International Journal of Innovations & Research Analysis (IJIRA)
(An International Quarterly Multidisciplinary Peer Reviewed Refereed Journal)
ISSN: 2583-0295 (Online), Impact Factor: (Cosmos 7.662 & I2OR 5.105), Volume 06, No. 04(I), October-December, 2026, pp 105-113

The Algorithmic Gaze: Beauty Standards and the Objectification of Indian Women in AI-Generated Images

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Citation: Dessai, P. (2026). The Algorithmic Gaze: Beauty Standards and the Objectification of Indian Women in AI-Generated Images. International Journal of Innovations & Research Analysis, 06(04(I)), 105–113.

Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) has revolutionized modern visual culture by creating innovative methods for creating, disseminating, and viewing images. The influence of AI-generated images on the portrayal of gender, beauty, femininity, and identity has grown steadily. But, these technological advancements also present significant issues about the reproduction of patriarchy and traditional notions of the "beautiful female figure." The current study explores the process of how the concept of 'ideal Indian woman' is built and reproduced through visual depictions of Indian feminity through the media created by AI. The study draws on feminist literary criticism, specifically Laura Mulvey's (1975) notion of the male gaze, Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) objectification theory, and postcolonial feminist views to examine the interplay between the generation of an image and the objectification of women's bodies. It places special emphasis on the depiction of skin colour, facial features, body shapes, dress, facial expressions and the culturally defined notions of feminine beauty. The study also looks at the intersection of Indian beauty ideals, colourism, and patriarchal expectations, and algorithmic bias. From a methodological point of view, it suggests a qualitative feminist visual analysis of images generated by artificial intelligence through specific mechanisms of image generation by text. It advances the idea of the 'algorithmic gaze', an explanation of how artificial intelligence could perpetuate existing structures of visual power by means of automated image production. It holds that artificially-created images cannot simply be considered "technological" products, but rather cultural images reflecting historical, social and gendered assumptions. The study aims to help feminist conversations about digital representation by exploring how contemporary AI tools can contribute to the creation, normalisation, and dissemination of specific notions of Indian femininity.

***Keywords**: Algorithmic Gaze, Artificial Intelligence, Indian Women, Beauty Standards, Male Gaze, Female Objectification, Feminist Literary Criticism, Colourism, Digital Representation, Gender Stereotypes.*

Introduction

Women's presence in literature, feminist studies and media studies has been a major topic. In the past, the body and identity of a woman has often been described by the socially constructed ideals of beauty, femininity, attractiveness and desirability. These expectations are shaped and disseminated in the literature, cinema, painting, photo journalism and popular culture. AI has also given rise to a new medium in today's society in which women's representations are created and used: the image of AI.

The use of AI-generated images in digital marketing, social media, fashion, entertainment, and online communication is becoming more commonplace. Text to image generation technologies are tools that enable users to produce images from textual descriptions or prompts. Although these systems offer

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new possibilities for creativity and visual expression, their outputs are influenced by the cultural patterns and visual conventions present in their training data. Therefore AI-generated images cannot be made without social structures. Instead, it can reinforce assumptions about gender, beauty and femininity.

It is important to note that the image of Indian women in AI-generated images is crucial because Indian femininity is a result of multiple cultural, social, historical and regional experiences. A number of factors—like colourism, caste, class, religion, colonial history, consumer culture and patriarchal expectations—interplay in shaping beauty standards in India. However, certain physical features are often linked to traditional notions of beauty for women, which include lighter skin, even facial features, dark long hair, a slender figure, and culturally specific styles of clothing.

These are not all the attributes of Indian women. However, they are re-distributed in the visual culture and can be a part of the development of a limited vision of ideal Indian woman.

In her seminal essay Laura Mulvey (1975), Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, introduces the term 'male gaze' to describe the way women are represented as objects of visual pleasure in the patriarchal system. As a theory it looks mainly at cinema but it's a useful structure for understanding the digital images of the present day. In AI-generated visual culture, the male gaze might find a new technological expression in algorithms that reinvent the same patterns of objectification and attractiveness of females.

Likewise, Bartky (1990) describes how women's bodies are disciplined within patriarchal society by the acceptable feminine codes of behavior. Bordo (1993) looks at the role of culture in shaping women's relationships with their bodies, and Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) show how the sexual objectification of women can lead to a self-evaluation by an outside viewer.

These feminist viewpoints can serve as a starting point for exploring the potential for AI-generated images to perpetuate traditional beauty ideologies. This allows for an insight into the manner through which these algorithms can potentially re-affirm the traditional conceptions of beauty. Thus, in the current study, the concept of ‘algorithmic gaze' is used to understand how artificial intelligence facilitates the creation and dissemination of visual representations of women in India.

One of the important considerations within this paper is that the old-fashioned ‘male gaze' could be modernized with the development of AI images, where the female identity and body would be constructed based on culturally constructed conceptions of beauty, attraction and feminity.

Statement of the Problem

Artificial Intelligence is often referred to as a highly sophisticated technology that can create unique and varied images. But AI-generated images are shaped by the data sets, training methodologies and cultural presumptions behind their creation. If these systems are trained with visual data that are saturated with stereotypes and unequal gender representations, the results can reflect these patterns.

This issue is of greater importance in the context of portraying women from India. Infrequent or stereotypical appearance of light skin, specific facial characteristics, thin figures, mainstream hairstyles and outfits can perpetuate a narrow view of Indian feminity.

Representing such images can also aid in the objectification of women by focusing more on the body than on the person, their career, their ideas or their social lives.

The other significant issue is that AI seems to be neutral. AI-generated images are created by technological systems and can seem to be outside of human cultural tastes. But the products of their work can be manifestations of social inequalities and accepted aesthetic norms.

Hence, the present study aims to explore the possibility of the images produced by AI systems reproducing patriarchal beauty norms and playing a role in the creation of the ideal Indian woman. It also explores whether these depictions defy stereotypes or reaffirm traditional notions of femininity.

Research Objectives

The major objectives of the study are:

- To examine how AI-generated images construct and represent the concept of the ideal Indian woman.
- To identify the physical and aesthetic characteristics associated with Indian feminine beauty in AI-generated images.

- To analyse the representation of skin colour, facial features, body types, clothing, and expressions.
- To study the reproduction of patriarchal standards of beauty through AI-generated imagery.
- To look into the interconnection of the male gaze, female objectivisation, and the process of creation of an algorithmic image.
- To look into the possibility that AI-generated imagery reproduces colourism and cultural stereotypes connected with Indian women.
- To find out whether AI-generated visual culture reproduces standardised or diverse representation of Indian femininity.
- To create the concept of the algorithmic gaze as a feminist paradigm of analysing contemporary visual digital culture.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

- How do AI-generated images construct the visual identity of the ideal Indian woman?
- What physical characteristics and aesthetic features are repeatedly associated with Indian femininity?
- How do AI-generated images reproduce conventional patriarchal standards of beauty and female desirability?
- In what ways can Mulvey's concept of the male gaze be applied to AI-generated visual representations?
- How are skin colour, body types, facial features, clothing, and expressions represented in AI-generated images of Indian women?
- To what extent do these representations reproduce colourism, objectification, and cultural stereotypes?
- Do AI-generated images challenge conventional beauty standards or reinforce existing expectations of Indian femininity?

Review of Literature

The present research is informed by feminist literary criticism, feminist media studies, post-colonial feminist theory and recent research on algorithmic bias. These views provide insight into the representation, assessment and regulation of women's bodies in visual culture.

- **The Male Gaze and the Representation of Women**

In Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, Mulvey (1975) builds on the idea of the male gaze to account for the dominant male gaze in conventional films. In her argument, the image of women is often seen as an object of observation, and the position of looking is generally privileged over men. While Mulvey's study is of cinema, her theory could be applied to today's Digital representations. Similarly, AI-generated images use visual elements such as appearance, clothing, posture, facial expression, and composition to build female bodies. By applying the male gaze to the images created by AI, it is possible to explore the possibility of women being repeatedly depicted in a certain way based on standards of attractiveness and desirability. The present study then investigates whether algorithmically-generated images yields similar visual power structures. The female body as viewed by feminists is the subject of this unit. This unit focuses on the female body, as seen by feminists

- **Feminist Perspectives on the Female Body**

In Femininity and Domination, Bartky (1990) describes how the power of the patriarchy controls women's bodies through strict standards of appearance and behavior. She believes that femininity is achieved by discipline, which impacts the ways by which women exhibit and assess their femininity. Unbearable Weight, Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body" by Bordo (1993) studies the connection among the female body, cultural expectations, and social power. Her work shows how the body itself can function as a site of expression of culture, ideals and discipline. These points can particularly be relevant to the AI-generated images since frequent exposure to the images of slims, youth, facial symmetry and physical perfection may help in normalizing slim body ideals. According to the objectification theory,

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) explain how the women from cultures where women are objectified can take the position of an observer. The theory suggests that women are capable of rating themselves primarily based on their appearance. It provides us with one of the contexts for the replicates of the images of idealized women generated using AI.

- **Beauty Standards and Contemporary Media Culture**

In her discussion of the postfeminist media culture, Gill (2007) explores how modern media represents femininity through beauty practice, sexualisation, self-surveillance and disciplining the body. She shows that the media of our own generation can sometimes teach that beauty is a personal decision but is still promulgating narrow standards for feminine looks. Other authors, such as Wolf (1991) in The Beauty Myth, also discuss how the culturally constructed norms of beauty can be used as forms of social control. In her conversation, she emphasizes the artificialness of beauty ideals and how they relate to women's social identities. These arguments offer a valuable starting point for considering if AI-produced images are capable of evoking the traditional notion of beauty, while simultaneously demonstrating the creativity and innovation of technology.

- **Postcolonial Feminism and the Representation of Indian Women**

Mohanty (1984) challenges the problem of "averageizing" the women of varying cultures in his book, Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. Her argument is relevant to the present research as it highlights that Indian women have to be understood as being of multiple cultural, social and physical identity. Indian womanhood is extremely diverse in terms of region, language, religion, caste and class. Representations that tend to dwell upon a particular range of physical and cultural attributes on a regular basis could then limit this diversity to a stereotypical visual identity. In their study Melanin on the Margins: Advertising and the Cultural Politics of Fair/Light/White Beauty in India, Parameswaran and Cardoza delve into the nexus between advertising and skin colour and feminine beauty in Indian society. Their work reveals the role of commercial images in the production and proliferation of ideas of whiteness or fairness. They conclude that their results offer a uniquely Indian cultural lens for assessing the bias of AI-generated images toward fairer skin tones and their reinforcement of the fairness-femine beauty stereotype.

- **Algorithmic Bias and Digital Representation**

Algorithms of Oppression, authored by noble (2018), states that algorithms are not culturally neutral as they can reinforce the social inequalities and ill-representations found within society. Her work argues the significance of the technological system and power structures. Both Benjamin (2019) in Race After Technology and A. K. Bharadwaj (2001) in South Asian Cinema: The Politics of Popular Film discuss how technology reproduces racial hierarchies under the guise of objectivity and efficiency. Theory proves useful in comprehending how AI-created images reproduce color- and culture-based discrimination. In "Gender Shades" (2018), Buolamwini and Gebru find significant accuracy differences between skin color and gender among commercial gender classifiers. Though the study is not concerned with image production, it does raise the importance of addressing gender and racial discrimination in AI.

- **Recent Research on AI-Generated Images**

In their work entitled Easily Accessible Text-to-Image Generation Amplifies Demographic In Easily Accessible Text-to-Image Generation Amplifies Demographic Stereotypes at Large, Bianchi et al. (2023) look into the reproduction of demographic stereotypes in text-to-image generation models. This paper provides important empirical data that will be useful in understanding AI-generated images as cultural artifacts influenced by existing social inequalities. In Stable Diffusion Exposed: Gender Bias from Prompt to Image by Wu et al. (2024), the impact of gender bias parameters on the visual characteristics, objects and composition of AI-generated images is investigated. The findings prove that gender bias may be revealed in various stages of image generation. In AI-Generated Faces Influence Gender Stereotypes and Racial Homogenization*. Their work finds that created faces exhibit a pattern of demographic bias and racial homogenisation. They also show that encountering a face generated by the inclusive AI or the non-inclusive AI can affect people's perceptions of social groups. In the paper Gender Bias in Text-to-Image Generative Artificial Intelligence: Neglect and Stereotypical Presentations Across Three Popular Platforms, Weinmann et al. (2026) analyze 1,344 images produced using the generative AI tools DALL·E, Midjourney, and Stable Diffusion. They found that there are gender differences in representation and visual stereotypes such as face size, the amount of smiling, head position. The studies offer a valuable contemporary context for analyzing the link between AI-generated images and gender stereotypes. But,*

there is a need for further research on the portrayal of women in visual arts in India, especially with regard to colourism, cultural differences and beauty norms.

- **Research Gap**

Much feminist work has already been written about the male gaze, the objectification of women, beauty standards and the regulation of women's bodies. Likewise, recent studies around AI have found that image-generating systems are biased against gender and race. However, these sites require something more to fit into the representational schema of Indian women. What is needed is a detailed analysis of how the ideals of beauty, colourism, patriarchal values, cultural identity, and the visual output of the AI algorithm interact. This paper seeks to address this gap by analyzing the visual text generated through AI and how it may be perpetuating stereotypes about Indian womanhood. There is an emergence of an algorithmic gaze which connects feminist visual theory with image creation in the algorithmic age.

Theoretical Framework

The research's theoretical framework is composed of four main feminist theoretical lenses, the interdisciplinary approach.

- **Laura Mulvey's Concept of the Male Gaze**

The research mainly draws on Mulvey's (1975) theory that is known as the male gaze. It gives a basis for understanding women's depiction as objects of visual pleasure in the context of patriarchy. This research further explores whether AI reproduces visual conventions that emphasize female attractiveness, physical appearance, and desirability, when applied to AI-generated images.

- **Objectification Theory**

The objectification theory by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) can be used to look at how women's identities are being reduced to their bodies. The study will examine if the images created by AI focus on the physical body, beauty, and aesthetics of females instead of their individuality, mental identity and social agency.

- **Postcolonial Feminist Perspective**

The cultural specificity of Indian women's representation will be examined by Mohanty's (1984) postcolonial feminist view. It will aid in understanding if the images produced by AI are depleting the diversity of the feminine in India to a standardised visual category driven by prevailing cultural and aesthetic views.

- **Algorithmic Bias Perspective**

The research draws upon Noble (2018), Benjamin (2019), and contemporary scholarship on generative AI to understand how technological systems may reproduce existing inequalities.

This perspective will help explain how algorithmic processes can participate in the construction of gendered, racialised, and colour-based beauty standards.

On the basis of these perspectives, the study proposes the concept of the **algorithmic gaze**, referring to the possible technological reproduction of culturally established ways of looking at, evaluating, and representing women's bodies.

Research Methodology

- **Research Design**

The research design used in the study is a qualitative descriptive and interpretative research method with a feminist visual approach. It explores how images created by artificial intelligence can be understood as a cultural text and how the image of a gender, beauty and the expectations of the man can be conveyed through it. The research emphasizes a feminist visual analysis and critical discourse analysis to examine the interaction between textual cues and the visual products. The study will not make the assumption that all AI-generated images are inherently objectifying towards women. Instead, it will find commonalities in visual forms, and draw inferences about their likely cultural and ideological significance.

- **Sources of Data**

The main data will be AI-generated images of adult Indian women. Selected text to image platforms will be used to create images:

- DALL·E
- Midjourney
- Stable Diffusion

This will serve as a comparative perspective to analyse the construction of Indian femininity through different generative systems. Secondary sources will consist of published books, peer-reviewed research articles, feminist theoretical literature, and scholarly works dealing with beauty standards, gender representation, objectification and algorithmic bias.

- **Data Collection Procedure**

Images will be created according to a set of instructions. Consistency will be achieved throughout the selected platforms by the use of similar prompts. The questions will touch upon various dimensions of Indian womanhood such as 'traditional beauty', 'professional woman', ‘cultural dressing’, skin colour, body variety and agency. Here are some examples of prompts to use: A perfect woman from India, according to traditional standards of beauty. 2. A lovely fair-skinned Indian lady with long black hair. 3. An Indian woman who is confident, wearing modern attire. A dark-skinned, natural haired Indian woman. An elderly Indian woman in traditional attire.

- **Sampling Technique**

The study will employ purposive sampling to select images relevant to the research objectives.

A sample of 90 images is proposed for selection, and this would consist of 30 images from each of the three AI platforms selected.

The images would be selected based on the following criteria:

- Clear representation of adult Indian women.
- Relevance to the research objectives.
- Visibility of facial features, skin tone, clothing, and body representation.
- Inclusion of traditional and contemporary visual identities.
- Representation of different beauty ideals and feminine identities.

The final sample will be determined by the availability and quality of generated images and the feasibility of systematic analysis.

- **Analytical Categories**

The selected images will be analysed through the following categories:

Analytical Category	Aspects of Examination
Skin colour	Representation of lighter and darker skin tones
Facial features	Facial symmetry, eyes, nose, lips, and facial structure
Body representation	Body proportions, slimness, and physical diversity
Hair and appearance	Hair length, texture, styling, and grooming
Clothing	Traditional, regional, and contemporary clothing
Facial expressions	Smiling, seriousness, confidence, and passivity
Body positioning	Posture, poses, framing, and visual emphasis
Sexualisation	Body-focused composition and sexualised presentation
Female agency	Professional identity, independence, and individuality
Cultural diversity	Regional, social, and cultural representation

- **Data Analysis**

The images collected will then undergo a qualitative feminist visual analysis.

This will consist of four steps.

- **Step One:** Identification of Visual Patterns

The generated images will be analyzed for repeated physical features, expressions, fashion sense, body type, and composition.

- **Step Two:** Beauty Standards Analysis

The images will be analyzed to see if there is any repetition of certain skin tone, facial features, body proportions, and aesthetics.

- **Step Three:** Feminist Interpretation

The observed patterns will be analyzed using Mulvey's male gaze concept and the theories of objectification and postcolonial feminism.

Specifically, the relationship between the women's physical appearance and desirability in visual sense and their social agency.

- **Step Four:** Comparative Analysis

There will be a comparative analysis of the images produced by various platforms to see whether the representations of Indian femininity are similar in all cases or not.

- **Ethical Considerations**

The research will make use of artificial imagery created using AI software and will not claim it to be pictures of actual people.

The images will only be used for scholarly research purposes. The researcher will refrain from making generalized claims about all women in India based on a small sample size.

The research will also take into consideration the challenges posed by inaccessible training datasets, evolving models, and the impact of prompt writing on the output generated.

Scope of the Study

This research work considers AI generated visual representation of adult Indian women only. It analyses how the concepts of femininity and beauty are constructed through text-to-image generation applications chosen for the research purpose.

The research will focus on the aspects of visual representation like skin tone, facial features, body build, clothing, facial expression, posture and culture of the image subjects.

Another aspect to be explored is that of the relation between traditional standards of beauty in India and aesthetic values of the AI generated images.

The research will not try to assess the accuracy of AI algorithms or study the full set of data used for their training.

Significance of the Study

The relevance of this research is its effort to establish a link between feminist literary criticism and current trends in artificial intelligence.

Firstly, it expands the concept of male gaze into the context of artificial intelligence-generated images and tries to find out whether the mechanisms of visual objectivation persist in technological systems of today.

Secondly, the research contributes to the comprehension of Indian standards of beauty since it explores the possibility of replicating colourism, classic facial features, and other expectations of female appearance that are rooted in culture.

Thirdly, it stresses the need for cultural diversity in AI-generated images since there can never be one look, type of clothes or culture associated with Indian femininity.

Lastly, the research contributes to the discussion about responsible AI as it highlights the need for culturally diverse and gender-sensitive visual representation.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study include the following:

- The study will use a chosen sample of AI-generated images rather than all the images generated using generative AI tools.
- Outputs generated using AI could vary depending on the updated version of the model, prompt, and generation setting.
- Internal training data set and process of generating images using commercial AI platforms may not be entirely available.
- Notions of beauty, femininity, and objectivity have cultural and subjective perspectives.
- The study will analyze representations of Indian women and does not attempt to generalize about all other cultural/ geographic regions.

These limitations will be dealt with by documenting prompts used, platform, version of the model, criteria of choosing the images and analysis process.

Expected Findings and Discussion

The study is anticipated to delve into the potential ways in which AI-generated images can shape and perpetuate traditional notions of Indian womanhood. The direction of research will be investigated in 1 of the important areas, which is skin colour representation. Since fairness has been linked to beauty in Indian advertising and popular media, the study will look into if there is a disproportionate association of lighter skin tones with idealised feminine portrayal. This issue will be looked at in the light of the findings of Parameswaran and Cardoza (2009). The second aspect is the female body representation. The study will examine if the AI-generated images consistently depict feminine attractiveness through thinness, symmetry, youth and the conventional ideals of physical perfection. When such patterns are recognized, they will be examined using the objectification theory of Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), and the theory of bodily discipline of Bartky (1990). The relationship of clothing and cultural identity will also be explored. Sarees and salwar suits are traditional Indian attire that might come with certain expectations of modesty, grace, and femininity. The study will explore if and how such representations lead to a narrow understanding of Indian cultural identity or recognize the diversity of women's experiences in contemporary India. Other dimension to be analysed will be through facial expressions and body positioning. The research will examine the presence of women in smiles, passivity, decorative poses or the body-centred compositions. The visual features will be discussed in terms of Mulvey's (1975) notion of the male gaze and recent study of gender stereotypes in generative AI (Wu et al., 2024; Weinmann et al., 2026). Beauty/agency will also be of a particular interest. The research will focus on the comparison of the images which highlight physical attractiveness with the images which represent women in the context of professional identity, intellectual confidence, leadership and independence. This comparison will help to determine if images created with AI offer varied depictions of women or if they are mostly used to criticize or appreciate women. The results will be derived from the visual evidence gathered and won't make the assumption that every AI platform creates the same type of gender bias.

Conclusion

AI has added a new layer of possibilities to visual creativity, representation, and communication. Technology however does not bring about the removal of social and cultural inequalities automatically though. These are the visual patterns, cultural assumptions, and representational conventions that are historically and socially acquired, influencing the AI-generated images. The current study will explore the possible effects these processes have on the creation of an idealized image of an Indian woman in modern digital visual culture. The research combines Mulvey's idea of the male gaze, feminist objectification theory, postcolonial feminist criticism, and recent research on algorithmic bias and creates the notion of algorithmic gaze to explain the gendered creation of AI-generated images. The main thesis is that algorithmic visual production can give rise to new forms of objectification of the female. Traditional media have often portrayed women in ways that align with the patriarchal notions of beauty and desirability, while AI-generated images can be a reflection of these patriarchal ideals through their automated image-producing systems. This is a big concern in the Indian scenario as beauty norms are linked to colourism, social stratification, cultural identity and various expectations of what a woman should look like. A narrow understanding of the idea of womanhood, with respect to certain physical and aesthetic traits of a woman, would further reinforce the concept of femininity and impose limitations on other types of appearances. Therefore, this paper proposes to take a critical look at the AI-generated imagery in terms of cultural text and not a mere technological product. The feminist approach to AI-generated imagery will provide insights into the reproduction of beauty standards, the objectification of female bodies in visual culture, and the involvement of algorithmic systems in shaping modern concepts of 'femininity'. The purpose of this research is to identify not only how artificial intelligence creates images of women but whose understanding of beauty, femininity, and desirability is reproduced by those images. Thus, it is essential to understand the algorithmic gaze for the development of a gender-inclusive visual culture.

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