

Gender Representation in News Images: A Study of Newspapers in Bangladesh

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Abstract

News images are a powerful part of journalism. It makes stories more emotional, trustworthy and important. Media can play an important role in eradicating gender inequality by publishing positive news images of all genders. But there is a tendency to prioritize male dominance and marginalize women and people of other genders in news images. The research aims to find out how men and women are represented in news images in Bangladeshi newspapers and to explore the extent and nature of visual gender bias in media representation. The study used quantitative and qualitative content analysis methods to analyze the news images. Three national dailies, Prothom Alo, Ittefaq and Samakal were selected for the study through purposive sampling. The researcher collected 664 images from five news beats as follows: politics, economy, education, sports and entertainment from January 1 to January 7, 2025. Representation theory, feminist theory and semiology were used as theoretical frameworks for the study. The findings showed that 57.98% of news images represented exclusively men, 21.08% represented exclusively women and 20.93% featured both men and women. Men dominated coverage of political (17.17%), economy (15.06%) and sports (15.96%) where women are featured more in entertainment beats (10.54%). Men were shown in leadership roles, formal attire and serious expressions while women were more often shown smiling, dressed casually and in passive or decorative roles. Additionally, women's images were overrepresented in education beat. The study concludes that visual content in newspapers still reflects traditional gender stereotypes and reinforces existing social power imbalance.

Keywords: Media representation, visual stereotypes, news images, Bangladeshi newspapers, gender bias, feminist analysis

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Introduction

Gender relates to socially constructed roles, attitudes and expectations, whereas sex refers to the biological identities of men and women. Gender division is created when society creates different rules and privileges based on biological differences, a process reinforced through family, culture, and social institutions (Rita and Mir, 2014). In the context of Bangladesh, although men and women contribute equally to the development of the family, society, and state, discrimination against people of different genders is evident in media news coverage (Kaioum, 2017).

According to the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), women appear or are heard in just 26 percent of all broadcast, radio and print news (UN Women, 2025). Another study found that only 12 to 30 percent of news published in the country's mass media includes representations of women and transgender people. Among them, 30 percent of newspapers content, 25 percent of television channels news and a minimum of 12 percent of news on online portals are about women and the transgender community (Prothom Alo, 2023). Media organizations are still lagging especially in their use of language, pictures, and videos (Daily Slogaan, 2022). Women's presence in the news is mostly as the subject of the news or as a narrator of their experiences, and rarely as an expert (Prothom Alo, 2023). Research has shown that women made up only 26 percent of experts or commentators in the media industries (Josephine and Estella, 2015).

Despite the equal rights of men and women being guaranteed at the international level (CEDAW Convention, Beijing PFA, etc.) and in some policies and laws of the state (such as the Constitution, National Women's Development Policy, National Broadcasting Policy, Press Council Act, Obscenity and Defamation Act), the respectful portrayal of women or other gender in the media has not changed to the expected extent. Still, there have been many positive changes in media coverage and gender equality in media institutions in Bangladesh compared to the past (Kaioum, 2017).

Statement of the problem

A powerful thematic image can often convey what a thousand-word report cannot. However, this positive potential and the associated ethical responsibility in visual representation are often neglected by news outlets (Hossain, 2023). Rita and Mira (2014) in *Gender and Media* argue that gender representation is biased in Bangladesh in portraying news images. Another study has shown that gender bias in news image differs by topic and males are three times more visible than females (Jia et al., 2015). Mainstream newspaper sometimes present female face in border aspects than male face especially in entertainment page and other section of the newspaper. Sometimes, the male face show in lower scale with low resolution (Rita and Mir, 2014). In such a context, it is essential to critically analyze the portrayal of gender in news images to address and eliminate gender-based segregation. The current study explores how men and women are represented in news image of newspaper in Bangladesh.

Research questions

The primary questions of this research are:

1. How much images used in Bangladeshi newspapers to represent gender?
2. What is the consistent pattern of underrepresentation and stereotypical portrayal of gender?

3. What type of news are published in women's images more compared to men's in newspapers?
4. How women and men are visually framed in news image?
5. What are the significant differences in the portrayal of men and women?

Review of the literature

The Pew Research Center used machine vision to analyze 44,056 Facebook news images from 17 national outlets between April 1 and June 30, 2018, examining the representation of women in news visuals. The study revealed that 67% of the individuals depicted were men (35,367), while only 33% were women (17,700), indicating that men appeared twice as often as women in news photographs. Women are shown relatively more in news about entertainment, but never more than men overall. A total of 22% of individuals shown in stories about the economy were women, while 78% were men (Lam et al., 2019). Mindatika et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative study to examine women's physical image, psychological image, and social image in Kekeberen oral literature. Their analysis revealed a clear gender imbalance, with unequal distribution of roles and positions between men and women. The study also identified four types of gender bias arising from gender inequalities in oral literature: subordination, stereotypes, violence against women, and double labor burdens. Jia et al. (2015) classified faces in news images by gender and found biases. They collected 885,573 news articles from 882 news outlets on the web between October 19, 2014 and January 29, 2015. The researchers found that gender bias in news images varies by topic, whereas fashion and arts images showed the least bias.

Ibarra et al. (2024) conducted a quantitative content analysis of graphic images in 15 newspapers from Mexico, the U.S., and Germany. They found that events geographically and culturally farther away were more likely to feature graphic images. Additionally, non-white victims and non-citizens were more likely to be depicted in graphic imagery. Mexican and U.S. newspapers were also more likely to publish graphic images than German newspapers. Ulloa et al. (2024) analyzed gender bias in image search, focusing on representativeness and face-ism across Google, Bing, Baidu, and Yandex, using 240 simulated user-behavior agents. They found that female faces are comparatively common on Baidu, while Bing and Yandex showed significantly fewer female faces when searching for 'person.' Overall, the study highlighted a dominant face-ism bias prevalent in search engines globally.

Dev (2024) investigated the representation of women in news and feature photographs in two major Bangladeshi newspapers, Prothom Alo and The Daily Star. Employing a content analysis methodology, the study analyzed 405 photos published between January 1 and December 31, 2022. The findings showed that women are underrepresented and misrepresented in news and feature photos, and presenting them as negative, insignificant, and mostly associated with the private sphere (domestic and family life). Women were rarely portrayed as protagonists in photographs. Blackwood (1979) analyzed 2,039 news photos from three U.S. newspapers and found that only 13% of the images featured non-white individuals and 24% featured women. Except lifestyle pages, every section of the dailies published far more photos of men than women and only a quarter of women's pictures appeared on front pages.

Miller (1975) analyzed the roles of men and women in news photos of The Washington Post and The Los Angeles Times. She found that news photos rarely covered women in professional roles; instead, they were primarily shown as activists and entertainers, while men were depicted as professionals, politicians, and sports figures. Notably, eighty percent of the images of women were presented as spouses. A study by Hossen (2001) analyzed the contents of the two major dailies of Bangladesh, The Daily Ittefaq and The Daily Manab Zamin, to explore the representation of women in press photographs. This research found a pattern consistent with global trends: women were significantly underrepresented, their issues were trivialized, and they were frequently overrepresented as decorative or commodified figures.

Sharma (2017) found that Indian news media represent women in stereotypical roles such as mothers, wives, or subordinates, with emphasis on their appearance. The researcher suggested that the unfavorable and disrespectful representation of women should be altered in the media, along with empowering women through the positive representation of women's expertise. Talukder (2021) carried out a study on narrative analysis of eight major Bangladeshi films to understand the representation of gender. Researcher found that women are represented as vulnerable and sexualized, whereas men are depicted as strong, dominant, and often as abusers or criminals. With the exception of *Common Gender*, third-gender representation was absent. Male characters showed dynamic roles in contrast to women characters showed passive roles. Though women's struggles were shown in some scenes, it is insufficient to address broader gender issues.

Research significance

Image content analysis is necessary to contribute to gender-sensitive journalism and media accountability, just like other forms of media content analysis. It also supports ongoing discussions related to media and gender studies, encouraging fair and balanced visual narratives (Ross and Carter, 2011). Though various studies have been conducted on gender and image representation in the media at both international and national contexts, there is no in-depth analysis of the visual representation of gender in news images of Bangladeshi newspapers. The study will fill that gap. This research will also provide a significant direction in ensuring equal representation of all genders in news and journalism. Overall, this research will create a more in-depth scientific research field in the future.

Methodology

This research followed both quantitative and qualitative content analysis method to investigate gender representation in news images of newspapers. The quantitative analysis (answering questions like how much, how many, how often) used for measuring aspects such as the frequency of appearance, and comparison of men and women in news images. The qualitative analysis explores how gender identities, roles, and ideas are constructed and represented through images, symbols, and visual framing.

Data collection

Three national dailies of Bangladesh, The Daily Prothom Alo, The Daily Ittefaq, and The Daily Samakal, were selected for content analysis using the purposive sampling method. These newspapers were chosen due to their wide readership and influence in shaping public opinion.

Researcher collected data in five news beats to reach the goal of the study to analyze the gender representation in news images on newspapers. The categories of investigation in the current study are as follows: Politics, Economy, Education, Sports, and Entertainment. Data were collected from 01 January 2025 to 07 January for carrying out the research.

Data analysis

The researcher analyzed 664 news images from five varied beats of sample newspapers. The frequency distribution and percentage of the Microsoft Excel have been used to analyze the extent of gender representation. The study used semiotic, and feminist analysis to examine visual stereotypes. It also interprets the messages conveyed, which helps analyze the qualitative portrayal of gender roles. A comparative analysis across five news beats helps identify areas where gender disparities are more visible.

Theoretical framework

Representation theory, feminist theory and semiology have been followed as theoretical frameworks for the study. Stuart Hall's representation theory is an integral part of media studies that seeks to explore how media texts 'represent' reality. According to Hall, such things as identities, race, gender, or class are not fixed but rather constructed and 'represented' through the media (Haque, 2001). In this study, the representation theory has been used in explaining the news images of the newspaper. News images do not simply reflect some anterior realities of gender, but actively participate in the construction and reinforcement of ideas of gender in society. This theory will also explain the way that news images are represented and reproduced in the existing power structure. Representation theory helps to show how often men appear compared to women, in what they are featured doing or performance, and how they are framed visually in newspaper.

Feminist theory illustrates how stereotypes are reinforced by the media, allowing women and men to take certain positions (Gill, 2007). Often, news images show women as passive and domestic or in a subordinate role and men as active, commanding, authoritative, and in a public role. Such a trend only upholds the stereotypical perceptions of gender and deprives women of being represented in various other roles, including that of a leader or a professional (Ross & Carter, 2011). Feminist media analysis is of the opinion that such depictions influence societal expectations, underlying gender hierarchies, and public perception towards the acceptable or anticipated roles for each gender.

Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes's semiology theory focuses on how meaning is constructed from visual aspects, and the gender ideologies underlying are established. Signs in an image in semiotic analysis have a signifier (the actual visual element) and the signified (its meaning) (Saussure, 1916 & Barthes, 1957). For example, an image of a male leader in a work environment can imply power, while a female leader shown in a domestic environment might reinforce traditional gender roles. Roland Barthes' theory of myth also explains how repetitive media images generate dominant ideologies. When the media consistently represent men as decision-makers and women as caregivers, such images become naturalized, affecting public knowledge about gender roles. Visual framing such as camera angles, positioning, and body language also operates to reinforce these norms. Structuralist binary oppositions (strong/weak,

rational/emotional, etc.) also help to clarify the differential positioning of men and women in the media. A semiotic approach, through a systematic analysis of newspaper images, uncovers the implicit biases in media representations, highlighting the role of visual culture in shaping societal gender norms. The researcher felt these theories may provide an academic framework to reach any conclusion on this research.

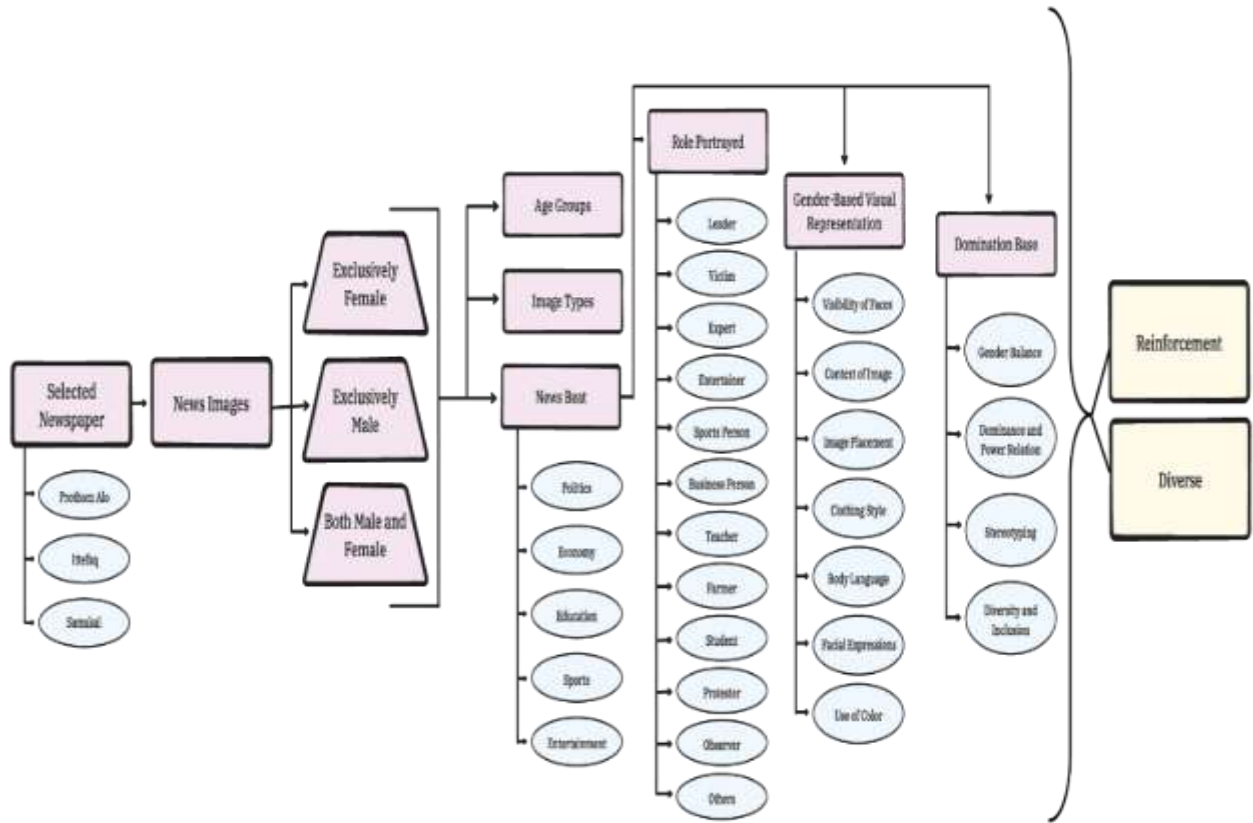


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

On the basis of these theories, the researcher developed a framework to analyze gender representation in news images by examining frequency of appearance, beat-wise representation, age groups, image types, and visual framing. This analysis is carried out to explore how men and women are portrayed, what roles they perform, and whether visual elements reinforce dominant gender roles, identities, and power relations within media discourse or provide diverse representations.

Results and Findings

Table 01: Newspaper based gender representation in news images

Newspaper	News Images (%)	Exclusively Male (%)	Exclusively Female (%)	Both Male and Female (%)
Prothom Alo	231 (34.79)	137 (20.63)	50 (7.53)	44 (6.63)
Ittefaq	207 (31.17)	131 (19.73)	40 (6.02)	36 (5.42)
Samakal	226 (34.04)	117 (17.62)	50 (7.53)	59 (8.89)
Total	664 (100%)	385 (57.98)	140 (21.08)	139 (20.93)

Table 01 shows the gender disparities in visual representation from an analysis of 664 news images. Exclusively men were featured in 57.98% of the images, whereas exclusively women were featured in only 21.08%. The other 20.93% of the photographs featured both men and women. Of the newspapers analyzed, The Daily Prothom Alo published the highest number of images 231 (34.79%), of which 137 (20.37%) featured only men and 50 (7.53%) featured only women, reflecting a continuation of male predominance in representation. The Daily Samakal had the highest percentage of images featuring both males and females (8.89%), while The Daily Ittefaq had the lowest percentage of such images (5.42%).

Table 02: Representation of age groups and image types in news images

	Value	Total (%)	Exclusively Male (%)	Exclusively Female (%)	Both Male and Female (%)
Age Group	Child	14 (2.11)	4 (0.60)	4 (0.60)	6 (0.90)
	Teen	29 (4.37)	8 (1.20)	16 (2.41)	5 (0.75)
	Adult	518 (78.01)	298 (44.88)	93 (14.01)	127 (19.13)
	Elder	103 (15.51)	75 (11.30)	27 (4.07)	1 (0.15)
Image Type	Photograph	577 (86.90)	336 (50.60)	123 (18.52)	118 (17.77)
	Illustration	84 (12.65)	47 (7.08)	16 (2.41)	21 (3.16)
	Infographic	3 (0.45)	2 (0.30)	1 (0.15)	0 (0.00)

Table 02 demonstrates that news images mostly feature adults. They make up 78.01% of all images, of which 44.88% are male, and 14.01% are female. Regarding the image types, almost all images used are photographs (86.90%), compare to illustrations (12.65%), and infographics (0.45%). However, there is a known issue of gender imbalance in all the images, with men being overrepresented.

Table 03: Beat wise gender representation in news images

News Beat	Total (%)	Exclusively Male (%)	Exclusively Female (%)	Both (%)
Politics	161 (24.25)	114 (17.17)	23 (3.46)	24 (3.61)
Economy	154 (23.19)	100 (15.06)	10 (1.51)	44 (6.63)
Education	56 (8.43)	17 (2.56)	19 (2.86)	20 (3.01)
Sports	131 (19.73)	106 (15.96)	18 (2.71)	7 (1.05)
Entertainment	162 (24.40)	48 (7.23)	70 (10.54)	44 (6.63)
Total	664 (100.00)	385 (57.98)	140 (21.08)	139 (20.93)

Table 03 represents the beat-wise gender representation in news images. The study shows that men dominate political (17.17%) and sports (15.96%) coverage. In contrast, women are featured more in entertainment beats. Women appear in 10.54% of entertainment images, compared to 7.23% for men. The economy beat covers business and financial news and is equally men-dominated. In this beat, 15.06% of the images featured men, while only 1.51% of images featured women. In the education beat, women appeared slightly more often. Here, 2.86% of the images showed women, while 2.56% featured men.

Table 04: Representation in different gender roles

Role Portrayed	Exclusively Male (%)	Exclusively Female (%)	Both Male and Female (%)
Leader (n = 91)	72 (79.12)	16 (17.58)	3 (3.30)
Victim (n = 21)	18 (85.71)	2 (9.52)	1 (4.76)
Expert (n = 113)	83 (73.45)	3 (2.65)	27 (23.89)
Entertainer (n =161)	48 (29.81)	70 (43.48)	43 (26.71)
Sports Person (n = 106)	83 (78.30)	17 (16.04)	6 (5.66)
Business Person (n =31)	20 (64.52)	2 (6.45)	9 (29.03)
Teacher (n = 6)	3 (50.00)	1 (16.67)	2 (33.33)
Farmer (n = 24)	18 (75.00)	3 (12.50)	3 (12.50)
Student (n = 37)	7 (18.92)	17 (45.95)	13 (35.14)
Protester (n = 42)	23 (54.76)	4 (9.52)	15 (35.71)
Observer (n = 6)	1 (16.67)	1 (16.67)	4 (66.67)
Others (n = 26)	9 (34.62)	4 (15.38)	13 (50.00)

Table 04 shows the different gender roles in news images. The analysis of roles finds that men dominate the leadership, expert, sports, business, farmer, and protester roles, while women are more prominent only in entertainment and student roles. In leadership positions, 79.12% of portrayals are exclusively men, 17.58% are exclusively women; and only 3.30% are feature both, which captures the disparity of the genders in authoritative seats. A similar trend can be noted in expert roles, which are 73.45% men, and only 2.65% women. Similarly, business roles are male-dominated, with 64.52% men and only 6.45% women. Portrayal of men in sports are the highest at 78.30%, compared to 16.04% for women, which shows the cultural notion of sports being for men. On the contrary, the entertainment beats where women participation (43.48%) is much higher than men (29.81). Women are also more frequently represented in student roles (45.95%) compared to men (18.92%). Finally, women participate in protest activities or public movements in only 9.52% of the cases, while men are very active (54.76%) of such images.

Table 05: Gender-based visual representation in news images

Value		Total (%)	Exclusively Male (%)	Exclusively Female (%)	Both Male and Female (%)
Visibility of faces	Fully Visible	302 (45.48)	160 (24.10)	92 (13.86)	50 (7.53)
	Partially Visible	360 (54.22)	225 (33.89)	47 (7.08)	88 (13.25)
	Not Visible	2 (0.30)	1 (0.15)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.15)
Context of image	Workplace	118 (17.77)	71 (10.69)	23 (3.46)	24 (3.61)
	Event	181 (27.26)	94 (14.16)	21 (3.16)	66 (9.94)
	Street	43 (6.48)	21 (3.16)	5 (0.75)	17 (2.56)
	Sports field	61 (9.19)	53 (7.98)	6 (0.90)	2 (0.30)
	Home	8 (1.20)	3 (0.45)	3 (0.45)	2 (0.30)
	Not applicable	253 (38.10)	143 (21.54)	82 (12.35)	28 (4.22)
Image placement	Headline	232 (34.94)	156 (23.49)	32 (4.82)	44 (6.63)
	Body	201 (30.27)	61 (9.19)	91 (13.70)	49 (7.38)
	Sidebar	168 (25.30)	144 (21.69)	16 (2.41)	8 (1.20)
	Background	63 (9.49)	24 (3.61)	1 (0.15)	38 (5.72)
Clothing style	Formal	220 (33.13)	150 (22.59)	28 (4.22)	42 (6.33)
	Casual	351 (52.86)	160 (24.10)	106 (15.96)	85 (12.80)
	Traditional	20 (3.01)	15 (2.26)	2 (0.30)	3 (0.45)
	Sportswear	62 (9.34)	57 (8.58)	0 (0.00)	5 (0.75)
	Others	11 (1.66)	3 (0.45)	4 (0.60)	4 (0.60)
Body language	Strong	371 (55.87)	206 (31.02)	108 (16.27)	57 (8.58)
	Authoritative	127 (19.13)	92 (13.86)	15 (2.26)	20 (3.01)
	Aggressive	69 (10.39)	51 (7.68)	1 (0.15)	17 (2.56)
	Emotional	39 (5.87)	3 (0.45)	7 (1.05)	29 (4.37)
	Passive	58 (8.73)	33 (4.97)	9 (1.36)	16 (2.41)
Facial expressions	Serious	357 (53.77)	241 (36.30)	54 (8.13)	62 (9.34)
	Smiling	251 (37.80)	116 (17.47)	74 (11.14)	61 (9.19)
	Emotional	6 (0.90)	1 (0.15)	3 (0.45)	2 (0.30)
	Neutral	50 (7.53)	28 (4.22)	8 (1.20)	14 (2.11)
Use of color	Dark Tone	236 (35.54)	142 (21.39)	35 (5.27)	59 (8.89)
	Bright Tone	328 (49.40)	143 (21.54)	105 (15.81)	80 (12.05)

Table 05 shows the gender-based visual representation in news images. The data reveal that men's faces are shown more frequently as fully visible (24.10%) compared to women's (13.86%), reinforcing the dominant visual presence of men in news images. In terms of contextual representation, men are broadly portrayed within professional environments (10.69%) and sports activities (7.98%), while the representation of women in these areas remains notably limited. Similarly, image placement reflects this imbalance, with men appearing in headlines (23.49%) to a far more often than women (4.82%). Attire-based differences also contribute to gendered portrayals; men are more frequently shown in formal wear (22.59%), thereby reinforcing associations with power and professionalism, while women appear formally dressed in only 4.22% of the images analyzed. Body language description indicates that men are predominantly described as strong (31.02%) and authoritative (13.86%), whereas women are passive (1.36%) and emotional

(1.05%). Facial expression analysis shows that men are more likely to exhibit serious expressions (36.30%), while women are more frequently shown smiling (11.47%), reflecting stereotypical emotional displays. Similar color use patterns have accentuated such extremes, as men are frequently associated with dark color (21.39%), symbolizing power, while women use light colors (15.81%), conforming stereotypes of warmth and friendliness.

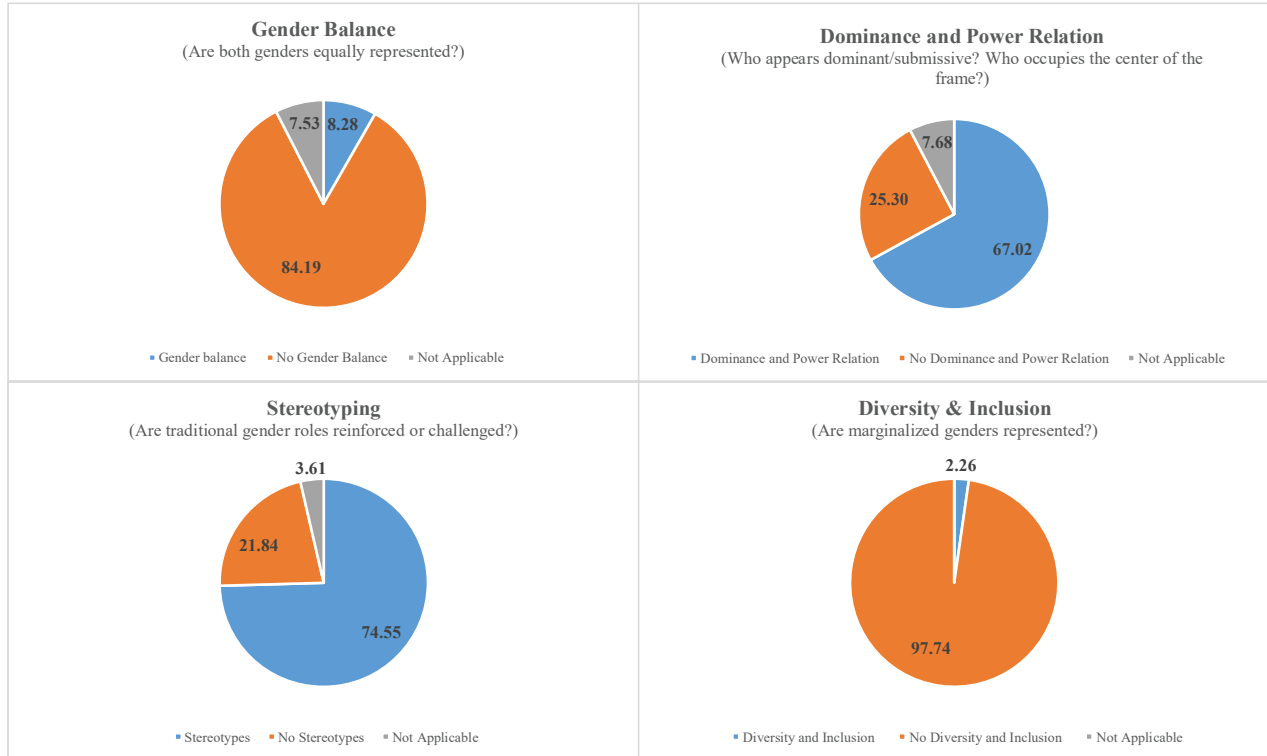


Figure 02: Measuring visual representation of gender Balance, power relations, stereotypes, and inclusion

Chart 02 illustrates the measurement of visual representation of gender Balance, power relations, stereotypes, and inclusion. The data shows that 84.19% of the content fails to portray gender equally, while only 8.28% achieves balanced representation. This indicates most of the images are biased towards men. In light of Dominance and Power Relations, 67.02% of the content reflects a clear imbalance where men are more dominant. Regarding stereotypes, 74.55% of the images preserves gender-based stereotypes, while only 21.84% is free from them. In the diversity and inclusion, finally, the images fail to represent marginalized genders in 97.74% of cases.

Qualitative analysis of gender in news image

Thematic representation

Thematic representation refers to the process of organizing and presenting information or data based on identified themes or topics. In qualitative research, data (such as texts or interviews) are analyzed to find common ideas, patterns, and meanings (Naeem et al., 2023). The observation of

gender-based thematic representation in the media in Bangladesh reflects the media's structural bias and patriarchal views towards different genders. Amongst the five beats investigated in the study, the image of men is mainly presented in the 'hard news' section related to politics, economy, crime, sports, business and administration. In this presentation, they are portrayed as decision-makers, experts or powerful figures. This establishes men as influential and intelligent, which further strengthens their influence and authority in society. On the other hand, women are mainly



Image-1

presented in the 'soft news' section related to lifestyle, entertainment, education, and cultural events. Such representations diminish women's leadership and decision-making roles, which hinders their social and professional advancement. In addition, this division hides the real contributions of women, which becomes an obstacle to their empowerment. This gender-based division of issues presents an unequal and biased image in the media, which further reinforces gender inequality in society.

Body language and posture

This collage of Image-1 from Bangladeshi newspapers shows how images convey meaning through body language and posture in gender representation. In this image, the male sportsperson is featured in the largest frame, taking an active part in a cricket match, with his body in motion, showing intensity, concentration, and physical engagement. This active photograph supports the dominant pattern of associating male sportspersons with action and physical strength. In contrast, the women are shown in less dynamic and more emotional roles. The woman in formal attire is smiling while speaking, indicating that her role is likely related to media or commentary rather than participation in sports competitions. The tennis player, though an athlete, is caught smiling and waving after a game in a photo that emphasizes the emotional appeal and public interaction

The news image (Image-2) shows two actors, a male and a female, used to visually support an entertainment news story. The male actor is standing with a confident smile, wearing a simple jacket and tie. This image conveys the confidence and competence of the male actor. On the other hand, the female actor is sitting or leaning slightly and her hands are resting gracefully on a ledge, and she is wearing a sleeveless dress designed to emphasize her physical beauty and grace. In this image, the female actor stands in a more passive and decorative stance, not with force but with elegance. Her photograph is representative of another common media trend whereby women are represented in soft, stylized rather than assertive, forceful poses, different from how men are represented. The photo invisibly reinforces gender expectations in film promotion, where male visibility is linked to personality and control, and female visibility is linked to beauty and elegance.

Professional identity and positionality



Image-3

In the news photos (Image-3) from the three newspapers, both women and men are seen in different professions. However, men’s professional roles are more diverse and visible. Men are shown in a wide range of professions such as politicians, experts, business person, and sports person, with clear signs of their roles. They are explicitly shown in the images performing professional tasks

such as giving speeches, handling equipment, leading teams. In contrast, women's professional identities are often obscured or downplayed. In many cases, their visual cues did not emphasize their roles and the captions did not include professional titles. Even when women were present in leadership and professional roles, the choice of images and composition failed to reinforce that position.



Image-4

The image of female athletes (Image-4) standing in a group selfie, rather than being shown playing the sport, suggests an underlying problem of gender inequality in sports media. Male athletes are shown demonstrating their ability and professionalism in active, competitive situations, solidifying their status as serious sports figures. On the other hand, this image of women diminishes their sporting self, placing emphasis on a social moment as opposed to sporting capability. Such representation perpetuates stereotypes shown that female sportspersons are not so serious or competitive as men. This not only diminishes their visibility as sports professionals but also assumptions in the audience that systematically reducing their contribution to the sport.

Symbolism and background cues

In Bangladeshi newspapers, the visual backgrounds and symbolic cues utilized in news images are significant in reinforcing traditional gender roles. Male-centric images frequently feature institutional elements such as flags, podiums, press symbols, or governmental office settings to signify authority, power, and identification with state or public spaces. On the other hand, women are represented as being located in the private or domestic environments like homes, schools, or outdoors, which visually mark them as part of the private sphere and reinforce stereotypical caregiving and passivity roles. This gendered visual construction subtly but powerfully conveys men as leaders and decision-makers and positions women in secondary or supportive roles. Such representation not only strengthens stereotypical gender expectations but also shapes audience

perception by normalizing male authority in public life and limiting women's presence in authorizing situations.

Women are often portrayed unnecessarily in the entertainment beat



Image-5



Image-6

All three newspapers have unnecessarily presented women's pictures on their 'entertainment' pages. There was also a tendency to present women celebrities as sex objects without any reason in any general news. A picture (Image-5) was published on the 'entertainment' page of Prothom Alo on 5 January 2025 with the title 'Mumbai's Vedika Shines as a South Star (Mumbai Er Vedika Jakhon Dokkhiner Taroka'. In this picture, Bollywood actress Vedika Kumar was standing in a provocative pose and the camera focused on her exposed navel. A similar picture (Image-6) was published in Daily Ittefaq on 4 January 2025, with the title 'Aashe Shraddha's wife-3'. There, another Bollywood actress, Shraddha Kapoor, is shown wearing a revealing tight-fitting top, where a part of her chest and back area of her body is exposed. Thus, women's short clothing and sex appeal were often the focus of the newspaper pictures, as if the woman's body and appearance were the important subject of the news. Although both of this news stories analyzed in the study discuss the careers or achievements of female actors, the use of such images in visual presentation often seems unnecessary.

Absence of transgender representation

The transgender community constitutes an integral segment of the national population. Inclusive development is not possible without their participation. To include transgender individuals in mainstream society, both the government and private sectors have taken appropriate initiatives. In this regard, assistance from media and society is needed to empower the marginalized transgender community and render them productive human assets. Despite media hegemony in constructing social awareness of minority groups, transgender people do not appear prominently in news images of Bangladeshi dailies. Research has shown that despite official acknowledgment of the transgender community as the third gender back in 2013, their visual presence in mainstream media continues to be negligible or simply non-existent. This underrepresentation does not only work to continue their marginalization, but also entrenches social ignorance and bias by denying them visibility and validity.

Overrepresentation of women in education beat



Image-7

Image 7 depicts that all the newspapers sampled showed that female students were overrepresented in education-related reports compared to male students. Female students are disproportionately represented in various news stories such as book distributions, SSC exam celebrations, as examinees, and publishing exam results, often depicted with bright smiles and attractive appearances, reflecting a form of commodified portrayal aimed at pleasing patriarchal gaze. While such portrayals attempt to tell so-called “success stories,” they actually obscure gender inequality, socio-economic inequality, and the challenges of women’s safety in education. As a result, female students are frequently depicted not as active agents or contributors, but as symbolic figures, used more for visual appeal than substantive representation.

Conclusion

In this free market economy, the media plays a very significant role as an indirect influencer of social formation. It is for this reason that the discriminatory notion of portraying women as consumer objects and dependents, rooted in patriarchal society, is further strengthened by various depictions in the media. Therefore, the issue of gender discrimination is emerging prominently in dramas, movies, and even in news photos (Aziz, 2016). This study shows this type of gender disparity in the visual representation of men and women in Bangladeshi newspapers. Drawing on representation theory, feminist theory, and semiology, the research highlights the media’s role in constructing and reinforcing patriarchal narratives. Representation theory points out that these images do not just represent reality but actually shape social perceptions which reinforce existing power relations. Feminist theory insists on the demolition of such stereotypes by portraying women as leaders, experts, and active representatives in different spheres of life. Semiotic analysis too underscores a need to break the traditional visual signs to project more equitable and empowering images of women. Further, gender equity in the media can be achieved through concerted efforts among media professionals, civil society, and development stakeholders towards making presentations equitable, representative, and balanced for all genders.

Limitations of the research

The limitations of this study include its limited sample of newspapers and its short timeframe for content analysis, which prevent the findings from being broadly generalizable.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares that she has no competing interests.

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