

Mass Media and Beauty Standards: Positive and Negative Effects on Women's Lives

Assist. Prof. Revati Dayaram Katekhaye

**Department of English, Dnyanda Mahila Mahavidyalay, Arts and Science College,
Wadegaon, Dist. Gondia, Maharashtra**

Abstract:

Women's empowerment is a big issue today, especially in social, political, and economic life. The media is a powerful way to communicate. It shapes how people think about women, their roles, and their bodies. This study looks at how the media helps and hurts women. It checks how the media raises awareness, how it portrays women, and how it affects women's participation in society. The paper looks at the media's power to challenge stereotypes and also to keep them going. Based on the literature and discussion, it shows both good and bad effects of media on women's empowerment. The findings say media can do a lot to empower women, but only if representation is responsible and content is inclusive. True gender equality needs that.

Keywords: Media, Women, Empowerment, Effects on Lives, Perception Designing, Representation

Introduction:

Beauty standards have been around forever. Now, mass media is one of the strongest forces setting and spreading those standards.

Scholars say seeing idealized images again and again makes people unhappy with their bodies and makes women treat themselves like objects. Social media makes this worse. Young women compare themselves all the time.

Old media pushed fair skin, slim bodies, and youth as the ideal. Some recent campaigns and films are more diverse.

Still, mass media is a major force shaping how women see themselves and others.

Aim:

To look at how mass media builds and challenges beauty norms. To show how media can boost women's confidence and empowerment. And to show how it also spreads unrealistic beauty ideas.

Literature Review:

Roy, S.S. (2012). *Portrayal of women in Indian Media-In the era of neo-liberal economy*, Global Media journal, June, Vol. 3, No.1. Roy says that the shift to an open market and privatization made media producers compete fiercely. In this attention economy, advertisers and filmmakers use women's faces and bodies to attract consumers. Female representation gets cheapened. Women are often shown in ads where they are not needed. Think men's shaving cream or men's underwear ads. Roy argues that commercial pressure keeps the media from



being a true mirror of society. She calls for stronger ethical codes for advertisers and for media literacy among women so they resist media demands about appearance and lifestyle.

HariPriya, M. (2005). *Women in Advertisement on Television in Kiran Prasad (ed.) Women and media challenging feminist discourse*, The Women's Press, New Delhi. HariPriya says India's economic opening turned the public into a massive consumer market. Urban India picked up more Western traits. The information revolution and the global village idea pushed advertisers to use one message for global markets. That often kills local representation. Even though Indian women are changing, advertisers haven't caught up. They still show women unfairly. HariPriya urges people to raise their voice against current ads and to put forth an ethical code that treats women with respect.

Fredrickson, B. and Roberts, T. (1997). *Objectification Theory. Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experience and Mental Health Risks*, Cambridge University Press, USA. The authors say girls and women learn to see themselves as if watched by others. That view leads to constant body monitoring. It can increase shame and anxiety, reduce peak motivation, and cut awareness of internal bodily states.

Tiggemann, M. and Slater, A.E. (2013). *NetGirls: The Internet, Facebook, and body images concern in adolescent girls*. International Journal of Eating Disorders. These authors say body dissatisfaction, especially about shape and weight, is widespread among adolescent girls. Sociocultural theory says the ultra-thin idea is pushed by many social influences, and the media is a big one.

Objectives:

To study how the media shapes women's identity and to suggest ways to use the media better for empowering women.

Research Methodology:

This is qualitative research, uses:

- 1) Analysis of advertising campaign
- 2) Review of academic literature
- 3) Look at social media trends
- 4) Secondary Sources. The researcher collected material from books, magazines, journals, social media platforms, and websites.

Analysis of Mass Media

1] Femvertising:

The term femvertising refers to advertising strategies that employ female-centered narratives and imagery to promote women's empowerment.

Positive view: Some big campaigns really question social norms and start a conversation.

Example: In India, Dove's #StopTheBeautyTest asks about the old marriage market idea of beauty. Nykaa's #BreakTheHashtag pushes body positivity.



Negative View: Some Indian femvertising only skims inequality without addressing it. A rebrand is sometimes just a label swap. 'Fair & Lovely' becomes 'Glow & Lovely'. That shows how brands use social justice language without addressing colorism.

2] Advertisement:

We see tons of ads showing women cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and taking care of kids. The brand always shows the woman doing it. Then people say, 'WOMAN CAN DO ANYTHING, ALMOST EVERYTHING'.

It's 2026, and these ads are still everywhere. Same formula. Every brand shows the woman doing household work. They make it seem normal.

Then Women's Day comes. The same brand put up inspirational lines, 'YOU BREAK BARRIERS, YOU ARE UNSTOPPABLE, WE SALUTE ALL THE WOMEN'. One day of praise. The other 364 days, the same stereotypes.

It's a business model. Brands condition us to accept women's place in the home and then sell both ideas. They post an emotional ad saying 'WE EMPOWER WOMEN' and profit from both sides.

Real empowerment would be showing women every day as scientists, engineers, pilots, politicians, and CEOs. Not just one-day praise. Give representation every day. Because,

"Men work from Sun to Sun,

Women's work is never done."

3] OTT Platforms and Web Series:

Positive View: With less censorship, OTT lets creators tell unconventional gender stories and tackle taboo topics like female sexuality and LGBTQ+ rights.

Example: Delhi Crime shows a strong female police officer juggling work and life. Made in Heaven looks at different sexualities.

Negative View: A new bias is growing. The male-to-female lead ratio on OTT went from 1.4x in 2022 to 3.5x in 2025. Female-led shows have dropped. The same report found that female-led OTT titles dropped from 31% in 2022 to around 12% in 2025, while male-led stories increased significantly across genres. [The Economic Times]

Example: Action and Crime thrillers stay male-dominated. Women get a side role as a supporting role.

4] Indian Film Industry:

Positive View: Recently, more women-led films have done well commercially. Movies show women as independent and career-focused, not just romantic interests.

Example: Laapata Ladies (2024) and Crew (2024) focus on female agency.

Negative View: Male-dominated storytelling still rules. Women get screen time mostly in items



Songs or roles that reinforce beauty ideals. Item song culture objectifies women, turning them into props or eye candy.

5] News Channels:

Positive View: Community journalism has let rural women tell their own stories and expose issues like corruption and domestic violence.

Example: ‘Khabar Lahariya’, run by Dalit and tribal women, challenges mainstream bias with real rural reporting.

Negative View: Women are still underrepresented in mainstream news. In some regions, they are central in only about 28% of coverage. Debates have many male experts. Coverage of gender violence can slip into sensationalism instead of being sensitive.

6] Television & Daily Soaps:

Positive View: Some serials now show complicated female characters who try to balance tradition and modern goals.

Example: Think Sona in Kuch Rang Pyar Ke Aise Bhi [Sony], Meet in Meet: Badlegi Duniya Ki Reet [Zee TV], and IPS Kanchan Choudhary in Udaan [Doordarshan, 90s].

Negative View: Most daily soaps still praise the all-sacrificing mother and the ideal daughter-in-law who stays within patriarchal limits. Progressive women become the ‘vamps.’

Example: In Anupama [Star Plus], Kavya is often shown as the bad woman for being independent, while Anupama is idealized.

7] Social Media:

Positive View: Social platforms have made entrepreneurship and activism more democratic. Women build digital communities and global movements.

Example: Hashtags like #SheInspiresMe on Instagram foster solidarity and help home-based entrepreneurs get paid work.

Negative View: Digital spaces are full of gender-based threats, trolling, and doxing. High-profile female activists face massive coordinated trolling and AI-based Deepfakes meant to silence them.

8] Newspapers and Magazines:

Positive View: Papers and magazines show celebrity images, fashion, and beauty tips. Celebrity coverage, like that of Kim Kardashian, can be framed as empowerment.

Negative View: Headlines often focus on women’s looks rather than their work. They push the idea that beauty equals value.

Analysis of Beauty Standards:

1] Body Image and Size:



Positive View: Body positivity movements on social media and OTT challenge the Size Zero obsession. Brands and creators celebrate different bodies and talk about health over thinness. Example: Double XL (2022), with Sonakshi Sihna and Huma Qureshi, calls out fat-shaming and pressure on women's sizes.

Negative View: Instagram filters and editing apps create new perfection and new body dysmorphia. TV ads for weight loss and slimming teas still link thinness to success and marriage. High-fashion magazines often edit actresses to erase folds or flaws, pushing unrealistic looks.

2] Black Vs. White Skin:

Positive View: A big unlearning is happening. Feminist pressure made brands drop words like Fair or Whitening. Dark skin pride gets more support.

Example: Fair & Lovely changed to Glow & Lovely after Feminist activism. Dark-skinned models like Nidhi Sunil are now global faces for L'Oreal.

Negative View: Rebranding doesn't always change the message. Many ads still imply that glowing or bright skin equals confidence. Daily soaps tend to cast fair-skinned protagonists and darker-skinned characters as unlucky or villainous.

Example: Matrimonial ads still say 'Fair Bride Wanted'. Media-fuelled colorism runs deep.

3] The Male Perspectives [Objectification]:

Positive View: More people are media literate and call out the Male Gaze, where the camera lingers on a woman's body for male pleasure.

Examples: Backlash against item numbers in films like Animal or Pushpa shows that audience sensitivity is changing.

Negative View: Action films and commercial Bollywood still use the lustful camera. Women are framed as trophies or motivation for the male hero.

Example: In the movie, Animal (2023), female characters are often shot to emphasize vulnerability and submissiveness.

4] The Feminist Perspectives [Subjectivity]:

Positive View: The female gaze centers on emotional intimacy, female desire, and inner life. It treats women as subjects of their own stories.

Example: Made in Heaven and Lipstick Under My Burkha focus on what women feel, their sexual agency, and ambitions. The camera work often feels intimate rather than intrusive.

Negative View: The female gaze is mostly on OTT and so stays an elite viewpoint. Mass audiences watching free-to-air TV still get patriarchal content. A web series might show a woman's pleasure, but a daily soap will still value her for serving her husband and in-laws, erasing her independent identity.

Conclusion:



Mass media- films, ads, newspapers, TV, and social media- play a big role in setting beauty standards that affect women's lives. Some moves toward inclusivity and empowerment are hopeful. But idealized and unrealistic portrayals still dominate. This dual impact shows that we need media literacy education, responsible advertising, more diverse representation, and critical media consumption. Media can empower women or cause psychological harm, depending on how beauty is shown and taken. A balanced approach could turn media into a real tool for empowerment instead of pressure.

References:

- ❖ Haripriya, M. (2005). *Women in Advertisement on Television in Kiran Prasad (ed.) Women and media challenging feminist discourse*, The Women's Press, New Delhi.
- ❖ Tiggemann, M. and Slater, A.E. (2013). *NetGirls: The Internet, Facebook, and body image concerns in adolescent girls*. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 46(6), 630-633.
- ❖ Fredrickson, B. and Roberts, T. (1997). *Objectification Theory. Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks*, *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, Cambridge University Press, USA.
- ❖ Roy, S.S. (2012). "Portrayal of women in Indian Media-In the era of neo-liberal economy", *Global Media journal*, June, Vol. 3, No.1.
- ❖ Perloff, R.M. (2014). *Social media effects on young women's body image concerns*. *Sex Roles*, 71(11-12), 363-377.
- ❖ Haseena, V.A. and Jesla Galibdeen, P. (2025). *Media Pathways to Women's Empowerment: Evidence from Kerala*, *Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*.
- ❖ Verma, S., Suyo, A.M.C., and Sharma, J. (2025). *Role of Mass Media in Women's Empowerment*, *Euro-Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*.
- ❖ School of International Business and Entrepreneurship Researchers. (2023-2025). *The Role of Social Media in Women's Empowerment in India*, *Leadership, Education, Personality: An Interdisciplinary Journal*.
- ❖ Ormax Media. (2025). *Streaming has a new bias: The male lead*. Ormax Media Insights.
- ❖ Das, T. (2025). *Men are taking over Hindi OTT content; female-led shows dropped to 12%*. The Print.

Webliography:

- ❖ https://youtu.be/jEpTa2cMl_I?si=f3kxV7ohQYS87rPI. [Dove Campaign]
- ❖ https://youtu.be/9Dkb6rmbtpQ?si=R6_J7l7AyzfFB8rs. [Nykaa Campaign]
- ❖ <https://youtu.be/8tU3kJJC5Y?si=42rw47P7TWE2EgTE>. [Glow&Lovely Ad]
- ❖ <https://youtu.be/9I4FKW0tlFU?si=7VVHno3Cqm-sozL7>. [Delhi Crime]
- ❖ <https://youtu.be/6DfaBq2rVoE?si=O2aFSScGem6wOvz>. [Animal Movie]
- ❖ <https://youtu.be/9xaxH4-H7qM?si=-LEmAYzBH2rpFn8H>. [Laapta Ladies]
- ❖ <https://youtu.be/D-BesyehZsI?si=p0e7v-NeDonYN4qt>. [Bollywood Item Songs]
- ❖ <https://youtu.be/5vjmCucHDq4?si=kfNN-eYaObVQzEN1> [Khabar Lahariya]
- ❖ <https://youtu.be/Xk4AI5Fk3Go?si=Az05GTi5XyR2dLGJ> [Double XL Movie]



- ❖ <https://youtu.be/u1DFcj5UdvY?si=-uGKTg9dacuzmiGz> [Udaan- Doordarshan]
- ❖ https://youtu.be/oaz7kisun2E?si=yLQ_j07_RCBelitL [Kuch Rang Pyar Ke Aise Bhi-SONY]
- ❖ <https://youtu.be/1DiOVBZLyW8?si=oeEcnZ6lqRbgaVp> [Meet – Zee TV]
- ❖ https://youtu.be/GoCzQMOoJ14?si=4sc4Fp2vSA4GrTu_r [Anupama-StarPlus]
- ❖ <https://youtu.be/KWmbpdOjYRo?si=BO8ZGkBR6Edvhdo8> [Made in Heaven]
- ❖ <https://youtu.be/ApH-8pVwsnM?si=IlURzHHeiFo6wwDV> [Lipstick Under My Burkha]