

**MEDIA CONTEXT AND CHANGES IN ATTITUDE TOWARDS
LGBTQ COMMUNITY: A STUDY INTO THE NATURE OF
CINEMA AND STREAMING TELEVISION CONTENT**

DISSERTATION

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Introduction

Melvin DeFleur and Timothy Plax proposed Meaning Theory of Media Portrayal. The theory defines the way media shape messages and what that means for social conduct. Communication has worked as a tool to process meanings. Individuals interpret texts, signs and symbols and retain a sense of meaning. According to the theory, the meaning reside within people and people relate it with media content. The theory talks about four type of media influences: establishment (new words or meanings are added to the system), extension (media expands or adds to the current definition of something), substitution (the older meanings are substituted by the new ones) and stabilization (reinforcing conventions between words or symbols and their meaning).

This research is about media portrayal of LGBTQ community. The researcher here tries to outline how Bollywood cinema and Streaming content portray the LGBTQ characters. This research work also concentrates on what people think of LGBTQ community and their views on media portrayal of LGBTQ community.

Statement of the Problem

The Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and Azim Premji University conducted a research survey from 2017-18 in eight states. The survey showed that 28% people somewhat agreed to homosexuality and they were of the opinion that it should be accepted by the society.

According to a data submitted to the Supreme Court in the year 2013 by then Central government of India, India had 25 lakh gay populations. 1.75 lakh of the gay population (7 per cent) were infected with HIV.

In 2017, Avert, UK based charity organization, released its data on homosexuality in India. According to the data, 2.7% of total population of gay/MSM (men who have sex with men) are HIV infected and 65% of them are aware of their status.

Due to the disapproval to the LGBT community by society and perceiving it as a taboo and against the nature will never let homosexuals to come forward and open up about their sexual identity. This further leaves them ignorant of the possible STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) danger, including HIV.

It becomes very important on the part of mass media to perform one of its basic functions of 'educating' people. There should be a strong endeavor by Indian media to discuss the issues of homosexuality and aware people.

Significance of the Study

- ✓ As mentioned above, it is very important to accept LGBTQ community as the way they are in order to reduce the risk of deadly STDs like Aids. This research will help in outlining the role played by media in bringing up issues of LGBT community and how it has been able to change the way people think of same-sex love and LGBT community.
- ✓ The main aim of the study is to measure the degree with which media has/or not performed its function of educating people about same sex love and LGBT related issues and to outline if it has influenced progressive attitudinal changes in society.
- ✓ The exploratory nature of the research helps in highlighting new insights into media representation of LGBT community and what people have learnt through media about them.
- ✓ This nature of research can further help future studies to generate hypothesis and carry out research in a specific way. The study will also allow media persons to know where they are lacking in the upliftment of a community and what changes they can make to fix it.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to recognize the contribution of media in portraying a positive image of LGBT community and how that portrayal has effectively developed positive and progressive thoughts among people. Which medium, television programmes or movies, has been used by people the most to derive more knowledge and which medium has helped shape their understandings of homosexuality.

Objectives of the Study

- ✓ Tracing media portrayal of LGBT community through Bollywood and streaming television.
- ✓ Knowing if media representation of homosexuality alters the notion that homosexuality is an illness and need to be treated and establishes the fact that it is a **personal issue** and a normal sexual orientation.
- ✓ Determining if perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of people on homosexuality are influenced by the media.

Research Questions

- ✓ What has been the stand of media on LGBT community?
- ✓ Has media been able to influence people and change their attitude towards members of LGBT community?
- ✓ What is people's opinion of media when it comes to portrayal of LGBTQ community?

Research Design

The term design actually means drawing or sketching. Research design is basically a blueprint on the basis of which an entire building is constructed. It involves the process of decision makings, i.e. before one starts pursuing a research project, research design gives one a clear picture of 'how to conduct a particular research'. William Zikmund has described research as "a master plan specifying the methods and procedures for collecting and analyzing the needed information". If go by Martin Bulmer – "Research design is specification of the problem, conceptual definitions, derivation of hypotheses to test, and defining of population to be studies".

Thyer (1993) A traditional research design is a blueprint or detailed plan for how a research study is to completed- operationalizing variables so they can be measured, selecting a sample of interest to study, collecting data to be used as a basis for testing hypotheses, and analyzing the results.

- ✓ The research design is exploratory in nature and looks into new insights in the subject.
- ✓ The research is both quantitative and qualitative in nature.

Research Methodology

This paper aims at reviewing the nature of broadcast media (entertainment shows) and Bollywood cinema and the role played by it in formulating attitude of people towards homosexuality. To fulfill the objectives of the study, two methods have been used:

1. **Manifest Content Analysis**
2. **Survey**

- In survey method, **interview schedule** was used for data collection.
- Both quantitative and qualitative method of content analysis are used.

Unit of analysis for quantitative content analysis are –

- a) Holding Hands
- b) Hugs
- c) Kisses
- d) Intimate scenes

Tool Used for Qualitative Content Analysis: GLAAD's Network Responsibility Index.

Based on Vito Russo Test, Network Responsibility Index divides media content into four categories:

- a) Excellent
- b) Good
- c) Adequate
- d) Failing

Vito Russo Test has three parameters:

- i. The film contains a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer.
- ii. That character must not be solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- iii. That character must be tied into the plot in such a way that their removal would have a significant effect.

Universe of the Study

1.7.2.1) The researcher has taken University students from Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University and Lucknow University as universe of study.

1.7.2.2) Unit of Analysis: Individual student.

Sample Size

For the purpose of outlining attitudinal change among people, 100 students are surveyed. These 100 people are from age group 18-30 years. The age group is confined from 18-30 years so as to analyze the impact of streaming media and cinema on youth.

	Total number of Respondents (18-30 years)	Males	Females
BBAU	50	25	25
Lucknow University	50	25	25

For content Analysis, 5 Bollywood movies and 5 streaming television shows have been selected.

Name of the Movies	Name of the Streaming Television Shows
Fire	Maryada: Lekin Kab Tak
My Brother Nikhil	Shakti: Kahani Astitva ke Ehsas ki
Margarita with a Straw	Big F
Ekk Ladki ko Dekha to Esa Laga	Pyar ki ek Kahani
Aligarh	Satyamev Jayate

Sample Techniques

Following techniques have been used to select samples:

1.7.4.1) Non-Probability sampling

1.7.4.2) The researcher used Purposive and snowball sampling used for collecting the required number of data.

Tools and Techniques of Data Collection

The researcher used both primary and secondary data for the purpose of completing the research work with justifiable findings.

Primary Data

For the purpose of collecting primary data, a survey was conducted. The survey contained interviews schedule (consisting of both close-ended and open ended questions) with 100 people (18-30 years).

Secondary Data

Secondary data was gathered through different TV programmes, movies, books, previously done surveys and researches, case studies, different articles, news stories and online content.

Limitations of the Study

Due to time limitations, there were limitations to research study as well. The researcher was able to survey only 100 respondents. In order to understand the impact of media representation on youth, people above the age 30 were not included in the research study. As the members of LGBT community were not able to come out as who they are, their take on media representation was not recognized.

Findings of the Survey Data

The survey that was conducted in Lucknow was able to uncover the role played by media in normalizing the same-sex relationships. The researcher used the interview schedule of data collection so that the respondents can also be observed while collecting the data. The

questionnaire for schedule included 24 questions that tried to understand the thinking and views of people on homosexuality. The questions focused on the role of media and its influence on youth.

The research largely focused on the role of streaming television media and Indian Cinema. It concentrated on the role played by streaming television and Indian cinema in bringing attitudinal changes in people towards same-sex love. The findings of the research can be summed up under the following categories:

Youth have a progressive attitude towards same sex love

When the respondents were asked about their views on Supreme Court verdict, 58% of them responded being either very happy or happy with the decision. 31% of the respondents were neutral with the verdict. It means that if they are not happy with the decision they are also not against it. Neutral is also a kind of positive gesture. Only 11% of the respondents were unhappy with the verdict.

Youth are of an opinion that media play a very important role in bringing a progressive change in attitude towards homosexuality while they also opine that media has not been able to play its role whole heartedly.

78% of respondents were of the opinion that media has a major role to play in bringing a progressive change in attitude towards homosexuality. Just 4% of the respondents disagreed while 18% remained neutral. On the other hand, majority of 44% said that media has not played its role whole heartedly for LGBT community. Also, 29% said that media has played its role whole heartedly while rest remained neutral towards it.

96% of the respondents accept to be influenced by media in some way.

60% of the respondents said their views on homosexuality got influenced by media to a large extent. 19% said they are influenced to a moderate scale, 15% said they are influenced to a small scale while 2% accepted to be influenced to a small scale. It can be said that media has proven to be successful in influencing the views of people on homosexuality to a greater extent.

Mainstream Bollywood movies with big stars are more popular and influential.

People find mainstream Bollywood movies with big stars more influential. When the respondents were asked about the ‘movies’ they were mostly influenced by, people named different movies, but these five movies had the highest frequency – *Dostana*, *Ek Ladki ko Dekha to Esa Laga*, *Aligarh*, *Fire* and *My Brother Nikhil*.

Going by the content of the movie, *Fire*, *My Brother Nikhil* and *Aligarh* are more touching movies with a serious tone. But as *Dostana* and *Ek Ladki ko Dekha to Esa Laga* have big name associated with them, they both got a lot of popularity. On the other hand, movies like *Fire* and *My Brother Nikhil*, which have a very strong and emotional appeal, failed to grab the attention of the people.

LGBTQ community is mostly portrayed as comic figures.

Maximum of the respondents maintained that LGBT community is mostly shown as comic characters. 60% of the respondents are of the opinion that the LGBTQ community members are shown as comic characters to a large scale, 19% agree with moderate scale, 15% say to some extent and 2% go with small extent. Only 4% are of the opinion that they are not shown as comic characters.

More than half of the respondents believe that homosexuality is a normal sexual variant.

58% of the respondents believed that homosexuality is basically a normal sexual variant and there is nothing wrong with it. 18% of the respondents believed that homosexuals have some psychological problems and almost equal number of respondents (17%) believed that there are some other reasons for homosexuality. Very small per cent of respondents think that homosexuality is a result of bad upbringing or is a result of bad peer group – 4% and 3% respectively.

Half of the respondents think that media can help LGBT community get equal status in the society.

51% of the respondents said that media has the capacity to help LGBT community get equal status in the society. Just 16% say that media cannot help them in any way and others are not clear about it. Most of the respondents who responded positively to the question stated (in open

ended questions) that media can help LGBT community by producing more LGBT-centric shows and movies.

69% of the respondents also believed that more LGBTQ centric educational TV programmes should be produced.

Women showing a more liberal attitude.

The survey uncovered at many stances that women have had a very positive and progressive attitude towards homosexuality. On the question of SC verdict, 66% of the women gave a positive response, while just 50% of men had a positive view.

Findings from the Content Analysis of Bollywood Movies and Streaming Television Content

The researcher analyzed five television shows and five Bollywood movies that were based on LGBTQ theme. Five television shows – *Shakti – Astitva ke Ehsaas ki*, *Maryada: Akhir Kab Tak*, *Pyar Ki Ekk Kahani*, *The Big F* and *Satyamev Jayate: Accepting Alternative Sexualities*. Five movies analyzed were – *Fire*, *My Brother Nikhil*, *Aligarh*, *Margarita with a Straw* and *Ekk Ladki ko Dekha to Esa Laga*. Here are the findings of analysis of Bollywood movies and broadcast television shows:

Mainstream Bollywood misses it.

It can be said that mainstream Bollywood movies are far away from a social theme like LGBT community. There are just two mainstream movies that concentrated on LGBT theme – *Dostana* and *Ekk Ladki ko Dekha to Esa Laga*. In the movie, both the actors show themselves as gay, in fact they are not. The movie is a comedy that takes up the issue in a light way. Still, the movie was much appreciated by the LGBT activists as it was the first time that such an effort was made. The second movie was *Ekk Ladki ko Dekha to Esa Laga*. *Ekk Ladki ko Dekha to Esa Laga* was light comedy but made a great effort in portraying the mental and emotional complexities that an LGBT member goes through their teenage.

Bollywood moving towards another ‘normal’ love story

Deepa Mehta's *Fire*(1996) was first of its kind that showed a same sex love story. The movie faced a lot of protest from a various religious outfits in India but was still released and that too without any cuts at first. It was the beginning of something. After that, homosexuality as a theme was then picked up by many other directors and movies like *Margareta with a straw*, *My brother Nikhil*, *Girlfriend*, *Dostana*, *Angry Indian Goddesses*, *Aligarh* and *Ekk Ladki ko Dekha to Esa Laga* came in line. These movies discuss the emotional complexities of the same sex couples. Now, there is wait for the day when the homosexuality theme will become completely normal.

Television too misses it! No television show is entirely based on a homosexual love story.

The Indian television shows are so much busy with their Saas-Bahu drama that they miss such an important issue. There are just a few shows that bothered to include it but just as a small part of it. There is no television show that is completely based on the theme. Almost the television soaps have love stories and all the love stories are entirely 'normal' (heterosexual) in nature. There is just one daily soap, '*Shakti – Astitva ke Ehsaas ki*', that is entirely based on the story of an intersex person. Otherwise there is no such show where the side actors or supportive actors are of LGBT community.

Just one educational programme on same sex love and LGBT community.

It can also be said that there is just one educational show broadcasted that made an honest effort to aware and educate the audience about a completely natural phenomenon – homosexuality. Amir Khan's *Satyamev Jayate: Accepting Alternative Sexualities* truly made a remarkable show that highlighted the complex life stories of LGBT community member who were able to live life happily only due to the support of their loved ones. The show also tried to convince the parents not to act in a complete arrogant or fuming way if they find out that their child is homosexual.

Answers of the Research Questions

After Surveying hundred students and analyzing the content of movies and streaming television shows, the research was able to find out the answers to the research questions she proposed. These research questions are:

- 1 What has been the stand of media on LGBT community?

- 2 Has media been able to influence people and change their attitude towards members of LGBT community?
- 3 What is people's opinion of media when it comes to media portrayal of LGBTQ community?

5.2.1) What has been the stand of media on LGBT community?

The researcher analyzed the content of streaming television and movies following both quantitative and qualitative method of content analysis. After finely analyzing the content of movies and television shows, the researcher was able to get the answer to the very first research question. Here is what researcher found out about Indian media (Bollywood movies and streaming television content):

- ✓ Bollywood movies has started taken the issue seriously and the movies produced would rank excellent on GLAAD's Network Responsibility Index.
- ✓ Streaming television is also moving ahead towards a better world for LGBT community. Though they are lagging far behind Indian cinema, they are making efforts to highlight the issues of LGBT community. Out of five shows reviewed, three would ranked excellent on GLAAD's index.
- ✓ The quantitative analysis was done to count the number of hand holding, kissing, hugging and intimate scenes. These four labels were chosen as they are very much common in any heterosexual love story. Out of five movies reviewed, two of the movies did not have any such scenes which means that cinema is making an effort by they are still away from normalizing things. Same is the case with streaming television shows. Only Big F was bold enough to have a lesbian kissing scene.

Has media been able to influence people and change their attitude towards members of LGBT community?

- ✓ Yes, it will not be wrong to say that media has been able to influence people and change their attitude towards members of LGBT community.
- ✓ 60% of the respondents said that their views on LGBTQ were influenced by media to a large extent. 19% of the respondents said that they were influenced to a moderate scale

while 15% said that they were to some extent. Only 2% said that they were to a small scale and just 4% of the opinion that the media couldn't influence them in any way.

- ✓ Maximum number of the respondents (48%) said that they were influenced by movies. It can be said that cinema influences people more than other medium.

What is people's opinion of media when it comes to media portrayal of LGBTQ community?

- ✓ 78% of the respondents agreed with the statement that media plays a very important role in propagating global trends and it has resulted in a changed (progressive) attitude towards homosexuality. They believe that media are wheels of change and brought about attitudinal changes in society.
- ✓ 78% of the respondents say that media has done a lot in bringing progressive attitudinal change in society. On the same hand, 60% of the respondents say that the LGBTQ community is mostly shown as comic characters in the movies. It means they are in the movie just to create humor.
- ✓ Half of the respondents say that media can help LGBTQ community get equal status in society. 51% of the students said that media can help LGBTQ community get equal status in society while just 16% responded negatively. Rests were not sure about it.
- ✓ 69% of the total respondents said that more educational programs should be produced as such programs can help uplift the society.
- ✓ The sad part of media is that people believe that media has not whole heartedly played its role of educating people and it has not been successful in forming a positive general attitude towards LGBTQ community. 44 % of the respondents believe that media has been unsuccessful in playing its role towards this socially marginalized community.

Conclusion

After going through and analyzing Bollywood movies and television shows, it can be said that both the streams are somewhere lagging behind in the depiction of LGBTQ community. **60% of the respondents think that LGBTQ community is mostly shown as comic characters in the movies.**

Bollywood is moving ahead by producing more LGBTQ-centric movies. Recently released movie – Ekk Ladki ko Dekha to Esa Laga is a prove that the mainstream Bollywood is also coming forward and contributing awareness towards the community.**All the movies analyzed by the researcher rank ‘Excellent’ on GLAAD’s Network Responsibility Index.** The movie produced till now can be appreciated for their tremendous efforts for trying to depict the both emotional and social challenges the community goes through.

Fire makes commendable portrayal of same-sex love between two women who badly want to come out of their failed marriages and find love in each other. My Brother Nikhil discusses how a homosexual infected with HIV person goes through social shame and elimination from his own parents. Aligarh tells that how a homosexual professor is socially and mentally punished for his relationship with a boy. The movie also depicts that how his sexuality is used as a weapon against him in the University politics. Margarita with a Straw successfully defines the emotional dilemma a bisexual goes through and how being loyal becomes a big issue for her. And the recently produced Ekk Ladki ko Dekha to Esa Laga beautifully and successfully explains the life of a homosexual from childhood to adulthood. The emotional scars she goes through at the age of her puberty and the social challenges she faces due to her love relationship with another girl.

Talking about the Indian television, the case is not as similar as movies. There is a lot of work to be done and efforts to be taken. There is just one television show that stands out among all – *Shakti – Astitva ke Ehsaas ki*.**Three of the five shows analyzed rank ‘Excellent’ on GLAAD’s scale while two just rank ‘Adequate’.** Or else, even if a few stories have same sex love stories, they are just a minor part of something big and that is why, television has a long way to go.

The survey conducted revealed a lot about the people’s attitude towards homosexuality and media’s effect on them. Majority of the population believe that media leave a good impact on them. **More than 90% of the respondents believed that media influenced their views in some way. And, around half of the respondents said that movies have been the main source of information for them.** People have now started to know and believe that homosexuality is a natural sexual variant and media can help them get equal status in society. **Half of the population says that media can help them get equal status in the society and 70% of the respondents say that more educational programs should be produced on homosexuality.**

Suggestions

After analyzing the content of the media and the result of the survey data, researcher has reached to some conclusions and wants to make suggestions. These suggestions are as follows:

- ✓ Homosexuality should be openly discussed and more educational television shows must be produced.
- ✓ More movies should be produced with homosexuality as main theme. This would help add normality to the same sex love stories. When more of such movies are produced, homosexuality will no longer be an alien to the society.
- ✓ Indian cinema should stop stereotyping the community as humorous and funny. In fact, they should be portrayed as heroes. It will not only motivate the community but will also create a respectful place for them among heterosexuals.
- ✓ *Ek Ladki ko Dekho* to *Esa Laga* and *Dostana* were the most watched movies. Both the movies were the big banner movies and both have big names attached to them. Therefore, the superstars of the Bollywood must come forward and be part of more of such movies.
- ✓ In case if more LGBTQ centric movies cannot be produced then at least one LGBTQ character should be there in the movie who has a vital role to play in the story and is far away from stereotypes.
- ✓ More educational shows like *Satyamev Jayate* (hosted by a star) must be produced as it will help in the proliferation of the idea that homosexuality is just a natural variant of human sexuality.
- ✓ Educational programs, TV debates & discussions, and more LGBT-centric movies are the need of the hour and so think 69% of the respondents.
- ✓ Movies produce on LGBT community mostly focus on same-sex love. There should be movies based on transgender and intersex which should try to pull them out of their stereotyped image.
- ✓ Prime time slot should be given to television shows based on LGBT community.
- ✓ LGBT-centric movies and shows should be promoted on a larger scale. Movies like *Ekk Ladki ko Dekha to Esa Laga* and *My Brother Nikhil* were not promoted as having homosexual theme. Promoting a movie or show for having a same-sex love story may also help normalize things.

Scope for Future Studies

Not much work has been done on the particular issue in India and that is why there can be done much on the topic. More similar studies can be conducted across the country to draw overall attitudinal change in the country. This study leaves some suggestions and scope for future studies. This study has future scope in following ways:

- ✓ 5.5.1. This research work was exploratory in nature and therefore concluded with various findings. This study can be used as hypothesis for future studies. There are several new findings that can be further used as hypothesis.
- ✓ 5.5.2. Due to limitation of time, only youth (students) could be the unit of analysis in survey method. The future studies can focus on other professions and age group as well. For example, more focus can be given to housewife or people who are not well educated or may be professionals who do not spend much time watching movies and television shows due to their busy schedule.
- ✓ 5.5.3. Due to time constraints and unwillingness of people to come out as homosexuals, this research misses take of LGBT community on media. The future research can concentrate on just LGBT community.
- ✓ 5.5.4. Researchers aspiring to consider content analysis of media may concentrate on the comparative study between heterosexual and homosexual love stories.