



## Women's portrayal in the news media: A feminine perspective

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**Abstract :** *Women's portrayal in the media has been a point of strong international debate, and is also a highly-sensitive topic in our country.*

*The issue of media sociology is an important element in this scenario, rendering it difficult to determine whether it is the media that affects and shapes the trends of society or vice versa. It is generally believed that the media and the masses influence and modify each other in an open-ended and undetermined way. Since women constitute half the society, their own role in ascertaining how the fairer sex is projected in the media cannot be overlooked.*

*Whether we say that it is this normative society that is mirrored by the media or that media is conjuring up images of women in which it wants to see them fitted — in either case women cannot be totally absolved from holding responsibility for the way in which the media projects them.*

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*Many women entering the glamorous world of films, television or advertising want to be considered as sex-symbols or queens of physical perfection themselves.*

*"Women's real liberation lies in the realization of their individuality and independent thought process, not in stripping themselves or taking to the streets," observes the eminent writer, Bano Qudsia.*

*In recent months, there has been a flood of reportage on women, on the electronic media and in print. These images of women need to be examined from a sociological perspective. As students of the media, we may ask:*

*What kind of message does a daily newspaper give that describes the murder or rape of a young woman by placing a headline that reads, 'Fashionable woman murdered or raped in train'? The subheads say, 'Polished nails and henna on hands'.*

*Are women portrayed only as victims, or as vamps? What are the images used when reporting on women?*

*One may therefore infer that while women's projection in the media constitutes a major concern with the women, it's not only men who need be gender sensitized in a positive way. Even women need to be clear about what they want to adopt as the insignia of their identity, ensuring that this conviction comes from within the women directly involved 'in the media and with the media', because these are the women who are eventually in a position to direct change by their firm stance.*

*Therefore, this paper has attempts to gauge the women's viewpoints and opinions of their portrayal in the media.*

*Towards this end, a cross-section of women have been interviewed as consumers and producers of news.*

**Keywords :** *Television, Women, Media, Bihar, Feminism, Media Content, TV shows.*

## Introduction :

Women's portrayal in the media has been a point of strong international debate, and is also a highly-sensitive topic in our country.

The issue of media sociology is an important element in this scenario, rendering it difficult to determine whether it is the media that affects and shapes the trends of society or vice versa. It is generally believed that the media and the masses influence and modify each other in an open-ended and undetermined way. Since women constitute half the society, their own role in ascertaining how the fairer sex is projected in the media cannot be overlooked.

Whether we say that it is this normative society that is mirrored by the media or that media is conjuring up images of women in which it wants to see them fitted — in either case women cannot be totally absolved from holding responsibility for the way in which the media projects them.

Many women entering the glamorous world of films, television or advertising want to be considered as sex-symbols or queens of physical perfection themselves.

"Women's real liberation lies in the realization of their individuality and independent thought process, not in stripping themselves or taking to the streets," observes the eminent writer, BanoQudsia.

In recent months, there has been a flood of reportage on women, on the electronic media and in print. These images of women need to be examined from a sociological perspective.

## Objective :

1. To establish a perspective of how women in the capital of Bihar perceive the news media's portrayal of themselves (as women).

2. To gauge the view points and ideologies of women both as consumers and producers of news.

## Hypothesis :

- Women as subjects of the news media will generally be portrayed as victims, vamps, or as an 'attachment' to a successful man. It is generally believed that women are not the prime consumers of news, and that most middle class women view fictional programmes and don't read newspapers.
- To a great extent, women themselves will be unclear about what constitutes 'exploitation', 'negative images', 'moral policing' etc; and often become part of the patriarchal discourse, thus negating women's progress.
- The women who are part of the news industry are often being forced to deal with patriarchal constructs and often compromise meaningful and progressive gender discourse, thus contributing to the male-dominated and male-oriented packaging of news.

We propose to test the above hypotheses with particular reference to middle-class women in Patna, Bihar and women working in media houses in the state capital.

## Research and Methodology :

The methodology consisted of (1) survey through open and closed ended questionnaires, (2) interviews (3) observation (4) desk reviews of previously published data related to the study.

The survey sample size was: 50 women aged above 30 out of which 20 were working women and 50 women aged between 18 and 30 out of which 20 were professionals.

Interviews were held and recorded with 20 women employed in electronic and print media organisations, and 15 women who have been

themselves the subject of news reports. 15 women were interviewed from women's social organisations.

The survey and interviews were collated and a report on the same presented.

### **Findings :**

Women are not the prime consumers of news.

60% women view fictional programmes and don't read newspapers. Thus the first hypothesis was partially proved.

They focus more on entertainment shows.

100% women are against violence and they believe that it is their duty to complain to the authorities about such mishaps.

Women are themselves unclear about what constitutes violence and exploitation. This proves the second hypothesis.

Media not only portrays women as mere commodities, they often unintentionally stereotype women. This proves the third hypothesis.

### **Conclusion :**

It is clear that there is a need for women to be more media literate.

They need to be active consumers and interpreters of news in order to gain better decision making power.

There is a need of media education at school and college level for all children, especially girls.

Women organizations should grow stronger and they should join hands to stop violence against women.

Women should concentrate and focus more on news and desist from watching fictional programmes.

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