

Original Article

Representation of Women in Modern Cinema: A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Female representation in contemporary cinema has evolved significantly from traditional stereotypes of passive and dependent characters to more diverse and empowered portrayals. This study analyzes how women are represented in films from 2000–2024 across global film industries, including Hollywood and Bollywood. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the research evaluates factors such as screen time, narrative importance, occupational roles, character agency, and dialogue contribution. The analysis applies perspectives from feminist film theory, gender studies, and cultural studies to identify trends in representation. Findings show that while modern cinema increasingly portrays women as independent professionals and leaders, subtle stereotypes and limitations still exist, including restricted narrative agency and underrepresentation in leadership roles. The study concludes that meaningful representation requires not only increased screen presence but also strong character development, narrative influence, and authentic storytelling that reflects the realities of women in modern society.

KEYWORDS

Women Representation, Modern Cinema, Gender Studies, Feminist Film Theory, Media Representation, Cultural Studies.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Cinema is generally considered to be one of the most influential types of mass media which shapes the attitude of society, culture values and gender roles perception. Ever since the inception of the film industry, films have been used as a channel through which concepts touching on identity, relationships and social expectations are passed onto the audiences. Mostly in the past, the role of representing women in motion pictures was majorly influenced by patriarchal societal set-ups, which tended to limit the portrayal onto women of stereotypical roles. Women were most of the time presented as nurturers, lovers, or passive people whose lives were interwoven narrations of male characters. These representations encouraged the conventional gender expectations and helped to form the social opinions about the role of a woman in the society. The way women are portrayed in film has been changing over the years in a way which is affected by the societal and social changes in the society. The emergence of feminist movements and growing support of gender equality and a greater consciousness of how gender is portrayed in the media have prompted filmmakers to attempt to break traditional stereotypical characters, as well as to consider more varied kinds of female characters. Consequently, films have started to portray women as free individuals with complicated personalities, goals, and leadership ability gradually, given that modern cinema. The role of female characters has been increasingly represented as a professional, decision-maker, and protagonists who can influence the storytelling instead of supporting other characters, usually males. Simultaneously, the movie industry has a complicated environment with regards to the cultural traditions, the viewer expectations, and trade interests. The increasing need toward inclusive and balanced storytelling has also been the result of globalization and the development of digital media platforms. A lot of filmmakers are becoming more conscious of the need to portray women in ways that would capture a mirror of the current social realities. Nevertheless, in spite of the above-mentioned advances, the presence of women in cinema remains a topic of constant scholarly and popular discussions. Although a number of recent movies have strong and empowered female characters, critics state that some of the representations remains based on the conventional stereotypes or explores the notion of empowerment in a scanty manner. Consequently, the study of the portrayal of women in the contemporary cinema will continue to be critical in the overall correlation of media and culture and gender equality.

1.2. Importance of Representation of Women in Modern Cinema

Gender roles, attitudes, and beliefs about women in modern cinema are critical in influencing the shaping of the society. Films are an effective means that affects viewers to make sense of identity, power, and social relations. Cinema can also break the traditional stereotypes and enhance the gender equality when women portrayed are an accurate and varied reflection of women in real life. Both precise and proportional portrayal does not only show the realities of the present society, but also enables women to feel empowered as they show their successes, abilities, and contribution in various fields. The significance of female representation in the films can be explained by a number of major elements.

IMPORTANCE OF REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN MODERN CINEMA

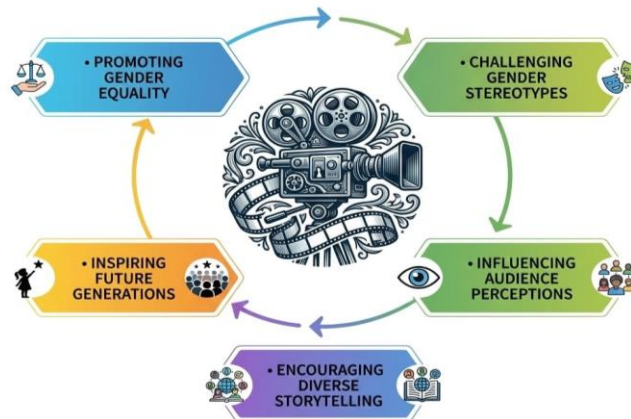


Fig 1 - Importance of Representation of Women in Modern Cinema

1.2.1. Promoting Gender Equality

Among the greatest reasons that led to the enhancement of representation of women in cinema, there is the one of ensuring gender equality. Movies are watched by a great number of people and can change the social opinion regarding social roles and expectations. By representing women as such leaders, professionals and decision-makers, this contributes to the challenge of long held stereotypes that deprived women to passive or peripheral roles. Positive representation makes the viewers realize that women are competent people who can also play equal roles in any area of life.

1.2.2. Breaking the Gender Stereotypes

The female gender was commonly stereotyped through traditional cinema through the depiction of homemakers, romantic partners or people who were in need of the male characters. As a medium, modern cinema can prominently disrupt such stereotypes by portraying women as strong and independent and complex characters. It is not necessary to adhere to archaic images and stereotypes since through film, producers are able to produce projects that are more complex and multifaceted in terms of women and their identities.

1.2.3. Influencing Audience Perceptions

Cinema is capable of exerting influence on the perception of social expectations and gender expectations. When movies offer a constant reinforcement of women as empowered and various, they facilitate the recreation of social attitudes in terms of women involvement in leadership, career and other decision-making roles. These images may encourage viewers, especially young ones, to challenge conventional gender role and assumptions and embrace more accommodative views.

1.2.4. Encouraging Diverse Storytelling

The incorporation of female characters that are well developed would open more variety in narration in the film industry. Women-focused stories present fresh ideas, experiences, and topics that strengthen films. Through understanding various facets of the lives of women, the filmmakers would be able to create films that are more entertaining and socially important to a wider audience.

1.2.5. *Inspiring Future Generations*

The high percentage of female representation in the cinema can be viewed as an inspiration to the latter generations. Because when viewers watch women doing things that emphasize the idea of empowered women, innovators, and problem-solvers, it has the potential to encourage young girls and women to follow through on their goals and break social restrictions. Through this, cinema does not only entertain, but also creates a great influence in shaping aspirations as well bringing about a positive social change.

1.3. **Changing Trends in Modern Cinema**

In its present state, modern cinema has experienced radical shifts in how female characters are depicted, which translate into an even wider social change and heightened appreciation of gender equality. Women in movies used to play small roles and were associated with household chores or romances or emotional reliance on their male counterparts in the past decades. But filmmaking today has slowly been transformed into more active and decentralized portrayals of women. The female characters are also becoming a focus of the narratives, where their lives and choices and their own personal paths serve the plot. This change is evidence of the increasing awareness in the film industry that the viewers are intrigued in interesting and significant representations of women. The growing contribution of female characters in traditionally male-dominated genres of modern cinema is one of the most prominent trends in the new cinematic era. Now movies of all kinds of genre like action, science fiction, adventure, and political drama have a higher chance of including the strong female lead which instead of an over-sexualized figure reflects courage, intelligence, and leadership skills. Some of the roles assumed by such characters include warriors, scientists, political leaders, or professionals who are actively involved in the resolution of conflicts in the story. These images depict the emerging social demands and expectations such that women are now being given references regarding their ability and success in different areas. Besides their appearances on screen; there is also a gradual growth in the number of women behind the scenes as directors, writers and producers. This participation has helped to bring more refined narratives and more voices of women in film narratives. Consequently, the issues of female empowerment, identity and career aspirations, and social problems of women in modern world are being revisited in numerous movies. Though such favorable changes seem to happen, critics say that even such modern representations of women, should have certain stereotypes related to them. In some instances, women characters might seem strong superficially, but will still be either relying on males characters to move the story forward or to seek emotional confirmation. Besides, other movies powerify women in a shallow way without going into details of the female lives. Consequently, even though the contemporary cinema has achieved significant advancements in the area of increasing the number of female characters, more needs to be done to make sure that the women characters can be similarly depicted as characters with independence, dimensions, and variety throughout all genres.

2. **LITERATURE SURVEY**

Gender representation in cinemas is one of the main areas of the study, which has attracted numerous scholars within the field of media studies, sociology, or cultural studies. The question of career how films mirror and influence the attitude of the society towards gender roles has been researched. Cinema being one of the most influential mass media tends to reflect the existing cultural norms and at the same time shape the perceptions of the audience. Previous researchers, to a large extent, focused their attention on the disproportion of the representation between the male and female characters since most of the times females were either underrepresented, or their roles were limited to a few, clearly defined functions. As time went by, researchers became interested in the

issue of how women appeared in movies, but also the quality of their characters and their power. With the worldwide debate on the issue of gender equality increasing, there was also a growing scholarly interest in cinema representation, which resulted in an extensive literature that has critically discussed the role of films in constructing gender identities.

2.1. Early Studies on Gender Representation

Most of the early scholarly studies of gender representation in cinema were devoted to the determination of the stereotypes that recur in female characters. Research in the 1970s and 1980s emphasized the fact that women were frequently reduced to stereotypical and predictable roles of caregiver, love interest or victim. Scholars had noted that female characters were commonly used as minor characters whose stories centered around male heroes. These images were contributing to the prevailing gender norms by portraying women as emotionally weak, inactive, and independent. The fact is that scholars believed that these representations helped construct the assumption into the nature of a society with respect to the abilities and roles of women in actual life. First research on this topic by analyzing the content of mainstream movies of the time showed that the split in screen time, character growth, and plot prominence was highly skewed in favor of the male gender.

2.2. Feminist Film Theory Contributions

Due to increased feminist scholarly work, alternative theoretical perspectives arose to examine gender representation in film critically. Feminist film theorists analyzed the ways in which language of the movie, its storyline as well as visual effects are used so that they play the role of constructing the image of women on screen. Among the most powerful concepts, which are brought into the field is the male gaze, which implies that women in films tend to be portrayed in a male-centric image, which would mean as objects of visual attraction instead of active agents of the narrative. According to academics, camera shots, editing rhythm, and plot emphasis often privileges the male perspective, and is a way of supporting patriarchal values in the narrative of films. Another consequence of the feminist film theory was more analytical consideration of agency of character, narrative control and socio-cultural that the films are created and viewed in as well.

2.3. Contemporary Studies on Female Empowerment

According to recent studies, the contemporary film industry has achieved a significant advance in this respect of the better portrayal of women. Recent research reveals the emergence of female protagonists and the rise of the diversification of characters given to women in cinema. There has been an increasing number of female-led stories that have been documented by researchers especially in the genre that has been dominated by male characters such as in action, science fiction and adventure films. These trends can be associated with macro changes in society, where there is greater support of gender equality and more understanding of media representation. There is also an importance in the aspect that the participation behind-the-scenes plays a significant role in the success of female directors, female writers and female producers, and that more subtle and real representations of women on screen tend to be the result of this aspect. Nevertheless, even being advanced, researchers still argue whether these gains and development are the permanent change or are tied down to genres and markets.

2.4. Research Gap

Although recent years saw development observed in terms of gender representation in cinema, scholars are supposed to state that there are still huge gaps in academic research. Most of the literature looks at particular territories, genre, or time periods and prevents generalizing on cinematic

trends in the world. Also, a great portion of the work is substantially based on qualitative analysis that, though providing rather informative insights, might lack the ability to fully discern trends in large collections of films. Strength is the necessity to study which will integrate quantitative techniques -Basing (statistical analysis of screen time, the distribution of dialogues, and character prominence) with qualitative analysis of roles in the narrative, and thematic manifestation. By filling in this void, it is possible to have a more comprehensive insight into the various representations of women in various film industries and even cultures. The purpose of this study, in its turn, is to add a contribution to the field, combining statistical and interpretive methods of analyzing the subject of female representation in cinema to make the study more systematic.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study is based on gender representation as a research design which involves analyzing a chosen sample of films released within the period 2000 and 2024. The time was selected due to the period that reflects major advancements in the film industry around the world, such as the shift in the audience demands, the rising levels of understanding the equality of sexes, and the rise in the number of women on screen and in control of camera shots. Focusing on this period of film production therefore the research will be seeking to capture the trends in female representation in these days and check whether any meaningful improvement has been realized in portraying women in various and empowering roles.

The structure corresponds to mixed-method research, which is a kind of study that suggests including qualitative and quantitative analysis and obtaining a theses of the gender representation in the cinema. Certain criteria were used to select the films to avoid having an unrepresentative sample as the attempts were to have an influential and widely watched movie. The films were selected on the basis of their popularity, cultural influence and the instances of prominent female characters in the stories. Popularity was quantified using the measure of box office performance, viewing audience and press coverage whereas the cultural impact was measured based on reviews, awards and conversations on themes and characters of the film.

Also, there were films of various genres, including drama, action, science fiction, and romance, to embrace differences in depicting female characters in the different types of movie. The research design also focuses on diversity in terms of representation in that there are films which have women playing both traditional and non-traditional roles. All chosen movies are evaluated based on a range of predetermined indicators that include screen time, narrative significance, agency of characters, and their leadership, and the kind of interactions with other characters. The frequency and prominence of female characters are measured through quantitative analysis and the interpretation of these characters in the narrative is done through qualitative analysis. It is in this methodical way that the research design will seek to determine patterns, trends and changes in the way women are portrayed on the screen in the last 20 years hence making it possible to understand gender representation in contemporary film more comprehensively.

3.2. Data Collection

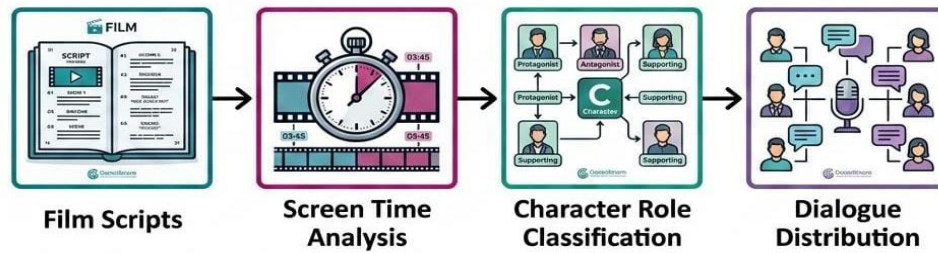


Fig 2 - Data Collection

3.2.1. Film Scripts

One of the main sources of information used in this research was film scripts. The scripts contain vivid details on the plot, relationships, and following the dialogue structure, and it is worthwhile in studying the writing and presentation of the characters. The analysis of the scripts of selected films helped the study to determine the roles of female characters in the films, how they are involved into the storyline, and what role they play in the film. Analysis of scripts also aided in the assessment of whether female characters are central or peripheral in the plot or whether they occupy peripheral positions in the movie hence its strength in providing information on the significance of the role of women in movie storytelling.

3.2.2. Screen Time Analysis

The visibility and presence of female characters in the selected movies were measured by the screen time analysis. This approach consists in determining the overall length of time female characters are on the screen against male characters. The objective of the study is to establish the equal visual representation of women in the movie by analyzing screen time. The frequency of performances of female characters in the main scenes, their involvement in the development of the main plot, is also examined in the analysis. Such measure gives to quantitative data concerning the degree of representation and assists in emphasizing differences between male and female characters in terms of visual priority.

3.2.3. Character Role Classification

The classification of characters role was applied to identify the type of roles played by female characters in the chosen movies. The characters were categorized according to their significance in the narrative, where include the lead parts, supporting parts, or minor appearances. Also, the paper has analyzed the quality of these roles, whether the characters were shown as a leader, professionals, caregivers or they were romantic interests or not. This classification assists the discovery of the trends in the way female characters are depicted and the role they play in the challenge or reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes. The systematic classification of character roles in the study makes it easier to understand the variety of female characters in the movie as well as their depth.

3.2.4. Dialogue Distribution

The topic of dialogue distribution analysis is aimed at considering the quantity and importance of dialogue provided to female characters as compared to the male ones. The dialogue is a valuable sign of agency of characters and the power of the narrative because often, characters who speak more are also increasingly a part of the narrative.

This paper quantified and compared the lines of female characters to the amount of male characters to determine whether there is gender equality in the verbal representation. It further addressed content and context of the dialogue to appreciate whether female characters receive meaningful conversations to develop any plot or whether their conversations are simplistic or participating in the plot-supporting support. This approach assists in determining the presence of female voices in the films.

3.3. Analytical Framework

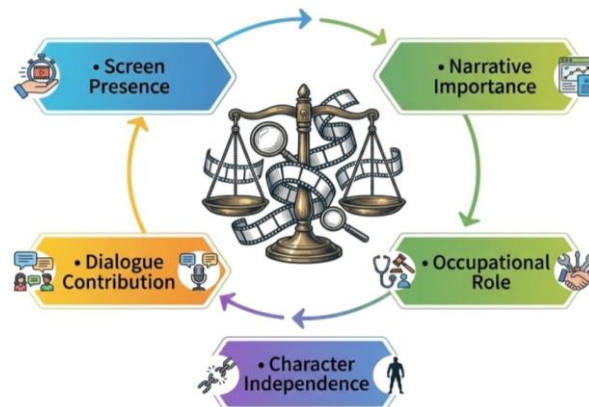


Fig 3 - Analytical Framework

3.3.1. Screen Presence

Screen presence denotes how much of the length of time the film coverage of a female character takes to cover the film. The variable is used to estimate the visibility and prominence of women in the narrative of the cinema. The study measures whether women are given sufficient screen time by summing up the number of hours that female characters have in films and compare this with the number of hours that a male character has in films. Screen presence is also a factor that takes into consideration the rate at which the female characters feature in key scenes that help in enhancing the storyline. When the screen presence is more, it may suggest a larger role in the movie whereas less screen time may imply that the female characters are either relegated to secondary or background roles.

3.3.2. Narrative Importance

Narrative importance explores how female characters control the flow of the story. This variable deals with the issue of whether the female characters are major characters in moving the plot forward or are included to be simply as supporting characters to their male counterparts. Characters of high narrative significance are those that tend to participate in key conflict situations, decision-making, and turning points as connected to the storyline. Through the narrative significance of female characters, the research will also aim at establishing whether women are played as active agents in the story or are just part of the supporting characters whose presence aids the formation of male oriented stories.

3.3.3. Occupational Role

Occupational role is a term used to refer to the professional or social status of female characters in the movie. This variable judges the way in which females are reflected in their career, roles and duties. The paper explores whether women characters are represented in various fields including leaders, scientists, entrepreneurs, or those in positions of authority or whether the

characters are limited to the traditional roles of care givers, homemakers and love interests. Through a study of occupational roles, the study seeks to establish whether movies are progressive in terms of their depictions of women involvement in various fields of the society or it perpetrates traditional gender roles.

3.3.4. Character Independence

The system of independence of character evaluates the degree of independence and choice of female characters in the movie. This variable dwells on whether women have independent actions when it comes to writing their own stories or their actions are highly colored by male characters. Independent characters: independent characters are described as those who act out of their own to make significant decisions and follow their own objectives in the storyline. Analyzing character-independence contributes to the discovery of whether female characters are depicted as empowered characters who are able to influence the events or as dependent ones who have their roles determined by their relationships with others.

3.3.5. Dialogue Contribution

The contribution of dialogue is the size and the weight of spoken dialogue given to female characters in the movie. This variable measures the level of active behavior of women in conversations and narrative discussions. The characters that add more dialogue, tend to be more influential in the development of the story and conveying critical themes. The analysis takes into account the number and the quality of the dialogue asking whether the female characters receive purposeful lines making the story or whether their dialogues are restricted to supportive, emotional, and background interactions. Using this variable, the research assesses how the voices of women are underrepresented and not heard within the narratives of the cinema.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Overview of Findings

Based on the results of the present research, it can be stated that there has been observable improvement in terms of portraying the role of women in the contemporary cinema in comparison to the past decades. Movies that have been released after 2000 through to 2024 have shown a higher number of women taking up leading roles, they get more screen time and they also have more characters of different types. Compared to the previous epochs of film history when women often had to be satisfied with stereotypical roles of love interest or silent supporters of the males, modern cinema tends to represent women as professionals and leaders, as well as people having their own identities. Even a lot of new movies include female actors who contribute to the plot development actively and take a significant role in major plot events. This change points to the increased impact of international discourse of gender equality and the necessity of the film industry to be more inclusive with its stories. It was also noted that the female characters are increasingly emerging in the genres that used to be dominated by the male characters in action films, science fiction films, and adventure films. There are a number of occasions when women are depicted as powerful, competent, and qualified people who assume their leadership responsibilities and struggle alone. Moreover the number of films based on female centered plotlines has risen where female experience, view points, and personal experiences become the main thread of the narrative. This tendency indicates that the filmmakers and the production companies are increasingly responsive in terms of audience expectations with respect to the diversified and balanced representation. Nevertheless, despite these optimistic changes, there still are some discoveries of limitations that remain in female representation in cinema. In most movies, male characters continue to take major roles in leadership and decision

making processes in the film. Although women can seem as a prominent character, their actions are sometimes set against the actions of male protagonists and not be entirely self-driven. Moreover, the differences in distribution of dialogue and narrative independence and control are still present whereby the male characters in most cases get more powers in controlling the way the plot moves. These results indicate that modern cinema has achieved substantial progress in terms of the film representation of women; however, this research area needs to be slightly further developed to guarantee that female characters are more balanced, independent, and equally represented in all genres and moviemaking industries.

4.2. Representation Analysis

Table 1: Representation Analysis

Representation Category	Percentage (%)
Female Lead Characters	38%
Female Supporting Characters	42%
Women in Professional Roles	31%
Women in Leadership Roles	19%
Independent Female Narratives	27%
Female Dialogue Contribution	35%

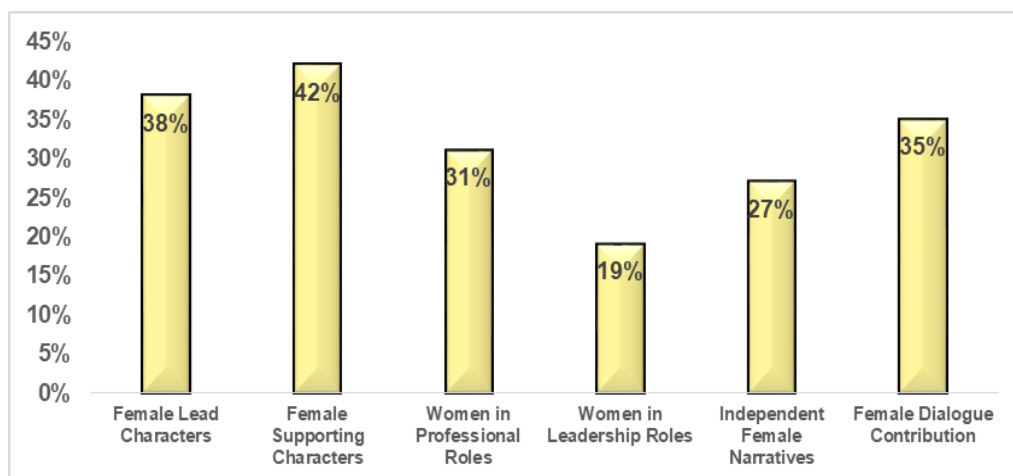


Fig 4 - Representation Analysis

4.2.1. Female Lead Characters (38%)

In the analysis, it can be noted that about 38 percent of the film in the sample chosen has women as the lead characters. The percentage shows a slow rise in the popularity of women as the main heroes in film stories in relation to the previous decades. The female lead characters are the ones involved in moving the main plot and whose life becomes the main subject matter of the movie. The percentage also reflects an improvement in giving women the lead roles, yet men feature in most movies. The abundance of female leading characters indicates that the film industry is gradually gaining awareness on the relevance of pluralistic narratives and the need to serve audience with movies based on the experiences and the views of women.

4.2.2. Female Supporting Characters (42%)

Women characters in supporting roles in the chosen films take up approximate 42 percent of the roles. These characters frequently serve significant purposes in carrying the plot along with playing a role in character development, yet they are not always placed in the heart of the stories.

Supporting roles include friends, kinsmen, workmates or partners who help the protagonist or take other actions depending on it to move the plot. Although the comparatively high figure means that women are often represented in movies, it signifies their increased popularity in the secondary roles and less so as the lead characters.

4.2.3. *Women in Professional Roles (31%)*

The research concluded that approximately 31 percent of the women characters are represented in the field of work as a doctor, lawyer, scientist, business leader, journalist, or any other professional occupation. This portrayal is an indication of positive changes towards representing women as active players in the different spheres of society. In comparison with the previous representations, in which women were frequently rated with the limited roles of either housewife or child nurturer, the contemporary films reflect a growing movement of the female gender achieving a professional career and proving their abilities. Nevertheless, the percentage also implies that professional representation is yet to be balanced to the point, as there is still room to work on depicting women in various fields of profession.

4.2.4. *Women in Leadership Roles (19%)*

Female leaders in the movies under consideration make up almost, 19 percent of the representation. There are leadership jobs in which the female characters are depicted as decision-makers, authority figures, or people responsible to lead others. This can be political leaders, the heads of organisations, commanders of armies or the team leaders. Though the rate of women in leadership positions is growing, the percentage is still relatively very low suggesting that such showcases are minimal. This indicates that films continue to have the problem of associating leadership and authority with more men characters.

4.2.5. *Independent Female Narratives (27%)*

There is approximately 27-percent female-only narrated films in the study. These stories are chiefly related to personal experiences, adventures, and struggles of the female characters in them without much dependence on the male-centered narratives. These types of films usually take into focus the issues of individual development, career goals, social frustrations, and self-exploration. The existence of free female narratives is a significant change in providing women with their own stories and feminine vision in future cinema. Nevertheless, the percentage indicates that there are a significant number of movies that still stick to male-driven narratives, and female characters are regularly placed into those structures.

4.2.6. *Female Dialogue Contribution (35%)*

The dialogue distribution analysis reveals that the female characters take about 35% of all the dialogue in the chosen movies. The dialogue input is a significant marker of the narrative power since more talkative characters tend to be more active in forming the narrative and representing its theme. Although this characterization shows that there is a visible presence of women in the discussion of films, it also leaves a gap to the male characters who usually have more dialogue. Ensuring that the female characters have a more significant contribution on dialogue will help to guarantee that the voice and the perspectives brought by women are more actively reflected in the movie narration.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of this paper show that the situation with the female representation in the contemporary cinema has got much better in comparison to the previous decades. The last twenty years have seen the difference in terms of the representation of the female characters in the movies. Modern movies become more focused on female professionals, leaders, and independent people, playing an active role in the plot development. In contrast to the traditional representations in the past, which tended to confine the women to either passive roles like caregivers, or to stereotypical traits of the woman like a love interest or as a background character, contemporary movies are slowly providing more multifaceted and varied images of the female character. The emergence of female genres, such as action, science fiction, and drama show is another indication that the film industry is more welcoming of the representation of women in roles that are against the typical gender roles. Although these are favorable factors, the research also uncovers that the full gender equality in movie themes has not been fully realized. There are still a large number of movies that follow the traditional style of story telling with male characters playing the lead and the female characters playing a support or supplementary roles. Even though women are more likely to be seen on the screen and even play major roles, there are still limited cases when they are free in their narrative and can make their choices. The comparison of variables relating to leadership roles, contribution to dialogues and independent female stories reveals that still there are weak points on the extent that female characters can impact in film narratives. This implies that as far as visibility and representation have been achieved, more structural shifts are necessary in order to have real equality in narration. The results reveal the need to encourage new and inclusive storytelling methodologies that give the genuine and significant representation of the women. Writers, producers, and filmmakers are key elements in defining the stories that would be put forward to the viewers. The film industry has an opportunity to break the old stereotypes and promote gender balance in how they are portrayed by making films that highlight the female agentic, multifaceted, and independent, as a means of provoking a more balanced gender presentation. Well-developed and strong female characters not only make the storytelling interesting, but also mirror the current society where women are employees in different professions and locations as well as women who hold various leadership positions in different communities. Moreover, the study also proposes that member involvement of women in camera work (behind camera) in the form of directing, scripts and producing may contribute immensely to the stereotyping of female characters in movies. Women filmmakers usually have their own views and experience, and through it they can bring more sublime and realistic images of women. The future studies must thus delve into the connection between women involvement in the film production and screen representation of women. Further growth of such studies in other film industries and cultures will give more insight on the perpetual changing of gender in cinema.

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