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Presentation of Women Harassment in Pakistani Dramas

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Abstract

This research is aimed to analyze the themes used to construct the plot of Pakistani dramas to depict women-based harassment. A rigorous thematic analysis of prime-time dramas of two mainstream Pakistani channels has been carried out. The researchers employed simple random sampling technique to dig out the dramas based on harassment concept while the theory applied is feminist theory of media. The findings suggested that the portrayal is modest and emotional on one channel while the other channel portrayed the victim as a fighter in the climax, the dramas factually exhibit the types of acts an offender commits, the issues a victim faces, how social pressure makes the situation worse and the most significant fact was how men are not able to control their male ego and oppress women to get satisfaction. The following themes emerged from the content, good looking women from middle class fall in this trap; they mostly endured verbal, nonverbal and physical abuse; shame; blame; suffering depression; panic attacks; breaking silence but be afraid of not being believed and males are too sensitive to rejection.

Keywords: Women Harassment, thematic analysis, Pakistani Dramas, feminist media theory

Introduction

Women harassment is a global issue, no culture or strata is unaware of this evil deed, every woman faces it at least once a year around the globe (Tangri et al., 1982). Prior to 21st century the issue of women harassment was untouched and unknown for the media of the whole world (Planalp, 2010). But it is worth mentioning that when media started to give coverage to the women harassment issue, it made a huge impact. Ample amount of media coverage in news and entertainment content accelerated the debate of attention from law makers. Women harassment was once considered a taboo topic to discuss and to report until the seventies of the previous

century (Lin & Yang, 2019). Eve teasing is the frequent form of harassment portrayed in Hindi cinema (Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2003).

This research seeks to know the themes used by different channels while depicting women harassment scenes and pointing out the most frequent themes and the difference of portrayal among different TV channels. The researchers choose to explore this issue as they observed a research gap, frequency of occurrence of this crime has been gathered many times but the themes used to highlight such a delicate matter were still uncovered, particularly in terms of Pakistani dramas. The findings of this study would help the masses to better understand the feminist portrayal in media, themes like shame, blame and staying silent because of the fear of not being believed are the themes used by the women in #me too movement under the particular tag #why I didn't report (Heath et al, 2013). It will also help the production houses to better explain the taboo topics related to gender-based harassment.

Literature Review

The gendered offence of sexual harassment is mainly endured by female, transgender, bisexual, homosexual and children and perpetrators are male most of the time. Irrespective of this much frequency and seriousness of this crime, it is most underreported crime of our society (Morgan & Oudekerk, 2019). But media has started creating awareness about this ill willed crime by raising voice through its news coverage and entertainment-based content. Luu Nguyet (2021), conducted study to aim because why people didn't report sexual harassment keeping in view the victim's tweets under #whyIdidntreport. This hash tag went viral when #Me too movement started on twitter and internet got flooded with people's tweets, retweets and comments about their own experiences of sexual harassment. This study extracted the themes that affected the intention of victim and refrain her to report the incident immediately; these themes included mainly shame, blame, lack of evidence and powerlessness. Somewhere media also lacks to highlight the issue properly, according to Swedish and Danish newspapers #me too framed sexual assault as an individual problem in both countries Askanius & Hartley (2019).

Comments were collected from the *The Guardian's women's pages* online, public commented that the writer is exaggerating, using old indexes to support her arguments and promoting her feminist perspective through these blogs (Harmer et al., 2020). Counter narrative to these comments is that these men committing this serious crime are not mentally sick, they are normal human beings, it's just that they consider it as their right to humiliate and offend every woman they want. Ahmed, Hussain & Mowly (2010) observed the coverage of street harassment faced by women in two leading newspapers of Bangladesh they found that there was lack of efficiency on the part of media to raise street harassment of women as a key issue in front of masses.

The study conducted on the depiction of females in situations like sexual harassment and assault in primetime dramas of Pakistani mainstream channels unfolds the fact that women are portrayed as victims of male offences, weak and dependent on family men to fight for justice, findings of this study are compatible to the previous literature (Abrahams 2010).

On the other hand media also encourages masses to speak up about the issue as changing trends of female portrayal in the recent films of Marvel Cinematic Universe indicate that the recent wave of feminism has influenced the tendency of film studios to present females as superheroes, the

empowered portrayal of women has been increased, Sheikh, Sheikh, Khan and Rashid (2020). Even in Pakistani pop culture the awareness about the feminine issues in a patriarchal society like Pakistan, have been raised. Women are portrayed as weak, feeble, a commodity most prevalent concept in dramas related to violence against women was honor discourse, the other prominent discourse include domestic violence, low labor participation, right to marry their own choice, silencing the survivors of rape and sexual harassment (Anam Fatima, 2019).

Alagappan & Marican (2014) analyzed the issue of sexual harassment in a leading newspaper in Malaysia. The detailed analysis of the selected articles showed that newspaper which is selected as sample focused on the legislation about sexual harassment of women. Additionally, newspaper also tried to influence the officials and the government to make the legislation about the sexual harassment or general harassment of women. Ramasubramanian & Oliver (2003) analyzed the Hindi films in terms of sexual violence that somewhat less than half of the sexual scenes comprised of violence. And eve teasing was the most frequent form of sexual violence and the likelihood of women being a victim was more than men.

Entertainment media is confusing the masses by portraying a sexually abusing or harassing scene as efforts of impressing women, the portrayal like women admire whistles, winks and chasing makes people believe that it is a norm. Tripathy (2019) analyses the concepts of sexual harassment from reel to real life, in Bollywood movies most of the times sexual harassment of women by men ultimately turned into love relationship at the end. The perception of sexual violence in Tamil movies in Malaysian Indian viewers points out four main themes including types of sexual violence, chasing, sexually abusing comedy and premarital sex. Viewers identified rape scenes as sexual violence, but they were confused to label sexually abusing comedy as sexual violence (Karpuiah, Pathmanathan & Nikku (2020).

Feminist Media Theory

This research has employed the feminist media theory which basically revolves around the success women have achieved so far from being a slave of men to the right to vote, right to get education and liberty to speak and move. Feminist theories were initially employed to access and understand the gender inequality which pertains in mainstream media too (Kim, 2016). Women representation in media was too low initially because there were less women producers and directors to raise objection over with very few opportunities, stated in a book “Symbolic Annihilation of Women in the Mass Media (Gaye Tuchman, 1978).

In prime time, 80% subjects of important news were men, all the news sources were men, and if they were portrayed, they were mostly displayed as victims, doing household work, as silly, illogical, less representation at work or in public. In Political coverage women got more coverage of their personal life, clothing, eating habits and taste and less of their Political stance. In sports coverage of women they were mostly represented as sex objects, talks about their bodies, their personal relationships, mostly shown off the field the racial, ethnic, sexual and country of origin differences also demand a long debate (Steeves, 1987). In Films, power display is also showed as biased, the number of purposive roles is less for women, the salary of female actors is distinctive from that of the male ones and elimination of these problems can only be possible if media would start fair representation of gender in its popular culture.

Research Questions

- What are the themes used by Pakistani mainstream channels through dramas to address the issue of women harassment?
- What is the difference between depictions of themes by both the channels?
- Which themes are the most frequent themes in terms of screen timing?

Methodology

This study underwent qualitative research technique, a widespread terminology which analyzes subjects in their natural setting by practicing multiple empirical methods such as observation, interviews and life histories (Denizen & Lincoln, 1994). The purpose of this particular study is to explore descriptive and thorough patterns hidden in the data that can better explain how Pakistani dramas are showcasing sexual harassment.

Sample

To analyze the presentation of women-based harassment in Pakistani televised dramas; mainstream television channels like HUM TV and ARY Digital are included. Both are high viewership channels of TV networks media. In terms of popularity dramas of HUM TV are the most desirable among the viewers (Khan, 2015). Sampling is essential for any media content analysis (Head, 1954). All the prime-time dramas from January 2019 to June 2020 that contain and relate to content like, women harassment is the sampling frame for this research. The researchers have engaged purposive sampling technique for this study at first stage. It is a non-probability technique, it is useful when generalization of findings over the whole proportion is not required (Crossman, 2019).

A small survey was conducted by the researchers to dig out harassment enriched dramas. Researchers find out that five dramas from Hum TV and six dramas from ARY Digital were sufficiently portraying women harassment issue. The researchers applied simple random sampling technique to extract the dramas equipped with the required data. The researchers then personally watched all the episodes of these dramas and reached to the fact that harassment content is dense in drama *Hania* and *Cheekh* from ARY Digital and *Inkaar* and *Pyar k Sadkey* from Hum TV. Data was collected in Urdu language and transcribed into English language later.

Data Analysis Method

Thematic Analysis

The researchers have selected thematic analysis method for this research. Thematic analysis approach is data driven, the codes present in the data emerge after keen observation and analysis of the sexual harassment scenes, words and phrases and the researchers did not strive to put the findings into previously established coding frames, which ensure that the observations are strongly relevant to the data (Alhojailan, 2012).

To familiarize with the data the researchers got submerged into the data to identify core concepts and possible codes that appear and are pertinent to the research objectives (Nguyet Luu, 2021). Basic index of ideas, codes and few engaging facts are assembled. The researchers associate a

label or a name for the codes that best illustrates the content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase is summed up with the list of exhaustive codes and categories based on the similarities among the codes that assisted to reframe research questions. The researchers probe the codes and categories, picked out the patterns which are most prevalent in the data and eventually gave rise to few emergent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the next stage, researchers analyze once again if any themes need fusion to or departure from other themes. This step is very crucial in developing contextual and thematic plot of the data that best illustrates the correlation of themes and their correspondence with research questions. The accumulated data and themes need to be coherent not just rephrased. The researchers quote statements from the data as a source to best explain the real essence of the theme. Then started writing up the report. Analysis of the data narrates persuasive and coherent story of the data.

Findings

Dramas that were analyzed for research were reached and recorded through internet; harassment scenes where women were targeted as victim were repeatedly viewed by the researchers for better understanding of the data and to develop coherent themes. These themes answer the first research question which aims to find out that how Pakistani media depicts a woman who has been sexually harassed, in what manner, with what attitude and in which context.

Good-looking women from middle class fall in this trap

Researchers found that in Pakistani mainstream dramas the women who faced sexual harassment were mostly those who wanted to jump from middle class to upper class. They are taught to be perfect in household chores and take care of their physical appearance so that a boy from sound financial status can marry them. They start daydreaming about it and when a rich guy comes closer, they misunderstand it as their dream comes true and fell prey to his evil intentions. Most of the victims of sexual harassment were educated, but after the incident they compromised on their freedom of movement and right to education.

Young

“I was out to bring medicine for my mother, she was not feeling well, it was quite late at night, when I was on my way back to home someone started following me on a car, with high beam lights.” (Cheekh, episode 17, scene 7, length 19 sec)

Educated

“Yes! I used to go to university, but it has been a while I have discontinued it, I will resume soon In Sha Allah” (Inkaar, episode 1, scene 7, length 4 sec)

Daydreaming to get married to upper class guy

“Respected Judge! The romantic messages I have sent to him are my dreams, my idiotic acts, we who belong to middle class dream about marrying a guy like him, I also had this dream, but I day dreamed it, I know my limits and when he tried to cross those limits I shunned him.” (Inkaar, episode 23, scene 7, length 37 sec)

Mostly endured Verbal, non-verbal and Physical abuse

Most of the time women endured chasing and stalking. Car chasers are the most damaging ones than any others, they speed up the car to harass a woman and then slightly touch women with their car, at night they flash beam on the girl to seek her attention and enjoy. Mostly men stare at women considering it their right. Sometimes some men want to protect the girl they like by keeping continuous check on her doings. The harasser takes away the shawl off her body to have a look at her physical appearance.

Stalking

“I was out to bring medicine for my mother, she was not feeling well, it was quite late at night, when I was on my way back to home someone started following me on a car, with high beam lights.” (Cheekh, episode 17, scene 7, length 19 sec)

Staring

“Mother! I don’t like when that big boss stares at me.” (Pyar k Sadkey episode 4, scene 7, length 14 sec)

Snatching Shawl

“I was asking him to stop getting closer to me, to let me go, he didn’t listen to me, then I slapped him and pushed him away, after all this he snatched my shawl from my head.” (Inkaar, episode 6, scene 4, length 18 sec)

Rape attempt

“He has tried to sexually attempt on me, that day I started hating him and we departed our ways” (Inkaar, episode 18, scene 1, length 15 sec)

Repeatedly asked for sexual favors

“Mother! He has tried many times to touch me, he says you can meet me alone anytime, he won’t tell anyone” (Pyar k Sadkey episode 8, scene 4, length 5 sec)

Malign talk

“He says bad things to me, I don’t like that talk, he is not a nice man, I don’t like listening to him” (Pyar k Sadkey episode 8, scene 11 length 12 sec)

Forcefully holding hands

“I request you to leave my hand” (Hania, episode 4, scene 2, length 4 sec)

Bad Touch

Some men don’t limit their self to holding hands; they try to touch other parts of women’s body to show their power and control.

“He touches me too... sometimes he grabs me through shoulders, it feels like I have been captured.” (Pyar k Sadkey episode 5, scene8, length 8 sec)

These actions and conversations make her feel helpless and partially naked in front of a stranger. These dramas reveal that men are not as pious or abide by the values as women are; women repeatedly refuse to commit these kinds of sinful acts, so men try to rape them which is a religious offence in a country like Pakistan and a social crime. It shatters a woman’s confidence and damages her dignity. Women hate those men and start doubting others too. Powerful men, who are senior by profession or by age, ask for sexual favors. If the girl says no, they make her survival difficult, they defame her. Some men use dirty language to enjoy the uncomfortable expressions of the girl. Holding hands is considered as easy to commit offence by sexual offenders.

Shame

This theme reveals what kind of values, lessons, attitudes and behaviors this type of portrayal can nurture. The victims feel self-embarrassment in a way that their bodies are not pure anymore, they are filthy and ruined. Victim feels ashamed to face the society and even try to avoid court trials with family, the humiliating court trial make them criminals in their own view. They are character assassinated and questioned about their clothing choices, co- friendships which ultimately develop their social perception as an offender or irresponsible, inviting person.

Self-embarrassment

“I feel ashamed of myself, I fell for you, and this is not how a man should treat a woman”.
(Cheekh, episode 6, scene 8, length 7 sec)

Ashamed to face society

“Listen tomorrow is my court trial; I don’t want you to be there to see how they will humiliate me in front of fully crowded court.” (Inkaar, episode16, scene 6, length 9 sec)

Blame

During the assault most of the women start blaming themselves for the trouble. As it was their choice to roam around, to enter into world ruled by men and to give right to the offender to enter into her personal space at first and regret visiting the abuser alone.

Victim blames herself

“It is my fault, why I believed this person, why I came to meet him, Oh Allah! I shouldn’t have come to this place.” (Inkaar, episode 6, scene 4, length 17 sec)

Victim blaming by society

“This is wrong, I have not called him to meet me in the salon, it is a lie, respected judge.”
(Inkaar, episode 18, scene 3, length 14 sec)

Rape myth

Rape myth is a misconception deeply rooted in the patriarchal society like Pakistan, according to this myth a woman can't wear revealing clothes, can't drink or move out and if she does so she can't blame men to tease her and if any offence happens society keeps asking her that why it happened to you and not to any other girl in street? Rape myth is also attached to harassment offence and it also prevails in Pakistani society which transfers blame of the sexual violence to victims from perpetrators also known as slut shaming. Personal liking or past affair of a woman with the criminal is a mistake that can never be forgiven by the society and is a good enough reason for the happenings.

"We were friends, I am not his girlfriend, I am telling you that I was attached to him but I am not anybody's girlfriend." (Inkaar, episode 16, scene 10, length 9 sec)

Breaking silence, but being afraid of not being believed

Most of the time family, friends, colleges and authorities don't believe the victim thinking that victim is trying to seek attention, or the perpetrator is a valuable person everyone trusts him more than her. Other reasons are victim's habit of speaking lies or doing pranks and lack of evidence as mostly this offence is committed in a closed room, in darkness or when alone.

Liar

"My in laws have a very spiritual connection with him, I can't tell them that he has evil intentions for me, they won't believe me." (Hania, episode 4, scene 6, length 6 sec)

Storyteller

Women who are talkative, and make up stories casually, when fell prey to this crime are mistrusted, it takes away the chirp from their personality. That's why; they choose holy places to disclose the incident to someone.

"No! I am not speaking lie, I am not crazy, he is deceitful respected Judge, I don't make up stories, I am only speaking truth" (Cheekh, episode 24, scene 7, length 9 sec)

Depression

Most of the women who endured this offence experience a severe trauma they try to remove the filth they believe they have on their body, they hide their self. They are actually waiting to die. Women lock themselves in dark rooms, to think where they were wrong, to make their self believe that it didn't happen. To let the bruises on their bodies fade away and to think and choose between hide or fight.

"Mother I don't want to meet anyone; I don't want to talk to anybody." (Hania, episode 8, scene 5, length 8 sec)

Panic

Some women experience shivering attacks when they see the same situation again and close eyes, shout and run away. Victim hates his eyes that pierced her body, his hands that damaged her skin and his bad intentions that killed her spirit to live. The breathing rate of the victim increases whenever she faces the harasser, she suffers insomnia as in her dreams she mostly repels the harasser, tries to escape, verbally resists the abuser, calls someone to save her.

“Leave me, please let me go, don’t touch me, don’t come close to me.” (Hania, episode20, scene 7, length 14 sec)

Male rejection sensitivity

Rejection sensitivity is a behavior developed after emotional and cognitive processing of male social interactions, men has three major characteristics related to rejection that includes keen expectation of rejection, biasness towards rejection perception and an extreme reaction to the perceived rejection. Men don’t accept women’s No as No, they assume that when a woman says no she is conveying that you need to put more efforts and ask again and again. As depicted in Pakistani dramas men cannot handle rejection and can’t control their ego driven anger. Most of the time men prefer to do such a damage to a woman, like acid throwing, that everyone would reject her lifelong. Some men close the chapter forever by killing that woman.

Men not accepting a women’s No as No

“You know what sir why he is not in my life anymore because I replied to this same perverted demand with a No, and No simply means No and once a no is always a no you better understand.” (Inkaar episode 13, scene 7, length 29 sec)

Aggressively abusing women in reaction

“That day, I was about to get married, I was in a salon, my make-up was almost done, I was alone in the room for a while, he came and asked me to run away with him, I continuously denied it, then he got angry and asked if I love him? I said no I hate you, He said No you love me, I said I hate you and he picked scissors from the table and stabbed me here and here many times until I went unconscious.” (Inkaar, episode 15, scene 4, length 1 minute and 3 sec)

Discussion & Conclusion

The aim of this study was to extract themes, that how the women is depicted in situation like sexual harassment and assault in primetime dramas of Pakistani mainstream channels using feminist theory. According to this theory females and their issues get less media attention than males, the portrayal is biased to some extent as women are always shown doing households and a commodity of men. Findings of this study are compatible to the previous findings; women are portrayed as victims of male offences, weak and dependent on family men to fight for justice (Abrahams 2010). Thematic analysis approach was used to dig out themes from four dramas, drama serial Hania and Cheekh from ARY Digital and Pyar k sadkey and Inkaar from HUM TV. The first research question seeks the themes used to depict the harassment offence; eight themes emerged from the data set that includes young girls from middle class who daydreamed to marry in upper class

mostly fell prey to the rich men outside. The harassment they endured was mostly of verbal, nonverbal and physical nature which included stalking, staring, malign talk, holding hands, grabbing from shoulders, rape attempt, snatching headscarf, repeatedly asking for sexual favors. The aftereffects of the incident on women include self-embarrassment and feeling ashamed in front of others. The girl blames herself; the society blames her and rape myth is attached to her, according to rape myth, women's attire and liberal actions invite men, also known as slut shaming. Most of the time women don't break silence about it but if they do, they are called liar or storyteller, or they have to tell the same thing at some sacred place like mosque as shown in Pakistani dramas. Due to all this woman start losing interest in living, feel traumatized, start living in darkness. Out of panic they suffer from haunting dreams and fast breathing whenever they face the perpetrator. The last theme that emerged from the statements of the victims of sexual harassment is that males are sensitive to rejection, their male ego can't accept women's No as No, they aggressively abuse women in reaction to that rejection like throwing acid or attempt to murder. As mentioned earlier the theme emerged from the comments under feminist blogs of The Guardian, reveal that these men committing this serious crime are not mentally sick, they are normal human beings, it's just that they consider it as their right to humiliate and offend every woman they get attracted to (Harmer et al., 2020).

The answer to the second research question is that the issue has been portrayed as less sentimental and less sensitive in the dramas of ARY entertainment. While approaching towards the climax few of the dramas of ARY showed victim as a consistent fighter for justice against offenders. HUM TV continues to portray women as weak, unsafe in public, dependent and born to marry and doing households and portrayed that if the girl didn't fight back, she can't claim that she was offended (Mc Mahon, 2011). Women must own half blame if she had relationship in past with the person harassing her now (Peterson, 2004). The answer to the third research question is that Shame, blame and fear of not being believed are the most frequent themes among all (Patterson et al., 2009), but the most emphasized theme in terms of screen timing is male rejection sensitivity.

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