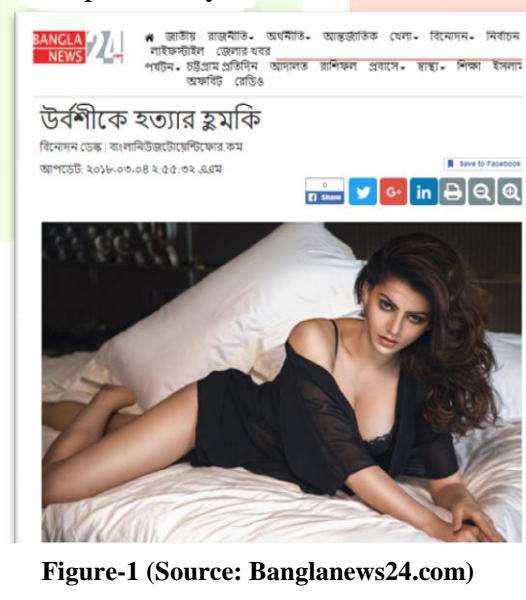


Figure-1 (Source: Banglanews24.com)

### Inconsistency of Image with News

The impact of the visual image on a viewer comes directly from the belief that the “camera never lies” (Rao, 2013). However, the harsh reality of entertainment news on these online news portals of Bangladesh is the inconsistency and irrelevant images with the news. Sometimes, it goes beyond any relation between the news and the image. For instance, *Banglanews24.com* uploaded news on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2018 titled “Urvashi gets life threat”

<sup>1</sup><http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/banglade.htm>

where the online portal uses a very sexually explicit picture of Bollywood actress Urvashi Rautela. The news is about life threat to Urvashi Rautela for her acting in the “Hate Story 4” cinema, however, the photos of Urvashi Rautela used in the news do not represent anything related to life threat (Figure-1), rather it represents sexual appeal. This inconsistency and irrelevance are mainly to attract the audience rather than “to inform”.

On the same day, *Banglanews24.com* uploaded entertainment news titled “Miss Ireland interested in politics”. The news is about a Bangladeshi model Maksuda Akter Priyoti who achieved the “Miss Ireland” title recently and interested to get herself involved in Bangladeshi politics. But the news and the pictures of Maksuda Akter Priyoti used in the news are totally irrelevant and depict sexuality. She is interested in politics, so the pictures related to politics or her profile photo could have been used. Nevertheless, her sexual appealing images have been used for creating a sensation. Another online news portal *Prothomalo.com* has uploaded a similar irrelevant sexual image of Bollywood actress Katrina Kaif while the news was titled “Daily food menu of Katrina”.

Talking about online journalism’s ethics, David (2011) mentioned, online journalism needs to be more specific and focused on providing an understanding and explanation of the information and its value and relevance. For the entertainment beat, the tendency of using such inconsistent images is basically to attract the audience and to increase the traffic to their website, because the highest amount of traffic will also attract advertisement companies. As young and adolescents are mainly the users of social media in Bangladesh (Uddin, et al., 2016), online news portals target these huge numbers of audiences through these sexual images and content and young people are getting attracted as well.



Figure-2 (Source: Banglanews24.com)

### Sexuality Is Inseparable Part

Bangladeshi socio-cultural situation of women and media representation of women in the entertainment beat is totally opposite. For most of the entertainment news and its representation with women is related to sexuality and explicit appeal. Especially the images used in entertainment news are very fond of sexual depiction. Talking about socio-cultural concept and media representation, Smith(2014) argued that the pictures in the news which do not match with the socio-cultural concept can prompt many people to accuse the news media as sensational, insensitive, and exploitation. Understanding the entertainment news and its representation, it has been observed that explicit sensationalism and entertainment news enjoys a symbiotic relationship and dependent on each other. Considering this discourse, a woman is symbolized as a “token of sex” or “sexual product” in the entertainment beat. For instance, *Banglanews24* uploaded the news “Appealing Shahrukh’s daughter” where it describes “Suhana Khan, daughter of Bollywood actor Shahrukh Khan, and her friend are spending time in the swimming pool and they both are looking sexually appealing (Figure-2).”

When news media use words like “sexually appealing” inside the news, it clearly gives a message that why people accuse news media as sensational, insensitive, and exploitation. Considering the ethics of online journalism (David, 2011), this is not at all a news but a “clickbait” to attract the audience. The picture used in the

news is nothing but sexual representation because the online news portal uses the picture of Suhana Khan and her friend in “swimsuit” at the swimming pool while they were enjoying their personal time. The online news portals have created a new discourse that “to entertain” means “sexual entertainment” where women are the “sexual product”. As a result of this discourse, it could be the reason for poor sensitivity towards women and could increase the crime against women.



### Photo Feature Is Like “Feature Sexuality”

Photo feature refers to the series or collection of photos which are been used for describing any incident, topic, person, place, etc. instead of a news story. In the context of online news portals of Bangladesh, photo feature is a common phenomenon, especially for entertainment beat; however, it is a harsh reality that most of the photo features represent “feature sexuality”. For instance, *Ntvbd.com* uploaded a photo feature “Bollywood actress Richa Chadda in swimming pool” where four photos are added. Among these photos, each and every photo is a pure representation of sexuality (Figure-3). Another news portal *KalerKantho.com* uploaded a photo feature titled “Celina Jeitli’s birthday” where they have used a total of 18 photos of Bollywood actress Celina Jeitli and all of these photos are the depiction of sexuality (Figure-4). It is about Celina Jeitli’s birthday, so the photo feature could have carried the pictures of her birthday celebration not a sexual representation of her body. *Banglanews24.com* uploaded a photo feature titled “Interior design of Radhika’s house” where along with pictures of different furniture and interior design of Radhika Apte’s house, the new portal uploaded a very sexually appealing picture of Radhika as well. The photo feature is mainly about furniture and interior design of Radhika’s house; however, the use of Radhika’s such picture depicts a different story which is nothing but sexual sensationalism.



The discussion gives an understanding that the language used for the caption of all of these photo features in every online news portals is irrelevant and non-descriptive with the news item. Words like “appealing”, “sexy”, and “bikini” were loosely used as captions where only women were the subject. Ironically, not a single photo feature in five online news portals was found during data collection which features men as the subject. It means women are being framed as the “sensational object” in the media.

### Online News Means “Image Is Mandatory”

If we pay attention in Table2, it shows that the total 4299 photos were uploaded on the five online news portals in six days when the data was collected. Among them, 2046 photos are either completely or partly related with news, total 1293 photos are used as file photos (previous photos of the same incident), total 816 photos are symbolized photos which are not related or file photos but a symbolic picture (e.g. someone committed suicide and a graphical sketch of suicide to represent that, someone has been murdered and an image of a gun to refer that), and 144 photos have been used as photo feature.

**Table-2: Total photos uploaded in 6 days**

Related (completely or partly) Photos	2,046
File Photos	1,293
Symbolized Photos	816
Photo Features	144
Total Pictures	4,299

*Source: Author*

If we now consider the news and photos comparison, we can observe that a total of 4355 news was uploaded in six days on five online news portals (Table-1) while 4299 photos were uploaded at the same time (Table-2). So, it can be easily said that “photos are mandatory” is a very common discourse for the online news portals. Each and every news portals used the photos as a medium of representing their frame to the audience. Because, people are very fond of believing if they see something which has been theorised as “seeing is believing” (Philo, 1990). It also sets a frame among the audience’s mind and they start to believe that whatever the news portals are portraying is actual and authentic, because it contains pictures. Yet, there are media ethics and laws to use photos in news, however, the application of these ethics and laws are not up to its mark. Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) sets some guidelines and ethical values for photo journalism, such as indecent and distorted pictures should not be captured and published, victim’s picture (especially women) should not be disclosed, and the photographer and publisher should be careful to capture or even publish brutality of any kind (Chowdhury, 2017). When it comes to adhering media ethics, the online news portals, especially the entertainment beat, largely overlook the reality. Hence, the ethics are just in theory, far away from reality.

### IV. CONCLUSION

The understanding of the entertainment beat in the online news portals of Bangladesh depicts an indifferent media representation. The representation of women on these online news portals is sub-standard, even somehow it disregards the principle of media ethics and photo journalism. Considering media as a spectacle, if we look closely at the power of spectacle (Debord, 1990), it clearly gives an understanding that how people of the society explore the world through the spectacle (e.g. media). So, the media is directly indirectly responsible for representing women as “sexual products” in the entertainment beat. Media needs to be sensible and responsible in representing women, not as a “product” but as a “human being”, and for doing that, the right selection of photos, words, and language is very important.

After understanding the scenario, the study suggests some recommendations for the media house and media professionals, especially for those who are involved in the entertainment beat. Firstly, the photos which will be used in news should be related to the news. If irrelevant photos are found, then it should be carrying decent photos which do not depict women as a sexual product. Secondly, entertainment beat needs to come out from the discourse of entertainment means “sexual entertainment”. To do that, online news portals should follow the ethics and laws of journalism, especially for photo journalism. Thirdly, photo feature should be for describing an incident, person, history, etc. and not for describing sexuality. Even, the caption should not carry any sensationalism or explicit sexual appeal. Finally, the online news portals should be careful in selecting pictures, words, language, and incidents, especially for the entertainment beat. Women should be given respect and positive representation to increase their participation in different sectors including media, because, women in

Bangladesh do not get full support from their family members in order to join the media industry for this negative representation of women. Therefore, a positive representation of women in media could be an inspiration for the thousands of women in different nooks and corners of the country to join media and to hold their head high.

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