

Representation of LGBT Community in Web Series: A Study Of Netflix

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Abstract:

This LGBTQ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. The term LGBT is in use since the 1990s, the term is an adaptation of the term LGB, which replaced the term *gay* in reference to the LGBT community beginning in the mid-to-late 1980s. Many activists believed that the term *gay community* did not accurately represent all those to whom it referred.

Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code is a section of the Indian Penal Code introduced in 1861 during the British rule of India. Modelled on the Buggery Act of 1533, it makes sexual activities "against the order of nature" illegal. On 6 September 2018, the Supreme Court of India ruled that the application of Section 377 to consensual homosexual sex between adults was unconstitutional, "irrational, indefensible and manifestly arbitrary", but that Section 377 remains in force relating to sex with minors, non-consensual sexual acts, and bestiality.

Time and again media have played role in creating awareness about the concerns related to the community. Many films, television shows, and OTT platforms have also shown content related to the LGBT.

In recent times with majority of viewers have shifted to OTT platforms and one can witness that with benefits of OTT it has become easy for content producers to highlight any topic of interest and relevance. Many series on famous OTT platforms are presenting LGBT relations undisguisedly. So that society also accept the society and it may create awareness in the mind of the viewers.

The study aims to find out the representation of LGBT on Netflix and their influence on society. This will be an exploratory research. The content analysis of web series on Netflix will be done to understand the type of content shown in web series and in-depth interviews will be conducted to understand the influence of such content on the LGBT community members.

Keywords- LGBT, NETFLIX, web series, OTT, new media.

I. INTRODUCTION

This LGBT is an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation, preference or gender identity. These communities proudly celebrate pride, diversity, individuality, and sexuality. The term pride is used to express the LGBT community's identity and collective strength. Pride parades provide both a prime example of the use and a demonstration of the general meaning of the term. Following is a detailed explanation of each term in LGBT -

Lesbian- a female who is sexually, romantically and physically attracted to other females.

Gay- a male who is sexually, romantically and physically attracted to other males.

Bisexual – a bisexual person is some who is sexually, romantically and physically attracted to both males and females.

Transgender - people whose gender identity differs from what is generally associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

The last 3 years in India have seen the massive growth of Over-the-top (OTT) platforms for entertainment purposes. The viewership has shifted from televisions to online portals for watching movies or series. These OTT platforms provide a plethora of options and genres to choose from and give the viewers the benefit of watching anything, anytime and from anywhere. Another major change

that happened in India in recent time was the decriminalization of Article 377. On 6th September'18, the Supreme Court of India gave the historic verdict of decriminalization of Article 377 of Indian Penal Code which earlier considered gay sex as a criminal offence in India. The Indian LGBT community was the happiest that day who fought for so long to prove that love is not gender biased.

Among the many kinds of shows and movies on the OTT platforms, there are some whose storyline revolve around the LGBT community. Be it their representation, acceptance or rejection, there are many series and movie on Netflix which have characters from the LGBT community. Media has always played vital role in spreading any social cause. The frequency of any topic raised through social media directly affects its acknowledgment among the citizens.

Now the question arises whether the representation of the LGBT community on the OTT platform has impacted the Indian viewers in any way or not?

2. REVIEW OF LITRATURE

Paradoxes of visibility': Lesbian and gay parents in the Australian print media

Damien W Riggs

Jindal Global Law Review 4 (1), 201-218, 2012

Damien W Riggs in his study in 2012 concluded "As media is increasingly representing lesbian and

gay parents, with this comes into the picture what Gamson terms ‘paradoxes of visibility’. The increase in representation means that gay and lesbian headed families can see themselves being portrayed in the social realm. Also such representation signifies increasing acceptance such families. Looking at the other side of the coin, the representation of gay and lesbian parents is prone towards normativity, sensationalism and potential misrepresentation. This article tries to look into this paradox by going through a sample of articles taken from popular Australian magazines featuring gay and lesbian parents.”

The presented analysis suggests that normativity dominate across all representations examined, occurring especially through:

- 1) The evocation of ‘loving families’ to account for lesbian-and gay-headed families in highly normative ways,
- 2) An emphasis upon biological relatedness to the exclusion of all other family forms,
- 3) A failure to recognize the racial and class privilege of white middle-class lesbian and gay parents, and
- 4) A primary focus upon coupled parents. This article suggests that while the appearance of the articles analyzed is positive for what it potentially signifies about public acceptance and the intelligibility of lesbian and gay parents, the articles function to exclude as much as they include.

Making diversity conform? An intersectional, longitudinal analysis of LGBT-specific mainstream media advertisements

Ana-Isabel Nölke

Journal of homosexuality 65 (2), 224-255, 2018

This study explains an intersectional analysis of accurate LGBT portrayals in mainstream advertising from 2009-2015. The analysis gives observations of the invisibility of the LGBT community over a period of social change. Using a new ad format, advertisers move away from hyper sexualization, towards real individual stories of families and love. Nevertheless, the analysis points out how the deletion of multiply marginalized groups in mainstream advertising continues to preserve a heteronormative, domesticized version of “gayness” and discusses the adverse effects that lie herein. It is proposed that non-LGBT consumers are the underlying target group of LGBT-explicit advertising, causing non-target market effects that alienate large parts of the LGBT community despite their undisguised inclusion.

3.

Beyond the pink curtain. Everyday life of LGBT people in Eastern Europe

IOUTWE COME

The idea of this book was born in the Intimate/Sexual Citizenship conference in October 2005 in Ljubljana where scholars focusing on the

lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in post-socialist Eastern Europe were gathered to discuss the everyday experiences of LGBT people regarding the functioning of political, social and cultural boundaries that separate the “good heterosexual citizen” from the rest. The 21 articles of this volume illustrate the increasingly evident ways of LGBT existence being specifically characteristic to Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, East-Germany, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

4.

Perspectives of LGBTQ emerging adults on the depiction and impact of LGBTQ media representation

Lauren B McInroy, Shelley L Craig

Journal of Youth Studies 20 (1), 32-46, 2017

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people have been increasingly represented in traditional media over the past two decades. However, research had not properly focused on the content of contemporary representations, how such depictions impact LGBT young people, or how the experiences of young people are affected by the present context characterized by the increasing prevalence of new media. Results indicate that while traditional media creates a common dialogue and validates identity, it continues to represent LGBT people as one-dimensional and stereotypical,

limits and ignores LGBT young people’s perceptions of their future trajectories and offers no opportunities for critique. In contrast, emerging new media offers important, new, and valued spaces for creativity and discussion.

5.

Bisexuality, mental health, and media representation

Hannah J Johnson

Journal of Bisexuality 16 (3), 378-396, 2016

There is a mental health crisis in the bisexual community, and though the issues of mental health and media representation are analyzed separately in bisexual literature, they are rarely put side by side. Media such as film, television and music often contribute to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and stigmas about people who are bisexual. How do these issues contribute to the high rates of anxiety, depression and suicide among individuals who are bisexual? What issues do individuals who are bisexual face when they choose to seek help? This research project contributes to bisexual literature by drawing connections between media representation and mental health by firstly checking existing literature on bisexual issues such as bisexual erasure, biphobia, media representation, and mental health, and secondly discussing the results of an online survey to determine how other people who identify as bisexual feel about media

representation and its relationship to the mental health crisis in the bisexual community.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Objectives of the Study: -

- To study the portrayal of LGBT characters in web series.
- To find the influence of content on viewers
- To find out the effect of web series on the community members.

3.2 Hypotheses of the Study

The hypotheses of the study are proposed on the objectives and literature review.

The experimental methodology was chosen using different statistical and methods to test the hypotheses.

The formulation of the hypotheses is as follows:

Hypothesis

H1₀ The portrayal is negative in web series. (Null Hypothesis)

H1_a The portrayal is positive in web series. (Alternate Hypothesis)

H2₀ The content has not influenced the viewers. (Null Hypothesis)

H2_a The content has influenced the viewers. (Alternate Hypothesis)

H3₀ The effect is negative on community members. (Null Hypothesis)

H3_a The effect is positive on community members. (Alternate Hypothesis)

3.3 Research Techniques:

For the respective research, there will be two sources for primary data. The first sources is taking in depth interviews from various community members where they have to answer some of the questions. The second source is the content analysis of Netflix show 13 Reasons Why based on portrayal, appearance and story line.

The interviews have to be done because this will provide the real experiences of the community members which is required for the research.

Content analysis will help in getting the portrayal of the community on OTT platforms.

4. Data Collection

4.1 In-depth

Ques. 1 What is your take on the representation of LGBT community on Netflix shows and are they really having impact on society?

Answer 1 - So there is lack of representation, but you can't disregard shows like queer eye as well.

There is always them playing in stereotyped roles such as the best friend. Big mouth, for me gives the best representation and explains sexuality well.

Indian shows mai toh kuch nahi hai. Literally. We need India to make their audience aware. And it becomes a special issue if it's on the LGBT community.

They ask me if I like women, I say yes. Then they say are you sure I say yes. Sometimes they go like have you ever been with anyone. Sometimes I end

up going out with them and sometimes they get disgusted from the fact that I am gay and stop talking to me.

Answer 2 – I was in a lot of confusion before I came out even to myself. One day my friend recommended me to watch a LGBT+ show which she has already watched, after watching that show that I realized that how much I can relate to the character and I am indeed a lesbian. I was bit hesitant to talk to anybody about that, but I wanted to express what I was feeling so I talked to my friend who recommended me to watch that show in hope that maybe she will be able to understand and surprisingly she did in a beautiful way and helped me to see my own reflection through the spectrum. She is not a person who belongs to LGBT community but with the help of that show she understood my feelings and my ways. So yes I believe that these types of shows do make great positive change in the thinking of many people out there and help them to understand people from my community.

Answer 3 - I don't really watch Netflix zyada so I don't know how much I'll be able to help you out here but from whatever I know, representing the LGBT community in media plays a big role. Depends na like if you represent it the stereotypical way then it's going to have a negative impact and increase homophobia bit if there's a true representation, which normalizes in a sense or

teaches people to be accepting of people who identify as a part of this community, it can help a lot Like okay see I don't know if you've seen it or not but Ruby Rose in that was my calling that helped me a lot in realizing that I was infect bisexual.

Analysis of responses on representation:

Anonymous 1 has said that the representation is not accurate. These shows are just presenting the community in stereotyped ways as a best friend or some supporting roles. They aren't focusing on any LGBT character in lime light in India. Our country is lagging far behind in the acceptance of the LGBT community. Plus, people start to ignore the LGBT members once they come to know about their identity.

Anonymous 2 has expressed how he came out to himself about being gay. Contradicting to Anonymous 1 answer in the case of Anonymous 2, his friend actually respected and accepted his feelings really well. He also agreed with the fact that if a show is made positively representing LGBT community, it can bring positive changes in the society as well.

Anonymous 3 believes that if the representation is in a correct way, consequences will also be correct. If the representation is in a wrong way the consequences will also be wrong.

4.2 Content analysis of Netflix show 13 Reasons

Why

The show revolves around the suicide of the protagonist Hannah Baker and the 13 reasons behind her suicide.

The analysis has been done based on the following criteria –

1). Portrayal – There are 5 characters representing the LGBT community namely-

Tony Padila – a gay character whose identity is known to people, shown with a positive and helpful personality.

Montgomery de la Cruz – another gay character but in a negative role whose identity is not known to people. He deliberately does something or another to make people believe that he is straight.

Courteny Crimson – a lesbian character whose identity is not known to people.

Todd Crimson and Steve Crimson – Both are the fathers of Courteny. Their identity is known to people, both of them are shown as successful businessmen.

2). Appearance –

Tony Padila – a regular muscular man who likes gyming and cars. He works in a garage and also has been shown in some fighting scenes also in the show. He is not represented as a typical gay character who is soft and afraid of coming out to people, rather he is a strong personality who is confident enough to let people know that he is gay.

Montgomery de la Cruz – he plays sports and is also a member of the school's rugby team. Contrary to Tony's character he is not so confident about revealing his personality to others.

Courteny Crimson – a small height, shy and reserved girl who is not very confident to talk to people because her fathers are also gay.

Todd Crimson and Steve Crimson – adopted Courtney and took good care of her. Don't look gay by appearance, shown as muscular gentlemen who proudly accept that yet are gay.

3). Story line – All the 5 characters are in the supporting role which somehow shows less importance given to their roles. 3 of them are portrayed as confident LGBT people who have no shame in accepting their identity and proudly lead their lives, while the other 2 don't want to reveal their identities due to societal pressures, stereotypes or other biased factors.

CONCLUSION

The survey showed what is really happening in the real world with the LGBT community. All three of the interviews provided different experiences, aspects and perspectives. They also helped in understanding what are the things and constraints that actually force the people from the LGBT community to disclose their identity. The show 13 Reasons Why too had the LGBT community members in the supporting role only and not in the

mainstream, which directly or indirectly shows that those characters aren't of much importance.

All the 3 answers had mixed responses, some of them were treated like normal people while others were ignored when they disclosed their identities. In India we still lack the acceptance of the LGBT community, we don't want to accept them even after the Supreme Court's approval on the same issue because of our rigid cultures and beliefs. Indian shows still don't have gay characters because they don't think that those characters would be accepted across the country. The research also helped in understanding that how these shows helps the person to understand what they exactly are.

Internationally, still there are shows being made with gay characters, be them in supporting roles or in the main roles. In India people are still thinking that it is a disease or something, they are not accepting that there is something like LGBT present in the society and is a part of the society.

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