AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN WEB SERIES

Vandana Yadav

Research Scholar, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, Manipal University Jaipur, Jaipur, Rajasthan

Dr. Vaishali Kapoor

Associate Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Manipal University Jaipur, Jaipur, Rajasthan

Adarsh Kumar

Assistant Professor, School of Journalism & Mass Communication, Noida International University, Gautam Budh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh

1. Abstract:

The online streaming services are grabbing viewers' attention and making the registers ring like never before. They are squabbling over television's stagnated content and the blossoming chances for the advent of rich, high-quality material. As internet streaming services tend to restock the entertainment market, the overly dramatic television programming makes room for the new and relatable stories they provide. The Covid 19 reportedly destroyed practically every industry, but it also gave rise to Over The Top (O.T.T) platforms and saw an increase in subscriber numbers. Different online media platforms have emerged as a result of new media, providing viewers with both entertainment and information. Users now have simpler access to media materials when viewing them online thanks to new media applications. Due to the pandemic, viewers have started to use and choose online media more frequently, especially for videos that are related to entertainment. However, expansion of O.T.T platforms & web series is having a big impact on how its customers are amused by online media services. According to research, O.T.T platforms are particularly popular among young people due to their ease of access. People turned to web series as a way to escape the monotony of everyday life because they were trapped inside their houses and had no other methods of entertainment. Additionally, a series was created for the internet to challenge preconceived notions about women and alter how women are portrayed in popular culture. The purpose of the study's audience surveys and the researcher's goal is to analyse this updated representation. Understanding the variables influencing the success of O.T.T platforms and how viewers are responding to changing representations of women in mainstream media is made easier with the use of the poll's information. Understanding how Indian women are portrayed in internet series is the goal of this study.

2. Keywords: Web Series, Indian Women, O.T.T, Media, Representation

3. Introduction

O.T.T platforms have recently gained popularity in India. The digital revolution in communication and media technology has led to the creation of this platform. Over-the-Top platform is referred to as O.T.T. "O.T.T video services" refers to the network of a final-mile wireless broadband carrier that is disconnected from the online content provider. This platform, which may be accessed over the public Internet, offers consumers content and services. We have the opportunity to broadcast video at any time using a variety of devices thanks to this platform. The O.T.T platform makes a wide variety of video material available online. However, these platforms stopped producing news content within a year. Traditional product placement research. According to product placement studies, modern media like computers, online video, digital gadgets, and internet devices are becoming more popular than conventional media like television and movies.

Millennials have long been fans of the web series that are available to stream on internet services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, and Hoi Choi. Due to India's technological advancement, Indian film is also seeing rapid growth. The internet and cellphones in particular are rapidly altering Indian television and film. Indian fans now watch movies, documentaries, and other video programming through social networking sites, new digital platforms, and wi-fi sticks. The online series' content is more relatable to its younger audience. The simplicity of watching at one's own pace and the authenticity of the content are further benefits. These online streaming businesses' growth and sales have been spurred by the Covid-19 pandemic. Online streaming services are doing everything possible to increase membership numbers and are highly successful, particularly when movie theatres must stay closed owing to lockdown and social ostracisation.

Future will require digital entertainment more than just as a trend. Another significant development is how the portrayal of women in web series has been altered to reflect the times. The production, maintenance, and eradication of many types of images or stereotypes of women are thought to be powerfully influenced by the media. The online series subverts stereo-typical representation of women that is frequently found in mainstream media. They present women as individuals who are forging their own identities outside from the support of men. O.T.T platforms in India like Netflix, Amazon Prime, ALT Balaji, Zee5, MX Player, and Hoichi, to name a few, have benefited from the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown (Bhattacharyya, 2020), which has caused the dominance of television networks and movie theatres as the primary entertainment hub to crumble. India's lockdown and stay-at-home restrictions have compelled people to turn to internet entertainment, hastening an already established trend as the main platforms spend billions luring customers away from theatres (The Hindu, 2020).

The traditional multichannel pay-TV providers have long controlled the television distribution market, but the O.T.T platform presents a significant challenge. The O.T.T platforms have their own apps and websites where users can sign up and subscribe to view content. After subscribing, viewers can watch on any device, including a smartphone, tablet, laptop, or television. On the other hand, Netflix offered various subscription packages based on video quality and accessing methods. Only requested content was delivered by the O.T.T platform. Every device has a different internet connection that connects to the O.T.T platform's source, giving it the name "unicast." Unicast refers to the simultaneous on-demand delivery of device-specific material to all users. The audience can sign using the same Username on

many devices at once if they have a platform subscription. For other television shows, this doesn't work. When watching cable TV for entertainment, customers are limited to using their setup box at home. If you choose the premium subscription, the O.T.T platform offers entertainment free of advertisements. By doing this, viewers are spared from commercial breaks, lost time, and data usage when online. Noll defines video streaming as a technique that enables real-time viewing of television shows through the Internet as opposed to seeing watching them aired over the air or on cable. Watching traditional television shows that are downloaded via the internet is simply defined.

New media is transforming our daily lives and generating new worlds. Internet is rapidly transforming Indian film (Singh, 2019). The use of Over The Top (O.T.T) applications is mostly motivated by entertainment. The portability of technology is the second most important factor in the use of this service. The accessibility of on-demand media is the third (Singh, 2019). In India, internet traffic coming from mobile devices has already overtaken that coming from desktop computers. Today, mobile devices are used by the majority of consumers to access the internet. Consequently, producers and filmmakers were aware that it would be challenging to secure a spot for their movie in the theatre for a sizable amount of time even after the removal of lockdown restrictions. (Salih, 2020) Before the shutdown, digital premieres were commonplace. A tectonic change has occurred, though, since theatres have been closed for more than four months. (Mitra, 2020) As a result of the trend of more movies being released on O.T.T platforms, O.T.T platforms are expected to take over the entertainment business in the near future (Salih, 2020). There are many films that have already been finished, and some that are almost finished.

Gender and sexual orientation continue to be crucial to how a person's identity is perceived by society in today's world, where media and communication have taken on significant roles in day-to-day life (Gauntlett, 2005). Gender identities are primarily constructed by the media. Additionally, media depictions of both genders frequently communicate messages about men's and women's sexual orientation. These images have an impact on how people perceive their gender, sexuality, and manner of life. On the other hand, the media has played a significant role in helping women realise their potential as agents of social change (Kumari & Joshi, 2015).

The representation and portrayal of women varies throughout the many genres of online web series and shows, but one thing that unites them all is the distance between the depicted women's life and the real world. As a result, media often depicts desires rather than reality (Kumari& Joshi, 2015). Gender stereotypes have always been present in the pictures that are depicted in media content. The majority of the time, various media content has depicted stereotypical portrayals of males, women, and transgender people. However, due to internet intervention, there have been changes in how men and women are portrayed (Dasgupta, 2018).

4. O.T.T Services in India

Similar to online programming, internet TV delivers media content via a computer screen, laptop, or tablet. The O.T.T (Over-the-top) players have altered the way we consume content, according to the global marketing research firm The Boston Consulting Group (BCG), and the O.T.T market in India is predicted to reach $5 billion in size by 2023. There are currently more than 6, 21,000 Netflix subscribers and 7, 11,000 Amazon Prime subscribers in India, which is a sizable untapped market for O.T.T players.

An adaptable kind of entertainment, Indian audiences are like that. IBEF claims that Covid 19 Lockdown will cause O.T.T platforms to see a 30% increase in paying subscribers from 23.1 million to 31.0 million between March and July 2021. According to a Redseer research, India's consumption of internet material increased by 40% in April 2020 compared to January 2020. India presently has 96 online O.T.T platforms for streaming video, music, and podcasts, according to Inc42.com. Since early March 2020, Indian users' average time spent on O.T.T platforms has climbed by 30–60%. Viewers now employ several media to meet their demands in the new digital era. Age and gender-based media usage has many different subgroups. As individuals age and become more retired and have more spare time, they will utilise audio-visual media more frequently and look for entertainment and information to pass the time.

5. Literature Review

In the modern day, media relevance cannot be disregarded. One of the four pillars of democracy is regarded to be the media. Information about various topics, such as development, climate change, sustainable development, gender discrimination, political and economic issues, etc., is distributed to a wider audience with the aid of the media. On television and O.T.T services like Netflix, Amazon Prime India, Zee5, etc., there are numerous sociopolitical issues that are being displayed. Different platforms depict various gender stereotypes and roles. As a result, several images are represented in media (Lata). The way these gender roles are portrayed can significantly affect how society views gender. The media may also have an impact on how some social issues are perceived differently by men and women. For instance, female characters typically highlight concerns like body shaming, gender-based discrimination, and others.

Web series deviate from conventional television forms since they aren't constrained by time or have to worry about being regulated (Nanda, 2018). They offer a technique to maintain viewers' interest and keep them coming back for more (Kumar 2019). In an Outlook piece, it is hailed as a "a bracing remedy for repression. In "Made in Heaven," every key character longs to be freed from some form of oppression (Outlook, 2019). Soumya Shrivastava says, "The best desi original by Amazon Prime, it unmasks the sparkling lies of enormous fat Indian weddings" (Shrivastava, 2019). In addition, he says that "In contrast to other films, Made in Heaven clearly addresses and emphasises contemporary social and political issues, particularly those that don't typically fit into canonical storylines.

These streaming services have the chance to create material for a specific audience because Hindi and other regional languages are increasingly used in India for watching videos. The series' dialogue and presentation,, which are aired on O.T.T platforms, are shocking when compared to the current television programming since they are bold, spicy, and mature in character (Pandit, 2020). According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's Indian Telecom Services Performance Indicators 2020 report, wired internet subscribers would make up 4.20% of all internet subscribers by September 2021, while 97.59% of all internet subscribers get the service via mobile devices.

According to McKinsey Global Institute's 2019 report, "Digital India: Technology to Transform a Connection Nation," by 2023, India would have a 40% increase in internet users and a doubling of its smartphone population. According to the report, India currently has more than 550 million internet users, ranking second in the world, and by 2023, this number may rise to 800 million as a result of the

growing affordability and availability of smartphones and high-speed connectivity. Indians will use higher over 74 times as much data in 2020 similar to how they performed in the middle of 2016 thanks to the government's Digital India Initiative and appealing packages provided by commercial telecommunications firms to internet users.

The report also notes that when it comes to digital user interaction in the areas of messaging, tweeting, shopping, and streaming, India is digitising more quickly than all but one other country in the study, Indonesia. Following the widespread and inexpensive availability of internet via mobile phones, content is now accessible in internet "dark zones," particularly in semi-urban and rural locations. According to the Indian O.T.T Platforms Report 2019 by Mudra Institute of Communication Ahmedabad and Communication Crafts, many of these users are first-generation consumers of O.T.T content. Smartphones and internet services, which are not only requirements but also a new source of entertainment, have shifted the paradigm from television sets to mobile devices. Because they are aimed at young people, the web series' new realistic innovation themes attract a lot of viewers. In order to compete in the digital age, brands are modernising their branding strategies on this cutting-edge platform (Nanda, 2018).

6. Women's representation in web series

According to studies, a woman's value in a movie is mostly based on whether she identifies as a mother, wife, or lover (Lang, 2015). When compared to industrious and adventurous male characters, women are portrayed as being overly emotional, dependant on other characters, and restricted to low-status employment (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The return of formulaic depictions in today's prime-time stories has been labelled as a "backlash" by some analysts. Independent women are portrayed as needing control, but by the story's conclusion, they have become doormats or shadows.

These myths glorify the "traditional" Indian woman for only performing domestic tasks (Sujata Moorti, 2007). "It's always inspiring to see strong women take the initiative and be open about their desires and flaws, but this shouldn't come at the expense of the narrative's fluidity. The show's plot leads us to believe that its characters are ambitious, although they hardly ever behave in that way. According to a News18.com report, their assertiveness, badass nature, and unapologetic personality can oftentimes come across as contrived and unfounded. (News18) Web series culture is seen as a new wave of narrating women's experiences and reflecting their realities with the launch of Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, and other streaming services, as well as their original content. A News18.com study claims that sometimes their assertiveness, badass nature, and unapologetic personality can come across as contrived and unfounded. With the launch of Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar, and other streaming services, as well as their original content, web series culture is seen as a new wave of narrating women's experiences and reflecting their realities in India (Wardhan, 2020).

In contrast to the socially acceptable sanskari characters of traditional television soap operas, characters like Poroma Sarkar in Love, Lust, and Confusion and Megha in Lust Stories make strong appearances on TV (Pandit, 2020).

Numerous online series, such Sacred Games, Mirzapur, Pitchers, Permanent Roommates, or Lust Stories, which featured strong female characters and received high praise for their performances, have become highly popular with viewers.

Despite the fact that these stories primarily follow male protagonists, female leads like Kubra Sait, Radhika Apte, Shweta Tripathi, Riska Duggal, Maanvi Gagroo, and Nidhi Singh have been successful in forging a distinct identity from the stereotypical and typecast roles that women in TV series typically play. These individuals are seen as contemporary, forward-thinking, and extremely relatable (Wardhan, 2020). Tara from Made in Heaven demonstrates to the world how a career-focused woman may be as feminine as she chooses to really be while still relentlessly pursuing her aspirations.

One of the few good representations of a trans woman on television is Cukoo from Sacred Games, while Vartika Chaturved, an IPS officer in Delhi Crime, demonstrated how strong, tough, and supportive women can be (Wardhan, 2020). Shreya, the female lead in TVF Pitchers, puts her passion ahead of her relationship, sending a clear message to the audience.

7. Research Objectives

- To critically analyze the evolving gender narratives in mainstream Indian web series, focusing specifically on how women characters are portrayed and the impact of these portrayals on societal perceptions.
- To study the audience reception of different portrayals of women characters in Indian web series and assess how these portrayals influence social attitudes and behaviors, shedding light on the potential role of media in shaping societal norms.
- To investigate the impact of diverse portrayals of women characters on audience perceptions and attitudes towards gender roles, identity, and equality, aiming to contribute insights that can inform media literacy programs and educational initiatives focused on fostering critical media consumption.

8. Research Methodology

An online survey was carried out using a quantitative approach to determine the web series' popularity in India. The poll was carried out using Google Forms, and the responses were examined in order to determine the factors contributing to the success of Indian web series and acceptance of newly developing identity of women as it is represented in the series.

In order to comprehend the study goals of the paper and the effects that the Indian web series' portrayal of the changing position of women is having on society, secondary data was also gathered.
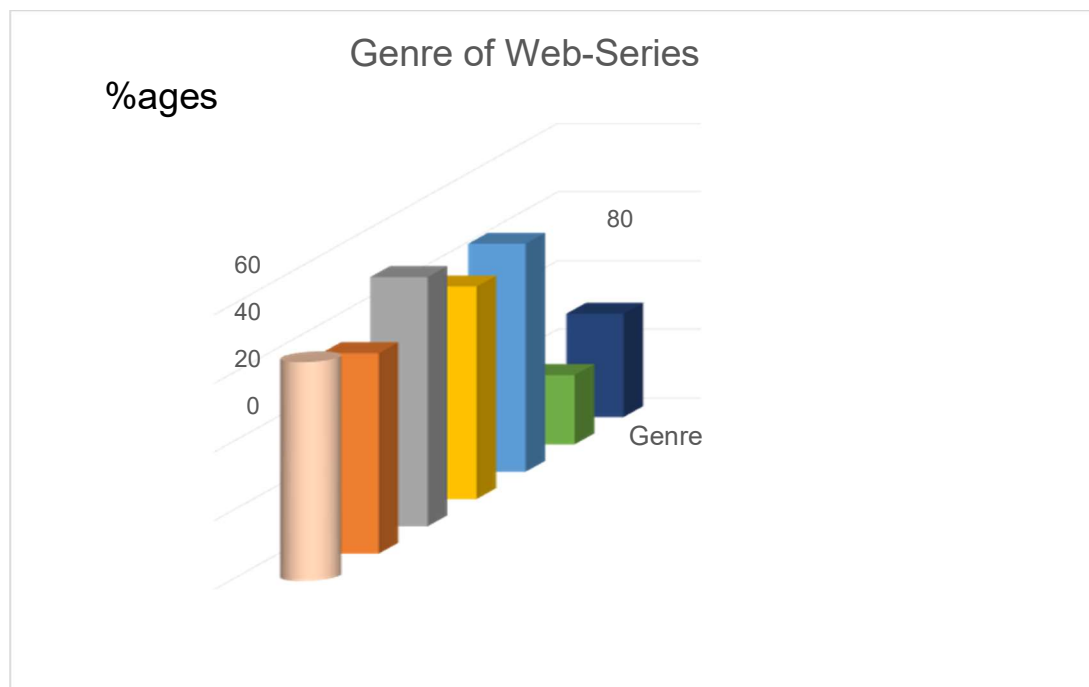
9. Discussions and Results

Figure. 1. The genre that O.T.T platform users favour

Survey Demographics: The age of the respondents is primarily between the ages of 18 and 25, which indicates that millennials have replied more than any other age group, but the age range of the poll was 18 to 45.

Web-Series Genre: Figure 1 displays the categories of web series that respondents, who are viewers of web series, find most appealing. The graph below indicates that Drama (59.3%), Comedy (73.4%), Romance (67.3%), and Crime (62.8%) are the most well-liked genres, have a better affinity with the young audience, and are more likely to receive critical acclaim. The family and thriller genres were also mentioned to a sizable percentage of the respondents as ones that they like. According to the survey, 21.3% of participants are interested in watching horror/thriller-related content. On the other hand, 31.1% of those surveyed stated that they value family-related stories.
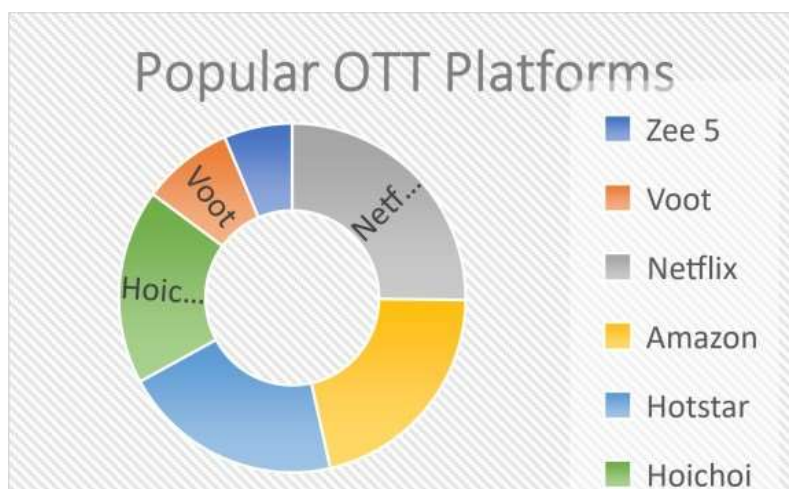
Figure 2. The most widely used O.T.T services

Popularity of O.T.T platforms: When participants were asked which O.T.T platforms they favoured for watching content, 45.1% chose Hoi Choi, 51.4% said Hotstar, and 55.1% answered Amazon. 65.8% of respondents watch Netflix. 22.2% of people like Voot, while 16% favour Zee 5. Ninety-two percent of the respondents (92%) agreed that the content of web series in terms of portraying women is revolutionising in their approach, and this huge percentage of audiences are quite receptive of this as they believe this is going to bring about a significant change in the way women are portrayed in media. When asked if there has been a significant change in how women were portrayed in Indian web series, a responder responded, "Yes, they are redefining what Indian women signify. Women have always been the foundation of every country in the globe, and their contributions to society have a significant positive impact, according to a young media student.

We have a wide variety of audiences throughout India. Web series are popular among young people, therefore promoting the subject of women's empowerment through various series serves to inform people about the safety of women and the need of not discriminating on the basis of gender or caste. Women are just as capable as men, if not more so. "Yes, it has provided numerous wide options to demonstrate and portray one's talent through the screenplay," another respondent stated. Another individual affirmed the change by responding, "Yes, of course.

Take Jamtara or Delhi crimes as examples. When discussing the television dramas, a millennial said, "Yes. Finally, Indian online programmes are moving away from the stereotypical Saas-Bahu representation of women. Examples include Kavya from "Little Things," Meera from "Girl in the City," Damini, Siddhi, Anjana from "Four More Shots Please," Chanchal from "Tripling," and many others. The list goes on forever. When talking about how gender roles are changing, it is important to include how the LGBTQ community is represented. A commenter on this topic stated, "Exploring women's sexuality or people's sexuality in general is not viewed as "risqué" as it is for TV channels as the general content consumers are young adults and teenagers. The web series does a good job of highlighting the taboo nature of women's sexuality, including aspects like polyamory, L.G.B.T.Q, and domination.

Sacred Games, Byomkesh, Kota Factory, Little Things, Girl in the City, Mirzapur, Stories by Tagore, A Family Man, Ghost stories, etc. were among the web series that the respondents really enjoyed

according to the data that was gathered. These were the respondents' top-favored television shows. Some of them, however, spoke about places like Kota Factory, Made in Heaven, Charitraheen, and Four more shots, please! One commenter made the following observation about the female leads in web series' choice of clothing and cosmetics: "First of all, there has been a big shift in the manner that female protagonists have experimented with their looks.

Focus should be placed more on the personalities of the characters rather than their appearance or skin tone, as well as on how elevated the standing of the female protagonists is in the plot. Many web series, according to a large fan of web series, are emphasising women's empowerment and including female protagonists. A millennial, however, said that rather than continuing with the same old plot, web series writers should aim to produce unique content.

10. Conclusion

Web series and movies are both incredibly effective communication tools. According to researchers, communication plays a role in the establishment, maintenance, and alteration of cultures. A society can only advance if it makes an effort to break free from the antiquated customs and ways of thinking that frequently act as a barrier to that society's development. Changing representation of women in web series is also dismantling ingrained gender stereotypes in people's thoughts. These have enormous sway, are transcendent, and can result in progress for the better. Because the digital platform is becoming more and more popular with Indian viewers, its content is crucial in influencing how people view gender.

How people view gender roles is influenced by how gender is depicted in the media. The representation of gender roles in current media on O.T.T platforms differs from that of traditional media platforms. When it comes to displaying various gender roles, the O.T.T platform has been more courageous and progressive than traditional media outlets. Because contemporary web series reflect the virtual reality of our modern lives and have more realistic plotlines, gender representation in the media has a significant impact on how people perceive themselves and gender roles in the modern world.

The online series attempted to represent carefree, accountable, freeing, and free-spirited women who take full responsibility for their mistakes, as evidenced by a number of incidences from the series. The fact that Sidhi's mother makes her look good and get married suggests that, despite their independence and strength, women still need marriage and love from men to complete their lives. The web series develops a conversation about women's equal rights, their sexuality, and prejudice at various ages. The web series does its utmost to depict the minute particulars of women's struggles in Indian society by giving each of the various characters in the show various levels. The thematic analysis leads to the conclusion that strong, autonomous women are defying stereotypes regarding gender and sexuality. The series has depicted traits and issues a woman in a society where patriarchy is deeply ingrained, according to the discussion on how women are represented in web series.

11. References

1. Park, E. A. (2018). Business strategies of Korean TV players in the age of over-the-top (O.T.T) video service. International journal of communication, 12, 22.

2. Skot, T. A. (2014). Value chain dynamics and evolving consumer demographics in the American television

industry (Doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology).

3. Roshan. (2017, july 11). 5 benefits of video on demand over traditional TV. Retrieved from muvi:

https://www.muvi.com/blogs/5-benefits-video-demand-traditional-tv.html

4. Noll, A. M. (2004). Internet television: Definition and prospects.

5. Schechner, S. and Stewart, C. S. (2012). Hulu to create more original dhows. The Wall Street Journal.

6. Harwood, J. (2007). Understanding communication and aging: Developing knowledge and awareness.

7. Gauntlett, D., and Hill, A. (2002). TV living: Television, culture and everyday life. Routledge.

8. Bollywoodmoviesreviewz. (2020, July 31). Bollywoodmoviesreviewz.com. Retrieved September 15, 2020, from Shakuntali Devi budget and box office collection: https://www.bollymoviereviewz.com/2020/07/shakuntala-devi-budget-box-office-collection-profit-loss.html

9. News18. (n.d.). Retrieved from newss18.com: https://www.news18.com/news/movies/four-more-shots-please-review-a-mess-that-struggles-to-find-its-central-theme-2016789.html

10. Outlook. (2019, 03 08). Retrieved 02 06, 2020, from outlookindia.com: https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/entertainment-news-made-in-heaven-possibly-the-best-web-series-india-has-produced/326661

11. Kumar M, Dwivedi S. (2020) Impact of Coronavirus Imposed Lockdown on Indian Population and their Habits, International Journal of Science and Healthcare Research.

12. Mishra, D. (2015). Portrayal of women in media. Journal of Higher education and research society.

13. Pandit, M. (2020). Beyond Television And Cinema: Audience Evolution In The Streaming Age.

14. Pathak, A. (2019, 03 12). Huffingtonpost. Retrieved 02 5, 2020, from https://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/made-in-heaven-review-zoya-akhtars-show-exposes-our-vulgar-obsession-with-social-perceptions_in_5c81327ae4b06ff26ba665a7

15. Ukwuaba.L.C. , Elechi N.C, & Okenwa G. N. (2016), The influence of violent program on social behaviour of ENUGU state university of science and technology (ESUT) students international journal of advanced research (IJAR) ISSN 2320-5407,20 December 2016.

16. Khan, A.A. , Sohail, A.Q. (2020), "An increasing trend of web series & their effects on youth", M.phil   thises, https://www.academia.edu/42027174/_An_Increasing_Trend_of_Web_Series_and_Their_Effects_on_Youth_Institute_of_Communication_Studies

17. Chattopadhyay, A. (2020). Web series and web movies and their psycho-sociological impact on netizens in India. The asian thinker, volume: VII, july-september.