



Research article

A qualitative investigation to understand the challenges and representation of women in the media industry of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the representation of women in the media in Bangladesh and the social perception regarding their media engagement. Both Dhaka and Khulna cities were purposively selected as the study area for fulfilling the research objective. A qualitative research method has been used to conduct the study and primary data were collected by using an in-depth interviews (IDIs) and two focus group discussions (FGDs). Using a convenient sampling technique, a total of fifteen informants, including IDIs with five (5) informants who were media professionals, two FGDs of ten (10) informants (five in each group), were communicated for data collection. The findings revealed that women are represented as a commodity for marketing the product, and their charm or glamour became the main requirement for recruitment. The informants perceived that the lack of professionalism in the media industry ignores women's intellectual value. Moreover, female models are mostly judged by their physical beauty, not by their merit. The findings also revealed the presence of sexual harassment in the media industry. From the consumers perspective, the study revealed that elderly people have a negative perception of women's engagement in the media; however, the younger people adjusted their thoughts to new media portrayal of females as sexual objects but lack respect for the profession. The study significantly recommends measures such as eliminating sexually objectifying roles for female artists, introducing pay protection and social support campaigns to ensure a non-discriminatory media industry and consumer culture.

1. Introduction

The commodification of women has a long history, and it has been brought to light by the commencement of capitalism [1]. In fact, the continuation of sexual exploitation of women has never ended; rather, it has incrementally increased with time, particularly through the media industry. The representation of women as a commodity in media dates back to the 17th century when the Paris

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Opera Ballet, the world's first professional ballet company, used to hire children between the ages of six and eight and train them as ballerinas to perform on the stage and make them bound to offer sexual favors to the influential financiers, both in the front and backstage of the opera house [2–4].

Nowadays, media plays a significant role in reaching out to people with information, and it is considered a critical conduit for the social, economic, and political development of women [5]. Although working in media seems lucrative because of the attached prestige and financial benefits, the physical and sexual abuse by male co-workers to fulfill their libido cannot be denied [6]. Advertisements of different corporate and manufacturing industries provide financial backup to media where women are presented as sexualized products for marketization that allows the advertisers to attract and influence their clients [7,8]. In fact, female bodies have been uncovered to the maximum possible extent, and the sexual impression of female bodies has been used to sell almost all consumer products, such as from food to floor cleaners, creams to cars, and perfume to popcorn across continents [9–11]. In their respective studies, Stephy [12] and Wade [13] found that the advertising industry represents men as sexual subjects and women as sex objects to increase product sales among the targeted consumers. This consumerist demand not only portrays women in mass media as sexual objects, but also establishes an ideal body image that women are expected to embody [14]. Moreover, the media projection of women as younger, taller and thinner [10,11] in films and televised series and dramas provoke women to have an ideal body image that creates an intense dissatisfaction with one's existing body, which subsequently leads to eating disorders [14–16].

Though Bangladesh is a developing country, the exposure of media to mass people is similar to that of the developed nations. Almost all advertisements, such as for beauty soap, show women taking showers either in a bath tub or an open pool, half naked [17–19]. To beautify a product like soap, the media uses another symbol of beauty, 'women'. Subsequently, the soap is out of wrap, and the woman is out of her clothes. Even in advertisements for male products like shaving cream, deodorant spray, or perfume, advertisers display female models in a desirous way [20]. Moreover, the media aligns itself with 'give and take policy,' where potential female models rarely get an opportunity or career advancement without making a 'sacrifice' – a sexual favor either to the director or the producer [14,19].

Based on the aforementioned scenario, the main objective of the current study is to explore the representation of women in the media in Bangladesh and the social perception regarding women's media engagement.

1.1. Theoretical foundation

The theoretical foundation of this research is instituted on patriarchy and sexual objectification theory. In the context of women's exploitation in media, the very relevant theory of patriarchy comes first. The central theme of patriarchy is that male dominance or sexism exists not just as a product of capitalism, but as something which stands beyond capitalism. This theory represents the 'perpetual truth' that patriarchy is the leading cause of women's oppression [21]. Patriarchy, along with capitalism, are analytically independent and hold this by pointing to the tensions between the two systems over the exploitation of women's labor [22]. Shohel, Niner and Gunawardana [23,24], and Sultana [25], in their study, theoretically expounded how patriarchal society provides absolute right of way to men, and a great extent, it limits women's human rights.

Similarly, male dominance over women is not natural or biological, but the product of a historical development that began in the second millennium BC in the Ancient Near East [26]. Patriarchy as a system of organizing society was established historically, where economic oppression and exploitation of women are based as much on the commodification of female sexuality and the appropriation by men of women's labor and reproductive power as on the direct economic acquisition of resources and persons [26].

Likewise, Goffman [27] illustrated that nowadays, advertisements do not depict how men and women behave; instead, they serve the social purpose of convincing us that this is how women and men are expected to behave. Advertisers can use celebrities as models, for although these personages are not known personally, they are known [27]. Susan Bordo, a modern feminist philosopher, pointed out that while men have historically been associated with intellect and the mind or spirit, women have long been associated with the body, the subordinated, negatively infused term in the mind or body of irreconcilable difference [19]. This concept regarding women induces a capitalist mode of production to women's subjugation by considering them as bodily or biological beings rather than intellectual ones [28].

This thought is the successor of another similar theory, the sexual objectification theory, which was proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts [29]. This theory evaluates that women are sexually objectified, and people use them like sex objects. This objectification occurs in two ways – firstly, males imagine and use them in this way, secondly, women are responsible for this objectification as they remain concerned about their physical beauty [30]. However, female models remain concerned about beauty and fitness [31]. If they do not keep themselves in a particular physical shape preferred by the media, they cannot get their desired job because of a bulky body, dark skin color, and shorter height. Nevertheless, this brutal truth is appropriate only for females, not for males. These factors are acutely pervasive in the media, so they face gender inequality [32].

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Study design

The study was conducted using a qualitative methodology since doing so allows us to understand better the rationale behind people's behaviors, thoughts, and beliefs as they are influenced by their own personal experiences and perspectives [33]. On this ground, the qualitative approach assists us in gaining an understanding of the meaningful and logical explanations of perceptions of media personalities and the general public regarding the abuse of women, and why it is happening in the media. Our approach is

focused on media depictions of women in Bangladesh, where a culture of darkness has flourished in the guise of glamour and stardom. The qualitative technique helps us collect validated human understandings in a specific social situation influenced by socio-cultural factors [23,24,34,35], which in turn helps us understand the complicated human perceptions with causal links.

2.2. Informant recruitment

Recruitment of informants for such research regarding the media industry in Bangladesh, particularly for qualitative investigation, was the biggest challenge for this research. However, we tried to overrule the challenge by setting up a multistage sampling procedure to recruit our study informants. The study was focused on personnel directly affiliated with the media. For this purpose, we had to choose Dhaka city for IDIs (the capital city of Bangladesh) because a significant number of the main media organizations are headquartered in Dhaka [36]. Meanwhile, for conducting FGDs, we considered regular graduate students at Khulna University to be the mass people. For making generalizations regarding the study findings, the assumption was that as the students come from different parts of the country, they can represent the overall perception of media and media personnel.

In the first stage, a filmmaker/director was selected by using a purposive sampling method. After that, four informants, directly affiliated with the media, were selected by using the respondent-assisted sampling method because it helps us to find segments of the population characterized by the criteria needed for specific research [37]. However, all five informants [among whom two were artists of TV, drama, and cinema, one was a filmmaker, director, and producer, and the other two were senior artists] were chosen for In-depth Interviews (IDIs). Accordingly, to comprehend mass people’s perceptions on the subject we conducted two focus group discussions (FGDs) where the number of informants was 10 (Ten), and they were selected by following the convenience sampling method because it helps us to explore the nature and scope of the issues with a small number of target informants [38,39]. It is worth mentioning that the IDI informants were selected from Dhaka city while for FGDs, the informants were selected from Khulna city, among whom students enrolled in regular graduate programs in Khulna University were selected for the first FGD (5 informants) while for the second FGD (5 informants) the informants were selected from mass population by using special relation. Some specifications were established to identify the unit of analysis, e.g., for In-depth Interviews, (i) both male and female models or actors who are engaged in media for at least five years; (ii) directors or filmmakers who have at least ten years’ work experience; and for FGD, (i) university students who watch TV daily for at least 1 h and read newspaper; (ii) mass people; who watch TV on a regular basis. Please see the following table (see Table 1) representing the recruited informant of this study.

2.3. Interview outline

For this research, we set up the interview guidelines and FGD checklist by going through relevant literature and expert guidance and choosing the informants of various categories for the IDIs and FGDs (see Table 2). The key theme questions were centered on the following issues –

2.4. Ethical issues

The ethical clearance committee of Khulna University accepted this research (Protocol No. KUECC-2022/07/21). All informants provided informed permission before the interviews, and this conversation was recorded and will be provided upon request. Each of the authors has also confirmed that no unethical practices, such as falsifying data, were used in the creation of this research.

Table 1
Composition of the informants for in-depth interviews and FGDs.

Sl. No.	Informants	Age	Sex	Education	Profession	Category
1	Informant 1	37	Male	Masters	Filmmaker and Director	In-depth interviews
2	Informant 2	32	Female	Masters	Actress and Model	
3	Informant 3	67	Female	Honors	Senior artist	
4	Informant 4	35	Female	Masters	Actress and Model	
5	Informant 5	65	Female	Masters	Senior Artist, director and producer	
6	Informant 6	23	Male	Honors 4th year	Student	FGD1
7	Informant 7	23	Male	Honors 4th year		
8	Informant 8	19	Female	Honors 2nd year		
9	Informant 9	20	Female	Honors 2nd year		
10	Informant 10	22	Female	Honors 3rd year		
11	Informant 11	22	Male	N/A	Business	FGD2
12	Informant 12	47	Male	N/A	Business	
13	Informant 13	41	Male	N/A	Banker	
14	Informant 14	58	Female	N/A	Entrepreneur	
15	Informant 15	45	Female	N/A	Teaching	

(Source: Authors’ creation)

Table 2
Data collection themes.

For IDIs		For FGDs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Self-experience and assessment ● Involvement in media ● Payment ● Dress code ● Make over ● Discrimination ● Sexual harassment ● Role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Perception about the Female Models ● Attitude towards female counterpart ● Discrimination ● Negative behavior of director ● Evaluation on costume ● Evaluation on make over ● Sexual harassment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Perception about the Female Models ● Pattern of exposing ● Sexual harassment ● Payment discrimination ● Impact of gender role ● Attitude towards female models

(Source: Authors' creation)

2.5. Data collection

To fulfill the objectives, we selected two major techniques to collect qualitative data from the research informants. In this regard, we conducted one-on-one in-depth interviews with media artists by using a semi-structured interview guideline which contains several open-ended questions because IDI with open-ended questions maximize the possibilities for comments that are discursive, comprehensive, and richly textured [40]. We also used a short FGD checklist to collect data from the study's FGD informants. However, prior to collecting data from all the informants, the investigative issues were made clear to the informants, verbal consent was obtained, and audio was recorded. Additionally, we do not use their real names or pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Bangla language was used to carry out the face-to-face interview session for each informant as well as during the FGDs. There were no breaks taken throughout the IDIs, which lasted 50–60 min on average. The responses of IDIs and FGDs were recorded with prior consent from the research informants and were kept confidential. In addition to that, impartiality was maintained throughout the data collection procedure, and the informants were given the alternative of withdrawing from the research at any moment without providing any clarification.

2.6. Data analysis

To code and analyze the collected data into themes, NVivo 12 was utilized shortly after the interviews and FGDs were completed. As a group, the authors summarized essential themes and set the scene for the subsequent discussions. Thematic analysis (see Fig. 1) was used to dissect the collected information. By comparing how often certain themes appeared, we were able to draw a link between the study's results and the real world. Furthermore, we discussed and agreed upon what to include in our preliminary analysis after each interview. Meanwhile, the researchers extensively analyzed and debated the interview data to iron out any discrepancies or rule them

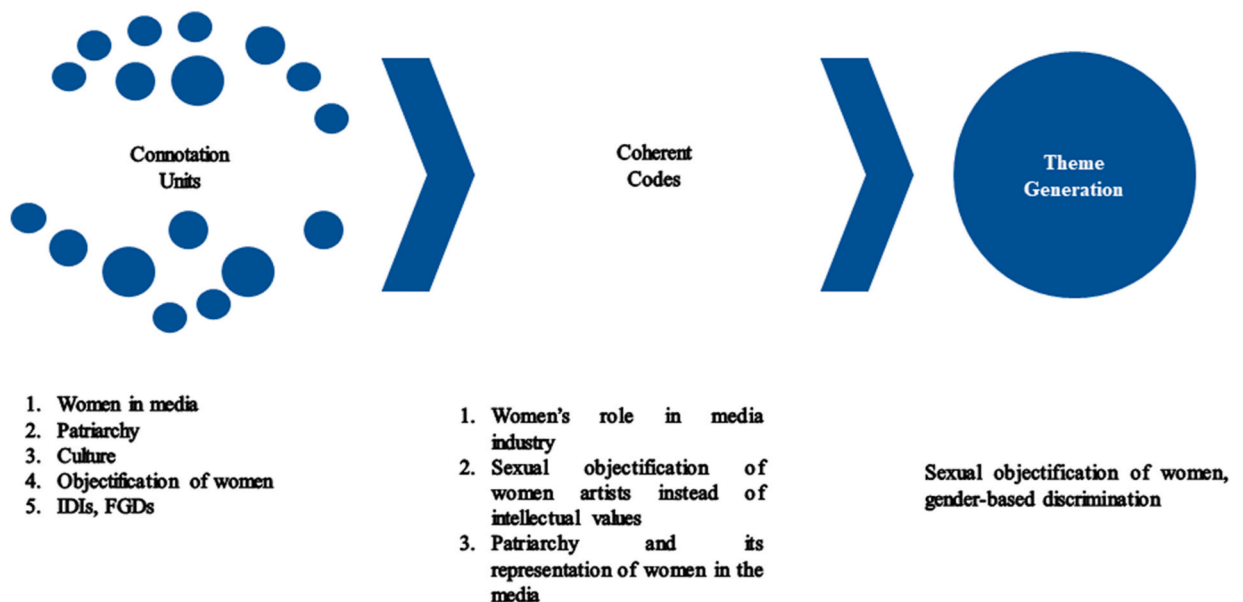


Fig. 1. Development of themes
Source: Authors' creation by using MS Word SmartArt design template.

out entirely.

3. Results and findings

After analyzing the data, considerable themes were reached. Several key points from the informants' perspectives also helped carry out the research objective. The results are illustrated under four broad thematic areas according to the objective.

Theme 1. Portrayal of female artists as an object and policy of capitalism

Theme 2. Basic reason behind the failure in the professionalism of media personnel regarding women

Theme 3. Discrimination towards female artists

Theme 4. Social perception regarding women's participation in media

3.1. Portrayal of female artists as an object and policy of capitalism

In the policy of capitalist mode of production, women in media are being commoditized or objectified in the contemporary world. The informants provided information based on their knowledge. In advertisements, women are used to enhance the products' market value; however, in doing this, they were portrayed as items for consumption. After watching the physical representation of women, desirability arises among the spectators, and this appeal leads to the product being marketized.

A 23-year-old student (Informant 6) of FGD expressed his perception that,

“Media is portraying women explicitly to maximize their market. This way, they can attract viewers and increase their sales. So, they are commercially successful. And it is also true (blaming expression) that women enjoy this exposure by thinking that it's their liberty.”

Similarly, all the female informants of FGD 1 understood that the representation of the body is the focal point in the media, which is exhibited badly. They believed that even models could do any pose or fashion for fame in advertisements or direct programs. A 2nd-year university going young student (Informant 8, 19 years old) mentioned that,

“Women come into the media to display themselves openly, and they can do everything for the sake of their profession. So here, no one is using them, rather, they are marketing themselves.”

About these circumstances of women, a 65-year-old senior artist (informant 5), who is also a director and producer, described that multinational corporations would like to objectify women for profit expansion in front of the media in an illuminating mode. In her statement, she says,

“If a beauty soap demands to show beautiful skin, then it is very much logical to present a woman in taking a shower in a bathtub or a pool because women are representative of beauty, and they can beautify any product easily.”

She also said that these advertisements were fashioned by superstars in the past, but they only showed hands and faces. But now the plot and the concept have changed. Informant 4, a 35-year-old model of TVC, exposed one bare truth. She said,

“For the sake of marketing, women are portrayed very sensually so that people go to the cinema hall or watch adverts on television. Even in the movie posters, women are so revealing.”

She compares media with a candle by saying that,

“There must be darkness just below a candle. Media world is similar to candlelight where eclipse and glamor cohabit together.”

3.2. Basic reasons behind the failure in professionalism of media personnel regarding women

Media personnel think that women are a part of society; they represent society and the country in front of the world, and that is why they can represent themselves in any role in the media. A 37-year-old (informant 1) director and producer said that if a woman wants to build a career in the media, it is important to expose herself in front of the camera or the media. On the contrary, he also said that he does not think that women get the proper value for their merit or intelligence. He said,

“Since our industry doesn't have a professional working culture yet, it is difficult to earn the proper respect here. It is difficult for people to realize the value of the merit or intelligence of a true actor or actress in our industry. We all have to go through the proper process to come to a place where professionalism will prevail, and it will help everyone to get their values for their merit and intelligence as deserved.”

Moreover, informant 5 (a-65-year-old), a successful senior artist, director, and producer, acknowledged that women who are working in media have no own standard. They cannot get work being choosy. To get any role or to upright themselves, they had to have a lot of struggles, and good networking with established media persons is required. The competition is extremely high today. Therefore, many female actors were condemned for engaging with directors or producers very explicitly for the sake of their career,

and such reports or gossiping were increasing daily. In the past, if the number was one out of ten, it is now eight out of ten. Everybody in the media always keeps their eyes on women. In her language,

“It’s harsh but true that when this industry selects a woman as a model or artist, she is looked at like a domesticated being bought from the market. Each and every part of her body is to be seen and judged.”

In addition, patriarchy has a great and deep impact on our society. Everywhere in our society, patriarchy dominates the social system. Patriarchal effects also stir mass media. By inculcating our patriarchal social system, informant 3 (67-year-old), a senior artist, lamented that,

“Women don’t get proper justice for their merit or intelligence, and the main reason is our patriarchal society. We have many limitations in our thinking, knowledge and mentality. In this sector, there is a scarcity of intellectual and qualified people. They can’t think of something differently, something new. Staging men and women in different ways represents our patriarchal society. This is a reflection of our old-fashioned mentality. And the reason behind this is the dogmatism of male-controlled society.”

Though she criticized the male-controlled society, she also advises women to uphold dignity as it is their own responsibility. If women fail to advance and confront, no one will willingly hand the control over to them. Informant 4 (35-year-old), a TVC model, also talked about different flanks of media, such as the attitude of media staff towards female artists at the point of costume selection, makeover, camera shots, and personal affiliation with director, producer, and other dominating stakeholders. In her language,

“The producer does pressure the directors to cast certain female models they want. Consequently, the director becomes compelled to cast her. This is one of the reasons why non-capable performers who have good networking get chances, and the quality decreases. It becomes easier to force these models to do whatever the director or producer wants. These non-performing models pursue money and compromise their dignity in many cases. However, financially struggling models may do it willingly. This financially constrained model would play any role in survival. Sometimes, they accept lascivious roles offered to them. Even the camera operator also wants to take advantage of the situation. I have experienced the camera operator setting an angle where the cleavage is focused. Even the makeup man found flirting with or harassing the struggling models.”

3.3. Discrimination towards female artists

Female artists are also found to face various types of discrimination like injustice with merit, inadequate remuneration, sexual harassment etc. A 32-year-old (informant 2) model and actress spoke about this phenomenon. She says that most of the time, the remuneration of females is less than that of males. Since no fixed or minimum remuneration amount is found in the media industry; actual merit or intelligence does not get justice. In some cases, many less-talented artists get handsome remuneration in favor of being a relative or being personally involved with any producer or director. She directly said,

“Media is like a syndicate. Here, who has the better backup has the better income.”

Not only that, when disbursing remuneration, sometimes producers give less money than the promised amount, or sometimes they curtail plane or bus fare. Being disheartened, she said,

“If someone has any personal relationship with the producers, getting money becomes so easy. All this happens because, in many cases, there is no written deed of remuneration; an oral contract has been made before production, and the producers take this advantage and show many excuses at the time of payment. Very few directors give payment without showing any excuse.”

A 35-year-old actor and model (Informant 4) gives a familiar experience. She said that in this sector, the remuneration of females is less than that of males. However, it also depends on one’s professional experience. If an actress is more experienced than a newcomer actor, then she can earn more. Since there is no written deed, these happen very frequently.

Informant 1 (37-year-old renowned filmmaker and director) from IDIs admitted the discrimination. He mentioned that the allegation is true since Bangladesh’s media industry is very unstructured and unprofessional. Consequently, discrimination can come from different corners in different forms. He said that,

“In general, women face discrimination by the director or a male counterpart, but this depends on the particular individuals they are working with. Some female models face sexual harassments. Why and how are difficult to answer, but if they choose to work with the wrong people from the industry who are not morally upright, they will end up in scenarios like that which can be very unfortunate. Also, if they are not professional enough and don’t know where to draw the lines in maintaining media relationships, that may cause unfortunate situations like this. The kinds of sexual harassment can vary; it can be verbal, virtual or at times unfortunately physical as well.”

Besides the media personnel, ordinary people spoke about various forms of discrimination like sexual harassment and payment discrimination. They believed that sexual harassment allegations are very acute in the media. They also perceive that each and every moment, women are facing multidimensional forms of sexual harassment. It may be verbal, symbolic, linguistic, and, more severely physical abuse. A 22-year-old (Informant 10 from FGDs) 3rd year student perceived that,

“When a girl comes into media without knowing it’s culture or pattern, she may face various types of sexual harassment like physical exploitation, exposing in front of cameras and visuals, lascivious proposal and so on”.

Similarly, informant 15 (a 45-year-old college teacher) from FGDs said that she believes women are being frequently harassed by directors, producers, cameraman, makeup-man, and their male counterparts. She said,

“It is very common in media to get involved in relationships, and mostly it starts from sexual harassment. And many scandals have been flashed out in newspapers on a regular basis”.

Regarding payment discrimination, informants from FGDs accepted that the female model’s income depends on experience and public demand. Most of the FGD informants argued that women always earn less than men. They consider male-dominated patriarchy as the reason for this wage discrimination. Informant 14 (a 58-year-old female entrepreneur) from FGDs expressed that,

“When we do work with men, we get a lesser amount of money than them, and I believe the same discrimination attached in the media industry. Here, women must have also been paid smaller amounts. The media industry is not out of our patriarchy.”

3.4. Social perception regarding women’s participation in media

As not all informants are directly related to the media, they present diverse thoughts. The informants from the FGDs are from mass people, and they provided their opinions by taking into consideration their stage of development, class, and schooling rank. Some said that they give a good reason for the female based on their perception of media life. Moreover, some do not distinguish between their real life and media life. Informant 7 (23-year-old) from FGDs, a 4th-year student thought that,

“If any female model comes to any public place, most of the time, there will be a crowd. Some people show them respect; some come just to watch a celebrity figure and enjoy their presence. But some people may enjoy unpleasant sexual flavors by harassing them, such as blowing whistles, throwing sexualized words, or teasing them. The majority of people fail to differentiate media people’s personal lives from professional ones. They treat them as they see on the TV screen.”

Informant 9 (20-year-old) from FGDs, a 2nd-year student shares her thoughts dissimilarly by saying that,

“Celebrities are not justified based on their profession. Everybody accepts celebrities with lots of curiosity, either with their positive or negative gossip. Therefore, if any scandal about them gets published, then matters will not be the same as for commoners.”

The observation of aged and middle-aged citizens about women actors is not so positive. As media actors cannot distinguish between their own life and media life, elderly people do not prefer them with media representation. On the contrary, the younger generation usually likes sensual media representations of women, and often, they go to the extent of giving immoral commentary on them. Informant 11 (22-year-old) from FGDs, a young businessperson, assented with the statement and said,

“Women are beautiful, and exposing them in this way makes them more sensual and erotic to attract people. I like to see them in this way. The last movie I watched was after seeing an erotic picture of the movie actress on its promotional poster.”

Nevertheless, informant 12 (47-year-old) from FGDs, a vendor, showed his hesitation to accept media girls and accused them of harnessing immoral social acts and loss of social values. In his view,

“These women are spreading vulgarism in society and have a very bad impact on the young generation. Young girls are following their dress code. They are wearing short, skimpy dresses attracting sexual vandalizers. And this attitude may also cause incidents like eve-teasing and rape.”

Informant 14 (58-year-old) from FGDs, an entrepreneur, thought that women should always sustain their dignity. It should not be misplaced at any cost of money, reputation, or glamor. In his words,

“As we earn little, our social status is lower, but we have self-esteem. However, these women working in the media cannot defend their pride because they have lost their dignity. They are marketing their self-respect by exposing bodies in exchange for money”.

Religious points of sight also came to the front position among the informants’ conversations. They consider that the media should not put on display women openly. They alerted to religious factors on the subject of this. They also believed that they should maintain their dignity on their own. Women should not expose themselves here and there. Aged people do not like to see this type of exposed picture. A 45-year-old (informant 15 from FGDs) female teacher said that,

“Women should not do such type of job belonging to a Muslim family. They should cover themselves with a veil. Their body is their dignity,”

Many informants were concerned about the young generation. They are not particularly blaming women but questioning the culture that is experienced in the media. Being very upset, a 41-year-old banker (informant 13 from FGDs) spoke about the decay of society.

“Young boys and girls are intensely following the media culture, engaging with live-in relationships. Pre- and post-marital affairs have become very common in our society. As a result, unwanted pregnancy and illegal child abortion have been made as social crimes.”

As many people have a sexualized idea about women in the media, they come together for public opinion or feedback towards them on different contemporary issues. Informant 2 (32-year-old), a female artist, faces this type of unsatisfying condition frequently. She said that –

“We are not only facing unwelcome circumstances in the industry but also the public attempts to take benefit from us or harassing in manners. In my case, it happened several times. Such as once I was walking on the road, some people made a bad sound or a bad comment about me; and coming back home in an auto rickshaw, the driver said, sister, I see you on TV, I'm your fan, give me 100 taka more. Moreover, he drives very slowly so that he can spend much time with me; checking me out by the looking glass, and perhaps he makes a sensualized story to his friends involving me.”

Being very upset, she added further,

“The outlook of our society is that an actress is easily accessible to anybody in any sensualized vision. They also think that actresses are involved in media due to their gorgeous looks and figures, not by merit. She has no other quality to become but an actress.”

These findings, both from the media and non-media people, indicate the male-dominated outlook where women are considered nothing but a sexual object. The representation of patriarchy in practice or perception is found strong and that articulate women in media as sex objects.

4. Discussion

The qualitative findings of this study have rational explanations of the perceptions of media traits and the general public regarding the misuse of women in the advertisement of products. The findings showed that media representation of women is largely founded on patriarchal stereotypes, such as women's participation in media often portrayed as explicit to sexuality and their wage and professional demand are undervalued in comparison to men. Cultivating on Patriarchy and Sexual Objectification theory, this study has four major findings that provide insight into the representation of women in the media in Bangladesh and the social perception regarding women's media engagement.

This paper's first and foremost realistic finding is about the portrayal of female artists as a sexually explicit object and the policy of capitalism. As in patriarchy, our economic system has become “Libidinous Commercial System”, which is based on the male point of view as well as their sexual wish. The study also explains that women are more often presented in commercials because they are seen as responsible for making everyday purchases; women are even shown in commercials with cosmetics and domestic products [41]. On this foundation, the shape of a product is manufactured with the appearance of a female body so that the value and reception of such products rise very high in the user society. In the same way, Stankiewicz and Rosselli [42] identified that 51.8 % of advertisements use women as sex objects. That is why women are very much humiliated and exposed as objects around the world. Apart from that, most of the informants somewhat mentioned in this study that the commoditization of women in the media is a diplomatic capitalization policy. Behind the objectification of women, profit maximization is the ultimate motto.

The second representative finding of this paper is about the sexualization of media professional women. It is a fact of our society that women, in general, are considered weak or dependent [1,8]. Advertisements and the commercial sector often portray women primarily to target young boys and girls, or both adult men and women to become their product consumers easily. Whereby the commercials may sketch women as (a role of) sexual objects rather inappropriately. For example, our study informants perceive that advertisements for beauty soap present women as inappropriately vulgar and obsessive. Those advertisements are thematically sexualized by presenting women's beauty as an object to market their product. The sexualized presentation of women has a direct link between capitalism and marketing strategy for product selling capacity enhancement. In this link, patriarchy also plays a crucial role [10]. Such as, some informants accused the media culture, the TVC makers, directors that carry capitalism, as well as they accused women themselves. Through social media, women self-objectify by posting provocative images that they know will be objectified by their viewers as a form of seeking validation [43].

In this study, it comes out that being part of a larger patriarchal culture, the media professional women themselves are equally liable for their situation. Findings showed that media professional women remain dependent on men and fail to maintain a standard regarding their work and a line between personal and professional boundaries. Both this study and previous research have found many accusations regarding female models/actresses establishing personal affiliations with the directors, producers, and to some extent with their male co-actors to get some facility like advancing in career, recruitment in commercials/TVC or getting monetary gain [14,16]. This type of affiliation reduces women's value in a patriarchal media culture, and sometimes the affiliation was forceful from the male's (e.g., directors, producers, male co-actors) end. Sometimes, women are bound to compromise issues such as sexual abuse, financial loss, psychological stress or trauma for survival in the industry. However, these compromises worsen the situation of women in media, as males (e.g., directors, producers, male co-actors) are in control of the steering of the industry as a patriarchal lineage.

The third finding showed that with the prevalence of patriarchy, women actors are faced with various injustices in the sector of payment. For these reasons, without any written agreement, female actors get paid less than male actors. On the other hand, as women look attractive and sensual, the public likes to see them in different programs. Other studies also showed that women get more sexually

objectifying treatment as compared to men [29,44]. Patriarchy is also responsible for the disgraceful situation of women. It is not necessary that men always hold the steering of patriarchy, women are also indulging in male-dominated society. The outcome is that women are forced by the media staff and even by the local political leaders to demand sexual compromise [26].

This study’s fourth finding is the social perception of women’s media participation. Conceptualizing the sexualized role of female actresses/models, the industry portrays female actors performing (e.g., while wearing costumes that are revealed in front of the camera) in a manner that is somewhat indecent to the dominant mass culture and also considered as hurting the mass sentiment (e.g., religious traditions). Sometimes, the role women play (e.g., appearance, dialogue) in commercials, advertisements, or films, even if they might be victims of those activities, degradation of social values in terms of respect and prestige [19]. The dominant culture (e.g., society, community, aged population) emphasized the religious point of view and suggested that women not do such jobs where there is a high risk of losing self-dignity.

Nevertheless, it is a matter of regret that women barely get the proper value of their merit or intelligence. Women are used as products of capitalist marketing and rarely have the opportunity to protest against their subjugation in this patriarchal portrayal. In addition, media professional women are being accused by the dominant culture for inflicting the young generation into a degraded lifestyle. Other research also found that media exposure hugely motivates people to follow a lifestyle beyond the dominant culture’s sketchbook [32]. Another study also found that people accuse media professional women of nurturing an illusionary lifestyle that goes against the norms and regulations of the masses [25]. This current study also evidenced mass culture accusing women media professionals of causing moral degradation of the community and young generations; however, being a stronghold of the industry, men get less criticism, and patriarchy comes as their shield.

Based on the key findings of this discussion part, this study thematized the ‘Patriarchy’ and ‘Sexual Objectification Theory’, where capitalism is found as a force that uses patriarchy and gains profit in terms of money and marketing products by sexually objectifying women in media. The patriarchy and sexual objectification of women in media (see Fig. 2) articulate that patriarchy confirms men’s rule and dominance (e.g., cultural and economic dominance) in the media industry, creates undervalued perception (e.g., sexually explicit commodity, lack of talent, erotic roles in demand) against female media professionals and regulates gender-based discrimination (e.g., harassment, negative social recognition, and undervalued status, wage/payment discrimination) against women in the media.

5. Limitations

The choice of the study area does not fully cover a representative depiction of the whole of Bangladesh and its scenario regarding media portrayal of women. Therefore, data were collected from a limited number of informants directly related to the media and were collected months before the COVID-19 pandemic. Apart from that, contacting media personalities was the biggest problem as we have

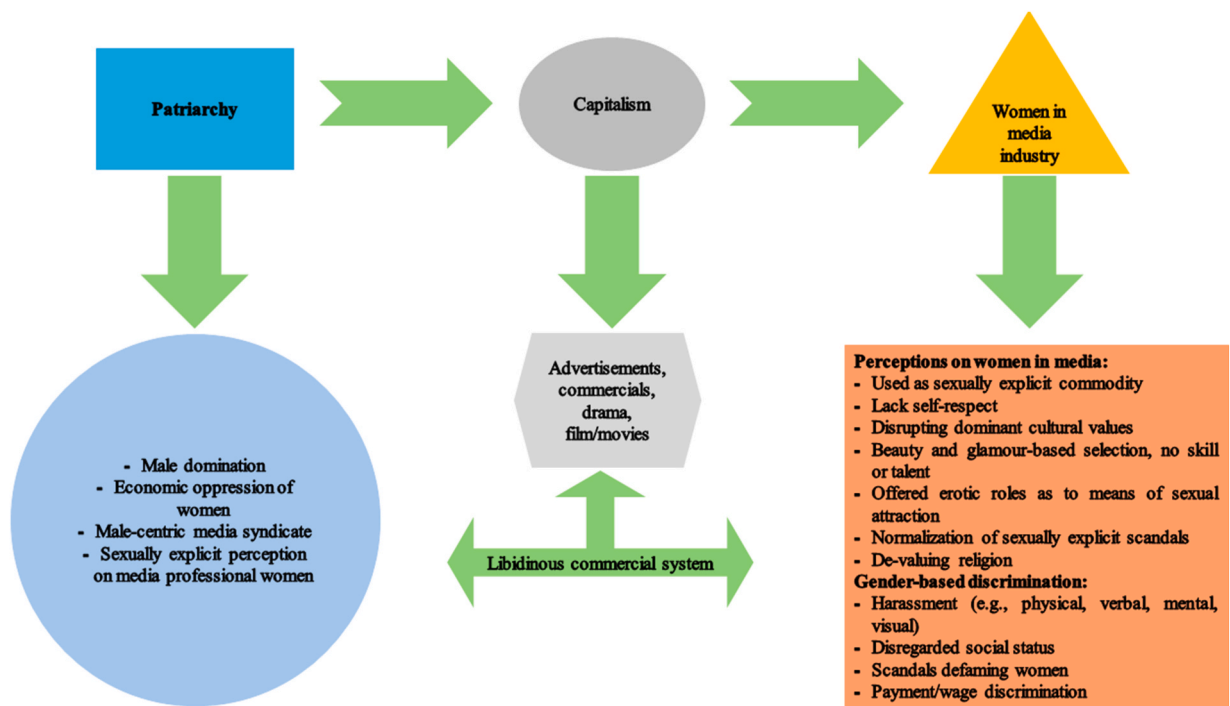


Fig. 2. Patriarchy and sexual objectification of women in media
Source: Authors’ creation.

less acquaintance in the media. However, the findings of this study would potentially be important in providing insights to assess the representation of women in the media in Bangladesh and the cultural perspectives regarding women's media engagement perceptions.

6. Conclusion

As women's capacity remains outshone in the mass media, only their physical outlook greatly emphasizes codes of sex. Most performers function, but regrettably, the conduct they receive depends on their glamour and sex appeal. In order to create a progressive as well as favorable atmosphere for the media actors, people have to appreciate their talent so that they can work without any harassment. In media, women are objectified to such a point that their physical and sexual image outshines their intellectual ability. A work environment like this, which emphasizes glamour and sex appeal, ultimately leads to issues such as physical and mental harassment, favoritism, ageism, immoral behavior etc. Such issues not only prove harmful for women working in the media, but also negatively affect the public perception of women working in the media. Patriarchy, as a point of view, creates an environment where women are subjugated into being voiceless entities, and their physical attributes are presented sexually in an attempt to objectify them. Women themselves are mostly engulfed in this process and agree upon such objectivity at the expense of their cerebral capacities. This research touches upon the importance of being valued for one's intellectual abilities and can help reduce the number of immoral activities surrounding media.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend the following (1) women's role in the media (e.g., advertisements, movies, dramas): should get equal weight and importance to men, be non-discriminatory (e.g., patriarchal representation) and eliminate sexual objectification (e.g., stereotyped physical/sexist beautification and its exposure for the audience) of their role; (2) merit and intellectual ability must be attended to while recruiting, contracting, displaying, visualizing and telecasting a role for female artists instead of emphasizing discriminatory, sexist, objectified or racist glorification; (3) discrimination in terms of payment for female artists requires great attention. A non-discriminatory payment structure is required for female artists with pay protection, wage equivalence and timely payment as equal to male artists; and (4) media representative bodies (e.g., actors', directors', producers' association), in affiliation with the government representative(s) and consumers, may initiate campaigns, road shows, and social awareness programs to build a non-discriminatory and gender-supportive media industry and consumer culture.

Data availability statement

The data used for the research was described in the article.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Noshin Yeasmin: Writing – original draft, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Morsheda Akter Heme:** Writing – original draft, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Maherun Nahar Mumu:** Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Taufiq-E-Ahmed Shovo:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology. **Rina Aktar:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. **Hamalna Nizam:** Writing – review & editing. **Md. Tanvir Hossain:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. **Tunvir Ahamed Shohel:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Software, Resources, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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