

APPRAISAL OF GENDER CONTENT IN THE ADVERTISING SYLLABI OF MASS COMMUNICATION COURSES

A Case for Gendered and Inclusive Curricula

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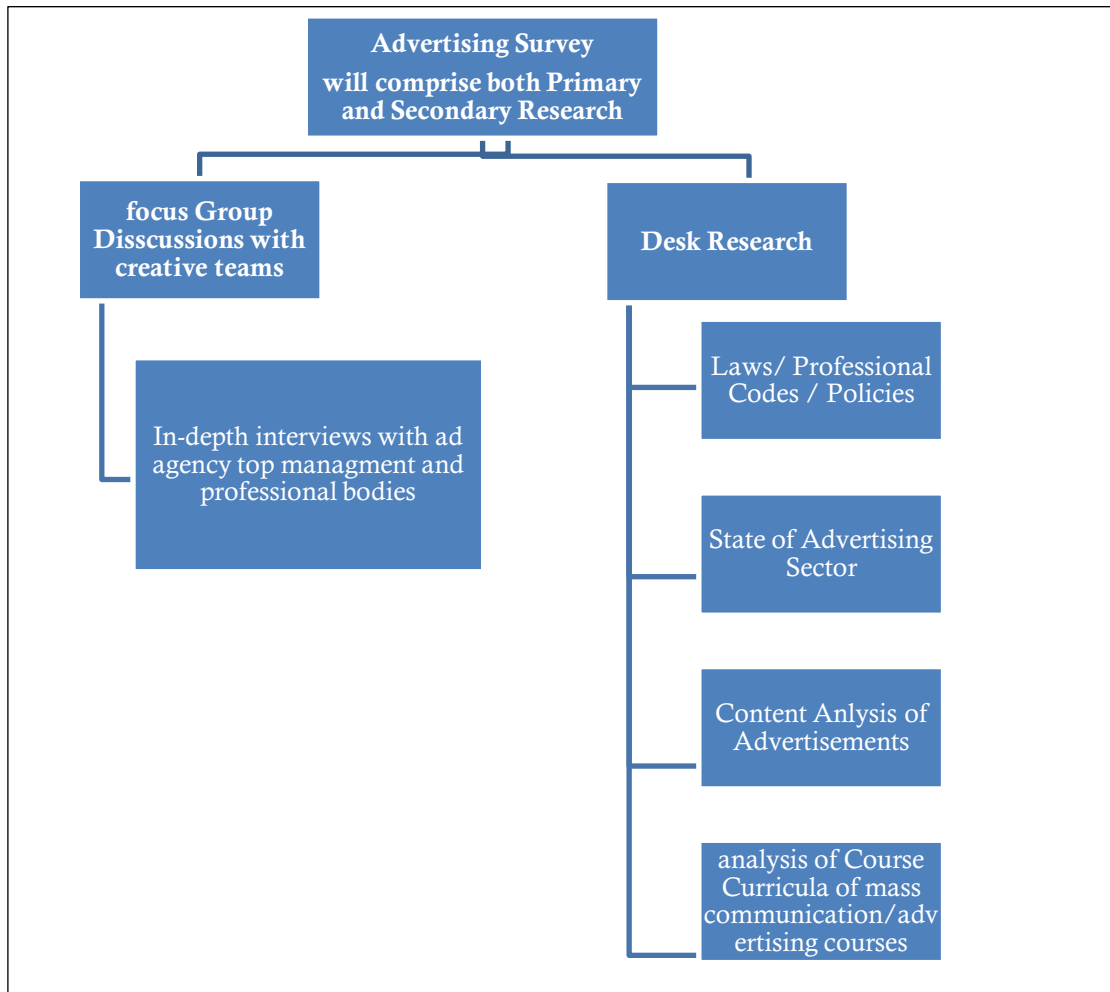
Abstract

Insensitive gender reporting in news media and content creation in promotional media has been an issue of concern for long. Insensitivity in reporting on issues relating to women and derogatory portrayal of woman cuts across various genres of media, viz., news, entertainment and advertising. With hundreds of universities in India now imparting professional education in mass communication, the area of inquiry of the current research paper was to see the prevalence or absence of gender content in the course curriculum of mass communication, especially advertising, which is often criticized for inappropriate and indecent portrayal of women in its narrative. The inclusion of mass communication as a subject of study at the university level in India began soon after independence in a couple of universities. In 1965, the Government of India set up the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) to impart professional training in journalism and mass communication. A postgraduate diploma course in Advertising & Public Relations began at IIMC in 1981. Today over 300 universities and institutions both in the public and private domain impart professional courses in advertising as a part of mass communication curriculum and also as exclusive courses in advertising at undergraduate and post graduate levels. The findings of the research vindicate the research hypothesis that mass communication teaching in India in general does not include gender discourse and gender sensitization to students.

Keywords: Advertising, Course curricula, Gender, Portrayal

Background of the study

The current study is a sub-set of the research project funded by the ICSSR on the subject: Portrayal of Women: An Empirical Study of Advertising Content: *Issues and Concerns for Policy Intervention*. In order to understand the various possible factors behind the portrayal of women in the promotional media, especially advertising, it was decided to look at the entire eco-system from various perspectives, which possibly contribute to a stereotypical and derogatory portrayal of women in the media viz., policies and laws, sociology of the ad sector, the process of campaign making, the codes of professional conduct propounded by industry bodies and the academic training of professionals in advertising at the mass communication schools. The research trajectory broadly included as reflected in the flow chart below.



The current paper enquires specifically into the course curricula of advertising in the mass communication syllabi taught at various universities and institutes, both in the public and private domains in India.

Introduction

Media is often criticised for being sensational in its discourse about people and events. Media is especially insensitive to gender reporting. Discrimination of women workers at work place and a general lack of gender sensitive environment in media institutions, including the advertising sector is also a known fact. The eruption of the #MeToo Movement in India in mid-2018 brought to light names of some known persons from the media including advertising sector, reflecting that a lot needs to be addressed to provide a gender sensitive environment to women. Although many women join the profession as reporters, desk writers, creative writers and advertising executives, but only a miniscule break the glass ceiling. There are hardly any women editors in the over one hundred thousand newspapers and scores

of news channels in India. Similarly, in the advertising sector, only one woman heads a global agency at the time of the field survey in October 2018. One does however, find some woman as branch heads and as creative and account servicing heads. There has been an increasing concern on the need for orienting media professionals in gender sensitive reporting and content creation. The best place to sensitize young entrants to the profession can be the schools of mass communication that impart professional training to thousands of students year after year. The moot question however is are our course curricula gendered?

Media a non-accredited profession

Media sector is probably the only profession in which one does not necessarily need a degree or professional training to enter the field. The people joining media and related sector such as advertising and public relations do not need accreditation as other professions like finance, legal and medical professions, among others. The baptism as they say happens on the job. In the past, one has seen some discourse in the public domain on the state of journalism and mass communication education in India¹. However, there probably has been none on the advertising *per se*, which is an important subset of mass communication.

Teaching Mass communication in India

There are over 300 universities and institutions imparting teaching and professional training in mass communication including advertising. Advertising as an exclusive area of study was included by the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) when it started a one year post graduate diploma (PGD) in Advertising and Public relations in 1981, which went on to become one of its most popular courses that set the benchmark for future courses of study elsewhere in the country. The pass-outs from the IIMC hold leadership positions in top agencies in the country. Advertising is also taught as a part of journalism curricula as a full paper or an elective across all courses in most universities and institutes of higher learning. Besides, thousands of students, who do their MBA in India, also get exposure to the promotional media including advertising in their course curricula. What is the course content of these professional courses? Is there a course or module on gender or gender studies in the syllabi? What are the views of media faculty on this? In this paper an effort has been made to content analyse the course curricula of select syllabi to enquire into the subject and map the views of select media teachers on the need for a gendered syllabus.

¹ http://cmsindia.org/sites/default/files/Aug_Monograph_Vision-&-Communication_for-web.pdf.

Mass communication teaching in India

Institute/ University/ College	No
Number Central University	25
State University	81
Private University	29
Distance Learning	54
Private Institutes	48
Colleges affiliated to university	46
Deemed University	10
Media owned institute	11
TOTAL	310

Source:http://cmsindia.org/sites/default/files/Aug_Monograph_Vision-&-Communication_for-web.pdf2

Research hypothesis

The course curricula in mass communication in general and advertising in particular are not gendered and inclusive across public and private universities and institutions of higher learning in India.

Research Universe, Sample and Research method

The universe for the study comprised all the universities and institutions of higher learning engaged in the imparting of mass communication teaching. Sixty-four (64) courses across 31 universities and institutions were shortlisted through the purposive sampling method to represent central and state universities, both regular and open, private universities and institutions of higher learning. The two exclusive journalism and mass communication universities were also included in the sample viz., the Makhanlal Chaturvedi University of Journalism and Mass Communication in Bhopal, MP, with a campus in the neighbouring state of UP and the Kushabhau Thakre University in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. The third exclusive university for Journalism, namely, the Hardeo Joshi University created in 2012 at Jaipur, Rajasthan, however was merged with the department of journalism at the Rajasthan University in 2016. With the Congress party returning to power in Rajasthan in 2018, the

² Ibid.

university was revived in 2019. As it is still in the process of being set up, we have not included it in our sample.

The sample population of select universities is reflected in the annexure. The syllabi of the sample drawn was accessed on-line from the respective university's or department's website and in many cases from the written documents. Makhanlal Chaturvedi University of Journalism and Mass Communication runs 35 courses on various areas of journalism and mass communication. However, for the purpose of this study only two courses, viz., BBA in Advertising and Marketing and MA in Advertising have been included.

In all, the syllabi of 31 universities and institutions including the 'Model' syllabus from the University Grants Commission (UGC) covering 64 Courses at BA, MA and PGD level have been content-analysed to find whether gender forms a part of teaching in the mass communication syllabi, especially in the advertising course curricula.

The sample also includes some course curricula from select foreign universities (16 courses across seven universities/ institutions), with an aim to draw insights on what is being included or not, on gender in some of the well-known universities as reflected in the annexure.

Why study gender in mass communication?

Mass communication through various media over the years has become all pervasive, reaching out to millions of people cutting across boundaries defined by geography, race, caste, sex and colour. Media, a powerful institution is often criticized for making people think what it would like them to think. An average person knows about the world around her/him through the mass media stimuli. People of various cultures and backgrounds create the mass media content by way of news, entertainment and promotional material including advertising. It is believed that what appears in mass media can have a telling effect on the mass psyche both for good and bad reasons. Media they say is also a good barometer of how a society treats its people. Promotional media, including advertising provide glimpses of popular culture at a given time. Women who comprise half the world population have not received the space and the treatment that they deserve in mass media, both in its narrative and in job situation. If under-representation of women in the media space is a reality on the one hand, in whatever space they get, women often have been portrayed stereotypically and as sex objects, on the other. The content, both words and imagery bears this out across cultures. Jaya Menon and I. Arul Aram (2004) argue, "Journalistic aspect of media too indulges in sexploitation (sexual exploitation), at times even in the mainstream media. When an actress commits suicide, the news is treated without sympathy and sensationalized. A woman is seen as an

object of pleasure and source of sexual scandals. When commercial sex workers are arrested, headlines of most regional language newspapers would read ‘beauties arrested’.³

The long history of struggle to get women their rightful place in the society culminated in the feminist movements in the West in the mid-20th century and later elsewhere including India, that resulted in the setting up of academic programmes in women studies at universities. India also did not lag behind. The 1970s saw it happening in India as well. When this area of study was introduced at the university level, the general perception was and it continues to be so among critics that such courses are of interest to only women activists and feminists and that this area of study would never become mainstream. The moot point however, is whether it is enough to have exclusive schools in gender and women studies, or all the students should be exposed to the gender discourse in various areas of studies cutting across intersectionality covering, culture, race, diversity, positionality and voice in various disciplines encompassing arts, humanities, social science and more so in mass communication, which influences all.

In the USA, the women studies programs grew out of the feminist movement, especially in the 1960s. The San Diego and Cornell universities can be credited for establishing two of the first departments in 1970. It is believed that activists pushed for these programs, along with others such as Chicano or Latino studies and African American studies. Analysts argue that these were established as a corrective to the traditional focus of the white- and male-dominated academy. According to Alice E. Ginsberg, editor of *The Evolution of American Women's studies*, the purpose of these courses has always been “to make visible what has been invisible and to make conscious what has been overlooked or silenced.”⁴

Impact of learning on practice

Every year, thousands of students enrol in mass communication courses at different universities and institutions all over the country. Roughly the same number of students pass out from these universities and enter the workforce, trained in different areas as a Bachelor of this or a Master of that craft. In the course of a few years at the under graduate or post graduate levels, they are exposed to the conceptual framework in mass communication, the various theories and paradigms, besides getting hands-on-skills in reporting, editing, anchoring, copy writing and business management, among others. Therefore, the nature of how these courses are shaped becomes an important issue. Questions about how these courses are formulated, what needs to be taught and who decides the content of the course curriculum

³ Jaya Menon and I. Arul Aram

(2004)http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/18794/9/09_chapter2.pdf

⁴ Diamond, A. (3rd September, 2015) “Making the invisible Visible”, Slate

http://www.slate.com/articles/life/classes/2015/09/women_s_and_gender_studies_class_learn_to_understand_and_recognize_sexism.html. Accessed on 22.12.2018.

becomes an important point of engagement for people who have a stake in it. Realizing the imperative of answering these questions, discussion and debates on it become an integral part of the larger discourse that goes along with reforms in the system.

What one learns at school and higher education system, such as colleges and universities, is shaped by the larger politic of the time [Das: 2004, Altbach: 1993]. That the curricula of what is taught in various colleges and universities is not distant from the society that one lives in and it is more so that what one learns in the educational system is shaped by what the larger social structure thinks is suitable and appropriate for each discipline. As such, the normative of what needs to be taught keeps changing as the larger normative of the society changes. This however, is not the only impetus for bringing about changes in the educational system; there are other forces also that contribute to it as much as the societal context. Professional courses from the field of mass communication are expected to be 'industry oriented', which in other words mean that students who pass out need to know the wherewithal of the profession as she/he enters the industry. Debates within a particular discipline on the matter that concerns the nature of pedagogy and the subject matter are a constant process. In this debate, issues such as emergence of new perspectives, theories, methodology and ideology within disciplines are discussed and debated that result in the shift of paradigm and focus of the particular discipline [Singh: 2004]. Further, the state and the political environment plays an integral role in shaping course curriculum and the nature of the larger education system through different policy recommendation [Altbach: 1993].

Mass Communication in India: UGC, Curricula and Gender

In India, the University Grant Commission and the Ministry of HRD play an important role in shaping the course of higher education in the country. There are other bodies such as the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR), Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID) and many more that are either fully or partially funded by the State, and are constantly engaged in policy research and capacity building programs for the faculty at large. These research centres also form an integral part in shaping how the nature of certain knowledge system changes through their engagement in researches of different nature which in turn shape what the students learn in universities and colleges. Therefore, the education system, especially higher education systems, is constantly going through a process of re-structuring as these different stakeholders come together bringing in certain interest of their own [Das: 2004].

As per the University Grants Commission (UGC), all schools and departments recognized by it have to have Boards of Studies (BoS) for clearing the syllabi periodically. The members of the BoS generally are drawn from among academics of repute and at times also from the industry. The UGC also decides on the student: faculty ratio, subject credits among other

things. It is disheartening to know however, that the UGC has not formally reviewed the mass communication syllabi since 2000-01. In the year 2000, a committee was formed with Professor MR Dua of IIMC as the chair. The committee had a representation from a cross section of universities and across specializations (including the present researcher) which met a few times and finalized the model syllabi in Journalism and Mass communication both at the BA and MA levels.⁵ The syllabi was sent to all the universities by the UGC, which some followed, others might not have. Interestingly there was neither any discussion on the need for including gender studies in the syllabus, nor was it included.

It will not be wrong to assume that the discourse on the necessity of making the course curricula in mass communication including journalism and advertising among other niche areas gender sensitive and inclusive, has been seen in the public domain only in the last one and half decade or so. One can posit that this has been due to the huge proliferation in the electronic media with hundreds of 24x7 television channels in various genre including entertainment and news and the increasing commercialization of the space via advertising, the computer manipulation of images and expanding breadth of the digital media that has brought to focus the objectionable imagery of women into discussion, not only within the academia, but also among the civil society groups.

The setting up of the National Commission for Women at the central and state levels and the passing of laws relating to the indecent portrayal of women in media and the sexual harassment of women at workplace brought the debate on woman imagery centre stage and the need for its correction. A lot of credit need to go to women activist groups and civil society organizations in this regard and UN organizations like the UNESCO that has been spearheading the movement for a gendered media, globally.

On the academic front, the 1990s, besides witnessing a huge spurt in the mass media, especially with the augmentation of television channels, also saw the mushrooming of schools of mass communication in both public and private domains, most of them emphasising on producing young professionals with hands-on-skills in anchoring, news reporting and production. Some media houses also set up their schools. The glamour and glitz of the media world drew many youngsters into the mass media courses who saw it as a ticket to name and fame. Some private universities like the Amity, Manipal and Symbiosis started multiple course at under graduate, postgraduate and diploma levels attracting thousands of

⁵ In 2001 the current author was a member of the UGC committee for Curricula Development Committee (CDC) for Mass Communication. Reflecting back on that the author realized that Gender as an issue did neither came up in the discussion nor was it included in the detailed course curriculum developed for Masters level course. <https://www.ugc.ac.in/oldpdf/modelcurriculum/masscomm.pdf>.

students at their various campuses. The private universities saw such courses as a business opportunity, earning a huge revenue from running such courses. There seemed no serious effort on the part of the new entrants in mass communication schools to debate and discuss syllabus content. For most, it was a ‘cut and paste’ job from the syllabi of well know institutions, who in any case did not have a gendered syllabus. While the industry’s demand was met largely, but a growing debate on the poor quality of education and training at most of the schools continues until today. When one looks at the syllabi of media houses’ driven schools including the Bennet University, there is less emphasis on the theory and more on the hands-on-skills. Gender, in private universities is not an area of academic pursuance.

The central, state and private universities have failed to formulate a common core curriculum to keep pace with the fast-changing media industry (C.S.H.N. Murthy, 2011). Murthy comments, “Media education continues to suffer from poorly designed courses, lack of rigorous contents in theory, practice and research.”⁶ Analysing the gender component in the journalism course curriculum, Eapen (1995) rues, “if ethics could not form a part of journalism curriculum, how can one expect the gender components find a place in it?”⁷ Rakow (2004) has found that the existing journalism curricula reflected the ‘status quo’ in its content and composition. He has argued that reforming the journalism curriculum as gender inclusive, will solve the problems faced by women students, teachers, media content creators and audiences. Reforming the curriculum would have the ultimate effect of changing our systems of communication and eventually, society.⁸

As we look into how the discipline of mass communication came about in India, it is also important to inquire and ask ourselves about the nature of the larger discussion on gender or women at the time. What was the nature of women’s movement and the issue that they were raising? What was the state of some other courses of social science and gender? How was Women’s Studies as a discipline of its own taking shape? Lastly, how were mass

⁶ Murthy, C. S. H. N (2011) “Dilemma of course content and curriculum in Indian journalism education: Theory, practice and research”. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, Issue no. 21. Pp. 24-42. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1337&context=apme>

⁷ Ibid.Eapen (1995).

⁸ Geertsema-Sligh, M. (2014), “Gender Mainstreaming in Journalism Education”, ed. Aimée Vega Montiel, *Media and Gender: A Scholarly Agenda for the Global Alliance on Media and Gender*, France: UNESCO.

https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKEwiZOXgl8zgAhVNeXAKHcuTDqIQFjAAegQIARAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fdigitalcommons.butler.edu%2Fcgi%2Fviewcontent.cgi%3Farticle%3D1073%26context%3Dccom_papers&usg=AOvVaw3gMtm4JMebFZ_QKF8YvPsg&httpsredir=1&article=1073&context=ccom_papers

communication courses affected or not affected by such developments outside of its discipline?

In India the question of women's issue became a point of engagement in academia as the larger women's movement began during the 1970s [Mazumdar: 1994, Chaudhuri: 2002]. Mazumdar argues that women became a point of engagement in politics as well as research and academia during the colonial rule with an objective to justify both social reform or to give a backbone for India's cultural pride. She writes that this however, became redundant in post-independent India, as the need for justification was no longer necessary. This may have in some way led to the side lining of women's issue and with that the increase in gender disparity between men and women. This gap was highlighted in the investigation by the *Committee on the Status of Women in India* and the subsequent report 'Towards Equality' 1975. With this, a new agenda was set up to change the status of women and for that research on women's issue was one area, which received the impetus. A new program for Women's Studies was set up, initiated by the ICSSR, to bring about this change. This went along with several other processes of bringing about change and empowerment as the larger women's movement also went along.

Later, the Education Policy of 1986 and the National Commission on Women's Bill of 1989 gave further grounding to the establishment and institutionalisation on women's issue as fundamental in shaping the educational system of India. It was under such historical processes that the issue of women in specific and gender in general, became part of a critical engagement in the Indian academia. It is under such context that the present situation of advertising and its engagement with gender needs to be conceptualised.

The University Grants Commission developed guidelines for women studies for the 11th Plan (2012-17) defining the expectations as follows:

Academia to develop women's studies as a discipline with a core area of theory in an interdisciplinary framework and as a perspective to transform other disciplines to feminist perspectives.

Planners for understanding women's particular role in the formulation of policy, particularly in establishing a just and secular society in India.

Scholars and activists to make more visible in research and policy the issues raised by women from Dalit, tribal, labouring and minority religious communities.

Policy makers to make more visible and empower women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) as also all public institutions including women in universities and colleges.⁹

From the above-mentioned suggestions, the first one is particularly important here. This is because with virtually no formal advice from the UGC to universities on course curricula in journalism and mass communication, except for a miniscule number of university departments (out of their own efforts) have included gender studies in their mass communication curricula.

State of Advertising Course Curricula in Mass Communication Courses in Universities and Media Institutes in India

Advertising component in mass communication studies

There are over 650 universities, about 35,000 colleges and over 13,000 standalone institutions in India out of which over 300 universities and institutions in both public and private domains teach media and mass communication courses and prepare over 20,000 students each year for the industry. All the various courses, viz., journalism, mass communication, digital media, corporate communication, public relations etc. incorporate some component on advertising. There are also exclusive courses in advertising at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels a number of universities. The mass communication courses are available in major metros, mini metros and various districts where both central and state universities and private institutions are located.

Advertising curriculum in Business schools

Advertising is a part of marketing, therefore business schools while teaching marketing as a core subject, also include advertising in their curriculum. Just to provide a bird's eye view, in 2015-16, B Schools offered 5,20,000 seats in MBA courses, compared to 3, 60,000 in 2011-12.¹⁰ At a rough estimate, over 20,000 mass communication students and a couple of lakhs of MBA students get exposure in advertising curriculum each year.

Content analysis of Curricula

As brought out above, 31 out of 300 universities across the country that offer courses on the above mentioned discipline were shortlisted in the sample. Within these 31 Universities, 64 different course curricula were taken up for analysis. The sample population also included the 'model' course curriculum prepared by the UGC in 2001, which was circulated to all

⁹ https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/8004557_WS-Guidelines_XII-Plan_Revised-Final.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.assochem.org/newsdetail.php?id=565>

universities teaching mass communication courses. The selection of the sample was through purposive sampling to cover universities both public funded and private and mass communication institutions. The curricula were accessed from either the university websites or hard copies requested from faculties. A limitation of this analysis may be that there might be some incongruence between what is reflected in the course curriculum and what is actually taught by the faculty.

The examination of 64 different courses, taught in 31 different universities and institutions around the country revealed a common problem that stands out unambiguously, i.e. the near absence of gendered syllabi. The UGC prepared syllabus also is not gendered and inclusive. In other words, the syllabi in most cases are neither inclusive nor gender-sensitive across a majority of universities and institutes of higher learning both in the public and private domains. Of the 64 different courses examined, only nine courses in eight different universities have gender as a course of study within the mass communication course curriculum. Here it is included either as an exclusive paper or as a separate elective or compulsory paper and in some cases as a sub-unit of some other courses. For instance, the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) has it in the curricula of their PG diploma course on Advertising and Public Relations as “Development, Gender Issues and Women Empowerment”. Reading from how the course is titled, there seems to be an association of different concepts such as gender with that of development and empowerment. This speaks of the contemporary discourse within the larger academia where there is a conscious effort to bring together the conceptual framework of theory and practice together [Singh: 2004, Das: 2004]. Besides this, the course also has a section on ‘Advertising-Law and Ethics’, where the issues of women’s portrayal are expected to be dealt with by the concerned faculty. Further, one finds an inclusion of gender in the training course that IIMC offers for the Indian Information Services (IIS) Officers- Grade I. This training programme includes a workshop on gender sensitisation along with a gender oriented course curriculum. Delhi School of Journalism has a section titled “Gender in Media” as part of its 5-year integrated course on journalism. Sharda University offers a paper on “Media and Diversity: Race, Gender, Religion, Ethnic and Class” as a part of the MA course in Journalism and Mass Communication. Sikkim Manipal University has a paper on “Ethics in Advertising” as a part of its MBA course in Marketing.

In contrast to this, some universities have incorporated Gender in the course curriculum more in terms of theoretical engagement. For instance, the St. Xavier’s College, Kolkata offers a BA course on Mass Communication and Videography where gender is a part of a paper titled “Paradigm and Practices”. Here the engagement seems to be more in terms of theory because the theory of feminism is one part of the course along with other theories. Another such case is of the Khawja Moinuddin Chishti Urdu Arabic Farsi University, Lucknow, where under

the BA course in Journalism and Mass Communication a paper titled “Gender Studies” forms part of the curriculum. The Masters program at the Indraprastha University in Delhi has a module on gender studies, that includes feminist theory of cinema and various codes of ethics by professional bodies including ASCI. The difference in the structuring of these courses may be because of the level in which the courses are introduced. Therefore, for those courses at the undergraduate level, the choice is a more towards a theoretical engagement for an introductory course. In contrast to this, at the Masters level of higher study, the focus is on the mode of engagement through the intersectionality of gender as a concept and its practical relevance along with a theory. At this level, the assumption is that some basic introduction about gender as a concept has already been taught at the undergraduate level and that the need for an understanding that is grounded in the application of these concepts is needed at the Master’s level. This may however not always work in the favour of students, as many students at the Masters level come from varying stream of science and arts and not necessarily from mass communication.

Other than these handful of courses that offer gender as a part of their courses, a majority of the course curricula examined reflected a complete absence of gender content. This in a way is indicative of the larger structural problem of the discipline where gender and the critical engagement of a long feminist scholarship does not form part of the discipline. This absence of it is even more astonishing if it is contextualised in relation to other disciplines of social sciences such as sociology, where engagement with issues concerning women in India began a few decades ago, sometime roughly around the 1980s [Chaudhuri: 2002]. This although was late in comparison to the west, where feminist critique has been part of the larger academia for a while. It is now almost a given in most course of social sciences, say sociology, that gender is a component that cannot be ignored and therefore forms part of each course. In some cases, it is taught and engaged with as a separate course in itself. This change has a close relation with the institutionalisation of women studies and gender studies as a separate discipline in many of the Indian universities. Further, all of these changes had a dialectical relation with the larger social current where a strong uprising among the general mass of Indian society on the issue of gender equality is slowly gaining momentum in the public and the private sphere as well, which thereby influences the nature of academic as well. This can be observed by the rise in the number of political assertions made by women and men all over the country against factors that create inequality and unsafe environment for women, which are rooted in the gendered social norms. These social movements in turn have shaped the nature of research in social sciences and have resulted in the emergence of new perspectives and ways of understanding gender in various perspectives.

Interestingly, despite the absence of gender in course curricula, portrayal of women in advertising is quite a popular area of research among students and academic.

Faculty interface

During a field visit, a round table for discussing and deliberating on the need for including gender discourse in mass communication syllabi was convened in Lucknow in the month of October 2018. There was a sizable representation from the mass communication faculty from various state and private universities. Suggestions were also sought from among a cross section of media academics by mail. The academics included both men and women. At the end of the paper, an indicative course curriculum with objectives and thrust areas has been recommended, at the KhawjaMoinuddin Chishti Urdu Arabic Farsi University, Lucknow, based on the input from over 25 academics from a number of universities, both in the public and private domains. A few observations and suggestions during the round table are quite noteworthy. Some Verbatim:

“It is common to see gender discrimination at the campus. It will be a good beginning to include gender studies, to begin with”.

“How gender is reflected within the media platforms should be an area of study.”

“There need to be role reversals for women working in the media by giving them a chance in the ‘hard’ story segments like sports and crime based shows and not just soft desks”.

The syllabus must include, “Male gaze, equality of sexes, sexual harassment of women at work place based on Vishaka judgement guidelines, how the portrayal of women has changed in ads over a period of time.”

To include “contemporary gender discourse”

“The course must include “empowerment” what it means when it comes to women empowerment”

“For Pedagogy one could also think in terms of organising workshops”.

“Every communicator before he/she enters the field of Journalism and Mass communication should understand the nuances of balancing gender reportage considering its impact on our value system and society as such”.

“Gender related variables as per sustainable development goals (SDG) need to be included in the curriculum”.

Gender reflection in the course curricula of international universities

As our analysis of courses in mass communication, especially in the advertising courses in India was not encouraging, it was decided to look at some top rung communication courses in the US and elsewhere to see where the Indian curricula were missing. For this purpose, as a part of the exercise, 16 courses on Marketing, Communication, Journalism and Media were selected from the seven top universities. Here also what came as a big surprise was that most of these courses in the high ranking universities of the world, gender curriculum was absent as a separate paper, but of the 16 courses, 4 of them had modules as sub sets of larger courses of study that were wholly or partially dedicated to the understanding the gender dynamic as part of the discipline. These included syllabi from the Columbia University, Yale University, University of California (Berkeley) and the London School of Economic and Political Science. The Master of Science in Strategic Communication offered by Columbia University has a module titled “Gender and Communication at work place”. Further, in the course description it said, *“Gender and Communication in the Workplace offers professionals across sectors and industries the knowledge and skills needed to identify the social and linguistic practices enacted at work, and the opportunity to advance the interests of those who run up against barriers to advancement as a result of prejudice and stereotyping.”* With this, one could make out how the course plans to shape a different nature of engagement than what is the larger social norm. Similarly, Yale offers an MBA course where gender forms a part of a paper titled “Diversity and the Corporation”. The course outline of this paper refers to how in the recent years, the corporate world has been plagued with scandals of sexual misconduct and how it is “struggling to establish business cultures that are diverse and inclusive”. Now, acknowledging that it mentioned how the course, is situated within this context *“...will explore the intersection of race and gender with corporate law, governance, and theory.”*

The MA in Journalism offered by the University of California, Berkeley has a section titled “Gender and Journalism”. Here the outline of the course states the evident gap within the society based on one’s gender. Keeping that in mind, it states that the objective of such a course on gender and journalism would be to bridge that gap and this is believed to achieve by providing *“...a classroom where we can reflect together on the best approaches to covering, and personally thriving, amidst the vast social changes in these areas”*. Finally, from the sample of foreign universities, the London School of Economics and Political Science offers a short term course on International Journalism and Society where a paper is titled “News, Journalism and Gender”. Other than these course, it was observed that most of the courses did not have any mention on gender. A study by the Gender in Media Education (GIME) looked into 25 institutions in 13 countries from October 2009 to April 2010 that

revealed the same result. Key findings included that gender was missing from course materials and gender was missing from assessments of student and faculty work.¹¹

Limitation of the Study

The current exercise is largely based on examining the curriculum put up by various universities on their websites. In most cases detailed PDF files have been uploaded, but in others only outlines, where a detailed examination of the curriculum is lacking. About 25% syllabi were also analysed from the hard copies. It might also so happen that, despite an overt absence of gender in the course curriculum, the classroom engagement from both the teachers and students may include a discourse on gender to contextualize a concept or when tracking media discourse or deconstructing ad campaigns, the area is covered. The reverse might also be true in some cases, whereby the syllabus may contain various areas in gender studies, but these may not either be taken fully or neglected altogether.

Recommendations

Some of the universities in India have a separate degree courses on gender studies, women or sexuality. Interestingly in courses relating to women studies, there is often a paper or component on *gender and mass media*, which looks at the gender perspectives, besides the “*Influence of media, patriarchy in operation, use of feminist methods for critiquing media representation*”, (Pondicherry University). ¹²In an MA in Gender studies, there is full paper on Gender, Culture and Media, which includes “*media and stereotyping, gender discourse, perspectives on feminism: western and non-western* (Jamia Millia Islamia); in yet another MA in women studies, there is full paper on Gender and Media, which besides news media’s construct of gender also has a full module on gender in the ‘paid ‘ media space like advertising: “*Critical analysis of Gender in Magazines and Newspapers, advertising and the image of women, women’s magazines, politics of paid news*” (Goa university). The courses in sociology in most cases also have exclusive paper on Gender and media. These courses have academics who are experts in their area of scholarship. The universities that have both mass communication departments and sociology or women studies departments would not suffer a faculty resource crunch if this area of study were to be included in the mass communication syllabi. Therefore, UGCs & Universities can consider including gender studies courses in mass communication in general or various niche areas like advertising, PR, digital media, integrated marketing communication can consider including a compulsory paper in gender studies/gender and media with a view to sensitize future communication professionals on gender and related issues. The faculty can easily be sourced from the departments of sociology and women studies. The Ministry of Human Resource Development and the

¹¹ Media and gender: a scholarly agenda for the Global Alliance on Media and Gender By UNESCO, International Association for Media and Communication Research, , 2014, p.85.

¹² <http://www.pondiuni.edu.in/sites/default/files/downloads/pgdiploma-womemstudies.pdf>

University Grants Commission (UGC) can consider making it mandatory for all the universities and institutions in both public and private domains to have gender related curriculum in various courses in media and mass communication.

Suggestion for a gender based paper for inclusion in mass communication syllabi in India (Thrust areas):

To introduce relevant theories (feminist, standpoint, intersectionality, social justice et al) and select women-centric literature to make students understand women perspectives, struggles, issues and movements- global and Indian.

- To introduce social and cultural construct of gender
- To sensitize students on issues and concerns relating to women including patriarchy, culture and their concomitant impact (gender discrimination and disparities)
- Conceptual framework of Gender, Power, and Representation (in media, popular culture, and the arts, and assess the effects of these representations)
- Gender Rights and Challenges (various policies and laws and their implementation mechanism, including the Indecent portrayal of women in media, 1986 and the sexual harassment of women at workplace (prevention), 2013)
- Gender related variables as per sustainable development goals (SDG)
- To introduce through case study method, the manifestation of gender insensitivity in media content, including advertising both at overt and subtle levels.
- To introduce various laws against portrayal of women, sexual harassment at workplace and the right to equality under the Constitution
- To introduce various codes of conduct by professional bodies

Pedagogy

Conceptual framework, Review of literature, Classroom discussions, gender workshops, Content analysis and deconstruction of media content, advertising campaigns, case studies, term and research papers by students etc. besides an active interface of academia with the industry.

Conclusion

The research, a small effort on our part has thrown some findings and insights, if taken up seriously and on a priority basis at the policy level can be a game changer in bringing about the desired change in the mass communication curricula.

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