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Immigration in the media sphere: key political actors' strategies

Abstract

This article explores the ideological positions and communications strategies adopted by different actors who are relevant in the news coverage of immigration and immigrants. A methodological model was designed that considers the mass media as creators of discourses, and the public authorities and social organisations as promoters of policies and sources of information that can influence the media sphere. Similarly, this analytical model makes it possible to examine the interrelations that take place amongst the selected actors during the process of news production, as well as in possible spaces for dialogue and the management of joint policies. The Basque Autonomous Region was chosen as the area for the case study, with a sample that is funnel-shaped, making it possible to start out from the local level (small organisations, local journalism, major town councils) and then to obtain a broader vision of this context (immigrants' platforms, policies managed by the Basque Government, mass media). Amongst the main conclusions, we underscore the fact that the actors interviewed agree on their diagnosis of the quality of the treatment of immigration and immigrants in the news, the difficulty of seeing migration as a phenomenon with a broad scope, the controversial role played by the media, as well as actors' lack of systematic communications strategies that might influence the media sphere.

Keywords

Journalism, political communication, programme content, sociology of communication, communication strategies, information sources, immigration, racism.

1. Introduction and state of the matter

Recently, different researchers have indicated the need to attend to the process of news creation in the study of the news coverage of immigration (Erik & de Graauw, 2015; González-Cortés, Sierra-Caballero & Benítez-Eyzaguirre, 2014), since many biases detected in the news are related to production criteria. This paper supports this idea and makes use of the research trend of Newsmaking, which studies the relationship between negativity and news value, routines and the construction of newsworthy events (Gemi, Ulasiuk & Triandafyllidou,

2013; Preston, 2008). Ever since those pioneers who first looked at the sociology of communication revealed the idea that news is an artefact constructed by people who work in a bureaucratized environment (Fishman, 1980; Tuchman, 1978), many authors have studied working routines in the media. However, this perspective has rarely been taken in the study of the news coverage of immigration and immigrants.

In fact, since the 1980s, there have been two major research trends. Firstly, qualitative studies have been carried out based on the technique of critical discourse analysis, or CDA (Bañón, 2002; Fajardo & Soriano, 2016; Van Dijk, 2016). These analyses have focussed on establishing the ways in which social domination based, in this case, on supremacy according to ethnicity, skin colour or place of origin, are reproduced. The scholar Teun A. van Dijk was a pioneer in this regard and has spent fifty years applying critical discourse analysis in order to detect racist discourses. In his studies, he repeatedly points out that one of the main characteristics of these discourses is that they offer a negative image of “them” often combined with a positive representation of “us”. Furthermore, he argues that migrants, ethnic minorities and people from the global South are associated in the media with deviant behaviour, crime and socioeconomic and cultural threats. In the same way, many studies indicate these same patterns, which are repeated in the media, with some particularities according to the samples. In Spain, the latest research shows that the media link immigrants with an unfavourable lexicon of meanings (Alcaraz-Mármol & Soto, 2016), sometimes belonging to the military semantic field, contributing to the creation of prejudices that associate immigration with the idea of invasion and conquest (Chakour, Toumader & Portillo Fernández, 2018).

Besides this, news frame theory, understood as an extension of agenda-setting theory, has permitted reflection on which matters are covered by the media and what is thought about them (McCombs, López & Llamas, 2000). There are numerous contributions (Allen & Scott, 2013; Bauder, 2008; Berry, García-Blanco & Moore, 2016; Bruno, 2016; Fernández & Corral, 2016; Fernández-Fernández, 2013; Thorbjørnsrud, 2015; Muñiz Muriel et al., 2009; Sciortino & Colombo, 2004; Van Dijk, 2016; Checa & Garrido, 2011). Although the viewpoints and conclusions of the studies carried out so far have varied among countries, depending on the migratory experience and the legislative and self-regulatory conditions of the media, a review of the literature indicates the predominance of journalistic coverage focussing on matters and frames that link negative values with immigrants (Gemi, Ulasjuk, & Triandafyllidou, 2013) and a tendency to build narratives that relate immigrants on the one hand to crime or terrorism (Armentia Vizuete et al., 2015; Fuentes Osorio, 2005; Wagman, 2002) and, on the other hand, with a threat to the economy (Caviedes, 2015). In general, after examining the literature it is possible to see a securitization of the debate which, in the words of Bauman, “causes the adiaphorization of the matter of migrants, which means that both they and what is done to them are detached from all moral evaluation” (2016).

For this reason, media discourses cannot dissociate themselves from the development of immigration legislation, which has such a great influence on the terminology used and viewpoints adopted by journalists (Prieto Andrés, 2017). From the field of law, critical analyses indicate the structuring of migrations in accordance with the criteria of legal production characteristic of neoliberal globalization. On the one hand, some authors question European Union and local regulatory bodies (in Spain, Organic Law 4/2000) and their failure to take human rights into account (Hernández, 2016), by linking these to the legal situation of the migrant. On the other hand, the regulatory standards of supranational institutions such as the IOM, the WTO and the European Union itself “are regulating migratory flows attending to the needs of global markets” (Barbero González, 2011).

In the study presented, we open up the usual newsmaking focus and consider, from a constructivist perspective, that the news is not only created by journalists, but also by other actors who intercede either as information sources or are influencing through other media.

2. Material and methods

Our own methodological framework has been created based on the triangulation of methods:

In the first place, a compilation of news has been carried out in order to detect outstanding news items. News that appeared in the Basque press (including upcoming events and different news genres) during the 2011-2014 period, based on the requirement that they feature: 1) migrants as protagonists; 2) the subject of immigration; 3) social diversity as the main focus of interest; 4) the inclusion of nationality in the text. The goal has been to identify recurring themes as well as to detect whether there is a link between immigration and crime. Furthermore, research has been done on manuals of good practice relating to the news coverage of immigration and immigrants.

Secondly, a funnel-shaped structure has been used (from the local to the Basque Government levels) for the sample, in such a way that the outstanding actors in the immigration sphere, from bottom to top, are included. In the case of associations, the following have been selected: 1) Platforms that include a broad range of organizations in the most populous municipalities; 2) Organizations with impact in the public sphere, attending to their size and to what extent they have their own infrastructure; 3) Presence on the Internet; 4) Associations made up of women migrants were included and, 5) Those associations which include the matter of asylum and refuge were included. So, interviews were carried out with: Plataforma de Inmigrantes de Getxo, Harresiak Apurtuz, Afric Forum, Camino al Barrio, Sos Racismo, Cear Euskadi and Centro Ellacuría. In the case of the media, the following criteria were used for the selection of the sample: 1) Hegemonic position in the audience market; 2) Variety on the ideological spectrum; 3) Representative ownership; 4) Territorial impact according to the percentage of audience of migrant population of foreign origin; 5) Inclusion of public ownership. The media selected were: *El Correo*, *Deia*, *Gara*, EITB and Radio Bilbao (Cadena Ser). With regard to public authorities, the choice was based on: 1) Geographical radius of action and 2) Relevance for the study. The sample included the councils of Bilbao, Getxo and Barakaldo, the Dirección de Inmigración y Gestión de la Diversidad del Departamento de Empleo y Asuntos Sociales del Gobierno Vasco (the Basque Government's Employment and Social Affairs Department's Diversity Management and Immigration Directorate) and Ararteko (Basque ombudsman). Thirdly, an analytical structure was created that is valid for all actors, with their corresponding categories. Our goal has been to study narratives and the communications strategies employed. The main innovative characteristic of the methodology is that it makes it possible to study the interrelationships of the actors selected: 1) As sources of information in the case of the public authorities and the different associations. 2) As informers in search of sources, in the case of journalists. Furthermore, an assessment is carried out of possible joint work, for example, between authorities and civil society, in order to influence the media agenda on immigration, and possible scenarios of confrontation, for example, detecting whether the media have received complaints about their coverage of some specific matter.

Table 1. General overview of the sample chosen for the fieldwork.

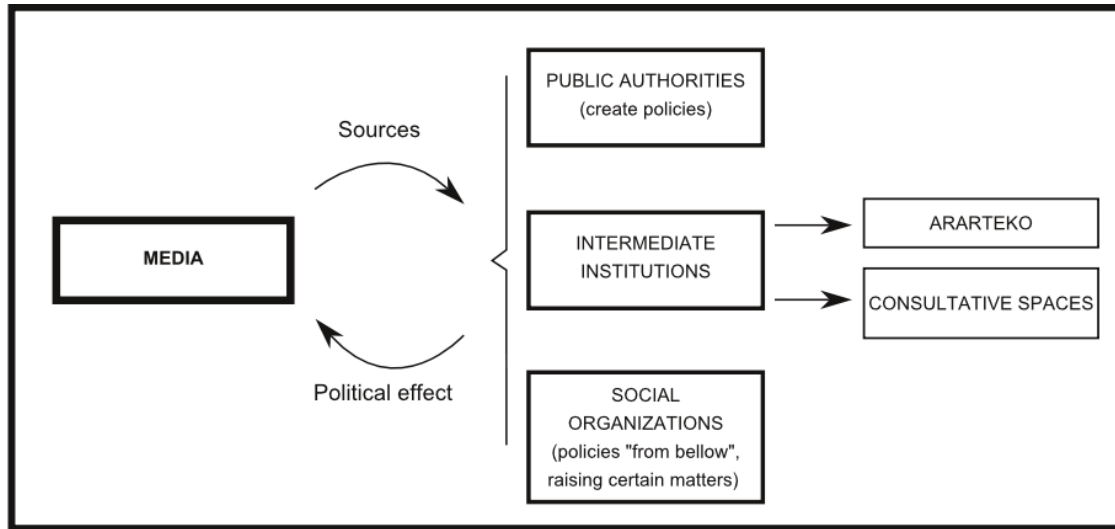


Table 2. General categories used for analysis (valid for the whole sample) and specific categories (which vary depending on whether they are media, authorities or associations).

STRUCTURE OF ANALYSIS	GENERAL CATEGORIES	SPECIFIC CATEGORIES		
		Media	Public Institutions	Social Organizations
NARRATIVES	IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation • Audience • Editorial line 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principles that guide institutional work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area of work • View of migration and immigration legislation
	ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detection of sensitive news 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of the crisis • Impact of European and national legislation on immigration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of social perceptions and racism challenges
	EVALUATION OF MEDIA COVERAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General assessment • Assessment of the public media • Experiences as source of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detection of sensitive and silenced subjects • General assessment of the work of the media
STRATEGIES	GENERAL COMMUNICATION ESTRATEGIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Style guide • Agenda • Professional specialization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies used as source of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda of tasks for influencing the media • Own communication channels • Communication strategies via internet
	SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies for sensitive news • Strategies against racism • Management of comments on the Web 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intervention through policies or recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies of intervention as sources of communication • Initiatives looking to protest about the quality of news coverage of immigration themes
PROPOSALS	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">Proposals for better news coverage of migrations and social diversity</div>			

3. Analysis and results

From the compilation of news, 3,513 items were extracted, corresponding to the newspapers *El Correo* (1,530), *Deia* (1,097) and *Gara* (886). To detect major news items, two factors were taken into consideration: 1) The volume of news dedicated to the subject or event; 2) The extent to which this news was covered over time. The following were found: 1) Regional

initiatives related to immigration (38%) 2) Information on *pateras* (small boats used by illegal migrants) and detention areas (27%), 3) Crime (23%), 4) Opinions about the regulation of migration (7%) and 5) Others (5%). As can be observed, local information and opinion occupy a considerable space in the Basque press, which reinforces the interest for our sample, given its influence on public opinion. Something worthy of being highlighted is that the results reflect the media practice of giving the nationality of the presumed perpetrator of a crime, given the number of news items dedicated to criminal acts.

With regard to professional ethics in the Basque Country, we find the *Inmigración y medios de comunicación* ("Immigration and Media") manual, published by the *Harresiak Apurtuz*, Basque immigration support association, which uses as a reference the work carried out by the *Colegio de Periodistas de Catalunya* (Catalan Journalists' Association) and the recommendations of the *Catalan Consejo Audiovisual* (Audiovisual Council), with proposals for ethnic minorities, migrant women and minors. Among the recommendations is the need to contextualize information, the use of multiple sources and avoidance of discriminatory language. *Ararteko* also makes recommendations with regard to the police forces that depend on public authorities, in which it is asked that these have codes of conduct with regard to the information they supply regarding immigration.

3.1. Considerations

The systematic analysis using the codes specified in the table offers results on the demonstrated and priority values of the actors interviewed.

In the first place, we find a difference between those media who link their work to values associated with the profession of journalism and those who can be defined as active political agents. With regard to the coverage of migration and the representation of social diversity, only EITB (the public news service) has a style guide that makes direct reference to the intercultural model as the desirable governance model for Basque society. In any case, *Gara* defends a sharply defined ideological position, since it sees itself as "far to the left" of most commercial newspapers and links immigrants to the Basque working class, given that "most people who emigrate do so for labour reasons". In this regard, they consider that there should not be any distinction made between those emigrants who "come from elsewhere in Spain" and those who arrive from abroad. *El Correo's* mission is "to relate the reality and try to encourage integration but not in a way that is different from other topics". *Radio Bilbao* reaffirms its position "totally against the dissemination of discourses that incite violence or xenophobic or discriminatory behaviour". And *Deia* says it keeps in mind that "the Basques also emigrated", which leads them "to understand and also contribute to the process of integration for migrants of foreign origin", as well as the fact that "immigration is positive, given that due to it, the birth rates improve and it improves certain sectors of the economy". Lastly, two topics were considered controversial by those interviewed, and they agree on this: 1) The relationship between migrants and crime and 2) The relationship that is established between migrants and the abuse of public resources.

From the interviews with migrants' associations and support organizations it can be seen that there are two main lines of action. Firstly, there is a commitment to the intercultural model of managing diversity. This is explained by one of the organizations interviewed:

So, in this regard I think that the change from multicultural to intercultural will have to come from citizens. From you and I, as citizens, wanting to live in a context of equality of conditions, but this also requires a basis that is not at all offered by the laws, by immigration, that is contrary to the present conditions of people's equality, to the current levels of dignity of women's work, to the way immigrants' labour is valued... (Camino al Barrio).

The second line of action is related to claiming rights for migrants, essentially those rights that have been violated by the Ley de Extranjería. In the words of another of the organizations:

We believe it is important to work with other concepts that are more linked to the matter of people's rights, particularly immigrants as legal subjects and really more than immigration policies we believe it is important to link up more with settlement policies since immigrants who live in the region have already passed through that stage since arrival... (Harresiak Apurtuz).

In general there has been a major trend towards working on the first line, a matter closely related to the requirements demanded for accessing different grants offered by town councils and the Basque Government (Di Carlo & Ruiz-Aranguren, 2012). Of the nine organizations interviewed, four warn of the dangers that can accompany the implementation of this model. Three reasons were given. Firstly, a criticism of the use of the word "interculturalism" as an empty concept. Secondly, it was mentioned that often the participation of migrants in public life is not taken into account. Thirdly, there was criticism of the priority given to cultural diversity over equality of rights. With regard to the topics they consider to be silenced in the media, mention was made of: 1) The experiences and difficulties experienced by many migrants in their daily lives ("If people are homeless, why is that? Because they feel like it?", CEAR). 2) The life of women working in domestic service ("21st-century slavery in Biscay province", Ellacuría). 3) Discriminatory and racist police action, including raids (Sos Racismo) 4) Raids on women sex workers (Sos Racismo). 5) Information about immigrants' economic contribution (Plataforma Getxo).

With regard to the public authorities, we can look at the III Plan Vasco de Inmigración, Ciudadanía y Convivencia Intercultural (3rd Basque Plan on Immigration, Citizenship and Intercultural Coexistence), during the Socialist Government legislature, which coincides with the early years of the economic crisis (2009-2012). Furthermore, it was drawn up with the participation of social agents (Immigration Forum, panel of experts, the coordinator of a Basque immigration support NGO, etc.). In order to analyse the institutional communication strategies in the early crisis period, an interview was carried out with Miguel Ángel González, Director of the Department of Immigration and Diversity Management between May 2009 and January 2013. In his opinion, there is a "social state of uncertainty" that causes a rejection of immigrants:

People don't know what is going to happen tomorrow. We have a series of open questions. Our ways of thinking about security in recent years have all been thrown up in the air, and so faced with this uncertainty people seek groups or reasons, explanations that give clarification about what is happening and normally immigrants become scapegoats.

Four ideas can be taken from his diagnosis. The first, as can be seen in the excerpt above, is his concern with the fact that social perceptions have become negative and the universalism of rights is starting to be questioned. Secondly, as he says, in Basque society "there exists the perception that people with irregular legal situations are problematic". Furthermore, the media do not contribute to dismantling this prejudice, given that "they treat migrants as heroes or villains", although public radio-television constituted a "different element" since it offered "more responsible" information as the interview subject put it. Lastly, in his opinion, there were not enough mechanisms for reporting racism and xenophobia, and so journalists have limitations when it comes to reporting on them. Furthermore, often migrants feel fear or encounter difficulties with identifying these kinds of situations.

In the case of town councils, the councillors responsible for the departments that looked after immigration matters were spoken to:

Well the economic crisis has brought a problem. Here in Bilbao the situation has changed a lot in the last three or four years and we can look at Ikuspegi data in this regard. Normally it is said that countries asked for workers when people came. The economic situation has meant that many people... that selfishness rises to the surface is in some way part of being human. (Idoia Uriarte, Director of the Department of Equality, Cooperation and Citizenship).

The main ideas that can be taken from the interview with Bilbao Council are: 1) Linking the increase in rejection of migrants to a competition over the scarce resources handled by the council; the crisis as social, not an issue of racism. 2) An indication of the “benefits” offered by immigration (birth rate and influence on the welfare system). 3) They avoid using the word “immigration”, since they consider that it is often linked with a low social level, yet Bilbao is “a city that aspires to be international”. 4) They consider municipal registration to be the key to accessing rights. With regard to the other restrictions on people with irregular legal situations that derive from the Ley de Extranjería, they didn’t want to “make any comments”. Lastly, in the case of Getxo Council, councillors were committed to an “intercultural model in which all people feel integrated” and for this reason they are part of the European Network of Intercultural Cities. In this regard, a number of initiatives have already been carried out such as campaigns to encourage municipal registration, the organization of commemorative days, such as a day against racism, or a refugees’ day. With regard to the assessment of social perceptions, it considers that “there haven’t been any major problems” and “there is no racism as such”. Barakaldo Council would not participate in the study.

3.2. Strategies

With regard to the study of communications strategies in the media, four ideas can be highlighted.

Firstly, the results obtained in the interviews confirm that there is no professional specialization or specific training in matters related to immigration. Only one of the media interviewed (Radio Bilbao) had a journalist with much experience on the matter, and whom they consider as a kind of “guide”, although she worked for the station in Madrid. All the media managers replied that their responsibility consists of covering matters that are important currently, without clearly specifying what or who define this contemporary state of affairs: “The way that you tackle subjects is very different (...). One might be that someone writes you a letter saying there is a problem in the whole of Spain with events and statistics ...” (Radio Bilbao). *Deia* referred to certain general matters they considered deserved particular attention: “the density of immigrants in certain municipalities and how this changes over time” and also initiatives of certain groups and people who are seen as “examples of integration” by the newspaper. *El Correo* has a section entitled “New Citizens”, which deals with the life stories of migrants of foreign origin. Furthermore, Radio Bilbao has a programme called *El Farol del Sur* (“The Lamp of the South”) which covers different social matters and particularly cultural diversity and migrations.

Secondly, those interviewed were asked directly about the relationship that is established between immigration and the abuse of public money. While some media indicated the existence of a mediatic responsibility on this question, others consider that newsmaking is not influencing the increase, or otherwise, of these prejudices. *Deia* avoided talking about the matter. *El Correo* believes that these are “comments you hear on the street” and “absurd beliefs”, avoiding any responsibility on the matter. In the case of EITB and Radio Euskadi, it is pointed out that they have always taken into consideration that the economic crisis “also affects” migrants. Therefore they try to avoid stigmatization, although they find it difficult to manage the comments of listeners and Internet users. Gara believes that it is “part of an agenda to try to take some kinds of support away, and this, again, in a

framework of creating fear, or insecurity and of considering that these kinds of behaviour occur most among certain ethnicities”, and so on certain occasions they refrain from publishing certain information, even if the sources are public.

Thirdly, these media managers talked about the relationship that is established between immigration and crime. As can be seen from the interviews, the internal debate is focussing on the inclusion or not of the nationality of the person who commits a crime. All the managers referred to their prudence on this matter. However, they admit “errors” and the fact that they do not have set rules on the matter. At *Gara* they consider that “the use of certain categories contributes to criminalization”, something they try to avoid in the newspaper, and so they ask “not to make a blank slate of all the media, and to judge them according to the case”, since they state that their editorial line on this matter “is different”. At Radio Bilbao they emphasize the need to “contextualize information”, although they believe that if they have that information they will certainly give it. At EITB they admit “making mistakes” on many occasions, and give two reasons why: “the day-to-day demands of the job of journalist which make it impossible to reflect calmly” and “on occasion because of the journalists’ prejudices”.

Lastly, in fourth place, the media interviewed do not keep in mind the need to cover matters that tackle the problem of racism and xenophobia. In the case of the management of comments on websites, all agree about the difficulty in filtering them to stop them affecting fundamental human rights and confess that they are not doing well on this matter. For now they are not applying any measures for improvement.

With regard to the organizations, it is important to indicate the dependence that some, with fewer resources, have on others, which act as coordinators. Of the nine organizations interviewed, three have their own agenda (Harresiak Apurtuz, Centro Ellacuria and Cear Euskadi). The agenda focusses on political incidence and on the transmission of information that highlights positive aspects about immigration. The other six organizations interviewed do not have their own communications agenda and give the following reasons: 1) Lack of resources. 2) Assembly-based and non-professionalized structure, which stops them from acting with the speed required by journalists. 3) Distrust of the media, due to negative past experiences. “The media seem to me to be a danger because they are distinctly reactive and sensationalist; they are not objective and they create controversy between the native and foreign populations. And there is misinformation. There is a manipulation. You don’t really see what the migratory process is” (Asociación Mujeres del Mundo).

None of the organizations interviewed reacted directly to comments that linked immigrants to committing crimes or fraud, since they consider that this would involve getting involved in a perverse game in which the rules are set down by others. With regard to a presence on the Internet, it is very limited. Of the nine interviewed, six have a website, but only two update it regularly. A presence in the social media (five of nine) is considered positive, although of limited scope. On the other hand, some had their own communications channel (for example, Candela Radio, Revista Mujeres del Mundo-Munduko Emakumeak, Revista Mugak and Harresial Info).

With respect to governmental strategies, one of the main points was the attempt to draw up the Pacto Social por la Inmigración en Euskadi (“Basque Social Pact for Immigrants”), whose subtitle gives a clue to the motivation behind its creation: “A common commitment to living in harmony”. The Pact could have laid down some basic aspects that influence political discourses on immigration. Following the arguments of Miguel González, the former Director of Immigration, it did not work for three reasons. 1) The focus of some political parties on electoral goals (referring to the PP), 2) The difficulty in reaching agreements with lower levels of government, such as provincial councils, when these are run by other parties, 3) A lack of interest, given that, in his words, “the matter of immigration is not considered to be a priority”.

In the case of municipal councils, Bilbao drew up the Be Open Municipal Diversity Management Plan (2011–2013), which does not cover actions in the sphere of communications, except for press releases to promote the plan. With regard to the link between immigration and crime, they choose, just like the associations, not to enter into dynamics of justification. In the case of Getxo Council, communications work is limited and is related to the promotion of policies carried out by the council's Immigration Unit.

3.3. Interrelations

Firstly, what is referred to here is the results obtained after the analysis of the relationship of the media with their information sources. Secondly, we analyse the institutional political spaces for talking together. Lastly, we refer to sensitive matters.

Thus, as the interviews indicate, journalists receive information principally from the public authorities, specifically from the departments linked to the area of social affairs. Three of the five managers says that little information reaches them from organizations, and this is not systematic, and one organization says its communications are run by two separate organizations that have more resources.

As far as the organizations are concerned, their experiences with the media have been negative, in the main. The arguments given have been: 1) The unequal treatment of information sources (the authorities "state", while organizations "mention"), sometimes linked to a racist position (when a neighbourhood organization protests about the opening of a mosque they are "residents" while those in favour are "organizations"). 2) A search for occasional testimony, without going into any depth on the organizations' point of view. 3) The vulgarization of information and a search for sensationalism. 4) A stereotyping of migrants. 5) Giving priority to political interest as against social interest, since sometimes they cover a fact in one way or another depending on the political interests they have at that moment. 6) Use of the crisis as a constant argument which gives rise to news, without going into depth.

With regard to the public authorities, some criticisms are given here that were made by the Basque Government's Immigration Directorate because of the lack of responsibility by some media, with headlines that the interviewee describes as "very much against immigrants". He quotes an *El Correo* headline which says: "Inmigrante busca alquiler protegido" ("Immigrant seeks social housing") with the subheadline "Foreigners living in the Basque Country now occupy 19% of the 8,000 properties rented out directly by the Basque Government". He also quotes the Deia headline: "Minors under legal guardianship, including immigrants, could receive up to 1,000 euros when they turn 18". This news is rather tendentious given that, firstly, a distinction is made between native and immigrant minors and, secondly, the amount of social assistant was little over 600 euros, and supplementary sums were related to matters such as, for example, having children. The experiences of intervening in the media have not been positive for the Immigration Directorate, except in the case of the Basque public media company. Furthermore, he criticized the fact that the media echo false information that starts up in provincial towns:

In Bermeo there was this rumour going around that Saharawi women spent the day in the park with their children while the rest of the world went to work, and they were living off social assistance, you know? And, well, this bad feeling started up and it started to get organized. Then there was a group that organized a demonstration [...]. There was also a group that started up that was, let's say, in their favour. And the media echoed this. (Miguel Ángel González, former Director of Immigration for the Basque Country).

The councils are also critical, mainly because of the tendency towards sensationalism. Bilbao Council states, firstly, that the media tend to link immigrants to crime, and secondly,

they criticize poor journalistic practice when covering gender violence, since they consider that female victims are dehumanized when they are migrants.

Secondly, we analyse the institutional spaces for policy participation. In general, the organizations criticise the fact that they are merely consultative and, in practice, not very effective. The Consejo Local de Inmigración de Bilbao (Bilbao Local Immigration Council) has not worked on the matter of discourses about immigration in the media. The Pacto Social por la Inmigración, promoted by the Basque Government did not achieve its goals. In this regard, a number of contributions, based on interviews, are highlighted: 1) One of the associations considers that communication is important, regardless of politics, and, therefore, in order for there to be a project of this kind there would need to be a previous agreement of certain minimums, which, as of today, does not exist. It defines it in this way:

How are we to be defined politically? This needs group work on political identity, which is being done but it is the most difficult thing, because on the Bilbao Council's Local Immigration Council there are immigrants' associations but political groups also participate. Bildu is there, the PP is there, the PSOE is there and the PNV is there and it is good that they are, because we debate with them. So it is very difficult to say in this regard, well, as Local Immigration Council we have this political profile. It is almost impossible, why? Because there are people with a defined political profile and so if you do not also have this defined then you tell me what kinds of communications you are going to create (Camino al Barrio).

2) In the judgement of another organization, the necessary mechanisms are not present so that irresponsible actions or discourses have to be accounted for, and so the commitment was never completed. 3) Another organization specifically refers to press offices and says that they follow the guidelines of whichever government it is in power, but that there is no true control over them.

Lastly, with regard to sensitive news, three of the five media companies interviewed say that the press releases from the communications departments of the different police forces that act in the Basque Country do not include nationality or origin of those who have committed an offence or a crime. However, two admit the existence of leaks. In this regard, the position of Bilbao Council stands out, whose councillors prefer "not to comment" on these leaks, but stresses the need for a "collective responsibility", referring to the poor practice of some media, when, for example, the headlines state that the perpetrator of a crime earns minimum wage or when they offer that person's nationality.

4. Discussion and conclusions

There is a reasonable consensus about the results thrown up by the analyses of the news coverage of immigration in the media and the need for this to improve. However, academic approaches have presented limitations, since they have not taken into consideration the influence of different actors on the construction of the news item, the public authorities' communications policies, the context of political and informative opportunity of the social organizations and, in short, production routines. If they have done, it has been in a compartmentalized way, not bearing in mind different agents. One of the main discoveries in the study has been that of bringing to light the media companies' lack of a specific and systematic communications strategy when giving news about immigrants. Most of the studies carried out up until now focus on dissecting news products by means of different methodologies, offering relevant data that allow the journalistic quality in the coverage of a given matter to be assessed, with approaches such as CDA and news framing theory. However, in this study we have looked at the media's working routines, since our main hypothesis is that there is no work planning involved in writing, that is to say, it cannot be guaranteed that the stereotyped and often distorted image that the media offer on

migrations and migrants is derived from a previously established strategy. More specifically, in our field study, when observing the results in the light of the literature, we find that working routines and latent racism are key factors behind controversial news coverage of this matter.

The second discovery is that practically all the actors interviewed agree on their diagnoses of the news coverage of immigrants, and the prejudices that affect migrants. However, except in the case of an interview with a content manager from Basque public radio-television, none refer to racism as a factor that is behind the discursive violence that the media keep up, but rather express other kinds of motivations, such as the fact that immigrants are a “scapegoat” in times of crisis. In this regard, the viewpoint of the social organizations interviewed is much broader and also attends to some aspects that stand outside of the media agenda, such as the police persecution of illegal immigrants based on ethnic or racial characteristics, and even the situations of abuse suffered by many migrant women domestic workers. In short, it has been possible to observe that the self-criticisms made by the managers of the media companies are intimately related to the cautions indicated in the style guides and the recommendations published by different bodies, which indicates the influence these have had, but also their limitations. However, the interviews carried out indicate that, on the one hand, the media are not taking into consideration either the structural causes that give rise to migrations or racism as key elements that should contextualize the information drawn up by journalists.

Thirdly, in recent years different social researchers have focussed on the study of relationships among social organizations and the structures of political opportunity. However, there has not been a transfer to the field of communications that makes it possible to understand what kind of structures of opportunity in terms of communications exist for social movements. In this regard, the research into interrelations has allowed us to see that the organizations' line of action has been mainly with the aim of promoting interculturalism and, to a lesser degree, claiming rights, which has conditioned their role as a source for the media. In fact, the media managers interviewed refer to the lack of important voices on this matter that would allow journalists to check information. In the same way, if the organizations' discourse is attended to, it can be seen that there is a notable mistrust with regard to the role played by the media, which makes it possible to state that they are not seen as allies that can contribute to achieving their goals.

Furthermore, the communications strategies employed by the public authorities have been frankly limited. The Immigration Plans created by the Basque Government have not managed to create sufficient consensus allowing the creation of communications policies that influence media agendas, and this continues to be an area of concern. In the case of municipal councils, the communications agenda is essentially based on the promotion of political actions they are carrying out.

Based on our study, we conclude that the view that the public authorities and the media have of migratory processes and racism is very limited, in that 1) It ignores the inequalities that are behind much of the migratory projects and the asymmetries that exist with regard to people's rights to travel and set up home in other territories. 2) They do not take into consideration the new forms in which racism is conveyed. 3) In some cases, they present a utilitarian view of immigration, based exclusively on the benefits that a native population might report. 4) It bases the “legitimacy” of immigration on the fact that the Basques also emigrated 5) There has been no reflection of the role of the media in the representation of social and cultural diversity. 6) Debates about security are considered in terms of the inclusion, or not, of the nationality of the perpetrator of a crime, without considering broader analytical frameworks.

The information printed or broadcast by media is reactive, in that their guidelines lack an agenda and strategies of their own, and so journalistic routines acquire huge importance

when it comes to the news coverage of immigrants. Although some differences are found in the positioning of the guidelines, according to the political role that medium considers itself to play in the Basque context, none have taken the reins in order to give this subject the importance it deserves.

Up until now, research into news coverage of immigrants and immigration has focussed on the study of news products and, from a critical perspective, offered conclusions that, due to the methodological framework employed, make the media responsible for making biased coverage that does not favour social cohesion. Our article concludes that, despite what can be inferred from other studies, the editorial line is much less important than it might appear. It is the lack of media, political and social strategy that largely contributes to making news coverage of immigration matters such low quality. Although there are studies (rather few) which have covered some aspects linked to production routines in the media (for example, the existence or not of journalistic specialization or the use of style guides) or the influence of political language on information, none have opened up the analytical framework of news production on migration in such a way as to include social organizations, public authorities and the media, nor have they taken into consideration the importance of the spaces of interaction between journalists and other relevant actors. We consider that the study shows the different actors' lack of communications strategies, and that this conclusion means not only an important contribution to the social sciences but also a contribution that can be useful when designing policies that favour a quality news coverage of immigrant themes.

4.1. Credibility and applicability

The analytical model used in this study makes it possible to open up the subject of study from the investigation of news products to the process of news creation. The fact that immigration from foreign countries into the Basque Country is a relatively recent phenomenon and that the studies on the matter of communication in this territory are very limited means that such research is all the more important, given that it can be inferred that the interviewees have developed fewer barriers and are more spontaneous when offering their answers. The concepts used are applicable to other contexts, as is the general analytical structure. Both the analytical model and the methodology employed refer to the importance of the subject studied and not to the degree to which they are generalizable. With regard to limitations, we would indicate that: 1) The positionings and practices indicated in the study do not offer permanent conclusions over time. 2) Future studies might make progress attending to the work done by press offices. 3) The sample selection is necessarily limited, given that it leaves out other figures who might have an important influence: such as, for example, elite sporting figures.

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