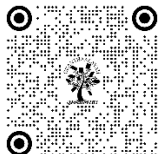# CONFLICTS OF MEDIA REPRESENTATION; COMPARING DOMINANT THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Society develops through the process of struggles and disputes. The media serves as a platform for staging social conflict and struggle. Therefore, it is important to understand social developments through the many disputes that result in significant protests. Marxian perspective identifies social conflict as interaction with individuals and groups. The technological expansion enabled media to extend the interactions among individuals. Media constitutes 'struggles over representation' Shohat and Stam (2014) and 'conflicts over identity Status' Rousiley (2014), bringing out social and political issues before the public. These conflicts initiate debate over arguments among audiences. The article reviews various theoretical perspectives on the relationship between representation and identity in social conflict and what is the significance of media representation in the process. The proposed research recognizes a case and employs multiple theoretical perspectives to compare the results. Online news reports (N=100) of the Citizenship Amendment Act (Bill) protests were purposively selected as a case and evaluated using different theoretical frameworks. The researcher questions whether this conflict happened between majority and minority groups and what were the complementing factors for widespread protest across the country. The case study shows critical media literacy is a constructive, essential way with flexible practice in explaining the role of representation and identity in social conflicts for underprivileged groups. The study worries about the implication of critical media literacy as a citizen-centric practice, signifying more exploratory research.

Keywords: Representation, Identity Building, Media Messages, Comparison Analysis, CAA Protests

1. INTRODUCTION

The identity of any individual in a society is formulated by the social construction of reality. Media allows individuals to communicate their interests, claims, and arguments. Individuals mobilize by identifying similar identities through media. Mass media evolved to newer forms like websites, blogs, news aggregators, social media, and the latest message delivery like smartphones and laptops. These evolutions intensify the scope and functioning of media in day-to-day life. The information in the 21st century concerns the socio-political significance of

media and communication. While the public keenly observes media messages, researchers analyse the effects of media and the audience's behaviours. Barber (1984), Habermas (1989), Mutz and Martin (2001). Beyond mere perception, they assessed that any socio-political dialogue while consuming media messages is vital in the present context of fake news, misinformation and disinformation. In a nutshell, media is a type of education that teaches a person how to be a man or woman while adhering to the prevailing system of norms, values, practices, and institutions Kellner (2011). Thus, the enlightened public comprehends power relations, misrepresentations, ideologies, stereotypes, and hidden fissures. Hence, communicating social-political issues through media constitutes various struggles and conflicts. These struggles are either representation Shohat and Stam (2014) or identity status Rousiley (2014).

Media constructs social conflicts at different levels of relations; structure and agency, creator and destroyer, supporter, and opposition. As a political Institution, the press maintains order, facilitating the functions of political institutions. Media as an agency ensures communication between the government, citizens, and citizens. The free flow of information in a society exposes many discriminations and inequalities. These realisations lead to purposeful interactions within/among groups, which causes conflict. Media also plays a significant role in deciding the direction and effects of any social dispute. Reporting, use of photographs, and targeted audience are the variables through which media creates, destroys, or supports, and opposes any disagreement.

The emergence and the resolutions of social disputes build up the characteristics of any society. The interaction between social forces triggers the tension around various decisions associated with 'Conflict' Dahrendorf (1959). The discussions regarding conflict started in the 19th century, when a group of sociologists Thomas N Carver, Giddings, Ward, and Hayes from the American Sociological Society started discussing the unexplored area of conflict. Cooley identifies the inseparability of conflict and cooperation and views them as the phases of one process Cooley (1897). Robert E Park from the Chicago school ranks conflict as the basic form of human interaction Park (1927). And Simmel views conflict as a form of socialisation. He argues that conflicts must happen within a group to emerge from their stagnated form. He asserts that no group is harmonious, it would be devoid of process and structure Simmel (1904).

Thus, the study requires defining representation and identity to understand the struggles caused by them. As conceived by Stuart Hall, representation is the production of meaning of the concepts in our minds through language Hall (1997). Representation is defined from different dimensions ranging from psychological, sociological, and linguistic. Linguistic and semiotic theories explain the way of presenting a subject with the help of signs and signifiers, giving prominence to the objectivity of media's visual and written language. Duveen (2000) argues that although representations are a by-product of communication, it is also true that communication would not be possible without representation. Representations are also identified as intersubjectively shared means of understanding and communicating Lloyd and Duveen (1990). Ideological meanings are transmitted through representations as created images. The images might also have a cultural impact on the group. The dominant groups in society will undoubtedly control representation to maintain their privilege. They encode the world in formats that help them keep their power and advance their social rank Hammer (1995).

Stuart Hall explains in his essay – Who needs an identity that identity is made in a specific moment through the process of identification Hall (1996). As a result,

defining an individual is similar to understanding particular identities. However, understanding 'identity' runs into the issue of the term's broad scope: identities are many, overlapping, and context-sensitive, and some are highly inconsequential or passing Appiah (2010). How we communicate, talk about, share with others, and communicate are all influenced by our identities and how we see and represent ourselves. As a result, identity, representation, culture, and diversity are all important aspects of communication Social Psychology Howarth (2011)

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study conducted by Liu and Chang (2019) investigates the relationship between the state and civil society in China by examining how the party and market media portrayed the topic between 2000 and 2012. The focus of the study is citizenship rights. The way that citizenship rights were represented in the media was examined in relation to Internet development, economic growth, the state of social conflict, and the establishment of civil society organisations. The party newspaper included citizenship rights in the political and economic spheres, per the logic of performance legitimacy of the party-state, according to comparative content analysis and extra media data analysis. The commercial newspaper placed rights concerns primarily in the context of civil society and connected them to the current state of social unrest and inequality.

The article "A Political Economy Communication Analysis of Media Representation of Social Conflicts by Chinese and Indian media in a Global Context" by Jing S discusses how social disputes are portrayed in China and India's media reflects state power and the political economy of the world are being negotiated. This study seeks to investigate how social disputes are represented in Chinese and Indian media in the context of the shifting global political economy. This research uses content analysis and discourse analysis techniques to argue that neither politics nor the economy alone can adequately explain the manifestation and nature of social conflicts in the two media systems. Along with these factors, media ideology, power dynamics, and conflict types should be considered. The interaction of the two states with the global political economy and the influence of state authority on the media is reflected in the media representation Jing (2009).

To provide a comprehensive, multifaceted, and nuanced knowledge of the social complexity, political dynamics, and cultural forms of mediatized conflicts in the modern world, the significant book by Simon Cottle (2006) brings together the most recent research findings and theoretical discussions. The case studies in the book, "Mediatized public crises centering on issues of `race' and racism" and "Identity politics and cultural recognition" gives an insight into the mediatized conflicts.

Ahmed et al. (2019) comprehend how the framing of social issues in news reports and discussions on social media is influenced by geopolitical proximity in their study 'Framing social conflicts in news coverage and social media: A multicountry comparative study'. Ahmed et al. (2019). A manual content and automated language analysis of 227 news stories and 4,495 tweets is done in the context of the Little India riot in Singapore in 2013. The classic theory of geopolitical proximity and global news coverage is supported by a multinational comparison of news media.

3. METHOD OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study is to explore social conflict in contemporary society by comparing different theoretical frameworks. The research also aims to identify a pedagogical framework's importance in understanding social conflict as a constructive process. The objectives of the study are.

- To identify the relationship between social conflict and media representation
- To analyse various social conflict theories and their variables
- To Compare the identified variables
- To identify the significance of a pedagogical framework by explaining the nature of the relationship between social conflict and media representation.

The main objective of this research is to examine the idea of conflicts in modern society. This study examines the function of media in social conflict production by mapping out the definition of social conflict and its socio-political ramifications.

Conflict theories diverge through functionalism, critical theory, and structuralism arenas. From the structural basis of social conflict, stratification, macro-sociological and social change constructs the descriptive variables in conflict theories. Social conflict theories, in general, have some variables to explain. They consider collective action, mobilisation, and participation. Thus, Conflict dynamics, conflict interaction processes, conflict types, scale, scope, length, conflict management and resolution, and the consequences of conflict results for contending groups and the greater society become the dependent variables in these theories. Any idea can contribute to understanding and changing the world we inhabit. Approach, in this sense, has everything to do with what Jennifer D. Slack and Martin Allor describe as "the epistemological and political" questions. From case studies to mathematical models, different theoretical frameworks are used to study conflicts worldwide Slack and Allor (1983). The present research chooses the theories concerning the struggles of representation and identity. The concepts of representation and conflict are connected in various dimensions. Analysing these concepts' application to different theoretical frameworks according to the context will enhance practical flexibility.

Analysing a social conflict from an unbiased, subjective perspective for educating an audience depends upon the suggested theories and frameworks. Comparison studies of various macro-level cases, such as systems cultures and markets, extensively contribute to communication research Esser and Hanitzsch (2012). The significance of comparative studies lies in explaining various relationships between objects and similarities and differences against specific contexts. Comparative analysis facilitates the understanding of structures and routines among multiple societies. It provides awareness of different cultures, patterns of thinking and acting, and particular forms of communication prevalent in other countries Esser and Vliegenthart (2017). This study compares systematic differences between examples, variation-finding comparison aims to "establish a principle of variation in the nature or intensity of a phenomenon" Tilly (1984). This entails contrasting various manifestations of a single occurrence in order to identify logical distinctions between them and set a benchmark for variation in the nature or intensity of that phenomenon.

The data for the study was collected from electronic websites, both alternative and popular websites, from December 4, 2019, to December 30, 2020. The research followed purposive sampling to collect appropriate data to get precise research outcomes. The collected reports are categorised under various theoretical perspectives for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses. The study followed open coding to identify the themes and coded under the variables from each theoretical framework.

The protests related to Citizen Amendment Act were started in the North-eastern states of India roughly around December 4, 2019. 'The Hindu' puts the gist of the CAA protest as

The BJP government enacted amendments to Citizenship law to grant citizenship to religious minorities of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, who had to flee their homeland, facing persecution……. in some areas, and violence broke out The Hindu (2020).

While Times of India explains CAA in the article, 'What is CAA?', specifies this as

The 2019 CAA amended the Citizenship Act of 1955, allowing Indian citizenship for Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian religious minorities who fled from the neighbouring Muslim majority countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan before December 2014 due to "religious persecution or fear of religious persecution The Times of India (2020).

After describing the amendment, this news article states, "however, the Act excludes Muslims". Reports explaining CAA do not sufficiently give importance to the issues in Northeastern India "regarding linguistic, cultural, and political marginalisation and apprehension regarding the stress on the resources and ecology of the state due to the expected demographic change" Sarma and Hazarika (2020). These struggles gain momentum across India after taking up the youngster's students at well-known Universities such as JNU, Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Milia etc. While evaluating Media representation and social conflicts within the context of India, The CAA protest right from the beginning in December till the present holds a special status. The reasons are given below.

- Emerges from a specific
- territory flourished as a 'minority issue', fumed debates over "self" and "others".
- Categories those in power and its supporters as 'we', while governed ones and government opposition as 'you'.
- Demand needs of a specific group and recognises the national identity of 'others.'
- Media consumers are provided with both supporting and opposing news reports, which makes them confused about to perceive Citizenship Amendment Act.

This protest stimulates debates on different dimensions of media representation of identity and conflict in India.

As minority-majority conflict

D Stanley Citizen proposes this model for placing social conflict between minority and majority, and it sums up the iterative process of social conflict and social change. Major postulates of this model sum up as; the majority and minority relations as power relations and struggles and conflicts are inherent to all power relations. The configuration of power produces conflict and changes the structure of dominance. This model proposes that majority-minority power relations iteratively

cause social conflict followed by social change due to dominance shift. Citizen Amendment Act is depicted as a tool which surges the majority-minority classification in India. Such protests against the CAA fall under a majority-minority relationship. The majority (80%) of the special report consists of references to the 'minority' category. Here 'minority' was chosen statistically and as represented by several media. The connotations include 'many women and girls in general, and further specifications are given as "some housewives, some students with hijabs covering their hair, and others in full-length burqa robes". This report from India today affirms the protest special from a minority perspective. The photographs of Shaheen Bagh perpetuate the women's participation, giving stress to the cause of conflict as a majority-minority power relation. Report from Ndtv headline as "Poet's Daughters, Other Women at Lucknow CAA Protest Charged with Rioting".

The study also collected reports that indirectly portray the mass demonstration as 'negative'. For example, the information published in Indian Express on December 21, 2019, argues that Indian Inc, including many celebrities and business tycoons, consider the CAA protest a threat to investment and further developments in India. The report also says that these protests are rooted in past issues rather than Citizenship Amendment Act. All the pieces selected for the study covered the CAA protest as a Minority-majority conflict. As shown in the chart below, 80% of the reports are directly associated with social conflicts.

The study evaluated the existence of majority-minority classifications and their power relations as a reason for the CAA protest. This protest can also be viewed as a social conflict with this theoretical framework. But there is no sufficient evidence to prove that all social conflict leads to social change and thus the dominance shift. When the majority is too powerful, social change can take more time. Hence, researchers choose a recognition model of media representation and conflict to understand the CAA protest and complement factors.

As recognition

Three perspectives of looking up the subjects in this model are beings with special requirements, beings who deserve equal respect and autonomy as everyone else in a political community, and beings who make significant contributions to society Rousiley (2014). The protest photographs show the urge to get recognised by the majority. The needs are publicly put as slogans in the protest. The reports from the wire, Deccan Herald, and print consists of photographs saying, "we want justice", "we need to live", "we need equality", and so on. The needs of the CAA protest asking for equal respect and place in a political community can be viewed from the below report.

It is a protest against the outrageousness of a government demanding proof of citizenship from its people. It serves as a reminder for the government to pay attention to its citizens. It is a spontaneous uprising against militaristic Hindutva nationalism as well as fear, hate, prejudice, and violence. (Indian Express, February 28, 2020)

Indian Express describes as a revolt against a regime that demonises minorities, students, and dissenters. It is a rejection of its inability to deal with the depressing realities of daily life, such as unemployment, farm poverty, violence against women, and a failing economy. This model holds no space for understanding the conflict from different perspectives. This opposite and accepted must be considered for perceiving the actual cause. Any disagreement over a cause must be assessed for truth and fallacy.
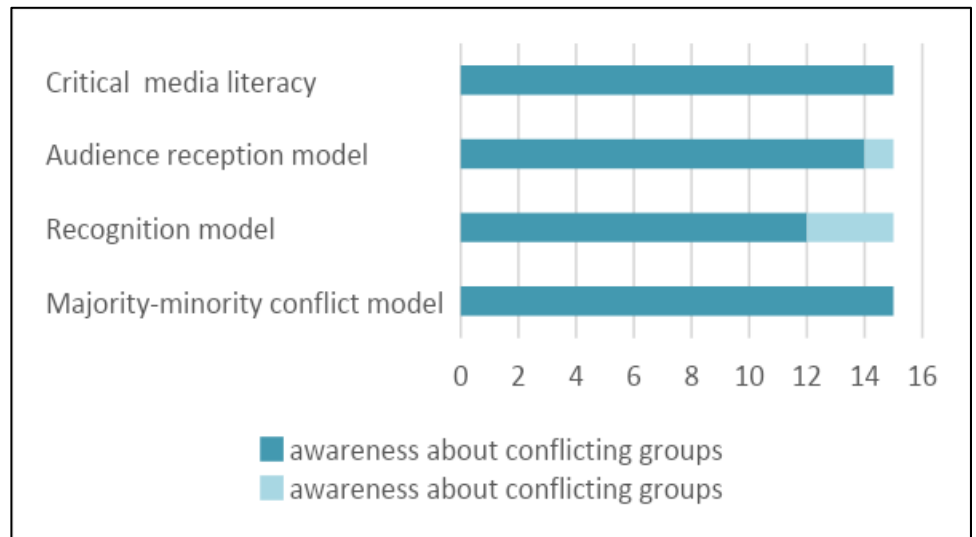
Audience Reception

All the reports were analysed within the contexts of different Dominant meanings, Oppositional meanings, and negotiated meanings. The headline "At pro-CAA rally in Mumbai, people hail PM Modi (TOF, December 21, 2019) encourages the public to follow the dominant meaning of the report.

The report titled "People are protesting against the citizenship law for different reasons (CNN, December 19, 2019)" – provides space for negotiated meanings by giving objective explanations of 'Muslim marginalisation' and 'influx of migrants. Two reports 'What is the Citizenship Amendment Act? "Here's what you need to know including what's happening, what's fuelling the protest, gatherings banned, and ongoing violence. All the reports were analysed using select theoretical frameworks to understand complementing factors for social conflicts.

Awareness of Conflicting groups: As shown in the figure, all theoretical frameworks assist in understanding the conflicting groups in the context of representation and identity. Critical media literacy and audience reception theory make understanding conflict groups much more robust than other models. Figure 1
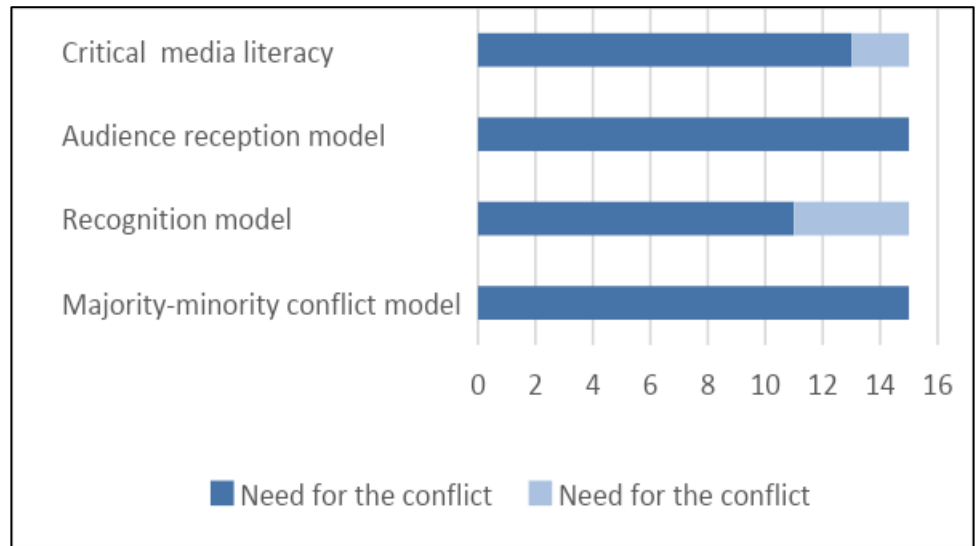
Figure 1

Figure 1 Graphical Representation of Awareness about conflicting groups

The need for the Conflict: The below graph depicts, employing an audience reception model, that the purpose of the conflict is more relevant and visible. The majority-minority conflict model and Audience reception model provide flexible frameworks for analysing reports. The need for competition can justify using the audience reception model and the majority and the minority conflict model. Figure 2
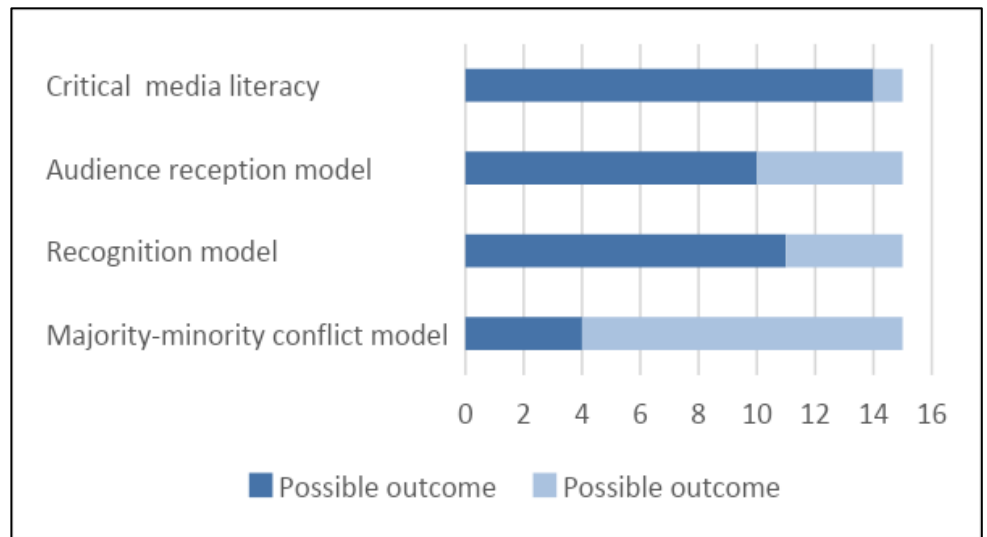
Figure 2

Figure 2 Graphical representation of Need for Conflict

Possible Outcomes from the conflicts: Critical media literacy provides flexibility to understand the battles and potential outcomes from all the frameworks employed. Critical media literacy as a theory analyses the essential understanding of the media messages and gives importance to the experience of media messages as a social process. When the individuals can identify the role of institutions and their meanings, the possible Outcome can also be interpreted. Figure 3

Figure 3

Figure 3 Graphical Representation of Possible Outcome

4. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY

There are several codes as referred by scholars for Critical media literacy. Non-transparency explains how media messages are constructed. Codes and Conventions deal with using creative language and constructing media messages.

Audience Decoding evaluates the psychological and cultural differences in perceiving media. Content and news reflect the embedded values and points of view delivered through media. Motivation as a code to examine the profit and power structures of media. The reports such as "From housewives to hijab-clad students, women take center stage in CAA protests" ...appealed to the citizens to peacefully support the CAA (TOF, 2019), ".... non-Muslim immigrants escaping religious persecution from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh......" (TOF,2019), Jantar Mantar turns into ground zero of anti-CAA protests in Delhi (HT, December 19, 2019)

The critical media literacy paradigm encourages a variety of viewpoints while analysing any research cases. A flexible framework for objective comprehension of the social conflict is necessary, one that considers both the majority and minority, demands and contributions, as well as direct and indirect meaning. The underlying causes of the disagreement can only be discovered after that. The current situation calls for selective perception. Although multiple transmission technologies are utilized, media literacy helps to improve the capacity to consume media messages. The critical Media Literacy (CML) paradigm promotes multicultural literacy by fostering support for, awareness of, and participation in the range of cultures and subcultures that make up a more and more global and multicultural world. Critical media literacy skills are taught to students so they may utilise media effectively, resist media manipulation, and learn from it. However, it also focuses on fostering abilities that will assist good citizens in becoming more socially adept and skilled participants. Critical media literacy emphasizes ideological critique and analysis of the politics of representation of essential gender, race, class, and sexuality characteristics in addition to embracing alternative media production and extending the textual analysis to include social context, control, and pleasure issues. Kellner and Share (2007).

Analysis of gender, race, and ethnicity representations as well as a critique of ideologies found in media texts are thus part of critical media literacy. It demonstrates how the prevailing ideology propagates its ideas through media messages and how they are fabricated to seem true. People and marginalized groups can better grasp how dominant groups use media as a tool to manipulate and oppress them by developing critical media literacy. They then attempt to depart from their previous objective and passive approach to media culture and engage in a struggle against marginalization and oppression. Instead of making individuals smart consumers, media literacy makes people sophisticated citizens.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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