PLATFORM MECHANICS OF HATE AND MARGINALITY: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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This panel speaks to concerns of platform imperialism by engaging with platform affordances and constraints as well as social practices they reshape. Using four grounded case studies from India and Kenya, we push back against Western ideal types[1] that have dominated theorizations around platform imperialism. We trace specific connections across the majority world as platforms intersect with shared histories of colonialism, racialized dispossession, and extraction. Through these interrogations, we

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[1] Borrowing from Bhambra, G. K. (2014). *Connected Sociologies*. Bloomsbury Academic.

aim to pave pathways for theoretical alternatives that resonate globally while speaking from the South.

Platforms have transformed processes of cultural and social reproduction. Ubiquitous across institutional processes, they have become infrastructural in mediating the form, functionality, distribution, adoption, and valuation of cultural artifacts (Poel, Neiborg, and Duffy, 2021; Morris, 2020; Anand, Appel and Gupta, 2018). Platform expansion and power have been studied through frameworks of imperialism, racial capitalism, and colonialism (Kwet, 2019; Couldry and Mejias, 2018; McMillan Cottom 2020). However, amidst these macro-theorizations and their proposed cataclysmic implications, the complexities of how platform power, logics, and affordances manifest in specific socio-historical contexts are often lost. Scholars such as Steinberg, Mukherjee, and Punathamekar (2022) have argued that platforms emerge within local markets, structures of governance, and distinct motivations for technological development as regionally specific infrastructures.

This panel examines how specific platform mechanics emerge as infrastructural and transform social processes. Exploring and subverting the mechanics of game-play has been the mainstay of critical games scholarship, where rules of play have been analyzed as sites of governance and constraint as well as generative boundaries within which creativity emerges (Ruberg and Shaw, 2017; Gray, 2012). We engage with the idea of 'platform mechanics' to think of the encoded and institutionalized boundaries in digital platforms within which practices of extraction and resistance emerge. We examine interface-specific affordances, modes of encryption, terms and conditions of use, content moderation, algorithmic management, surveillance, and extended practices of platform-enabled governance. Across individual papers, we weave in issues of ethnonationalism and Islamophobia; mass surveillance and digital repression; racialized segregation and social performance of caste; and gendered power. By encouraging open interpretations of 'platform mechanics', we invite creative ways of interpreting affordances as they relate to collective expression and organizing against majoritarian power.

The first paper examines how platforms mediate the viral circulation of scandalous content, affecting marginalized gendered bodies in public spaces. It explores how affordances of encryption and content moderation shape the spread of morally contentious videos. Drawing on ethnographic work with a trans* itinerant dancer in provincial north India, it analyzes the affective dimensions of virality. Using conceptualizations around molar and molecular virality, it argues that viral scandals emerge through an interplay of social power, recording technologies, and platform governance, contributing to the marginalization of vulnerable communities in India's digital ecosystem.

The second paper explores the cultural production of 'Abdul memes' within India's Hindu nationalist digital sphere, focusing on how social media platforms enable their circulation. These memes use humor and satire to construct exclusionary narratives. Hindu nationalist digital workers exploit platform algorithms and engagement-driven design to amplify anti-Muslim discourse while bypassing moderation. The study highlights how social media platforms actively shape ideological production, reinforcing

Hindutva's dominance in digital spaces. By examining the role of platforms in fostering political polarization, the paper demonstrates how digital technologies function as tools for cultural propaganda and ideological mobilization.

The third paper examines how the Kenyan government leveraged digital surveillance and content moderation on Twitter (X) to suppress the 2024 "Maandamano" protests. It exposes state use of surveillance capitalism, tracking protesters, harvesting behavioral data, and deploying state-affiliated online actors to suppress dissent. By focussing on three key events, we reveal how state-sponsored digital surveillance escalated violence and deaths. We also expose contradictions in platform governance, raising concerns about accountability in content moderation and broader implications for digital rights and democracy.

The final paper explores how digital 'gig' platforms intervene in the spatial and affective registers of caste in India. It unpacks platform strategies to regulate the social performance of caste across three scales: (1) home, (2) neighborhood, and (3) the city. From algorithmic management and precaritizing worker livelihoods through features like ratings to deploying invasive biometric surveillance and quantification, platforms regulate racialized bodies, times (Jamal, 2008; Sharma, 2014), and geographies (Safransky, 2020) in many ways. Caste-based discrimination and power attain invisibility and legitimacy when algorithmically mediated and shrouded within values of convenience for the consumer.

We hope that shedding light on how platform mechanics reanimate social inequality and associated modes of resistance would also illuminate radical counter-imaginaries of platform ecosystems. Overall, the panel's objective is not to 'parochialize' theories of platform capitalism. Instead, we wish to offer multiple standpoints to unpack its contours and implications, thereby opening theoretical horizons sensitive to *connected histories* of platform imperialism.

Keywords: platform mechanics, affordances, content moderation, global south, governance

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VIRAL BODIES AND CONTAGIOUS MORALITY: ENCRYPTION AND CONTENT MODERATION IN "SCANDAL" NETWORKS

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One day when Sapna returned after a trip, she found one of her friends rattled after a *kaand*(incident). She and her friend, both dancers, were living in a small village in Mewat (a region in North India) at the time. Being freelance dancers, they frequently shifted base between several villages or towns based on when celebrations, weddings, and communal entertainment events were held. On this fateful day, her friend encountered people who were initially cordial and curious about her work and suddenly changed their tone of questioning. They started recording and interrogating her: 'Do you do this work?', 'Tell us the truth!' In their questions, the implication was that Sapna's friend (and by extension she) was involved in sex work in the garb of being a dancer. Sensing the group's antagonism, her friend somehow managed to escape before things got worse. As Sapna recounted this story during an interview, she was particularly threatened by the fact that such recordings often become popular, or 'viral.' Such virality extends to private circulation on messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram along with audio-visual platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and, Youtube, among others. Sapna's worry, one about virality and the shudder she experiences at the thought of it, is contrasted with herself recorded and posted on Instagram about her adventures as an itinerant dancer. It was almost as if one day she wanted to become viral for her craft and not for undeserved ties to a scandal.

Drawing on Sapna's experiences, along with other such narratives, 'virality' can be thought through the affordances and governance enabled on platforms. This specifically includes considerations of how encryption and content moderation, as platform functionalities, combine with social power and identity towards the viral circulation of audio-visual content.

This paper engages with the messy, mediated contours of "scandalous" viral video circulation in provincial India. Methodologically, I combine ethnographic interviews with reviews of news coverage and close reading of viral content encountered in ethnographic work. As scholars like Gina Chen (2019) argue, news coverage of sexual scandals have accelerated with social media postings defying traditional journalistic gatekeeping structures. Despite that, social and power relations continue to dictate which content becomes understood and consumed as scandalously viral (Wood, 2018). However, prior to the moments of hidden virality, platform functionalities of encryption and (lack of) content moderation substantially mediate virality.

Encryption, and its contentious role in proliferating hate and mis/disinformation, has been studied by scholars in the field of internet studies and allied disciplines. This work has attempted to account for the growing epistemic burden of correction on minority communities (Paris and Pasquetto, 2023); to assess the normativization of social affordances in messaging apps (Raemdonck and Pierson, 2024); and several attempts to find design-based solutions for a complex socio-technical problem (Andrey et al,

2021). Relatedly, content moderation has been written about for its exploitative labor practices; operating under corporate logics of profit making (Roberts, 2018); and for its continuous inability to account for threats to marginalized bodies and populations (Baishya, Mini and Soundarajan, 2023)

Within the ecology of morally contentious "viral" videos, it is important to place them alongside networks of viral circulation that concern illegal and "forbidden" content such as explicit abuse and pornography. Such contextualization enables us to observe the contentious discursive lines for if/when a circulatory practice gets the attention of the State. For instance, law enforcement operations in India have been clamping down on networks of child pornography by finding means to bypass end-to-end encryption (HT Correspondent, 2019). These have been often absorbed in the rhetoric of cyber security and international digital protection-oriented initiatives. However, when it comes to both ethno-political hate speech and vicarious consumption of "immoral" videos (such as the one Sapna fears), the platform's and by extension State's governance mechanisms– through the inability to moderate encrypted communications–contribute to further marginalization and minoritization (Nizaruddin, 2019).

However, instead of singling out platforms and their mechanics, I used Tony Sampson's (2012) work to read these phenomena of dangerous virality as an interplay of bodies, fear, public morality, and technologies (including platforms). Such non-deterministic thinking about platforms involves understanding them not just as technical systems but also implicated and emerging in social processes, power, and technological practices. Here their implication in the discourse of gendered power (for instance when gender marginality manifests through the physical and felt presence of trans* bodies such as Sapna's) are mediated both through platforms and recording technologies, as well as the continuous reshaping of social discourses on gender.

Using this study, I further Sampson's work on combining ideas of molar and molecular virality where viral networks (be it in the context of disease or social media), circulate through the "contagious forces of relational encounter" (molar) as well as the subrepresentational flow of events that radiates outward (molecular). The case of purported scandalous recordings of gendered bodies, like the ones I described above, combines bodies in public spaces, physical movements and mobility, discourses of gender and morality, and patterns of instantaneity in utilizing mobile devices and circulatory affordances of the platform. However, the "becoming viral" of bodies also hinges on a sort of ethereal mood building that mirrors capitalist marketing techniques of what Sampson calls "affective contagion." The fear and foreboding experienced by Sapna and her friend, the fight or flight responses, constant sensing of moments of being "made viral" hinge on "prediscursive flow of contagious affect, feelings, and emotions" (Sampson, 2012, 3). Sensing these moments of potential virality (both for the subject of these recordings as well as those who record) can then transform which social events become a part of the ecology of contentious circulation and marginalization through platforms and their functionalities.

Overall, this paper calls for a renewed exploration into the circulation of scandals enabled through platforms. Any critical study of scandalous virality needs to account for the presence of marginalized bodies within *situated* power-dynamics. Here,

platform-based circulation cultures cannot be generalized as universal when theorizing how scandalous virality circulates and shapes gendered and social dynamics. Instead, they articulate through platform mechanics (of content moderation, encryption, and circulation in this case) as they combine with recording cultures, circulation networks, atmospheric morality (Cooper, 2024), and subrepresentational sensory and affective conditions in which such encounters take place.

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ABDUL-FICATION OF MUSLIM MEN: THE POLITICS OF MUSLIM ALIENATION BY THE HINDU RIGHT IN INDIA

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During the 2024 presidential debate, Donald Trump referred to the supposed head of the Taliban as 'Abdul,' sparking a wave of viral memes. The name 'Abdul' has long functioned as a placeholder for Muslim men in both social and mainstream media, reinforcing Islamophobic stereotypes. This paper examines the emergence and circulation of 'Abdul memes' within India's Hindu nationalist digital ecosystem, demonstrating how they function as political tools for exclusionary propaganda. The Hindutva ideology[2] parallels the right-wing extremists in the West (Leidig, 2020). Its relevance lies in its identitarian focus and access to state power.

One of the ways right-wing governments propagate their exclusionary ideals is through memes. Scholars have argued that due to the increasing impact of social media, memetic cultures based on visual and symbolic provocations should be understood as a metapolitical terrain for reshaping public opinion (Bogerts and Fielitz, 2019). Right-wing memetic cultures create a shared ethno-nationalist bond of solidarity across multilingual and transnational networks and publics (Sen, 2023). I will trace the creation and circulation of 'Abdul' memes by Hindu Nationalist accounts in India as a way to spread Islamophobia. Through this investigation, I look at how memes shared by Hindu nationalist digital workers function as political objects within the economy of political mobilization. I borrow the definition of Abdul memes from Udupa's Hindutva memes (Udupa, 2015). Abdul memes refer to an active stream of critical memes that combine sarcasm, parody, allegory, and irony to caricaturize and villainise Muslim men.

It's important to investigate the circulation of Abdul memes not just to notice the pattern of right-wing propaganda that they legitimize but also how they bypass the AI filters of social media platforms while doing so. Internet memes, widely circulated and transformed online, serve as cultural and political expressions (Shifman, 2014). The relationship between memes and politics is an interesting one. These are expressions of political agency in the digital age and follow a 'bottom-up' approach to political discussion that merges pop culture, politics, and participation (Shifman, 2014).

Studies have shown that right-wing communities have been early adopters of the internet. Similarly, the digital embrace of Hindutva has been particularly intense compared to other political parties and movements (Udupa, 2021). The movement has controlled most of the discourse in traditional media, social media, and political mobilization on the ground over the years, especially since the election of Narendra Modi, as the Indian prime minister, in 2014. The ruling Hindu Nationalist party in India, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), runs an Information Technology (IT) Cell which comprises online volunteers of Hindu nationalism with diverse occupational backgrounds and levels of ideological commitment (Udupa, 2015). The internet Hindu associated with the

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[2] Political ideology that advocates for Hindu supremacy in India.

IT Cell is usually a young male, tech-savvy urban middle-class user who associates himself with right-wing ideals and is a staunch supporter of Modi (Mohan, 2015). The key themes circulated by the IT Cell include rhetorical patriotism, emotional reference to the sacrifice of the Indian army; territorial attachment to the sacred land of India; the minority Muslim community as threats to the security of the nation, and others that are circulated and kept relevant by the radical right in postcolonial India. In Hindutva's media usage, there's a key emphasis on a particular vision of India's past and present as well as a push for a very specific interpretation of Hinduism among its practitioners. It often exercises a very targeted vision of the faith which is associated with upper-caste northern Indians, with a specific focus on masculinity and power. Its view of Indian history portrays Muslims and Christians as outsiders who align with opposing political forces to undermine Hindus and therefore, pose an imminent danger to Hindus and by extension, India (Stall et al., 2021).

Stuart Hall describes that in cases of gross inequalities of power, the inequities are maintained by the 'Spectacle of the Other' that is gazing at the representations of racialized others. This facilitates a binding together of 'All of us who are "normal" into one "imagined community" and sends the others, who are in some way "different", beyond the pale (Hall, 1997: 258). Through the usage of Abdul memes, the Muslim male body by default becomes the "designated other" from whom Hindus need to be shielded.

I build on Udupa's concept of fun as a meta-practice (2019). Udupa identifies "fun" as a key element in online right-wing networks where it facilitates activities like assembling online followers, engaging in ideological battles, and propagating exclusionary politics. By incorporating coded language and pop-cultural references and identifying Muslim men as 'Abdul' using the skull cap and facial hair iconography, these practices gain traction among the supporters of Hindu nationalist ideology while bypassing moderation algorithms. Here, the 'fun' on social media platforms plays an important role in legitimizing exclusionary practices against one community.

This paper will analyze the role of platforms in promoting Abdul memes - how platforms actively construct discursive spaces and governance through design choices and affordances. These platforms privilege certain behaviors which directly and indirectly shape sociocultural practices. Though platforms present themselves as neutral, their logics extend beyond their sites. My data collection sites will be Facebook and Twitter (X) (two of the most used social media platforms in India) followed by textual and discourse analysis of the material collected. This will also help compare how meme circulation differs across platforms. This paper will explore how social media platforms' affordances provide a space for Hindutva ideologues to practice Islamophobic politics and sustain an anti-Muslim sentiment online.

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DIGITAL ACTIVISM UNDER SIEGE: STATE SURVEILLANCE, CENSORSHIP, AND PLATFORM GOVERNANCE IN KENYA

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In 2024, Kenya experienced a surge of deaths, abductions, and police violence amidst *Maandamano* protests. These protests gained global traction through the hashtags #RejectFinanceBill, #RutoMustGo, and #OccupyParliament (Njuki et al., 2024; Kaigwa, 2024) and were intensified by the government's digital tracking and surveillance (Abiero, 2024; Mugaa, 2024). Altogether, these hashtags garnered over 24 million impressions on X (Twitter) between June 12th and July 1st, 2024 (Kaigwa, 2024). Under pressure to repay loans owed to international financial bodies, the government raised taxes on income and essential goods and services over the years. This move was met with criticism by citizens online and offline as these changes would further impoverish the majority (Loanes, 2024; Rukanga, 2024). The heightened online dissent reflected the public outcry to # RejectFinanceBill2024 particularly on X, the online protest amplified public outcry, increasing pressure on the government to respond (Kaigwa, 2024).

In response, the government imposed a form of 'surveillance capitalism'. The concept of surveillance capitalism as argued by Zuboff (2019), is a form of capitalism underpinned by lawlessness. The disappearance of suspected *Maandamano* leaders was facilitated by tracking IP addresses and tracing content from platforms such as X, TikTok, SMS, and phone calls (Citizen TV Kenya, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024), harvesting behavioral data, to manipulate and hijack the protesters by silencing them. Surveillance targeted key individuals, including media personalities, activists, and ordinary citizens, who were considered main actors in public discourse and civic engagement. For example, Albert Ojwang', a digital activist and teacher, was tracked to his father's home by the Kenyan state before his death in custody, raising serious concerns about misuse of surveillance (Laibuta, 2025). To fight back further, the government deployed coordinated "Twitter (X) goons," to disrupt and dilute conversations surrounding #RutoMustGo and #RejectFinanceBill hashtags online and offline, during the physical protests (Beer, 2024). This tactic, known as astroturfing or hashtag manipulation, involves flooding social media with counter-narratives, misinformation, or irrelevant content to suppress dissenting voices and shift public discourse (Tucker et. al., 2018). State-affiliated groups in Kenya have engaged in organized social media manipulation to control narratives, particularly during elections and policy debates (Bradshaw & Howard, 2021). Altogether, these surveillance tactics adapted by the government, reflects a state-driven adaptation of surveillance capitalism into an authoritarian tool

(Chahali, 2025; Kapiyo, 2024; Laibuta, 2025; Indenje, 2024; Ilori, 2025; Wachu, 2025; Ushahidi, 2024)

Twitter (X) plays a crucial role in this study as it influences agenda-setting in content moderation, trending topics, and thematic discourse. These discussions extend beyond casual conversations, garnering significant attention, particularly among Kenyans on Twitter (X) and beyond, including mainstream and international media outlets such as CNN, which have engaged with topics ranging from police brutality to global news. Some of these outlets have been criticized for misrepresenting facts about Kenya in their reporting (Nyabola, 2018). Laibuta (2025) describes the surveillance system in Kenya as deeply embedded, likening it to a "digital panopticon" where people are constantly monitored through their phones. He adds that surveillance is not limited to phone data: social media monitoring tools are being used to scan platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp) for keywords, behavioral patterns, and possibly dissent.

This study examines the contradictions of content moderation, platform governance, and power control to suppress political dissent in Kenya. We seek to answer: How do contradictions of content moderation, platform governance, and power in Kenya impact political dissent, particularly during the finance bill protests in 2024? What role does state-sponsored surveillance play in shaping communication flow during protests? Methodologically, we use case studies, content analysis and thematic analysis, with data collected from the X platform, and media and industry reports as supplemental data. For case studies, this research tracks major examples from the protests, identifying gaps and implications within the context of content moderation and platform governance, and making recommendations. Through content analysis, we track three significant events and the subsequent digital tracking and surveillance by the government under the hashtags #RejectFinanceBill, #RutoMustGo, and #OccupyParliament. These hashtags became flashpoints for activism despite subsequently getting hijacked by state-sponsored disinformation, misinformation, and defamation of suspected protest leaders. This study focuses on three major incidents that received major attention, thus significantly shaping the nature of the protests.

1. The first is the murder of a young Kenyan protestor, Rex Kanyike Masai, who was killed amid the protests against the proposed 2024 Finance Bill (Mendonca, 2024; Muia, 2024; Ogetta & Onyando, 2024; Ombuor, 2024). Rex's death fuelled more anger towards the government, leading to #OccupyParliament and simultaneously intensified abductions of suspected protest leaders.
2. Second: the government employed internet throttling during the day to curb online communication and mobilization of the protestors, citing public safety while selectively targeting dissenters. Safaricom, the leading telecommunications company, was accused of being complicit in releasing phone records and personal data to aid in abductions (Siele, 2025; Nzekwe, 2024; Kanali, 2024; Labuita, 2025). Protestors devised alternative means of communication, in addition to social media, by creating a radio channel on Zello (Kabweza, 2024; Ngigi, 2024; Omondi, 2024; Wangari, 2024).
3. The third incident is marked by reduced physical protests due to widespread fear and increased deaths and abductions. By this time, the *Maandamo* reverted

momentum online with the use of Gen AI to create cartoon silhouettes and political leaders' caricatures (Gathara & Wanjau, 2009; Msanii Kimani wa Wanjiru, 2023). For example, Gideon Kibet, alias Kibet Bull, a cartoonist, social media influencer, and bold critic of President Ruto, went missing after meeting on 24th December (Cartooning for Peace, 2025).

Our study reflects broader global trends in which authoritarian-leaning governments weaponize social media to silence critics while leveraging platforms' flawed content moderation policies to justify censorship. Preliminary findings indicate increased state surveillance to hijack peaceful protests, digital censorship, and inadequate content moderation, which resulted in deaths, disappearances, police brutality, and the silencing of online and offline dissent. The state tracked the digital footprints of protesters using their online activities, to intimidate, arrest, and abduct individuals, (Citizen TV Kenya, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024). Protestors and activists further erode democratic freedoms and contravene Articles 10 and 19(3) of Kenya's Constitution (Kisia, 2024; Nation Team, 2024; Shabibi et al., 2024).

Protestors and activists employed a range of innovative methods to evade state surveillance. For instance, they used Zello app for coordination and communication as it is more secure and decentralized in relation to other social media platforms. Protesters boycotted products and services from Safaricom in favor of other Internet Service Providers, resulting in recorded losses over the protest period. Protesters also leveraged platform functionalities of virality and scale through social media trends, challenges , cartoons, silhouettes, and memes to curtail individual profiling. Others infused local culture of vernacular language and songs metaphorical of political caricatures to navigate content flagging or deletion. Later on, there emerged AI generated cartoons and silhouettes resembling political figures that further supported identity anonymity. While the initial hashtags evolved over time to include other minor supporting ones, our thematic analysis reveals that they broadly included protest messaging and desire for an overhaul of the political ruling class. This also undermined infiltration of disinformation, and propaganda by state hired twitter goons. In addition, VPN networks were leveraged to obscure IP addresses, albeit eventually failing and several abductions reported.

Ordinary Kenyans have access and power to voice their grievances, making platforms strategic tools for online public spheres of discourse. Despite this, content moderation and platform governance maim freedom of speech when used as a means of dissent against political power, but overlook authoritarian governments' crackdown on the same. The platform's interest is digital capitalism, a hegemonic model for maximizing profits through the quest to extract and control immense amounts of data, which is the primary business model (Srnicek, 2017). This issue is exacerbated by platform algorithmic practices that prioritize trends and trending topics over content that fosters sustained social engagement (Gillespie, 2018; 2022; Poell, 2020). Yet, despite clear warning signs of loss of lives, platforms did not intervene to regulate state backed disinformation, and propaganda about the protests and protesters. X's business model as 'everything app' (Bradshaw, 2022), exponentially led to the rise of surveillance capitalism with the protests in Kenya, through becoming a dual tool for communication but at the same time

to push for social mistrust and fundamental damage of invasion of privacy. Given how government and political actors leveraged X to amplify counter-narratives and suppress dissenting voices, this study attempts to complicate content moderation policies in the context of political dissent. With these complexities in content moderation, we argue that both unchecked, and state-imposed moderation can amplify online and pffline societal risks, fuel hate, increase disorder, and escalate daily chaos, ultimately jeopardizing the effectiveness of online mobilization and protests, The findings highlight the deepening of digital colonialism and imperialism, the decline of freedom of expression online, and the urgent need for evolving, inclusive policies and governance frameworks to protect digital rights.

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SEGREGATING IN THE NAME OF CONVENIENCE: ALGORITHMIC REGIMES OF CASTE IN CONTEMPORARY URBAN INDIA

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Delhi is entering an era of 'making room for app-based services.' The Delhi Master Plan 2041 has initiated the reorientation of planning instruments like Development Control Norms (DCN) and building by-laws to aid the growth of on-demand platforms like Uber and its indie competitors Ola, Swiggy, and Urban Company. Against Delhi's history of racialized planning and development guided by purportedly neutral values like 'improvement' (Ranganathan, 2022; McFarlane, 2008; Kaviraj, 1997; Thatra, 2022), this paper explores algorithmic regimes of caste-based segregation enabled by digital technologies like platforms under the guise of promoting consumer convenience.

Much like race in the US, caste deeply penetrates India's social fabric and mediates access to epistemological, social, political, and economic power. As a system of *racialized* social difference, caste is centered around notions of purity-pollution and is maintained through endogamous social relations, ultimately codifying Indian society into a hierarchy of 'graded inequality' (Ambedkar, 1936). A central tenet of the caste-based social order is to preserve spatial and sensorial boundaries between 'the pure' and 'the polluted' (Appadurai, 1998), *"...[such that] spaces inhabited by subordinate castes should not only be set apart, but look, smell, and feel differently…"* (Lee, 2017, p. 470.) In urban India, on-demand platforms are unleashing service delivery models that preserve these socio-spatial segregations, reifying oppression and inequality.

In March 2024, Zomato, India's second-largest food delivery platform, rolled out a 'pure-veg mode' wherein vegetarian food would be separated, and handled exclusively by a 'pure-veg fleet.' Designed to 'serve customers better,' Zomato faced significant backlash over its casteist policy. This policy to preserve 'pure' vegetarian food during spillovers and "travelling scents" is symptomatic of broader sociocultural shifts and algorithmic techniques unleashed by gig platforms, in the name of convenience, to regulate the social performance of caste. Yet, limited research has examined how caste-based meanings and boundaries are negotiated in the network of humans and algorithms that constitute platforms, and the resultant implications for gig workers, city planners, and urban residents at large.

How are caste-based meanings around dirt, disgust, and intimacies negotiated and (re)mediated within the platform economy? How do platforms intervene in the spatial and sensorial registers of caste to produce convenience? I locate these questions against the background of growing partnerships between platforms and local/national governments, to mediate basic services for a vast urban population, thereby arbitrating everyday experiences of convenience, exclusion, and stratification (Surie, 2021; Singh and Park, 2022). As platform logics of algorithmic management, penetrative surveillance, and, entrepreneurship; and cityscapes inflected along caste, class, and gender, I explore how platforms become boundary-making devices that preserve the spatial and sensorial order of caste.

Within an uneven technopolitical landscape (Hecht, 2009) where digital technologies are strategically deployed to preserve structural power and hegemony, I situate platforms as *infrastructures of convenience*. Genealogically, convenience occupies similar registers of racialized colonial segregation that guided modern infrastructural values like 'improvement.' This promises a greater quality of urban life to racially privileged while mediating caste-based marginalization, social difference, and conditions of everyday life (Larkin, 2013; Anand et al., 2018). Platforms are far from simple technological entities guided solely by algorithms. In cities of the global south, land, labor, and capital relations are enmeshed within informal networks of production. In these contexts, platforms operate as complex assemblages where power is distributed (Komarraju et al., 2022; Richardson, 2020), and within which caste-coded practices are negotiated. These complexities, along with platform values like convenience, professionalism, and purported objectivity of algorithmic systems, not just veil but legitimize caste-based discrimination.

Based on ethnographic research with platform workers and consumers in Delhi, this paper sheds light on new kinds of spatial practices enabled by gig platforms that preserve caste-coded discrimination and segregation. To investigate these spatial practices across multiple scales of the home, neighborhood, and city, I unpack three popular platformized services on Urban Company and Swiggy – salon-at-home, contactless silent deliveries, and finally, 10-minute grocery deliveries. At each scale, I highlight specific configurations of human-algorithmic actors, processes, and meanings drawn into platform systems to reproduce caste-coded spaces. From rendering gig workers' bodies as sites where the affective orders of caste are algorithmically negotiated and disciplined, to controlling the flows of goods and people within and across neighborhoods to manufacture a sense of boundary, security, and convenience for elite consumers; platforms reinforce racialized geographies (Safransky, 2020) and racialized times (Jamal, 2008; Sharma, 2014) in numerous ways. At each scale, platforms also introduce unique forms of worker quantification and surveillance, revealing the unequal political economy that powers emergent modes of digital governance. Caste-based sensorial and spatial practices attain invisibility and legitimacy when algorithmically mediated and shrouded within logics of comfort, ease, and convenience for the consumer. Caste, in turn, functions as an invisible social infrastructure that legitimizes and propels platform-mediated service delivery.

By examining how spatial relations at multiple scales are fine-tuned by platforms to cater to elite desires of speed and convenience, I extend prior research on logistics, urban planning, and labor rights (Delfanti, 2021), by highlighting how 'convenience' becomes a rubric to veil racialized segregation and privilege under platform urbanism (Barns, 2020; Sadowski, 2020). In addition to revealing how racialized surveillance and digital technologies intersect in the global south, this paper extends prior scholarship on civic technologies of surveillance in Indian cities (Baviskar, 2003) and probes how platforms operate as devices of 'abjection' (Ghertner, 2015) that enable fortifications to keep away racialized others. And, finally, by revealing how platforms regulate racialization and biopower at the micro-scale of bodies, and how platform growth hinges on preserving embodied forms of racialized power and inequalities, this research feeds into informing anti-caste political practice in the future of work. Grounded in gig workers'

everyday lives and lived experiences of racialization, this paper disrupts the hegemony of the Western experience (Mufti, 2005) in understanding how racialization is mediated within algorithmic systems and contributes to transnational critical research on race, technology, and governance (Amrute, 2016; Lindtner, 2020; Irani 2019).

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