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DISCOURSE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT HEADLINES: A STUDY OF THE TIMES OF INDIA AND THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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ABSTRACT

The confluence of social norms and reporting of crime stories in the mass media has redefined relationship between social truth and what has been projected in the media. In the backdrop of the media hype, the hues and cries of not reporting sexual discrimination stories resurfaced with multitudes of rape stories more in their new avatar of 'gang rape'. This even catapulted toward an existing law to give shape to the criminal (amendment) Law, 2013. The stories which media did not expedite for so long (till the Nirbhaya episode) and words which were tabooed like 'rape', 'gang rape', 'sex', etc. have now flooded the news media. This study attempted to find out the much sensitive words and their occurrence in the headlines of such stories and a textual discourse of the race between the media coverage. Two leading English newspapers namely, The Times of India and The Hindustan Times were selected and their headlines were subjected to study for a period of one month from 16th Dec 2012 to 17th Jan 2013. The method inculcates textual analysis of various types of newspapers headlines based on headline meanings and their style with aspects of verbal and non-verbal meaning with reference to reporting crime stories. Further, for analysis simple descriptive statistics of percentile method is used to describe the data.
Key words: *Discrimination, Headlines, Media, Rape, Textual.*

INTRODUCTION

The union of two individuals (male and female) not only leads to the continuation of the human civilisation but it may create circumstances leading to certain social crimes. Two sides of sex is existing in society; one is accepted form of love, romance leading to union of two individuals with consent through institution of marriage getting legitimate sanction of societal norms. The other form is not accepted that is without consent and with force leading to the occurrence of 'Rape' and other sexual assault violence and crime against societal regulation and norms. This non-accepted side of sex is not openly talked about in Indian society or among its members, terming it as social or cultural taboo in society.

The confluence of social norms and reporting of crime stories in the mass media has redefined relationship between social truth and what has been projected in the media. In the backdrop of the media hype, the hues and cries of not reporting sexual discrimination stories resurfaced with multitudes of rape stories more in their new avatar of 'gang rape'. This even catapulted toward an existing law to give shape to the criminal (amendment)

Law, 2013. The stories which media did not expedite for so long (till the Nirbhaya episode) and words which were tabooed like 'rape', 'gang rape', 'sex', etc. have now flooded the news media.

The word 'Rape' is a signifier of an unacceptable and forced sex, which is considered as a social taboo and not frequently talked and openly used in social circumstances. It is used as a sign or symbol representing force and brutal crime of derogatory nature against society at large. It is an iconic signifier that represents some unacceptable process in society and in most of the cases victims of such social crimes are women. Similarly, the word 'Gang Rape as an iconic signifier represents forceful sexual intercourse by a gang upon the victim and the word 'Sexual Assault' signifies some kind of sexual misbehave has taken place. They all are used as transitive verbs with offender as subject and victim as object in news stories. The words 'rape', 'gang-rape' and 'sexual assault' describes the event that has taken place in such a crime.

The word 'Rape', 'Gang rape', and 'Sexual assault' if read in newspaper headlines lead readers to imagining and thinking of male chauvinism, machismo, power, patriarchy system and masculinity of male's. On the other side it also may lead to imagining force, violence, oppression and destruction of women and her life, making a miserable state of agony for them to survive in the society. Also those who are not experienced of such crimes may imagine affordance to create certain circumstances and those who are experienced will again go through this near to death experience as they are the ones who have survived such incidence.

With spurt of reporting of 'gang rape' and 'rape' cases in leading newspapers of the country (post Nirbhaya incidence) has led to the different style of writing a sexual crime newspaper report, being sensitive to the issue and at the same time to sound ethical. Language makes a difference in not only how an event is tabulated, but also in how it is framed, perceived, judged and experienced. Words attain their meaning within a context of use, invoking specific connotations and references that may differ a great deal between contexts.

Headlines are used as the title of the news story making it easier for the readers to relate to such stories. Usage of such words (rape, gang rape and sexual assault) in headlines makes it easier for readers to correlate to the kind of sexual crime or behaviour that has occurred. Bell (1991) and Nir (1993) have made "a distinction between headlines functioning as the abstract of the main event of the story and headlines as promoting one of the details of the story". The unspoken convention between author and reader regarding the intention of correlating a text to another text as a headline, concerns the double function of the headline: a semantic function, regarding the referential text, and a pragmatic function, regarding the reader to whom the text is addressed (Dor, 2003)

Dor (2003) has further defined function of headline as "relevance optimizers" designed to optimize the relevance of their stories for the readers. As relevance-optimizer, headlines function as negotiators between stories and readers. Relevance of words in headlines is as identified by reader's plays an important role in textual analysis and also the aspects of verbal and non-verbal meaning depicted by such words used in headlines. In this race of holding readers to the newspaper various styles has been adopted and generated by the publishers which also impacts the weight and importance given to such words or headlines.

OBJECTIVE

In this study attempts are made to explore much sensitive words and their occurrence in the headlines of sexual crime stories and a textual discourse of the race between the media coverage. The broad objectives of this study is to ascertain the meaning of the headlines and frequency of the usage of words 'Rape', 'Gang rape' or 'Sexual assault' in headlines of sexual crime news stories in newspapers namely, The Times of India and The Hindustan Times. Another objective of this study is to analyze the placement and other emphasis made on the headlines of sexual assault stories in these newspapers.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper researcher aims to preliminarily analysis through the textual discourse of headlines used to describe the crime or situation in a news story especially related to rape and sexual assault cases in India. For the purpose of this study two leading English newspapers – The Times of India and The Hindustan Times were taken for analysis of headlines for the period of one month from 16th December 2012 to 17th January 2013 and 410 new stories headlines were analysed. Out of 410 news items, 220 rape and sexual assault news stories were published in The Times of India and 190 were published in the Hindustan Times.

The method inculcates textual analysis of various types of newspapers headlines based on headline meanings and their style with aspects of verbal and non-verbal meaning with reference to reporting crime stories. Discourse analysis is described as one of the ways of exploring textual material, therefore 'Discourse Analysis' is adopted as the research methodology of textual analysis of sexual news stories headlines in this study. Discourse analysis focuses upon how does a particular phenomenon is represented in the society through the particular medium. Discourse can be thought of as a practice, belief, meaning, representation or knowledge that constructs a particular reality and is manifested in language (McCloskey 2008). Discourse analysis as defined by Krippendorff (2013) as "text above the level of sentences". Further it can be defined in two other ways also firstly, as "Language behaviours linked to social practices" and secondly, "Language as a system of thoughts". Study of discourse is linked to socio-linguistic approaches which can be conducted using one of the above mentioned ways or analysis can be done using all the three ways together.

All the headlines of news stories related to sexual assault cases were taken as a unit of analysis appearing in the main newspaper, excluding the supplements. Headlines were analysed based on different categories of analysis like headlines meaning, placement of the headlines, emphasis made on headlines, place of occurrence of the crime and the type of crime. These categories of headlines were further analysed based on units of analysis like headlines meaning (information only, interpretative only, question only, etc.), placement of headlines (kicker, hammer, etc.) and emphasis made on headlines (colour, bold, italics, etc.).

The unit of analysis, headline meaning in this study means that all the headlines as 'relevance optimizers' carries certain meanings as depicted by the writer or the publisher. These headlines meanings are classified as Information only, Interpretative only, Question only, Opinion only, Quotation only and others. Those headlines which are informative in nature are categorized under as information only headlines like "Alleged rape of 10-year-old girl". Those headlines from which meaning is interpreted and which are not direct are classified as interpretative only headline for example "Journalist booked after seven years". Those headlines in which question are asked are categorized under question only headlines like "How safe is Delhi for its women?". An

opinionated headline contains the opinion of a person or any authority for example "Procedure can't be cut short: Judges" and quotation headlines are those which carries the quotation of words from a person or from nay authority for example "Confident that we will get justice, says nirbhaya's father" and category of others is also included.

Headlines are also measured on the basis of placement such as Kicker, Hammer, Signature column, Raw-wrap, Sunken Dutch wrap and others. Signature Column headlines are the ones where most columns have a 'signature' headline that runs every time the column is printed, plus a story headline to describe the theme or at least the top item when the column covers several subject. Often photo of the column writer is integrated in to the head design. Ames (1989), defines Raw-wrap headlines are the ones where columns of type do not have a headline extended over them. Sunken Dutch Wrap headlines are those headlines where the headlines are at the centre between the columns of the text type and photo. Kicker are those headlines which are smaller in size, set over the main headline, or over short, one- column boxed stories, or for the writer's name in a standing column head. Hammer headlines are reverse of the kicker headlines, where the headline is set right under the main headline. They are an effective headline form if used for specially selected news or news features (Ames, 1989).

Headlines are also classified on the basis of the emphasis made on them thorough styling of writing, which impacts the verbal and non-verbal meaning or urgency interpretation. The basis of classification of emphasis is done as use of Colour, Bold, Italics, Coloured Highlights and Others. Type of news story, type of crime and place of occurrence of crime is also measured for the textual discourse of headlines in order to identify the frequency of type of sexual crime and also to acknowledge the frequency of type of news story.

RESULTS

Table 1 Placement of the headlines and its meaning in percentage.

Headlines meaning	Signature Column	Raw Wrap	Sunken Dutch wrap	Kicker	Hammer	Others
Information only	0.97	3.90	0.48	9.02	8.53	3.41
Interpretative only	0.48	1.21	0.73	0.24	6.58	7.07
Question only	0.48	0.73	0	0.24	0.97	0
Opinion only	2.43	2.19	0.24	0.24	5.36	0
Quotation only	0.24	0.24	0.24	0	3.41	0
Others	0	0.24	0.48	0.48	0.48	0.73

In table 1. The placement of headlines and its meaning was measured. Results shows that one-fourth percent of the headlines were placed in hammer style in the newspapers, out of which 8.35 percent hammer headlines are informative in context to its story. However, it is interesting to note that 9.02 percent of headlines are placed in kicker style and are informative. This trend is followed by 6.58 percent of headlines placed in hammer style but is interpretative in context and 5.36 percent of headlines are placed in hammer style but opinionated in context. This indicates that hammer is the most commonly used style of placement of headlines in newspapers and kicker is the most used placement for informative headlines. Further, it is interesting to note that quotation is the least used context for the headlines in newspapers. In other words, newspaper headlines not only have the function of indicating the topic and summarizing the main content of the news text, but they also try to help the reader grasp the meaning of the text.

Table 2 Type of news stories and headlines meaning in percentage

Headline meaning	Hard news	Feature	Editorial	Chronology	Interview	Others
Information only	49.26	5.36	0.24	2.19	0.24	0.48
Interpretative only	10.73	2.68	1.70	1.21	0	0
Question only	1.21	0.24	0.97	0.48	0	0.24
Opinion only	2.19	1.70	7.31	0	0.24	0.48
Quotation only	4.14	2.43	0.24	0	0.73	0.73
Others	0.97	0.48	0.48	0.24	0	0.24

In table 2. The type of news story and headline meaning was measured. Result shows that almost half (49.26%) of the hard news headlines are informational in context. Also, almost 11 percent (10.73%) of hard news headlines are interpretative in context. While only 5.36 percent of news features headlines are informative in context. However, it is important to acknowledge that 7.31 percent of editorial headlines are opinionated in nature, out of almost 11 percent of editorial headlines (10.97%). Further, it is interesting to note that 4.14 percent of hard news headlines are made up of quotation, 2.43 percent of feature headlines are made up of quotation and only one editorial has quotation as a headline. This indicates that most of the sexual assault news stories are published as hard news stories and there headlines are mostly informational in context followed by interpretative headlines. Also it indicates that editorial headlines are opinionated text of the writer.

Table 3. Type of crime and its place of occurrence in percentage

Place of occurrence	Group	Single	Not applicable
Delhi only	20.00	6.09	0.73
NCR only	1.95	0.73	0
State Capital Only	4.14	4.87	0.24
District HQ	4.39	6.28	0
Others	19.75	4.14	1.70

In table 3. The type of crime and its place of occurrence is measured. Result shows that a little more than one-fourth (26.82%) of the sexual crime incidences occurred in Delhi only, out of which 20 percent of the crime was done in a group activity and 6.09 percent done in a single act. While most of the incidences of rape done by a single perpetrator are 6.28 percent occurred in district headquarters. This indicates that most of the sexual assault stories featured in newspapers have occurred in national capital Delhi during this period of one month was of gang rape stories.

Table 4. Emphasis made on the headlines and its meaning in percentage

Headlines meaning	Colour	Bold	Italics	Coloured highlights	Others
Information	0.97	40.24	0	5.85	10.73
Interpretative	1.21	7.56	0.73	2.92	3.90
Question	0	2.68	0	0.48	0
Opinion	0.24	6.34	0.97	1.46	2.92
Quotation	0.24	3.17	0	2.68	2.19
Others	0.48	1.46	0	0.24	0.24

In table 4. Emphasis made on headlines and its meaning is measured. Result shows that most of the headlines were emphasized by using bold as a character and 40 percent of headlines were informative in nature. While around 8 percent headlines were interpretative in context and bold as a characteristic has been used. It is interesting to note that 56 headlines were characterized by using colour highlights to make emphasis on words like 'rape', 'gang rape', 'sexual assault', etc. Also, almost half of the colour highlighted headlines are

informative in context. This indicates that with advent of new printing technology and usage of various new media newspaper headlines are also undergoing through a tremendous change.
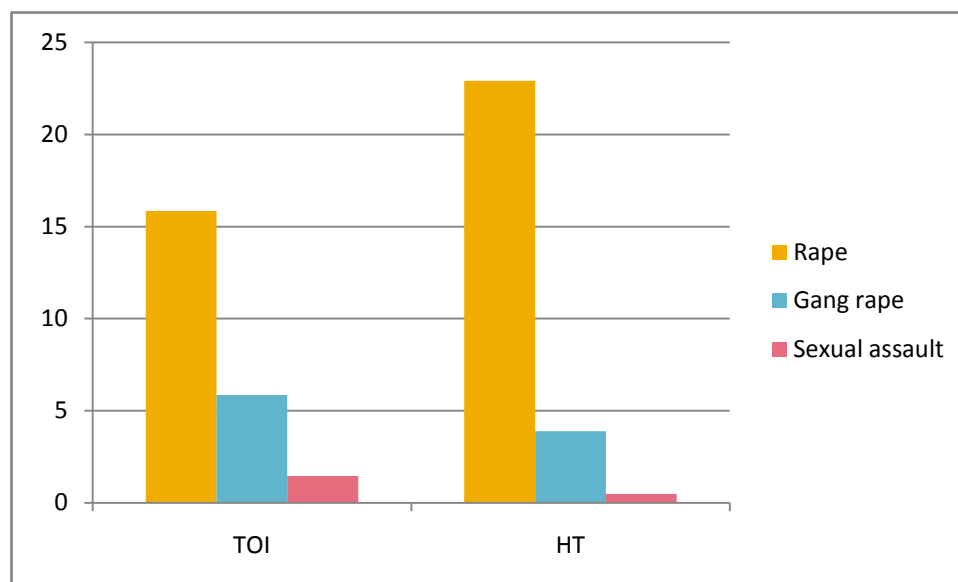

Figure 1 type of newspaper and the use of words in headlines in newspapers

In figure no.1 the type of newspaper and the usage of words in sexual assault stories headlines are measured. The blue one indicates the number of times the word 'Rape' is being used in headlines in both the newspaper. Red one indicates the usage of word 'Gang Rape' in headlines of the newspapers. And green indicates the usage of word 'Sexual assault' or 'Sexual Offences' or 'Sexual Violence' in headlines of newspapers. Result shows that a little less than one-fourth (22.92%) of the headlines contained word 'rape' in HT and almost 16 percent headline in TOI during the period of analysis. While the word 'gang rape' is being used almost in 10 percent headlines in both the newspapers. However, it is important to note that the word 'sexual assault' or 'sexual abuse' or 'sexual violence' was marginally being used in the headlines. This indicates that both the newspapers TOI and HT used the word 'rape' more frequently in headlines (38.85%) of news stories related to sexual assault crime against women.

DISCUSSION

All these three words 'rape', 'gang rape' and 'sexual assault' are used enormously in headlines in Indian national newspapers and also they are used inter-changeably to describe the sexual crime event . The words 'Rape', 'Gang-Rape' and 'Sexual assault' as a phrase differ in context in many ways. As word rape and gang rape are transitive verb which focuses on directly on subject and object. Sexual assault as a noun phrase refers to an event which requires the participation of two individual. Also, rape and gang rape refers to as a definite form of crime and sexual assault refers to a broad class of crime which may include other forms of sexual crimes like molestation. Rape and Gang rape are more powerful, suggestive and displeasing words for the readers than sexual assault. As they evoke emotions, empathy, distress and shocking reaction of audience towards the crime story and are more effective in increasing consciousness. Usage of these words in headlines definitely evokes such reactions and empathy in minds of readers, in return attracting the attention of the reader towards the sexual

crime story. But as these words have shock value they may not hold readers attention as readers may become uncomfortable and avoid the story. Also due to increase sensitivity of these words, a broader classification of sexual violence can be done through the use of word 'Sexual assault' more often in newspaper headlines. Though as a phrase 'sexual assault' is less striking and less evocative to readers than words 'rape' and 'gang rape'. As a phrase 'Sexual assault' is more effective word to use in promoting comfortable and open discussions. With the usage of words like 'sexual assault, sexual crime, sexual violence or sexual abuse more often than words like rape and gang rape in newspapers headlines a comfortable environment of discussion among readers can be created.

Also, the use of colour headlines, colour highlights of particular words, or bold and italics style of representation of sexual assault headlines shows the way newspapers represents the sexual crime stories. Colour headlines and colour highlights of words like rape, gang rape, and sexual assault shows the way newspaper sensationalize such crime stories and also how they seek attention of readers through such strategy. Sleazing and sensationalizing of such a sensitive issue by newspapers also affects and degrades the journalistic ethics and practices. With delimiting one's strategy of creating sensationalism through colour headlines or colour highlights of words, much needed sensitivity and seriousness of the issue can be anticipated in the minds of readers. Issues of sexual crime should be handled by newspaper with deliberate consideration keeping in mind journalistic practices and sensitivity of the issue.

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