

# To Fight or To Promote Gender Stereotypes: A study of 3 AVs produced during Pandemic

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## **Abstract**

Stereotype emerges stronger with its excessive presence in the content over different platforms generation after generation. Some creative minds try their best to fight against stereotypes and some can't do away with it. There are a few who do not realise what a stereotype is and how they have surrendered to it unknowingly. While the content generated during pandemic may be perceived as 'funny and easy to laugh about', the same has been perceived as having a tinge of various stereotypes prevailing in the society. There is a certain growth in the creators of content over various apps and other platforms which are easy to access and circulate without a thought. Some content has been celebrated and publicized widely to promote certain ideas and messages during the pandemic. The audio visual content produced jointly or separately during the latest pandemic times has raised a few questions primarily on the picturisation of women and men, jointly or separately. The 'message' oriented content made during COVID times ignore the undercurrent of gender bias largely. This paper studies three such audio visual contents packaged, presented as short films and analyse the presence of deeper gender bias in such films.

Key Words: Stereotype, Pandemic, Gender, Bias, Audio Visual, Films

## **Introduction**

A visual is worth a thousand words, is an age old saying. When it comes to audio visual the impact is even more. The life of cinema has proven it over the 130 years of its life and it has managed to keep the magic and impact of the medium even today on masses across the globe. With the invention of digital technology the creation of audio visual has made it democratic and with the invention of social media the frequency of creating the audio visual and then circulating it into the virtual world has made it easy. So many people today are trying their hand on the audio visual creation on their cell phones, which is the easiest to access tool for the audio visual creation. The circulation of such content has become extremely easy that even a small kid feels like the mobile belongs to him or her. The makers of such content are eager to put it on social media may be even before it is made. The responsibility towards the content that one is making and putting it out for the world, however small or big it is, is never questioned. The impact it creates is never thought of while one is addressing the thought that has come to one's mind. It becomes even more important when it comes to

addressing the gender. “Women constitute fifty per cent of the population and hence their portrayal on screen is crucial in determining the stereotypes that exist in the society” Sibal (2018). Tere (2012) raises a question about how the mainstream Hindi cinema undercover the patriarchal values have portrayed various characters of Indian women. Here the researcher is looking at this topic during the urgency situation and hence it has an edge. In the editorial of *Journal of Travel Medicine* states that “During Pandemic a lot of content was floated on social media. Social media can and should be harnessed to support the public health response.” (JTM 2020) To strengthen this argument an example has been given from china where during the pandemic in the massive community quarantine how the social media was used to provide the communication for the requirement for quarantine alongside the advice and how to fight the rumours and panic. The title of the editorial itself suggests how important has been the social media during this pandemic situation and it says “The pandemic of social media panic travels faster than the COVID-19 outbreak”. In India too during the pandemic a huge content was created and circulated not attending the impact it would create on the receiver. One of the main point during the pandemic was the ‘Stay Home Stay Safe campaign’. The commoners and the agencies having responsibility to promote this thought kept producing the AV content and it kept on circulating. The easiness of the consumption kept the dilemma of it being true or false remained on the viewers mind always. During this entire exercise the idea of gender bias was not attended and a lot of content got produced basis the funny conversations between husbands and wives. A lot of such stuff just ignored the attention that was required to be given to the portrayal of the image of a man and woman with extreme care and given one importance of one’s efforts and contribution to the family, society and nation. Here in this paper the author studies three very short films, one of which is made by the author himself ad try to see how the message oriented audio visual content has addressed to the portrayal of gender. The audio visuals made have actually fought the gender stereotypes or it has helped to promote to the stereotypes and thus creating the bias basis gender. This becomes very important exercise as images and audios play important role and unknowingly instead fighting the stereotypes they promote it. Here is a study to see the objects, metaphors and words in the audio visuals and how they function on the background of a Pandemic situation with regard to the Gender Stereotype.

## **Review of Literature**

Dasgupta (2018) explores how “masculinity and femininity are the socially constructed concepts of being male or female”. When it comes to mainstream Hindi cinema how the portrayal of an “ideal man and woman” pin points towards the ideal man and woman in our society. These two things (Femininity and masculinity) are more about how one looks at it as a society than what sex one belongs to. It is often the society decides the meaning of being a male of a female. Coegnarts & Kravanja (2012) argue that the visual metaphors can represent 'Time' in a film. The Time and Space are two very important factors in any film at any given point of time. Here the argument by Forceville & Renckens (2013) describing the good light and bad light become very important. They say that everything that is brighter represents 'GOOD' in cinema. Everything that is dark

represents 'BAD' in cinema. Happy, smiling, laughing, loving, joyful etc. fall in the Good category, whereas the bad can be looked at as suspicion, crime, dangerous etc. Carrol (1994) comments that visual metaphors could be observed in all types of arts and they can be expressed through the visual language. He analysis the various ways with which the visual metaphors could be identified, interpreted. Their ways to function and the various purposes they serve. Later Carrol (1996) elaborates that the visual metaphors should be taken as representation and a helping hand to structure the narrative in a film context. Ortiz (2014) explains that the primary metaphors are apparent in scene setting techniques like composition, lighting, camera movement etc. However, mise en scene can also be used as a metaphor to express certain thoughts like evil, relationship, fear, joy, importance and confusion. Various scholars has focused on visual metaphors how it works in the story telling for a film giving importance and emphasis on the emotion and mood creation, however it lacks in giving examples. The literature review did not find any research work which explains about visual metaphors in context of short films or films produced during the COVID 19 pandemic. While studying this particular topic the researcher also has analysed the importance camera placement and composition. The use of camera angles, placement of characters, framing for a particular shot and how they speak about gender. It has eventually given the very important information with regard to how the basic things in filmmaking throw light upon the stereotypes and here in this case Gender stereotypes.

Madaan, Mehta, Agrawaal, Malhotra. Aggarwal & Saxena (2017) argue that “Different features like occupation, introduction of cast in text, associated actions and descriptions are captured to show the pervasiveness of gender bias and stereotype in movies.” They have further stated that “The silver lining is that our system was able to identify 30 movies over last 3 years where such stereotypes were broken.”

However the researcher finds a gap that during the pandemic situation and the urgency of content creation alongside the fast circulation over the social media the attention towards the Gender Stereotyping and Gender Bias is lacking in the short film or short AV formats.

### **Objectives:**

- To study the Stereotypes in a few short films publicised during pandemic
- To find out how an image of Man and women address Gender Stereotype
- To analyse, how the message impacts the Gender bias
- To analyse, if the message of the AV favours a particular Gender

### **Research Methodology**

This research study has been based on ‘Film Analysis’ and falls in the category of content analysis as the research method. Film is considered as a text in the form of audio and visuals, and each element of audio and visual ads to the meaning. The content of a film is considered for analysis and interpreting it step by step is a

process that has been followed up. The researcher is required to watch the film content again and again to have a basic understanding of the story and the plot overarching the film. Here in this case the narrative structure and the message orientation are also analysed. After the first step the researcher needs to focus on the required or most essential area of the film to find out and address the objectives to achieve the research. This is done according to the relevance of the study. The analysis needs to be done on a few basic things at a primary level and a few core zones on a secondary level. The primary level may consist of narrative, storytelling devices, screenplay, dialogues, camera work, editing work, actors performances and then the between the line aspects which may be relevant to the topic (Dodia 2012). The Primary data for this study has been gathered by watching and observing the audio visual approach of the three short films and has been used as a primary data by watching it again and again and observing important factors mentioned above. Secondary data has been collected from research papers, articles and books. For this research study, the three films directed by three different directors have been watched many times. How the filmmakers have approached the message of 'Stay Home Stay Safe' is studied. These films are important as they have the involvement of the primary film school of the country. The approach of the film makers to use the images of man and woman or not to use these images and how they have impacted the gender stereotypes is studied. The meanings and emotions that float through the audio visual elements, metaphors, actors performance and how it unfolds the message becomes very important aspects of study through these films which are some way associated with FTII. The first film is made on Bhupendra Kainthola, Director FTII and his wife Mrs. Gargi by India Today Group. The second film is made by Dhiraj Meshram, Dean of Film wing at FTII, Pune. The third film is made by the author himself.

## Analysis

Analysis is the crucial part of this study here the analysis is done basis the following points. These points are very crucial and they impact the making and viewing of the film content.

**Narrative or plot of the film:** This is very important factor for study as it deals with the overarching theme that a film carries. This also deals with how the film has been conceived through the characters and how it is explored with the help of the various devices of cinema.

Narrative film 1: The film talks about a husband and wife and they are talking to each other while talking to the camera promoting the 'stay home stay safe' appeal by the Honourable Prime Minister of India. The film addresses how the wife has to do the house work and this pandemic situation has 'allowed' them to take help of their husband. The final appeal is done by the husband only. This is more of an Interview cum drama film.



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tive film 2: This film is a drama genre film. A girl is seen doing her dance riyaz in her house. The bell rings and the girl runs to open the door. Its her father who has come and the girl hugs him to welcome. A camera moving shot suggests a place to be the isolation zone. Finally the girl is seen wearing the mask and in isolation

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Narrative film 3: This is a drama genre film. A man is seen doing the preparation for cooking and then cooking too. The voice over is asking various questions about cooking. It addresses various steps and possibilities along with variants of cooking. Finally the man is seen with a napkin over his shoulder in a victorious gesture that he



has cooked, so can others. The film is an appeal to all men with this representation.

**Visual approach basis ‘Gender’ & Use of camera promoting ‘Gender’:** In the case of this study the researcher has tried to see the various visuals which address the 'Gender' in these films.



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the visuals communicate and how they either emphasis or marginalize the gender on screen or off screen. The camera plays a very important role in any audio visual content. The use of camera starts from placement of camera and placement of character, angle, composition, movement, light etc. How the camera has been used to fight or to promote the Gender stereotype through the imagery, is studied by the researcher. The images above show a man at work and how the onion is making him cry and in trouble, however the low angle image of the same man cleaning the utensils promotes his image to be larger than life.

All the three films favor the male and have been made through male gaze only. The visual has a classical narrative style and mostly eye level. The films favor the idea of male dominance with two films not having the leading lady of the house. The first film has kept the lady in the background not giving her any close up focusing the male. The husbands have lead the films and have influenced the films through their presence. In first film the woman is shown sitting and reading enjoying the tea. In the second film the father comes home. In the third film the man is cooking food and the camera has promoted the male misusing the women in the space. The first film close ups have been given to the tea making but there is no close up offered to the woman.

In the second film the girl is finally shown in the mask behind the isolation zone. The responsibility is left with the girl and leaves the man the father free. The image of the girl dissolving in the cage speaks a lot about the gender bias.



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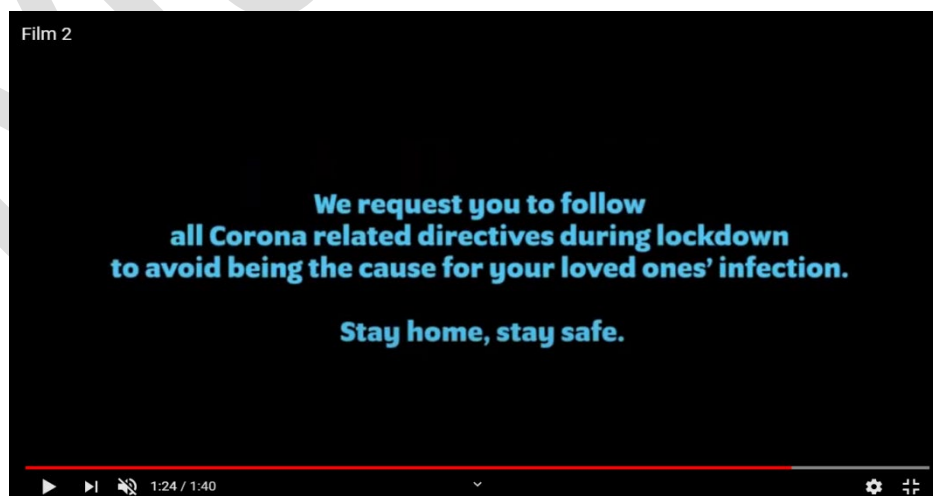
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Are there any metaphors used to deal with the Gender stereotype is studied in this point by the researcher. Metaphor knowingly or unknowingly work on the audiences mind to a great extent and they have a long lasting impact too. The metaphors used in the films are usually shown and are associated with the women. In these films the men have been shown using the property such as watering hose, tea making, cutting, chopping of vegetables etc, cooking, dancing. In one film all the cooking work has been shown being done by a man with a voice over.

**The words and voice over affecting the Gender Bias:** These films may or may not have a dialogue or a voice over. The study of words used in any format becomes essential to be considered for the study. The researcher here has tried to look into the words and how they play an important role in addressing the gender bias in these films.

The attention to visual objects, camera positions, use of metaphors and use of words have to be dealt with extreme care. This is across the formats of audio visuals. Under the garb of spreading a message the Gender must not be left loose to attend. The bias towards the gender must be handled with care. The third film actually asks a direct question to the men in the audience if they have ever worked as the person in the film is doing. This clearly indicates that the men doesn't work and it's the responsibility of the women of the house. The man is shown to be adjusting with the work but the voice over suggests to enjoy the process and lays no responsibility on the cook for the food to be good.



## Conclusion

All these contents actually are made to spread the message but they attempt the gender bias unknowingly. 'A certain kind of works are to be done by women' is the hidden argument that floats through these films. The films actually give an undercurrent of hidden bias towards a certain gender. These films had a spread over social media and were taken positively but the gender bias was not identified or discussed on any platform. Sometimes while we make something with a particular target in mind but miss out on the hidden aspects that the audio visual elements keep 'Saying'. The pop ups from such elements create a meaning and unknowingly the audience consume it. The Gender bias is neglected and not recognized and keeps floating due to such non addressal. The attention to visual objects, camera positions, use of metaphors and use of words have to be dealt with extreme care. This is across the formats of audio visuals. Under the garb of spreading a message the Gender must not be left loose to attend. The bias towards the gender must be handled with care.

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