



Routes to Inclusion? Migration and the New and Old Media

EMMA HILL AND NASAR MEER

SUMMARY

Discourses about migration are used to talk about the state's relationship both with those both outside and inside its borders. In the UK, the topic of migration has been used by politicians, public figures and commentators alike to discuss broad-ranging ideas about the nation, the Other, race, citizenship, class-dynamics and the border. As Crawley et al. note,¹ in recent years, news-media coverage of migration has become increasingly negative, whilst a recent report by the United Nations University noted the prevalence across Europe of xenophobic news coverage related to migration.²

In recent years, discussions in the news-media about migration has not only reflected public opinion but shaped it. There is a growing consensus that this has a similar impact on policy-making. The way in which the news-media frames its coverage about migration therefore has consequences not only for how migration – and migrants – are seen by society, but also for the way in which society and government responds to the idea of migration.

- The **first part** of this paper discusses (a) what 'xenophobic' media coverage of migration means (b) the impact of discriminatory coverage and the under-inclusion of migrant voices and (c) the relationship between media framings of migration and policy-making.

If these relationships were not already sufficiently complex, contemporary developments in media, technology and information dissemination present additional challenges to (a) representations of migration in the media (b) migrants' narrative access to media coverage and (c) policy-shaping and making.

- The **second part** of this paper therefore considers how new media presents challenges and opportunities for migrants, media institutions and policy-makers.

The United Nations University report on media and migration suggests that improved media coverage of migration by new and old media alike has the potential to improve both public opinion and better inform policy-making.

- In the **final part** of the paper, we respond by highlighting the subsequent importance for both news-media coverage and policy-making of (1) improved narrative access in the media for migrants (2) improved representational practices by the news media (both old and new) and (3) consideration of the ethics of access and representation in the rapidly changing new-media context.

1. Crawley et al. 2016
2. Desmares, 2017

NEW NEWS/OLD NEWS

The role of the news-media in the inclusion/exclusion of migrants extends across different aspects of public life. Since the 1960s, social scientists have argued that the news-media – and here specifically, the print media – plays an ‘agenda setting’ role in the issues of the day,¹ so that by framing items in a particular way, giving prominence to such items in their publications, and reporting on the items with frequency, particular topics gain momentum and attention.² These arguments are paralleled by more recent research in a migration context, which has suggested that news-media coverage of migration has the capacity to shape public attitudes towards the topic.³ Similarly, whilst one of the roles of the news-media is to report developments in public policy, research has also shown that it plays a part in making and shaping policy.⁴

Negative coverage of migration by the mainstream news-media is by no means a recent phenomenon.⁵ Since the 2015 Mediterranean crisis, negative coverage of migration has increased in both frequency and prominence in news-media outlets across Europe.⁶ In the UK, the topic of migration has been used by the news-media to discuss broad-ranging ideas about the nation, the Other, citizenship and the border,⁷ through a proportionately negative framework.⁸ Anti-migrant news-media coverage might be said to be xenophobic because it (1) frames the migrant as a foreigner and (2) attaches a climate of fear to this term. However, without being grounded in a consideration of the categories used to define ‘the foreigner’ – including race, nation, religion and gender – or the processes through which fear of ‘the foreigner’ is instilled – racism, Islamophobia, facism, patriarchy – commentary about ‘xenophobic’ media coverage of migration is in danger of sounding somewhat hollow. If we are considering the extent to which the news-media plays a role in (re)producing xenophobic narratives about migrants, we must also consider the terms through which it defines ‘foreign-ness’ and how this connects to racialised, religious, national and gendered norms both within media discourse and in broader public contexts. How is ‘foreign-ness’ related to the border? And what norms define the border?¹⁰ With this in mind, this paper turns more specifically to the matter at hand.

The under-inclusion and discriminatory coverage of migrants in the news-media have clear implications both for social justice and equality, and for policy-making:

- Discriminatory coverage has real-life, everyday impact (racism, discrimination, exclusion).¹¹
- Under-inclusion in the news-media means under-representation in public life, in the process of policy making and in policy provision.

These impacts are significant and require urgent attention. However, whilst there is a clear relationship between negative coverage of migration and the inclusion of migrants in everyday and public life, the precise role of the news-media in this relationship is less clear.

1. McCombs, 2014; Metzger, 2009;

2 Kosh, 2015

3. Russell et al., 2016

4. Desmares, 2017; Crawley et al. 2016; Allen, 2016; Gibson, 2007; Pirouet, 2010

5. Allen, 2016

6. Gibson, 2007

7. Allen, 2016; Crawley et al., 2016

8. Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000

9. Solomos, 2003, Virdee, 2014

10. Solomos, 2003, Virdee, 2014

11. van Dijk, 2015

In this paper we therefore ask (and attempt to answer):

- To what extent are the failings above the failings of the news-media as an institution? Or to what extent are they the failings of a particular type of (news) media?
- To what extent can new media address these issues to increase the inclusion of migrant voices in the news-media?
- To what extent might new media be able to change the dominant narratives about migration?

Textbox 1. News-media and policy making

The news-media can be understood in terms of having both a direct and indirect role in policy-making. Its influence covers: a) shaping opinions of the general public through framing, prominence and selectivity of coverage to support or challenge particular policy initiatives ('agenda-setting') b) creating a particular atmosphere – priming the public conversation – in anticipation of particular policy agendas ('agenda-building') and establishing 'issue salience' c) highlighting areas to which policy must respond d) challenging new or existing policy

The news-media's agenda and the processes of policy making are closely related.¹ This does not exist in a linear relationship but in feedback cycles (i.e. media agenda is informed by policy priorities, and policy priorities inform a news media agenda). Russell et al. suggest that there are 'policy windows' in this process.

Based on research on immigration policy and the US news media, Akdenizli et al. suggest that the particular politics of a news-media outlet has little impact on policy outcome: rather the exposure, longevity and prominence of coverage has more leverage over policy-makers' actions.²

1. Russell et al., 2016 ; 2 Akdenizli et al., 2009

THE TRADITIONAL (PRINT) MEDIA AND THE INCLUSION OF MIGRANT VOICES

In broad terms, the representation of migrants and migration in the news-media may be affected by issues such as: gatekeeping, institutional politics and accessibility.¹² Whilst these issues may extend across all news-media types, it is also worth considering the extent to which the medium of the coverage has an influence on access and representation. For instance, issues specific to the traditional, print media include:

- The type of coverage run by a news outlet on matters relating to migration is closely related to its status as a news organisation. Though news coverage purports to report
- Information, it nevertheless retains the influence of the institution in which it is produced. For instance, in a story, framing, language, representational tropes are drafted according to a publication's style and content guidelines, informed by the media organisation's norms and values.
- Meanwhile, the framing and narrativisation of a story are developed in the context of 'what sells?',¹³ and of financial and political sponsorship, which frequently results in sensationalized or overtly politicized coverage.¹⁴ In both these instances, decisions about who is included in coverage and how they are included is embedded in institutional culture.
- Traditional media is often found to reproduce negative narratives and stereotypes about migrants¹⁵ – an issue often compounded by a lack of accessibility of news-media organisations to minority groups or provision of platforms to address misrepresentations.¹⁶ In a study of British media representations of migrants, Crawley et al. found that only 15% of articles contained a migrant voice or perspective.¹⁷
- Misrepresentation and under-representation of minority groups in news-media coverage is paralleled by the under-representation of people from minority groups in news-media organisations,¹⁸ resulting in monolithic and monocultural representations and perspectives.

There are other factors that contribute to these issues, but we might suggest that both the institution and the medium of the traditional media can be seen to create barriers to the inclusion of migrants and migrant voices in news coverage. Here the three main issues might be summarized in terms of: **representation, participation and accessibility**. To what extent does new media offer solutions to these issues? To what extent can it challenge or avoid these issues of access, representation and participation?

12. Desmares, 2017

13. Desmares, 2017, p. 7

14. Crawley et al., 2016

15. Van Dijk, 2000, Hall, 1997, Desmares, 2017

16. Crawley et al., 2016, Allen, 2016

17. Crawley et al., 2016

18. Cottle, 2000

NEW MEDIA: A CONTRAST?

New media (including social media such as Twitter or Facebook, and content-building platforms such as YouTube or blog sites) can also now be considered in terms of news-media. With an emphasis that has shifted from asking users, 'what are you thinking?' to asking, 'what's happening?'¹⁹ it has increasingly become a space for news-generation, citizen journalism and interactivity.²⁰

Textbox 2. Changing news media/ changing policy?

There is some evidence to suggest that changing prevalences in traditional news media coverage have impacted the way policy is made.

In a US context, Akdenizli et al. suggest that the increasing popularity of cable television and new media in the US has significantly altered the way in which immigration policy has developed: 'over the course of this quarter-century, then, the scale of the policy challenge has grown exponentially, and the scale of actual policymaking has diminished'.¹

Crawley et al. suggest that since 2015, news-media focus has been on the personality rather than the policies of politicians.² As a result, they also find less of a focus in news-media coverage on immigration policy, and more on the opinions of individual figures. To what extent has this impact subsequent policy on immigration?

It could be suggested that subsequent policy-making on immigration in the UK has become increasingly orientated towards popular opinion. If new media users tend to opt for 'soft news' rather than 'hard news' (see below), is there potential for the new media to enhance this 'personality not policy' focus? Arguably, these trends are already observable in both the Vote Leave Brexit campaign and the 2016 Trump Presidential campaign.

Vliengenthart and Walgrave find that Members of Parliaments for four European states consider the media to be the most important agenda-setter of a policy cycle.³ Sparrow suggests thinking of the media in terms of a 'public diplomat'.⁴ How does the increasing prevalence of new media affect this role?

1 Akdenizli et al., 2009, p. 6 ; 2 Crawley et al., 2016, p. 20 ; 3 Vliengenthart and Walgrave, 2008 ; 4 Sparrow, 2006

19. Braun and Gillespie, 2011

20. Metzger, 2009

21. Metzger, 2009

The immediate benefits of new media for the issues raised above – representation, participation and accessibility – are perhaps readily apparent. Without established institutional infrastructure, easily-accessed platforms and offering a flexibility of media through which one might tell a story, new media appears to address many of the shortcomings of traditional media. However, it is not without restrictions or shortcomings. These include:

- Issues of expression and representation (content remains regulated, subject to user-agreements)
- Issues of structural inclusion/exclusion (including issues of self-selection, online ‘bubbles’ and trendmakers ²¹ and language)
- Issues of accessibility (internet access, local or national restrictions)
- the increasing prominence of abusive communication and hate speech, and scope of moderation
- Issues of ownership, data-usage and privacy

These issues are all ones that are likely to impact on the extent to which migrant voices are included in new media representations of migration – and are all areas that are currently notably under-researched or addressed in policy.

The area of most potential for the relationship between new media and migration might perhaps instead be found in how migrant groups themselves have so far made use of new media resources. New media has been mobilized by migrant groups and people of migrant backgrounds to maintain transnational networks.²² The interactivity, real-time connectivity and accessibility of new media has also been used by migrants to aid their mobility²³ and increase their public visibility.²⁴ It is in this context that the potential of new media for improving the inclusion of migrants in news-media coverage might be found.

22. Dekker and Engbersen, 2014

23. Alencar, 2017

24. Crawley et al., 2016

Though in these examples the circumstances in which new media was mobilized is quite broad, it notably was used because it was accessible and enabled self-directed expression and activity. This is an asset of power and potential.

In terms of new media, this raises some further questions:

1) If new media allows migrants to tell their own stories, to what extent can this be supported and developed?

- To what extent does social media support the development of its users? E.g. the 'Twitter for Good' initiative appears to support development work in local communities.²⁵ Would storytelling or journalism initiatives also have a place here?
- How might policy makers incentivize this development? If the new media was to be developed as an alternative/additional news source that promoted migrant stories, what impact might it have? How might new media begin to have a role in agenda-setting? There is some work that has already started to consider this: it suggests that the data generated by new media usage has potential to become a significant²⁶ driver in the way that government/policy makers collect and analyse public opinion. Of course, treating social media in terms of its data potential is hardly conducive to enhancing individual voices and narratives; however, the same report also suggests that government and NGOs explore and develop mechanisms through which 'enhanced granular insights' might be captured and analysed for policy-making purposes.²⁷ However, in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, there is a renewed need to consider issues of data ownership and privacy, especially if it is being used in a policy-making context.

2) How might the elements of new media that enable migrants to tell their own stories be incorporated in traditional media practices? Are there lessons for the traditional media to learn here? Or vice versa? Examples that have privileged migrant-led work include:

- 'A Syrian Refugee Shared His Struggle To Reach Europe In Real-Time On WhatsApp'²⁸ (a BuzzFeed article led by live-messaging reporting)
- 'Exodus: Our Journey to Europe' (a documentary series made up of footage filmed by people leaving Syria)²⁹
- Migrant Voice (a UK publication run by people of migrant backgrounds and giving prominence to migration in the news)³⁰

3) What are the ethical implications of facilitating self-reported news stories? For users? And for platforms? How might ethical guidance be developed to improve user experiences and the quality of coverage?

25. https://about.twitter.com/en_us/values/twitter-for-good.html.

26. Leavey, 2013

27. Ibid

28. Warren, 2015

29. BBC, 2015

30. Migrant Voice, 2017

CONCLUDING REMARKS

To better include migrants in news-media coverage, the United Nations University makes proposals to a) diversify voices in the news media,³¹ b) enhance the protection of vulnerable migrants who are also sources and ³² c) keep exploring stories relating to migrants' experiences.³³

We would suggest that these proposals would be well addressed if committed not only to supporting 'diverse voices' in the news-media, but rather to actively support initiatives that enabled migrants to tell their own stories. This would begin to address the current gaps in (1) representation (2) access and (3) ethics that are entrenched in current news media practices related to migration coverage.

Though new media offers some scope where traditional media has fallen short, it is by no means a cure-all and raises its own set of practical and ethical issues. However, if policy-making shares an increasingly close relationship to how migration is framed in the news-media, representationally-fair, accessible and ethical coverage of migration is urgently required. In a context in which policy initiatives appear to be increasingly influenced by trends enabled by new media – such as personality and populism – particular consideration be given to the pitfalls and potentials of a new media age.

31. Desmares, 2017; Recommendation 9, p.17

32. Desmares, 2017; Recommendation 10

33. Desmares, 2017; Recommendation 12

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