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The Caste-mediated Visibility Framework: Reframing Power, Voice, and Representation in Indian Media Narratives of Sexual Assault

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Abstract

This paper introduces the Caste-Mediated Visibility Framework (CMVF), a new theoretical model for understanding how caste hierarchies shape the visibility, voice, and representation of women in Indian news discourse. Drawing from a mixed-methods analysis of over 3,000 English-language newspaper articles published between August 2023 and August 2024, the study interrogates how the intersection of caste and gender influences the framing of sexual assault. Methodologically, the research pioneers the use of Robotic Process Automation (UiPath) for large-scale data collection across ten Indian outlets—five aligned with the Digital News Publishers Association (DNPA) and five with the DIGIPUB News India Foundation—allowing for systematic, replicable sampling free from human selection bias. The resulting corpus was examined through a combined quantitative content analysis and qualitative discourse analysis, creating a triangulated foundation for theory-building. Findings reveal a persistent visibility hierarchy: Savarna or caste privileged women's experiences of assault are amplified and moralised, while Asavarna or women from marginalised and oppressed castes experiences are minimised, invisibilised, or framed as exceptional. The CMVF conceptualises this process as one of mediated caste filtration, offering a practical framework for analysing and addressing caste privilege in journalistic practice. By articulating caste as a central determinant of mediated visibility, the CMVF extends global theories of intersectionality and agenda-setting to the South Asian context, offering a critical epistemology of media power rooted in anti-caste feminist praxis.

Keywords: Caste-Mediated Visibility, Intersectional Feminism, Media Studies, Robotic Process Automation, Sexual Assault