Gender Frames Portrayed in Television Series: Implications towards Women

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ABSTRACT

This study determined the gender frames portrayed in television series and their implications towards women. Two theoretical frameworks, framing theory and cultivation theory, and four research questions were used. Content analysis of one popular TV series and focus group discussions of 20 respondents were employed as data collection instruments. 20 episodes of the series were watched, and careful notes were taken; the researcher focused on narrating episodes from the series and stories and experiences shared by respondents (narrative analysis). The result showed unequal portrayal between men and women in TV series. The male gender is portrayed as educated, wealthy, smart, and providers who spend much time discussing business and development. The female gender is portrayed as weak, in a narrow range of roles as jobless, home stay mums and homemakers. More so, they are portrayed as emotional, dependent and gossipers

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who spend much of their time sharing their feelings and discussing people. 80% of male respondents perceive women as weak, sex vessels, and dependent. In reflection on cultivation theory, the implication of this kind of portrayal is that in real life, women are treated as weak, needy, and not involved in essential decisions because society sees them as weak and emotional. This further lowers the confidence and self-esteem of women in real life, which causes them to lose many opportunities and remain poor and dependent. It can be concluded that negative female gender frames portrayed in television series influence society's perception of women since the more people watch these series, the more they perceive the natural world as they see it in television series. This further minimizes women's capability and proficiency. The researcher recommends a more positive portrayal of gender frames in television series, especially female gender.

Keywords: Gender frames; portrayal of women; television series; female gender; male gender.

1. INTRODUCTION

Television is among the forces that shape the public both deliberately and unintentionally. Since the 1950s, the media has emerged as the leading actor in forming individuals' ideologies. Past studies show that societal perceptions, attitudes, and values are refined through media exposure [1].

Television is a media instrument with the most influential power in shaping public opinion on various issues. Society has taken the fact that television programs are shaping the public as they are. Television series, among other television programs, are the ones that capture the highest ratings in broadcasting; at the same time, they contribute more to economic inputs. Moreover, TV series play a significant role in shaping society; people who spend much time watching TV series tend to perceive the natural world and events just like what they see in Television series [2].

Khan [3] explain that media, especially television, not only represents the leading social morals and ethics but also educates people regarding various social issues. The beliefs portrayed by media pass through society and slowly become part of it, and finally, people start practicing the beliefs in real life.

A television series is a regular production on television, whether gratis or through a subscription-based service, with a running time of at least thirty (30) minutes (including commercial advertisement and interstitial programming). It includes but is not limited to, late-night variety series, daily news series, situation comedies, single-camera comedies; reality series, game shows, morning news, and news magazine show [4].

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Television is an essential tool for transmitting facts and information, which has a more profound and persuasive impact on viewers. It intends to inform, educate and entertain its audiences [5]. The portrayal of gender frames in television programs is a sensitive issue in society because it contributes to how society perceives and treats both men and women. The ways that television series portray gender send a particular message to society on how women or men should be perceived and treated.

The framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience influences people's choices about information processing. Media create these frames by introducing news items and programs [6]. This means that the ways women and men are framed and presented by television influence people's choices and decisions on how they should perceive and treat men and women in society.

The problem of this study is that womentoday face different gender problems rooted in the way they are viewed, defined, and perceived by societyas a result of the gender frames that are portrayed in television series. Referring to framing theory, this calls attention to how gender is portrayed and framed in popular television shows, especially television series. Therefore, this study seeks to examine gender frames portrayed in television series and understand their influence on how women are perceived by society to address the problem.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the leading themes portrayed in television series.
2. To Identify different dominant gender frames portrayed in television series.

3. To examine how these dominant frames influence people's decisions and attitudes in daily life.
4. To identify the implications of gender frames portrayed in television series towards women.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the leading themes portrayed in television series?
2. What are the dominant gender frames portrayed in television series?
3. How does dominant gender frames influence people's decisions and attitudes in daily life?
4. What are the implications of gender frames portrayed in television series towards women?

1.4 Literature Review

This study is grounded in two theories; framing theory and cultivation theory. These theories explain the ways that television programs influence people's perception in real life and how media influences what people think and how they think.

Framing theory: The value of understanding specific issues, even understanding a representation of an issue, is implemented through examining specific frames [7]. Soliman [8] clarify that framing is a procedure that allows the courier to tailor their message or content to a distinct audience. It functions as a two-way process that helps analyze and rebuild reality. Framing can also be described as "to select some elements of sensed reality and make them more notable in a communicating text, in a manner that encourages a particular issue depiction, causal understanding, principled evaluation, and treatment suggestion for the item described". Applying this theory to the prospect of this study, the communicators will be the screenwriters and directors. They can control viewers' perceptions of women's issues by framing them in their daily routines. If the communicators believe in women's power and rights, they will focus on specific traits and aspects and present them in specific frames that would be promoted through television. If they do not believe in women's power and rights, they could present them through traditional, stereotypical frames or frames that would undermine women's status [8].

Cultivation theory: Gebner [9] at the University of Pennsylvania, under the Cultural Indicator project, developed the Cultivation theory and suggested that television cultivates concepts of social reality. For those who spend much time on television, it becomes the leading source of information, and they are strongly influenced by how television frames their worldview and perception. On the other hand, those who do not spend much time watching television or light viewers seek information from alternate sources besides television and hold different worldviews. First-order effects are general beliefs about the everyday world; second-order effects are specific attitudes towards those beliefs.

Shrum [10], in the study of cultivation theory: effects and underlying processes, explains that cultivation theory has three components, which are entangled: media institutions, message production, and message effects on viewers. In general, it explains the relationship between the time viewers spend on television and its impact on viewers (in this regard, it impacts the belief that these viewers will have about the natural world). The primary hypothesis of cultivation theory is that the more people watch television, the more their views about the natural world will reflect the messages they see on television. Television's storytelling function in drama, series, or movies is compelling. This is why television is among the powerful tool that contributes to normalizing and promoting gender problems as it changes peoples' perception towards gender violence.

Television and the portrayal of gender frames: Although the representation of women in television drama series is currently better than before, women are always presented negatively through dialogues or actions. Women are always presented as irrational, sensitive, emotional, dependent, or indecisive, while men are always presented as rational, intelligent, independent, and competitive [11].

Dominant gender frames portraying women in television series: Television portrayal of women in series results from pre-determined gender stereotypes from societal values. However, at the same time, television portrayal of women intensifies stereotypes in society, and it affects how society perceives women and how women perceive themselves. Media portrayal of women in different programs results from dominant societal values and behaviors [12] observe that the media's portrayal of women, deliberately or unintentionally, is bolded from the real-life environment and assumptions. This has a significant impact on adolescents and the young generation in general.

Most television dramas that portray women rarely frame them as rational, active, and essential because of their dependent, romantic, and submissive personalities. Instead, they tend to emphasize food, fashion, and furnishing. Therefore, these television programs need reorientation to become more future and development-oriented [11].

Kaul [13] enlighten that women are framed in television according to pre-determined stereotypes that exist in society. These stereotypes are vivid and evident in how women are portrayed on television. For example, women are portrayed as domestic helpers, wives, or mothers who are supposed to remain in family roles and responsibilities. In contrast, men are portrayed as employed, competitive, and intelligent. Television series around male sexism create boundaries for women not to aim beyond a loving husband, children, and a beautiful home. Women are mostly portrayed as glamorous beings whose external appearance is their only asset. Women's compromising and sacrificing role in television series is highlighted as it does not threaten the patrilineal system. The outcome is that women are affected the most by these television series simply because they are watching more series than men.

Although the situation is not as extreme as before, the gendered framing of both male and female characters in TV dramas remains polarized, showing the dominant social significance of maleness. Women are usually related to words such as emotional, prudent, gentle, submissive and sensitive; conversely, while men are sensible, impulsive, ruthless, self-dependent and bold [14].

Foutus [15] clarify that women are mostly portrayed as tall, slim, and "conventionally beautiful." They are also portrayed as friendly and have happy personalities, without much intelligence. A lovely figure (relating to the relevant geographical and cultural location) is necessary to measure a woman's worth in the show. Research shows that over-weighted actresses tend to receive negative comments from other male characters about their bodies, and "80% of these comments are followed by canned audience Laughter".

Ingham [16] observes that in terms of the importance of family life, most female characters in TV dramas are set in domestic situations. Their eventual life accomplishment is supposed to be getting married and having children

because the home setting is where women's "capability" is highly valued. Different from marital status, female characters' professional lives are usually ignored, or more often, they are portrayed as housewives who take care of children and family chores every day but are not ambitious at all in building a career. Even if women work, they are often shown on TV in traditionally feminine jobs, such as teachers, secretaries and nurses.

Implications of the ways female gender is framed on television: Swift [17] in a special report: gender in the media; who makes the news, explained that women will be perceived and treated as abused if the media portrays them as weak, indecisive, unskilled, and have a low contribution. Media shape how people see and perceive life, so stereotypical and distorted representations of women in the media influence low self-esteem in women and disparity. When a woman is constantly seen in media programs as weak, real-life displays of boldness and courage from women will be perceived as arrogance and pride. As a result, most women who try to show their strength in real life are labeled as cold and not submissive.

Khan [3] reported that Liberal feminists suggest that women in television series are not portrayed as wise and sage characters. They are shown as beautiful and delicate but lacking intelligence and the capability to make and take a decision. Liberal feminists are critical regarding such portrayal.

Objectification of women in television series: Sen [18] has defined objectification of women as when women are reduced to a mere commodity, judged by attributes of their bodies rather than who they are as a person. Objectification of women has become an increasingly growing tendency in television since the twentieth century. Media, especially television, has always used unreal images of women's physical appearance, body image, behavioral standards, and beauty.

In today's society, women are constantly being over-sexualized and objectified when it comes to entertainment, specifically movies and series. The University of Southern California's School for Communication and Journalism studied how each gender is portrayed on screen. After viewing the 100 most-grossing movies from 2009, they found that females are more likely than males to be shown in sexually appealing clothing. The study also showed that teenage females from the ages of 13-20 years old are just

as likely as adult women to be portrayed as over-sexualized characters. Women in later ages are less likely to be portrayed as sexual characters [19]. Objectifying a gender is the worst thing in humankind. The impossible beauty standards which showcase on television that women should be thin and fair and should only be homemakers and do not deserve to have a career of their own create negative impacts on society, especially on women. For years, people have applied the things that they see on screen. This is one of the reasons that are making the situation of women worse and more miserable. Many of the females are starving themselves to get that beauty standard set by the industry. They eat less and exercise beyond their boundaries to get that model look. Women in the media are either the best examples or the worst. Though many women have started to showcase the real power of females, many females still accept the stereotypical Portrayal of women from the media. Young girls look out to one person as a role model. If it is from the entertainment industry, numerous things affect their thinking and raise problems, such as eating disorders, sexualizing clothes and their overall psychological well-being. Media is everywhere, and the Portrayal of women has been a controversial topic since the beginning. The industry portrays women in a way that is unattainable and unrealistic, which leads to depression and drug intake among the women in the industry. Women are shown as the so-called 'Perfectionists' instead of showing diversity, self Love or acceptance of their flaws [20].

In the media entertainment industry, it has been proven that a female actress who plays a hypersexual character will make more money than a female actress who does not. The men in charge, the ones who get the final say, do not care about depth; they care about money, so women do not have a choice but to play along. Women who play sexual, attractive characters sell more movies [19].

The negative impact of media objectification of women, mainly on television series, is that it has critical consequences on the cognitive fitness of women and girls. They perceive their physical beauty as a measure of the amount of love and the power they should receive. It also puts pressure on them to conform to usual beauty standards. It results in women constantly criticizing their bodies. They compulsively monitor their body's outward appearance and become overly concerned about how others perceive their physical appearance [18].

2. METHODOLOGY

Television is a complex subject to study. It is everywhere, and its influence on viewers is tricky to determine. Television also involves many interconnected elements of contemporary life that interact with one another in recognized and unrecognizable ways. This study aimed to reveal and examine gender frames portrayed in television series and understand their influence on how society perceives women.

Content analysis and focus group discussion were employed as methods of data collection. Content analysis was primarily employed to examine the complexity of television series. It was proper for studying television series because they are narrative. Focus group discussion was used as a method of data collection to identify the most preferred themes and frames and determine how these dominant themes and frames influence people's perceptions and decisions towards women in daily life. The focus group discussion included ten men and ten women. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents who are active television series viewers for this study.

Television series are multifaceted programs; for this reason, a qualitative research approach was chosen over a quantitative one. One television series was chosen for this study, "Siri za familia" (Family Secrets). Twenty episodes of this series were watched, and careful notes were taken. Siri za Familia is a popular TV series featuring true stories of different "family secrets" encountered by different African families. It was shot in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Aired on East African Television.

Episodes were examined to identify different leading and dominant gender themes and frames portrayed in this series. Of particular interest are the portrayals of female gender and how women relate to other characters. Also, episodes were examined to check if the portrayals of the female gender relate to daily experiences in real life. Narrative analysis was primarily used for this study. Narrative analysis is appropriate for studying television series because they are narrative. Therefore, the researcher focused on narrating episodes from the Siri za familia drama series and stories and experiences shared by respondents.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings of the study show an unequal portrayal of gender frames between female and male

genders, which is reflected in different roles, played by men and women in the Siri za familia series.95% of respondents insisted that there is unequal portrayal and framing between men and women in television series. This is mirrored by different themes that frame men and women. Respondents stressed that the female gender is framed and presented in undignified ways (half naked), weak, violated (beaten and confined), undermined and sometimes portrayed as people who do not have permission to voice their opinion in important family matters. Women are also portrayed as instruments of pleasure, unstable, and responsible for raising children. Women are the ones to blame if anything goes wrong with the children, not the husband/father. Respondents further added that women are portrayed as powerless, dependent and always given narrow chances, especially in leadership. However, the male gender is framed as dignified, strong, stable, and capable of leading society.

3.1 Leading Themes Portrayed in Television Series

Findings through content analysis show that the leading themes portrayed in the Siri za familia series include love and sexual relationships. These themes had sub-themes of betrayals, mainly used to make the series more exciting and keep viewers glued to the screen and anxiously awaiting the next episode. Other leading themes included conflicts, secrets, skeletons in the cupboard, gender violence, and plans going wrong.

3.2 Dominant Gender Frames Portrayed in Siri Za Familia Series

Content analysis from the Siri za familia series shows that the male gender is framed and presented as rational and competitive people who can make essential family decisions. This relates to the literature review from [11], who observed that women are always presented as irrational, sensitive, emotional, dependent, or indecisive. In contrast, men are always presented as rational, intelligent, independent, and competitive.

Content analysis also reveals that the female gender in siri za familia is typically framed as weak, needy and desperate for love from the male gender. It is also framed as sex objects, domestic servants, the weaker sex, wicked mothers-in-law, incompetent in making wise

decisions and using what they have, which mainly is their bodies and appearances, to get whatever they want, like material things and relationship partners. More so, the women/female gender is framed as jobless, with a concentration on the traditional roles of stay-at-home moms and homemakers with nothing to offer in development except for a few scenes in which women are portrayed as employed and economically independent.

This aligns with the literature review, which said women are generally negatively portrayed in television series. Most television dramas rarely portray women as rational, active, and essential.

Findings from content analysis of siri za familia also show that the female gender is framed as economically dependent on men and also emotionally dependent in relationships with men with which, without, their life means nothing. This is evident in most of the episodes when women are portrayed crying, complaining that their lives were destroyed and over because their fiancés betrayed them. On the other hand, findings show that when men meet, they discuss business and development issues, while when women meet, they gossip, discuss other people, and share their feelings.

3.3 Women Objectification

Findings show that women/female gender in television series is objectified, reducing them to their physical appearance and sexual attractiveness as in most episodes; women are praised on their physical appearance and not their mind power. Women are portrayed as asking for money from their partners to enhance their physical beauty, not development matters. Its impact towards women includes valuing women based on appearance, which minimizes women's abilities and competence [21]. This was found to be true in the Siri za familia series, in which women were objectified, filling stereotypical roles rather than educative and economic roles. In support of this finding, [22], in the study What drives female objectification? enlighten that objectified Women are perceived as less than fully human, less of a mind for thoughts or decisions and less deserving of moral treatment by others in society. The negative consequences for objectified women include increasing men's willingness and urge to sexually abuse them and normalization of sexual violence.

3.4 The Influence of Dominant Gender Frames in People's Decisions and Attitudes in Daily Life

98% of respondents think that how women are treated in society directly relates to how they are framed in television and mainly drama series. This is because the more people watch these series, the more they perceive the natural world as they see it on television. This is in agreement with the literature review on cultivation theory, which emphasizes that television cultivates concepts of social reality. For those who spend much time on television, it becomes the leading source of information, and they are strongly influenced by how television frames their worldview and perception.80% of male respondents said that they see and perceive women as weak, sex objects, and dependent. Men agreed that women who are homemakers and housewives are better compared to educated women as they can be submissive. They insisted that educated women are a threat towards men because they are opinionated.

Gender frames portrayed in Siri za familia also involved gender violence themes, in which, in most cases, women were the victims. These themes were used to make the story more exciting and make viewers more anxious for the next scene. Gender violence is romanticized, fantasized and glamorized. The implication is that gender violence is normalized and desensitized in the public eye. The more people see it, the more they normalize and promote it. This has become one of the contributing factors in the normalization of gender violence among young viewers.

Continuous exposure and portrayal of gender violence in television series towards women normalize gender violence in real life by making it less dangerous, acceptable and normal in public eye in daily life. This fatherly intensifies gender violence towards women in society.

3.5 Implications of Gender Frames Portrayed in Television Series towards Women

Respondents believe that in real life women are treated as weak, needy, and less involved in important decisions because the society sees them as weak and emotional. Female respondents said they are rarely included in important family decisions and excluded from owning family resources like land. They also feel that their strength is within their household, especially in domestic activities and not beyond that. This is in line with literature review, [17], in a special report: Gender in the Media; which reported that women will be perceived and treated as abused if the media portrays them as weak, indecisive, unskilled, and have a low contribution. Media shape how people see and perceive life, so stereotypical and distorted representations of women in the media influence low self-esteem in women and disparity. When a woman is constantly seen in media programs as weak, real-life displays of boldness and courage from women will be perceived as arrogance and pride.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the female gender is dominantly framed as emotional, dependent, sex objects, domestic servants, wicked mothers-in-law, and incompetent in making wise decisions, with a concentration on the traditional roles of stay-at-home moms and homemakers. Female gender is objectified, reducing them to their physical appearance and sexual attractiveness. Its impact towards women includes valuing women based on appearance, which minimizes women's capability and proficiency. Women in real life are perceived as instruments of pleasure, rarely included, in important decisions, also excluded from owning family resources like land, because the more people watch these series, the more they perceive the natural world as they see it on television series. The researcher recommends for

1. The more equal and positive portrayal of gender frames in television series
2. Women should be portrayed in a positive light which will help to reduce gender problems and impacts that television series have towards women and it will promote positive perceptions towards women.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of manuscripts.

CONSENT

The researcher sought agreement for participation from respondents, and only willing respondents participated in the study. Also, all

information from respondents was kept confidential. The researcher considered ethics every step of the way while conducting this study. All the respondents were treated with respect and dignity while remaining anonymous.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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