

**A Dissertation on**  
**IMPACT OF POPULAR CULTURE ON SOCIETY AND CONTEMPORARY**  
**ISSUES**

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of**  
**BA Journalism & Mass Communication program of**  
**Navrachana University, Vadodara**  
**during the academic session 2018-2021**

**By**  
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## *Certificate*

*Awarded*  
*to*  
**AASTHA SHAH**

*This is to certify that the dissertation titled ‘Impact of Popular culture on society and contemporary issues’ has been submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirement of the*

*Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Mass Communication program of*

*Navrachana University, Vadodara.*

## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation titled, '**Impact of Popular culture on society and contemporary issues**'

prepared and submitted by

**AASTHA SHAH**

of Navrachana University, Vadodara

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Mass Communication program is hereby accepted.

Place: Vadodara

Date: 01-05-2021

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Project Supervisor

**Accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Mass Communication.**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation titled '**Impact of Popular culture on society  
and contemporary issues**'

is an original work prepared and written by me, under the guidance of Professor Varsha Narayan,  
Assistant Professor, Journalism and Mass Communication program, Navrachana University in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Mass  
Communication.

This thesis or any other part of it has not been submitted to any other University for the award of other  
degree or diploma.

Date: 01- 05. 2021

Place: Vadodara



AASTHA SHAH

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**AASTHA SHAH**

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# **IMPACT OF POPULAR CULTURE ON SOCIETY AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES**

**Aastha Shah**

## **Abstract**

Popular culture refers to anything and everything that holds prominence over the society during a given period of time. The following study attempts to analyse and evaluate the importance, impact and prominence of rising influence pop culture on our society. Since ages, pop culture has revolutionized the life of many people, captivating a great amount of attention from industries as well as academia. In order to understand how researchers have adopted theories, used research constructs, and developed conceptual frameworks in their studies, a systematic and structured literature review based on ten to fifteen leading online academic databases was conducted. In addition, an online survey has been conducted to analyze the usage, efficiency and growing trends of pop culture. In the end, a collective observation has been presented, comprising both pros and cons of rising pop culture influence. A collection of theories and constructs adopted in these articles has also been summarized for easy reference and comprehension of extant research results.

**Key words:** Popular culture, Influence of pop culture on society, pop culture and youth, pop culture and feminism, contemporary issues and pop culture, pop culture and cinema



## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Popular culture is anything and everything that is dominant or prevalent in a society during a point of time. It could range from practices, beliefs, trends to people. A concept heavily influenced in today's world by mass media, this collection of ideas floods the everyday lives of people in a given society. The great challenge of defining popular culture is reflected in the diverse ways that scholars have conceptualized it for analysis. Raymond Williams, in his book, 'Culture and Society' (2014) has identified four common uses of the term "popular", one which is well liked by many people, one which is deemed unworthy or inferior, work deliberately seeking to win favour with people, and forms of culture made by people for themselves. According to Dustin Kidd, 'Popular culture is the set of practices, beliefs, and objects that embody the most broadly shared meanings of a social system. It includes media objects, entertainment and leisure, fashion and trends, and linguistic conventions, among other things. Popular culture is usually associated with either mass culture or folk culture, and differentiated from high culture and various institutional cultures' (Kidd, 2017). Different definitions clearly embody different assumptions and political orientations about popular culture as well. Even in the rapidly changing media landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, movies have remained an integral part of Indian popular culture. While methods of consumption have changed, millions of Indians still flock to theatres every year to see stories played out on the silver screen. This study aims to examine the extent to which society may be influenced by and organised around popular culture. The following study can broadly be titled as a thematic analysis on the impact of popular culture on society vis a vis feminism, gender equality and other contemporary issues. Therefore, popular culture has a way of

influencing an individual's attitudes towards certain topics. And hence, it is important to understand how it works in order to determine the growth and well-being of a society.

## **1.1 Significance of the study**

With the rise of social media, it has become easier to spread any culture across the globe transforming the world into one global society. This has also seen the dispersion of pop culture into various aspects of society in several forms. Pop culture affects society in many ways. The first and most primary effect of pop culture is how it builds and strengthens interactions with people who are also fascinated with something similar. Also, pop culture has evolved into a tool for propagating various issues and bringing to light various social issues that run widespread but still remain overlooked. Pop culture affects our life in one way or the other, hence it is important to study and analyse its effects on society.

## **1.2 Background of the study**

The research will have a holistic approach towards understanding the growing importance of pop culture on our society, especially on certain important issues like feminism and gender equality. Development of pop culture and how it has evolved over time will also be included in the study. It shall include topics relating from historical developments in pop culture to its contemporary dimensions. The study also tends to aim at various aspects relating to pop culture such as- Importance of pop culture in eradicating stereotypes, Contribution of pop culture in promoting women rights, Influence of pop on the overall mentality of the youth. In order to address one of our most critical issue In this study- Impact of popular culture on society in terms of feminism and gender equality, it is important that we have a basic understanding of how media and popular culture promotes/denounces the idea of feminism. A brief history on how the entire movement of feminism surfaced has been provided here for a quick reference.

For a long time now, woman's rights have been defined as "the regulation supporting social, political, and every single other right of women equivalent to those of men". Women's activism has more to it that goes beyond sexual orientations, races, ethnic foundations, and religions. Consistently, women's activists have never failed to utilized a wide range of media to spread their messages over the globe. This media incorporates however isn't restricted to newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, online networking, and web. Without media to circulate their thoughts, woman's rights developments would not have been widespread and could have dissolved just at initial stages. The roots of feminism dates back to the 19th century and continues through present day. Moreover, feminism can be categorised into three distinct sections: the first-wave, second-wave, and third-wave.

### **1.2.1 First-wave feminism**

First-wave feminism refers to the feminist movement of the 19th and early 20th century, the period when women had very little control over their own lives. In most cases, they worked as housewives who were uneducated and possessed no property or economic rights. Their lives were limited to phases such as motherhood or wife-hood.

### **1.2.2 Second-wave feminism**

The second wave of feminism marked its beginning in the 1960s and ran through the 1980s. During this time, women were making remarkable social and political gains and fundamental views were prevailing in society. This wave expanded the idea of feminism discussion from suffrage to a wide range of issues such as domestic violence, rape, the workplace, sexuality, reproductive rights, etc., drawing in women of different races.

### **1.2.3 Third wave feminism**

Third wave feminism marked its beginning in the early 1990s and continues till date. It is said that the movement grew as a response to the apparent and criticism of the second-wave

movement. The aims of this movement were extended from the second wave to focus on issues such as abolishment of gender related stereotypes, lesbian theory, defending sex work, pornography, and promoting sex-positivity.

An absurd idea of feminist women being dissociated with regular women has come to surface over the years. Feminists are also not often portrayed as victims, but rebels. In the media, the term "feminism" is often opposed to the term "family", giving out the idea that feminists can never be family-oriented women. This negative portrayal over the decades has compelled many young women to refuse the idea of feminism, due to feminists being labelled as "man haters". Mass media forms like social media, cinema, video game, print and electronic media etc, also play a key role in reflection the idea of feminism and influencing mindsets of the people, especially youth.

## **1.3 Objective**

### **1.3.1 General objective**

- 1.3.1.1 To critically analyse the relevance of pop culture on society.
- 1.3.1.2 To understand what is pop culture, how it influences the youth and society.
- 1.3.1.3 To determine the contribution of pop culture in promoting social values and outlooks.

### **1.3.2 Specific objective**

- 1.3.2.1 To analyse how feminist values are represented in modern cinema
- 1.3.2.2 To understand if pop culture promotes/demotes gender equality
- 1.3.2.3 To determine positive and negative effects of pop culture on society

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Literature**

A collection of seventeen review of literature has been presented below, comprising mainly of research study and articles by various publications on several topics related to popular culture and its influence on society.

#### **2.1 Laura Grindstaff: Culture and Popular Culture: A Case for Sociology**

The study of pop culture shares a very deep and long running relationship with the field of culture and sociology. This article analyses the intellectual traditions and values which have helped in shaping the sociology of popular culture. It traces the points of connection and difference between sociologists and other scholars studying popular culture, and supports the growing importance of cultural sociology in addressing key issues and concerns within the realm of what is broadly considered as ‘popular’. These developments include the rise of new media/communication technologies and the increasing interdependence between popular culture and other grounds of social life.

#### **2.2 Tim Delaney: Pop culture- An overview**

The article begins with a very standard and basic definition of pop culture- The term ‘popular culture’ holds different meanings depending on who is defining it and in what context is it being used overall. In general terms, popular culture may be seen as something vernacular or people’s culture that outweighs in a society at a particular point of time. The author also gives example of pop culture- Examples of popular culture come from a wide array

of genres, including popular music, print, cyber culture, sports, entertainment, leisure, fads, advertising and television. It can also be said that sports and television are some of the most widely consumed models of popular culture, and they also represent two examples of popular culture with great staying power. Other topics included in the write up are- Folk and High Culture, The Formation of Popular Culture and Sources of Popular Culture.

### **2.3 Efetobor Effevothu: Youth and Popular Culture**

Popular culture has become one of the most discussed issues of society in contemporary time. Moreover, it wouldn't be wrong to say that our society is one that is consumed by popular culture especially the new/mass media. The study examined the various ways popular culture (music) can be used by youths to achieve societal development. The researcher finds this study quite significant since it has the potential to add to the body of knowledge on popular culture and will help in an understanding of how popular culture can be used for the well-being of societies. The study was based on the historical facts and had an analytical approach to it. It made use of mainly secondary sources retrieved from books, journal articles and internet sources. It examined the emergence of popular culture in a contemporary globalized world and how it has become inevitable in our society given the new and rising technologies. It also determined how popular culture has linked itself with education, mass communication, and production and how it has become key factor and source of knowledge for the youth to learn about themselves, society and the larger world. The work was concluded by stating that despite the positive effects of popular culture on society, it can also have catastrophic consequences on youth when they are not properly educated on the proper use of the various forms of popular culture particularly the new/mass media.

#### **2.4 Doballi Srikanth: POP Culture: Interaction and Influence on the Youth**

This study measures the level of influence popular culture forms like internet, social networking sites, television, popular music, cinema, newspapers, magazines etc has on the youth. The study taken in account the time period of 20 Century, wherein it is found that various youth identities have emerged, with their unique styles in music, dance, clothing, hairstyle and language, with rising interactive media and social networking. With the escalating of television channels, social networking sites, blogs, music and film genres, video and computer games etc. the youth of today's generation lives a life that is completely dominated by technology and pop culture. The pressure to fit into the everyday changing world is compelling the youth to live a life purely dictated and seen, TV serials, and fashion tips from popular magazines.

#### **2.5 Trier-Bieniek: Feminist Theory and Pop Culture**

The study of Feminist Theory and Pop Culture creates a picture of feminist theory with modern portrayals of gender in media and popular culture. This study is a mixture of both comprehensive and interdisciplinary text which includes an introductory chapter written by the editor as well as nine contributor chapters of original content. Here are a few topics included in the text- Historical illustration of feminist theory, Application of feminist research methods for the study of gender, Feminist theoretical perspectives such as the male gaze, feminist standpoint theory, Black feminist thought, queer theory, masculinity theory, theories of feminist activism etc.

#### **2.6 Amy Peloff- "Unexpected feminisms: How popular culture brought feminism beyond the movement."**

This study examines the role that popular culture played in propagating feminist ideas apart from the preconceived notion of them merely being engaged in organization and activism, especially in the United States during the second wave of feminism (roughly from

1960s prolonging through the early 1980s). This study aims to challenge the dominant narrative of second wave feminism which focuses on the work of self-identified feminist organizations and activists, resulting in a history that describes the activities of white, middle class, heterosexual women who, by marking their privileged social identities, had the luxury of thinking about gender in isolation of other identity categories. Examining how the widespread experience of second wave feminism expands our understanding and knowledge of how different populations participated in this wave of feminism in their own respective ways, including those women who did not belong to a particular feminist organization. This study also illustrates how feminist ideas were communicated through media that was readily available to anyone in the United States who had access to television, radio, magazines, or newspapers during this period.

### **2.7 Sarah K. Cowan: Media and Popular Culture**

Media and Popular Culture is study that focuses on the various aspects of popular culture and how it is linked with media. The researcher defines 'popular culture' as movement that was initiated in order to give voice to the common masses through various forms of media, such as television programs, newspapers, magazines, folklore, sports, movies, contemporary books, paintings, sports, fashion, pop music, and so on. It was initiated against the pre-existing culture where only the upper class of the society had an influence on others. Media and Popular Culture aims to study this distance between the supremacy of the privileged class and the struggle faced by the lower class, and how media has been playing an effective role to bridge this gap. Being interdisciplinary in nature, the study emphasizes on the interconnection of popular culture with ethnicity, gender, identity, and social class.

### **2.8 The Children's Museum (Indianapolis): Influenced of Pop Culture?**



It is a blog that tries to highlight various topics related to pop culture and its impact on us- how we express ourselves with pop culture. We are surrounded by pop culture in our daily lives. It would be safe to say that we see pop culture all day, every day. The way we interact with pop culture says a lot about us. Our value as an individual is clearly reflected in the way we interact and let various forms of pop culture impose our thinking as well as our lifestyles. The writer feels that pop culture encourages conversation. Pop culture has the power to start conversations and build relationships with anyone and everyone around us, including family, friends as well as strangers. The author also says, pop culture keeps us moving- when new books, movies and games come out, we are exposed to new ideas, new stories, new characters and even new writers and artists who bring their own experiences into pop culture. Stating the fact that we have new experiences all the time, making us more aware on various contemporary issues and what is going around us. The writer concludes by saying, 'Every day is a new opportunity to discover something new that we love!'

### **2.9 Alan Smithee: The Influence of Pop Culture on Our Society**

To understand the many influences pop culture has on the people of today individually and collectively, the study has tried to explore a couple of instances that we have seen so far. The popularity of the series- Harry Potter soon transformed into a culture wherein it became a part of our lifestyles. Harry Potter-themed drinks initiated the whole trend. Soon we had Harry Potter themed t-shirts, glasses, backpacks, and of course dolls. The writer believes that the most precious given to each and every one of us by pop culture is voice. One of the greatest influences of pop culture on our society is the culture of protest. Our society had never experienced so many marches, protests and demonstrations as it does today. Protests were common before too, but not in the frequency as we see today. Nor did the young generation

participate so actively in these demonstrations any time before today, all thanks to influence of pop culture.

### **2.10 How popular culture influence fashion designers in NYC**

The author believes that fashion is never immune to changes. Everyday there is a room for new trends and developments in this industry. He also says that fashion gets its inspiration from the cultural and social movements taking place around us. London and New York were the very first places where pop culture developed in the '50s. Initially, it was started as a very rebellious fashion trend for the youth but gradually it became a complete global spectacle. Various subcultures and traditions have also influenced today's fashion standards and can be found even in traces today. Pop culture comes into play when one identifies his/her interests and preferences, be it in sports, music or fashion.

### **2.11 Rebecca Draper-2005: Student's perceptions of popular culture on their lives**

This qualitative study is comprised of in-depth interviews with 16 at-risk high school students. The students were asked to give reasons for their discipline problems in high school. They were also asked to give their perspectives on various forms of popular culture. Questions regarding television, movies, music, video games, and sports were posed to determine the participants' interest level in each of the areas. The students were then asked to gauge how much these interests had taken away from their schoolwork. The students' perceptions and life experiences were explored in depth via the interview process.

### **2.12 Katherine V. Russell-2007: The changing face of youth: Adolescent life and culture in print and online space**

This author's aim is to show the immense power of the mass media in the everyday life of teenagers, and examines surrounding factors in larger society that help to further

comprehend the daily experience of youth in modern society. The study also examines the modern adolescent experience as it relates to the mass media. The scope of this project is primarily cultural and calls upon the related disciplines of Sociology, Cultural Studies, History, Media Studies, and Psychology for its context and grounding. It incorporates evidence from both print and online spaces to demonstrate these suppositions. Throughout the project, the arguments presented here demonstrate that the media in both print and online forms is playing an ever-increasing role in the lives of American teenagers, having larger impact on peer and family interactions, romantic liaisons, and the psychological well-being of adolescents.

#### **2.14 Jennifer A. Irving-2007: An exploration of the influence of media and popular culture on the self-esteem, identity, and body image in adolescent girls**

This qualitative study aims to explore the impact of the media, advertising, and popular culture on the self-esteem and body image of adolescent girls and how they see themselves. This study tries to understand how and to what extent are teen girls negatively affected by various media outlets. Interview methods have been used to gather perspectives of participants on issues like self-esteem, body shaming, celebrity culture and media coverage of it etc.

#### **2.15 R.T Herman-2016: How popular culture affects brand identity and perceived quality in consumer decision making**

The purpose of this study is to determine whether factors like supposed quality, brand identity, brand image and Korean popular culture influence decisions making in any way. This research used systematic analysis to determine the relationship among these variables. Statistical analysis shows that product perceived quality has 0.741 direct contributions to purchase decision while brand identity has 0.792 direct contributions to purchase decision.

### **2.16 Rebecca Lind- 2006: The Framing of Feminists and Feminism in News and Public Affairs Programs in U.S. Electronic Media**

This research analyses the representation of feminists and feminism in media via the method content analysis of 35,000 hours of ABC, CNN, PBS, and NPR news and public affairs content. The researcher points out that feminists appear rarely and are often demonized. Although they are shown in a tailored and underestimated way, feminists are so represented less often than “regular” women. Feminists are usually dissociated with the idea of so-called ‘regular’ women , and largely called rebels, associated with the goals of the women’s movement. Yet feminists’ realm is not that of regular women; feminists are less often associated with day-to-day chores of a common women, and more often with activities related to public forum as well as media.

### **2. 17 Debra Beck- The ‘F’ word: How the media frames feminism**

Today’s mainstream media can occasionally be accused of being too friendly to the idea of feminism. In fact, many of the challenges the feminism movement faces can be linked to the way various media-outlet including print, and cinema represent the movement and the common issues it tries to address. This article aims to explores how the media frame feminism and those who claim it, popularly known as feminists and how that framing affects society’s acceptance or rejection of the movement and its goals.

The above literature reviews helped to establish familiarity with the concept and a deep understanding of how similar topics have been addressed before by research scholars. It also helped the researcher identify what issues have already been addressed as well as what remains undone or needs more work to be done upon.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Methodology**

Methodology is a systematically conducted theoretical analysis of methods applied in the field of research. It comprises of quantitative, qualitative as well as mixed methods. In this research, both quantitative and qualitative methods will be used in form of surveys and content analysis respectively. Content analysis is a research technique used to make replicable and valid information by referring, interpreting and decoding textual or online available material. It is a method for summarizing any form of content by counting various aspects of it. A qualitative content analysis will be used to examine female roles in the selected films. This method is selected due to the complex nature of portrayals in film. The content that is analyzed can be in any form but is often converted into written words before being critically analyzed.

The methodology process will take place in a way so as to highlight and analyse the following points- To what extent has modern technologies changed pop culture, the portrayal of feminism/feminist values in modern cinema, does pop culture promote or denounce gender equality, how has pop culture helped the acceptance of homosexuality in society, impact of pop culture in form of advertisement on audience, to what extent does pop culture influence contemporary issues, positive and negative effects of pop culture on our society.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

For the quantitative research, the study shall include Primary data collection- online surveys (among youth, adults and elders- Vadodara city). Secondary data collection- Documentaries, articles, blogs etc. Qualitative research is a scientific method of observation to gather non-numerical data. This type of study refers to the meanings, concepts definition,

characteristics, metaphors, symbols and description of things not to their counts or measures. In depth studies and similar patterns are used to construct the hypothesis in qualitative research. Hence, qualitative research is considered to be particularly suitable for gathering an in-depth understanding of underlying reasons and motivations. The study shall further include articles, documentaries and blogs. A short analysis of print advertisements and Public service announcements (PSAs) will also be done in order to determine the influence of pop culture in the sector of advertisement and how it impacts the viewers. A brief conclusion will be drawn using the data collected from both primary and secondary sources, providing a reasonable solution for the following research questions.

## Chapter 4

### Data Analysis

The following questionnaire survey contains fourteen questions in total including graphs and pie charts. The survey was conducted among citizens of Vadodara city for all age categories.

#### 4.1 Questionnaire survey

##### 4.1.1 Which what gender do you identify?

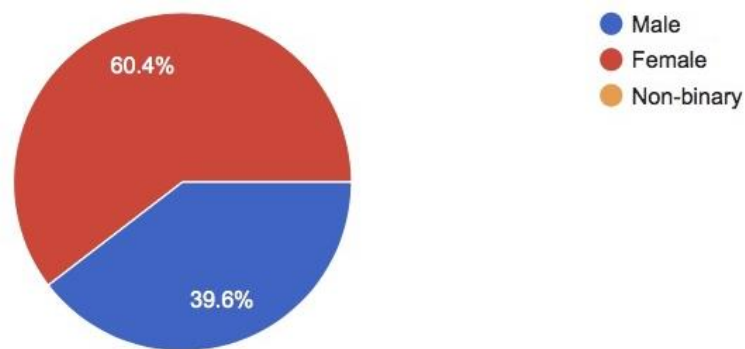


Chart 4.1.1

From chart 4.1.1, it should be noted that 60.4% of the respondents are female and 39.6% of them are male.

##### 4.1.2 Age group

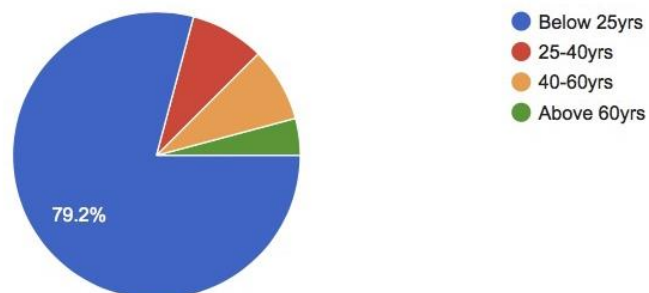


Chart 4.1.2

79.2% respondents belong to the age group of below 25years, followed by 25-40 years (8.3%), 40-60years (8.3%) and above 60years (4.2%).

4.1.3 Occupation

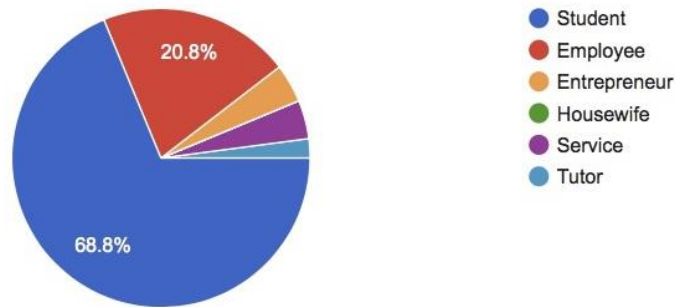


Chart 4.1.3

68.8% respondents are students, followed by employees (20.8%), entrepreneurs (4.2%) and others.

4.1.4 Would you call yourself a hardcore feminist?

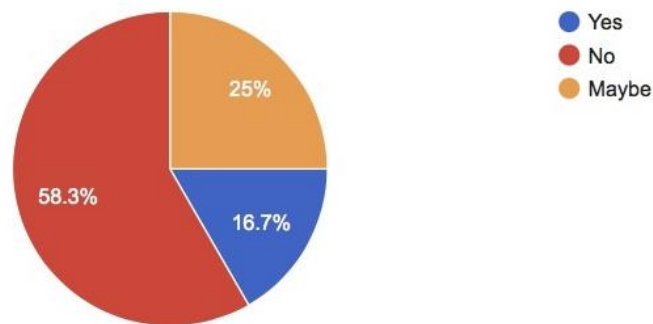


Chart 4.1.4

58.3% respondents would not call themselves as hardcore feminist, 16.7% would and 25% stand 16 neutral

4.1.5 On a scale of 1-10, how much of a feminist would be identify yourself as?



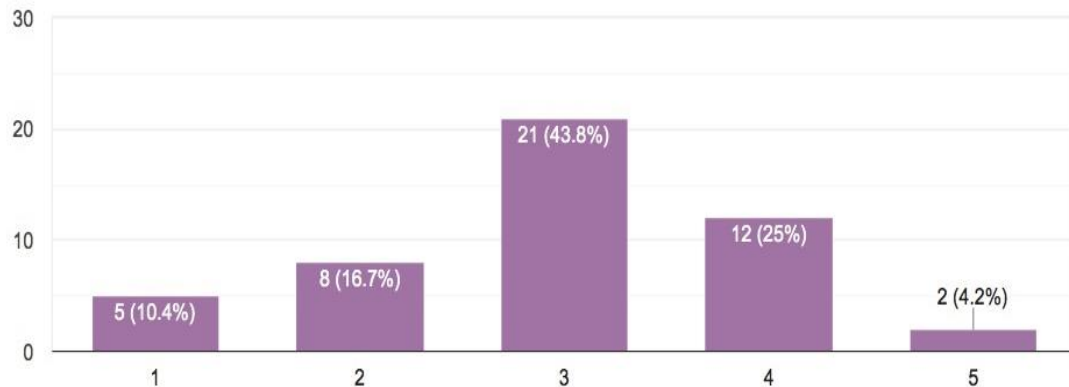


Chart 4.1.5

Most of them would rate their understanding of feminism as 3 out of 5. 10.4% rated 1 on 5 while just 4% rated a full 5 on 5.

4.1.6 Do you feel feminist are surrounded by negative stereotypes in today’s society?

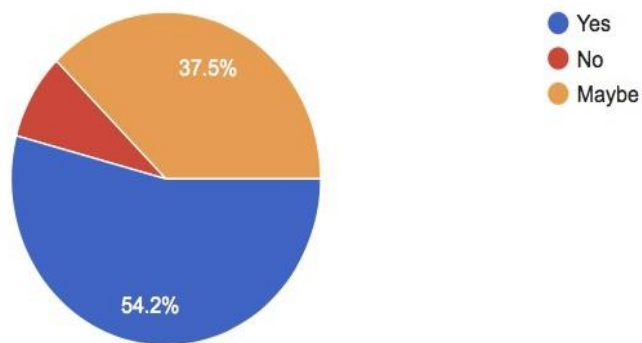


Chart 4.1.6

More than majority (54.2%) feel that feminists are surrounded by negative stereotypes in today’s society, 8.3% do not and 37.5% have a neutral opinion.

4.1.7 Have you heard any of these opinions about feminism in the past 10 years?

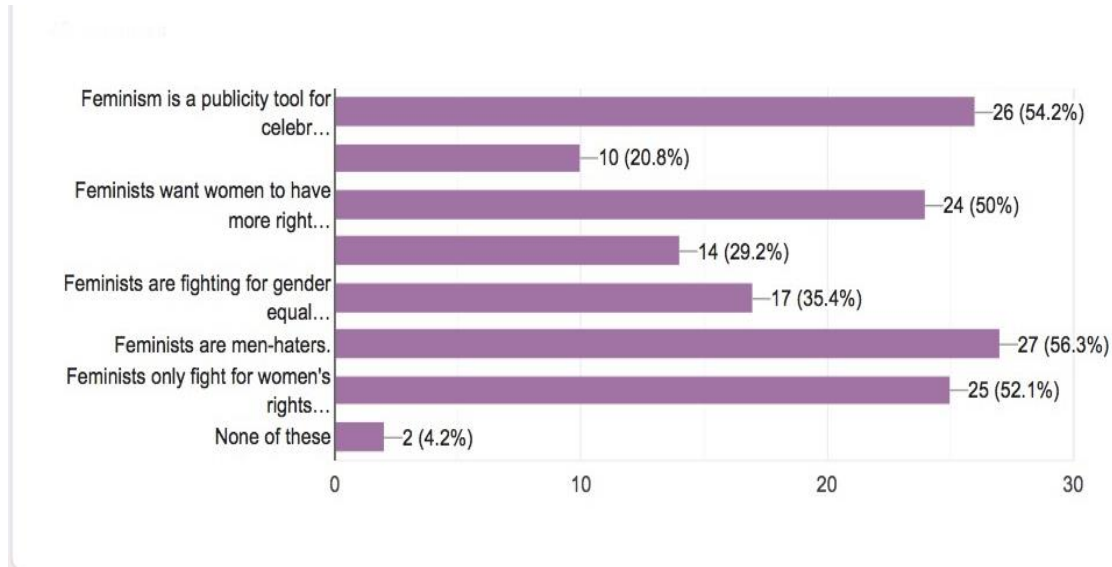


Chart 4.1.7

Talking about some notions related to feminism, a vast majority of the respondents (54.2%) have come across notion stating, ‘feminism is a publicity tool for gain popularity’. A vast 56.3% have heard that feminist are men haters, while 52% of them have heard of feminists fighting only for women rights. Another notion that feminists wants to have more rights than men or be superior to them, is familiar to a good 50% of the total respondents. Other notions related to feminism include- Feminism encourages the rejection of motherhood and marriage, being a feminist excludes having traditional family values (being a housewife) as well as - Feminists are fighting for gender equality, for both genders’ benefits.

4.1.8 Do you think that negative labels of feminism are being alleviated?

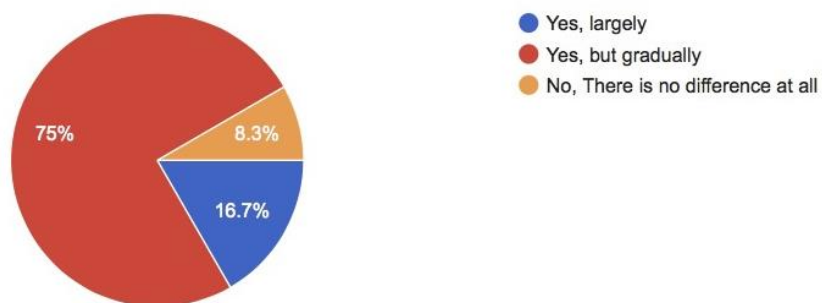


Chart 4.1.8

A good majority of 75% feel that negative labels related to feminism are being alleviated gradually with time whereas just 8.3% of them feel that there is no difference at all.

4.1.9 In your opinion, what is the best description of feminism?

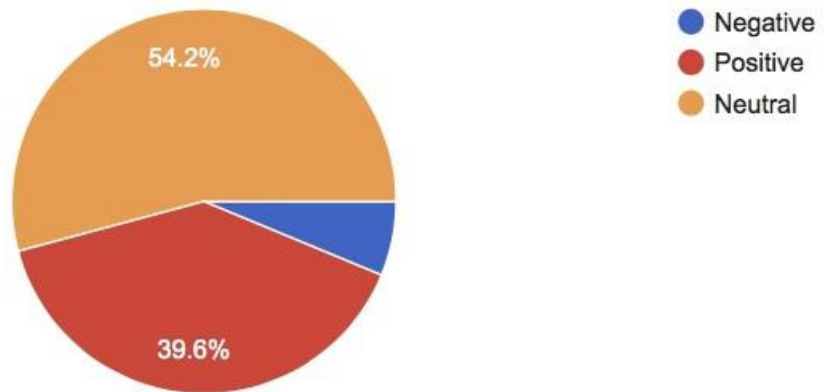


Chart 4.1.9

39.6% of the respondents believe the movement of feminist to be positive, 3% believe it to be negative whereas a majority of 54.2 % have a neutral opinion on it.

4.1.10 Do you feel that the current development initiatives are gender neutral?

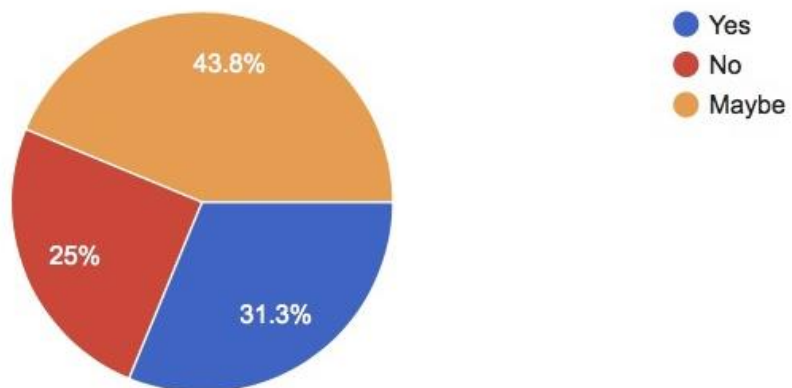


Chart 4.1.10

31.3% respondents firmly feel that the current development initiatives are gender neutral, 43.8% voted for maybe whereas 25% voted a complete no.

4.1.11 Do you think there is equal representation of men and women in movies and TV series?

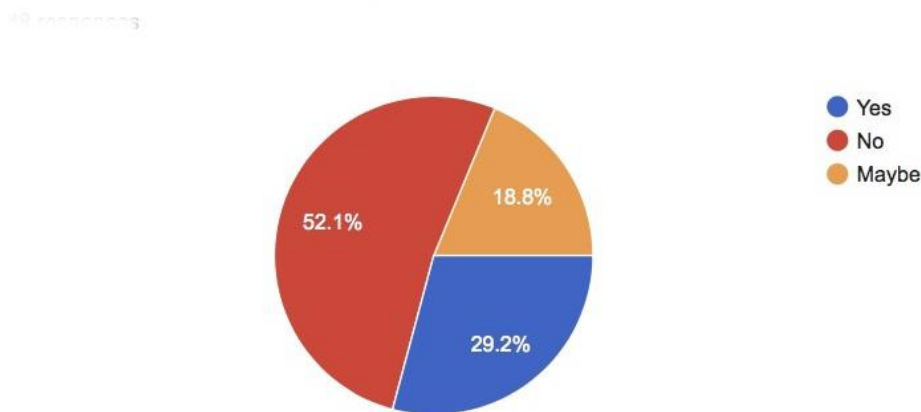


Chart 4.1.11

On the issue of representation of both genders in cinema and pop culture, more than half of the respondents (52.1%) feel that there is still a vast gap in equal portrayal of male and female leads in movies and TV series. 29.9% have voted for a firm yes while 18.8% have a neutral feeling on the given issue.

4.1.12 How much does the factor of 'popularity' affect any of your decisions?

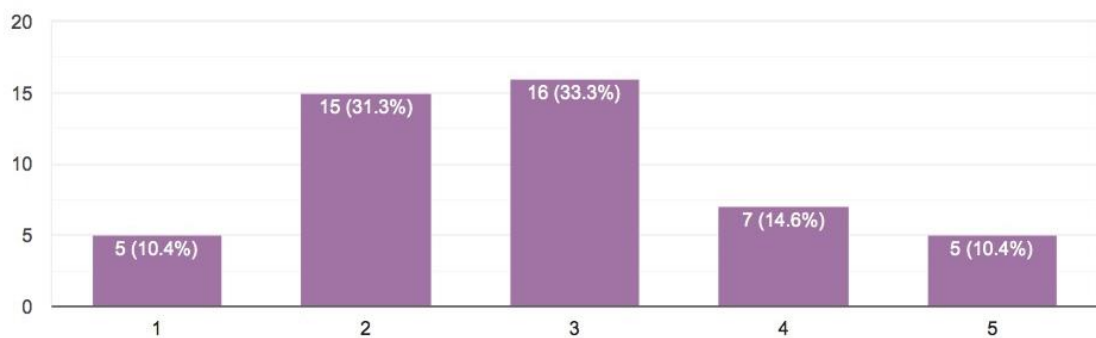


Chart 4.1.12

10.4% of the respondents believe that the factor of ‘popularity’, majorly affects their power of decision making. 33.3% and 33.1% of the respondents feel to be 50% (on average) being influenced by popularity of something

4.1.13 On a scale of 1-10, how much do you think we are imposing ourselves with western values

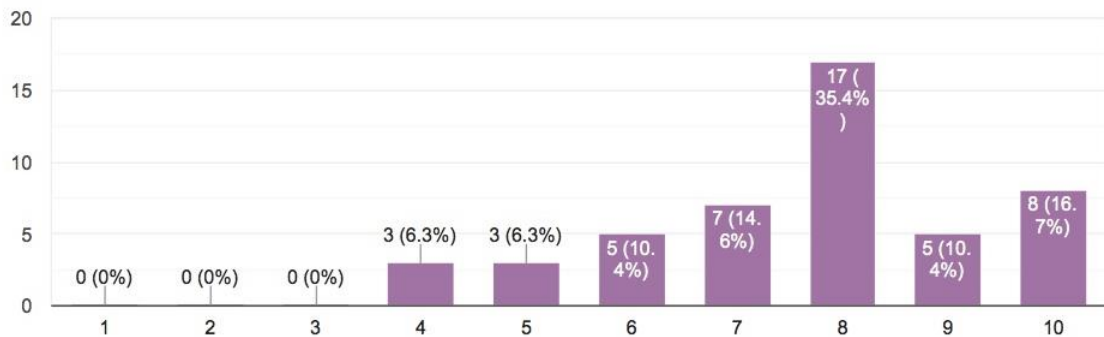


Chart 4.1.13

On a scale of 1 to 10, 35.4% respondents feel that we are imposing ourselves with western values with an impact of 80%. It can also be noted that more than half of the respondents (52.4%) feel the rate of imposition to be more than 60%.

4.1.14 Which of the following mediums would you give credit for your knowledge on major contemporary issues

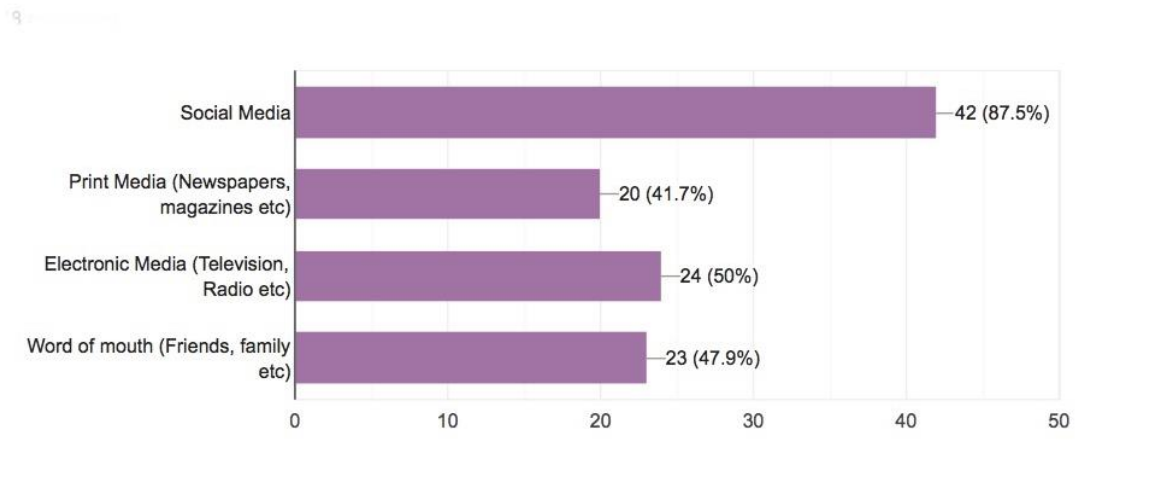


Chart 4.1.14

A vast majority comprising 87.5% of the total respondents, are willing to credit social media for their knowledge on major contemporary issues, followed by electronic media- TV and radio (50%), word of mouth (47.9%) and finally print media- newspapers and magazines (41.7%).

## 4.2 Content Analysis

In order to answer our most critical research question- Impact of popular culture on society in terms of feminism and gender equality, it is important that we have a basic understanding of how media and popular culture promotes/denounces the idea of feminism.

### 4.2.1 Article: Feminism and Media

For ages now, woman's rights have been defined as "the regulation supporting social, political, and every single other right of women equivalent to those of men". Women's activism has more to it that goes beyond sexual orientations, races, ethnic foundations, and religions. Consistently, women's activists have never failed to utilized a wide range of media to spread their messages over the globe. This media incorporates however isn't restricted to newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, online networking, and web. Without media to circulate their thoughts,

woman's rights developments would not have been widespread and could have dissolved just at initial stages.

#### **4.2.1.1 A brief history**

The roots of feminism dates back to the 19th century and continues through present day. Moreover, feminism can be categorized into three distinct sections: the first-wave, second-wave, and third-wave. The terms "suffragette" and "feminist" refer to various movements, particularly in the early 1900s. Suffragists aimed to make it possible for women to vote in elections, but reinforced the notion that women should remain domestic (caring for the home, family, and community). Feminists, on the other hand, not only supported suffrage, but also were advocates for women to be entitled to the "same level of participation, economic independence, and social and sexual freedoms as men," (Finn, 2012).

#### **4.2.1.2 First-wave feminism**

First-wave feminism refers to the feminist movement of the 19th and early 20th century, the period when women had very little control over their own lives. In most cases, they worked as housewives who were uneducated and possessed no property or economic rights. Their lives were limited to phases such as motherhood or wife-hood. Feminists of that time would mostly be middle-class white women who focused on the legal disabilities of women, especially women's suffrage. The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, marked the beginning of the first wave of feminism wherein Elizabeth Cady Stanton drafted the Seneca Falls Declaration. The Declaration defined the feminist's political strategies and philosophies. Suffragists worked together to attract and involve more masses of women to come out and support a common cause. Suffragists and feminists had their first success when New York passed the Married Women's Property Act in 1860, which legalized property ownership for women. Moreover, it was another victory for them when Congress authorized the 19th Amendment in 1920,

allowing women the right to vote. The feminist's message during first-wave feminism was primarily spread through newspaper and other printed media such as pamphlets and bulletins.

#### **4.2.1.3 Second-wave feminism**

The second wave of feminism marked its beginning in the 1960s and ran through the 1980s. During this time, women were making remarkable social and political gains and fundamental views were prevailing in society. This wave expanded the idea of feminism discussion from suffrage to a wide range of issues such as domestic violence, rape, the workplace, sexuality, reproductive rights, etc., drawing in women of different races. The civil rights movement and the anti-war movement of the 1960s, as they consistently attempted to give a voice to the minority, a positive thing for women. Feminist groups attempted to draw attention by forming women-only organizations, such as the National Organization for Women (NOW), and publishing papers that encouraged women's equality, such as "The BITCH Manifesto". The major legislative focus of the second wave was towards the authorization of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which guaranteed social equality regardless of sex. With more advanced technology backing the second wave, newspapers, television, radio, and published papers became a major medium for feminists to convey their messages to masses. Adding on, It was also during this period (1960s-70s) that women's portrayal on television was changing, in part due to the eventual release of "female sexual and political energy", (Douglas, 1994). Prior to this time, women's sexuality would be considered a "taboo" topic, creating for a revolutionary change in the portrayal of women on television. Examples of these different female roles include: Morticia Addams (The Addams Family), Samantha Stevens (Bewitched), and Mary Richards (The Mary Tyler Moore Show). All of these women were either a strong female character, as opposed the more stereotypical-housewife roles from the 1950s. In addition, more and more roles in this era portrayed the woman as someone who is independent, thus not needing or seeking out a man.



#### **4.2.1.4 Third wave feminism**

Third wave feminism marked its beginning in the early 1990s and continues till date. It is said that the movement grew as a response to the apparent and criticism of the second-wave movement. The aims of this movement were extended from the second wave to focus on issues such as abolishment of gender related stereotypes, lesbian theory, defending sex work, pornography, and promoting sex-positivity. However, the movement has a focus on lesbian and African American women as distinct from traditional feminists, and it has deteriorated many traditional concepts, those related to gender, heteronormativity, and "universal womanhood". This conversation on social media on womanhood has strengthened the understanding of the "economy of the celebrity" (Keller,2015). Third-wave feminism mostly depends on social media or online networking to spread its goals and ideas. Social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook are consistently promoting feminist messages. Moreover, hashtag campaigns are steadily spread to convey feminist ideas (#heforshe, #yesallwomen, #whyistayed). Many television shows also feature dominant, independent character of strong women and encourage the idea that women no less than men. (Nashville, Orange Is the New Black, and Buffy the Vampire Slayer). Press (2011) wrote that third-wave feminism focuses more on women's sexual freedom, which has come a long way since the time of second-wave feminism. The media till date continues to oppose the existence of women's sexual freedom, evident with the continued use of the word "slut" as well as the emphasized importance of virginity, which is often displayed in popular culture.

#### **4.2.1.5 Print Publications**

A fact that certainly cannot be denied is that newspapers, despite declined readership today, played a historically important role in the circulation of feminist ideas within Western societies. The 1800s and early 1900s marked the period where newspaper were the dominant form of mass media. Although, wide proliferation of electronic media such as radio and

television, led to the befall of print media. Feminist newspaper not only recognised women and their group interests to voice their opinion to a larger audience with better consistency and accuracy than word of mouth, but also helped lay the groundwork for organized movements to take hold. Throughout the 1800s, several newspapers having feminism as a core idea were started with varying degrees of success. The readership and lifespan of feminist newspapers varies widely, but there are several examples that are known for their contributions to the cause of feminism through this form of mass media.

#### **4.2.1.6 Mass Media**

Although, most of the journalists aim to have an objective or neutral view of their subjects, feminism has long been represented in a negative light. This representation is fuelled by the idea that the media seems to have a thing against opposition, holding women against men creates the mostly negative roles women could be portrayed by. A study by Lind and Saio (2006) revealed that feminists rarely appear in the media and are often demonized. They are often portrayed as non-conventional or different from so-called "regular" women, and are not associated with day-to-day chores, but rather have a strong presence on public forums.

An absurd idea of feminist women being dissociated with regular women has come to surface over the years. Feminists are also not often portrayed as victims, but rebels. In the media, the term "feminism" is often opposed to the term "family", giving out the idea that feminists can never be family-oriented women. This negative portrayal over the decades has compelled many young women to refuse the idea of feminism, due to feminists being labelled as "man haters". Other labels associated with feminism include: "bubblehead", "Amazons", "angries", "radical", and "hairy", (Jones, 1992). The practice of labelling feminists with disparaging terms has been used a way to silence its supporters and incite a fear of voicing opinions

Although, majority of the decision makers in media are males, women are gradually beginning to enter the field of journalism. Davis (1991) wrote in her book, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America*, that the media coverage on the issue of feminist movement wasn't necessarily negative, as it was the media that highlighted the movement in 1969. In addition, Davis notes that the media acted as a source to publicize the issues addressed by this movement and consequently allowed the idea to travel the globe.

#### **4.2.1.7 Social Media**

Within a span of just one-decade, social media has revolutionized the life of many people, captivating a great amount of attention from industries as well as academia. In recent years, social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook have regulated widespread discussion and attention on issues ranging from domestic abuse to public harassment, body-shaming and abortion. In 2012, women in Turkey created Facebook groups to organize and call up protests against regulation of a nationwide ban on abortion. Feminists in some other parts of the European Union took notice of the issue and began promoting it in their respective Facebook groups. The widespread chaos finally led the government to drop the legislation. According to Matthew Slutsky at Change.org, social media has opened the forums on these issues to not only feminists and other activists, but to anyone and everyone who are willing to discuss them.

In addition, celebrities such as Emma Watson have also taken a pro-feminist stance through social media. In 2014, the UN Women's Ambassador stated, "I am from Britain and think it is right that as a woman I am paid the same as my male counterparts. I think it is right that I should be able to make decisions about my own body. I think it is right that women be involved on my behalf in the policies and decision-making of my country. I think it is right that socially I am afforded the same respect as men. But sadly, I can say that there is no one country in the world where all women can expect to receive these rights." Her speech also goes into

depth about the negative connotation the word feminist has because of social media and how we as a society can take a stand for gender equality.

#### **4.2.1.8 Cinema**

Film, cinema and media can possibly be described as a social mirror that showcases the feelings or beliefs or culture of a particular time period in history. Feminism based themes in film have become more prevailing in today's cinema world. Also, feminist film theory was born out of a mixture of emerging film industry and the views of sexuality and gender roles. In 1970, Laura Mulvey wrote an essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in which she diagnosed two major issues within Hollywood responsible for an inaccurate that she felt allowed for an inaccurate portrayal of the feminine experience up until then. Her first claim, that "men and women are differentially positioned by cinema", conveys that women are positioned in inferior or compliant roles to men. The role of a protagonist is usually held by male actors. Mulvey argued that this promotes the stereotypes that females are less capable and that males are dominating leaders of the group. The second claim is that women are portrayed in film as "objects of desire and male gazing", writing that this relates directly to the claim that women can offer nothing more than sexuality element and a romantic element, basically women in the plot line are essentially worthless.

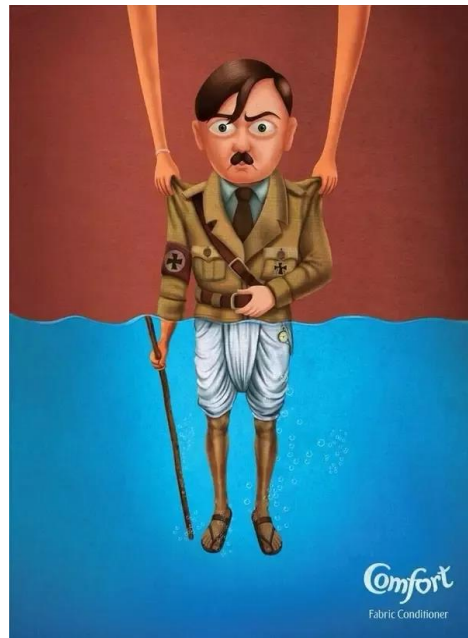
#### **4.2.2 Analyzing print advertisements and PSA**

Public service announcement or PSA, is commonly known as a message made in public interest in order to spread awareness, change public mindsets or raise questions on certain social issues. In most countries, PSAs are issued by the central body or government, usually free of cost or minimal cost. To understand how pop culture in form of Ads and PSA promote or highlight several issues, a four of them (two ads and two PSAs) have been critically analyzed.

The following analysis examines two print ads and two PSAs. The analysis has been conducted on the basis of these parameters-

- Focus on the appeal used by these ads to target their audience.
- Predicting the impact these ads will have on the audience
- Critically examining the message or idea the ad is aiming to give out
- An overall observation of the researcher.

#### 4.2.2.1 AD 1



#### Advertisement 1

A very humorous appeal has been used here for the target audience. The ad makers have very creatively used cartoon animation of Hitler as well as Gandhiji, portraying the difference in their attires quite effectively. Humor and creativity often produce positivity so yes! this ad may receive positive responses. The message given in the above ad is that ‘comfort’ fabric conditioner can be used for any kind of cloth material, from cotton to leather. It retains the fabric’s softness and longevity. It also helps clothes to dry faster and reduces fading. The researcher highly appreciates the creative design and thinking of the ad makers. Attires make

a huge impression of one's personality. Both Hitler and Gandhiji had their own unique personality which is clearly reflected in their clothing. Also, a mix of blue and red bright colors, add to the creativity. Pop culture finds its own way into the minds of public through humor and creativity.

#### 4.2.2.2 AD 2



#### ADVERTISEMENT 2

The appeal here used is- humorous, creative and simple. The researcher believes that a very positive response and impact can be created using this tourism ad. A very warm and welcoming message has been portrayed here- 'jaane kya dikh jaaye'. It reflects what is shown in the graphics- camels and birds are forming the image of a man with mustache, (symbolic of Rajasthan). The tagline also incites a feeling of exploring what is hidden, some true gems of the state. My observation- A very well drafted element of symbolism has been used here. Vivid birds, camels and mustache- all that reflects the beauty and spirit of Rajasthan. Also, there is

subtle and neutral use of colors, especially off-white (which in my opinion, indicates deserts- another unique element of the state). The creative use of graphics and text, could make this ad very effective and unique

#### 4.2.2.3 PSA 1:



#### PSA 1

The above picture Ad has a very deep and emotional appeals to its audience. The researcher feels this picture surely has the capacity to create a positive impact, given its accurate portrayal of emotions and fear. The message tried to be given here is that young children especially young girls are forced to remain silent and a sense of fear is instilled in them by elders (male specially). They have no right to voice out their opinions and if they do, they are forcefully silenced. Females from a very young age, are taught to remain silent and be submissive. The researcher feels it a very beautiful yet sad picture of a young girl being oppressed. It highlights two very negative elements of our society- fear and oppression. Many

people, especially girls can very well relate to this ad, which makes it effective and successful. A sense of emotional appeal is necessary to reach masses and make them relate to the issue.

#### 4.2.2.4 PSA 2:



#### PSA 2

A very emotional and sensitive appeal has been used here for the audience. The target of the ad itself is to bring a positive change in the society and stop domestic violence. Due to its strong appeal, it can compel people to make a move to bring in a change. The message here is pretty clear- 'if you can see it, you can change it. Don't turn a blind eye towards domestic violence'. The PSA compels people to donate a very small amount for a very great cause- To eradicate domestic violence. The researcher sees some kind of irony in the overall picture- Although the message is pretty clear- 'don't turn a blind eye', people are just walking past the ad, without even looking at it. However, it is pretty evident that pop culture in form of advertisements can also be used to bring about positive changes in a society.



### **4.2.3 Analysing Documentaries**

The Feminist Movement has come a long way from its roots in the 19th century, experiencing many ups and downs. But the fight for equal rights is not yet over and is still ongoing. Sure, women go to work, but they get paid less for equal work, as compared to their male counterparts. Women do get to vote, but getting to the top of the political hierarchy is still extremely difficult for them in most parts of the world, even in the most powerful countries. Fortunately, these stories of challenges and daily struggles have not gone unheard. The researcher looked around for some of the top documentaries that speak of women's issues at the best possible level. These documentaries cover developed as well as developing economies from around the globe, and tries to portray that maybe our challenges are different, but the ulterior motive is same- equality, which still a long way off, for majority of women in most parts of the world.

#### **4.2.3.1 She's beautiful when she's angry (2014). Directed by- Mary Dore**

It is the inspiring story which highlights the courage and bravery the women of the 1960s women's rights movement possessed. The documentary showcases the founding of the National Organization of Women to more radical factors of the movement such as the street battles of a group called Women's International Conspiracy from Hell, also known as WITCH. The documentary includes dramatizations, performances, and visuals and revolves around the life stories of women who started a global revolution while fighting for their own rights.

#### **4.2.3.2 Equal means Equal (2016). Directed by- Kamala Lopez**

The documentary has a critical view of how the western world treats women even after 50years of women's rights movement. The story revolves around the legal aspects of equal rights movement. Director Kamala Lopez takes in account real-life stories and showcases how outdated mindsets and laws influence cases of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, workplace harassment, and wage gap, among many other issues affecting women. The film

strongly advocates for law amendments in favour of women and highlights the urgent need of action, giving real-life examples.

#### **4.2.3.3 Finding home (2014). Directed by- Derek Hammeke**

The documentary highlights the life stories of three Cambodian women who were forced into sex trafficking due to economic disputes. Apart from the story of how they got into the business, Finding Home showcases the challenges and struggles of belonging to the lower class in the power hierarchy of slave owners and exploitative men. The Cambodian women try and heal over the years and put their traumas behind after years of struggling and move on. Finding Home does an great job at showcasing their struggles and spreading their message to masses.

#### **4.2.3.4 The hunting ground (2015). Directed by- Kirby D.**

This film contradicts the notion of schools and colleges being a safe place for young girls and women. The hunting ground chronicles the dreadful stories and rape and sexual assault and harassment taking place within the campus of an educational institute. The documentary takes a view of the staggering statistics of rape culture in academic institutes – one in five women in US college campuses are sexually assaulted – and why only a small fraction of these cases are reported, and even fewer result in justice for the victims. It spotlights the well-planned cover-up, excuses, victim-blaming, and denial of justice. The film harshly questions – Are women not safe even in their own schools/colleges?

#### **4.2.3.5 Miss Representation (2011). Directed by- Jennifer Newsom**

Popular culture and Media have the potential to showcase women in influential positions and create role models out of them. But, in order to attract male viewers and support an outdated mindset, they lost on this opportunity, and portrayed women as objects and housewives. It interlinks real-life stories of teenage girls by interviewing powerful feminists from politics and media, including Hillary Clinton, Dolly Parton, Oprah Winfrey, and Sarah

Palin, among others. The underlying message which the documentary tries to highlight is the urgent need for role model portrayals in the media.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

From the data mentioned above, it can be noted that with rising technologies, the medium of news consumption has surely changed and so has the impact of popular culture. Newspapers are slowly being replaced by online apps, Bluetooth is replacing radio, schools and colleges are shifting to an online mode of teaching. Though it will take time, but there is no doubt in the fact that someday this 'digital world' will surely take over. Chart 4.2, 4.4 and 4.5 suggest that most of the respondents who are above the age of 60years, do not call themselves a hardcore feminist and only rate their understanding of the issue at 1 or 2 out of 5 (which equates to less than 40%). This can be related to the theory that the movement of feminism in India was highlighted in the mid-20th century. Moreover, chart 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 might advocate the idea that the young generation, especially those under the age of 25years, mostly students, have a much greater understanding on the issue of feminism. This may also suggest that contemporary issues like feminism and gender equality are hugely promoted or at least majorly highlighted by popular culture, which plays a key role in framing mindsets of the youth. Also, it should be noted that the factor of 'popularity', or what popular culture basically means, plays a vital role in influencing mindsets of people and in turn the decision making of masses. Respondents have also felt a need to highlight the negative perceptions of feminists and feminism and a movement, including men-haters, publicity stunts and feminists only fighting for their own rights. Although, majority of them see a gradual decline in these notions. Hence, it can be suggested that, the youth, the very class which is dependent on social media for consuming news and shaping opinions, is well aware of social issues like feminism, gender equality, homosexuality etc. and stands by it on considerable

levels. The research provides answers to notions like- Evolution of modern technologies and popular culture go hand in hand, role of pop culture in highlighting contemporary issues like feminism and gender equality, and to what extent does popular culture influence minds etc, which have been justified from the above findings. Also, it is pretty evident that pop culture in form of advertisements can also be used to bring about changes in a society.

Movies and cinema have and will always be an integral part of our lives, even in the rapidly evolving landscape of the 21st century. Cinema, which is a vital form of popular culture, can be regarded as a reflection of our society and its reality. What we see is what we perceive. Our mindsets and thinking patterns are replicated by what is fed to us and how much of it we consume. As per a 2017 report by the Geena Davis Institute, only one in ten directors in Bollywood are women. Other statistics reveal that the screen time for females was a mere 31.5 per cent, against the 68.5 per cent received by male actors. Woman's representation in cinema is somewhat vague and might give a false impression of reality. They are either a secondary character or a romantic lead for the male actor. Women have lacked a sense of individuality in cinema. These negative depictions have implications that reach far beyond the entertainment industry. Because the role of film in popular culture and society, "motion pictures largely reflect prevailing cultural attitudes about gender roles, norms, attitudes and expectations" (Simonton, 2004).

However, with changing times, the role of women in movies has also reformed. Although on a very gradual pace, popular culture has given women a sense of individuality, which they lacked till now. Many female lead movies have grossed millions and achieved success at box office. The list includes- Wonder Woman (2017), Moana (2016), The intern (2015), Black Widow (2021) etc. even in Hindi film industries, popularly known as Bollywood, female lead movies have done wonders at box office- Kahani (2012), Queen (2013), Mardaani (2014), Piku (2015), Raazi (2018), Thappad (2020) and many more.

Movies of the 20th and 21st century also focus and highlights the need to normalize the issue such as homosexuality and LGBT. The list of films made on these topics go long- The Children's hour (1961), Desert Hearts (1985), Happy together (1997), Keeping the lights on (2015), Viva (2015), Beach Rats (2017) etc. In Bollywood, Margarita with a straw (2014) Kapoor and sons (2015), Aligarh (2016), Ek ladki ko dekha toh asia laga (2019) etc. Although bollywood still struggles to highlight non- conventional issues through movies, due to a reserved audience and a strict censor board, there is always a room for changes, developments and new ideas.

To expand upon this research, more films should be studied. While a vast amount of quantitative research exists in regard to gender equality in films, not much qualitative analysis exists. Future studies could also expand upon more specific elements of the representation of women in popular film or focus on another subsection of the film industry such as independent cinema, where women and female stories are more prominent. The research also highlights the clear gender gap still present in the film industry and suggests the need for more critical actors in popular film.

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