



Research Paper

“Know Girl, Know Pain; No Girl, No Pain”: Portraying Woman as Stereotyped Entity in the Humorous Posts of Facebook

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ABSTRACT: This paper attempts to expose the stereotyped images of women presented by the Facebook users in their statuses. It shows how their statuses, in the form of jokes, actually render stereotyped pictures of women in our society. Secondly, it tries to point out what are the socio-cultural effects of gender stereotypes occurred in Facebook. For fulfilling the purpose of the research, 183 samples of Facebook humors were collected. Later, they were interpreted and analyzed thematically to search for their having relevance with the traits of gender stereotypes. Qualitative research approach was used for data analysis. The result shows that the samples collected from Facebook contain ample evidences of the presentation of women as stereotyped beings. The study bears the significance that the result found through it will contribute positively to further studies in social science in relation to the interaction between gender ideology and social media.

KEY WORDS: Gender stereotyping, woman, Facebook, humor, society, culture

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I. INTRODUCTION

Gender stereotyping is a very common and inherently practiced, yet discursive, social, cultural as well as psychological phenomenon. It manifests its existence in every active podium of our daily life- our behavior, activities, discourses and communication. All are favorable abode for culturing, sustaining and manifesting gender stereotypes. Apart from these, Facebook, the most trendy and influential social media platform, is now being used as a very effective tool for transmitting socio-cultural discourses, such as, gender ideology. This social networking site has become an inseparable part in our life and been being used as a carrier of socio-cultural values. Social media allows the users “to communicate widely, to virtually manage others’ impressions of them, and to even express gendered identities in cyberspace” (Rose et al, 2012, p. 589). The users invest plenty of time to social media because of the availability of “diverse range of resources such as audios, videos, visuals, text and gifs that are on offer for online communication” which also provide “a means of communication that facilitates transgression of traditional gendered social interactions” (Salam, 2020, p.503), and thus, it “reflects and reaffirms existing gender identities and practices” (p.504). Dasgupta (2018) opines that through variety of ways Facebook users portray their gender identity through connectivity and narrative, comments, status updates as well as pictures (p.45).

This paper will shed light on the issue of symbiotic relationship between social media (here Facebook) and gender stereotypes. And, pointing specifically, this study will deal with the presence of women as stereotyped entity in the humors collected from Facebook. It will also critically look into the implanted socio-cultural practices and discursive mechanisms that sustain and enliven gender stereotyping.

II. EXPLAINING GENDER STEREOTYPES

Gender is a matter of social construction. It is constructed in, as Blackstone (2003) observes, “individual, interactional, and structural ways to create environmental constraints and opportunities that usually benefit men more than women” (p. 336). Sharda (2014) opines that gender implies “the roles and responsibilities that have been constructed by the society, in a given culture or location” and these roles contain “political, cultural, environmental, economic, social, and religious factors influencing them” (p. 44). Wood (2009) echoes the same tone and notes that the meaning of gender “depends heavily on cultural values and

practices; a culture’s definitions of masculinity and femininity shape expectations about how individual men and women should communicate” (p. 20).

Gender stereotypes are “beliefs and attitudes about masculinity and femininity” (Kiausiene, 2011, p. 86). They are influenced by custom, law, class, ethnicity, and individual or institutional bias. Our society determines which traits are to be ascribed to the female and which are to the male. It decides what kind of personality, choices, behavior, expectations and occupations are better suited to the female and what are to the male. Thus, emerges gender stereotype in the society. Blackstone (2003) offers the following definition of gender stereotype-

“Gender stereotypes are oversimplified understandings of males and females and the differences between them. Individuals sometimes base their perceptions about appropriate gender roles upon gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes tend to include exaggerated or erroneous assertions about the nature of males and females.” (p. 337)

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, UN) offers a comprehensive explanation of gender stereotypes. It holds that gender stereotype is “a generalized view or preconception about attributes, or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by women and men or the roles that are or should be performed by men and women” (Women’s Rights and Gender Section, OHCHR, September 2014). According to Gove & Watt (2004), a stereotype is a “simplified and possibly exaggerated representation of the most common typical characteristics associated with a category” (cited in Haleem, 2014, p.56). They also opine that these stereotypes are usually biased. Sharda (2010) argues that in gender stereotypical view, women are thought to be “dependent, weak, incompetent, emotional, fearful, flexible, passive, modest, soft-spoken, gentle, care takers while men are powerful, competent, important, logical, decision-makers, aggressive, focused, strong and assertive” (p. 44).

Citing Jankauskaite (1999) Kiausiene (2011) opines that it is still a predominant view that “a woman’s performance is associated with private life – home and family, and public field is assigned to a man, firstly realizing it as a professional performance” (p. 85); human beings are brought up in the environment of various gender stereotypes, e.g. ‘a woman’s job is in the family’, ‘a man has to support family and a woman has to look after children and educate them’, ‘men do not cry as they are powerful’, ‘a man is a defender, a courageous fighter, and a woman is dependent on a man, passive and full of fear’ (p.85). Rao (2007), citing Smelser (1993), shows some common social expectations regarding male-female differences. They are: men should be competitive, women are supposed to be cooperative; men can be impatient, women must have boundless patience; men may be critical, women should always be accepting and supportive; men can rush and be hurried, women are always supposed to have time for people, to sit and chat, to weave an effective network of mutual support and empathy; men are expected to express anger, women should never be angry- at least they should certainly never show it; men are supposed to gain gratification from the self-recognition of a job (p.814).

III. CLARIFICATION OF THE PHRASE “HUMOROUS POSTS”

By the phrase “Humorous posts” in Facebook I want to mean those posts where the users attempt to provide a taste of laughter through portraying women as funny. In that fun, women are presented as lower than men in terms of merit, social status, emotion, ethics, honesty, psychological orientation, economic affairs and many more. These images of women fabricated through Facebook posts are shown both directly and ironically.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is to find out how women are presented as stereotyped entity in the humorous posts of Facebook. It will also explain the socio-cultural effects of it.

V. RESEARCH QUESTION

In connection with the objectives of the study this paper will try to answer the following questions-

- a. In how many ways are women presented as stereotyped entity in the humorous posts of Facebook?
- b. What are the socio-cultural effects of those posts?

VI. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative approach has been used to conduct the research. Qualitative thematic analysis is adopted to present the data. The samples (Facebook posts) were 183 in number. They were in image form with texts. The languages of the texts were both Bangla and English. In case of Bangla, it is translated into English in the explanation part. The duration of the data collection was around eight months because it is not possible to find most-related data within a short period of time. After a long more than eight months’ observation, from around 450 primarily considered data, 183 most-related data were finally accepted for the investigation. The samples were then coded into 8 thematic categories (TC) of gender stereotypes. Finally, each category is presented and discussed.

VII. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

TC- 1: “Women are greedy of materialistic consumption”



Figure-1 (A)



Figure-1 (B)



Figure-1 (C)

It is a set belief, or, stereotyped idea, amongst male, that women have intense attraction for money, valuable gifts and shopping. They are believed to have passionate weakness towards precious objects of these sorts. Figure-1(A) shows that the girl is leaving her present fiancé because a new boy has tried to win her by promising her buying an iPhone. In Figure-1(B) we see that the wife is expressing her desire for a necklace to the husband by telling that it is seen in her dream. But, the humor resides in the reply of the husband that is frustrating for her and it creates fun to the reader by demeaning the position of the girl. Figure-1(C) says that there is no difference between girlfriend and internet because when a man will have no money, in both of the cases there will be ‘error connection’. It highlights the issue that women are greedy of money. In other samples of TC-1 there are multiple sub-themes related to the social belief that women have unusual attraction for valuable objects and money. For example, if a girl’s parents can find a BCS (Bangladesh Civil Service) cadre (man), they can do everything for getting him as their daughter’s prospective husband; a girl can leave her boyfriend if she finds a BCS cadre; a girl begs money from her boyfriend at the end of chatting; husbands are so afraid of their wives’ demand for shopping that they pray for shutdown of shopping malls till the Eid day.

TC-2: “Women are obsessed with beauty, ornaments, make up etc.”



Figure-2 (A)



Figure-2 (B)

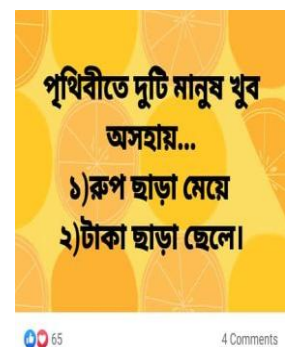


Figure-2 (C)

Our society thinks that women are helpless without beauty and they do not want to miss any single opportunity to show up their physical beauty. Figure-2 (C) is an example which says that two people are helpless- man without money and woman without beauty. Figure-2(B) describes that girls attend even online classes with wearing special dress and plenty of ornaments. Figure-2(A) tells that girls need specific cosmetics for specific part of their body, whereas, men need only one item for all kinds of bodily needs. Here, a strategy of resorting to binary opposition between the choices of man and woman is used to present women’s obsession with beauty, beauty products and ornaments in comparison to man’s very limited number of needs. The third figure clearly indicates that women are the owner of beauty, whereas, men are the store-house of money. There are some other sub-themes related to TC-2, for example- women are valued for beauty, men are for quality; wife is easily happy if husband praises her beauty.

TC-3: “Women are untruthful and use cheating.”



Figure-3 (A)



Figure-3 (B)

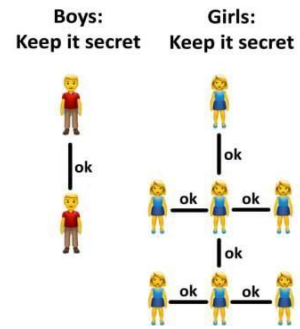


Figure-3 (C)

It is a very strong belief in our society that women are untruthful and maintain the act of cheating in need. First two figures are supporting this view openly by accusing women of doing cheating with boyfriends. Third figure manifests that women cannot hide secrets inside them, they share it with other girls immediately. It indicates their untruthfulness. Other samples describe that women change boyfriends frequently and whimsically; they wish to see the episodes of the *Star Jalsa* to learn cheating and hypocrisy.

TC-4: “Women are illogical and intellectually inferior”



Figure-4 (A)



Figure-4 (B)



Figure-4 (C)

The people of our society strongly possess the credulous belief that women are illogical, devoid of common sense and intellectually inferior; they exercise emotion more than intellect and logic. Figure-4(A) and Figure-4(B) clearly show how women are portrayed as vulnerable to emotion, impracticality and intellectual unproductivity. Figure-4(C) is even one step ahead to the falsified presentation of women. Here, the woman asks to the man for suggesting the names of some books that will make her cry. The man suggests the books of Physics, Chemistry and Higher Mathematics. We have prejudicial belief that women possess less skill and basic quality to study and understand science. They are believed to be so weak in science that they feel like crying when they come across it.

A group of people in our society fallaciously think that women cannot argue logically. The only thing they can do is to quarrel without any logical issue. One of the samples belonging to this category supports this view. The sample describes that arguing with a girl is similar to reading a software license while installing it because in both of the cases you have to accept everything and say “OK, this is my fault” even against your wish. This sample signifies that women are devoid of logic, argument, commonsense and practicality.

TC-5: “Women are for marriage and looking after family only”



Figure-5 (A)



Figure-5 (B)



Figure-5 (C)

That women’s ultimate place is their in-law’s house is firmly believed by our society. Daughters are brought up for making a potential wife, who will be successful as a caring wife, responsible mother and daughter-in-law. Women’s ultimate aim is to marry, give birth to children, look after them, manage the family and take care of their husband. Figure-5(A) describes that the girl is happy while hearing the news that she will be married off after Corona pandemic. But, when she hears that Corona is not leaving soon, she is frustrated. In Figure-5(B) we see that the father is trying to attract the son by telling that he has bought a car for the latter, whereas, the mother does it by offering favorite food for the son. It indicates that women’s place is kitchen and they have not access to income sources. Figure-5(C) seems to be physically disoriented. But it possesses a hidden discursive gender ideology that a wife will be obliged to do all to satisfy her husband.

TC-6: “Women are selfish, suspicious and jealous”



Figure-6 (A)



Figure-6 (B)



Figure-6 (C)

It is widely accepted among the people of our society that women are more selfish than men, suspicious of their husband’s activities and engrossed with jealousy. They are thought to be narrow-minded and not open to all psychologically. In Figure-6(A) it is indicated that women have no mentality of spending money for others, they spend only for their individual need, whereas, a man is open enough to spend money for all. This comparison is used to show women’s narrowness regarding this issue. Figure 6(B) depicts a so-called typical woman’s suspicious mind. Women are falsely believed to be suspicious about their husband. Their suspicion is centered on the intrusion of another woman in their husband’s life.

Figure 6(C) describes a situation to signify woman’s jealousy by narrating that when a girl sees her class-mate taking extra loose sheet in the examination hall, she becomes very jealous. Other samples, for example, suggest that girls resort ‘missed call’ to call their boyfriends. Another sample belonging to this category says-“Nothing makes a short girl happier than seeing someone shorter than her”. In another sample it is said that no bond is stronger than two girls hating the same person. It means that women are jealous both intrinsically and extrinsically. Jealousy pervades their life even in a distorted way.

TC-7: “Women are ominous and bring about destruction”

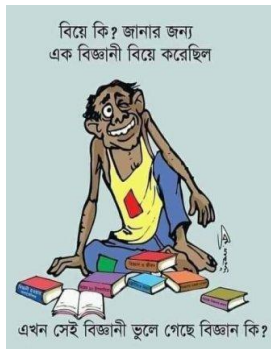


Figure-7 (A)

😂😂😂
Wife: Look at that drunk guy..
Husband: Who is he?
Wife: 10 years back he proposed me, & i rejected him.
Husband: Oh My God! He's still celebrating..

Figure-7 (B)

Wife was checking her husband's phone and saw a contact named Covid 19, she called the number and her own phone rang

Figure-7 (C)

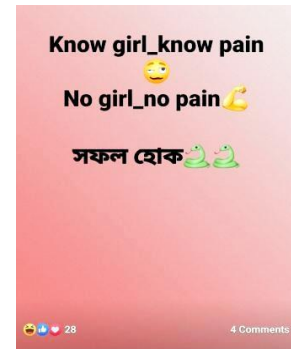


Figure-7(D)

It is a well-established social prejudice that women bring about no positive things for men; rather, they welcome destruction to the life of their husband. They are ominous and good for nothing. Figure-7(A) creates huge fun but shows woman as very degenerative and fruitless in terms of ensuring family success, peace and happiness. The figure describes that a scientist (male) gets married to know what marriage is, but, unfortunately, after getting married he has forgotten what science is. Figure-7(B) indicates that it would a matter celebration for the husband if the wife rejected him before marriage; that means, she has failed to ensure happiness. In Figure-7(C) wife is so unwelcome to the husband that she is compared with Covid-19. Figure-7(D) says that girls are reservoirs of pains for the boys. Other samples suggest that wives bring about destruction; husbands are tired of their wives and search for peace.

TC-8: “Women are synonymous with objects having no individuality”

When I was 13,
 23 Years old had an
 iPhone and Girlfriend.
 Now I'm 23,
 13 Years old have an
 iPhone and Girlfriend 😞

Figure-8 (A)



Figure-8 (B)



Figure-8 (C)

The position of women in our society is so lower that they are compared with objects and play-things for men. It seems that they have no real existence and active identity as human beings.

In Figure-8(A) the place of woman is set in parallel with iPhone. An iPhone has an owner; likewise, a girl has also an owner (man). Figure-8(B) depicts that a woman is ‘second-hand’ to her husband if she has maintained a previous relationship. Generally, we use ‘second-hand’ objects. By using the word to signify a woman has lowered her esteem. Figure-8(C) shows similar theme of objectifying woman by comparing woman to ‘relief goods’ in Corona pandemic time. All these examples imply that women are powerless, having no individual identity and existence in the eyes of the society.

VIII. SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACTS OF PORTRAYING WOMEN’S STEREOTYPED IMAGES IN FACEBOOK

Expressing personal beliefs and views through posting, commenting and sharing in Facebook has become very popular now. Portraying women as funny objects in Facebook is enjoyed and employed by a large number of users; most of them are teenagers and young who enjoy a distorted taste of fun by posting and reading this type of discursive practice, intentionally or innocently. Many of the users post in Facebook without

knowing its future socio-cultural impacts. They even do not know that by posting these sorts of demeaning images of women they are actually promoting discursive gender ideology. Thus, our teenagers and youths are growing up with an inherently rooted view of negative images of women. This type of mortifying and prejudicial images of women in Facebook is in fact endorsing gender stereotyping which is a hole of curse in our society. Promoting gender stereotyping through any media actually hinders the socio-cultural progress. As Facebook is a very fruitful tool for spreading any ideology, like gender ideology, by posting and sharing stereotypical images of women in Facebook the users are encouraging sexual discrimination and gendered division of labor in the society.

IX. CONCLUSION

The study is done through a long observation, examination and finally presentation of the samples. As a part of qualitative approach, this study is actually a thematic analysis where the samples are used to examine to show how stereotyped images of women are depicted and what their socio-cultural impacts are. The findings show very close proximity with the real scenario related to gender ideologies prevalent in our society. The present study bears the significance that the result found through it will contribute positively to further studies in social science regarding the interaction between gender ideology and social media

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