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Gender Role and Hate Speech Representation in Web Series

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Abstract: ***In India, media has been an essential component of life. The effect of the media can be seen with this that majority of people across the globe rely on various media platforms to increase consciousness and get information for enjoyment and to gain knowledge about a variety of other global events. Denis McQuail (2000) believes that "the media is accountable for illuminating and fostering systematic exposure, as well as influencing ideas and ideals." Furthermore, according to the BARC (Broadcast Audience Research Council) Report, 2019, "web series are defined as popular shows with high viewing that cover a wide range of socio-cultural elements of people's life." There are several types of streaming platforms for entertainment that broadcast 24*7. India much like other jurisdictions has been struggling with the issue of how to control hate speech on the internet. Regulating internet hate speech is a complex issue. The aim of this study is to examine web series in the perspective of Indian society. The stereotypical images of women and hate speech, including abusive language and rude behavior, and discrimination on the basis of religion and caste, have been portrayed in Indian web series. The current study intends to investigate how the Indian web series content structure continues to impact gender role and hate speech representation on streaming platforms.***
Keywords: Content, Gender Role, Hate Speech, Web Series, Streaming Platforms.

I. INTRODUCTION

The internet and technology has changed extremely and due to which the functioning of most of the industries have also changed. Entertainment industry was also unable to escape the changes. It has faced radical modification in its processes due to the rise of internet among its users. The audience/consumers are well informed and well versed with technology and are familiar with the changes taking place in entertainment industry. This scenario is highly responsible for the growth of the OTT platforms all around the world. Due to rise of OTT platforms there is shift in portrayal of Gender roles in Web Series and also the representation of Hate Speech has also increased gradually. Even target audience in India is much familiar with the movies, shows, music and other genres offered by different OTT platforms and because of this exposure the audience is also being exposed more to the hate speech.

Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+ Hotstar, Zee5 and more are becoming very popular video streaming platforms for salaried and youth market in India. The expansion of OTT industry has tuned out profitable to entertainment sector. This online streaming content and web series have become the heart of youth. Web series are now replacing television because big companies like Amazon Prime Videos, Eros Now, SoniLiv and more are heavily investing in regional content as well. Web series have gained popularity in India in past few years as online content can be streamed from wherever and whenever we want and this takes us where television can't. Web series allow their audience to stream according to their convenience.

In India, the media plays a significant role in our daily lives. The fact that the majority of people in India depend on different media platforms, particularly OTT platforms, to receive information for entertainment and to develop knowledge and awareness about a range of events helps us to understand the influence of the media. McQuail (2000) believes that, *"the media is accountable for illuminating and fostering systematic exposure, as well as influencing ideas and ideals."* Furthermore, according to the BARC (Broadcast Audience Research Council) Report, 2019, web series are defined as popular shows with high viewing that cover a wide range of socio-cultural elements of people's life. There are several OTT platforms available 24*7 for entertainment. India like several other jurisdictions, has been struggling with an issue of how to govern or restrict Hate Speech on Internet. Amending internet hate speech is a complex issue. Indian web series material has portrayed stereotypical representations of women, hate speech, including harsh and abusive language, and prejudice based on caste and religion. Gender representation and hate speech continue to be impacted by the content structure of Indian web series on contemporary and digital media.

In recent years, it has been seen that there is a tremendous increase in the availability of audio-visual material on OTT platforms. These materials are available for all age groups. According to the KPMG poll, during the period of lockdown, gaming and over the top (OTT) services have performed much better across India.

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India and Indians being the most potential market for OTT services it has make India the world's tenth-largest market for OTT with net worth of approx 4000 crore. OTT services initially were considered to be a potential replacement for traditional modes of entertainment and it has been even proved correct to a bit extent. OTT is not only a service but a phrase that is used to describe the delivery of content through internet when the audience does not have DTH subscription. Content customization is possible on OTT platforms which used to lack in traditional mode of entertainment and it is the most significant driving force. OTT platform develops content on the basis of data driven methodology which makes it unique.

In terms of efficacy, customized content trumps impersonalized content. The worldwide OTT content industry is anticipated to reach USD 87 billion by 2023, growing at a 14 percent CAGR between 2017 and 2023. (Market watch, 2020) In today's digital age, viewers may access a wide range of web series and other forms of entertainment online. The shows' audience comprises of people of diverse ages, ranging from a youngster to an old person. Any streaming service that transmits its content over the internet is referred to as OTT/Streaming platform. Many Over the Top (OTT) platforms operate as digital media, offering their audience a varied selection of genres to watch. In India the OTT platforms have become the voice of the audience. There are many OTT platforms available for their fans to access the content anytime and anywhere. There are almost all types of genres web series that can be accessed by the audience but the major focus or the center of attraction of web series is *Gender and Sexuality*. In the modern world, where media and communication have become essential elements of living, gender and sexuality continue to be at the core of how a person's identity is seen by society. The OTT platform has a significant impact on how people define their gender. The OTT also has a range of images of women and men, as well as remarks on their sexual orientation. OTT has become a language of communication for conveying message of gender and sexuality.

These shows shape the mentality of people about their sexuality, lifestyle, gender and more. On contrary OTT platforms have played a major role in informing and awaring women to their potential to be the change makers in the society. According to Himani (2015), *"Gender stereotypes have always been prevalent in the pictures depicted in media material. Stereotypical representations of males, women, and transgender people have been detailed in various media content for the most part."* However, changes in the representation of men and women may be seen as a result of the internet's influence (Debastuti, 2018).

OTT platforms are the representative for the future of entertainment business, content available on these platforms is still a matter of contention in terms of social responsibility and creative freedom. The anonymous content that is being supplied through producers on these platforms has a long raised concern for kids' safety and social responsibility. According to Bureau, 2020 people have frequently expressed dissatisfaction with the particular and daring content of web shows. Violence, nudity and sex have become the prominent genres of online shows. There is a debate in the society of whether this is necessary or not.

One segment of society feels that such kind of bold material is acceptable, while there is another segment that has totally opposite opinion for the same. Also, it has been seen that in certain cases these sexually explicit scenes or violence scenes are the need of an hour as by eliminating these scenes it might mislead the viewers and the story would not be depicted in the manner as it is written. The opposing half of society believes that sexual violence and nudity in web series affect Indian morality and values. While the savagery portrayed in web programmes makes it difficult to watch with the family, Indians are not often open to personal moments.

There is a conflict between social responsibility and artistic freedom due to the very nature of OTT content as they portray stereotypical identity of women and hate speech in Indian web series. According to Pallavi (2020), "People were addicted to social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube as our country's digitalization progressed. The use of the Internet has increased dramatically during the previous decade all across the world. But it wasn't until 2014 that the web series craze hit India, and it quickly grew in popularity thanks to its wide range of material. As a result of the internet revolution, digital channels have grown in popularity, ranging from searching for information on Google and YouTube to digital streaming services like Netflix, Disney Hot Star, Amazon Prime, and voot."

II. WEB SERIES IN INDIA

The days of sitting down as a family to watch television are long gone. While the Indian people anxiously awaited the arrival of foreign programming, they also supported Indian programmes with intriguing, avant-garde content. Digital platforms have successfully adapted traditional television culture, much to the satisfaction of both millennials and the vast majority of senior people. This new wave of digital visual culture came a few years ago with YouTube when they began broadcast of shows like TVF Pitchers, Band Baja Barat, Permanent Roommates and more. Since then, this digital content phenomenon has grown in India. With the increase in popularity and inclination of audience towards this type of content the OTT platforms even catalyzed good digital content. India is renowned for its wealth in variety, heritage, culture, religious beliefs, and ideals. When discussing how culture and customs are passed down to future generations, India is frequently used as a model.

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The Indian population has always relied heavily on the film and television industries for information and pleasure. They have also been a crucial source for influencing beliefs, behaviours, attitudes, and thinking.

Because there are so many options on the internet, customers with short attention spans are continually looking for bite-sized material. As a result, a web show's reception is heavily influenced by the quality of its production, content, and casting. As a result, the producers are very cautious about creating fresh and accessible content that would capture the interest of millennial. (TEAM, 2019)

It is frequently observed that moviegoers, particularly children and teenagers, have a tendency to memorize scenes, lines of conversation, and songs that afterwards stick in their heads for a long time. And as a consequence, parents always favored streaming those programmes or films that have uplifting content and are free of any negative elements.

Inappropriate language, hostility, vulgarity, a sense of rebellion against one's parents, one's nation, one's law or religion, and other social taboos are all present in this material. It deals with uniqueness and innovation, but it also has a strong chance of grabbing people's attention. In the end, it introduces a variety of concepts, ideas, and topics that the audience may not be familiar with or that they may be impacted by.

A person's typical day should be filled with physical activity, such as playing sports outdoors, hanging out with friends, and exercising. However, OTT and online programmes have now taken the place of all of these. They have less time for interpersonal connection due to their addiction to the internet and online information, which is detrimental to their physical and mental growth.

Because people can readily connect to what is displayed in online web programmes and other video content, subscribers who engage in frequent binge watching are more likely to mimic and modify behavior to fit their own.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dasgupta (2018), in her study “Gender Portrayal in Age of Social Networking Sites: An Analytical Discussion” explained that “another major manner in which social media demonstrates gender differences is in how young people present themselves in social network domains. The way young boys and girls share information on social media differs. Girls were more inclined to post their own photos, but guys were more likely to share photos and remarks that they regarded as self-promotion. Sexual elements or allusions to drinking are frequently seen in the images. Such behavior repeats gender stereotypes, and the media paints a picture of a "commodified" woman on the one hand, and a powerful stable representation of man on the other. Teenage girls are also more prone than males to disclose personal information, which might expose them to sexual harassment or cyber bullying. Gender inequalities, according to some experts, are deeply ingrained in our culture. They believe that females and boys are nurtured with different cultural ideals. Gender disparities and the depiction of gender stereotypes exist in conventional media, as they do in the internet world. Regardless of flaws, every social media networking site provides a diverse range of gendered performances. A thorough review of the current research on gender representation in social media reveals that users occasionally engage in gender stereotyping in social media, while in other situations it supports gender equality. There are still tremendous opportunities to deal with this specific sector; it is up to the users to decide whether they will utilize it to benefit or hurt themselves.”

Agrawal and Sharan (2020), in their study “Creative freedom of OTT wants industry to set standard," opines that because “OTT platforms represent the future of entertainment, it's critical to comprehend their customized nature. Their research uncovered an obscenity complaint against Netflix and suggested that the "full character" of OTT content also pushes creative freedom. The study looked at why the self-regulation approach for OTT platforms was rejected and proposed a panel with an outside expert. However, based on their results, this concept does not work with the majority of OTT platforms. OTT a boon for artists, filmmakers, and other content creators' as it provides the creative freedom. The regulation resulted in creative expression being exploited, particularly by smaller producers. OTT is a long way from overcoming the conventional hurdles that would prevent it from reaching a large audience. The research also fosters creative freedom and guarantees consistency of aim by improving content quality while being socially and sentimentally neutral.”

Agrawal (2020) & Pallavi (2020), in her study “Female Representation in Indian Web Series- Myth or Reality” opines that “Indian online shows have experienced a huge increase in substance that defies comparison to Bollywood. The majority of online shows with female protagonists are unrelatable. Women who live in cities other than Mumbai, Bangalore, or the metropolis will be unable to relate to these performances. The majority of women-centric episodes shown in the online series feature powerful women or women from wealthy backgrounds. The gender difference in internet access cannot go unnoticed. Even if the online series continues to produce more and more female-empowering content, it will all be for naught if it does not reach its intended audience.”

Kanwar and Singh (2021), in their study "Emerging Gender Role Representation in Indian Media - Thematic Analysis of Four More Shots Please Web Series" explained that "Gender portrayal in the media impacts people's perceptions of the different gender roles that society has assigned to them. However, modern media platforms may function as a change agent by shattering preconceptions and conventions about a wide range of societal concerns. Equal and justified depiction of different genders might help influence viewers' understanding of gender in a culture. The online series creates a dialogue about women's equal rights, sexuality, and prejudice at various phases of their life. The series has attempted to illustrate the microscopic aspects of women's challenges in Indian culture by offering distinct layers to the many characters featured in the web series. Thematic analysis leads to the conclusion that strong and independent women are questioning conventional conceptions of gender and sexuality."

Sharma (2021), in her article "Netflix & Amazon under fire in India over Controversial Content" states that "Even as the debate over Amazon Prime Video's political thriller "Tandav" rages on in India, Netflix's "Bombay Begums," a drama that follows the lives of five women in Mumbai, has come under criticism. On March 16, the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights ordered Netflix to delete some "objectionable" images involving children in "Bombay Begums," which premiered on Netflix on March 8 and quickly became popular. This follows a big controversy over sequences in "Tandav," a Hindi term that means "fury," which reportedly offended Hindus by depicting the faith's deities in a negative manner. Other recent examples include Amazon Prime's crime drama "Mirzapur," which sparked outrage for allegedly portraying a northern Indian city in a negative light, and Netflix's series "A Suitable Boy," which was based on author Vikram Seth's bestselling novel of the same name and featured a Muslim man and a Hindu woman kissing against the backdrop of a temple. Bobby Deol, the star of "Aashram," a popular programme on the streaming platform MX Player, has also been involved in legal issues due to his controversial portrayal of Hindu saints."

IV. CONTENT ANALYSIS WILL BE DONE ON THE FOLLOWING PARAMETERS

1) Style of the content
2) Gender difference
3) Hate speech/ Abusive content

Web Series are shortlisted on the basis of controversial content and sexual portrayal. Following are the selected Web Series:
Mirzapur Season 1 & 2
Aashram
Tandav
Bombay begums
Four more shots
Lust stories
Content Analysis of Web Series portraying gender identity issues and Hate Speech Representation

A. Mirzapur Season 1 & 2

It is the third Indian made original crime series available on Amazon Prime Video in India. We determined that the violence in Mirzapur is largely unfounded images, and the language is highly exaggerated and mostly hostile. The majority of the discussions revolve around four-letter phrases that have no apparent meaning. The killers liked pumping the bullet into someone, according to the conversation (Maarna Ek Kala hai, Bhaiyaji). Sexual moments and emotional bed scenes were used in the cinematic presentation. Mirzapur is painfully clinical when it comes to sex activities and killing. In a word, both seasons depict the same content: excessive violence, sex, improper language, and politics' dark underbelly. It features particularly harsh dialogues, which are primarily highlighted, based on conversation delivery.

- *"Mata ji yahan hai, Behen yahan hai, Maa-Behen ek karne mein aasani hogi."*
- *"Ch***ya hain woh important Nahi hai. Hamara ladka hai, Woh important hai."*
- *"Oh Bhos***i waley Chacha. Rest kariye, varna Rest in Peace ho jaoge!"*
- *"Middle class aadmi, aadmi nahi ch***** hota hai. Ch*****."*
- *"Jaati pratha kaahe banayi gayi, isiliye hi na ki power hamesha hum Brahamano ke haath mein rahe"*
- *"Bh****ke, Amar hain hum, Chutiye nahi…"*
- *"Bawaal cheez hai saara system hil jaata hai"*

B. Aashram

The genuine colors of Babas/ Godfathers are continued in a Hindi language crime-based drama as portrayed in web series on MX player, *Aashram*. It exposed a combination of naive confidence in Babas and political leaders. Based on the aforesaid characteristics, this series exploits religious feelings about saints, and the plot of Baba's of the Ashrams focuses upon Hindu beliefs. The Baba's language is unacceptably offensive. Viewers' religious emotions are harmed by extreme misuse and the display of narcotics in Prasad boxes. The tale also highlighted sexual exploitation and drug fostering,. Women are abused at the ashram. There are moments in which Baba takes advantage of the ashram's female residents and engages in sexual activity with them. The series is frank, focusing on people's naïve faith in Babas, but it also pokes fun at religious ideas and includes greater profanity. Dialogues which are mostly highly highlighted

- *"Shareer ke liye har ang zaroori hai upar waala bhi aur neeche waala bhi"*
- *"Jahaan noton se hoti hai kanoon ki aesi ki taisi,usiko kehte hain India ki democracy"*

C. Tandav

Tandav has come under fire from some members of the public who believe the performance offends Hindu Gods and Goddesses while also mocking faith. One scene shows Sandhya Mridul and Anup Soni as lovers, while another one features Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub as student leader-turned-rising politician as Shiva. While the majority of the accusations against Tandav are for allegedly injuring religious sensibilities, Shiva portrays Lord Shiva in a college play. He is dressed in a suit, holding a Trishul in one hand, and smearing blue paint on his face and neck, but he does not fit the conventional image of the Hindu God. The picture depicts how students in the country are speaking out against poverty, feudalism, and caste-based injustice, yet they are misunderstood. As the scene concludes, Shiva says, *"Matlab desh se azaadi nahi chaihye, desh me rehte hue azaadi chaihye."* In further conversations in the series shows hate speech regarding discrimination in the society on the basis of caste and also have hated comment for women and also using women as an object for the fulfilment of their needs and just for enjoyment.

- *"Jab ek chhoti jaat ka aadmi ek unchi jaat ki aurat ko date karta hai, toh sirf badla lene ke liye… sadiyon ke atyacharon ka, us ek aurat se."*

The series features very harsh and hated dialogues. Tandav has been the most popular and divisive online series of the year thus far.

D. Bombay Begums

A Netflix original web series centered in India caters to women's extramarital affairs in order to fulfill their needs. The web series portrays bisexuality on the Indian screen as well. The text does not promote outright abuse, but it does contain a number of harsh phrases, the majority of which are spoken by the mother. The content depicts child exploitation, with a focus on drug and alcohol usage, as well as kids in intercourse on television. The right to life and the right to education are both exploited in the narrative. We see minors engaging in casual intercourse and drug misuse in several situations. The storyline further include Menopause, me-too, sex, motherhood, and infidelity and more. The story's visual representation is bold, with passionate kissing scenes and adolescent and puberty check-in small concerns.

E. Four More Shots Please

This series streamed exclusively on Amazon Prime Video. The series follows the story of 4 unapologetically flawed women, two in their thirties and two in their early twenties who are scuffling with four typical problems of their own. They live, love, make mistakes and find out what really makes them tick through friendship and shots of tequila in millennial Mumbai. The story revolves around female friendships, their lives as one parent and single women, their flourishing and failing careers, their relationships and their routine lives. The series broadly focused on breaking taboo's through a character Umang Singh, a P.T. teacher from Ludhiana and becoming a gym instructor in Mumbai and also a bisexual and constantly trying to recuperate from the pangs of a breakup she has given by her girlfriends. The story highlights the true meaning of love, friendship and how women can make their life without any back support of a man.

F. Lust Stories

The Netflix original Indian-based web series consist of exceedingly simple stories but are capable of breaking taboos like a teacher's obsession with her student, an extramarital affair, a servant's relationship with her employer and a newly married couple and their bedroom problems.

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In this series 'Lust' takes the centre of space, which is considered a taboo subject. The characters struggled to elucidate the explanations for their actions and relationship status in a notoriously prude culture that was equipped with the tools to try and do so. The older generation is depicted as conservative, and for them, raising questions on sexual relationships or talking about sex openly is referred to as shameful. The show portrays characters drinking, swearing, and talking about sex openly. Perhaps the web series indirectly points to the necessity of sex education in our society.

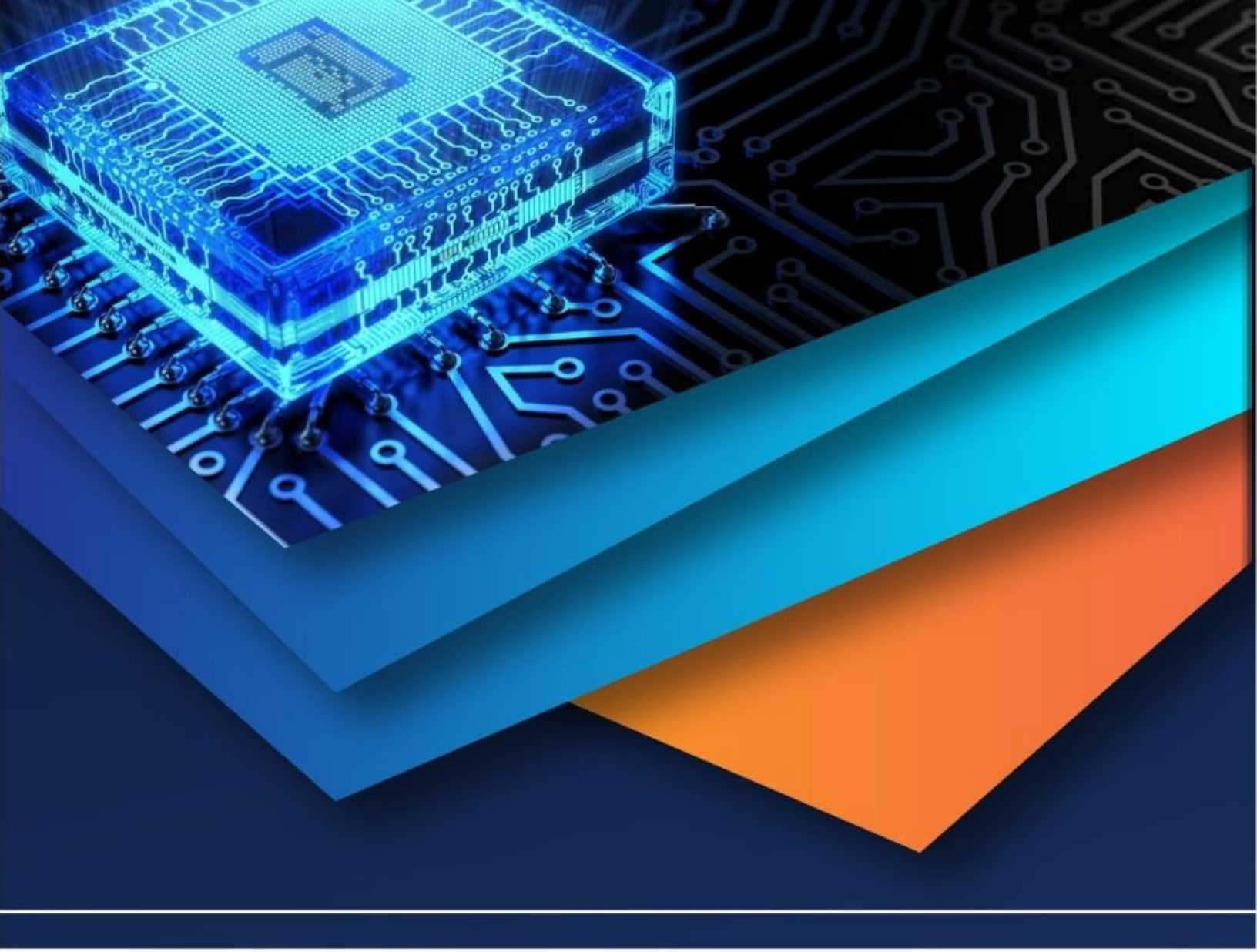
The OTT platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video are the most popular OTT video streaming platforms amongst other available platforms. The new OTT regulatory guidelines are not sufficient enough; it still needs improvisation and rectifications to control the content. Web series and online streaming content heavily use hate speech in terms of abusive language , gender discrimination , and also have a huge impact of all this on the society. It is justified that content makers produced such inflammatory content for grabbing the viewers' attention and also keep high standards than traditional television or the daily soap operas. OTT platforms are highly filled with sexual, abusive, violence content and also include consumption of alcohol, drugs and smoke. The culture of web series in India brings so many changes in our society and also effects in person individually. This culture effects people physiological behavior and communication language. Web series culture somewhere is unfit for the Indian youth. To conclude it can be said that on the name of creativity and reality the content makers are tarnishing the social fabric.

V. CONCLUSION

After analyzing all the aspects of the study the researcher would like to conclude that the Indian Web Series do affect the language pattern in daily life. It has been noticed that Indian web series and OTT platform contents uses hate speech, abusive language, gender discrimination and also has a large impact on society and individuals daily life. The content developers make such inflammatory content to grab the attention of viewers and also to maintain high standards than traditional soap operas telecasted on television. OTT platforms are filled with abusive, violent and sexual content and also portray the consumption of drugs, alcohol and smoke in order to increase the viewership and subscription. It has been noted that culture of web series has brought lot of changes in Indian society and has also affected individuals. This culture has impacted the psychological behavior of individuals and their language. It has been analyzed that on the name of creativity the content developers are trashing the societal fabric as the OTT regulatory guidelines are not enough and needs rectification and improvisation. At last it can be stated that the culture of web series in unfit for Indian society and youth.

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