



Migrants and Refugees: Analyzing Fake News, Myths and Facts in Online Media

Svetla Aleksandrova

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Svetla Aleksandrova

^a *Bulgaria, Sofia*

ABSTRACT:

The last decade has been marked by several waves of migration related to the military conflicts and wars. The consequences caused by these waves often were named as “crisis”.

The aim of the paper is to find the successful measures against the spread of fake news and offensive media coverage by studying the experience of European countries. The comparative analysis of Eurostat data on migration flows and Eurobarometer public opinion surveys will be applied as an indicator for successful social campaigns. The successful cases is further analysed in order to find common policies and measures that provides resilience to fake news and disinformation about migrants and refugees.

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✉ Corresponding Author: Tel.: + Fax: + ; E-mail:

Introduction

The complexity of issues related to migration involves social and economic factors and political environment of each country – source or destination of migrants and refugees. The plethora of issues is even more complicated in media coverage of these crises, adding the local language, inherited fears, myths and deliberately offensive and fake news. The migrant and refugees' crises were worsening by the influence of wide-spreading online media and social networks.

The analysis starts from the consideration of chronology of the refugee crisis in Europe. The study looks back at the key developments of the last three years. At the centre of the study is the influence of fake news in covering significant events, such as the "migrant crisis". Fake news aims to influence public opinion by greatly exaggerating or downplaying events.

There is a lot of literature on how the media covers crises and events and their impact on public opinion. The purpose of these studies is to trace how the different countries affected by the migration crisis view migration. Countries that are directly affected by migration present the process as a burden on the country's social policy and create an extremely negative opinion of migrants among the population. Countries that are indirectly involved in migration are oriented towards integration and society's perceptions are better.

Methods

The study uses methods that do not aim to achieve accurate statistical results, but the study of relationships and dependencies. The study focuses on the search for a relationship - the number of migrants (absolute value and relative to the population -

relative value), and then examines the perception of migrants in the countries. The basic idea is that those with better treatment have active measures to combat bad treatment, myths and fake news, and on the basis of this comparison a brief overview of their policies is made. As there are no sources to report a number of fake news, but there are general surveys on attitudes, public opinion and media representation, this approach has been chosen.

Main events in crises chronology.

Migration starts in the 2015 when, thousands of people escape war in Syria. Most of them, try to reach Western Europe via the Balkan route. Some of countries starts implying measures to stop the migrant wave. In July, Hungary erected a razorwire fence along the country's border with Serbia in order to decrease migrant arrivals. In August 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel announces a policy of open borders for refugees entering Europe. This event and the photo of a drowned Syrian boy washed on a beach in Turkey mark the beginning of Europe's social responsibility towards refugees and migrants.¹

In 2016, several European countries set up border control, and ceased passport -free travel.

In March 2016, the Balkan route through Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary was officially closed. Thousands of migrants remained trapped in Greece. Also in March, the EU-Turkey deal was signed: The EU agrees to safely resettle one Syrian refugee from Turkey for each irregular migrant returned to Turkey from Greece. In the autumn in 2016, around 5000 migrants died in their attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

In 2017, the countries pursued a policy of returning refugees to Syria. In November 2017, CNN footage showed that migrants were being sold at slave auctions in Libya, sparking outrage in Europe and Africa.

In the 2018, the migrant routes shift: The Western Mediterranean Route is seeing a threefold increase in arrivals. Thousands of migrants remain stranded in overcrowded camps on Greek islands.

¹ "A Chronology of the Refugee Crisis in Europe," www.infomigrant.net, *Understanding Europe* (blog), June 20, 2018.

The European social policy approves to reintroduce family reunifications for refugees with subsidiary protection. The European Social Policy Network (ESPN)² provides high quality and timely independent information, advice, analysis and expertise on social policy issues in the EU, in neighbouring countries and in third countries. It was established in 2014. According to Eurostat 5 000 000 migrants³ come from different countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Iraq and Guinea and they apply for asylum in the EU. These migrants are considered refugees.

In 2019-2020, in Greece refugee camps there are much more migrants, which is the reason for mass protests of the local population and civil disobedience.⁴

Migrants and the media. How the population of different countries perceives migration

The media can influence society's perception about various issues. When the media shows something as bad, it becomes bad and people recognize it on its dark side. Fake news contributes greatly to this. What is happening to the online public sphere is complex. First of all, disinformation and fake news are widespread, and those seeking to manipulate the online public sphere can capitalise on declining levels of trust in institutions and experts. There are different motivations for the types of propaganda and 'fake news' we are seeing.⁵

When it comes to reporting on polarising and contentious issues such as migration, what happens behind the scenes in media organisations can affect not only how we think about the issue, but even policy itself.

Team of researchers from the University of Oxford's Centre on Migration,

² *European Social Policy Network (ESPN)*, n.d.

³ "Eurostat International Migration Statistics: Immigration," <https://ec.europa.eu/>, September 10, 2019.

⁴ "Greeks Clash Again with Riot Police over New Migrant Camps," www.theguardian.com, *The Guardian* (blog), February 26, 2020.

⁵ Susan Morgan, "Fake News, Disinformation, Manipulation and Online Tactics to Undermine Democracy," May 8, 2018.

Policy and Society (COMPAS), the Budapest Business School and the European Journalism Centre based at Maastricht in the Netherlands, has been working to turn the camera around on news production in Europe. The objective is to understand why different themes and narratives about migration have taken hold in different countries – and what factors contributed to the people creating these stories operating so differently.

We look at data on the number of migrants in specific countries selected for the study of ... (COMPAS?) shown on Figure 1.

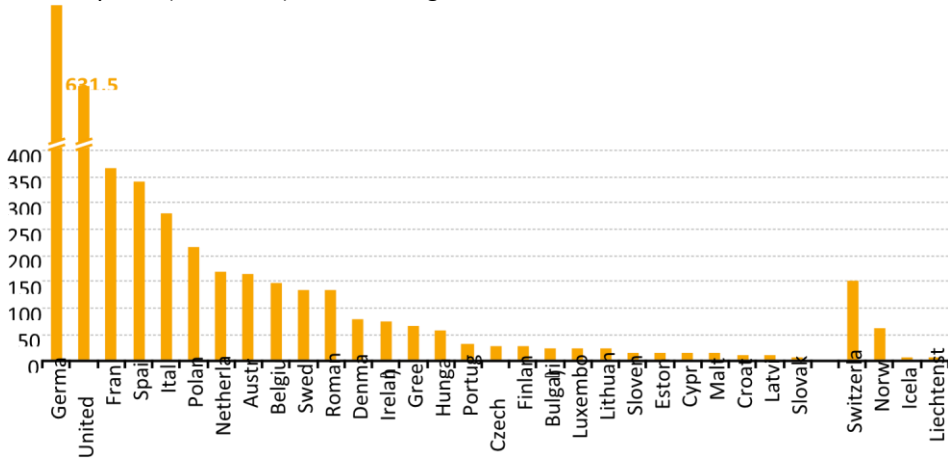


Figure 1 Immigration in EU countries

Table 1 Migration and how countries perceive migration

Country	Migrants of thousand	Public opinion decreasing immigration levels
Germany	1 543.8 thousand	56%
United Kingdom	631.5 thousand	69%
France	347.2 thousand	44%

Spain	343.9 thousand	56%	
Poland	258.8 thousand	40%	

From the data in the Table 1, it can be concluded that the relationship between the number of migrants and public opinion about migration is not proportional. In countries with fewer migrants, there is a stronger negative opinion.⁶ It is more important to emphasize the influence of the media and fake news on achieving these results.

The influence of “Fake News”

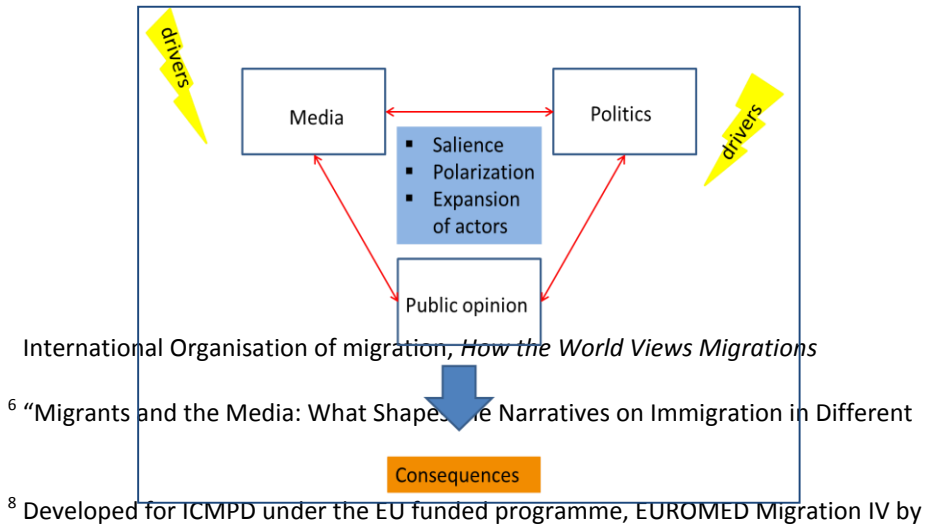
All events in the world are covered by the media. In the process of spreading the news, the danger of fake news appears. Fake news aims to influence public opinion by greatly exaggerating or downplaying events.⁶

Numerous studies have shown that, in general, the framing of the media affects public attitudes to immigration. In particular, there is evidence that negative stories provoke a perception of a threat to one’s group. This effect is stronger in regions with smaller existing immigrant populations. Further, stories emphasising humanitarian plight lead to increased support for provision of services to immigrants, and perhaps more permissive policies. Images of immigrants engaging in common human activities increase positivity to migrant groups⁸.

Figure . 1: Research concept for the investigation of politic

⁶ “5 Fake News about Migration,” <https://www.tdh.ch/>, August 7, 2019.

the Observatory of Public, and Attitudes to Migration - Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute, Florence, “Public Attitudes on Migration: Rethinking How People Perceive Migration.,” <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/opam/about/> <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu>, n.d.



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(Switzerland, n.d.).

Countries," theconversation.com, April 26, 2019.

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False news about migration builds the false image of the migrant, which is perceived by society. News such as "All migrants want to come to Europe" or "They don't need help, they have a smartphone" create the idea of threatening the local population. All this creates a precondition for civil resentment of the local population and the lack

of perception of integration. Fake news also has an impact on the effective implementation of social and integration policies.

The analysis and counter measures are not always obvious and easy-to-implement. The answer of the international organisations to this issue was directed to campaigns against disinformation and provisions of so-called fact-checking media. The European Commission started several research projects (within the Horizon 2020) with topics related to different aspects of the phenomena. The International Organization for Migration's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC) was set up to respond to calls for better international migration data and analysis.

The aim of this study is to find the successful measures to stop spreading fake news and offensive media coverage by studying the experience of European countries.

Conclusions

In conclusion from the study, it can be concluded that fake news has a direct bearing on public attitudes towards migration.

⁹ Birgit Glorius, "Public Opinion on Immigration and Refugees and Patterns of Politicisation" (CEASEVAL RESEARCH ON THE COMMON EUROPEAN ASYLUM SYSTEM, August 2018).

Despite the fact that Germany ranks first in the number of migrants, it is doing better than other countries and is achieving good public opinion on migration. This is achieved through in-depth actions, control over fake news and discussion of a law against fake news. The monitoring and elimination of false news is also embedded in future policies for the reliability of information in other European countries as well.

About the Author(s)

Svetla Alexandrova a PhD student at the University of National and World Economy, at the Department of National and Regional Security. She holds Master's degree in "Economics of Defence and Security". The topic of the dissertation is "Management of migration processes"

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