



Deconstructing Gender Stereotypes in Media: The Transformative Power of Media Literacy

Sameera Bhoi, Rajesh Kumar

Abstract: *The stereotypical perception of certain groups or communities has emerged as one of the most serious challenges in our multicultural, globalized society. While globalization has facilitated new economic opportunities and the free flow of resources, technology, ideas, and culture, market-driven consumerism has, on the other hand, narrowed human perspectives by promoting stereotypical projections and perceptions. This poses a significant obstacle to the development of a truly interconnected and inclusive multicultural world. The increasing stereotypical portrayal of men and women by the media remains a critical concern for society, and current trends suggest that such portrayals will persist in the long run. This article is a modest attempt to highlight the various gender stereotypes perpetuated by the media and explore the potential of media literacy in countering these stereotypes. Grounded in a qualitative approach, this study employs a Narrative Literature Review as its research method. The review synthesizes existing literature from multiple research databases, including JSTOR, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and CORE.uk, offering a thorough, critical, and objective analysis of the topic. On the one hand, the study provides a comprehensive examination of the portrayal of gender stereotypes across various media platforms; on the other hand, it investigates the transformative potential of media literacy in challenging and counteracting these biased and stereotypical narratives.*

Keywords: Media Literacy, Gender Stereotypes, Narrative Literature Review, Media Consumers, Content Creators, Media Portrayal

Abbreviations:

NAMLE: National Association for Media Literacy Education

I. INTRODUCTION

The stereotypical perception of certain groups or communities has emerged as one of the most serious challenges in our multicultural, globalized society. While globalization has facilitated new economic opportunities and the free flow of resources, technology, ideas, and culture, market-driven consumerism has, on the other hand, narrowed human perspectives by promoting stereotypical projections and perceptions. This poses a significant obstacle to the development of a truly interconnected and

inclusive multicultural world. In simple terms, a stereotype is a generalised and oversimplified notion about a particular social group or community that can significantly impact popular perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours (Spinner, Cameron, & Calogero, 2018) [20].

Historically, society has discriminated against women, subjecting them to inadequate nutrition, restricted or denied access to education, healthcare, and property rights. They have also been victims of child labour, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and other forms of injustice. Furthermore, power distribution in socio-economic and political decision-making has been unequal since time immemorial (Eristi & Erdem, 2017) [5]. Gender stereotyping has existed since the inception of civilisation and has become an inseparable part of societal evolution. It has deeply penetrated global cultures, significantly influencing societal standards, prescribed gender norms, and the roles individuals adopt (Smith, 2019). The media has played a crucial role in propagating and perpetuating stereotypical notions, creating obstacles in the path toward building a gender-neutral society. In today's media-saturated world, we are constantly exposed to content in various forms — text, audio, and video — which influences our thoughts, perceptions, and behaviours, often subconsciously. The media's power to shape perceptions has increased manifold over the past few decades, driven by technological advancements and expansion (Sharda, 2014). It can create a 'manufactured reality' by significantly manipulating social reality, aggravating several social problems, including gender bias and stereotypes. This article is a modest attempt to highlight the various gender stereotypes perpetuated by the media and explore the potential of media literacy in countering those stereotypes. This paper, though primarily grounded in the Indian context, holds relevance and significance that extend beyond India's borders, offering insights with broader global implications, additionally, in a mediated, globalized world where media content can be accessed from any corner of the earth at any time by anyone, even if its origin is traced to a specific geographical territory.

II. OBJECTIVES

- To review how gender stereotypes are portrayed in Indian media, including print, electronic, digital, film, and advertising.
- To investigate the power of media literacy as a transformative tool to counteract these stereotypes.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded on the following theories:

The cultivation theory explains how watching

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* Correspondence Author(s)

Sameera Bhoi*, Department of Mass Communication, Central University of Jharkhand (Ranchi), India. Email ID: sameerbhoi111@gmail.com, ORCID ID: [0000-0002-8031-9438](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8031-9438)

Dr. Rajesh Kumar, Department of Mass Communication, Central University of Jharkhand (Ranchi), India. Email ID: rajesh.kumar@cuja.ac.in, ORCID ID: [0000-0003-1050-7027](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1050-7027)

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television for prolonged periods can change people's attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours. People's perceptions of their social reality can be altered by the distorted portrayal of specific visuals on television (Park, Chung, & Kim, 2022) [17]. Several television programmes tend to portray women and men in particular ways, often reinforcing stereotypes. The content and messages of these programmes can subconsciously influence viewers and create a distorted perception of reality. Similarly, Social Learning Theory explains that individuals acquire knowledge, skills, behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes by closely observing and imitating their environment, which may include media (Islam et al., 2023) [9]. The information consumed through various media platforms can act as a stimulus, eliciting responses influenced by the media's portrayals of reality. Repeated stereotypical depictions of males and females in specific ways can affect the observational learning of media consumers, leaving a lasting impact on their thought patterns and behaviours. Framing Theory, first propounded by Erving Goffman, is often described as the second level of Agenda Setting. It refers to the way messages are constructed to influence how audiences think about an issue or event. In this process, the media highlights certain aspects while ignoring others, ultimately shaping a biased perception among media consumers. Media often frames male and female communities in specific ways, reinforcing stereotypical notions about both genders.

Feminist Media Theory critiques media for perpetuating gender inequalities, reinforcing stereotypes, and marginalising women's voices. The theory examines gender biases in media through a critical lens, challenging patriarchal social structures. It seeks to deconstruct the stereotypes, prejudices, and sexist ideologies embedded in media messages, ultimately advocating for and promoting a fair and inclusive media landscape. The Male Gaze is a theory that explains how women are objectified in mainstream films, as men largely control their production and make decisions that cater to their interests (Chen, 2024) [4]. As a result, the audience is positioned to accept these biased and sexist representations. In response to the Male Gaze, the concept of the Female Gaze became a topic of discussion among intellectual circles. It refers to the ways visual media can portray a female perspective of the world. Unlike the Male Gaze, the Female Gaze centres female directors and audiences, creating narratives that favour female perspectives. Developing critical thinking and media literacy skills is essential for deconstructing gender biases and stereotypical portrayals in media. These skills empower individuals to become active and informed media consumers.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Narrative Literature Review

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilising a Narrative Literature Review as the research method. A narrative literature review synthesises the available literature from multiple research databases to provide a thorough, critical, and objective assessment of the existing body of knowledge on a particular subject

(Pautasso, 2019). In contrast to systematic reviews, narrative reviews offer flexibility in structuring the analysis, allowing researchers to synthesise the outcomes of multiple sources coherently.

B. Data Sources

To ensure relevant and focused results, the methodological approach involves a thorough examination of literature from reputable academic and research databases, including JSTOR, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and CORE. The search was conducted using specific keywords like "Media Literacy," "Gender Stereotypes," "Media Representation," "Media Portrayal," "Indian Media," "Role of Media Literacy," "Challenging Stereotypes," and "Media and Gender Representation".

The keyword search yielded over two hundred papers, including journal articles, book chapters, case studies, reports, and conference proceedings. The researchers carefully reviewed the titles and abstracts of these works to assess their relevance to the study's focus on the media's portrayal of gender stereotypes and the power of media literacy to counteract them. Literature irrelevant to the subject matter was excluded, and non-academic sources, such as editorials and opinion pieces, were omitted to ensure academic rigour.

C. Approach

The study adopts a qualitative research approach, synthesising findings from various qualitative studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of gender stereotypes within the Indian media landscape with broader social relevance. The study identifies critical themes and patterns emerging from significant developments in the field of media literacy and gender representation in both conventional and new media.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After an extensive review of literature, the researchers identified two key themes that form the foundation for organizing the paper's findings and discussions. These themes include:

- A. Stereotypical portrayal of men and women in Indian media, including print, electronic, digital, film, and advertising; and
- B. The power of media literacy to counter gender stereotypes.

These themes are elaborately discussed below:

A. Stereotypical Portrayal of Gender, Men and Women in Indian Media

Patriarchy has been an integral part of Indian societal evolution, where women are often expected to conform to norms set by men. Similarly, the treatment of women in Indian media has not deviated significantly from this pattern. Over time, Indian media has perpetuated and reinforced stereotypical representations of various genders. This study aims to synthesise prominent past studies that provide a comprehensive understanding of the stereotypical portrayal of gender, both male and female,



across multiple media forms, including print, electronic, digital, film, and advertising.

As defined by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "a gender stereotype is a generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by women and men, or the roles that are or should be performed by men and women." India, being the most populous and multilingual country, has one of the largest print media industries in the world. Print media, which includes newspapers, periodicals, and newsletters, remains the oldest and most credible source of information compared to other media platforms (Kushwaha, 2024) [11]. In addition to reflecting societal values, print media serves as a platform for debate and discussion on various issues, which can ultimately lead to social change.

Past studies have observed that women's issues rarely receive front-page coverage unless they are linked to sensationalised stories such as rape, crime, sexual harassment, or abuse (Kushwaha, 2024) [11]. Even when news about women is featured, they are often portrayed as passive victims or reactors. Newspapers tend to focus on women-centric stories primarily on specific days dedicated to women, such as Mother's Day or International Women's Day. On regular days, women's issues rarely receive prominent coverage unless the news is particularly sensational or appealing to readers. Additionally, weekend newspapers often allocate special sections to women, featuring glossy stories on fashion, films, beauty tips, and luxury items, usually accompanied by suggestive images (Kaur & Kanwal, 2025) [10]. In the vernacular press, women are predominantly depicted in coloured pages filled with gossip about actresses, paired with alluring images that emphasise beauty and fashion. Magazines generally follow the same patterns as newspapers, showing little to no deviation from these trends (Fernandez & Menon, 2022) [6].

According to a content analysis of 1,065 matrimonial ads issued in two prominent English dailies, The Times of India and The Hindu, conducted by Mukherjee (2024) [15], gender stereotypes have a significant impact on partner preferences. The study found that when choosing a spouse, men's financial success and women's physical attractiveness were the most crucial factors. The desire for fair-skinned, thin women was especially noticeable. Traditional expectations in Indian society, where the "ideal woman" is often depicted as fair, lovely, religious, kind, courteous, innocent, modest, and culturally sophisticated, align with this preference (Mukherjee, 2024) [15]. Because older, more mature men are perceived as more financially stable, the survey also found that older men are viewed as more desirable partners than older women. The belief that ageing reduces a woman's physical appeal and fertility, on the other hand, makes older women much less desirable as life partners. According to Mukherjee (2024) [15], this phenomenon, often referred to as the "exchange of beauty for wealth," is a global tendency observed worldwide, including in India.

India has the third-largest television viewership in the world (Chakravorty & Bera, 2024) [3]. Watching television is one of the most popular leisure activities in the

country, with more than 780 million viewers spending an average of 3 hours and 16 minutes daily (Dasgupta & Grover, 2019). As a multilingual nation, India had over 826 television channels as of 2016. Television is a highly impactful medium that influences the public conscience by appealing to multiple senses of its audience. Unlike print media, which requires full literacy, television content can be consumed even by those unfamiliar with reading scripts.

Studies have shown that children are among the most vulnerable audiences for television programmes (Handa & Rossner, 2023) [7], particularly cartoons and animated shows (Fernandez & Menon, 2002), which significantly influence their perceptions, including those related to gender stereotypes. Female characters in children's programmes, including cartoons, are underrepresented compared to male characters (Castronuovo et al., 2021) [2]. Moreover, female children are often portrayed as immature and weak [13].

The portrayal of women in the television world is best exemplified by their depiction in soap operas. Specific recurring trends have been observed in popular Indian serials such as *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, *Kundali Bhagya*, and *Ek Mahal Ho Sapno Ka*. These shows frequently feature a self-sacrificing daughter-in-law who dutifully looks after her family, a villainous mother-in-law, a silent, inactive, and non-participative father or father-in-law, a hardworking son caught in familial conflicts, a cunning sister-in-law, and a pampered brother-in-law. Indian soap operas have also introduced bizarre and problematic themes, including a fantastical world of snakes, mongooses, bees, and witches (*Naagin*), the romanticisation of stalking, the promotion of superstitious beliefs, and the perpetuation of body shaming, age shaming, and rigid gender expectations in shows like *Sasural Simar Ka*, *Saat Phere*, *Bidai*, and *Pinjara Khubsurti Ka* (Ahuja and Pundir, 2022) [1]. Women in television programmes are often portrayed as *pativrata* (devoted to their husbands), physically weak, lacking strong willpower, caring homemakers, or objects of sexual desire (Mukherjee, 2024). In contrast, men are typically depicted as authoritative figures, prone to violence, and primarily driven by sexual interests rather than meaningful relationships.

Women in television programmes are seldom portrayed as educated, employed, independent, authoritative, or engaged in outdoor activities. When female characters are depicted as professionally successful, they are often shown as struggling to balance their personal and professional lives or as being unhappily married (Sandhu, 2018). This narrative sends a message that professionally successful women are seldom happy. Moreover, researchers have noted a recurring trend in many television serials where women are portrayed as engaging in conspiracies, having extramarital affairs, wearing expensive jewellery, promoting religious fundamentalism, organising extravagant parties, and primarily serving decorative functions (Fernandez & Menon, 2022). Television producers have also set unrealistic beauty and physique standards for both male and female characters. This creates pressure on viewers to emulate these idealised representations, which can lead to harmful physical and socio-economic consequences.

Additionally, a significant number of television and radio programmes often depict women as gossipmongers. In such programmes, so-called "experts" offer advice on becoming the ideal wife and mother, enhancing physical appearance, and preparing elaborate meals, reinforcing traditional and stereotypical roles for women.

Television advertisements similarly reinforce traditional gender roles, as highlighted in Deodran Lal's (2023) [12] study, "The Construction of Gender Identity in India through Television Advertisements: A Semiotic Analysis." Using semiotics, Correa analysed popular Indian advertisements and observed that they predominantly emphasise conventional roles for women, such as being a wife or mother. For instance, an ad for a backache ointment (Moov Brand) portrays a woman immersed in household chores, pausing briefly due to severe back pain. After applying the ointment, she gains relief and happily resumes her domestic work, reinforcing the stereotype of women as primary caretakers confined to domestic responsibilities.

Chakravorty & Bera, 2024 (2010), in her study titled "Gender Role Portrayals in Indian Television Ads," conducted a content analysis of 318 randomly selected television advertisements across three languages (72 English, 151 Hindi, and 95 Tamil) aired in India from 2004 onwards to examine the prevalence of gender stereotypes. The study revealed that males appeared more frequently than females as central characters and voiceover artists. Additionally, significant differences emerged in the type of credibility associated with male and female actors, the nature of the products they endorsed, and the settings in which they appeared. Female characters were often younger than their male counterparts and were predominantly depicted in relational roles.

Men are predominantly featured in advertisements for automobiles, often shown in driving positions. At the same time, women are depicted as passengers, subtly implying that women are not in control of their own lives or destinies (Ahuja and Pundir, 2022). The glorification of masculinity is evident in ads such as one portraying a newlywed woman suggestively washing her husband's underwear (**Chakravorty & Bera, 2024**). Women are frequently depicted in supporting roles, often appearing captivated by men who use specific brands of deodorants, automobiles, or shaving creams (Ahuja and Pundir, 2022). These advertisements reinforce stereotypical notions of the 'Alpha male' and 'Macho man,' perpetuating the idea that women are inherently attracted to assertive, dominating, overly confident, and wealthy men.

Stereotypical portrayals of genders are pervasive across professional depictions in mainstream media. In terms of occupations, men are commonly portrayed in the media as highly paid professionals, such as doctors, engineers, and lawyers. In contrast, women are frequently portrayed as housewives (**Ward & Grover, 2020**) [14] [21]. Contrarily, men who work in the kitchen are commonly stereotyped as stupid and 'incompetent', while 'authoritative', 'influential', and 'ambitious' women are often portrayed as 'greedy' and 'selfish' (Correa, 2011). Even major corporations like Wipro and Infosys, which advocate gender equality in recruitment, have been observed to depict men using computers in their advertisements (**Chakravorty & Bera, 2024**). Conversely,

beauty and fairness product advertisements frequently feature women, often reinforcing gender stereotypes. For instance, "Fair and Lovely" ads portray women using fairness creams to achieve career success, such as becoming an air hostess or cricket commentator, or securing a successful groom (**Chakravorty & Bera, 2024**). The use of attractive men and women in advertisements often fosters imitative desires and a sense of inferiority among viewers. Women are also predominantly shown in ads for home-related products, such as food (Maggi, Everest), kitchen appliances (Hawkins, Kent water purifier), and cleaning supplies (Lizol, Pantene, Harpic), often accompanied by emotional taglines (Ahuja and Pundir, 2022). A recurring trope involves women waiting at home all day while men return from work exhausted, subtly promoting the notion of women being confined to physical beauty and domestic responsibilities. While a few advertisements challenge these stereotypes—such as *TATA Tea Jaago Re's Inequality is learnt; Equality needs Teaching*, *Whisper's #LikeAGirl*, *Titan Raga's #BreakTheBias*, and *Ariel's Share the Load* campaign—such examples remain limited in number.

Films serve as a mirror reflecting societal norms through creative expression (Madaan et al., 2014). As a powerful medium that combines visuals, sound, and drama, it can influence even illiterate audiences (**Kushwaha, 2024**). The Indian film industry, which produces films in 20 languages, is one of the largest in the world, releasing 1,500 to 2,000 films annually and earning approximately ₹15,000 crore (\$1.9 billion) at the box office (Shirodkar, 2023). While films hold immense potential to shape societal perceptions, Indian cinema has largely failed to raise awareness about women's real status in society. Over time, Indian films have transitioned in their depiction of women, from roles limited to dancing around trees, romanticising love, and fulfilling idealised familial duties as daughters, wives, and daughters-in-law, to roles that still predominantly confine women within traditional stereotypes (**Kushwaha, 2024**). Across various media, including films, men are often shown as adventurous, aggressive, and dominant, while women are portrayed as submissive, nurturing, and affectionate (**Ward & Grover, 2020**). In Indian movies, women are frequently depicted as screaming, crying, or otherwise reacting passively to adverse situations, reinforcing stereotypes of helplessness and reactivity. Many Bollywood films have portrayed women as weak, vulnerable to exploitation, objects of desire, and often subject them to teasing, assault, and harassment (Shirodkar, 2023). These portrayals perpetuate gender norms and fail to challenge the societal status quo.

Many Indian films have reinforced patriarchal mindsets by glorifying 'Alpha male' or toxic masculine figures, celebrating aggressive, assertive, and dominating male characters. These portrayals are often idolised by youth and significantly contribute to a film's commercial success. The concept of the Alpha male has been glorified in several Hindi films, from *Deewar* (1975) and *Ghayal* (1990) to *Singham* (2011), *Kabir Singh* (2019), and *Animal* (2023). Such depictions not only perpetuate gender stereotypes but also normalise male chauvinism, portraying women



in subordinate roles and endorsing male authority. Additionally, misogynistic dialogues and item songs in numerous films further objectify women. These portrayals stereotype men as unemotional and insensitive, promoting a rigid and harmful notion of manhood. The glorification of toxic masculinity in the guise of Alpha males perpetuates societal norms that constrain both genders, reinforcing gender inequities and toxic behavioural expectations (Chakravorty & Bera, 2024).

However, some contemporary Indian films have begun challenging stereotypical notions of manhood by portraying men in a more rational and humanistic light. Movies such as *Dear Zindagi* (2016), *Kapoor & Sons* (2016), *Tamasha* (2015), *Article 15* (2019), and *Andhadhun* (2018) offer narratives that deviate from the rigid and toxic portrayals of masculinity traditionally prevalent in Hindi cinema (Chakravorty & Bera, 2024)—similarly, breaking the stereotypical depiction of women, films like *Mother India* (1957), *Bandit Queen* (1994), *Tanu Weds Manu* (2011), *Kahaani* (2012), *Queen* (2013), *Pink* (2016), *Dangal* (2016), *Thappad* (2020), *Chak De! India* (2007), *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2016), *Mary Kom* (2014), and *Fanney Khan* (2018) have portrayed women as strong, empowered characters, though such portrayals remain limited. However, the portrayal of women as independent professionals or strong characters leading lives on their terms remains uncommon in Indian films, unless driven by specific plot circumstances. Even highly educated female characters are often shown as homemakers, preoccupied with domestic affairs or shopping. When women are depicted as professionals, their roles are typically limited to traditional occupations, such as teaching, law, or reception, reflecting the ongoing stereotypical portrayal of gender roles in Indian cinema (Kushwaha, 2024).

Songs are integral to Indian films and the daily lives of people, resonating through religious festivals, personal events, and professional gatherings. While music has the power to shape societal attitudes toward women and influence how women perceive themselves, a subset known as "Item Songs" has been criticised for objectifying women with derogatory lyrics (Shirodkar, 2023). Examples include songs like "*Tu Cheez Badi Hai Mast Mast*" ("You Are a Great Thing, So Amazing"), "*Sheila Ki Jawani*" ("Sheila's Youth"), "*Chikni Chameli*" ("The Slender Chameli"), "*Fevicol Se*" ("With Fevicol"), and "*Aa Re Pritam Pyaare*" ("Come, My Dear Pritam") have raised ethical questions about creative expression in the music industry. Many songs' lyrics often describe the physical beauty of women, especially by glorifying the fairness of the female lead actress through comparisons to the moon. Item songs featuring female dancers wearing short clothes and exposing certain body parts have become a common phenomenon. Cameras are often zoomed in to capture shots of the waist, cleavage, and other erogenous body parts, objectifying their appearance. This technique is frequently employed as a strategy to achieve commercial success.

In recent times, Digital media, also known as new media, is gaining massive popularity among media users. It encapsulates all conventional forms of media and, as the fastest-growing and most preferred platform for modern media consumers, significantly influences contemporary

thoughts and perceptions. While digital media plays a role in reinforcing gender stereotypes, it also has the potential to challenge biased narratives (Kushwaha, 2024). However, its unregulated nature, particularly in social media, has led to an influx of content perpetuating stereotypes. Several nations, including India, are contemplating regulatory frameworks for the cyber world, sparking debates on social media regulation versus freedom of speech. Though stereotypical portrayals have declined in some Western European nations, they remain highly prevalent in Asia and Africa (Bharadwaj & Mehta, 2017).

B. The Power of Media Literacy to Counter Gender Stereotypes

The continuous portrayal of gender stereotypes by mainstream media distorts perceptions of reality, reinforces gender biases subconsciously among audiences, and exacerbates existing gender inequalities. Mainstream media do not seem to abide by their social responsibility, and given the present situation, they will continue to portray men and women in stereotypical ways. On the other hand, content creators on social media platforms often lack professionalism and awareness of their social responsibilities and the broader implications of their work. This highlights the crucial importance of media literacy.

So, what is media literacy? The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) defines media literacy as "*the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication.*" Simply put, we can say that media literacy is the competency to effectively access, understand, assess, and produce media content.

Carefully observing the definition, we can identify two-fold solutions to the biased and stereotypical portrayal of men and women in the media, termed as the 'Demand-side Solution' and the 'Supply-side Solution.' The skills outlined in the definition—accessing, analysing, evaluating, and acting upon media content—address the demand-side solution. In contrast, the ability to create content pertains to the supply-side solution. In this new media age, we are bombarded with an overwhelming volume of information, a significant portion of which may be fake, propaganda-laden, biased, or stereotypical. Such information can profoundly influence societal perceptions and reinforce stereotypes among media consumers. To counter this, media consumers must develop the ability to access content from authentic sources, analyse it to uncover latent meanings, evaluate its credibility and reliability, and act by making informed, responsible decisions. These skills encapsulate media literacy from the demand side. On the other hand, the accessibility of new media tools has empowered ordinary individuals to become content creators. The supply-side aspect of media literacy emphasises the need for creating media content professionally and ethically, with a strong sense of social responsibility.

Media literacy equips media consumers and producers with the skills for active and critical engagement with media. It empowers individuals to comprehend both the explicit and implicit meanings of media messages by critically questioning, analysing, and evaluating content before



consumption. This enables consumers to decode the social construction of messages, including recognising the stereotypical portrayals perpetuated by the media (Santonniccolo et al., 2023) [18] [19]. Simultaneously, media literacy fosters active and ethical media production, encouraging individuals to create content that serves as counter-narratives to biased and stereotypical representations. Mindful media users-both consumers and producers can drive significant positive transformations in the media landscape by critically assessing how information influences thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours (Lika, 2019).

Studies show that children, due to their immaturity and lack of life experience, are especially vulnerable to the influence of media, making them more susceptible to stereotypical gender representations. This highlights the importance of fostering a culture of active media consumption from a young age. Considering the evolving media landscape, there is a growing demand to incorporate media literacy into school and college curricula. A robust media literacy curriculum should focus on: (1) demonstrating how media messages are socially constructed; (2) examining the tools and methods used in media creation; (3) understanding how different audience segments perceive messages; (4) uncovering embedded ideologies in media; and (5) recognising that media messages are created with specific purposes (Nazarnia, Zarei, & Rozbahani, 2022) [16]. Media literacy programs provide critical tools to analyse how media influences perceptions of gender roles, especially in occupations and societal expectations. For instance, the study *"Media Literacy and Gender: Teaching Middle School Children about Gender Stereotypes and Occupations"* by Puchner, Markowitz, and Hedley highlights the success of implementing a critical media literacy curriculum at the micro level, helping children identify and challenge gender stereotypes in media. Similarly, such programs must be integrated into college curricula to address the needs of young adults.

Additionally, media literacy can be imparted through recreational settings, such as after-school clubs, summer camps, and workshops, where participants engage in media production and develop critical thinking skills (Hobbs, 2024) [8]. If not included in formal curricula, informal educational initiatives can serve as vital platforms for fostering media literacy. Adult education must also prioritise media literacy to reach those who missed formal education or remain unaware of the implications of biased media portrayals. The government, as well as NGOs, civil societies, and other active private entities, must come forward to prepare a clear roadmap and practical action plans to actualise this vision. Integrating media literacy into both formal and informal education equips individuals across age groups to navigate the media landscape critically, challenge stereotypes, and become informed and responsible media consumers and creators.

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Like any other study, this paper has the following limitations:

- A. Although this narrative literature review attempts to incorporate all significant and relevant existing literature on media portrayal of men and women and the potential of media literacy to challenge biased and stereotypical representations, there remains a possibility of missing some pertinent studies.
- B. The research primarily focuses on the Indian scenario regarding gender portrayal in media, assuming broader applicability in a global context. However, the study may not fully account for the cultural nuances of different regions worldwide.
- C. The study does not delve into the portrayal of the LGBTQ+ community in media due to the vastness of the topic. There is limited literature on LGBTQ+ representation, and focused research on third-gender and non-binary representation in media could provide valuable insights into this area.

Despite a few limitations, the study is crucial as it provides a holistic understanding of one of the most pertinent issues in society, gender stereotypes in media, and explores the potential of media literacy to counter such biased narratives.

VII. CONCLUSION

Patriarchal societies have historically been discriminatory, oppressive, and unjust to women, with the media playing a significant role in perpetuating this state of affairs. The increasingly biased and stereotypical portrayal of men and women by the media remains a critical concern for societal evolution, and current trends suggest that such portrayals will persist. Although legal frameworks exist to regulate biased and stereotypical portrayals, their enforcement is often inadequate. In this context, educating media users on the mindful consumption of media content becomes a proactive and practical approach. Additionally, the evolving digital and social media landscape has democratized content creation, providing platforms for many individuals. However, most content creators lack professionalism and are often unaware of the ethical implications and societal impact of their content. Media literacy emerges as a powerful solution, fostering critical, moral, and active media consumers and creators while challenging biased and stereotypical gender narratives. Studies have consistently demonstrated the efficacy of media literacy in countering mis/disinformation and false narratives within the information ecosystem. Governments, NGOs, civil society organisations, and private entities must collaborate to develop a clear roadmap and implement practical action plans that integrate media literacy into both formal and informal education systems.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

After aggregating input from all authors, I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

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- **Data Access Statement and Material Availability:** The adequate resources of this article are publicly accessible.
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AUTHOR'S PROFILE



Sameera Bhoi is a writer and PhD scholar, currently pursuing his doctorate at the Central University of Jharkhand. He holds a PG Diploma from the esteemed Indian Institute of Mass Communication, Dhenkanal, and an M.A. from Guru Jambheshwar University of Science & Technology, Hisar. He is a recipient of UGC-JRF/SRF in journalism and mass communication. His areas of interest are media literacy, media laws and ethics, and media psychology.



Dr. Rajesh Kumar has been associated with the discipline of media education as a distinguished academician, researcher, administrator, and media professional. Currently, he serves as an assistant professor in the Department of Mass Communication at the Central University of Jharkhand, Ranchi. He has authored numerous high-quality publications in SCOPUS and UGC-CARE-indexed journals. Dr. Kumar is also an alumnus of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) in New Delhi and has served as the editor of multiple university-level publications.

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