



## DEPICTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN OTT CONTENTS

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### Abstract

*In a patriarchal society like ours, violence against women has been a common norm and is considered important to discipline women inside the four walls. Violence is generally described as 'the use of physical force to harm or injure a person, group or community which results in injury, trauma or even death'. In India, it is observed that violence against women is quite normalized and somehow violence is perceived as the parameter of strength and power exercised by the male population in the country. Often violence is 'tolerated' to such an extent that it is rather disguised as a form of duty and affection. Over the past few years, OTT content has gained massive popularity among people because of its content presented in the form of TV series, films and documentaries which are easily accessible now. Parallely, it has also given rise to digital violence against women and digital abuse is more common now than it was a decade ago. It is important to note that the portrayal of violence in certain media content can unintentionally inspire individuals to imitate or justify real-life violent behaviors, leading to the replication of crimes depicted on screen. The research is examined through various frameworks such as feminist perspective, observational analysis, male gaze theory, and the paper intends to explore how media contributes in sustaining depictions of violent content against women via OTT platforms. The present study attempts to shed light on various types of violence committed against women and its depiction and coverage in popular media through OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu etc.*

### Keywords

*Manawaka, Multiculturalism, Metis, Ukrainians, Indigenous, Settlers, and Culture, etc.*

### Full Article

#### **Introduction:**

Media representation plays a significant role in educating people, transposing behaviors and values. It is one of the most pivotal forms of communication in the 21st century, it includes newspapers, television, social media, radio etc. In the last decade, the media has progressively transformed and began to disseminate information rapidly, serving as a way to broadcast the news 'first' and to connect with a wider set of audiences across the globe. While the media's primary role is to educate, entertain and inform, not being influenced and persuaded by the media is almost impossible. It is highly crucial to consider that the media holds the potential to bring social change and control public and social discourse. According to Vijayendra M N (2019), media representation influences societal perceptions which are why it is important to critically analyse its content and the profound impact it is able to create among people. The research highlights the growing need to censor certain media content which is not advisable to be viewed by the younger



generation. The same media content on OTT platforms has also created awareness amongst women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century who are now aware of their fundamental rights and are battling to oppose violence against the vulnerable. The paper also focuses on digital OTT content which is promoting violence against women and how to prevent its spread. The present study employs qualitative analysis using theoretical frameworks from media theory, feminist theory and social learning theory.

The rising popularity of OTT (Over-the-Top) has emerged ever since traditional distribution channels such as satellite and television faded from our routine life replacing it with modern on-demand streaming content online. The digital revolution has brought audiences closer to a plethora of online content and platforms to choose from. While OTT platforms make global entertainment easy to access, they also show a lot of violent and crime-based content. Such content can make aggression and criminal behaviour seem normal or acceptable. This is especially risky for young viewers, who may not fully understand the difference between fictional stories and real life. As a result, these shows can affect their behaviour, values, and emotional growth (Banani Adhikari, 2023). In line with these concerns of harmful influences, The Government of India recently banned over 25 OTT platforms for its portrayal of contents that had sexual innuendos and, in some cases, extended sexually explicit scenes with nudity, making it pornographic in nature (*The Hindu*, 2025). Visual violence on screen creates curiosity, thrill but at the same time it invents disturbing images, tension and sometimes titillation through the same content. Violence has been normalised and the suffering of women as victims is often glamorised on OTT, for instance, Coolen Hoover's book *It Ends With Us* and E L James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy which romanticises abuse against women. The real question is not whether explicit content on OTT platforms impacts the audience but to what extent it influences.

### **Gender-based Violence:**

The digital revolution has exacerbated violence against women namely stalking, sexual harassment, morphing images etc. Digital platforms are where explicit substance becomes viral content for instant gratification. Women are frequently subjected to violence in real life, hence it does not come as a surprise when the same is enacted on digital platforms. (The Wire, 2025) Women are regarded as the 'perfect victim', somebody who gets captivated easily, and is subjected to cruelty and brutality at the hands of men, an ideal entertainment for TV drama and web series. Effects of media violence portrayed on OTT platforms can be seen in our day to day lives, as often it becomes the inspiration for the criminals to commit such crimes in broad daylight. As reported in the media, the case of Shraddha Walker who was brutally murdered in May 2022 by her boyfriend Aftab Poonawala, later revealed during the investigation that he was inspired by an American crime show *Dexter* on a digital platform (Times Entertainment, 2022). In a similar case, infamously called 'Tiktok Villain' on social media Ashwini Kashyap, a resident of Uttar Pradesh killed three people before taking away his own life. The accused was inspired by a Hindi film *Kabir Singh* and shot dead 28 year old flight attendant, Nikita Sharma (The Quint, 2019). Violence against women (VAW) has been an accepted practise on OTT platforms, shows such as *Mirzapur* (Amazon Prime Video), *Sacred Games* (Netflix), *Dexter* (Netflix/JioCinema), *The Boys* (Amazon Prime Video), these shows include explicit violence, full-frontal nudity, abusive language and sexually explicit content. Further, similar shows like these do not have strict age restriction rules, enabling the younger generation to have access to gory, violent and repulsive content which is not age appropriate.

### **Technology facilitated Violence:**



Digital abuse has become more frequent in the last two decades wherein women and men both have been subjected to online abuse, however public reports suggest that women experiencing abuse is significantly higher compared to male population in India. Ljubica Fuentes, Founder, 'Ciudadanas del Mundo', says digital violence follows you everywhere during the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 22 September 2025. As per UN Women data, between 16-58 per cent of women have already experienced digital violence across the globe. About 38 per cent of women have claimed that they have personally experienced digital violence while 85 per cent have witnessed it happening to others (UN Women, 2025). Many online users find it easier to attack women on the internet since the perpetrators can hide behind a fake user ID, act anonymously and spread hate speech or engage in online bullying. The detailed graphic depiction of violence against women has been appalling (The Wire, 2016). It is important to inform viewers about crimes being committed against women, therefore they can be warned or take precautions for that reason; however it is the onus of the directors, producers and actors to showcase violence responsibly and not to incite young viewers to enact the crime in real life. There are on screen warning signs for alcohol, smoking, narcotics and dangerous stunt scenes while OTT platforms must also bear the responsibility of showing on-display statutory warnings while depicting a violent scene, clearly stating that it is a work of fiction and not to be imitated in any way.

### Objectives of the Study:

The research aims to assess the representation of women in select OTT content showcased in various platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Zee5 etc. The study will also focus on how these platforms inadvertently may influence violence and assault against women and girls. The research poses following objectives, such as:

- To investigate the representation of violence against women in various OTT contents.
- To explore the role of the media in perpetuating violence against women through OTT.
- To analyse whether OTT contents provide statutory warnings for sexual, physical and psychological abuse against women.

### Review of Literature:

In the research article, *The Influence of Media Representations On Social Perceptions* (2019) the authors state that it is important for media to be utilised carefully as it is a powerful tool and can be used to shape the perception of individuals. The media plays an important role in constructing narratives and reinforcing stereotypes among viewers. In the news article titled *How the Rise in TV 'Crime Porn' Normalises Violence Against Women* (2016) Ruth Penfold Mounce explains that many crime shows glamorise violence against women often incorporating rape fantasy, fetishism of various kinds, gore imagery and violent content which can leave a disturbing impression on the viewers.

L Rowell Huesmann in his research *The Impact of Electronic Media Violence: Scientific Theory and Research* (2007) suggests that exposure to violence often leads to detrimental effects on the mind of the viewers. Media violence affects children and adults in both short term and long term period and observational learning plays a key role in contributing to their aggression.

### Discussion:

Accessibility to OTT contents have given rise to maximum viewership allowing people to watch it from anywhere across the globe. The first major concern that arises from this relates to the representation of women in OTT content. The essential question is why these violent shows mainly focus on women related violence, and further OTT has repeatedly victimised women and has not depicted them in crucial or dominant roles (Hart, 2025). This becomes clearer when





viewed through Laura Mulvey's concept of the *male gaze*, which argues that mainstream visual media often constructs women as passive objects to be looked at rather than as active participants in the narrative (Rachael, 2015). Instead of giving women strong or important roles, many series focus on kidnapping, assault, harassment, trafficking, or domestic abuse as their main storyline. They become tools to move the plot forward, rather than individuals with their own choices, strength, or influence. The next concern is how these kinds of representations affect the viewers. There are many studies which indicate the risk factors for aggressive behavior (Huesmann, 2007) on account of continuous exposure to violent content. When OTT platforms repeatedly portray women's suffering as entertainment, viewers may internalise the idea that such violence is inevitable or acceptable. In addition to these issues, the discussion also connects to the need for clearer statutory warnings regarding gender-based violence. The foreign TV shows especially those violent ones are now being dubbed into regional languages in India, further making it reachable to viewers of all age groups and even in remote areas. If pornographic films and websites are banned, OTT contents with violence, foul language and gore contents shouldn't go unchecked. (*The Times of India*, 2022). Despite having IT rules that specify content classification allowing parental control and age based restrictions, regulatory frameworks in India remain weak and inconsistent (Tripathi, 2023). This gap between rule and practice creates ignorance in viewer protection, especially for children and adolescents accessing OTT content without supervision.

### Limitations of the Study:

Owing to the absence of strict guidelines or regulations, the study does not entirely focus on media discourse which can aid in creating awareness among the viewers. There is a lack of well-informed representation of violence in the mainstream OTT content which further leads to stereotypes and victim blaming. One OTT platform might show violence against women in a serious and meaningful way, as seen in *Delhi Crime*, which focuses on the investigation and its emotional and legal impacts, while another might depict similar violence mainly for entertainment, as in *Mirzapur*, where it is used to strengthen the storyline. Since there are no common rules or guidelines for how this content should be handled, it becomes hard for the study to compare these shows fairly.

### Conclusion:

The present paper discusses the representation of violence against women in media, it also emphasizes the need to regulate media in order to not depict extreme explicit content for viewers, especially pertaining to violence related to women. Violence against women presented in the media further reinforces the notion of gendered victimhood (Hart, 2025) that supplements the existing stereotypes. The research highlighted the need to monitor the content on OTT platforms, and it also proposes that women in media have been overly represented as the *ideal victim* which eventually influence the perception of the audience towards women as weak, vulnerable and easy prey for individuals in power or authority.

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