

Piloting Social Transformation: an Innovative Approach in Mass Education

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Abstract: *Forbids or taboos are a social convention prevalent in every culture. The core concern of this research is with regard to taboos practiced against women in metropolitan cities such as sexuality, mensuration, gender inequality, homosexuality etc. and the role of technology in educating the masses. This is a qualitative enquiry which resorts to phenomenological research through data collection techniques such as observation, reviewing text and watching videos. The research also recurses to case studies of prominent artists and their bold artworks on Instagram profiles; commercially successful as well as amateur directors of short films; and enterprising advertising professionals who are setting new social trends through television commercials. The research documents a growing trend of adoption of these taboos as themes by Indian mass media; which aims at creating a wave of social change since the past two decades. Thus, the purpose of this study has been to undertake a holistic view on the adoption of technology by people, both content creators and users, as an instrument to usher social change in India. The scope of this study offers to document the visual efforts for social education made by advertising agencies, artists, creative directors and producers.*

The results decipher a substantial growth in adoption of bold and forbidden themes by resorting to new technology and its formats for reaching out to the youth. There is a considerable growth in awareness which can be measured by the viewership or followers count and a definite change in the attitude of people which can be deciphered from the fact that in all case studies the number of likes is considerably more than dislikes.

Index terms: *Women, Taboos, Technology, Social change, Mass Education*

I. INTRODUCTION

Taboo can be defined as a restriction or prohibition on people, places or objects by social customs. Various taboos garbed in the name of traditions or customs, especially those which are practiced against women have subtly defined the fabric of Indian culture. Though numerous efforts have been made to combat them, it is the launch of commercial internet services that have revolutionized the way people disseminate and access information. Ever since its launch in late 1980's, India has witnessed an upsurge in the adoption of technological innovations and has undoubtedly facilitated the realm of education. New pedagogies have negotiated with the ever

growing demands of people, ushering them into a world which is constantly evolving with e learning.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Media content analysis has a long history but the subject of taboos in India as represented in the media has been adopted only by a few. William M. O'Bar traces the evolution of Indian advertising in the context of globalization and makes a study on the intermingling of the traditional and the global values in 2008. He briefly touches about the taboo of sex and non-vegetarian food with reference to product brands and their strategic advertising in Indian cultural context. In 2014, Subhas Singha Roy elaborates on the evolution of media technology and the evolution of women's image as projected in Indian advertisements and the biases thereof. Tarishi Verma makes a detailed study in 2015 on the cultural taboo of menstruation and the strategy adopted by Indian advertisers which is hesitant and reserved.

In 2017, the changing perception of Indian parents in the context of live in relationships is explained with the help of an advertisement of a tea brand as a case study by Fritzi-Marie Titzmann. Maitrayee Chaudhari writes about depiction of gender in media in her article published in Routledge Handbook of Gender in South Asia touches upon the biases and experiments by Indian advertisers in the representation of women.

Not much research exists specifically in the context of taboos as represented in Indian films or short films. In 2017, Pushpinder Kaur traces the representation of the LGBT community in Hindi films and various myths that are associated with them. Noraien Mansor and Normaliza Abd Rahim in their research on Instagram have established that new media technologies such as Instagram and YouTube are adopted as innovative pedagogical tools in the sphere of public education, but not specifically in the case of taboos.

In 2018, Ftoon Ahmad Othman, adopts SWOT analysis for YouTube and validated it as a new technology that may be adopted for teaching in higher education. He does not refer to the use of technology in the sphere of cultural forbids. In the same year, Burhanettin Keskin also critically analysed YouTube videos which are meant for public education and analyses them on various grounds to justify their perception in positive, negative or neutral light, again

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not specifically for culturally reserved subjects. However, Magdalena Hensoldt-Fyda in 2018 makes a comparative study of advertising in America and India and the differences of depiction of cultural taboos, especially those based on gender but with reference to its impact on product sales.

A.Theoretical framework: The research is an amalgamation of theoretical frameworks comprising of social media influencers which comprise of advertisers, film makers and Instagram artists in this case and the theory of social media integration to decipher the impact of online communication.

B.Research questions: There is a growing trend in the adoption of these taboos by Indian media, but there is no systematic study which analyses this phenomenon holistically. Existing research on measuring and analysing the impact of technology such as You Tube and Instagram in India focuses on its pros and cons primarily with reference to business, product sales or impact on human behaviour. Deciphering the changing attitude of people, measured quantifiably by their likes and dislikes or qualitatively through their subjective reviews has not been attempted before, specifically for issues that are considered as a taboo against women in the Indian society. The existing literature also does not enumerate which taboos are more popularly adopted by visual artists and there is no analysis on the visual strategy adopted to deal with taboo subjects in a country like India. Thus, the purpose of this study has been to undertake a holistic view on the adoption of technology by people, both content creators and users, as an instrument to usher social change in India.

C.Research Methodology: This is a qualitative enquiry which resorts to phenomenological research through techniques such as observation, reviewing text and watching videos.

For the purpose of analysing the phenomena of taboos, three commonly practiced taboos have been considered i.e. homosexuality, menstruation and oppression of women. You Tube and Instagram have been considered as popular mediums resorted to by advertisers, directors and artists for reaching out to the masses and sensitizing them. A sample of ten case studies for each taboo has been considered based on its launch date and popularity that is gauged by its viewership or follower count. Ten short films, advertisements and Instagram accounts have been analysed for each taboo. Only relevant comments given by the viewers, which are critical to the content of the videos, have been considered for the purpose of investigation.

Interviews of prominent artists who are storming the world, unapologetically through their bold artworks on Instagram profiles, commercially successful as well as amateur directors of short films and web series on various subjects of taboo and enterprising advertising professionals who are moving away from the conventional expressions and setting

new social trends through television commercials have also been analysed.

III. TABOOS IN ADVERTISING-

You Tube was launched in Feb 2005 and since then there has been an overwhelming viewership response that is growing every second. Within a decade, the user base has touched more than a quarter of million in India, which amounts to eighty percent of total share of internet users in the world. This makes India rank second in content and user market where men and women are equally active individual and group you tubers. The numerous options offered by this revolutionary app have resulted in quick access to information and entertainment through advertisements, short films as well as channels. One of the core concerns of this research is to analyse the approach embraced to combat the taboos in Indian society.

In the world of advertising, Virgin India mobile released in 2008 the 'think hatke' ad which smartly used the idea of homosexuality to convince parents on accepting relationships. (4,19,511 views, 139 likes and 9 dislikes). In 2009 one of India's leading newspaper Hindustan Times supported this cause with the tagline 'It is time to open our minds' (12,688 views but only 56 likes and 2 dislikes). Pepsi with its 'youngistaanka wow' ad campaign, made by JWT was released in 2010. It dealt with the idea of homosexuality in a humorous manner in support of a female friend in the context of avoiding marriage (4.2k views, 17 likes and 2 dislikes). The casual approach to this taboo changed in the year 2013, with Amul butter illustration extensively advertised on 'freedom of choice' that supported this notion when the legalization by upheld by the Supreme court of India. Tanishq supported the view with "two of a kind makes a beautiful pair" as the headline of its campaign in favour of Article 377. Fastrack closet advertisement by Lowe Lintas, also released in the same year had a carefree and progressive approach with 'move on' (2,61,129 views, 495 likes and 18 dislikes). Myntra too supported this idea with 'don't discriminate' typographical ad in 2015. Going further ahead, Myntra's brand Anouk showcased an ad featuring females in a bold display of emotions which are dealt with more sincerely. Released in 2016, it created much upheaval for its approach (4m views, 16k likes and 2k dislikes). Another ad released in the same year which sensibly featured the hesitation of parents in accepting the LGBT relationship was by Urban Clap. With the legalization of LGBTQ in 2018 many brands such as Uber, Zomato, Swiggy and Flipkart etc. creatively advertised their happiness for the community.

The taboo of menstruation in advertising has been projected with much hesitation to suit the Indian cultural sensibilities. Most advertisements focus on problems and solutions offered by various brands to build the confidence of women and offer comfort. For instance, commercials such as Stayfree Army in 2011, whereby women are encouraged to choose a profession of their choice breaking stereotypes. However, this decade has also witnessed Touch the pickle by Whisperin 2014, which was a sensible effort that focused on

changing the age old Indian attitude towards menstruation.(2,066,237 views, 285 likes and 62 dislikes). Following this, Sofy'sIm not down campaign in 2015 initiated a change in the language associated with menstruation advertising (1.7k views, 7 likes, 0 dislikes). In 2017, Whisper creatively propagated the idea of 'sit improper' promoting its product and changing notions (190k views, 1.7k likes and 49 dislikes). One cannot ignore the Sofy's stampoon ad in 2017 with its honest dialogue was India's first bold ad on the subject (308k views, 3.4k likes and 103 dislikes). Don't hide it: period campaign by NH1 Designs in 2018 focused on change in packaging the product for a more confident approach to the subject. In the same year, a remarkable effort in combatting this taboo was made when a man, Akshay Kumar promoted the use of sanitary pads in a no smoking campaign while promoting his movie Padman; unlike the conventional women making hushed dialogues. Stayfree's Project Free Period in 2018 was a projection of menstruation as a positive time for sex trade workers (1,337,602 views, 418 likes and 13 dislikes).

Prejudice against women has been subtly weaved in our visual culture by defining gender roles and social conventions for their freedom and sexuality. Advertising in the current decade has attempted to depict the new empowered women with an aim to bring a social change. Tanishq jewellery changed its advertising strategy in 2013 from focus on desire to ushering a change in the society with the notion of remarriage.(1,600,243 views, 7.3k likes and 537 dislikes). Nirma advertisement in 2015 depicted the new image of women who is capable of performing any task that is traditionally associated with the capability of a man (113k views, 325 likes and 28 dislikes). Titan Raga's in 2015 with Don't get married commercial featuring Katrina Kaif encouraged women to make a decision for the right reason rather than under social pressure (565k views, 9.1k likes and 186 dislikes). Titan Raga's women of today or Break the bias are also iconic commercials, wherein there is a depiction of confident working women who makes her choices and does not regret and women who mocks subtly at the prejudices men have. Havells appliances released a series of commercials in 2014 which propagated respect for women sarcastically comparing people who objectify the role of a woman with the work done by appliances. Llyod promoted the idea that laundry is not just a woman's job in its unisex washing machine advertisement in 2015 (1.6m views, 190 likes and 35 dislikes). There is an endless list of advertisements which now try to change the conventional attitudes of masses such as working women who is her husband's boss ad by Airtel, the notion of second marriage by Tanishq, Havell's winds of change campaign and the latest being Ariel share the load campaign.

A. Taboos in short films:

The feasibility of short films has counteracted against the format of successful commercial cinema. You Tube has facilitated the popularity of this medium, where the internet being accessible 24X7 has paved a great way for spreading a message. Apart from measurable viewership, one can also have a feedback through number of posts and likes or dislikes. Though there is no organized data available on

short films on taboos, the google search engine provides a list of popularly viewed, trending or viral films on various subjects related to taboos in India.

Though commercial cinema has long depicted the LGBT community, it has always been enveloped with mockery and social humour. Serious depiction of the issue met with much criticism as in the case of 'Fire' or 'Bomgay' both released in 1996. Short films ranging from 10 to 40 minute duration became the preferred medium of expression by young, creative and experimental filmmakers to spread any important message related to this taboo subject.

Six Sigma Films has dedicated itself to the cause with six short films on the subject of homosexuality. A short film titled Birthday was released in 2013 with an aim to sensitize the viewers through an online platform, expressing sympathy for the gay characters portrayed (13,96,583 views, 2k likes and 748 dislikes). Tanha, also released in the same year had a similar theme (10,37,472 views and 1K likes and 355 dislikes). A short film titled Them, was published online in 2014 which propagated that right to live is inclusive of the right to love (37,503 views, 104 likes and 12 dislikes). My Valentine, a short love story of the lesbians was published in 2015 (47,693 views, 154 likes and 30 dislikes). Relations (2,69,296 views, 422 likes and 166 dislikes); Me (2,574 views, 18 likes and 1 dislike) and The Chair directed by Sumit Singh (531k views, 3.2k likes and 1k dislikes) are all short films released in 2017 which creatively deal with the taboo of LGBT. Cliché- The Surprise Date, released in 2018 extends the idea of acceptance of gay love by parents. (18,014 views, 348 likes and 56 dislikes).

Earnest efforts have been made through documentaries, discussions and short films to spread the awareness about menstruation by leading brands who manufacture sanitary products. Apart from them, there are a handful of few directors who have been successful in creating an impact on the masses. Pad Bank, a short film released in 2017 by Tee Foundation sensitively deals with the issue of economic affordability by a motherless girl; with a message to donate a pad endorsed by Anushka Sharma (1,027,538 views, 31k likes and 410 dislikes). Alert condition: Red by Short films released in the same year is one of the most popular short film on the subject aimed at spreading general awareness among public. (7,376,786 views 99k likes and 3.4k dislikes) Bharath Mata in New India also released in 2017, makes a mockery of the governmental policies by highlighting the problem of affordability in comparison to other essential products by Black Sheep Films (548,772 views, 21k likes and 352 dislikes). Since commercialization Titan raga's short film in 2017 elegantly challenged the point of view which people hold against working women. In 2018, Six Sigma Films won many accolades for its film Gaokor- A Period House, a short film deals which deals with the popular rural practice of early marriage and social discarding of women during her period days (5,208,518 views with 35k likes 3.6k dislikes) Large Short films

also in 2018 released a sensitive short film titled 'Her First Time', thoughtfully dealing with a father and daughter situation (1,887,242 views, 60k likes and 626 dislikes).

It is also imperative to mention certain documentaries and discussions on YouTube channels which deal with popular taboos subjects. Various issues are dealt with through videos which either have a serious approach or they capitalize humour to create social awareness. For instance, old Delhi films is a YouTube channel run by Aniket Jaiswal, who published "What if Taboo words were censored in India-Sex, Periods and teen pregnancy" in 2017 (113k views, 2.4k likes and 238 dislikes). NDTV on We the People discussed female sexuality-why the taboo? in 2017 (25k views, 193 likes and 47 dislikes). Regardless of the approach adopted, it is essential to note that men and women in India participate together with an aim to create social awareness.

With short films gaining popularity, commercially successful directors such as Anurag Kashyap delved into

B.Taboos in virtual art:

Instagram was launched in Oct 2010 and in less than a decade has more than 800 million users across the world. According to the statistical data of October 2018, India ranks second after United States of America with 71 million monthly users; of which approximately one fourth Instagram accounts belong to women. Of these, a few young and creative women artists are ignoring the traditional gallery space and are resorting to making their presence felt online through their bold Instagram posts. Artists such as Rupri Kaur, Kaviya Illango, Namita Sunil, Priyanka Paul, Mehr Chatterjee and Sarah Naqvi are assertively expressing their views on menstruation, masturbation, sex and other subjects of taboos, without any inhibitions and ushering in a virtual culture sans the taboos. With 120 posts, 17.8 k followers and 307 following has illustrations on various taboos in India, sexuality and health in general for women by Mumbai based artist Kaviya Illango. Menstrupedia, an illustrated comic guide on menstruation by Aditi Gupta is first of its kind meant for education of masses on the subject. With 3.2m followers and 763 posts 15.8k comments on her menstruation photographs, artist and poet Rupri Kaur initiates bold discussions in the Instagram world to change mindsets about this taboo.

From mythological to contemporary Indian art, there are numerous references of characterizations and narratives related to the LGBT community. But Instagram has revolutionized the portfolio display of many artists both successful and amateurs. Illustrations, paintings and photographs are popular mediums adopted by artists to express their views. Maitri Dore, an architect artist from Mumbai makes illustrations on LGBT and Anusha Raichur from Bangalore addresses the notion of homosexuality in her illustration which represents voice of youth.

IV.RESULTS:

The deliberate effort of depicting taboos themes in popular media is a way of capturing people's attention and subtly

the medium with the subject of eve teasing in 'That Day after every day' which was released in 2013 (12m views, 85k likes and 4.4k dislikes). Juice released in 2017, on sexism and gender discrimination by Neeraj Ghaywan with Shefali Shah; who portrays the role of a typical housewife who asserts herself against the mercy displayed by indifferent guests (4.9m views, 99k likes and 2.3k dislikes). In the same year, Naked featuring Kalki Koechlin and Ritabhari was released which deals with the uneasiness women are made to feel about their profession and body (9.1m views, 105k likes and 5.4k dislikes). Khaneymeinkyahai is an entertaining short film released in 2017; about female desires as expressed in a metaphorical conversation between mother and her newly married daughter. (9.9m views, 103k likes and 9.5k dislikes) The Good Girl published in Nov 2017 on the subject of premarital pregnancy (1m views, 19k likes and 595 dislikes). Aniruddha Roy Chowdhary's Devi, Neerak Pandey's Ouch, and Shirish Kunder's Kriti are also a few more examples that can be enumerated on the subject.

piloting a social change. Technological features such as viewership count, followers, likes, dislikes, and comments are indicators of social engagement and changing attitude. The current decade reflects a substantial growth in adoption of bold and forbidden themes by individuals and organizations, who aim to usher a social change by resorting to new technology and its formats for reaching out to the youth. Indian audiences are becoming increasingly sensitized which can be measured not just by the viewership or follower count but by content of their expressed views on the forbidden themes. There is a definite change in the attitude of people which can be deciphered from the fact that in all case studies the number of likes is considerably more than dislikes for the videos uploaded. The change in attitude is also evident from the fact that the depiction of these taboo subjects has been done more earnestly.

Indian advertisers in the past two decades have patronized the notion of taboos as their big idea to sensitize people, especially about gender role reversals. Certain brands have audaciously endorsed live in relationships, sexuality, homosexuality and a more candid dialogue on menstruation. Trending celebrities have been roped in to capture attention of the masses on such subjects and sensitize them for a change in social attitude. Advertisements which represent the new confident woman were either banned or not attempted earlier. Past two decades have witnessed a change in the way women are portrayed by advertisers. Escaping the commercialized cinema which gauges the attention of the masses and media, the creative directors had earlier espoused parallel cinema which dealt with lesser talked about topics and made their impact internationally. However, the current trend for short films and web series boldly represents notions of various taboos in a creatively weaved storyline.

Apart from amateurs, commercially successful directors are now opting for this relatively economical medium, as they realize

the growing power of this new medium to successfully reach out to masses. A range of complex emotions reflected in the context of everyday life in India creatively attempt to deal with certain taboos. The current decade has seen commercialization of the subject of menstruation in cinema and sensible short films on the same subject have followed. The legalization of homosexuality has also supported the creative minds to adopt it with a more serious approach rather than humorous as it was done in the past. A handful of recent short films on this banned subject have attempted to alter conventional attitudes, paving way for its social acceptance. Oppression of women's sexuality and freedom along with the practice of gender inequality is also one the most popularly attempted taboo by short film makers, aimed at empowering women.

There is also a growing popularity of certain Instagram profiles of artists who deal with various taboos against women. The number of followers for such artists are increasing and sharing bold ideas.

IV. DISCUSSION:

The limitations of the mentioned popular mediums need serious consideration for analysing any online data. To begin with, it is challenging to search for artists on Instagram as they do not use their real identities but experiment variously with creative account names. There is also no information available as to when artists launched their Instagram profiles. One cannot compare the growth in the number of followers unless the data is collected over a period of defined time. Similarly, there is a definite gap in the release of short films and advertisements and the time they are published online for mass viewing.

The access to ratings and feedback on Netflix which was earlier available to the viewers has been withdrawn for commercial purposes. Hence, the feedback given on short films or web series is inaccessible to understand the attitude of people for a particular subject. One also needs to acknowledge the presence of vague identities of the online viewers, which cannot be deciphered for comprehending their gender and bias if any in views expressed. Relevant comments need to be filtered for serious discussion on the subject. There is no access to information such as region, gender or age of people who like or dislike any video which is posted online. Advertising agencies or companies which manufacture products do not necessarily have official YouTube channels and hence the online launch of the advertisement is sometimes done by many You Tubers. In such cases, data on viewership count, likes and dislikes may vary hugely, depending on the popularity of a channel. Such technical and demographic considerations can have a serious impact on the way any data is interpreted for the purpose of research.

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