Original Research Paper

Media Science

A STUDY ON THE PORTRAYAL OF GENDER VIOLENCE IN THE DIGITAL AGE AS SHOWN IN SOUTH INDIAN FILMS

Rashmi Raja V.R	PhD Research Scholar, Department of Media Sciences, Anna University, Chennai - 600025
Dr.C.Velayutham	Assistant Professor, Department of Media Sciences, Anna University, Chennai - 600025

ABSTRACT The present study delves into the mapping of cyber savagery and gender directed violence after the advent of digital age as shown in South Indian films based on selected criterion. Study analyzes how the digital medium changes the perceptions of human lives, shift of morals, and thus making the governing human value a variable. Also this study looks into how the cultural self shifts during offline and online presentation, gender based stalking and invasion of privacy in digital age. The study maps the different strategies deployed by the stalkers offline and online, technology -human conflict which roots the causes of moral panic and also looks into the types of violence that are caused because of the above said. People definitely undergo a sense of identity projection in order to cater to their audiences needs. Results show that after the dawning of digital media, violence is majorly directed towards women more than men, the major value changes like impatience, intolerance, less secret about relationships, polygamy, increase in cyber violence and less openness to change. Also results show that women are threatened more on the basis of *maanam* (meaning: Honor) more than their men counterparts. Further explorations are possible by widening the research through live social interactions with people on digital interventions in relationships.

KEYWORDS : Cyber Violence, Digital age, privacy, Stalking, identity projection,

Introduction

Gender based violence especially in India has been a never ending topic of discussion. Girls undergoing depression due to workplace harassment, or women having suicidal thoughts because of dowry problems have always been the headlines of newspapers these days. It has taken to many levels and shapes which is sure a sheer issue of dismay. One of the many factors which still make-stays women empowerment as an illusion is many of our religion based/ archaic practices thus leading to our socio-economic growth a mirage. Also the fact that the rape culture is normalized and misogyny transmitted through peppy Indian songs in the mainstream media has seen to have severe culture based ill effects on its audiences. It has taken this long for women of the media industry (who are branded as very open in their thoughts) to talk and discuss about casting couch as a problem to be addressed.

Being in the age of digital era is easy and difficult in many ways at the same time. Technology has almost transformed everything that we see, face and experience today. Human relationships have undergone a massive change in the digital age. Words have changed into emoticons, face to face communications transformed to Skype calls, giving/receiving gifts became dedicating videos and lastly physical actions malformed into sex chats. During this course of time, we must also realize the mammoth of change in the norms and morals we had previously considered to be sacred.

Films are always considered to be a state of art and expression of people as collective in nature, which reflects the part of society they can be associated to. Hence this present study analyzes South Indian films of the digital age, in order to understand how stalking and other gender based violence issues have changed its forms, paving ways for women to feel less safe and empowered.

The objectives of the study include:
- To analyze the gender based violence directed towards the characters of the films
- To analyze the changes in violent behavior meted out by the characters in the digital era through the chosen films.
- To trace the relationship between change in cultural identity and invasion of privacy in the digital age.
- To scrutinize changes in human values and attitudes after the advent of digital age.

Literature Review

According to United Nations Entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women, violence against women takes many forms and dimensions among which the prevalent ones are physical, sexual, emotional and economic types. The less document ed ones include various violent behaviors such as: crimes committed in the name of honor, elder abuse, throwing of acid etc. The report on sexual assault preventions which gives big data about the hate crimes directed towards the different gender reveals that offenders or assailants often choose to violate people those who they think they are vulnerable in nature". This proves that rape is not about sex, but is about exercising power and control on the other

After the advent of digital technologies, it not only takes up much of the everyday activity time, but also decides and changes the way of existential human life, says Professor Levin. (Levin, 2014) Digital culture can be possibly defined as the way we behave and interact with each other by the ways and means technology and the new media sets the agenda for us to do so. (Bell, 2009, p.30). The paving of digital technologies enable its audiences to easily react towards it, share or send a feedback and in short participate. But as Jenkins rightly points out that participatory culture should also be looked at through the lens of participatory politics and learning. By ways of doing this, one gets an extended mentorship, acceptance seeking behavior and identity projection. (Jenkins, 2016) Once the always-on communication, the concept of privacy has become dichotomous with the private life and social media.

Danah Boyd says that, 'Due to the digital cultures, the always-on communications doesn't allow one to be felt alone. In this generation's terms, it can also be described as 'Digital natives' being always on and updated with the technology. But as and when the technology gets updated the applications of privacy also does with that of access given to other people (Boyd, 2012) Scholar Ruth Gavison explains privacy as a limitation of others' access to individual and a loss of privacy occurs when someone else is given access to it. (Gavison, 1980, p.421)

Erving Goffman differentiates between the two sides of online and offline presentations of self in the digital age which primarily hold good even today. He says that the self presentation is itself a social product, and is externally validated by others. Thus the self is caught by the act of becoming into a blended personality of online and

offline self where the former seems more real to their virtual groups. This phenomenon is called as masking of identities. (Goffman, 1959) In a visual governed age, to understand more on the communi cation of digital age, Nancy Baym's Personal connections in the digital age seeks to find that digital communication should not be looked at as a replacement of face-to face interactions and instead as a mixed modality so that the tactics of communication is more nuanced. (Baym, 2015)

To bestow upon a historical perspective to value systems, one has to date back to the Greek philosophers of Plato, Aristotle and Kant's times. To them, values were fundamental problems which raise the concerns of existence, philosophy, way of living life, and the question of to be just or unjust. Values vary from different cultures, ethnicity and religion. One society might value family and relationships more while the other need not. Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy says that values are of different types namely intrinsic and extrinsic where intrinsic is something that has a value within itself and extrinsic is the one which are not intrinsic. Scholar Alexius Meinong through an ontological perspective adds more subjectivity to the definition of value by saying 'anything that pleases and to what extent counts as a value'(Meinong, 1912, p.34)

Methodology
The present study uses Qualitative content analysis of selected movies

Criterion for selection of movies
- Films which have 'cyber bullying, cyber stalking, online pornography, or technology as a threat' as its main theme.
- Films which were released post 2010, considering cyber stalking etc is noticeably a recent peril.
- Films which showcases a change in human values or belief systems after the intervention of technology.

Selected films for the present study
- Chappa Kurishu – Malayalam release- 2011
- Asha Black- Malayalam release- 2014
- Papanasam-Tamil release- 2015
- Lens-Tamil release- 2017

Synopsis of films analyzed
Chappa Kurishu is a 2011 Malayalam release, which in Kochi slang when translated gives the meaning of 'head or tail'. The story revolves around two protagonists, one whom is an affluent businessman based in Kochi and another one who is a slum dweller, works for a supermarket. The businessman has an affair with his subordinate, while is also preparing to get married to a well-off family friend's daughter, which is later learnt by the subordinate. Heated arguments follow up because of this and in the meanwhile the businessman forgets his mobile phone thereby which ends up with the slum dweller. He doesn't want to give back the mobile and undergoes a major character change in the meantime. While taking the phone to a service center, the shop owner finds a private video clip between the businessman and his subordinate thus uploads it on YouTube for cheap thrill. Finally the two meet up for confrontation, and the subordinate who initially has suicidal ideas leaves the city.

Asha Black is a 2014 Malayalam release which has its central theme within online stalking and cyber pornography. There is a series of killings of people of Indian origin, which happen in Malaysia and thus the suspected reason was based on racial attacks. But as a Tamil officer intervenes, he and his team find out that all of the victims had had a mutual friend on Facebook in the name of Asha black. Asha Black is a teenage girl who is habitual to make online friends, chat with them who is shown to be a typical spoilt single girl child, raised from a rich family. She falls in love with a Tamil guy, who wants to surprise her by coming down to Malaysia on her 18th birthday but apparently finds out that she had committed suicide. He later understands that, she had been victimized by many on the grounds of online stalking. He tracks down and kills every tormentor of hers.

The news being known to their parents, were compulsorily hidden to protect their status. The film ends with a note that, how unmonitored usage of cyber space can be hazardous especially to young adults.

Papanasam is a 2015 Tamil release, which gives the translated meaning of destructions of sins, and it also happens to be the name of the place the protagonists hail from. The story revolves around a middle class family, where the very protective father of two girls runs a cable TV service shop. Apart from his business, he's shown to be an avid movie watcher. When his first daughter ventures out for a nature camp, she's being bullied by a guy of her batch, who also secretly records her by hiding his mobile inside the bathroom. The culprit who is later understood that he hails from a prosperous background of an Inspector General family. He comes down to the girl's house in order to blackmail her, but ends up getting killed accidentally. The whole family including the younger daughter cooperates in hiding the attacker's killing. The father coaches the whole family as to how to behave if the police interrogate them. After many turn of events, the family undergoes severe police treatment, yet no news on the body of attacker comes out. Later the audiences are able to understand that the body was hidden under the newly built police station of the same village.

Lens is a 2017 Tamil release which has its main plot around the subject of cyber pornography and voyeurism. The protagonist of the film is shown to have a troubled marriage and hence habituates himself into virtual sexual relationships through Skype calls. During this period he, encounters with the antagonist who is shown to be the husband of the girl the protagonist was in virtual relationship with. There after the audience understands that the antagonist has baited him into this, because he had involved himself into uploading of a private video clip between the antagonist (whom we later empathize) and his wife, which also led to the suicide of his pregnant wife. The later part of the film shows that the antagonist wants the voyeur to watch his suicide through Skype call.

Parameters to analyze within the films selected
1. Narrative tradition
- Story vs. Plot
- Role of technology/ Computer Mediated Commu nication (CMC)
- Technology vs. Human as a conflict

2. Characterization
- Pivotal characters
- Relationships shown in the films
- Cultural identity of the characters.
- Role of moral panic shown in films
- Invasion of privacy
- Nature of violence in films (physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, financial& material)
- Gender vs. stalking (victim vs. assailant)
- Presentation of self through online and offline interactions
- Socio economic strata of victim vs. assailant

3. Human values
- Self-direction
- Stimulation
- Hedonism
- Achievement
- Power
- Security
- Conformity

Theoretical framework of the present study
The theoretical frameworks used for this study are based on the ideology of feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey. Her ideas of Male gaze, Visual pleasure and narrative cinema are used as a base. She argues that phallo-centricism and patriarchy forms the key concept of all films, dialogue and artwork in the so called man's world. The

different looks that she differentiates are the camera's "look" as a record of events, the voyeuristic "look" of the audience, and the third is the character's "look" within the film text. The pleasure of looking at the human body especially the opposite sex is defined to be as voyeurism.

Though the study was done as early as 1975, discussing the patriarchal setup of the Hollywood, it still holds good, considering the prevalent representational images of women being stalked or looked at without their knowledge etc.

Results
Narrative Traditions
- In all the four films analyzed the **5 plot elements a**s given by Gustav Freytag namely: Exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and denouement were analyzed. The films majorly use non-linear narrative so that the audience gets the idea of complexity of the film elements. All film fall under dark culture thriller/slasher film genre. They also come under a sub-genre of exploitation films.
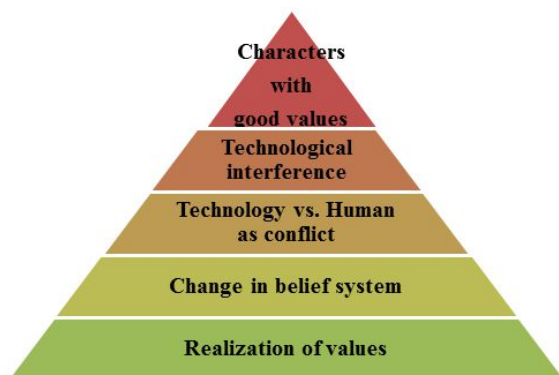
Figure 2: Gustav Pyramid and Mapping of plot points in films analyzed

Plot points	Turn of events
Exposition	**Good values, morals namely benevolence, meaning no harm to each other, confirming to family values, monogamy etc.**
Rising Action	**Computer mediated communication occurs**
Climax	**The technology leads to the conflict in the story thereby creating an invasion of privacy**
Falling action	**Belief system changes thus the previously good valued characters become less virtuous.**
Denouement	**Morals and take home messages are given away. Technology when manhandled creates hassle.**

Table 1: Table of plot points vs. turn of events in the films analyzed

- In all the four films analyzed, the intervention of technology is one of the main characters in the narrative. The **stalkers or attackers use technology** such as Skype, Facebook, chatroom etc in the films in order to advance to their victims, or at times in order to know additional information about them. The technology users are neither high tech guys, but as shown as mere video voyeurs, who have a troubled lives, or they at times also involve in intimate partner violence for seeking revenge and other self gratification purposes. Also that the technology is shown to be very fragile and easy to manipulate. For e.g.: There is a film which shows an uneducated manhandling technology by uploading an intimate video on YouTube. Thus the technology acts like click bait, to the voyeurs and at times also the stalk victims.
- After the intervention of technology happens there are several changes in the narrative and characterization in the films that

are mapped. One of the main transformations is changes in the pivotal character's belief and value systems. Out of four films, three films show that the **pivotal characters are addicted to digital** media that evolves the character arcs unfolding the plot.

Characterization
- The **types of relationships shown in the films** are all influenced by the intervention of technology in them. There are 7 prototypes of relationships that are found in the films analyzed. They are
1. Protagonist vs. antagonist,
2. Protagonist vs. technology,
3. Antagonist vs. technology,
4. Protagonist vs. technology as an antagonist,
5. Antagonist who is later found out to be protagonist vs. technology as an antagonist,
6. Protagonist's wife/mate/daughter vs. Technology as an antagonist and
7. Protagonist's entire family vs. Antagonist's entire family.

- The role of the internet and digital media plays a great role in **changing the cultural identity** of characters of the films analyzed. The pivotal roles who all hail from a happy family set up share the sense of belonging with each other. But after the intervention of technology occurs their intimacy with their families reduces and instead they start to feel the degree of closeness is more towards their virtual partners than their real life relationships. Also that in all the four films analyzed the stalkers or voyeurs share it with their virtual peers amongst known and unknown thus paving way for new identity construction.

- **The role of moral panic** is analyzed in the four films. According to Stanley Cohen in his book *Folk Devils and Moral panics*, the media appears in two of the roles in moral panic in the present study namely: Setting the agenda (The films have selected socially deviant problems and set them as newsworthy), and transmitting the images (The stalkers try to share and upload the videos of their victims which also increases the moral panic)

- **Women are always associated with saving honor for themselves or their family.** When they undergo certain forms of character assassination mainly through exploitation of their right of bodily integrity, they consider or they are believed to consider everything is lost. Thus suicide becomes the only option left. In all the films analyzed, a woman who "lost her *maanam*" is shown to committing suicide and she is also silenced by her parents by moralizing of enduring the pain she undergoes.

- **The invasion of privacy** is analyzed in the four films. Out of four, in three films the victims are initially unaware about the fact that their right of bodily integrity has been breached through various forms of digital media intervention, and in one film the privacy is voluntarily sacrificed. Invasion of privacy happens based on various factors in the films among which the prevalent ones are: the access of information the others have on one person, personhood and autonomy, self identity, personal growth, and weakening of intimate relationships.

- **The types of violence** analyzed in the films are of different types such as physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, verbal abuse, cyber stalking, and identity theft. In all the four films analyzed, the victims are always women who are either facing sexual abuse or/and cyber voyeurism. Also that in these films, the types of stalkers are observed to be non-psychotic and yet predatory in their nature. It has both known and unknown stalkers.

- The discussion on **gender based stalking** is prevalent in the films analyzed. Stalking generally is done to invoke fear and exercise control over the victim, and it is considered that women are easier to prey and it happens to be that all stalkers are males in the chosen films.

- **Women who are shown to be promiscuous in nature are the**

ones to get killed or violated in the films. The films show as if those women who seem to socialize more or bound with different set of moral values are the ones to be punished especially by the opposite gender.

• As the Goffman theories suggest, **the masking of online identities** of the characters that are depicted in the films are mapped. The duality of online and offline identity creates a blended self of the character, which is considered to be 'real' to their non-virtual identities. In one such film where a real mask is used whereas in the others, it is considered as a metaphor. The films also shows that the characters mask to hide their personal identity, for a sort of impression management so as to present themselves as a new self to their selected online audiences.

• **The class of the assailant vs. the victim** plays a major role in these films. The attacker or the online voyeur is suggestively from an affluent background, and the victim is shown to be from working middle class families. It is also shown that it is easy to prey or meddle up especially with a middle class woman by a well off , rich, dominant attacker who would go up to any predatory extent.

Human Values

• According to the basic human value theory of Schwartz the ten universal assumptions are decoded to the chosen films. The **openness to change** has relatively reduced after the intervention of technology. The pivotal characters become more dependent, especially less thought and action prone. Previously those who'd been offline self directing, also become online-self directing.

• The **stimulation** of the characters is shown to be towards virtual identities, and they tend to be more creative and choosy in their masking of old self. While earlier, they liked to have a sense of excitement, novelty amidst their families it gets transformed to their newly created groups or peers.

• **Self-enhancement** factors such as hedonism which is considered to be a form of personal gratification is sought in a very retrograde and crooked manner such as invading of other's privacy etc. Also **power** is exercised in the form of abusive relationships or blackmails, in order to take control or dominance over the other based on factors like gender and class predominantly.

• What is considered to be an **achievement** itself differs after the technology human conflict. Social status and reputation of not letting something to be uploaded on the internet is considered to be more sacred than that of the life of an individual.

• The **purity of intimate relationships** is lost after the digital intervention, thus reducing the safety and the feel of security with your loved ones. In particular, after the entry of digital media, it paves way to say okay to be breached if it is your loved ones.

• **Conformity** to the group's norms such as friends, family or peers was considered to be sacred. But later, human impulses are more likely to upset, harm or at times even violate the social norms in order to seek acceptance from their virtual relation ships.

• **Tradition values** also are degraded. In the films analyzed, value systems also shift from **monogamy to polygamy,** at times also **polyandry.**

• **Benevolence** in characters are shown to be shattered after the digital media usage, where the people who used to preserve and enhance welfare amidst their groups tend to change or the rules that govern them are broken.

• The factors of **Universalism** such as **understanding, apprecia tion, and tolerance** have reduced with the non virtual relationships and families they hail from, whereas adjustments are made to compensate between their virtual groups.

Conclusion

The introduction of digital media has undoubtedly brought in a colossal change in the gender based violence caused to humans and their change in value systems. The present study shows that digital media makes the people undergo a process of mythmaking that makes them think that virtual relationships, the virality or hit rate of a video is more imperative than that of the degree of closeness a family bonding shares or the values that we are governed by. The films show that the age of information paves way too many new types of violence, but at the same time the character arcs advocates that 'no such thing is useful or useless by itself.'

Hence the manhandling or getting addicted to the technology is where the problem escalates thus leading to a paradigm shift of human values. Further researches may be possible by conducting intensive interviews with participants of the digital age to dig deeper on the technology human conflicts. Education should be promoted amongst the people to re-look at the gender roles constructed by the age old society and archaic systems within. Mainstreaming women empowerment and vocalizing them by giving more powerful roles would repair the existing damage created to the women of the society.

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