



Research Article

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# Political Rhetoric and Media Narratives on Rape: Analysing the Impact of Political Communication and Media Narratives on Public Perception in India

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## ARTICLE INFO

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## ABSTRACT

In India, the political discourse surrounding rape and sexual violence is a critical factor influencing both public perception and policy making. The portrayal of these issues in political rhetoric and media narratives often reflects and re-enforces societal attitudes, which can impact the effectiveness of legal and social responses towards sexual violence. However, the extent to which political communication shapes public perception and policy reforms remain unexplored. The significance of this problem lies in its impact on both public attitudes toward sexual violence and the effectiveness of policy responses. Political leaders have the power to influence public opinion and the media's coverage of certain issues and media narratives can shape political discourse, especially in a democracy like India, where the public is highly influenced by the information disseminated through both social and traditional media. Understanding how these two interact, one can realise how rape is constructed as a social problem and how policies addressing sexual violence are influenced by these narratives

## INTRODUCTION

### Background and Context

According to (Khushaliani,1982), rape is a horrific and widespread crime, unconstrained by cultural, socioeconomic, or geographical borders. Beyond physical assault, it also breaches human dignity and violates personal autonomy (Bergelson V,2007). In the modern world, discussions around rape have become complex, integrating perspectives from legal systems, society, politics, and the media (Bevacqua M, 2000). Historically, rape has been used to exert dominance and subjection (Henderson, H, 2007). (McGlynn C & Munro V.E, 2010) Researchers have examined how political leaders interpret rape incidents, especially through the lenses of morality, law, and cultural norms. Many studies show that political figures often use rape cases for electoral gain, either by

condemning opponents or by presenting themselves as defenders of women's rights (Ford, L, 2018). Meanwhile, media researchers have focused on how rape is reported, highlighting the sensationalization of high-profile cases, selective reporting, and the consequences of victim blaming (Kitzinger, J, 2013). However, according to (Bradley, T., Sahariah, S., and Siddiqui, O, 2017), we still lack a full understanding of how political rhetoric and media narratives together shape policy-making and public perceptions of rape in India.

### Statement of the Problem

In India, the political discourse surrounding rape and sexual violence is a critical factor influencing both public perception and policy making. The portrayal of these issues in political rhetoric and media narratives often reflects and re-enforces societal attitudes, which can

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impact the effectiveness of legal and social responses towards sexual violence. However, the extent to which political communication shapes public perception and policy reforms remain unexplored. The significance of this problem lies in its impact on both public attitudes toward sexual violence and the effectiveness of policy responses. Political leaders have the power to influence public opinion and the media's coverage of certain issues and media narratives can shape political discourse, especially in a democracy like India, where the public is highly influenced by the information disseminated through both social and traditional media. Understanding how these two interact, one can realise how rape is constructed as a social problem and how policies addressing sexual violence are influenced by these narratives.

### **Research Questions or Hypotheses**

The research question is How does political rhetoric and media narratives shape public perceptions and attitudes towards rape in India. The null hypotheses is, Political communication and media narratives affects public perception and attitudes towards rape in India and the alternative hypotheses is that Political communication and media narratives have a minimal/negligible effect on public perceptions and attitudes towards rape in India.

### **Objectives of the Study**

To analyse how political rhetoric and media narratives converge to shape public perceptions and attitudes towards rape.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive analysis of the intersection between political rhetoric and media narratives on rape in India. It will offer new insights into how these two forces shape public perceptions and influence policy-making. The findings will shed light on the responsibility of leaders and the press in shaping narratives around sexual violence. The research could help inform policy-makers, media professionals, and political leaders about the importance of responsible communication and reporting on rape. By understanding the consequences of harmful rhetoric and sensationalized media coverage, stakeholders could develop more ethical approaches to addressing sexual violence in India. The findings could also be used to advocate for media reforms and political accountability in cases of sexual violence.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study focuses on political rhetoric and media narratives related to rape in India. It includes an analysis of media coverage, and political communication and its effect on the public. The research will also consider how political communication and media narrative influence the public's attitude and perception surrounding rapes.

The study does not include an exhaustive analysis of all rape cases in India. The research will not address the psychological or sociological aspects of rape, instead will concentrate on the elements within political and media spheres.

When analysing media coverage, the selection of specific outlets introduces selection bias, as each has its own political leanings and editorial stance, potentially overemphasizing certain narratives like victim-blaming or the politicization of crime. Similarly, examining political communication is susceptible to sampling bias if only prominent national figures are included, potentially overlooking crucial discourse from other political voices and skewing the understanding of overall political messaging.

When assessing public perception, the sensitive nature of the topic invites social desirability bias, where individuals might offer socially acceptable rather than true answers, especially in India, potentially overestimating the positive impact of certain narratives. Recall bias might also affect how accurately respondents remember specific messages, making it harder to establish a direct link between political communication/media and shifts in public perception. Since the study doesn't exhaustively analyse all rape cases, focusing on high-profile instances introduces case selection bias, which could lead to generalizations about the broader discourse that don't apply to the majority of cases.

Finally, by excluding psychological and sociological aspects of rape, the study risks attribution bias, potentially oversimplifying how public perception is formed by solely crediting political and media influences while neglecting broader societal factors. Ultimately, these biases could lead to an incomplete or distorted understanding of the true impact of political communication and media narratives on public perception of rape in India.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research is guided by the theoretical frameworks of Cultivation Theory (Mosharafa, E., 2015), developed by George Gerbner, which argues that long-term exposure to media content, particularly in news and entertainment, can shape audiences' perceptions of reality.

In the context of political rhetoric and media narratives on rape, this theory will help explore how continuous media portrayal of rape, influenced by political discourse, cultivates public perception about the prevalence, seriousness, and societal implications of sexual violence in India (Govindnathan, P., 2024). By using Cultivation Theory, this research analyses how media and political communication reinforce or challenge public beliefs about rape, potentially leading to changes in public policy or shifts in societal norms (Kahlor, L., & Eastin, M. S., 2011). This theory also allows us to investigate the role of media in either perpetuating stereotypes or fostering empathy and understanding regarding rape victims, and

the broader cultural implications of these narratives in influencing policy decisions (Luther, C. A., Clark, N., & Lepre, C. R., 2024).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of political rhetoric and media narratives surrounding rape in India strongly impacts public perception, policy formation, and societal responses to sexual violence (Dey, A., 2019). Political rhetoric is a strategic tool used by politicians and parties to frame issues, mobilize support, and advance their agendas. Meanwhile, media narratives are crucial in shaping public discourse and disseminating information about rape (Serisier, T., 2018).

Saumya Garima Jaipuria in her article (Jaipuria, S. G., 2010) explains the problematic representation of women in crime stories within mainstream English newspapers. The author analyzes the cases of Jessica Lal and Priyadarshini Mattoo. She highlights the media’s tendency to blame victims, stereotype and objectify women, and prioritize upper-middle-class victims. According to (Jaipuria, S. G., 2010), selective activism and an urban bias further perpetuate inequality.

Thabisile Buthelezi in the article (Buthelezi, T, 2011) examines the media’s role in shaping societal attitudes towards rape in South Africa. Analyzing isiZulu newspaper

articles, his study identifies a pattern of sensationalized reporting, victim-blaming, and a focus on specific types of rape cases. This pattern highlights the media’s contribution to misrepresenting rape and making women invisible.

Soma Chaudhuri and Sarah Fitzgerald (Chaudhuri, S., & Fitzgerald, S, 2015) examine the spontaneous and leaderless protests that erupted in India following the 2012 gang rape in Delhi. By analysing the characteristics of these protests, including their horizontal structure, diverse participation, and use of technology, the authors argue they represent a new form of contention in India. This new approach, distinct from traditional social movements, has led to significant shifts in public discourse, government action, and increased reporting of rape cases.

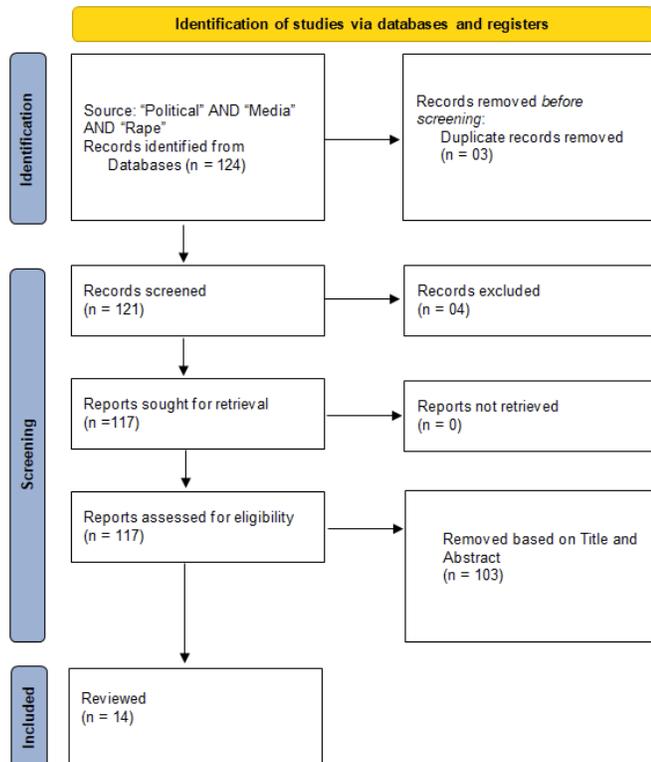
Loney-Howes’s “Online Anti-Rape Activism” (Loney-Howes, R, 2020) offers a comprehensive exploration of digital media’s role in shaping and amplifying anti-rape movements. The author investigates the strategies, challenges, and impacts of online activism. Loney-Howes critiques the limitations of online activism while highlighting its potential to drive social change and challenge dominant rape narratives.

The #MeToo movement, (Fileborn, B., & Loney-Howes, R, 2019) while significant, has faced critiques regarding its scope and inclusivity. While it has raised awareness of sexual violence and harassment, it has also been criticized for focusing on high-profile cases, excluding marginalized communities, and potential misuse. Despite these challenges, the movement offers opportunities for rethinking sexual consent and pleasure. It also emphasizes the importance of ethical activism and addressing systemic issues within anti-sexual violence movements.

The 2012 gang rape in India sparked widespread media coverage and debates about gender and violence. (Chaudhuri, S., Krishnan, P., & Subramaniam, M, 2018) analyzed media reports and identified three primary frames: mainstreaming gender, endangered woman, and ungendered woman. This analysis highlights the media’s role in shaping public discourse on women’s rights and the importance of critical media literacy in promoting gender equality.

A study examining public discourse and personal experiences in Delhi, India, (Edmunds, E., & Gupta, A, 2016) reveals a disconnect between media-driven narratives about rape and individual understandings of consent and pleasure. Middle-class individuals often learned about these topics through personal conversations rather than public discourse. While public figures often made harmful statements blaming women or absolving men, grassroots initiatives like the Erotic Photography Exhibit and Hackathon for Women’s Rights provided spaces for more nuanced discussions.

(Kaya, Ş, 2019) Kaya’s “Gender and Violence” examines how rape is represented in Turkish TV serials. The



**Figure 2.1:** PRISMA 2024 Flow diagram for Political Rhetoric and Media Narratives on Rape: Analysing the Impact of Political Communication on Public Perception and Policy in India source:(<https://www.prisma-statement.org/>).

article argues that the frequent portrayal of rape scenes normalizes violence against women, perpetuates stereotypes, and reinforces hegemonic masculinity. It also argues that while potentially harmful, the representation of rape can be a catalyst for social change. Kaya calls for responsible and sensitive use of rape narratives in television programming to promote awareness and challenge dominant ideologies.

The 2012 Delhi gang rape (John, M. E., 2020) catalyzed a shift in India's women's movement, focusing on sexual violence and harassment. While this led to legal reforms and increased awareness, it has overshadowed broader structural issues affecting women's autonomy, especially low employment rates.

The #MeToo movement further highlighted the pervasiveness of sexual violence but also underscored the need to address these deeper systemic problems.

(Larcombe, W., 2011) examines the decline in rape conviction rates despite feminist-inspired law reforms in India. While these reforms aimed to improve legal definitions, victim support, and institutional attitudes, their effectiveness remains questionable. The author argues that focusing solely on conviction rates may undermine feminist goals. This is because strategies to increase convictions can prioritize certain cases, disregard victim experiences, and perpetuate the 'real rape' myth.

(Harcourt, W., 2014) advocates for re-conceptualizing gender and development through the lens of body politics. Critiquing mainstream development discourse for failing to address root causes and objectifying women, the author emphasizes the importance of feminist activism, solidarity, and a decolonial perspective. Drawing on Foucault's biopolitics, (Peters, M. A., 2007) the article explores how power shapes women's bodies and lives. (Edwards, L., Philip, F., & Gerrard, Y. (2019) explores how Rape Crisis England & Wales (RCEW) uses social media, examining both its benefits and challenges. The study highlights that feminist organizations need strategies to navigate these complexities, balancing communication with protecting survivors and maintaining their work's integrity.

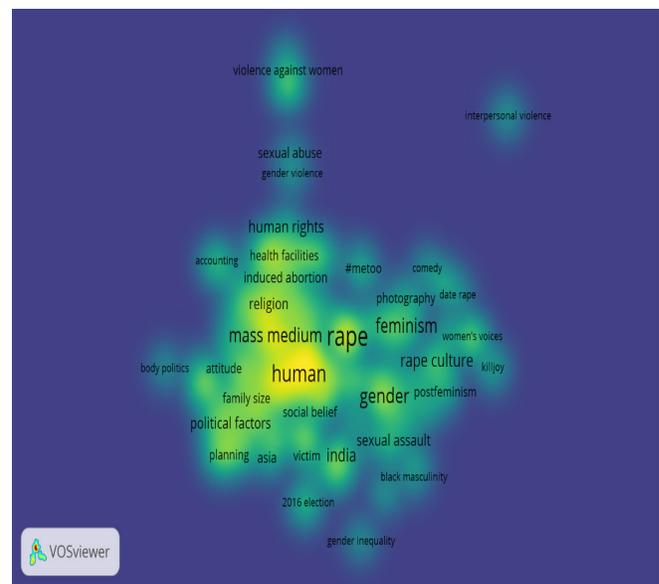
The article "Beyond Obstacles" (Parti, K., Robinson, R. A., Kohlmann, D., Virágh, E., & Varga-Sabján, D., 2021) explores the low rates of sexual violence reporting. It identifies factors like rape myths, victim blaming, and institutional betrayal as contributing to underreporting. The article emphasizes the need for improved support and awareness to encourage victims to come forward and seek justice. (Sen, A., Kaur, R., & Zabaliūtė, E., 2019) in "En(countering) Sexual Violence in the Indian City" examines the rise of gender-based violence in urban India, highlighting incidents like rape, acid attacks, and honor killings. It explores the urban context as a significant factor influencing women's experiences, activism, and vulnerability to violence. The article demonstrates how 'the urban' concept shapes discourses and critiques

surrounding sexual violence, highlighting the complex relationship between urban life and women's safety.

### Bibliometric Analysis

The density visualisation illustrates the frequency and relationships and the complex interplay of politics, rape, and media. Regions exhibiting a greater concentration of terms, as denoted by more intense hues, correspond to issues that are mentioned more frequently. Violence against women is the most prominent theme and the central focus encompassing concepts like sexual abuse, gender violence, interpersonal violence, and rape culture. The term body politics suggests a focus on the ways in which bodies are politicized and how this relates to issues of rape and gender. The arrangement of phrases "political factors," "planning," "2016 election," and "gender inequality," "mass medium rape," "photography," and "women's voices" offers valuable information about the intersection of politics, rape, and media.

The overlay visualisation illustrates the simultaneous presence of keywords in the research on political, media and rape. The central term, "violence against women," is connected to several subtopics such as "sexual abuse," "gender violence," and "interpersonal violence." Other related themes include "human rights," "health facilities," "religion," "feminism," and "rape culture." The visualization also highlights specific events like the "2016 election" and the "Me Too" movement. The timeline from 1990 to 2020 suggests the evolution of these topics over time. This form of visualisation illustrates the complex interplay between political factors, societal beliefs, and media representation in shaping attitudes and experiences related to violence against women.



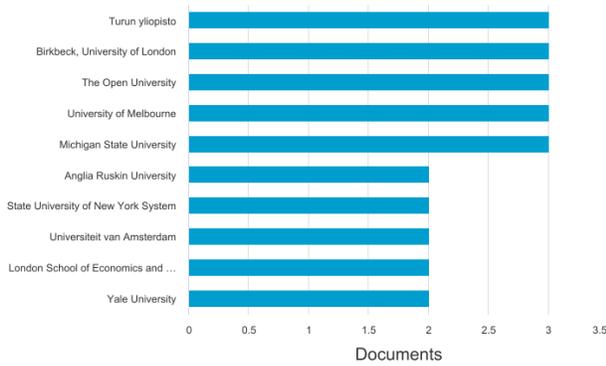
Density Visualisation



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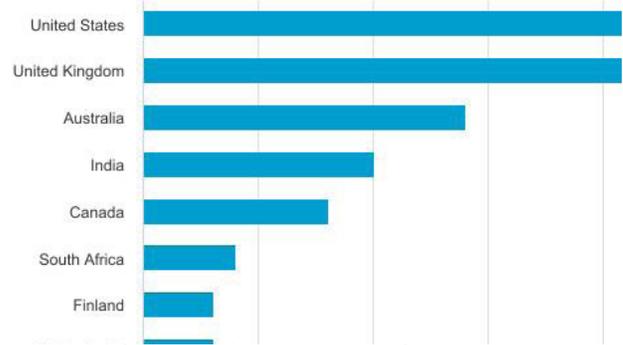


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Documents by country or territory

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Documents by country or territory

School of Economics and Political Science, and Yale University have lower document counts.

The bibliometric data presented provides a visual representation of the number of documents published by various authors. Serisier, T. has the highest number of publications, followed by Chaudhuñ, S, Horeck, T., and Keskinen, S. The remaining authors have published fewer documents.

The bibliometric data presented shows the distribution of research documents across 10 countries or territories. The United States has the highest number of documents, followed by the United Kingdom, Australia, India, and Canada. South Africa, Finland, the Netherlands, Hungary, and Poland have significantly fewer documents. This visualization allows for easy comparison of document counts between different regions.

The bibliometric data illustrates the distribution of document types related to the research paper on political rape and media. The majority of the documents (49.2%) are articles, followed by book chapters (30.25%). Books account for 11.9% of the documents, while reviews, editorials, letters, and conference papers make up smaller proportions (4.0%, 1.6%, 1.6%, and 0.8% respectively). Notes constitute a negligible 0.8% of the total documents.

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**CONCLUSION**

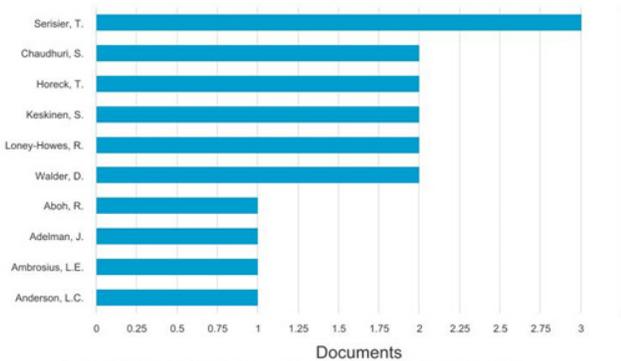
The literature review has consolidated a wide range of research from diverse academic sources, emphasizing the interplay of politics, media and rape and its effect on public perception and attitudes. Furthermore, it has explored subjects such as, "violence against women," "mass media," "feminism," "rape culture," "body politics," "social belief," "political factors," and "gender inequality." The literature emphasizes the intersection of politics, media, and rape in India as a complex and multifaceted issue with significant implications for public perception, policy formation, and societal responses to sexual violence.

The bibliometric analysis highlights the growing research interest in this area, particularly in the social sciences, and the increasing number of publications over time and suggests that the media plays a crucial role in shaping the public discourse on rape, often perpetuating stereotypes, victim-blaming, and sensationalized reporting. Despite the challenges, grassroots activism,

Documents by author

Compare the document counts for up to 15 authors.

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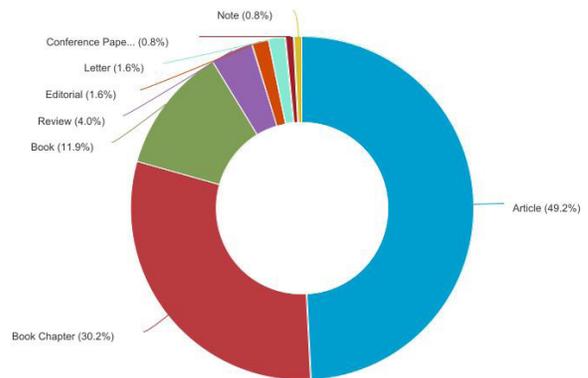


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online platforms, and legal reforms have played a significant role in raising awareness of sexual violence, challenging dominant narratives, and advocating for justice. However, addressing the systemic issues underlying sexual violence in India requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond media representations and political rhetoric, focusing on structural inequalities, gender justice, and the empowerment of women.

The reviewed literature reveals a deeply entrenched and multifaceted interaction between political rhetoric, media narratives, and public perceptions of rape in India. Scholars have consistently highlighted how selective reporting, victim-blaming, and politicization of sexual violence shape collective understanding and public discourse. However, despite this growing body of work, there remains a critical gap in quantitatively measuring how these narratives impact public attitudes in a contemporary Indian context. While many studies offer rich qualitative insights into media framing and political agendas, few have employed empirical methods to statistically evaluate the influence of these narratives on public perception and policy advocacy. Recognizing this gap, the present study adopts a quantitative methodological approach to systematically assess the extent to which political and media discourses influence societal attitudes toward rape. The following section outlines the research design, sampling strategy, data collection methods, and statistical tools used to investigate this relationship.

## METHODOLOGY

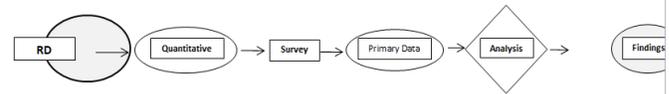
### Introduction

In India, the political discourse surrounding rape and sexual violence is a critical factor influencing both public perception and policy making. There is a significant gap in understanding how political discourse surrounding rape impact the public perception and policy making. Therefore, the objective is to analyse how political discourse surrounding rape and sexual violence influence both public perception and policy making.

### Overview of the Methodology

This research employs a quantitative methodology with a survey-based research design. The study targets a defined population of media consumers, employing judgmental sampling to ensure the inclusion of participants relevant to the research objectives. Primary data is collected through validated online questionnaires, and the analysis involves descriptive statistics, correlation, and advanced tests like chi-square, regression, and ANOVA to interpret relationships between variables. Ethical considerations, such as confidentiality and academic integrity, are strictly adhered to, ensuring the credibility and reliability of the findings. Limitations are acknowledged, particularly in terms of generalizability and potential sampling biases.

### Research Design



The research design for this study is primarily quantitative method. quantitative method involves survey research design which can be conducted on the basis of primary data. Finally, the data are analysed with proper statistical and thematic tools.

### Sampling

Population- the total Population required for quantitative sampling amounts to 31516. The total Population required for qualitative sampling amounts to 68.

#### Sample area -

the quantitative research is going to be conducted amongst various individuals who consume information through political discourse and the media.

#### Sample size -

the quantitative Sample amounts to 68 where the confidence level is 90%, the Population proportion is 50 and finally the margin of error is 10. The following is the equation that is used to calculate Sample size -

where

z is the z score

ε is the margin of error

N is the population size

$\hat{p}$  is the population proportion

The following is the equation that is used to calculate confidence interval -

$$n' = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{z^2 * \hat{p}(1 - \hat{p})}{\epsilon^2 N}}$$

where

z is z score

$\hat{p}$  is the population proportion

n and n' are sample size

N is the population size

#### Sampling method

the sampling method used for this research is judgmental sampling which is a non-probability sampling method. This particular Sample for this research because it serves the purpose of the research in conducting the study.

### Data Collection Method

The data collection method used in this research is primary in nature. The data will be collected from direct source to be analysed by proper statistical and thematic tools. For quantitative study the data will be converted to discrete to continuous for proper analysis. The data collection method will be ethical done by maintaining

all the standards of research data collection. The source used in this study will be confidential and be used for the purpose of academic research only.

### **Quantitative data collection**

The researcher will collect the quantitative data from various individuals who consume information through political discourse and the media.

### **Instrumentation**

The method of data collection involves online survey using google forms. The instruments used for research has been properly validated by the researcher before using them for this study. For quantitative study the Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value is ( $>0.5$ ) this justifies the credibility of the questionnaire.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Quantitative Research**

#### *Statistical method*

The research starts with descriptive statics which involves mean, median, mode and standard division. The next level of analysis involves Linear Pearson's corelation. The correlation provides the strength of the relationship of the variables. The next and the final statical tool employed by the research to prove the hypothesis is chi- square test. To complete chi- square test the researcher employed two more statical test Regression and ANOVA test.

### **Limitation of the Methodology**

The limitation involves proper generalisation of the data as the sampling method involved mostly is purposive. The other limitation involves standard error more 5 % in case of quantitative.

### **Justification**

The methodology for this study is justified by its strong alignment with the research objectives and the specific demands of the problem. A quantitative approach is chosen for its ability to systematically collect and analyse numerical data, which is essential for precisely measuring the influence of political rhetoric and media narratives on public perception and policy-making. This allows for the identification of statistical relationships and the rigorous testing of hypotheses regarding how these factors impact public attitudes towards rape. Utilizing a survey-based research design ensures the efficient gathering of empirical data directly from a defined population of media consumers. This design is particularly effective for capturing individual perceptions, attitudes, and reported exposure to specific types of political and media content.

The employment of judgmental sampling, a non-probability method, is specifically chosen because it serves the core purpose of this research: to include participants

who are most relevant to the study's objectives. This method allows the researcher to intentionally select individuals known to actively consume information through political discourse and media, ensuring that the collected data directly reflects the experiences and perceptions of the target group. This targeted selection enhances the depth and relevance of the findings for understanding the specific dynamics at play.

Primary data is collected through validated online questionnaires, ensuring standardized data collection and broad reach. The subsequent analysis, employing descriptive statistics, correlation, chi-square, regression, and ANOVA, further enhances the precision and credibility of the findings. These advanced statistical tools enable a robust interpretation of relationships between variables, allowing the results to effectively substantiate the research hypotheses and provide reliable insights into the complex interplay of political communication, media narratives, and public perception in India.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Descriptive Statistics Overview**

The descriptive statistics for the quantitative data reveal the following key insights:

#### *Demographics*

Respondents belong predominantly to male and female, with a slightly higher representation of female (mean = 1.76). Gender representation is skewed towards female, with a mean close to 2 (1 = male, 2 = female).

#### *Political rhetoric*

Most participants agree that emotionally charged language persuade public towards rape cases (mean=1.97). The Majority of participants feel that politicians use rape as a political tool to gain support (mean=1.90). Most participants agree that political rhetoric societal norma and legal discourse (mean= 2.01). Political discourse is highly influential in addressing policies aimed at preventing rape (mean=2.11)

### **Media Narratives and Coverage**

Majority of participants agree that media coverage of rape reflects rape against victims (mean=2.19). Media narrative has a high influence on public perception towards rape and its victims, with a mean of 1.75. Media is highly influential in reinforcing existing bias and stereotypes about rape (mean = 2.01).

### **Variability**

Standard deviations indicate moderate variability in responses, particularly in the influence media narrative on public perception (std = 0.70) and influence of media coverage on victims (std = 0.86).

### Correlation Analysis Insights

The correlation matrix highlights relationships among the variables:

#### Political rhetoric and public perception

A moderate positive correlation ( $r=0.40$  or  $r=0.36$ ) exists between the political rhetoric and public perception, suggesting these aspects are closely linked in participants' perceptions.

#### Media narratives and public perception

A moderate positive correlation ( $r=0.42$  or  $r=0.44$ ) is observed between media narratives and public perception of rapes, suggesting these aspects are moderately linked in participants' perceptions.

### Chi-Square Test Insights

The chi-square test examining the relationship between political rhetoric, media narratives and public perceptions of rape yielded the following results:

Chi-Square Value: 32.2

P-Value: 0.001

Degrees of Freedom: 9

#### Interpretation:

The p-value doesn't exceed the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, suggesting that there is statistically significant association between media narratives of rape, political rhetoric and public perception towards rape. However, this result does not rule out the possibility of nuanced differences in larger or more diverse datasets.

In this study, several statistical tools are employed to rigorously examine the relationship between political rhetoric, media narratives, and public perception regarding rape in India. These tools—correlation analysis, chi-square tests, regression analysis, and ANOVA—are essential in answering the central research question: to what extent do political and media discourses shape societal attitudes towards sexual violence?

Correlation analysis is used to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between two continuous variables. Specifically, this method identifies how changes in political rhetoric or media narratives are associated with changes in public perception. In the context of this study, Pearson's correlation coefficient reveals a moderate positive relationship between media narratives and public attitudes toward rape, suggesting that as exposure to certain types of media coverage increases, so does the likelihood that public perception aligns with those narratives. Similarly, the correlation between political rhetoric and public perception indicates a statistically relevant linkage. This helps validate the underlying hypothesis that both political and media messaging significantly influence how rape is understood and discussed in society.

The chi-square test is employed to determine whether there is a statistically significant association between

categorical variables, such as types of media narratives and corresponding public reactions. In this research, the chi-square test assesses whether public perception varies based on the nature of political or media messaging. The results demonstrate a significant association, as indicated by a chi-square value of 32.2 and a p-value of 0.001, which is well below the standard threshold of 0.05. This statistically significant outcome confirms that the connection between public attitudes and political/media discourse is not due to random chance, but rather reflects a meaningful pattern of influence.

Regression analysis offers a deeper understanding of the predictive relationships among variables. While specific regression coefficients are not detailed in the current findings, the method itself would enable the researcher to determine the extent to which political communication and media narratives predict changes in public perception. For instance, a linear regression model could quantify how much a unit increase in emotionally charged political rhetoric contributes to a shift in public opinion about rape. This method is particularly useful for isolating the unique effects of each independent variable while controlling for other factors, thereby offering more robust evidence of causation rather than simple association.

Lastly, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is used to compare means across different groups to determine if there are statistically significant differences in perception. In the context of this study, ANOVA could be applied to analyze whether public perception scores differ by demographic characteristics such as gender, age, or political affiliation. This would help uncover whether certain groups are more influenced by media and political rhetoric than others. For instance, younger respondents or individuals more frequently exposed to social media may show different perception patterns compared to older participants who rely on traditional news sources. By identifying such group-level differences, ANOVA adds a layer of nuance to the interpretation of results.

In summary, these four statistical tools work together to build a comprehensive and empirical foundation for the study's conclusions. Correlation and chi-square tests establish associations between key variables, while regression and ANOVA offer predictive insights and group-level comparisons. Together, they enhance the methodological rigor of the research and provide credible evidence for the argument that political rhetoric and media narratives are significant forces in shaping public understanding of rape in India.

### Findings

#### Objective

To analyse how political rhetoric and media narratives converge to shape public perceptions and attitudes towards rape.

The quantitative analysis reveals a significant correlation between political rhetoric, media narratives,

and public perception of rape in India. A majority of respondents believe that emotionally charged political rhetoric (mean=1.97) and biased media coverage (mean=1.75) influence public opinion, often reinforcing harmful stereotypes and victim-blaming narratives. The chi-square test examining the relationship between political rhetoric, media narratives and public perceptions of rape (P Value:0.001) suggests that there is significant association between media narratives of rape, political rhetoric and public perception.

This research underscores a significant correlation between political rhetoric, media narratives, and public perception of rape in India, revealing that emotionally charged political discourse and biased media coverage often reinforce harmful stereotypes and victim-blaming. In light of these findings, it is crucial for political communicators and media professionals to adopt responsible communication strategies.

Political leaders should prioritize factual accuracy, avoiding sensationalism and focusing on legal processes and survivor rights, while consistently championing victim-centric language and support. They must also utilize their platforms to educate the public on consent and promote systemic changes to combat sexual violence. Similarly, media professionals are urged to adhere to ethical reporting practices by avoiding sensationalism, respecting survivor privacy, and actively challenging harmful stereotypes. Their narratives should provide broader context on sexual violence, moving beyond individual cases to emphasize prevention strategies, legal remedies, and support avenues, thereby fostering a more informed and empathetic public discourse that supports survivors and promotes accountability.

## Discussion

The interaction between political rhetoric and media narratives profoundly shapes public perception of rape in India, often creating a cycle of intense, yet fleeting, outrage. Media outlets frequently sensationalize high-profile cases like the 2012 Delhi Gang Rape, employing “rape exceptionalism” and “rising criminality in urban India” frames to galvanize public demands for justice, with social media amplifying these calls, as seen with Sambhavi Saxena’s viral tweets. Yet, this coverage often paradoxically perpetuates victim-blaming and “otherization,” particularly for marginalized victims who receive less empathetic treatment and more doubting language.

Concurrently, political actors instrumentalize these incidents for electoral gain, such as Narendra Modi questioning the UPA’s record in 2014, and engage in blame games, exemplified by Sheila Dikshit shifting responsibility to Delhi police. This political discourse is further marred by insensitive comments, like Mulayam Singh Yadav’s “Boys will be boys,” and instances of obstruction of

justice, communalization, and caste-based manipulation in cases such as Unnao, Kathua, and Hathras. This complex interplay fosters a “selective outrage” that prioritizes privileged victims and often sidelines substantive policy discussions in favour of “scandal” or “revenge” frames, ultimately eroding public trust and reinforcing deeply ingrained patriarchal norms, even as online activism like #MeTooIndia struggles to translate into lasting political impact.

This interaction, characterized by “interdependent agenda-building” between social and mainstream media and a pervasive “selective outrage” that favours privileged victims, results in a public perception that oscillates between intense, often fleeting, outrage and a concerning normalization of sexual violence. Ultimately, this dynamic frequently sidelines substantive policy discussions, reinforces patriarchal norms, and undermines genuine justice, particularly for marginalized victims who often lack visibility and political leverage.

## CONCLUSION

This research underscores the powerful role of political communication and media in shaping societal attitudes and public perception towards rape. The analysis highlights the tendency of politicians to exploit sensitive issues like rape for political gain, often employing emotionally charged language and divisive rhetoric and the media’s role in perpetuating harmful stereotypes and victim-blaming narratives which cannot be ignored. To address this issue, it is imperative to promote responsible political discourse and ethical journalism. By fostering a more informed and empathetic public discourse, a safer and more just society can be created. This study therefore, highlights the need for responsible political discourse and ethical journalism to promote empathy, understanding, and justice for survivors of sexual assault.

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