

Gender Stereotyped Portrayal of Women in the Media: Perception and Impact on Adolescent

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Abstract: *It has been widely recognized that media can play an instrumental role in bringing social transformation and social change by promoting and disseminating information. The content of media reflects the pattern of value in any society. The prevailing attitude of the society gets revealed through the way subjects dealing with women are treated by the media. Whether deliberately or unintentionally, the way women have been portrayed in media is exaggerated form of real life circumstances and assumptions and it has very little relationship with the real life. The matter of concern is that it has a great impact on life style of today's adolescents as they imitate and identify themselves with the character shown in the content of programmes of printed or electronic media. The purpose of the study is to find out the perception of adolescent's regarding sex-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media and its relationship with real life experiences. A sample of 100 students in the age group of 17 to 20 years was selected by using purposive sampling technique. The sample of 100 students comprised of 50 boys and 50 girls. The data collection for the present study was undertaken with the help of a self constructed questionnaire. The questionnaire includes 70 questions to elicit the perception of boys and girls belonging to the age group 17 to 20 years towards sex stereotyped depiction of women in print and electronic media. The statistical analysis of data collected included percentage, mean, standard deviation and t-test. The findings of the study show that there is stereotypical representation of gender roles in media and in some ways it reinforces the traditional patriarchal notions of gender as perceived by the adolescents. Female students showed more agreement with typical stereotypical representation of women in traditional role or as a sex object and they felt a need of regulation on the content of media as compared to male.*

Key Words: *Media, portrayal, women, stereotyped*

I. Introduction

“There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing.”
- Swami Vivekananda

Women's are the prime assets for the development of a country, especially in the context of India where nearly 50% of total population comprises of women. The time has gone when women were generally considered as an object and their role in family and society was very limited. The women of 21st century are achieving several mile stones and they are becoming source of inspiration for many. However, we cannot say it confidently that the image of women in Indian society has completely transformed, there are many evidences which proves the existence of systematic discrimination and neglect of women's in India. It may be in terms of inadequate nutrition, denial or limited access to education, health and property rights, child labor and domestic violence (Purnima, 2010). Media has always been a significant pillar of social transformation and social change. To bring a social change the instrumental role of media can-not be denied. It doesn't just have the power to build public opinion by reaching to far, wide and diversified audience but also mobilize people and mould the public opinion. This puts the media in a powerful position in a democracy. Popular mass media such as news papers, television, and radio represent a symbolic power of social control. Now days there are other interactive forms of communication have emerged out such as internet, blogs, social networking sites, text messaging, wikis, virtual world and many more. They are generally termed as new Media and becoming increasingly powerful mechanisms for mobilizing popular support. The characteristics of this new media are collect, collaborate, create and interact (Arif Moin & Ehtesham Ahmad Khan 2013). They effectively solicit public support and participation for the well being of the society. The structure of ownership and participation are new in new media and directly challenge the monopoly on mass communication possessed by traditional media producer. Women have crucial role to play in every sphere of life whether it is household, economic contribution child rearing or improving the quality of life. To play these role women should be conscious of their potential and it can only be possible when they will not be deliberately marginalized by male domination. In this context, media has an important role to play to create awakening in women to achieve their potential as the prime movers of change in society.

The content of media reflects the pattern of value in any society. The prevailing attitude of the society gets revealed through the way subjects dealing with women are treated by the media (Arpita Sharma, 2012). Media can act as both a perpetrator and as a protagonist – it can either reinforce the gender based discrimination by portraying stereotypical sensational images of women or it can provide balanced coverage that empowers women while exposing acts of gender bias (Amrita Ray and Mr. Ritwajit Das). Recognizing the role of media in women empowerment, the National commission for women and other organizations are striving hard to improve the status of Indian women different forms of communication for the mass.

This paper would try to prove the ways women are portrayed in media may empower women in society but may also promote them as sexual objects, submissive to male dominance and wrapped with stereotyped roles, which has detrimental impact on the self esteem and .body image of young girls.

Women in Commercials

Though media proves out to be a boon to bring social change in Indian society but its policy in terms of depicting women image has somehow distorted. More often than not the media depicts women as a sexual object with little value. It sends negative messages about the ways in which women should be treated and constantly degrade status of women in the society.

In news and entertainment media, women have frequently been marginalized with minor changes in proportions over the past decade. The female characters often depicted in film and television cast gender stereotypes and the likelihood of women, specifically young women, to be hyper sexualized in film is far more expected than men. In television commercials the trend of sex-role stereotype can be observed where women are mostly given the roles such as not making important decision at home and outside, dependent on men, need men's protection (Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971). The commercials for men's products generally involve women as sex objects (advertisement of deodorant, shaving cream etc.). In an observation of 1000 TV commercials Dominick and Rauch (1974) observed that the role given to women are limited to housewife/mother and rarely given occupational roles. This type of stereotypical representation of women in media can have a detrimental impact on young girls who identifies themselves with their role model shown in these commercials. Women may perceive the image of a complete housewife stereotype as a cultural directive. They may learn to suppress their desire of pursuing their career of interest and replace them with the "ideal" presented to them through the media in their daily lives. Most of the time media depicts the desire rather than the reality. Behind the sensational portrayal of women in advertisements the simple reason is to pursue the target audience in favor of a respective product or service. We can see a women depicting a vulgar and lusty image in many advertisements such as soft drinks (Slice), Deodorant and Body Spray ("Engage", "Axe", "Wild Stone"), which is not at all necessary to portray in this kind of advertisements of male products. In many two wheeler and four wheeler advertisements and an advertisement of E-commerce website of second hand products portrays a kind of greedy and self-centered woman character, which makes a very bad impression to the society.

The message conveyed through the media may misguide the adolescents of today to maintain a slim and skinny body image. It may give rise to many health related issued among adolescents girls. The pervasiveness of sex stereotyped role in commercials are not only limited to India but a strong similarity of sex role in advertising can be seen around the world (Siu and Au, 1997, in Japan, Ford et.al., 1998), in Korea, Cutler et.al., 1995, in Hong Kong, Sengupta, 1992).

Women in Television

In the era of cable and satellite television has become the part of everyday's life in almost every level of socioeconomic strata. It is one of the vast and widely accepted media in the developing world. The development of satellite television in 1991 revolutionized the content and context of television. There are a number of channels with specific content of programmes like cartoon channels for kids, health channels, devotional channels and channels especially for daily soaps (Zee TV, Colors, Star Plus.). These channels showing daily soaps basically targeted the housewives sitting at home in the afternoon. Women watch more daily soaps than man (Jyotin, 2002). But the popularity of these daily soaps is not limited only to these category of women, many working women and male also watch these serials regularly. The striking features of these serials is that it portrays women either as vamps planning some conspiracy or an ideal women who keep herself busy in performing household chores, whose main aim is to make everyone happy over sacrificing herself. But it has no relationship with reality. Though in few serials like "Balika Vadhu", "Punarvivah", "Diya and Baati" has came up to raise the bold tabooed issues related to women such as child marriage, widow remarriage and women education. But being based on these themes ultimately, they portray the submissive and sacrificing image of women simultaneously. It is also been shown in these serials that when women possess the power or excel in professions, the ego of males get hurt and gets webbed into allsorts of insecurities and inferiorities. (Karthika, 2005). These serials exaggerate a selection of real life circumstances and assumptions. These types of programme create a world which seems very real and viewers are unable to differentiate between the contrived

world and the real one. Television serials have a definite impact on thought pattern of society (Desai, 1996). Women have been portrayed as men would like to see them- beautiful creatures, submissive mothers of their children, efficient house keepers, but nothing else. Impact of television is more on the young children and adolescents. It may have an adverse impact on the attitude and behavior of adolescents.

The present scenario demands of taking initiative on the part of women in making sure of presenting a positive ideals of both men and women in the society by altering portrayal of damaging stereotypes (Gahulant, 2002).

Women in Print Media

The print media include newspapers, periodicals, newsletters is one of the oldest media and has been relied upon by the people as credible source of information. The print media are known for fearless criticism and service. Print media not only reflects the values prevailing in the society but also provides platform for dialogue and discussions on issues leading to social change (Kumar. P. 1995). No doubt that electronic media broadcast the issue immediately but print media creates a more persistent and lasting effect.

It has been observed that women issues generally do not get a chance to come up on the front page, unless they are rape cases, crime, sexual harassment, abuse of women or other atrocities. Even in news on issues related to women they are presented as passive victims or passive reactors to public event in news media. Visibility of women in news is widely covered on some specific days like Mother's Day, Women's Day etc. On other day's news related to women generally occupied with sensational stories of glamour, sex, domestic violence and other forms of violence.

Besides Sunday and Saturday special glossy editions on women's leisure, fashion, beauty and other luxurious news items with erotic photographs are issued from time to time by daily newspapers (Dhar, Pattnaik ;1996). The presentation of women in media has changed the perception of perfection especially among adolescents. Perfection means being skinny beyond healthy standards, and fit and beautiful for today's adolescents. Ultimate impact of identifying themselves with these models of media contributes to the growing rate of eating disorders among young women. Many women now feel the need to be skinny and do so through drastic measures, such as anorexia or bulimia (Morgan S, 2012).

Women in Film

Films are the most complex way of communicating which may include all aids like visual, sound and drama it has an advantage over the print media and impressive impact well on illiterate audience, the movies are made on different spheres like family social drama, romance, religious stories and affairs of family and society. It's the most influencing medium with whom the audience often gets carried away and any immoral interpretation can have unethical impact on the society. The fact cannot be denied that film has brought the change in perception of society to some extent but still there is a dearth of awareness in society regarding the real status of women. There has been a shift in depicting women in film story from dancing around tress, making love with men, taking care of everyone in the house, and bounded to behave like an ideal daughter, wife and daughter-in-law. Over 75 years a change has emerged in feminists across the respective time "a new wave" in the cinema has leashed Rao(1989). In the last decades many women role oriented films have come in which women are shown breaking the barriers of stereotypical role such as in "Mardani", "Lajja". Many real life crimes against women are also depicted through movie such as "No one killed Jessica". The films like 'Mary Kom' depicts the success story of women.

But these kind of movies are so meager that they can be counted on finger and they do not come in the list of crossing 100 crores like a commercial film showing women in songs, dance, in a situation of asking for help and men fighting to protect women. This shows the stereotypical mindset of the audience where they enjoy men and women in their traditionally defined roles. Women are hardly shown as a working unless compelled by the circumstances. She sits at home or show doing shopping even though she is highly educated. Even if shown working then the areas get specified like teachers, lawyers and receptionist. Working women often shown encountering sexual harassment and reinforces masculinity by media (Gallagher1992). Modern women shown in films is a complete transform of patriarchal tradition women who is well educated beautiful independent but still needs a hero to save her from petty thieves. New cinema and the portrayal of women may lead to myth in society (Laxmi1986). It is a prejudice mind-set that women directors must create a film related to some feminine problems (Gupta 1994). In a study conducted on 'reading habits and perception of portrayal of women' by Nidhi Mittal (1999) where she found out that the respondents themselves felt that there is a need to change women's portrayal in magazines as they were shown more in subdued roles.

Emerging Trends in Media

However the scenario has been changed to sporadically if not completely in favor of women's issues. The coverage of women issues has increased may be because of the greater participation of women in media as

a reporter and the presence of some senior journalist in a position of responsibility in both the print and electronic media Joseph Sharma, (1994).

When we talk about the emerging trend in media, we cannot afford to deny the role of new media in changing the scenario in the context of women issues. Online platforms are becoming increasingly powerful mechanisms for mobilizing popular support. The recent example is horrific Delhi rape case. This incidence was widely covered by all kind of media but the online responses changed the mindsets of the adolescents and created a wave around the globe and it seems that people are no longer willing to accept rape and sexual assault as simply a news. Media is becoming the most important tool for people to make their voices heard. There are many online platforms where people are raising their voice against crime and sexual assault such as Twitter, Face book and Internet Blogs. Within 10 days of the incident, Face book groups ‘Gang raped in Delhi’ created on December 20, 2012 and ‘Delhi for Women’s Safety’ created on December 18, 2012 received 5046 and 4263 ‘Likes’ respectively. Other Face book groups such as ‘Another girl gang raped in Delhi – Can we stop it?’, ‘Delhi Gang Rape – Please Don’t Ignore “Must Read” For Damini’, and ‘Delhi Gang Rape – Protest’ emerged as individual fight against such crimes. These groups acted like platforms for justice and empowering women and have given a voice to everyone, even those who want to protest against sexual assault cases in India even if they are out of the country (Ahmad Khan, Arif Moin,2013). It is not like rape cases and sexual assault cases are the recent trend in the society but the sensitivity and active and wide coverage of media bringing these issues in front of the public. Public opinions on online media have been playing an important role in making the media sensitive towards the issues related to women.

Women, who constitute half of the population, need particular attention of the media not only to raise the issues related to them but also to show their achievements, success stories and their struggle towards their dream of creating a sense of self respect, self reliance, economic independence and equality in status with men. During the last two decades, proliferation of women in developmental research is remarkable but there is still a dearth of researches inquiring the sensitivity of media towards presentation of women in their content. Today’s adolescents are most of the time exposed to one or other kind of media and they learn through identifying themselves with their role model, most often the characters shown in news, films and serials. On the backdrop of this the present study has been taken to find out the perception of adolescents regarding how women are portrayed in the media and whether it has any relation with the real life characters.

Objectives:

1. To study the trend of women portrayal in print and electronic media
1. To find out the impact of depiction of women in media on today’s adolescents
2. To study whether the portrayed image has any relation with the real life
3. To find out the impact of depiction of women in media on adolescents with respect to gender

II. Methods

The present study on ‘Gender Stereotyped Portrayal of Women in the Media: Perception and Impact on Adolescents’ is based on a descriptive research as it describes the present status of the given situation, attitudes and progress. The study is based on quantitative data where the survey research method has been used to gather the required information.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample was for the present study consists of 100 students in the age group of 17 to 20 years. They were selected by using purposive sampling technique. That means only those students who are the regular viewer or user of both electronic and print media are selected. Out of those 100 students, 50 girls and 50 boys students of the age group 17 to 20 years were included in the sample.

Tool& Data Collection

The tool used for the study was a self-constructed questionnaire, comprises of 70 questions seeking the respondent to answer them based on their perception regarding depiction of women in media. The data was collected from 100 students in which questionnaires were filled on one to one basis between the respondent and researcher.

Data analysis: The scores obtained through the administration of questionnaire were subjected to statistical analysis such as mean, SD, and t-test with the help of SPSS version 20. The t test was applied to compare the perception of boys and girls towards portrayal of women in media and how far it is related to real life circumstances and assumptions prevailing in the society.

III. Analysis and Discussion

Table: 1 Percentile Distribution of Perception of Adolescents Regarding Portrayal of Women in Media

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Can't say (%)
Display unnecessary vulgarity	70	29	1
Overemphasize beauty and sexuality	61	39	00
Used as decorative objects	62	32	6
Used as a commodity	60	36	4
Women are used more than men in advertisement	80	16	4
Use of women to increase the sale of product	70	24	6
Show stereotyped role of women	76	21	3
Unethical appeal	57	30	13
Play submissive role	44	45	10

From the table 1, it is greatly evident that the country's adolescents has kept their perception forward and agreed upon the unnecessarily display of vulgarity in media (76%) they relied upon the fact that women are used more in commercials then men (80%), used as commodity (60%) to attract the customers and depicting sex stereotypes roles shown in sitcoms (76%) which in turns create a vague image of women in society. Approximately 60% students agreed on showing women as decorative objects as they overemphasize beauty and sexuality. It creates a false notion of beauty that if girls are fair and slim (skinny), they are beautiful. It may lead to development of inferiority complex in young girls.

Table 2. Percentile Distribution of Perception Regarding Impact of Content of Media on Adolescents

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Can't say (%)
Heavy use of sex means high quality	36	64	
Interested in watching if women is there	47	53	
Influenced to buy a product	68	28	4
Moderate use of sex is more appealing	61	32	7
Agree with the way women are portrayed	41	52	7
Changed men perception	40	35	25
Changed women perception	17	45	38

Table no.2 depicts that the adolescent's perception about women has not been changed much by the way women is portrayed in media (52%). However they like to watch attractive models in the media (47%) and they may also get influenced to buy the products (68%) which they endorse but denied from the fact that high sex appeal in the commercials guarantees high quality product (64%). 52% of adolescents are not agreed with the way women are portrayed in media but as per their opinion, the moderate use of sex appeal has no harm to be contended (61%).

Table 3 Percentile Distribution of Adolescents Considering it a Matter of Concern for the Society

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Can't say (%)
Consider it a social issue	63	34	3
Need of regulating the content	62	31	7
Need of rejection of product depicting women unethically	67	33	-

The above mention table no 3 shows the result stating that today's generation is not very ignorant of what is happening in their surroundings and they are concerned with the issues and challenges of the society. 63% of students consider the unethical and stereotyped presentation of women as a major social issue and they want that there should be some kind of regulation on this unnecessary and unethical content (62%). Younger generation is strongly in favor of condemning those products that depicts women very badly (67%). The depiction of women as a sexual and decorative object is done to attract the consumer but just because the product has been recommended or advocated by a beautiful model cannot be correlated with the high quality of the product.

Figure 1. Diagrammatic Presentation of Adolescents Considering it a Matter of Concern for the Society

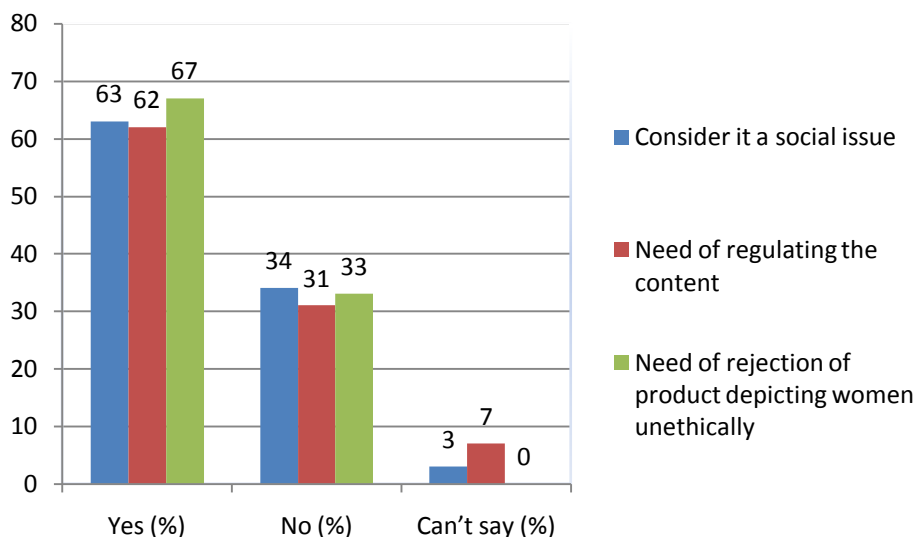
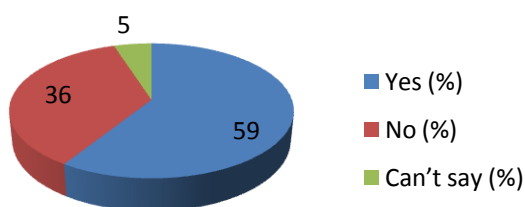
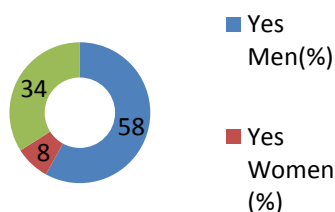


Figure 2. Diagrammatic Presentation of Perception of Adolescents Regarding the portrayal of Women in Media and its Relationship to the Real Life



The result of the above mentioned figure no 2 proves out to be very concerning and clearly depicts the effect of media portraying women. It states that 59% of the adolescents agree with the point that women in reel life and real life are just the same. However in reality it is poles apart but slowly it has changed the mindset of the future leaders (adolescents).

Figure 3. Diagrammatic Presentation of Adolescents Interest Towards Watching Women in Stereotyped Roles



The figure 3 clearly depicts that adolescent boys get attracted towards the sensuous attractive clad models (58%) used in media which motivates the media industry to keep the stereotype upgoing. This is little contradictory with another findings of the same study which states that 67% students believe that the product portraying women badly, should be rejected but at the same time they enjoy the attractive models in sensual outfits. It can be said that adolescents of today know that it is unethical and it should be stopped. They are also aware of the fact that rejection of those products may reduce the immoral portrayal of women but they are very much self-centered and give priority to their own pleasure and least bothered about the issue.

Table:4 Mean, Standard Deviation and t value of Perception of Adolescents Regarding Portrayal of Women in Media

Items	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value
Display unnecessary Vulgarity	male	1.34	.593	2.624
	female	1.66	.626	
overemphasize beauty and sexuality	male	1.30	.463	8.150*

	female	1.92	.274	
Decorative object	male	1.20	.639	7.324*
	female	1.34	.479	
used as commodity	male	1.26	.600	6.108*
	female	1.92	.274	
Women are used more than men in advertisement	Male	1.82	.438	1.168*
	female	1.70	.580	
Use of women to increase the sale of product	Male	1.60	.571	0.670
	female	1.68	.621	
Depiction of sex stereotyped role	Male	1.50	.614	5.039*
	female	1.96	.198	
Unethical appeal	Male	1.22	.679	3.218
	female	1.66	.688	
mostly play submissive role	Male	1.50	2.873	0.192
	female	1.58	.642	

*Significant at the level of 0.05

From the table 4, it is evident that there is a significant difference in perception of students regarding use of women in media as a commodity and decorative object, where they are given a sex stereotyped role to play and their physical beauty is overemphasized rather than their success and achievements. As indicated by the mean values, it can also be interpreted from the table that female students are more agreed with these views as compared to male students. No significant difference was found among boys and girls regarding showing women unethically and with unnecessary vulgarity. Most of the boys and girls feel that women mostly play submissive roles, and the content of media presents women unethically and unnecessary vulgarity is shown in the content.

Table: 5 Mean, Standard Deviation and t value of Perception Regarding Impact of Content of Media on Adolescents

Items	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value
Heavy use of sex means high quality	male	1.38	.490	0.413
	female	1.34	.479	
Interested in watching if women is there	male	1.74	.443	6.368
	female	1.20	.404	
Influenced to buy a product depicting women	male	1.52	.646	2.183*
	female	1.76	.431	
Moderate use of sex is more appealing	male	1.72	.607	2.986
	female	1.36	.598	
Agree with the way women are portrayed	Male	1.62	.602	5.183*
	female	1.06	.470	
Changed men perception	Male	1.10	.544	0.626*
	female	1.20	.990	
Changed women perception	Male	.40	.670	6.491*
	female	1.18	.523	
negative influence on adolescents girls	male	1.30	.814	3.710*
	female	1.80	.495	
feeling of inferiority to women	male	1.68	.587	2.198
	female	1.44	.501	

*Significant at the level of 0.05

The Table No 5 shows that there is a significant difference in perception of college students regarding change in perception of boys and girls as a result of stereotyped role played by women in media. To some extent it has created a fake image in the society of an ideal wife, ideal daughter-in-law and myths such as women are always indulge in gossips and doing conspiracy against others. It has contributed in reinforcing the sacrificing and submissive image of women, which is not true in real life. Women of 21st century are showing their presence in each and every professional field. It can also be interpreted from the table that female students are more agreed with the fact that there is a change in perception of women because of this media content as compared to male students. They believe that stereotyped biased presentation of women in media has negative influence on adolescent girls and people are getting influenced to buy a product if it is modeled by women. Although no significant difference was found in their interest in watching the film/ advertisements/serials/magazine, if women are there, moderate use of sex is more appealing and use of sex means high quality of product.

Table 6. Mean, Standard Deviation and t value of Adolescents Considering it a Matter of Concern for the Society

Items	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value
Consider it a social issue	Male	1.32	.513	5.888*
	Female	1.88	.435	
Need of regulating the content	Male	1.28	.701	4.765*
	Female	1.82	.388	
Need of rejection of product depicting women unethically	Male	1.62	.490	5.352*
	Female	1.72	.454	

*Significant at the level of 0.05

The young generation of every country are its valuable human resource. The responsibility for change, progress and innovation lies on their shoulders. For this they need to be aware of the progress as well as issues of the society and more important is that they should be sensitive towards these issues. The significant value of 't' in the above table no:6 depicts that media has affected boy's perception to a great extent towards women and indeed men has fabricated a personal interest in watching women the way they have been portrayed in media which has very little relation with reality. They therefore denies from accepting it as a social issues (mean: 1.32) and don't want any content regulation need on media (mean: 1.28) because if that will happen they will be segregated from the stimulating content. Whereas women desires to bring up the content regulation on media (mean: 1.82) so that they would clogged from getting portrayed as sex object and should be shown as a motivation figure which could encourage other women to excel themselves and come out from the selvedge of illusionary portrayal and relies their will. Both have agreed upon the point of condemning those products which have shown unnecessarily vulgarity about women.

IV. Conclusion

It is without a doubt that media has huge influence on people and it can be a dominant medium for advocacy of gender equality and uplifting the present status of women in the society. But unfortunately media is reinforcing stereotyped images of women and their roles in society. The news regarding women is mostly about their hardships and atrocities imposed upon them. It shows the gender insensitivity of media. It has become indispensable that media should take responsibilities of acting as a powerful instrument for bringing social change for women in more favorable terms. Media can be utilized for substituting her traditional passive image imprinted on the mind of the society as a whole with true and positive image of women. The positive and encouraging attitude of society can bring the change in the status of women and to bring that change media's role is very crucial. Priority has therefore necessarily to be given to changing image of women, from a passive onlooker and recipient, to that of a positive doer and achiever.

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