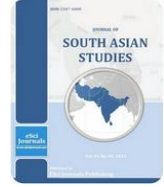




Available Online at ESci Journals

Journal of South Asian Studies

ISSN: 2307-4000 (Online), 2308-7846 (Print)
<http://www.escijournals.net/JSAS>



A MEDIA FRAMING ANALYSIS: THE COVERAGE OF RAPE IN INDIAN AND WESTERN NEWS SOURCES

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ABSTRACT

The media is an integral segment of public knowledge sources and can wield powerful influence, particularly in the dissemination of political and legislative information. The purpose of this study is to acknowledge the essential nature of the media, and to provide awareness that all media information contains subjective judgments, some of these judgments arising from media framing techniques, or the context and rationale provided by news sources that account for and help explain the purpose for the event that is being reported or commented upon. This investigation analyzes a selection of news sources from within India as well as correlating western sources (United Kingdom, United States) from December 2012 (starting with the original reporting of the New Delhi rape case) to February 2014, for the purpose of identifying the media framing techniques that were developed during and after the New Delhi case. This paper also asks how those techniques have contributed to progressive legislative reform in India; continued pressure that media has been placing on the Indian government in regard to violence against women; and political protections and reforms that have been deemed necessary.

Keywords: Framing, India, Media, Political reform, Rape, Violence.

INTRODUCTION

In December of 2012, the horrific rape and abuse of a medical student in New Delhi, India, attracted international attention and indignation, and “shocked the consciousness of the nation” (Agarwal, 2013). This event was a fulcrum for a media outcry against the court systems, a corrupted, inadequate police force, and an obvious absence of community-protective legislation. The fallout forced politicians along with the general population of India to address violence against women to a degree that it had never done before. Protesters, the media, and politicians alike were all compelled to face the looming issue of rape in a nation with a history of prominent female leaders; in the nation termed the largest democracy in the world. The purpose of this investigation is to examine news sources from both within India as well as select prominent western news outlets; to ask about the rationale and arguments, or framing techniques, that various media outlets have

provided for this ‘epidemic’. This paper will also explore, subsequent to the New Delhi incident of 2012, whether one framing technique or argument in particular has become prevalent throughout the extensive news media coverage addressing violence against women in India.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

Before the specifics of an investigation conducted can begin, a more in-depth examination of framing techniques, particularly in the context of the media’s reaction to social issues and movements is warranted. In the study by David Benford and David Snow (2000), “analytic utility of the framing literature for understanding social movement dynamics” and “framing as meaning construction” is stressed (Benford & Snow, 2000). “A shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change.” This definition is particularly pertinent to the topic of this paper. This paper’s goal is to analyze framing techniques given by the media to provide explanation for, as well as to

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continue to motivate, the social movement/change of how rape and rape victims are viewed by Indian culture and the endeavor to change thousands of years of a specific societal mindset.

“Framing analysis is presented as a constructivist approach to examine news discourse with the primary focus on conceptualizing news texts into empirically operationalizable dimensions- syntactical, script, thematic, and rhetorical structures- so that evidence of the news media’s framing of issues in news text may be gathered. “This definition, found in the study *Framing Analysis: An approach to news discourse*, done by Z. Pan and G. Kosicki, identifies the concept of framing analysis: how a news source puts an event into context, gives an explanation for the occurrence of an event, and thus helps to frame the consuming public’s opinion of a news event, which is the primary focus of research within this paper. Pan and Kosicki state that framing techniques are often difficult to pin down, based upon the very nature of the media market that presents them, thus the analytical approach taken in their study is particularly helpful for understanding the occurrences of framing techniques. Framing techniques are not only what a publication specifically *says* about an event, but also the context in which it is placed.

Huong (2012) uses framing techniques to study three different cases of rape that had sensational elements, and thus drew significant attention in the media. Huong analyzed prominent Vietnamese newspapers and how different news outlets presented each case differently. Similar to the media and public outcry over rape in India, Huong states in his study that, “public discourse often lamented the deterioration of moral values in Vietnamese society.” Though the political climate of Vietnam includes factors that are not present in India, there are still similarities, and this study provides a comparative guideline and partial explanation for why the media and the public reacted so aggressively to the New Delhi rape case.

This particular case (New Delhi 2012) has begun the gradual evolution of how the media in India frames sexual violence against women. The New Delhi case, like the cases Huong examines, had many “sensational” elements. The extreme physical abuse of the New Delhi victim, which included an iron rod being so violently thrust into her body that internal organs were later found detached from the parietal peritoneum, the abuse of her male colleague. This story initially generated little

media interest, but as the facts came to light; the media pounced on the story because of its sensational elements and used them to shock the public into protesting and pushing for immediate government action.

Additionally; scholarly journals used are studies that relate to rape culture and its presentation in the media; the role of social media in the news, gender justice, and human rights studies in India to augment the research. Some examples of these sources include “Reconstructing the Indian public sphere: Network and social media in the Delhi gang rape case”, “Monsters, playboys, virgins and whores: Rape myths in the news media’s coverage of sexual violence”, “News in monochrome: journalism in India”, “Debating Gender Justice in India”, “Gender-Based Violence in India: Long-Term Trends”, and others (Agarwal, 2013b).

METHODOLOGY

An extensive search of online news archives from 2010 to February 2014 provided numerous news articles, opinion pieces, and editorials focusing on rape in India after the New Delhi incident in December of 2012. An initial comparison revealed that media coverage style of *all* rape cases by Indian news sources dramatically changed, subsequent to that particular case. The definition of framing techniques as a concept to help facilitate the comprehension of the media as an agent of social movement and a determinant of public opinion. Prior to December 2012, very few opinion or editorial pieces were included in any news sources regarding the issue of human rights and violence against women in India.

In this study, attention was directed toward articles written subsequent to December 2012 (including the original report of the New Delhi incident from *The Times of India*) through February 2014. The articles included news reports, opinion pieces, and editorials from *The Asian Age*, *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, *The Hindu*, *Tehelka*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *BBC*. All of these stories were located using each respective publication’s online archives using the keywords “rape “and “rape in India”. An analysis of these sources included the annotation of over fifty individual articles, for the purpose of determining predominate framing techniques interpreted by the media.

While examining the news articles and editorials, particular attention was paid to the rhetorical usage of the *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* appeals. *Ethos* and *pathos* were most commonly found, and were most often

present in editorials, which is to be expected due to the opinion-oriented approach the majority of journalists take towards editorials. The majority of the publications found from the Western news sources were editorials, suggesting that the Western papers were more interested in debating the implications that rape has for India as opposed to reporting straight news. However, there was also a significant amount of the appeals used in news articles reporting specific events. It is difficult to separate emotions from a controversial and often heart wrenching topic. This serves to contribute to the theory that no news we as the public consume is without bias.

An inductive methodology was used to determine what framing techniques had become distinct. After synthesizing the articles and studies, comprehensive conclusions seemed apparent, regarding what framing techniques were addressed in these media sources, as well as which ones can be interpreted as the dominant ones.

MEDIA FRAMING TECHNIQUES/FINDINGS

Below are the predominant media framing techniques in the news sources that were examined. Some of them have similar contributing components. Multiple framing techniques were present within each news source, and even within one article, none occurring in a vacuum.

Socioeconomics

The theme of the socioeconomic profile of young men in India is the first framing technique addressed. There is a new class within India that is not being accounted for by governmental programs. Young, unattached men without higher education, prospects for marriage, family, or decent jobs are migrating to the larger cities of India for work that is often part time or temporary, and difficult to come by. They live in city slums. There is no foreseeable change in their situation. The lack of education and a 'nothing to lose mentality' leads to these behaviors. "If we cannot stop such incidents, then both the state and the country will be doomed" (Press Trust of India, 2014). They are "troublemakers" and displaced, often blame Indian society for their situations, and thus, see fit to take it out on society in the largest insult they can render. "Dishonoring a woman is equal to dishonoring a family and even a culture" (Rape in the World's Largest Democracy, 2014). All of the men who were responsible for the gangrape of the medical student in December of 2012 fit this socioeconomic profile, as well as many other perpetrators in recently reported rape cases that were located in both cities and

rural areas, including the recent outrage over the gangrape to a "kangaroo court" "in the Birbhum district of India in January 2014. Many of the perpetrators that followed the instructions of the court and were described as "barbaric, savage, and uncivilized" (Mohammed Salim, quoted in Das, 2014).

This demographic phenomenon has precedents in other countries. For example, displaced young African American men in Britain in the 1960s were seen as responsible for a rise in the number of muggings and an increase in general crime (Hall et al., 1978).

PATRIARCHAL, TRADITIONAL MINDSET

This theme has a basis in the cultural history of India, which has a historical tradition of caste systems, honor killings, bride burnings, pyre sati burnings, and women being treated, in many cases, as second-class citizens. "India must work on changing a culture in which women are routinely devalued" (Rape in the World's Largest Democracy, 2014). All of these factors contribute to a traditional, patriarchal mindset that clashes with the westernization of India. An expansion of education and employment opportunities for Indian women often results in victim blaming when it comes to cases of sexual violence. The mindset of female empowerment being unsettling is one that is very pertinent to some Indian men today. "Rape isn't a man's fault. It's a fault of the times" one man was quoted as saying in an article from *The Indian Express* (Giridharadas, 2013). This is a dominant framing technique in regard to articles about the discussion of protestors fighting for their azaadi, or freedom. "We do not want to hear this defensive argument that women only leave their homes for work, poor things, what can they do, they are compelled to go out. We believe that regardless of whether she is indoors or outside, whether it is day or night, for whatever reason, however she may be dressed- women have a right to freedom" (Delhi's Rape Case, 2013).

This mindset has had a significant presence in many other countries' modernization. In her book *Rape on Trial*, Lisa M. Cuklanz addresses how before the 1970s, U.S. rape law, (which drew its precedents from Britain), made the priority of the law protecting the accused rapists, due to the importance of a woman's honor and chastity in society. The only way a woman could protect her and her family from dishonor due to her lack of virtue was to "cry rape" (Cuklanz, 1996). This is a mindset that, as indicated by some excerpts above, is one that Indian society finds itself at war with, a war that is

often a one between generations- the culturally traditional views of grandparents versus that of newly educated grandchildren who often possess a very globalized outlook.

CONFLICT WITH RAPID ECONOMIC GROWTH, NEW FORMS OF WEALTH

India has had a long economic struggle, beginning with British colonization. However, the rapid economic growth of India in the nineties led to a new mindset of consumerism, new forms of wealth (televisions, cars, even refrigerators, as opposed to more traditional forms of wealth like cows, valuable spices and cloth), and accelerated westernization. "A chasm between the world of their minds, flush with medieval ideas of womankind, and the world of the modernizing megacity in which they find themselves" (Giridharadas, 2013). India twenty to thirty years ago as compared to India today, both economically and socially, has shifted so drastically to a western mindset that some argue that the traditional cultural mindset, frankly, has not had the time to evolve with the new social and economic landscape of India, in regard to all social welfare issues, but particularly women's rights (Choudhury, 2011). "The Indian society has to change its mindset about women...this is something that will take more than a year" (Agarwal, 2013a).

In order to reach its full economic potential, India requires significant reform in the arena of social issues such as social security, education, health care, and other basic social welfare (Dreze & Sen, 1999). The result of rapid economic growth that India experienced in the nineties is an ill-prepared social infrastructure today. In their book *India: Development and Participation*, Dreze and Sen state the disturbing fact that often times, regulatory measures receive more priority in Parliament than other issues that are actually significant to the well-being of the Indian populace. This shows further evidence that the Indian government is at least partially to blame for the enormous problems still prevalent in "basic education and elementary health care, or the persistence of debilitating social inequalities, or other issues that have a crucial bearing on the well-being and freedom of the population."

INSUFFICIENT, OVERWORKED, UNDERSTAFFED POLICE FORCE

Another theme that is present in a large portion of the media is one demonstrating an insufficient, overworked, and understaffed police force; one not equipped to give

victims of rape and sexual violence the help and justice they seek. This framing technique was often found along with the framing technique regarding the corruption of the police and the courts, explained in the section below. In many cases, victims who muster up the courage to report their attacks to the police are met with apathy and encouraged to settle for a payment out of court. In the largest democracy in the world, there is a police force that is still hindered by colonial stigma and prejudice throughout the ranks. "A police force that is corrupt, easily susceptible to political interference, heavily male, and woefully understaffed" (Harris, 2013). Conspiracies between the police and politicians are common.

Approximately five percent of the police force consists of women, and the law enforcement officer to citizen ratio is approximately one officer to seven hundred citizens (Prenzler & Sinclair, 2013). Additionally, over eighty percent of India's law enforcement officers are constables who cannot investigate crimes or issue fines, making them largely ineffective (Harris, 2013). The basic framework of the system is flawed. Higher ups are chosen from the Indian Police Service, "an elite core of bureaucrats who never serve in front line positions" (Harris, 2013). The IPS is an institution that still remains from the time that India was under British colonial rule. Originally, the IPS was manned only by British imperial officers, and is now confined to bureaucrats, as stated above (Das & Palmiotto, 2005). This creates a sort of class boundary within the police force, enforced by the historical stigma of the IPS under British colonial rule, and makes it almost impossible for a regular officer to climb the ranks, leading to no incentive for officers to take their work seriously, especially when it comes to cases of rape, sexual assault, or sexual harassment.

Corruption of Police and Courts

Several different news sources have gone through great lengths to press this framing technique in particular. The poor salary of both judges and the police in India make the justice system susceptible to corruption and bribery at nearly every level. Telhelka, "India's Weekly Independent Magazine" (Telhelka.com) devoted a two-week long "undercover investigation" on discovering what police officers really thought of rape and its victims. The result of this investigation demonstrated that there was an underlying prejudice against rape victims in police precincts. "These cops are the first point of contact for any victim of sexual assault when

they have to lodge a complaint” (Bhalla & Vishnu, 2012). In addition to a prejudiced and corrupt police force, courts are inexcusably slow to trial, and oftentimes, cases of sexual violence are dismissed far before they even reach court. Even the in the case of the rape of the New Delhi medical student, it took almost the entirety of two years for those responsible to be officially sentenced. That case was “fast-tracked” due to the attention it received. Oftentimes, victims do not see results unless they have connections of some kind with important or high-ranking government officials (Dutta, 2013). This practice undermines the very definition of a democracy, when not everyone has equal protection, or in some cases, *any* protection under the law. “India, a rising economic power and the world’s largest democracy, can never reach its full potential if half its population lives in fear of unspeakable violence” (Rape in the World’s Largest Democracy, 2013).

This corruption has its roots in colonial India, when law enforcement had absolute control in order to prevent uprisings against British rule and has been slow to change. Even though India has been independent for a significant period of time, there is a “mercenary” behavior of police officers that can be traced back to British colonial rule and is still encouraged by government authorities (Verma, 1999). Due to the civil service infrastructure, many people entering the IPS (Indian Police Service) today only do so because they have failed to meet the more “stringent” expectations for the IAS (Indian Administrative Service). This “method of selection” naturally leads to “a lack of building pride and confidence in the IPS members, and it has negative implications for the police in India” (Das & Palmiotto, 2005).

Indifference, Inaction, and Insufficiency of the Politicians and Legislature

After the New Delhi case of December 2012, the press and the people of India were galvanized to protest and pressure the government of India for some major legislature reforms in regard to the punishment for crimes of sexual violence as well as protectionary legislation for women. For the first time, stalking and harassment were considered punishable crimes, and existing legislature was reformed to include greater protection for victims and a more accurate justice system. However, in all the editorials and opinion pieces found from various news sources that were reflecting on the year anniversary of the New Delhi rape case, the

general consensus is that the press and the public are both far from pleased with the legislative efforts of the government at this point in time. “[This] puts a question mark of the AAP’s electoral promise to make Delhi safe for women” (“Delhi Rape Case,” 2013). Additionally, news reports of rape often indicate the victim’s lack of faith in the justice system and the law to take care of their cases in an efficient, judicious manner. This often results in “disappointment at the extent of changes to the conditions for women in the country” (Agarwal, 2013). Many people, victims and non-victims alike, speak out against the lack of protections in place and are expressing their frustration with the law’s inability to protect their mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters. Media outlets, Indian and Western alike, took the opportunity of the rape trial resulting from the New Delhi rape incident to open a forum for discussion on various elements of ideas on rape reform, one that has spiraled and now occupies a significant section of the news that is reported on in India.

This is a common situation in regard to rape trials that have received significant attention. Other precedents include American newspapers’ coverage of the *Rideout* case of 1978 and how that nation’s society began to change its opinions on marital rape, just as the New Delhi case of 2012 is changing rape reform ideas in the mainstream media of India (Cuklanz, 1996). However, as stated previously, rape cases that draw media attention and eventually contribute to rape reform, both socially and in the legislative system, are “...the same sort of cases that the media deem newsworthy...most frequently the most unusual and the more sensational types of rape cases” (Ardevini-Brooker & Caringella-Macdonald, 2002).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

All of the above-mentioned framing techniques were found significant in the news sources examined; regardless of if the source was from within India or a Western source. Overall, the framing techniques that were most commonly found in the articles read were the Indifference, Inaction, and Insufficiency of Politicians and Legislature, the barriers that are found along with a Traditional, Patriarchal Mindset, and a Conflict with Rapid Economic Growth and New Forms of Wealth. Oftentimes, as previously stated, these techniques were located concurrently within one source. Specifically, Indifference, Inaction, and Insufficiency of Politicians and Legislature is the most common framing technique

present in the news sources I examined and were stressed in several editorials drawn from every news outlet analyzed. The framing techniques that have been synthesized possess a basis in studies and observations pertaining to the history, traditions, and culture of gender violence and gender stereotypes in India.

In India, it is difficult topic to discuss with the cultural stigma surrounding women and sex, a stigma that the next generation of Indians is struggling to rid themselves of. The rape “epidemic” has drawn so much public backlash that it has created a debate within India about Indian society and identity. Modern Indian society has prided itself on being a democracy and a sense of inclusiveness that the government and the people have strove for since the end of British colonial rule. The increasing issue of violence against women is a sort of slap in the face to the democracy that India has endeavored to become. Dominance with violence seems to go against several culturally significant Indian values, particularly in accordance with religious ideals of Buddhism and Hindu, which are both commonly practiced in India.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the influence that the media has on our lives and on our opinions; especially in regard to controversial topics. Framing techniques are often far-reaching conceptualizations that possess the ability to perpetuate a public change of opinion, as shown in this particular case. The rapid legislative change in Indian legislature would not have happened nearly as rapidly as it has and is continuing to do without the push of the media.

The majority of protestors since the New Delhi rape case of 2012 have been college students, implying that the key to positive, sustainable change is an educated populace. Education is the solution to stereotypes and fear that is often perpetuated by ignorance and hatred of the new and unknown. The tradition of a patriarchal mindset is something that women all around the world are struggling to rid their communities of, and as many others have mentioned, that is a process that requires time by its very nature. The support of the media in this topic will lead to a more rapid progress, as exhibited over the past two years in India, especially in the arena of politics and legislature. There is far to go, but the progress already made must also be noted and the efforts of those who have already created so much positive change is to be praised. We look to the future generation to perpetuate the progress that has been

made thus far.

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