

Observing the ‘Observed Vulnerability’: Media Reports on Indian Migrant Workers During COVID-19 Lockdowns

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Short Abstract:

The COVID-19 lockdowns caused disruptions around the world with countries being isolated, industries massively effected, companies closing their business and people losing their jobs, along with losing their lives with the virus. Particularly the most vulnerable consumers experienced the lockdowns the toughest, including more than 139 million domestic ‘migrant workers’ in India whose lack of access to market resources put them in serious danger. Aiming to advance the current theorisation of the notion of ‘observed consumer vulnerability’, and drawing upon Stuart Hall’s theory of representation, we investigate how migrant workers’ situation was observed and reported by news media. An analysis of articles in the *Times of India* using Leximancer underscored the main themes of: workers, district, COVID, train, cases and labour. The findings inform the current consumer vulnerability theory and offer public policy implications especially during a crisis.

Keywords: Consumer vulnerability, Observed Vulnerability, Representation theory, COVID-19.