



Content-Based Study on Ek Thi Mariam: Changing Gender Role Portrayal in Media

Original Article

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Citation

Hasan, N., & Sahar, N. (2024). Content-based study on Ek Thi Mariam: Changing gender role portrayal in media. *Open Access Organization and Management Review*, 3(1), 1-7.

WEBSITE: www.mdPIP.com**PUBLISHER:** MDPIP

ISSN: Print: 2959-6211

ISSN: Online: 2959-622X

Abstract

Gender role development is significant among children during their personality development. This results in the formation of gender identity, which later determines the type of gender role exhibited by the child in later life. Home is the main platform from where the key features of personality for a child are shaped. Similarly, variable gender roles are also being taught by the family members. The growing media and its impact also play a significant role. The current research made an account of how gender role portrayal is changing in media and its respective impact on gender role shift in society. This objective was achieved by surveying the content portrayed in the Pakistani movie “*Ek Thi Mariam*” (2016). The study followed a quantitative descriptive research method. The purposive sampling technique was used based on the objective or purpose of the study. The sample comprised 40 university students aged 16-30 years old, such that the mean age is 25.3. Findings suggest that the media today is displaying a changed gender role instead of gender stereotypical portrayal. The study was conducted with a limited sample, in the future, however, studies could be expanded, and sample size could be increased to get a holistic picture. It could help future research to identify modern trends and to study the effect of these variations among individuals of different age groups.

Keywords: Gender Role, Gender Identity, Media, Development, Children.

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Open Access Organization & Management Review

Introduction

Gender Role

Gender is the major aspect of human beings (Gauntlett, 2008). It includes the presumptions held about the characteristics, aptitude, and likely behaviors of both men and women as determined by the social and cultural roles that are considered appropriate for both (World Health Organization [WHO], 2017). These roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies, and our cultures are termed as gender roles. Gender roles and expectations are learned. They can change over time and vary from culture to culture and society to society as well.

Gender role is a set of behavioral norms and values that are particularly related to males and females. The division of labor is also concerned with the gender roles of men and women. Gender roles adopted during childhood usually continue in adulthood. The gender role of a person is composed of certain elements that can be expressed by dressing, profession, behavior, personal relationships, and many other aspects. Gender role is usually the representation of gender identity, but it is not necessarily so (Noppe, 2019). Gender role is developed through a gradual stepwise procedure, which is termed “Gender role development” constituting the most important and major aspect of human life. Family is the major platform for the socialization of children which also involves gender socialization. As, for example, toughness is concerned with males while females are taught to have calm and compromising attitudes. Gender role development is also followed by imitating peer groups as well as the content portrayal in media. Gender development leads to the formation of a sound gender identity (Jackson, 2014).

Media and Gender Roles

Media is very influential in its impact on the human as stated by Tabassum, Khan, & Abbas (2023) whereas, representation of different genders is portrayed differently by media. It influences gender identity and respective gender roles by defining how males and females look, dress up, act, play games, and feel differently (Gaunlett, 2008). Media impart this influence through media messages that are conveyed in two ways, 1. message content of television shows, magazines, news articles, music, drama serials, and movies; and 2. message delivered by the advertisements. Media create a false consciousness, under which it strongly influences people’s effects, behaviors, and cognitions (Tamuli & Mishra, 2022). Through actors, actresses, models, and performers, the male is conveyed as masculine dominant and active while the female is conveyed as feminine ineffective, and passive (DeFrancisco, 2014). The problem statement for current research is “changing gender role portrayal in media”

Research Questions

The research questions for the present research project are as follows:

1. Is the gender role portrayal (display) in media changing?
2. How is this change considered?
3. What is the most influential part of the movie clip (i.e., attached in the survey)?
4. What is the nature of agreement with gender role diffusion (i.e., no specified roles for either men or women) portrayed by the movie clip?
5. What are the movies or dramas other than the one surveyed (i.e., “Ek Thi Marium”) that show the changing gender roles?

Literature Review

The theoretical background of our research lies in the social role theory by Eagly (1987). The theory argues that a society is characterized by the division of labor between both genders. This labor is widely influenced by gender stereotypes. It is also stated by the theory that in Western societies, men have greater participation in paid positions of higher power and status, and the nurturing role was however assigned to women (Tamuli & Mishra, 2022). This

has created gender-related stereotypes. Also, it had been found that the distribution of gendered roles had fostered differentiated skills in men and women. The significant prevalence of gender-related stereotypes in the group also plays a prominent role in shaping behavior as per the expectations imposed by those stereotypes and the stereotypical behavior experienced by others in society (Akhter & Naheed, 2014). Therefore, in situations that don't control behavior in the gendered stereotypical manner, the members of society (i.e., both men and women) act in a varied manner based on the differentially acquired gender roles and skills.

Social role theory is also relevant in this context (Tabassum, Khan, & Abbas, 2023). It presents a broad scope of the social roles each of us carries, which implies interaction in all contexts whether it be assertive-power-associated behaviors or supportive-socioemotional behaviors. The theory proposes that in general women act in a more emotionally or communally oriented manner and less instrumentally; that is service-oriented manner. However, men are generally inclined to act otherwise providing the same context. These differences were found to persist greatest in situations where gender is highly salient, whereas, in formal-institutional settings, those gender differences will be weaker or even absent (Arias, 2019).

Literature also indicated the research that studied the gender roles differentiation. Eisend (2019) conducted a meta-analysis on gender role stereotypes and the moderating role of advertisements. It was concluded that the negative role of advertisements concerning gender roles; that is, in strengthening gender stereotypes should be carefully monitored and avoided. Another study was carried out by Windels (2016) by conducting interviews with 42 practitioners working in an advertising agency. The participants were asked about the role of gender stereotypes in advertising. It was concluded that stereotypes are closely associated with advertisements and stereotypes are most inappropriate when a negative perception is reinforced by them.

Research by Trolan (2013) studied the impact of media on gender inequality within sports. Findings suggested that despite of the advancement of women's sports and female athletes, their media portrayal is subjected to objectification and less strong as compared to male athletes and the obsession about the body of female athletes instead of their skills still exists and will persist until the portrayal of female athletes is re-examined by media. The study by Hardin and Greer (2009) also concluded that media play a significant role in thinking of certain sports as masculine and feminine and women's participation in sports does do little to change the traditional gender-typing that exists in the society (Arias, 2019). In Pakistan however, no study has yet examined the media role in this regard and the literature exhibited a gap in the comparison of the gender role portrayal in media across the age generations (Awan, 2012). This research will thus provide a comparative account of past and contemporary perspectives on gender portrayal in media.

Method

The present study used the purposive sampling technique; that is, selected based on the objective or purpose of the study. The sample comprised 40 university students aged 16-30 years old, such that the mean age is 25.3. The main characteristics of the sample are as follows:

Table 1
Main Characteristics of Sample (N=40) for the Survey

Variable		Frequency	Percentages
Gender	Men	9	22.5%
	Women	30	75%
	Don't want to mention	1	2.5%
Age	16-19 years old	10	25%
	20-23 years old	5	12.5%
	24-27 years old	17	42.5%
	28 years old and above	8	20%

Table 1 demonstrates that the sample comprised mostly of girls and most of the participants of the study lie in the age range of 24 to 27 years old.

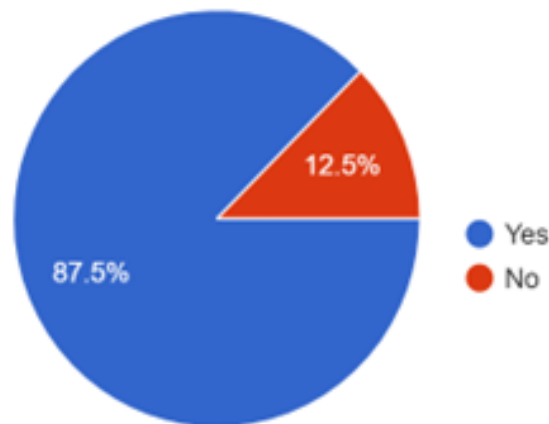
Data Collection and Analysis

The data is collected by using the Google form survey. This was the most appropriate way for the current study as the movie clip from “Ek Thi Marium” could be easily attached with the Google form and a large sample could be approached in a short period. The data obtained from the survey was analyzed by making the analysis of the responses obtained from each research question and generating the common themes found. The demographic characteristics of the sample were also mentioned by determining the frequencies of the number of participants, their gender,, and age respectively.

Results and Discussion

Figure 1

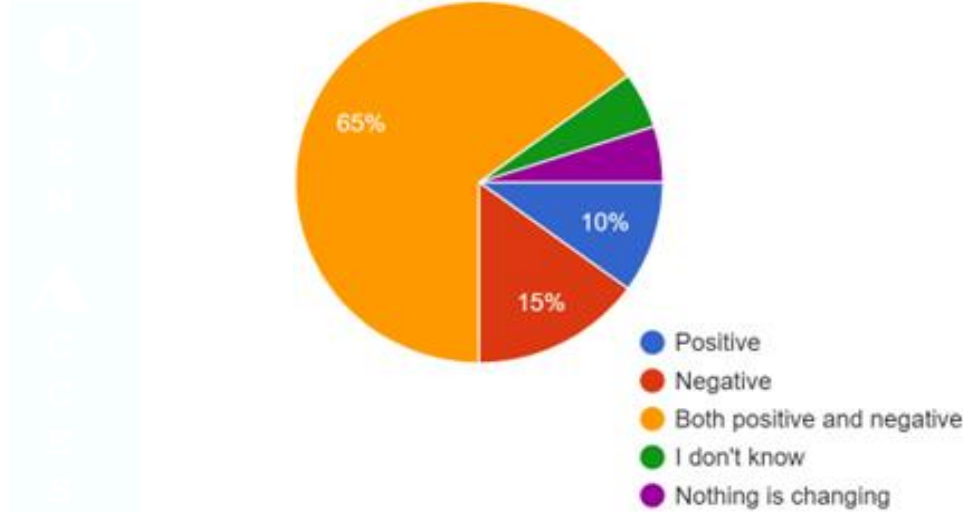
Responses to Research Question 1



The survey conducted under the current research project obtained the set of variable findings on the research questions which are mentioned earlier. The findings on question 1 “Is the gender role portrayal (display) in media is changing?” suggest that the majority of the participants were on the view agree with changing gender role portrayal in media; such that 87.5% of the participants responded “yes” to this question. The following figure indicate the responses to this question:

The findings on question 2 “How is this change considered?” suggest that the majority of the participants considered the change in gender role portrayal as both positive and negative; such that 65% of the participants responded “both positive and negative” to this question. The following figure indicate the responses to this question:

Figure 2
Responses to Research Question 2



The responses on question 3 “What is the most influential part of the movie clip (i.e., attached in the survey)?” demonstrates following major responses:

1. Father being proud of daughters
2. Education above dowry
3. There should be no gender discrimination
4. Every girl can do anything
5. Parents’ support and trust in the capability of Mariam
6. Focus Mariam on her dreams
7. Encouragement by parents
8. The character of Mariam

These responses indicated that the part of the movie clip that was found to be most influential by the participants of the study is “father being proud of her daughters”. The responses to question 4 “What is the nature of agreement with gender role diffusion (i.e., no specified roles for either men or women)?” are as follows:

Figure 3
Responses to Question 4

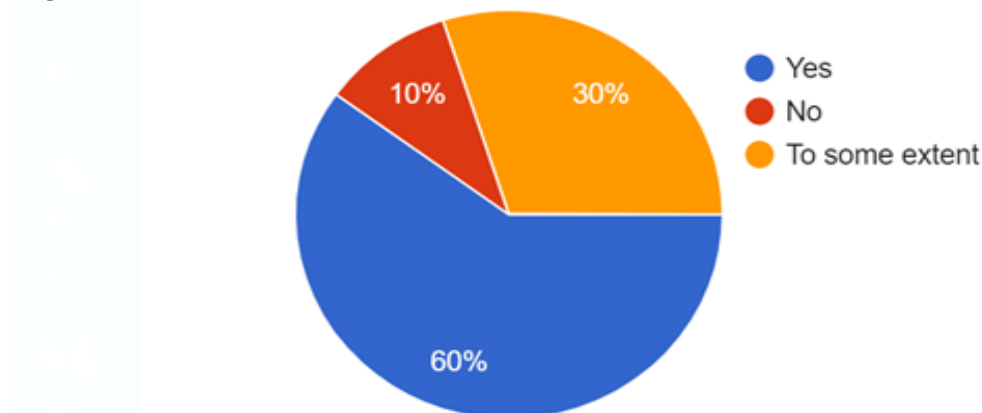


Figure 3 indicated that the majority of the participants agree with the display of gender role diffusion in the movie clip; such that 60% of the participants responded “yes” to this question. The information obtained on question 5 “What are the movies or dramas other than the one surveyed (i.e., “Ek Thi Marium”) that show the changing gender roles?” shows that other movies and dramas also indicate changing gender roles as portrayed by media. The movies and dramas mentioned by the participants include Motorcycle (Vespa) Girl, Bhaagi, Meri Beti, Bhaag Amna Bhaag, Bhoor, Khaani, Bol Meri Machli Kitna Pani, Cheekh, Dangal, and Superwoman.

Conclusions

Gender role development is instrumental for children in personality development stages where the formation of gender identity plays a critical role that is later manifested in determining the gender role. Family and home are the primary and key platforms that shape and reshape the features of personality. Likewise, increasing media and its impact also play a significant role. The study in hand focused on how gender role portrayal is changing in media and its respective impact on gender role shift in society. This objective was achieved by surveying the content portrayed in the Pakistani movie “*Ek Thi Marium*”. Findings suggest that the media today is displaying a changed gender role instead of a gender stereotypical portrayal.

Study Limitations and Implications

The study was conducted with a limited sample, in the future, however, studies could be expanded, and sample size could be increased to get a holistic picture. The research will help in developing a better understanding of how gender role portrayal is shifting in our media. This will help identify the major areas that need to be focused on to build a positive and non-discriminated gender identity. It could help future research to identify modern trends and to study the effect of these variations among individuals of different age groups.

Acknowledgements

The researchers acknowledge the help of the respondents in filling out the online Google-created questionnaire.

Deceleration of Interest

We the researchers declare that we have no clash of interest.

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