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Female Portrayal in Punjabi Stage Dramas: Audience Perceptions and Content Creators' Perspectives

Author(s)

Fazila Ijaz¹

Javeria Nazeer²

¹ M. Phil Scholar, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore

² Dr. Javeria Nazeer, Assistant Professor, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore
Email: javerianazeer@lgu.edu.pk

Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of women in Punjabi stage dramas; with specific focus on how audiences perceive these representations and what are the motivations of content creators behind these portrayals. The research critically analyzes the portrayal of women through the lens of Male Gaze Theory, Objectification Theory and Gender Role Theory in order to understand how certain cultural norms and commercial pressures shape the portrayal of women on stage. A mixed-method research approach was used in this study. Quantitative data was collected from 250 participants, comprising 60% male and 40% female respondents, while the qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with writers, directors and producers which were the part of Punjabi stage dramas. The quantitative findings reveal that traditional portrayal of women significantly influence audience perceptions. Approximately 65% respondents agreed that stereotypical portrayal of women is due to economic pressure, 56% agreed there are certain beauty standards for casting in stage dramas and further 72% agreed that female characters are frequently sexualized on stage. The qualitative findings further support these results by emphasizing that audience demand, commercial pressure and sponsors play a central role in the portrayal of women in Punjabi stage dramas. This study also highlights that economic interest and societal expectations reinforces the objectification and stereotypical portrayal of women, limiting the scope for any diverse or empowering female representation.

Keywords: *Punjabi stage dramas, female portrayal, gender roles, theater, audience perception.*

Introduction

The portrayal of female characters in Punjabi stage dramas have been serving to the entertainment industry of Pakistan. It has been a powerful reflection of societal attitudes. These are the concerns related to the societal norms. It is addressed toward the gender roles and expectations in the region of South Asia. The study has a particular focus towards the Punjab province (Adukia et al., 2022). There are various Punjabi stage dramas that have been produced so far. These are known for their humor, satire, and cultural resonance.

Women in these dramas are frequently depicted through patriarchal ideals (Wardaningsih & Kasih, 2022). These women are focusing on traits and appearances of the society but in reality, these are distracting the cultural values in a huge way. This thing is considered to be aligned with societal norms. There are many kinds of viewers and the audiences perceive the gender role in different way. These are the particular views and the concepts related to the femininity, masculinity, and gender identity.

The inclusion of gender identity has been considered as a proper construct in the study. It is related to the independent variable where it has been considered a vital variable in this study. This concept is associated with the prime theme of the study and it has also expanded the scope of this research study. These portrayals are mainly examining the basis of the physical appearance of the women working in the dramas and their societal expectations (Ward & Grower, 2020). The study has incorporated the aspects of audience demand, economic pressures, and influences of the sponsorship (Dion, 2022). All of these aspects have wide range of implications and these have been studied to identify their level of influence in the progress of stage dramas. The ethical norms have also been analyzed in terms of the cultural values that are prevailing in our society. These norms have been perpetuated across multiple productions (Craig & Lee, 2020). These are also limiting the diversity of female characters and gender expressions on the stage. This study seeks to uncover the phenomenon of these dramas as the prevailing dramas are reflecting evolving cultural values (Field et al., 2019).

This study has been driven by the need that is associated with the understanding of the gender identities of the role models in the dramas and the portrayal of the females. The implications of the study provide and reflect about the current level of the society (Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2019).

The study aims to examine the critical portrayal of women in Punjabi stage dramas to understand their influence on both masculinity and femininity as well as audience

perspectives of both genders. The study explores how commercialization influences gender portrayal and determines if these depictions support or oppose societal gender expectations.

The theme has been based on the Punjabi stage dramas. The study has been conducted by analyzing the portrayal of female characters (Varghese & Kumar, 2022). It has been found that there is significance of the phenomenon in the academic realm. The study has also expanded the literature in gender studies and media representation (Middleton et al., 2020). It has been applied through the application of the queer theory to a regional form of entertainment. This is the underlying theory that is mainly challenging our conventional views. It is also encouraging the exploration of gender diversity within the cultural productions. The study has mainly attempted to address a vital gap in the existing research and it has tried to fulfill the identified gap while providing the practical insights based on the facts.

Research Objectives

The following research objectives have been fulfilled by the study:

1. To analyze the women portrayal in Punjabi stage dramas in Lahore.
2. To examine the role of gender identity in Punjabi stage dramas of Lahore.
3. To understand the perceptions of both audience and content creators regarding female portrayal in Punjabi stage dramas.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been formulated in order to address the underlying research objectives:

RQ1. How women are portrayed in Punjabi stage dramas in Lahore?

RQ2. How physical appearance and gender roles matter in Punjabi stage dramas of Lahore?

RQ3. What are the perceptions of audiences and content creators regarding female portrayal in Punjabi stage dramas?

Hypotheses

H1: The sexual element of female characters in Punjabi stage dramas of Lahore is associated with stereotypical gender portrayals.

H2: The element of physical appearance is associated with the gender identity in Punjabi stage dramas of Lahore.

H3: Audience perception of Punjabi stage dramas is correlated with traditional portrayals of female roles.

Literature Review

Representations of gender in the media are thematically central to studies within both gender and cultural studies. This literature review is about women in Punjabi stage dramas specifically in commercial theatres of Lahore. The colorful, vibrant and extemporaneous art form of the Punjabi stage dance and theatre, sheds some light on our unusual societal norms as well as gender dynamics. The role of visual representation in media, especially in stage dramas, in audience understanding of gender roles and the way it does or does not reinforce societal expectations is so central.

Historical Background

There is a strong history of these stage dramas in Punjab. These early performances had been frequently held in open spaces, with the primary cause of wonderful the local population even as simultaneously educating them on diverse social troubles and moral values. Over time, these performances developed, incorporating factors of satire, humor, and social statement, which have become the hallmark of Punjabi stage dramas.

The evolution of Punjabi theatre may be traced lower back to the colonial period when it served as a medium for expressing dissent towards colonial rule. The subject matters of these early performances have been closely encouraged with the aid of the socio-political landscape of the time, reflecting the struggles and aspirations of the people. Post-independence, Punjabi theatre continued to conform, reflecting the converting societal norms and values. The partition of India in 1947 had a profound effect on Punjabi theatre, because it did on many different aspects of existence in the vicinity. The partition caused a good-sized displacement of humans, which changed into meditated in the topics of the stage dramas of the time. The performances often depicted the trauma of displacement, the lack of native land, and the struggles of rebuilding lives in new surroundings (Hao & Mahmood, 2022). This period also noticed the upward push of recent theatre businesses and playwrights who introduced fresh views and narratives to the degree (Akhtar, Chohan, & Talib, 2022).

In the present-day context, Punjabi stage dramas hold to thrive, both in Pakistan and many of the Punjabi diaspora around the sector. The creation of digital media has in addition expanded the reach of those performances, allowing them to connect with a global target audience. Online systems inclusive of YouTube have end up famous channels for disseminating Punjabi stage dramas, allowing them to attain audiences who

may not have get right of entry to stay performances. Contemporary Punjabi level dramas often feature sturdy girl characters who undertaking traditional gender roles and assert their organization. This shift is reflective of the wider adjustments in societal attitudes in the direction of gender equality and girl's rights (Hao & Mahmood, 2022). Despite those improvements, Punjabi stage dramas continue to stand demanding situations.

Post-Independence Theatre

Talking further about portrayal of women, a study by Sobia Mubarak "Dramatizing Power and Resistance: Images of Women in Pakistani and Indian Alternative Theater" highlights that portrayals aren't just restrained to the physical representation of ladies however expand to how their roles and characters are framed inside the narrative of the dramas. The ancient context of Pakistani drama also performs a crucial position in shaping those portrayals. Post-independence, the dramatic arts in Pakistan had been influenced via political regimes and societal transformations (Fawzia Afzal-Khan, 2024). During the generation of General Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship, as an example, stringent Sharia legal guidelines significantly restricted women's roles within the media and performing arts, further embedding conservative values within the portrayal of ladies . However, the upward push of opportunity theater companies like Ajoka Theatre, which emerged in the course of this repressive regime, supplied a platform for greater essential and politically charged narratives that regularly highlighted the struggles and resistance of women (Mubarak, 2015). Mubarak's study employs a qualitative technique, focusing on close textual analysis of dramatic texts. It integrates feminist vital views, ancient context, and theoretical frameworks to apprehend the portrayal of women in Pakistani and Indian alternative theater. The method includes distinct close reading, examining textuality, literary devices, and theatricality, together with ideological and unconscious themes related to gender dynamics and societal norms.

Cinema and Stage Drama

The concept of male gaze theory, introduced by Laura Mulvey (1975), remains highly relevant in the understanding of portrayal of women in Punjabi stage dramas. Maryam Raza's (2021) study highlights how female bodies are sexualized in advertising to cater the male pleasure reinforcing objectification and societal norms. Similar representation patterns can be seen in Punjabi stage dramas where female actors are just for the pleasure of male audiences through their appearance, the way they are dressed or presented on stage and the way they perform on stage rather than any meaningful representation of a strong character. Such portrayals not only reflect the gender

inequalities but also contribute in shaping the societal attitudes towards women and gender roles in general.

Objectification and Gender Stereotyping

The literature discusses about how the objectification of women portrayed in these stage dramas is related to cultural norms and economical elements. The use of dance sequences, wherein ladies are dressed in revealing garments and carry out suggestive dances, is a not unusual function geared toward growing the economic achievement of these dramas (Khan, 2022).

Audience perceptions of gender roles are notably formed through the media they consume. The look at "Gender Stereotyping: The Role of Traditional and Social Media: An Analysis of Audience Perception" by means of Aparna S Menon and Shyamali Banerjee affords a comprehensive analysis of the way traditional and social media perpetuate gender stereotypes and impact audience perceptions (Menon & Banerjee, 2022).

Content Creators and Stage Drama

Not only audience but also the content creators and their motivation behind writing the script, producing and directing a play also play an important role in the portrayal of women in media or Pakistani Punjabi stage dramas. Female characters are regularly depicted in passive, supportive roles while male characters are frequently shown as active and dominant (Raza, 2021). This is consistent with Laura Mulvey's "Male Gaze" concept, which indicates that the portrayal of women in media is designed to cater to a heterosexual male target audience, emphasizing their physical appearance over their personal or expert attributes (Stecher, 2023).

Literature Gap

There is an intensive research on gender representation in South Asia but still there is not much research related in the context of Punjabi stage dramas. While current research has highlighted how these portrayals reflect and make stronger societal norms, there are limited studies on how they impact real-lifestyles attitudes and behaviors closer to women (Hira Siddique & Muhammad Rizwan Safdar, 2024). Studies that observe the effect of media illustration on gender norms, perceptions of femininity and masculinity, and societal attitudes in the direction of female could be precious additions to the literature (Santoniccolo et al., 2023).

Theoretical Framework

This framework consists of three main theories which are Male Gaze Theory, Objectification Theory and Gender Role Theory, also talks about how they are linked with Punjabi Stage Dramas.

Male Gaze Theory

Male gaze theory was introduced by Laura Mulvey and the core of this theory depends how to present a woman in front of camera or which camera angles will be used to give pleasure to male. According to Punjabi stage dramas it can show how women are presented on the stage. For instance, lady characters are often dressed provocatively, and their roles are built to enchantment to male fantasies, which is clear in dance sequences and comedic skits that rely on suggestive humor. This not simplest limit the intensity and complexity of lady characters but additionally perpetuates a narrow view of femininity this is subservient to male satisfaction (Hira Siddique & Muhammad Rizwan Safdar, 2024).

Objectification Theory

Objectification Theory, evolved by way of Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts (1997), extend the idea of the male gaze through focusing at the effects of objectifying girls. The way they are dressed or which dialogues they are delivering on the stage which kind of vulgar jokes are used on them. This objectification not best impacts the portrayal of ladies on degree but additionally impacts societal attitudes towards girls, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and gender biases.

Gender Role Theory

Gender Role, as mentioned by way of scholars which include Sandra Bem (1981), examines how societal expectancies and cultural norms form the behaviors and attitudes of people based totally on their gender. In accordance to Punjabi stage dramas it talks about how women are always shown in the secondary roles, they are there to nurture and take care of the male lead. Women are always presented as a side character no strong role is ever given to them, they just excites the audience through showing their bodies or doing item songs.

Methodology

This study is based on mixed-method approach so it contains both quantitative research design and qualitative research design.

Quantitative Research Design

250 participants were given the survey that had at least seen a single show in the past six months. The respondents' age, gender, occupation, level of education, and place of living were all diverse. Likert-scale and closed-ended questions were used to gather data. The survey instrument's reliability was demonstrated by its Cronbach's alpha of

0.886, which showed strong internal consistency. Descriptive statistics, regression analyses, t-tests, and correlation tests were used in the process of data analysis.

Qualitative Research Design

A semi-structured interview consists of 10 open ended questions was designed in which writers, directors and producers participated. Thematic analysis was used to further create themes and sub-themes for finding out about gender dynamics. Both components guaranteed voluntary involvement, secrecy, and ethical considerations.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Quantitative Findings

250 people were asked to fill out the survey that at least had seen one show in the past six months in theatre. Independent samples t-tests and correlation tests are used for descriptive and inferential statistics for the analysis to investigate the connections between **audience perceptions, commercial influences on female portrayal, and gender representation in stage dramas**. The result shows how cultural expectations, gender norms, body shaming, and stereotypical representations affect views of the audience. Additionally, the **influence of sponsorships** on how women are portrayed is assessed in these dramas.

Table 1 *Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 250)*

Category	Subcategory	N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	150	60.0%
	Female	100	40.0%
Residence	Urban	130	52.0%
	Rural	120	48.0%
Marital Status	Married	120	48.0%
	Unmarried	110	44.0%
	Other	20	8.0%
Age Group	18-25 years	80	32.0%
	26-35 years	100	40.0%
	36-45 years	50	20.0%
	46+ years	20	8.0%
Education Level	High School	60	24.0%

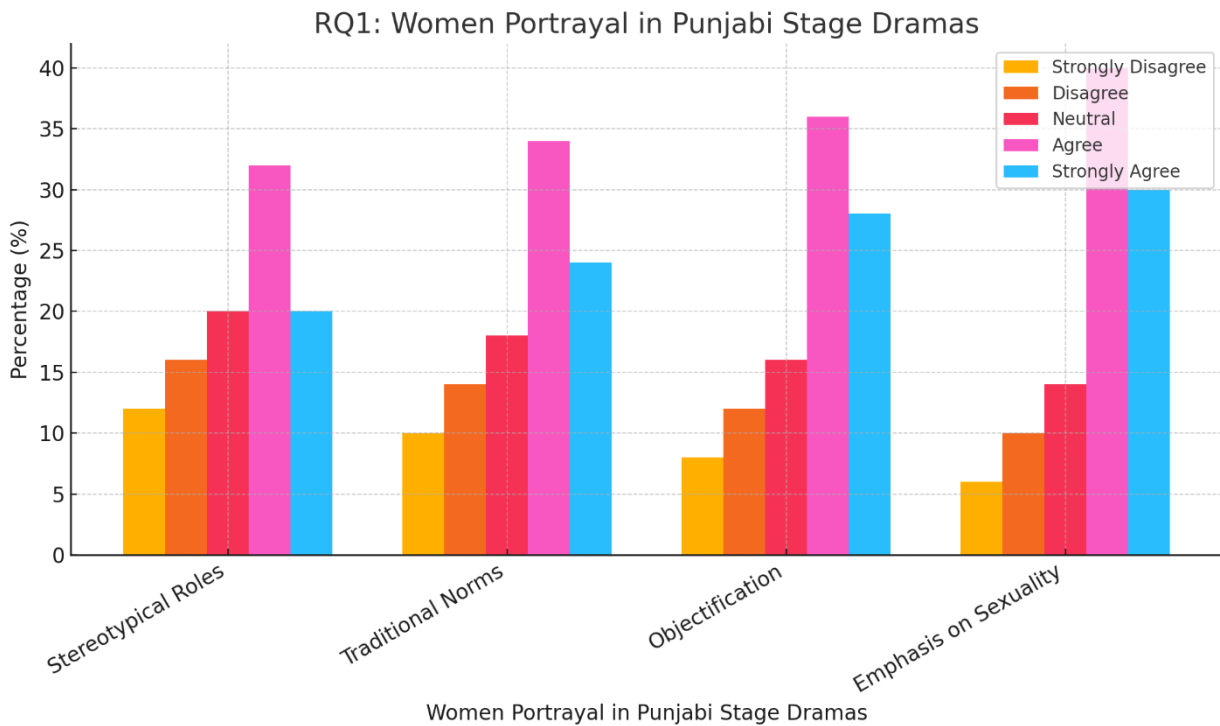
Category	Subcategory	N	Percentage (%)
Employment Status	Bachelor's	110	44.0%
	Master's	60	24.0%
	PhD/Other	20	8.0%
	Employed	140	56.0%
	Unemployed	50	20.0%
	Student	40	16.0%
	Retired/Other	20	8.0%

RQ1: How are women portrayed in Punjabi stage dramas in Lahore

Table 2: Women Portrayal in Punjabi Stage Dramas

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Women in Punjabi stage dramas are often portrayed in stereotypical roles	30 (12.0%)	40 (16.0%)	50 (20.0%)	80 (32.0%)	50 (20.0%)
The portrayal of women in these dramas reinforces traditional gender norms	25 (10.0%)	35 (14.0%)	45 (18.0%)	85 (34.0%)	60 (24.0%)
Female characters in Punjabi stage dramas are objectified through their roles and dressing	20 (8.0%)	30 (12.0%)	40 (16.0%)	90 (36.0%)	70 (28.0%)
Women in these dramas are depicted in a way that emphasizes their sexuality over their abilities	15 (6.0%)	25 (10.0%)	35 (14.0%)	100 (40.0%)	75 (30.0%)

Interpretation: This indicates that 32.0% and 20.0% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that women are portrayed in stereotypical roles, while 34.0% believed these portrayals reinforce traditional gender norms. Additionally, 36.0% and 28.0% agreed or strongly agreed that female characters are objectified through appearance and dressing.



Statistical Testing of Hypothesis H1

H₁: The sexual element of female characters in Punjabi stage dramas of Lahore is associated with stereotypical gender portrayals.

H₀: The sexual element of female characters in Punjabi stage dramas of Lahore is not associated with stereotypical gender portrayals.

Model Summary

Model	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig. (p-value)
1	0.512	0.507	0.567	0.000

Model Summary Table

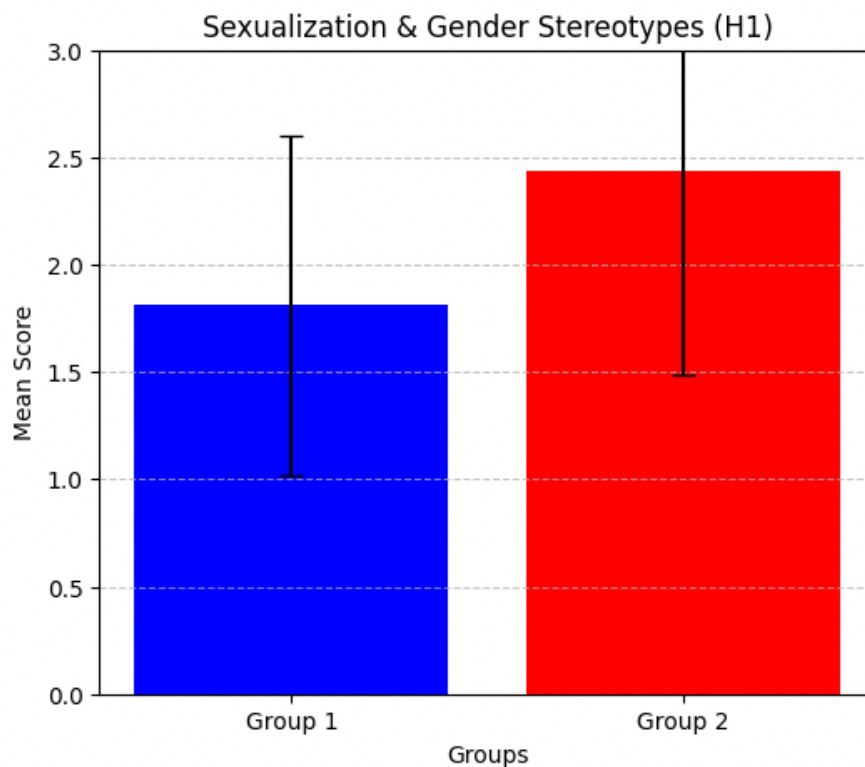
The regression model for H₁ is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), with an R² of 51.2%, indicating a strong relationship between the sexualization of female characters and gender stereotypes.

T-test

Variable	T	Df	M (Group 1)	SD (Group 1)	M (Group 2)	SD (Group 2)	Mean Difference	SE	95% CI	p

Variable	T	Df	M (Group 1)	SD (Group 1)	M (Group 2)	SD (Group 2)	Mean Difference	SE	95% CI	p
Sexualization and Gender Stereotypes	-4.742	170	1.81	0.79	2.44	0.95	-0.637	0.134	(-0.902, -0.372)	<.001

Interpretation: The t-value (-4.742, $p < .001$) indicates a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Since $p < .05$, confirming a strong association between the sexualization of female characters and stereotypical gender portrayals.



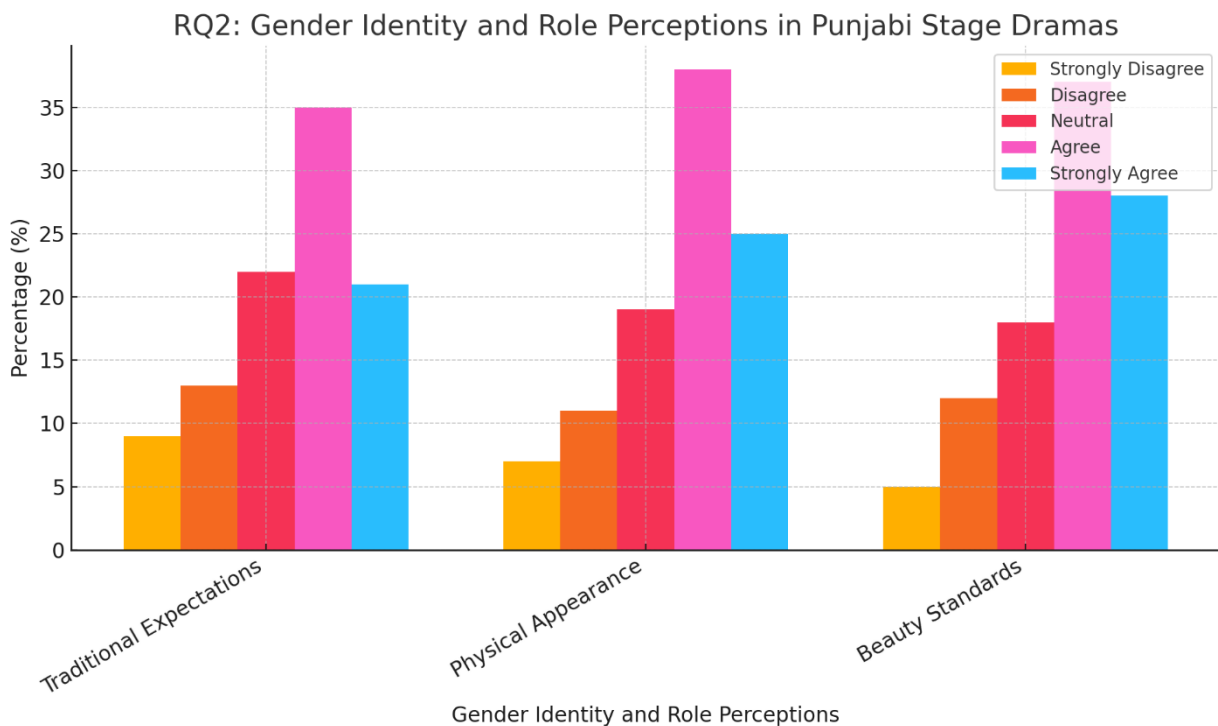
RQ2: How do physical appearance and gender roles matter in Punjabi stage dramas of Lahore?

Table 3: Impact of Physical Appearance and Gender Roles

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Gender roles in Punjabi stage dramas are influenced by	22 (9.0%)	32	55	87	52

traditional societal expectations		(13.0%)	(22.0%)	(35.0%)	(21.0%)
Physical appearance plays a significant role in the casting of female characters in these dramas	18 (7.0%)	27 (11.0%)	48 (19.0%)	96 (38.0%)	63 (25.0%)
Women in these dramas are expected to conform to specific beauty standards to secure roles	13 (5.0%)	30 (12.0%)	45 (18.0%)	92 (37.0%)	70 (28.0%)

Interpretation: It shows that 35.0% and 21.0% of participants agreed and strongly agreed that physical attractiveness influences casting, and (25.0%, 28.0%) strongly believed women must meet beauty standards to secure roles.



Statistical Testing of Hypothesis H2

H₂: The element of physical appearance is associated with gender identity in Punjabi stage dramas of Lahore.

H₀: The element of physical appearance is not associated with gender identity in Punjabi stage dramas of Lahore.

Model Summary

Model	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig. (p-value)
1	0.438	0.432	0.592	0.000

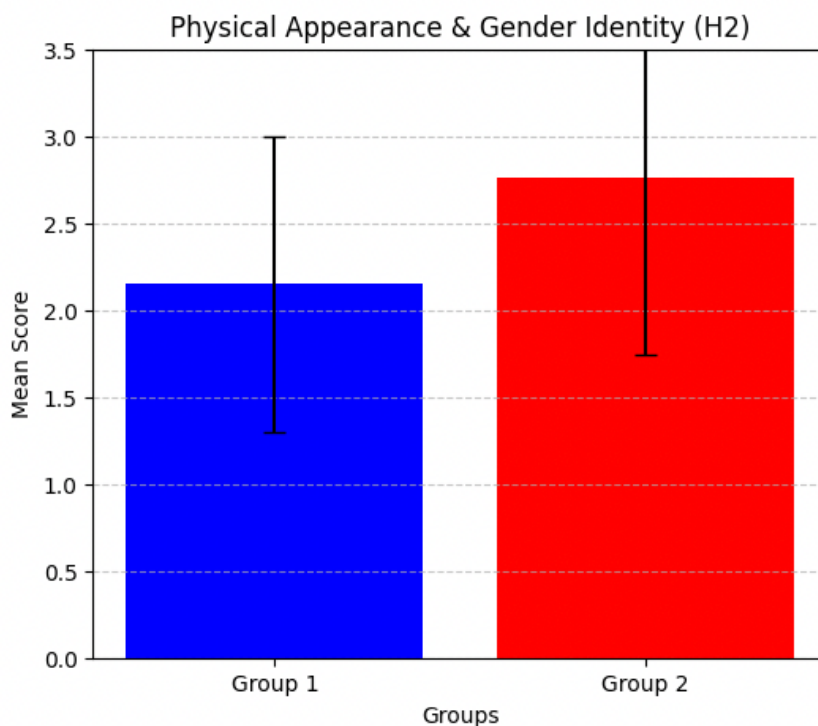
Model Summary Table

The regression model for H₂ is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), with an R² of 43.8%, indicating that physical appearance plays a significant role in gender identity portrayal.

T-test

Variable	T	Df	M (Group 1)	SD (Group 1)	M (Group 2)	SD (Group 2)	Mean Difference	SE	95% CI	P
Physical Appearance and Gender Identity	-4.742	170	1.81	0.79	2.44	0.95	-0.637	0.134	(-0.902, -0.372)	<.001

Interpretation: The p-value (0.000) < 0.05, meaning the difference is statistically significant. Mean difference and confidence interval further confirms the significance of the findings.

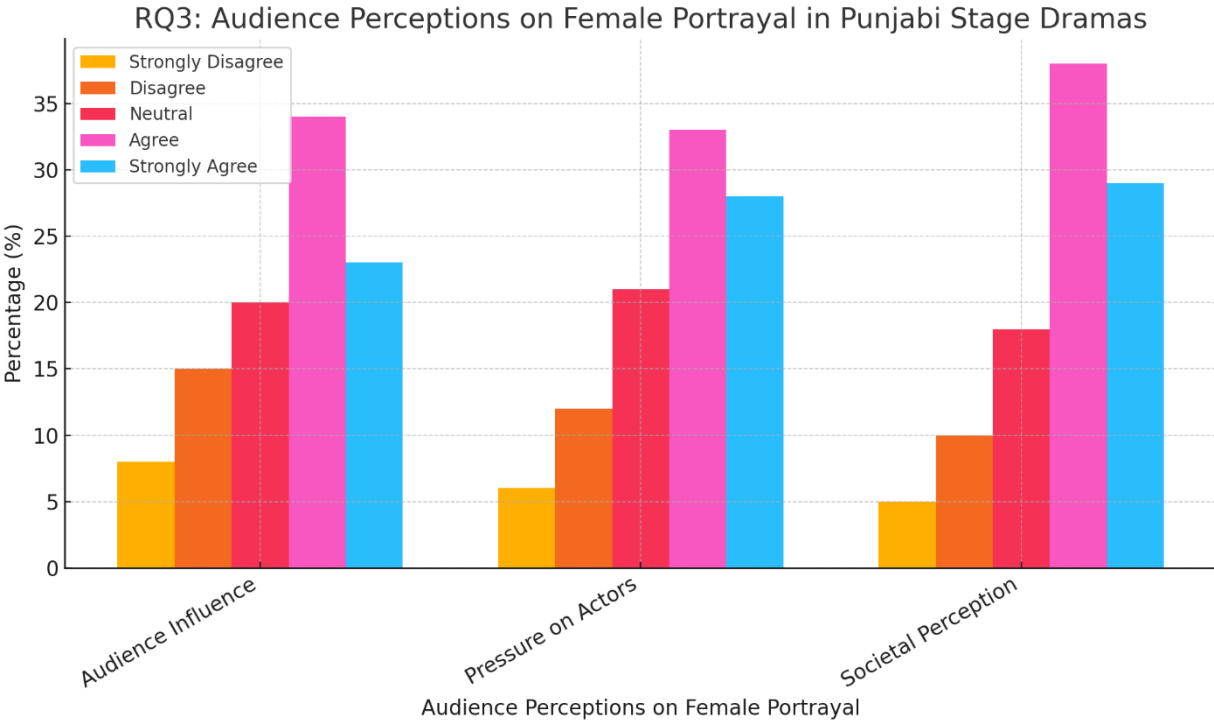


RQ3: What are the perceptions of audiences regarding female portrayal in Punjabi stage dramas?

Table 4: Audience Perception of Female Portrayal

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Audience preferences influence the way female characters are portrayed in Punjabi stage dramas	20 (8.0%)	38 (15.0%)	50 (20.0%)	85 (34.0%)	57 (23.0%)
Female actors are often pressured to take on roles that reinforce stereotypes	15 (6.0%)	30 (12.0%)	52 (21.0%)	82 (33.0%)	70 (28.0%)
The portrayal of women in these dramas affects societal perceptions of gender roles	12 (5.0%)	25 (10.0%)	45 (18.0%)	95 (38.0%)	72 (29.0%)

Interpretation: It shows that (34.0%, 23.0%) agreed and strongly agreed that audience preferences influence the way female characters are portrayed. 28.0% and 29.0% believed female actors are pressurized to take stereotypical roles.



Statistical Testing of Hypothesis H3

H₃: Audience perception of Punjabi stage dramas is correlated with traditional portrayals of female roles.

H₀: Audience perception of Punjabi stage dramas is not correlated with traditional portrayals of female roles.

Model Summary

Model	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig. (p-value)
1	0.476	0.471	0.578	0.000

Model Summary Table

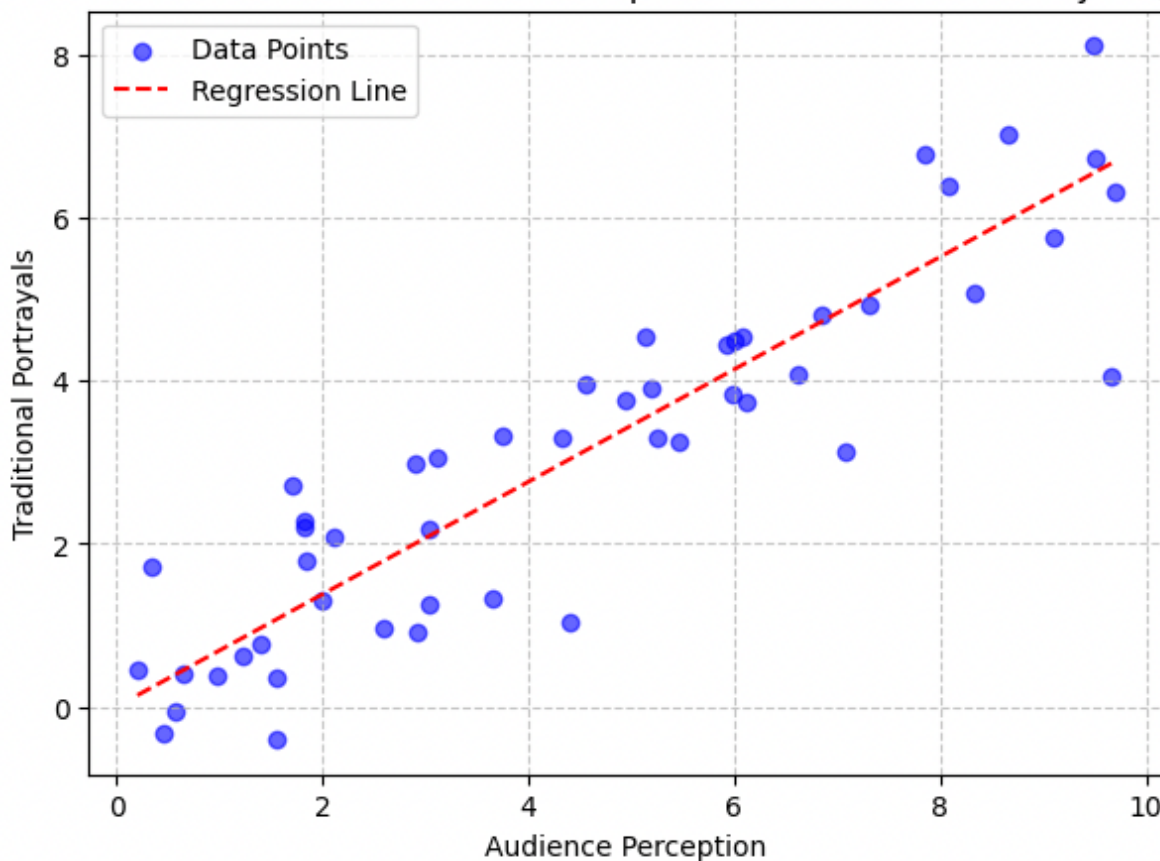
The regression model for H₃ is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), with an R^2 of 47.6%, indicating that audience perceptions strongly align with traditional portrayals of female roles.

Correlation

Variable 1	Variable 2	R	P	N
Audience Perception	Traditional Portrayals	0.69	<.001	250

Interpretation: Using the $R^2 = 0.476$ from the model summary, calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) as $\sqrt{R^2}$, which gives $r \approx 0.69$. $R=0.69$ shows a strong positive correlation between audience perception and traditional female roles in Punjabi stage dramas. The p -value (< 0.001) confirms that the correlation is statistically significant. Additionally, body shaming was moderately correlated with empowerment perceptions ($r = .452$, $p < .001$). A small but significant correlation was observed between financial influence and body shaming ($r = .179$, $p = .005$). However, body shaming did not significantly correlate with cultural roles ($r = -.004$, $p = .945$), indicating that cultural factors might not directly impact this aspect of representation.

Correlation Between Audience Perception and Traditional Portrayals (H3)



Qualitative Analysis:

The qualitative analysis is based on the theme extracted from the research questions regarding representation of women in Punjabi stage dramas and how these representations conform or challenge societal norms. This theme provides the bases upon which the analyses of what has been done to female characters in these dramas and their effects on the viewers' perception, the motivation of content providers, and cultural discourses are made from.

The analysis is organized into sub-themes that emerge from the data, each addressing a specific aspect of this portrayal, including body shaming, the emphasis on physical appearance, the use of vulgar dialogues, cultural and ethical implications, and role of commercialization and sponsorship.

THEME 1: Portrayal of Women in Punjabi Stage Dramas

1. Female Body Shaming in Punjabi Stage Dramas

Body shaming is the most important sub-theme of portrayal of women in Punjabi stage dramas according to this study. Many respondents agreed and noted that physical attractive often takes a center stage, in particularly, to the overall characterization of female actors. Female performers are subjected to comments and judgments regarding their body shape and size, reinforcing unrealistic beauty standards.

Asim said in 2nd interview:

“A women’s body is everything. Today, if she does not appear thin, the audience does not enjoy. This thing is also highlighted in scripts, specifically the physical appearance related attributes”

Ahmed stated in interview 7:

"Women are constantly criticized for their complexion, shape, and structure. Having more weight or 'not ideal looks' has become a stigma in the stage industry."

This heavily discriminates against persons who do not meet these benchmarks, in the process making it less easy for such people to secure parts. Some of the respondents mentioned regret made over this practice, but they also recognized that body shaming is always encouraged – for characters in scripts and randomly by audiences.

The results support the poststructuralist version of Objectification Theory, which holds that women’s worth is reduced to sexual allure and that they are perceived primarily as sexual objects. Such portrayals can have a rather negative effect on the perception of the society on the worth of women, and thus contribute to the development of more regressive norms.

Grabe et al.'s (2008) syntheses of various parameters incorporated into research on the impact of media representations on thin-basic images proposed that such epitomes positively influenced body dissatisfaction and detrimental behavior. Similarly, the Punjabi stage drama industry also plays this predatory behavior by exalting specific body templates and erasing others.

Additionally, Wolf's (1991) "The Beauty Myth" describes how women are controlled by beauty standards, a problem that is vividly apparent in the topics taken from this study.

Asim said in interview 2:

“Mostly a women’s character is limited to a sexual symbol. She is treated as a comic relief or used for a dance performance merely”

Adeel added in 6th interview:

“If the writers’ mindset is that the roles of women should only attract viewers’ attention through their appearance, then no one has yet had the courage to write a character of a strong and independent woman”

Most of them are with regard to male interests. Females are often depicted as passive,

sexualized, or limited to the roles of wife and housemaker. From a theoretical point of view Gender Role Theory attributes such portrayals to the imposition of traditional roles of women in society. Aside from hindering artists' freedom this practice also preserves a sexist perception of gender relations.

Hegemonic masculinity theory Hegemonic masculinity theory developed by Connell (1987) helps to reveal the ways media perpetuates patriarchal attitudes and makes women supporting roles for male characters. Unfortunately, the Punjabi stage dramas further the culture depicted in these movies owing to undermining and emitting stereotype characters. Furthermore, more generally, Mulvey's (1975) Male Gaze framework allows viewing how female characters are created mainly for male visual consumption.

2. Emphasis on Physical Appearance

The impact on female actors' body shapes was the most discussed issue throughout the interviews. There are doubts about the fact that casting decisions are greatly based on the physical appearance of the actors; the majority of respondents confirmed that beauty is one of the primary criteria when choosing the female lead. Sexual and revealing images and hedonic movements are used to lure fans, adding to the sexualization of women. As per Ahmed in 7th interview:

"If the writers' mindset is that the roles of women should only attract viewers' attention through their appearance, then no one has yet had the courage to write a character of a strong and independent woman"

Rehan shared in 4th interview:

"No female artist is brought on stage without wardrobe and makeup. This is a silent expectation that actresses fulfill"

It also alienates good bodies that may not fit these standards, perpetuating a culture that devalues women and renders them as objects to be looked at. Hypotheses which can be used for the analysis of this phenomenon include The Male Gaze Theory, according to which women are portrayed as visual stocks for men's enjoyment in media and performance arts.

Another study showing this emphasis encourages self-surveillance among women; Fredrickson and Roberts (1997)' on objectification theory. Further, analyzing the practices themselves, Nussbaum (1995) Objectification of Women in Media framework explain the examined practices as turning women into mere objects of visual use.

3. Vulgar Comments and Dialogue

One prevalent problem in Punjabi stage dramas is the use of obscene vocabulary. Sexually inappropriate jokes, double entendre, and foul language aimed at female characters are common in Punjabi stage dramas. Although these conversations are frequently intended to be humorous, they also help normalize misogynistic speech. According to a number of respondents, these conversations are included to satisfy audience desire and boost commercial attractiveness. According to a number of interviews, scripts usually include vulgar phrases and jokes with multiple meanings to entertain male audiences. Sarim in 5th interview said:

“Despite of being vulgar, these dialogues seem funny and the audience tends to enjoy them. We only perform what the audience demands”

Asim said in the 2nd interview:

“Vulgarity has become a commercial necessity, but it is a shortcut that leaves true talent behind”

However, there is growing criticism from audiences who feel that this kind of language encourages disrespect for women and gender inequality in public entertainment settings.

Kilbourne (1999) takes the case of vulgar and objectifying contents where media legitimizes injurious gender stereotype that Punjabi stage dramas also manifest. The coarsening of the fictive diminishes the capacities of the aesthetic and drives away viewers desiring either redemption arcs or changed worlds. For instance, Brown’s Cultural Commodification article also discusses the process of the entrepreneurial transformation of culture within the economies, and how art forms can be degraded when the possibilities for profiting out of them outweigh the potentiality for producing quality work (Stone & Grebenar, 2021).

4. Cultural and Ethical Implications

According to a number of interviewers, recurring exposure to objectified female characters feeds prejudice and discrimination against women. Furthermore, these dramas have drawn criticism from cultural and religious groups for encouraging immodesty and unethical depictions of women. In the seventh interview, Ahmad mentioned:

"Women who act in these dramas are seen as ‘loose’ by society. They face criticism, even if they are just earning a livelihood"

This stigmatization discourages many women from pursuing careers in theatre and entertainment, thereby limiting female representation in the performing arts.

5. Role of Commercialization and Sponsorship

Economic factors have a big impact on how women are portrayed in Punjabi stage productions. Many producers and directors alter the content to increase ticket sales and get sponsorships because these plays' financial success is so important. In order to increase revenue, objectified representations of women are often featured. Gender stereotypes are perpetuated when producers and sponsors compel the inclusion of aspects such as flashy female characters, sensual dancing scenes, and exaggerated physical displays. In interview 2, Asim underlined this notion by saying,

"Dramas must be commercially viable. When an actress dances and dons skimpy attire, it draws sponsors and boosts income"

This implies that there are little opportunities for diverse and progressive portrayals of women in Punjabi theatre since financial interests often trump artistic integrity.

Discussion

Discussion on Quantitative Results

The findings reveal that Punjabi stage dramas largely reinforce traditional and stereotypical gender roles, where women are portrayed as visually appealing and objectified characters rather than as empowered or independent individuals.

Table 5

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Result	Explanation
H1: The sexual element of female characters in Punjabi stage dramas of Lahore is associated with stereotypical gender portrayals.	Approved	According to the study's inferences, female characters in Punjabi stage dramas are frequently objectified, with a focus on their physical attributes and sexualization. Statistical analysis, including correlation tests, supports the association between stereotypical gender portrayals and the depiction of female characters.

Hypothesis	Result	Explanation
<p>H2: The element of physical appearance is associated with gender identity in Punjabi stage dramas of Lahore.</p>	<p>Approved</p>	<p>The findings emphasize how physical appearance serves as a major representation of gender identity and reinforces traditional gender norms. It is confirmed by thematic analysis and audience responses that physical characteristics, not personality or abilities, influence gender depiction.</p>
<p>H3: Audience perception of Punjabi stage dramas is correlated with traditional portrayals of female roles.</p>	<p>Approved</p>	<p>Content creators' decisions are further influenced by audience expectations and demand, which reinforce traditional depictions of female roles, according to the study's quantitative analysis (survey data) and qualitative insights (interviews with content creators).</p>

The research deeply studies what audiences think about female characters in Punjabi stage drama performances. Cronbach's alpha result above 0.8 shows that the measurement tool met high reliability standards which in return proves that audience perceptions were accurately measured for valid research data. Data reliability shows that the survey results accurately represent what audiences think.

The hypothesis 1 shows that female characters are frequently sexualized on stage in these dramas. They are portrayed in such a way the male audience can get all the pleasure instead of showing the female actors in any strong role.

The hypothesis 2 shows that how there are certain beauty standards which female character has to fall on in order to get the role. This not only affects the women on stage but also effects there real life.

The hypothesis 3 explains how there is a strong positive correlation between the audience perception and the traditional female roles in Punjabi stage dramas. The regression analysis further reveals that audience perceptions are significantly influenced by three main factors: women's position in society and the impact of media,

how the audiences The regression analysis adds another layer of insight, revealing that audience perceptions are significantly influenced by three key factors: Women's positions in society and media impact, plus how audiences view such portrayal affect the commercial success. 43.8% of the outcome results are determined by these metrics.

Discussion on Qualitative Results

This study was aimed at answering the following main research question- How far cultural stereotype of gender and beauty ideals are active in shaping female character portrayal in Punjabi stage dramas and how do the audiences respond to such portrayals? The research shows that there are five vital topics: body shaming, objectification, stereotypical representations of gender, and the vulgar representation of women. The study shows the prevalence of narrow physical dimensions of beauty in relation to talents of actresses, and their representation in film roles. In their responses respondents explained how thinness and normative attractiveness are expected for female performers that reflects socially acceptable standards of beauty.

These findings are in support with such theories in Media Representation as Objectification Theory, Gender Role Theory, and Cultural Commodification Theory. Objectification Theory states that culture prejudices young women to view themselves as sexualized objects resulting in lower psychological functioning. Richard Kline, in Gender Role Theory expresses how media plays a central role in reflecting the society and hence the limited and distorted types of images offered to women in Punjabi stage dramas. Cultural Commodification Theory argues against the value's orientation in profit and the absence of ethical portrayal; vulgarity and sensationalism are its manifestations.

Nevertheless, the study has some limitations because it only covers the city of Lahore and, therefore, may not give the real picture of Punjabi stage dramas performed in other areas. Despite such benefits as-depth understanding and analysis, the use of qualitative methodology offers less statistical credibility of quantitative procedures. The results of the study, as such, call for more changes on the Punjabi stage drama business. Concerning the representation of women, sexes producers and scriptwriters should follow more developed path of thinking, contrary to depicting female characters only as beautiful females or slaves.

The study then concludes by showing how social construction of women, reception by the audience, and culture of playwriting collectively contribute to gender stereotype portrayal of women in Punjabi stage dramas. All of these issues are interconnected and

cannot be solved without the contribution of industry players, policy makers and the audience for a progressive media culture.

Conclusion

The study looked at how women are depicted in Punjabi Stage Dramas in Lahore in terms of the view by the audience and the reasons behind the depiction by the content authors. These dramas, which sadly now lost their importance from Pakistan entertainment industry, have the potential to act as mirror of society and its culture. The research is therefore cross-sectional in nature, embracing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to understand the extent to which gender is portrayed in such performances to reproduce the existing cultural perceptions. In all, the procedures involved interviews with directors, writers, and producers, questionnaires with various audiences as well as an analysis of television productions. This work fills the existing gaps in the broader literature by exploring how economic and cultural factors as well as audience demand influence female representation in Punjabi stage dramas. This also points out the extreme normality of such representations to cultural and gender progressiveness in South Asia.

Quantitative Conclusion

Quantitative results show that there is strong women's harassment based on physical appearance in Punjabi stage dramas. These results align with how societal expectations are placed on women to follow certain beauty standards, which reduces them to mere sexual objects. The correlation analysis shows that there is strong positive relationship between objectification and reinforcement of stereotypical roles for female in Punjabi stage dramas. The misinterpretation of certain beauty standards not only affect those female actors on stage but also causes problem in real life

Women are always shown in secondary roles in dramas so that this narrative can position them as needing or for sexual purpose only. Data shows that women who don't follow these protocols or the traditional roles remain very rare in the drama industry.

Women in Punjabi stage dramas are shown primarily as objects for sexual satisfaction for the male targeted audience instead of an individual being with some strong story. This representation of women in Punjabi stage dramas not only reduces the diversity of character but also reinforces societal power dynamics in the favor of patriarchy only.

Qualitative Conclusion

The qualitative results further affirm objectification of women seen in Punjabi stage drama as an issue that has become imbedded in and organization culture coupled with entrepreneurial patronage of offence-enhancing screen content. In many instances there shows depersonalization of female characters with beautiful figures and body size described many a time omitting the inner qualities such as intelligence, emotion and personality. This is in-line with Objectification Theory by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) which states that such images minimize women and encourage the fashioning of culture senior to disapprove women's body.

From the perspective of the Male Gaze Theory which was articulated by Mulvey in 1975, these aspects of representation are designed main for male observers and viewers. This dynamic accentuates women's positioning as static and sexualized beings rather than as agents within the visual story. Interviews with directors, writers, and producers also confirmed an element of showing skin, provocative dialogue, and obvious physical comedy in adverts to grab attention. Although these creative decisions were made for purely economic reasons, such approaches reestablish regressive stereotypes and deeply enshrine objectification in communities' values. Such focus on physical appearance not only reduces possibilities to represent woman as a multi-faceted character but also excludes those who do not meet standards of beauty.

The study of the body image opens up the data to show that stereotypical representations of gender reinforce male power over women, their need for male characters and their significance in the show. These representations not only fit with dominant discourses of patriarchal culture where women are to be obedient and controlled by men but also contribute to the construction of audiences through operating as a medium of power which reproduces such discourses through the representation of women and the legitimization of gender inequality.

The quantitative and qualitative studies provide a realistic view of the source and the multifaceted processes leading to the representation of women in Punjabi stage dramas. Overall these findings go on to further prove that how economic concerns, audience reception and culture influence content choices are steeped in patriarchal values. The results of the current study indicate that 62% of the respondents recognize that stereotypical depictions are partly due to economic purposes, meaning that the priority and audiences' preferences dictate the content of the creators. The regression analysis that accentuates audience perception as the primary factor in media content decisions supports the argument that message recipients' preferences play the role of a driving force for the sustained reinforcement of gender stereotypes.

Nevertheless, these results are constrained by methodological limitations due to male-dominated sample, and an urban centric focus that includes an over-representation from Lahore. A larger sample would probably give a better picture of how various stakeholders view these representations. The perception that people have for gender representation in media could be affected by gender, geographical location and the socioeconomic status of the people. Ideally, future research extending this work should use a larger, more gender balanced sample and a wider geographical dispersion of participants to provide additional insight into these phenomena and increase the external validity of the findings.

Recommendations

According to the research findings researchers identified multiple strategies which can help develop gender-inclusive stories for Punjabi stage dramas. Storytellers must maintain ethical storytelling practices which eliminate the practice of sexual objectification alongside the representation of women in multidimensional encouraging roles. Media production guidelines need implementation by regulatory bodies and those guidelines should aim to support equal gender representation during stage drama performances as well as throughout other media productions.

The industry needs to create more opportunities that allow female playwrights and directors as well as actors to take leadership positions. Research investigating how modern media trends affect audience perceptions of gender roles should be conducted to develop a comprehensive understanding of these changes.

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