
Media Must Be the Key Against Biases and Stereotypes

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Since the onset of the “migrant crisis” in 2015, numerous European countries have grappled not only with the surge in migration but also with the challenge of fostering seamless integration within host communities. Part of this challenge stems from dealing with polarized host communities that either support or oppose migration. However, the more significant challenge lies within the “anxious middle”, a group with moderate concerns about the impact of migration on their society (Katwala and Somerville, 2016). Understanding the power of media narratives and their profound influence on public perceptions and attitudes toward migrants, refugees, and people on the move is crucial. Media narratives can either reinforce stereotypes and biases or contribute to a more compassionate and informed society, significantly affecting the lives of vulnerable populations and the communities they inhabit.

One of the prevailing media narratives centers on the perceived threat posed by migrants and refugees, whether economically in terms of job and welfare concerns or socially in terms of the introduction of new cultures. Moreover, these vulnerable communities are often unjustly framed as threats to national security, especially during events like elections in countries such as Turkey, Italy, Sweden, or the Brexit referendum. Such alarmist narratives portray migrants and refugees as potential terrorists or criminals, casting a shadow of stigma over entire communities. These narratives frequently overlook the fact that the majority of migrants and refugees are seeking safety and better opportunities, and they often make positive contributions to the societies they join, revitalizing cities and towns (American Immigration Council, 2023). Consequently, it is imperative to critically analyse and challenge these narratives as they can fuel xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments (Coleman, 2007).

It is undeniable that media narratives intersect with the political discourse on migration. Politicians and policymakers frequently employ sensationalized or divisive rhetoric that both influences and is influenced by media coverage, creating a detrimental cycle. Research has shown that political discourse can shape media narratives and vice versa, resulting in a cycle of mutual influence (Boswell, 2009).

To counteract this, both media outlets and consumers must critically evaluate political messaging and its impact on the framing of migration issues.

The present special issue number 53 of *Tripodos*, seeks to dissect the media narratives surrounding migrants, refugees, and people on the move in Europe. Through the articles featured herein, we aim to explore various aspects of this broad topic, including specific country examples which will contribute to better understanding on the role of media in both constructing and de-constructing narratives on migration.

In the paper titled “Media framing of the refugee crisis at the periphery of Europe”, by Milojevic and Milic, the examination delves into how media portrays and frames migrations and refugees beyond the EU member states, with a focus on the media framing of the refugee crisis in Serbia between 2015 and 2016. The authors identify three frames, viewing the refugee crisis as a problem for the political system, society, or refugees. Their analysis reveals that framing differs across destination countries, with varying emphases on social problems and political issues.

Aspriadis’ paper, “Refugee representations by the Greek Public Administration: A critical review of the Greek institutional discourse”, scrutinizes the political narratives used in strategic communication between Greek authorities and the public administration during the refugee flows of 2015-2018. This article investigates the formation of images related to refugees and the role of political rhetoric in strategic and non-strategic image formation, shedding light on the less-explored aspect of media representation within public administration institutions.

In the paper titled “From belief to hate: An analysis of the beliefs that support hate speech towards migrants and refugees spread on Twitter from the theory of reasoned action”, by González-Baquero *et al.*, the authors explore the underlying beliefs fuelling racist and xenophobic attitudes. They also examine the perceived pressure that drives the spread of hate speech, with a specific focus on the Spanish case study. The authors highlight the pivotal role of direct interactions with migrants and refugees in the publication or suppression of racist and xenophobic messages. Furthermore, they note how perceived social pressure significantly influences the prevalence of racist and xenophobic hate speech, unveiling power dynamics and influences within migration narratives.

An additional compelling case study, “The representation of immigration in the Spanish press from a gender perspective (2008-2019)”, authored by Romero *et al.*, investigates gender intersections within immigration portrayal in the press. Given recent gender-related issues in Spain and Spanish media concerning immigration, this study offers intriguing insights. The authors reveal that while immigrant women are underrepresented in migration narratives, their portrayal is often linked to more social and integrative perspectives.

Martinez de Bartolome and Martin’s chapter, “Analysis of media discourse and social audiences on refugees in the conflict in Ukraine”, analyses the discourse of the Spanish press’s social audience concerning refugees. In doing so, they identify various frames through which refugees are depicted, with negative frames serving as indicators of rejection and animosity.

Mangone's paper, "Italian migration policies and Newspaper Communication: A case study", explores the cultural changes resulting from the interplay between communication and migration in Italy, specifically focusing on media language and the ideas surrounding migrations from an Italian perspective. The author highlights how media language has evolved and impacted the representation of migrations and related issues of general interest.

The paper "Openness as a new communication strategy for political parties", by Diez-Garrido, compares Spanish and Portuguese political parties' websites to better understand transparency and communication. The authors stress the need for a paradigm shift in political party communication with the electorate.

While there is a pressing need to understand the content and type of messaging that secures public support, appeals to empathy have proven effective, as have stories of success (Katwala *et al.*, 2017). Some media outlets indeed provide alternative narratives that humanize migrants and refugees by sharing their personal stories and experiences. These narratives focus on the resilience, courage, and contributions of individuals and families who have fled conflict or hardship. By providing a platform for the voices of migrants and refugees, these humanizing stories can foster empathy and understanding among the public, dispelling stereotypes (Hamlin, 2021). Such narratives play a crucial role in counterbalancing negative stereotypes and emphasizing the shared humanity between people on the move and the communities they encounter. It is important to note, however, that changing the narrative does not solely entail myth-busting, and moral messaging appears ineffective in addressing genuine concerns (Katwala *et al.*, 2017).

Numerous academic studies have shown that increased contact with migrants weakens anti-immigration sentiments in the public. In other words, concerns about diversity and the integration of migrants are more pronounced among individuals who have little personal contact with refugees and migrants. To change public opinion effectively, it is crucial to engage with people's genuine real-world concerns and create space for open discussions of solutions that acknowledge these difficulties (Dempster and Hargrave, 2017). Useful approaches involve programs that facilitate genuine connections between communities, building trust and shared goals (Moretti and Bozon, 2017). People need to engage with one another, fostering contact between the host community and migrants/refugees in collaborative activities with common aims (British Red Cross, 2019).

This compilation of articles aims to shed light on the intricate global realities societies face today through the lens of media narratives on refugees. In conclusion, media narratives surrounding migrants, refugees, and people on the move are multifaceted and exert significant influence in shaping public perceptions. It is imperative to remain mindful of potential biases and stereotypes present in media.

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