Media and Communication
Open Access Journal | ISSN: 2183-2439
Volume 10, Issue 2 (2022)

Media and Migration in the Covid-19 Pandemic: Discourses, Policies, and Practices in Times of Crisis

Editors

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COGITATIO

Media and Communication, 2022, Volume 10, Issue 2
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Published by Cogitatio Press
Rua Fialho de Almeida 14, 2º Esq.,
1070-129 Lisbon
Portugal

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Available online at: www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication

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2022, Volume 10, Issue 2, Pages 214–217
https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i2.5918

Editorial

Editorial: Media and Migration in the Covid-19 Pandemic—Discourses, Policies, and Practices in Times of Crisis

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Submitted: 20 June 2022 | Published: 30 June 2022

Abstract
This editorial serves as an introduction to *Media and Communication*'s thematic issue "Media and Migration in the Covid-19 Pandemic: Discourses, Policies, and Practices in Times of Crisis." This thematic issue presents a space for discussion on ways in which digital infrastructures and media have an impact on understandings and experiences of migration during the pandemic. The seven articles in this volume offer an integrated account of this issue from many empirical studies adopting a multi-actor perspective while also involving different methodologies and cross-cultural and interdisciplinary frameworks. The contributions featured in this thematic issue shed new light on the role of mediated processes and discourses around migration and may be of assistance to understanding the opportunities and challenges of leveraging media technologies to promote inclusive, sustainable, and meaningful participation and representation of migrants beyond the pandemic.

Keywords
Covid-19; digital technologies; media and migration; media discourses; migrants

Issue
This editorial is part of the issue "Media and Migration in the Covid-19 Pandemic: Discourses, Policies, and Practices in Times of Crisis" edited by Vasiliki Tsagkroni (Leiden University), Amanda Alencar (Erasmus University Rotterdam), and Dimitris Skleparis (Newcastle University).

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has been perceived and managed by many states as a mobility issue. Discourses of fear and war-like metaphors around the ongoing health crisis have paved the way for the introduction of unprecedented mobility restrictions at the local, national, and global levels. These measures were introduced at a time when the rights of free movement and settlement of the most vulnerable had been already considerably limited. At the same time, these measures and relevant discourses have all been intensely mediated, shaped through complex media landscapes and imagined by a diversity of social actors, with far-reaching consequences for public attitudes toward migration and their associated processes. The risk of these discourses and measures further exacerbating the rights and vulnerabilities of migrants, as well as undermining ongoing processes of migrant reception, settlement, and integration is real.

Additionally, during times of crisis, the media are key in contributing to debates over ratification of preventive measures, as well as providing communities, including migrants and refugees, with access to relevant information. Against this background, it is important to highlight barriers related to digital accessibility and literacies, as well as associated risks of technology use (e.g., misinformation, privacy issues, and surveillance), which can prevent refugees, asylum seekers and other forcibly displaced persons from staying up to date on developments in the Covid-19 crisis in their locations of settlement. This not only increases their vulnerability and exacerbates existing inequalities, but also renders them invisible as

a community. Finally, communication and relations in transnational families have also potentially been transformed and challenged, while also being reflected in the digital practices and mobility policies in times of crisis.

This thematic issue of *Media and Communication* focuses on contributions that bring together digital infrastructures and media through the spectre of migration during the Covid-19 crisis. The selected contributions in this thematic issue include themes related to: (a) the role of media discourses around the immediate and long-term effects of the Covid-19 on migrants as well as in facilitating solidarity movements towards migrant groups, or conversely, anti-immigrant mobilizations; (b) the benefits and constraints of digital technologies in risk and crisis management among migrant communities; (c) the opportunities and challenges of using digital technologies to conduct research on migrant populations during a global pandemic; and (d) the impact of media on transnational family relations and communications within the context of limited global mobility. The following section provides a summarized account of the seven articles included in this volume.

2. Presentation of the Contributions in this Thematic Issue

Kaarina Nikunen and Sanna Valtonen (2022) open the thematic issue with an article exploring the digital self-representation of the everyday life of recently or currently undocumented migrants in times of Covid-19 in Finland through a photographic exhibition in collaboration with photographer Katja Tähjä, Helinä Rautavaara Museum, and seven participants from the research project. Informed by the prevalence of digital technologies as an intimate infrastructure the article explores visibility on a dual level: as a position in society and as part of a photographic research method that enhances societal visibility. It also reflects on connections of vulnerability, visibility, and invisibility in digital everyday life. The authors' observations on studying visual images of self-expression of people in precarious life situations show how digital media environments expose these populations to coerced visibility in their constant struggle for communicative rights.

Julia Camargo et al. (2022) also address communication rights in the context of social and digital inequalities aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic by exploring the experiences of Venezuelan refugees in Brazil. The study discusses the growing notion of digital inequalities, characterized by reduced connectivity, and exacerbated (online) vulnerabilities during Covid-19, which are connected to issues of transnational family communication, obtaining, and accessing information, resources, and rights in a host society. The results of the research point to a high level of digital precarity in all three, along with strong exposure to online misinformation, and the lack of communication rights for refugees. Additionally, it is argued that government and humanitarian digital infrastructures contributed to enhancing social exclusion and marginalization of refugees, while accessing precarious information landscapes online has an impact not only on the well-being and health of refugees but also deters safe pathways to mobility.

Nikos Fotopoulos et al. (2022) explore the salience and framing of the refugee issue in German, Greek, and British media between 1 January 2021 and 1 May 2021. The authors employ qualitative content analysis in a selection of print and online editions of two mainstream, one regional, and one tabloid newspaper from each of the three countries. Their article argues that the pertinent coverage dedicated to Covid-19 and refugees was scarce in the three countries and was overshadowed by epidemiological developments or other health aspects related to local populations. Interestingly, the authors also note that salience varied at both the country and newspaper levels, with centre-left newspapers being more likely to report on the refugee issue than centre-right, regional, or tabloid ones. Moreover, the article finds that the dominant frame in the coverage of the refugee issue amid the pandemic was the "victim" frame. Again, interesting differences are observed at the newspaper level, with centre-left outlets being more likely to show sympathy or empathy towards refugees by acknowledging the challenges that they face in the context of the pandemic.

Thea de Gruchy et al. (2022) explore the ways in which migrant and mobile populations in South Africa were framed in the media as the pandemic unfolded in 2020. The authors undertake a quantitative assessment of outputs produced globally by English language media about Covid-19 and migration in South Africa. This is coupled with a framing analysis that aims to identify how migration and migrants were framed by the media in South Africa. Their findings illustrate that articles published by US- and UK-based outlets had a far greater reach than locally or regionally produced outputs, suggesting that much of the information about, and framing of, migration in the country was not produced locally amid the pandemic. Contra their expectations, the authors also find that the framing of migration as a threat or as detrimental to South Africa was not the dominant one. Rather, migrants were given a human face through the acknowledgement of the difficulties they faced due to the pandemic and the state's inadequate responses to it.

Hanna Orsolya Vincze and Delia Cristina Balaban (2022) explore the main themes and voices that comprised Romanian media coverage of native intra-EU labour migration and the ways in which German media perspectives were integrated into that coverage in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Focusing on the early stage of the pandemic, between 1 March and 30 July 2020, the authors undertake a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of leading Romanian online news outlets. Their findings show that, despite migrants' voices being underrepresented, both Romanian and

German media, to a certain extent, used the pandemic as an opportunity to reflect on the general social costs of migration, and the responsibility of political actors in the home and destination countries, as well as at the EU level. However, the authors also find strong negative overtones, particularly at the later stage of the pandemic (April–July 2020), with Romanian migrants being portrayed as beneficiaries of "privileged" treatment, as they were able to remain mobile while their compatriots had to endure strict lockdown measures.

Hakimu Sseviiri et al. (2022) analyze the daily digital experiences and social connections of urban refugees during the Covid-19 crisis in Uganda. By interviewing refugees and refugee-led organisations, the authors discuss the notion of social capital within refugees and host communities and how it affects digitally mediated responses to livelihoods, social wellbeing, and information access during the pandemic. The findings underline the significant impact of digitally enabled and mediated social networks through bonds, bridges, and links when it comes to coping with crisis effects. The article underscores that while the use of digital social networks in mobilizing support for refugees during the crisis was hampered by a fragmented digital infrastructure, inequalities regarding access to ICTs, inadequate government response, language barriers, and the spread of fake news, digital technologies offer the tools to increase social support and mobilization capacity of refugees.

Svetlana S. Bodrunova and Anna Smoliarova (2022), in the closing article of this thematic issue, examine the coverage of the Russian and EU migration in Russian media during the Covid-19 pandemic. The authors examine how internal and foreign immigrants were treated during the Covid-19 pandemic, to evaluate if, in the face of the pandemic, coverage was fair and humanistic, rather than different and politically motivated. Their analysis of 12 federal and digital media, as well as four TV channels from the year 2020, shows the prevalence of the above-mentioned dualism throughout the pandemic, with pro-state media providing only a modest counterbalance. Overall, the authors' findings point out that immigration-related concerns faded from public consciousness, particularly in regional media, and the pandemic did not result in a re-humanization of immigration coverage.

3. Conclusion

This thematic issue of *Media and Communication* focuses on the connection of media and migration as a critical lens to think through themes of borders, refugees, integration, governance, and representation associated with this pandemic crisis. The seven contributions featured in this thematic issue have extended our knowledge of the topic and put forward several questions that call for further investigation. Further work will be needed to determine how digital infrastructures and media have shaped migration processes and discourses amidst the pandemic.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2022, Volume 10, Issue 2, Pages 218–229
https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i2.5036

Article

Precariousness and Hope: Digital Everyday Life of the Undocumented Migrants Explored Through Collaborative Photography

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Submitted: 30 October 2021 | Accepted: 11 March 2022 | Published: 30 June 2022

Abstract
The article explores the digital everyday life of recently or currently undocumented migrants in times of Covid-19 in Finland. It is based on an empirical case study on a collaborative photographic exhibition and workshop including visual images, diaries, interviews, and discussions. The analysis explores the ways in which a photography exhibition and a workshop may depict meaningful moments in digital everyday life as well as open up an understanding of the various vulnerabilities that emerge in the life of the undocumented, as expressed by themselves. The study demonstrates the fundamental importance of communication rights for people in precarious life situations, expressed by themselves in visual images. The insight produced multidimensionally in images, discussions, and interviews illustrates how digital media environment exposes to coerced visibility and requires constant struggle for communicative rights. These struggles take place on the material infrastructural level of devices, chargers, and access, but also on the level of self-expression and connection on social media platforms. Finally, the article discusses the emancipatory potential of a collaborative exhibition and workshop as a way to encounter and deal with increasingly vulnerable life situations. It points out the relevance of collaborative work as a research method, in providing knowledge from experience as well as space of recognition.

Keywords
communicative rights; datafication; digital everyday life; participation; photography; undocumented migrants; visibility

Issue
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1. Introduction

Covid-19 has profoundly affected people's everyday lives with various vulnerabilities, restrictions, and an increased dependency on digital media to manage work, school, and social relations. For undocumented migrants, who already exist in a marginal position in society, Covid-19 has created new obstacles and uncertainties. Due to the lockdown, public places central to the undocumented community, such as cafes and libraries, are rendered inaccessible. These public places offer refuge where one can meet others, use free Wi-Fi to connect with family and friends, and charge mobile phones. Digital media has become fundamentally important for the undocumented as a tool to manage their lives, yet it also leads to the risk of surveillance and potential detainment (Latonero & Kift, 2018). Lockdown inevitably heightens this dependability and various struggles connected to the digital everyday life of those who live in vulnerable situations.

In this article, we explore the self-representation of the everyday life of recently or currently undocumented migrants in Finland through a photographic exhibition organised in collaboration with photographer Katja Tähjä, the Helinä Rautavaara Museum, and seven participants from the research project. Our focus on everyday life is

informed by the prevalence of digital technologies as an intimate infrastructure (Wilson, 2016) that profoundly organises and shapes daily life. The aim of this article is to explore the ways in which a photography exhibition and workshop may depict meaningful moments in digital everyday life and open understanding of the vulnerabilities that emerge in the lives of the undocumented, as expressed by themselves through images, diary notes, and in an interview and workshop discussions.

Photographic workshops and an exhibition provide a unique source of knowledge production to explore the question of visibility. This article approaches visibility on two levels. First, we refer to visibility in relation to membership or position in society. Visibility in this sense is attuned to ideas of being recognised as a member of society (Ghorashi, 2010). Such visibility is connected in complex ways with media representation, digital media participation, and communication rights (Leurs, 2017; Thomas, 2011). While media representation may produce stereotypical hyper-visibility, the context of digital media produces also coerced visibility (Barassi, 2019). Both of these affect the ability to practice communication rights by particularly vulnerable groups. Second, visibility is discussed as part of the photographic research method, as a way to use visual materials of everyday life to enhance societal visibility and connect experiences with larger social trajectories (Rose, 2012; Schreiber, 2020).

By making visible the life of the undocumented to a larger audience, the aim of the photographic exhibition is to accumulate understanding of the conditions and experiences they face on a daily basis. More than that, the photographic workshop can provide a space for reflection and encounters that may add insight and perspective to one's life situation and its connections to struggles for human rights and the right to live (Thomas, 2011). This article does not aim to suggest that photographic exhibition and a workshop operate as a simple path to belonging, but instead to present it as an opening to explore and reflect on the complex connections of vulnerability, visibility, and invisibility in digital everyday life.

2. Contradictions of Visibility

Visibility is considered a central element in enhancing the emancipation of migrant and minority populations in their struggles to become full members of society. Visibility, to be seen as a member of society, is closely connected to the concept of voice, to be able to narrate one's life and reflect on it (Couldry, 2010; Georgiou, 2018). Visibility then resonates with the concept of a multiethnic public sphere (Husband, 1996) that refers to the recognition of an equal position in a society across differences. However, visibility can also be seen as a trap that essentializes identities and conceals differences within social, gendered, and ethnic groups (Phelan, 1993). As argued by Ghorashi (2010) and Schreiber (2020) visibility should not be treated as a simple gateway to belonging. The contradictions of visibility become evident in research that shows how migrants are simultaneously hyper-visible and invisible in society. As argued by Collins (2016, p. 1170), migrants remain invisible in terms of their daily lives "yet, at other moments, often associated with various crises, migrants become subject to excessive attention" (see also Nikunen, 2020). In a similar way Saltsman and Majidi (2021, p. 2523) argue that "forced migrants often find themselves in something of a contradiction: by becoming hyper-visible in ways that play into dominant narratives of tragedy, insecurity, or victimhood, they simultaneously experience invisibility and inaudibility in terms of their lived experience." Recent studies on migration in European context have also pointed out the gendered nature of hypervisibility where particularly young men are represented as a potential threat connected to sexual violence and terrorism, whereas women and children are represented more in terms of ideal victims (Mavelli, 2017; Nikunen, 2020).

Digital media technologies have provided new possibilities to gain visibility and to be visibly present. Digital media have become a central area for public gatherings, debates, and social interaction, and therefore also a space of possibility for marginal voices to appear (Nikunen, 2019). Being visible on social media can enhance social life and interaction in ways that increase a sense of social solidarity, recognition, and belonging (Fraser, 1995; Nikunen, 2019). It can provide currency to make claims and raise concerns over social issues. Indeed, the ability to be seen as part of society is deeply entangled with digital media. Digital technologies have become an essential infrastructure in everyday life, not only for the "connected refugees" (Diminescu, 2008) but for people across society. Digital media, such as smartphones, provide information, maps, and tools to navigate and take care of official and everyday errands and operate as a site of imagination, joy, and connectivity. Discussed in terms of intimate infrastructures (Wilson, 2016), digital technologies are immersing in growing areas of everyday practices and experience.

Contradictions of visibility are further embodied in the ways in which being visible on digital media exposes to surveillance and coerced visibility (Barassi, 2019). The current social media platforms are built on infrastructures of data gathering and automated surveillance (Andrejevic, 2020), now normalised in the everyday use of social media and considered essential for the functioning of commercial platforms (Van Dijck, 2014). The vulnerability produced by the traces left by data is often difficult to conceive due to the complex and hidden workings of data-driven platforms. Gangadharan (2012) points out that the ease of tracking personal data can create "non-transparent, asymmetric power relations between the profilers and profiled, in political, social, and economic contexts."

Inspired by Leurs' (2017) research on communication rights as performed through digital media by young

refugees' digital practices, we approach visibility and digital media from the perspective of communication rights. The right to communicate is considered to be fundamentally connected to human rights. All people, regardless of their age, status, ability, or communicative capacity have the right to interact with others, hold opinions, and express themselves. The communicative rights, as discussed by Leurs (2017) emphasize inclusive, participatory understanding of rights as essential for membership in the society. These include for example the right for information, family life, and self-expression. In digital media context, these rights may appear self-evident for many.

However, the undocumented in this study expressed fear for their safety in general terms on social media as a semi-public space that renders them visible to unknown audiences. In this way, surveillance by platforms, peers, governments, officials, and potentially hostile groups add to the complexity of visibility and the multiple levels it operates in digital everyday life. The visibility on datafied platforms produces various challenges to people in vulnerable life situations. Therefore, visibility on digital platforms does not equal communication rights. To clarify the relation between visibility and communication rights, we consider visibility as a loose term to refer to the different ways in which people can be "seen" as members of society. Such visibility can operate as a pathway to recognition in a particular social context (for example within a nation-state), whereas communication rights refer to more concrete rights that every person is entitled to—as part of human wellbeing. Previous migration research has shown that both visibility and the right to communicate may be severely compromised for example on basis of gender or sexuality when women's use of media is controlled by family members or in cases where homosexuality is not accepted and therefore severely affects self-expression (Dhoest & Szulc, 2016; Shield, 2019; Witteborn, 2020).

We argue that, for the undocumented, visibility, invisibility, and digital media form a complex terrain of danger, dependency, and emerging possibilities in daily life. While migrants struggle for more just visibility in society, the undocumented are in a particularly precarious position. Understanding their difficult life situation requires more public attention; however, for the individuals, this creates a substantial threat with the potential discovery and deportation. We explore the ways in which the necessity to remain unidentified and invisible shapes the ability to achieve communicative rights, even if digital technologies of communication are an essential part of everyday life.

3. Participatory Photography Method

Substantial social initiatives, programmes, and research have been devoted to enhancing the possibilities for migrants, asylum seekers, and the undocumented to become more visible in society and to voice their concerns and claims (Georgiou, 2018; Ghorashi, 2010). The tradition of participatory photography draws on feminist theory, action research, Freire's critical pedagogy, and documentary photography (Pienimäki, 2020) with the aim of centring knowledge from experience and empowering participants through their own identification of the structures of oppression. Saltsman and Majidi (2021) identify increased interest in action research as a way to provide more collaborative framing for research and the ability to "give voice" to migrants. However, they note that too often in action research projects, voice is taken for granted and serves certain frames of suffering, tragedy, and vulnerability, possibly for advocacy purposes, rather than offering a view of the complexities and contradictions of lived experience. Often in these projects, voices are nevertheless produced in unequal settings with substantial power in the hands of researchers, curators, governments, and funders. They emphasise the importance of integrating the value of experience-based knowledge into the research design (Saltsman & Majidi, 2021).

Acknowledging these shortcomings, limitations, and complications of collaborative research, our research project set out to explore the digital everyday life of undocumented migrants with the aim of centring their experience as a source of knowledge. Besides examining the digital everyday life and social media participation, the aim is to discover how photography as a participatory medium can provide new insights and reflections into their everyday lives. This can be considered as a way to counter symbolic immobility of being stuck in a limited representational frame (Smets, 2019).

In this way, the study connects with the visual turn in social sciences to use photography not only as an illustration but as a source of knowledge in the research process (Ball, 2014; Rose, 2012, pp. 298–299). In addition, in this context, being able to express oneself through images rather than through words may carry importance for those who struggle with the language barrier, and therefore offers more open opportunities for self-expression (Brigham et al., 2018; Pienimäki, 2020).

The workshop was situated in the Helinä Rautavaara Museum, which focuses on mobility and diversity (Rastas & Koivunen, 2021). The museum presents itself as an institution that through its "exhibitions, collections and audience work contribute to a culturally diverse Finland and a world in which there is social justice" (Helinä Rautavaara Museum, n.d.). As such, the Helinä Rautavaara Museum connects with a larger shift in the museum sector towards multi-vocal and participatory exhibitions and inclusion of previously marginalised groups, their stories, and perspectives. (Johansson, 2017). Several scholars have used exhibitions as part of the research process, where the exhibitions provide a space for self-expression and a public forum to address issues related to migration and marginalisation in society. (Schreiber, 2020).

The participants were invited to take part in the study in July 2020 via networks and professionals working

with undocumented migrants and asylum seekers: social workers, NGOs, and volunteers, as well as through day centres for undocumented people. Eventually, 15 men and four women joined the research; however, not all were able to take part in it. One of the women was deported shortly after the project began and one of the men was unable to attend the interview due to anxiety and other mental health problems. Most of the participants in our study are men, partly due to the fact that men are overrepresented in the day centers where we recruited participants. There are many reasons why undocumented women are extremely difficult to reach. Finland has only gradually come to realize that women and men need their own special forms of services, and services for women are still in development. This imbalance is reflected in the composition of the participants of this study.

The participants photographed their everyday lives for one week. On the side, they kept a voice or written diary about the digital aspects of their everyday life. After the diaries were completed, the participants were interviewed individually. All participants met individually with the researcher and a translator, who discussed the study setting, aims, and ethics of the research with them. Seven participants wanted to participate in the photography workshop in addition to writing diaries. They met again with the researcher, the photographer, and a translator (if needed). These seven people were in heterogeneous life situations: One had a newly received permanent residence permit but had severe trouble with family re-uniting and another one had a temporary residence permit. The rest were undocumented and hiding from authorities, save for one, who had just been denied asylum and was still living in the reception centre. The ethnic backgrounds of the participants were also diverse: Two were from North Africa, two from Central Africa, one from the Middle East, and three from Central Asia. One African participant gave up the photography workshop after the camera of their mobile phone broke which was particularly unfortunate due to its relevance in the everyday life.

One to three images from each participant were chosen by the participants, photographer Katja Tähjä, and researchers to be presented in a photographic exhibition at the Helinä Rautavaara Museum. The exhibition titled *Unprotected*, with 19 images, was staged beside and as a continuance of the previously set exhibition *Those Who Left* (Lähteneet). *Those Who Left* included photographs and artefacts of people who had fled their home countries and sought refuge in Europe. While *Those Who Left* included images by professional photographers Katja Tähjä and Anna Autio, *Unprotected* continued the theme, this time through the images taken by the undocumented themselves. Before the public opening of the exhibition in October 2020, the participants gathered at the museum with the researchers and Katja Tähjä for the workshop. In the workshop, the participants discussed the images, the process of taking pictures, the thoughts and feelings they evoked, and the ways in which they connected with digital life and their life situations.

Since we are dealing with a vulnerable group, our research requires particular sensitivity and a sense of trust. We are committed to ethical principles of confidentiality, openness, and doing no harm (Black, 2003). In line with the reciprocal research process, as the participants give their time to our study, we do our best in helping them in their situation and legal cases with information, advice, and help in official hearings if asked for. One researcher in our group is voluntarily working with an association to support undocumented migrants and is therefore well informed and trusted to help with legal issues.

We are aware of the unequal power relations between the participants and the researchers in this research setting. Therefore, we pay particular attention to ethical guidelines of research and possibilities to advance collaborative methods. There is no denying that the researchers have definitional power in research even if the project stems from ideas of collaborative knowledge production. This is something we consider important to acknowledge. We follow the idea of constructing knowledge as a joint effort that forefronts the voice of the undocumented but also "recognises the power relations where they emerged" (Saltsman & Majidi, 2021, p. 4).

To protect the identity of the research participants, we do not use any names or pseudonyms and have removed features that might disclose aspects of their identity. We refer to the sources in the research data with numerical identification (Diary 1, Interview 1, etc.).

The analysis of the data is built around themes that emerged in the photographic exhibition and discussion. These themes are discussed and analysed in juxtaposition with the diary, interview, and workshop data. While our main attention is on the meanings provided by the photographic workshop participants, additional background data is also provided by the whole corpus of the data. In what follows, we introduce the insights from these discussions and those expressed in the interviews and diaries.

4. From Secrecy to the Public: The Undocumented in Finland

A diverse group of people live undocumented in Finland, following a negative asylum or residence permit decision, or the expiry of a visa or residence permit. We use the term "undocumented" which has become established in the use of human rights organizations, human rights experts, and researchers in Finland and is considered to carry a minimal amount of stigma, referring to a situation where there is no document enabling a permitted stay. We acknowledge that one term can hardly capture the different contexts and life situations that people have. The undocumented comprise a heterogeneous group of people. Most people living in Finland

without a residence permit have entered the country completely legally, either as asylum seekers, with a short-term visa, or with a residence permit. Their situations can be varied—They may have applied for a new residence permit, appealed against a negative decision, or simply considered returning too dangerous and stayed. They may not be able to be deported to their state of nationality.

It is impossible to know exactly how many are undocumented in Finland, as they do not appear in the population information system or other registers. The number and backgrounds of the undocumented have changed recently as legalisation of residence has been made more difficult by legislative changes. According to different NGOs, the number of undocumented workers has increased significantly since the end of 2016. By 2020, there were at least 4,000–5,000 undocumented people in Finland, depending on the definition. Many live in the Helsinki metropolitan area, fewer in other large cities and a minority in rural areas and small towns (Jauhiainen & Tedeschi, 2021).

The everyday life of the undocumented is marked by constant uncertainty about the future. Many fear being caught and therefore avoid the authorities. As undocumented people in Finland cannot turn to the authorities for aid in most cases, they are vulnerable to exploitation and various forms of abuse. The undocumented are not part of society's basic services, so they depend completely on their employers, spouses, or other personal networks, and a few services provided by the third sector such as day centres. The pain of having to keep things secret runs throughout the participants' diaries and interviews. They tell stories of life as a permanent struggle against authorities, "being found," and then deported.

The experience of marginalization is emphasized through media representations that tie the undocumented to particular spaces of illegality, such as the border or detention facilities (Canelo, 2020). A photographic exhibition, based on images by the undocumented, may then challenge the dominant representations and hypervisuality of the undocumented. As argued by Schreiber (2020), a form of agency can be realised when the undocumented speak of their private experiences and choose how they want to portray their lives and themselves. Since our research consists mostly of male participants, it doesn't diversify the existing male-dominated public imagery of the undocumented migrants or shed light in the possible gendered inequalities in digital media use. However, the focus on everyday life can challenge the stereotypical representations of male migrants as dangerous and threatening to society and open up their experienced vulnerabilities to the wider public.

The pandemic formed a special context for the research. Due to the rapid spread of Covid-19 in the spring of 2020, the Finnish government declared a state of emergency and the first three-week lockdown began on March 8 and was extended until mid-June. The lockdown closed schools and daycares and a widespread recommendation for telework came into effect. Restrictions on assembly were imposed, public facilities were closed first, and eventually the regional government agency imposed strict restrictions on private operators as well. These restrictions weakened some services provided for the marginalized and vulnerable groups such as the homeless and the undocumented. By August 2020, online work and the use of facemasks were recommended nationally. The second lockdown started in the autumn of 2020 just after the photography exhibition opened. This time the lockdown did not close primary schools or daycare, but for other groups it was as isolating as the first one. All public spaces were closed, and masks were demanded.

The pictures taken by the undocumented in our research show the ordinariness of everyday life and bring out the complexity of being on the margins of society. Among the pictures, we see mundane moments such as having coffee, a modest birthday celebration with a doughnut, and a joyful picture of hand-picked raspberries. Photos of lakes, woods, and a heart-shaped cloud convey beauty in the everyday but also a sense of longing and loneliness. Some images convey friends or family members, and many depict mobile phones, wires, and screens that maintain connections with the world around them.

In what follows, we focus on three images in particular that convey the central themes that came out of the discussions, diaries, and interviews in connection to digital everyday life. They illustrate the ways in which visibility and invisibility shape everyday life and the vulnerabilities that emerge in this life situation, particularly those connected to digital media and communication rights. These themes are material connectivity, selfies, and non-privacy.

5. Material Connectivity

Figure 1 depicts a white charger in the centre of the image against a soft grey texture that appears to be a bedsheet. The charger is surrounded by a circle of wires and a pair of grey headphones. Together, they form a modest bundle that's a familiar necessity for many. The image is plain, yet intimate. In its simplicity, it displays the presence and relevance of digital infrastructures in daily life. It speaks of the way material conditions of the digital become accentuated in a situation where affordable Wi-Fi, good connections, and access to charging are not always self-evident.

The participant who took this picture is a young North African who has been in Finland for over two years but never applied for a residence permit. The participant is interested in technology and dreams of a job in digital technology. With this particular picture, the participant wanted the viewer to understand how concrete the "small things that matter in life" are (Diary 17). In discussion with the workshop team, the participant also talked about the need to have a mobile phone, charger, and

headphones always available, and this is something that now connects most people, so there was a point in picturing the device that shows us how similar we are despite differences in legal status.

Figure 1. Small things that matter in life.

The relevance of smartphone technology as an everyday infrastructure for people in precarious situations stated in earlier research (Gillespie et al., 2018; Latonero & Kift, 2018; Leurs, 2017; Ponzanesi, 2019) is also present in the outcomes of the photographic workshop. At the moment of fleeing, smartphone apps are used to translate, discover routes and border closures, discern costs, determine the best destinations, find reliable smugglers, avoid the police and the border guards, document journeys, and follow news about migration and policy in Europe. Described as a digital passage, Latonero and Kift (2018) discuss digital media as a new infrastructure of refugee journeys.

The first thing the participants told us they did when they arrived in Finland was to get a SIM card and message their families that they were safe. Sometimes, they looked for their families with their digital devices. Smartphones can help with integration in the host country and, most importantly, maintain ties and support family and friends abroad (Alencar, 2018; Leurs, 2019). For the undocumented, who live in a constant state of uncertainty, smartphones offer a practical way to reduce experiences of anxiety and fear by connecting with someone important. According to the participants in this study, this communication is vital to their sense of security and well-being. At the same time, the smartphone as a device causes experiences of anxiety and fear, because it reminds them of "things back home" via news and renews worries for their loved ones or reminds them of their traumatic pasts as explained by one of the participants:

> All the time, I could not stop thinking about what I saw on Facebook. For example, people being killed, children being killed. There was one piece of news, a whole village, Taliban, had burned. These kinds of things. I deleted [Facebook] temporarily. I wasn't sure if I would put Facebook back again. But then again, what if my mom and dad [want to] find me. I continue with Facebook, post images, if mom and dad, or big brother see them, that I am here. (Interview 5)

To make digital media use more secure, several tactics are adopted. Some participants simply gave up their phones while travelling due to the fear of being traced or concerns that their data was being interpreted in a wrong way. Some expressed fear of digital surveillance by the authorities in their country of origin, but they also expressed fear that the authorities in Finland may locate and eventually deport them by tracking their smartphones.

Many of the participants knew of the different security features of different apps and used mostly WhatsApp, Telegram, or Signal to secure unmonitored communication. The participants explained how they try to protect themselves by sticking to encrypted apps, using pseudonyms, avoiding open social media groups, and changing SIM cards as often as possible. However, even if using smartphones increases the risk of surveillance, giving up their use seemed impossible. The phone is a pocket archive (Leurs, 2017) that carries everything valuable to them: pictures of family and friends, music, video clips, and copies of important personal documents. Some of the most valuable possessions of undocumented migrants are their personal and legal documents. These documents serve as evidence of their lives before fleeing their country of origin. Some participants in our study used their smartphones also to capture and archive different milestones during the journey: For instance, when making it to another country or getting released from border police custody; moments of fear in the Aegean sea, terror and violence when facing the border patrol in Hungary and Croatia; and moments of joy with friendly people or co-travellers were treasured and saved in phones (Diary 2). On the other hand, some participants expressed fear of documenting anything and even took their SIM cards away occasionally "to be safe" (Interview 5).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, charging phones and finding public places with free Wi-Fi has been a perpetual problem for the undocumented. Free Wi-Fi calls and messages account for one of the main sources of connection to global social networks:

> And when they closed malls and libraries and all it was difficult to find a place to charge the phone. The guards didn't let you stop anywhere indoors. It was really awkward, even though there is a wireless network in almost every location in the center. To us, it meant you can only stay home if you want to be somehow connected. If you have a home. I sometimes think about what this means to some of my friends who live seven in one studio apartment. (Diary 4)

Thus, the second lockdown meant increased constant worry about access to the internet and made it difficult for the participants to regularly contact family and friends. This illustrates what has been described as "information precarity" (Wall et al., 2016). The fact that looking for free Wi-Fi was still part of their lives, after several years of arriving in Finland, caused a sense of disappointment and despair. One of the participants described that the pandemic made them realise the totality of exclusion from society and "normal" life.

The experiences of the participants speak of the ways in which a smartphone and digital media as material devices operates as fairway to communication rights. Smartphones are used for essential information to survive, to connect with family, and to find ways to live in a new environment. However, these aspects of communication rights cannot be pursued freely. They are subject of constant material struggles of access, pursued through forced invisibility and therefore partial to start with.

6. Hidden Selfies

Figure 2 depicts a bright summer day by the lake. Most of the image is covered by a medium close-up of a person with curly light brown hair, baseball cap, and mirrored sunglasses. The person looks towards the camera with a faint smile. The image is taken against the light, so it covers most features. Behind the person, who is possibly a woman, we see the clear blue sky and the sun, making a bridge of light to the water. The image conveys a fragile moment of happiness.

The participant who took this image pondered carefully how to take a selfie without being visible. The contrast with the emergence of digital photography and the surge of selfies as a ubiquitous practice is striking. The selfies taken by the undocumented aim at being unrecognisable; however, the pictures can still be full of meaningful details that help interpret how they want to be seen. These selfies are often crafted with lights and shadows. Instead of centring ones' face, images may capture a part of the body, hand, or foot, or a reflection of shadows on the wall. They capture the desire to be part of the social media world and to be connected with others. Selfies operate on multiple levels as technologies of self, identity, and citizenship. They re-narrate identities through a predefined structure, one connected to social connectivity and temporality of presentness (Nikunen, 2018). Selfies are often critiqued as self-centred and individualistic (Cruz & Thornham, 2015); however, as Senft and Baym (2015) argue, selfies can capture and evoke a variety of meanings. Chouliaraki (2017) uses the remediation of migrant and refugee selfies in mainstream news as a case study of symbolic bordering that appropriates, marginalises, or displaces their digital testimonies in Western news media. Nemer and Freeman (2015), who have researched the use of selfies among urban youth in Brazilian favelas, argue that selfies can be a way to assume a voice—or to be seen—for the ones who have only limited access to the public. The simultaneous presence and non-presence illustrate the creativity in assuming a way to use the right to express oneself. A selfie is a documentation of a passing moment and a chance for subjects to show off a special side of themselves. Selfies are intimate because they represent a personal experience that is also social, taken for the purpose of sharing. The participants in the study wanted to share their pictures and moments of their lives just like the celebrities they follow as described below:

> Already in the morning I take a picture of me. It starts my day, I tell my friends how I feel. I use different picture frames and effects and edit my pictures if I feel like it. Then I might make a post or an update with a beautifully put-up Arabic saying that describes my feelings. But these are never for public, only for people I know and trust. So, it does not include my exhusband even, these are very private. (Diary 2)

Figure 2. A hidden selfie.

Selfies also depict what Leurs (2019) has described as transnational affective care work. The participants expressed the need to assure their families that they are OK by sending selfies and messages that convey a sense of ordinary everyday life. The fact that this was done even if it is risky speaks of the importance of the right to be connected with family and friends. This became embodied through the workshop discussion when one participant discussed an image where he poses together with his family and explained the support he gets from his family. Another participant, who came to Finland by herself became extremely emotional and explained that she missed her family deeply. Being in contact with the family was voiced as extremely important, as a form of (self-)care, yet in many ways challenging in the social media context. These examples speak of the relevance of communication rights for family life and the difficulties the undocumented face when pursuing those rights.

As discussed above, the participants use substantial time to control and manage their social media presence by restricting groups to only the closest and by using apps that are considered safe. However, even these efforts may not be enough as datafied social media collapse multiple contexts and audiences in ways that complicate the possibility of managing separate profiles and create a sense of uncontrollability (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Here, the hidden selfies evidence the precarious life situations that exclude one from society and the underlying deep desire to be connected with others, even from the shadows.

7. Non-Private Everyday

Figure 3 depicts a room with two bunk beds. The top beds seem empty without mattresses. One of them is filled with things—a backpack, clothes, and towels. The lower beds are unmade, and an orange towel hangs on the end of the other bed. Light glances through the window, making shadows on the walls. Beneath the window, there's an empty mattress. A pair of black shoes stand in the middle of the floor. The image conveys a sense of not being there, not belonging. The empty beds, backpacks, white walls, and lonely shoes speak of temporariness. People are not here to stay. They are here, but not present. The generativity of bunk beds reminds us of an institution, a boarding school, a prison, a hospital, or a reception centre, rather than a cosy, private home.

The picture was taken by a participant who had been living in two different reception centres but was undocumented at the moment of the workshop. With this picture, the participant wanted to draw attention to the difficulties of having to live in a reception centre. In the workshop, this participant spoke most vocally about the importance of shedding light on the difficult life situation of the undocumented. Most images taken by this participant reflected a similar sense of melancholy and loneliness, expressed through the aesthetics of quiet non-presence. The images were devoid of people, capturing the silence of buildings and the calm beauty of nature. The participant described the image in these words: "I want to show my moods and they aren't always

Figure 3. I am here alone.

beautiful. I am here alone, and my daily life is gloomy. The reception centre has not been a safe place for me" (Diary 7).

Most participants had been in a reception centre at some point during their journey. Life in the reception centre is characterised by a lack of privacy and the fact that they have to deal with their own emotions and those of others with little privacy: sorrow, depression, disappointment, aggression—but joy and happiness as well. Living with many types of people is described as arduous and challenging. "You have to live in tight spaces and close to unfamiliar people who come from different cultures" described one participant who added that "these strange people are also stressed and emotionally unpredictable, for the future of everyone is uncertain" (workshop discussion). Different symptoms are constantly in the air—for example, tearfulness, ferocity, introversion, or hyperactivity. The transfers from one housing unit to another do not promote a feeling of security—and there is the constant fear of being re-transferred. During the pandemic, reception centres have been risky, as the affection rate of the virus has been exceptionally high in these facilities. One of the participants describes this additional pressure during the pandemic as follows:

> Here in Helsinki, I have some Afghan friends or only two people I can call my friends, but they live in refugee camps, and I cannot meet them because of the corona. The whole camp has been in quarantine, and you cannot go in there. And they are both also very depressed. They have a lot of going, no residence permits and one of them lost his job because of Corona. So, they are my friends, but it is not always good for me to see them. (Diary 9)

Life at the reception centre is also carefully controlled: There is a set of ground rules that residents must follow and that can be demanding for people with emotional stress and trauma. A good example of inflexible rules and rigid control is that the participant who still lived in the reception centre lost his daily allowance because he was participating in the photography workshop instead of taking care of a cleaning shift. No negotiation or alternative arrangement was possible; however, eventually, he was compensated through the research project. Every day is also filled with arguments with residents, loss of temper, shouting, and even abuse of power. In this context, the digital world provides an avenue to escape, connect with friends, or travel to other worlds and imagine different lives. According to the participants, the smartphone is a haven and the only possible place for privacy when living in a reception centre. During the pandemic, as several public places have been closed, the affective space of digital media accumulates its value as an imaginary world where one can follow the life of others, as a space of anticipation, hopes, dreams, and resilience (Gillespie et al., 2018). As Twigt (2018, p. 8) points out in her research on digital devices among Iraqi refugees in Jordan, digital technologies orient towards hope, to make the current life situation bearable. The participant in our study, who took the picture above, had an active, shielded Instagram profile with many followers. For this participant life on Instagram provided a stark contrast to the confined non-privacy of the reception centre and an opportunity to use the right to express oneself.

8. Conclusions

The world of being undocumented concerns radical experiences of invisibility, dispossession, and disappearance. To be considered illegal, susceptible, and a danger to society affects one's sense of self and trust in the possibilities to change things. The pictures of the undocumented speak of courage to show their joie de vivre, love for the family, and vulnerability in their self-portraits. The images are powerful acts to assume communication rights to humanise the ones who are considered "surplus humanity" (Ticktin, 2010). With the mundane moments of life, they point to a deep desire to live life as ordinary and the impasse of not being able to do that. They suggest a critical awareness attained to a position from which they can speak. Even the process of taking pictures to an assumed audience was felt as meaningful, allowing them to act and to be seen in society, as described by one participant:

> I feel like you're listening to me through pictures. I get energy when the people around me can see what my life is like. It feels like I'm not alone. That's why I don't want to give up but look for solutions so that my new life can begin. (Diary 17)

This study contributes to the research of digital media in the everyday life of undocumented migrants and refugees on several levels. While previous research has explored digital media as a site of participation, drawing mainly on theorizations of participation and citizenship, this study is able to show the contradictions of participation in a datafied media environment. The study confirms the fundamental importance of communication rights—to get information, express oneself, and be in contact with family and friends safely— as central for the survival and wellbeing of people in precarious life situations. However, the study also shows that the necessity to remain constantly cautious and only partially part of the digital social world speaks of the digital bordering of communicative rights, which is intensified by the logic of datafication and surveillance. Visibility on digital platforms then is not a simple pathway to participation and citizenship. Visibility is also coerced through platform infrastructure in ways that can cause uncertainty and danger. While Leurs (2017) points out the ways in which refugees can digitally make claims for their human rights; our study also points out how the digital, datafied media environment operates as a site of constant surveillance

and struggle for communicative rights. These struggles take place on the material level of digital devices, chargers, and access, but also on the level of self-expression on social media platforms. The nuanced understanding of the contradictions of visibility in the context of datafied platforms contributes to the previous research and challenges the field to engage more with the interrelations of datafication and visibility.

Second, this study expands the methodological approach from interviews and observation to more participatory and multimodal forms of knowledge production. The photographic workshop provided a space for countering stereotypical representations as well as offering knowledge from experience through visual artwork and workshop reflections. Such a multidimensional approach opened the complexities and contradictions of lived experience in ways that can contribute to research more than the taken for granted idea of voice (Saltsman & Majidi, 2021).

At the same time, it is worth noticing that participating can require a lot from people in a precarious life situation. Sharing details of one's everyday life to the public can cause anxiety and fear and therefore the voluntariness of participation should be clear throughout the workshop process. Covid-19 has fortified many mechanisms of exclusion in different ways. The second lockdown also affected the exhibition and closed the doors of the museum only five days after the opening. In this way then, the exhibition was only briefly available to the public and Covid-19 severely limited the goals of the exhibition. To make up for this loss, the images will be made available on the project website.

Overall, the photographic exhibition operated as a space of knowledge production, encounter, and reflection in ways that may further imaginative politics for the future. The workshop brought together people in similar life situations, who were scattered in different parts of Finland, some with no other acquaintance with these difficulties. Sharing their stories with others in a similar situation entailed emancipatory power. To see ones' experience in someone else's story showed that one is not alone. These insights and encounters may provide a more longitudinal impact on the life of the participants than the public display of the images. They can potentially create pathways to solidarity struggles in terms of legal rights and status of the undocumented.

Drawing on these reflections, the study challenges the field to develop more participatory, multimodal approaches in ways that enhance collaborative knowledge from experience and provide research that becomes meaningful and supportive for the ones who participate in it.

Acknowledgments

This research has received funding from the Academy of Finland, Grant No. 327394.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2022, Volume 10, Issue 2, Pages 230–240
https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i2.5051

Article

Venezuelan Refugees in Brazil: Communication Rights and Digital Inequalities During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Submitted: 2 November 2021 | Accepted: 24 February 2022 | Published: 30 June 2022

Abstract
The article analyzes the experiences of Venezuelan refugees in the city of Boa Vista (Brazil) in exercising their communication rights in the context of social and digital inequalities aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This article outlines a perspective on digital inequalities from a rights-based approach, which focuses on granting the right to communicate to those who lack it rather than providing access to technology without highlighting the structural changes that are needed for promoting representation and participation of marginalized communities. Building on online and face-to-face interviews with 12 Venezuelan refugees, we identified three scenarios where inequalities regarding access and uses of ICTs are materialized: (a) reduction of digital communication interactions and affective networks due to the deterioration of connectivity in Venezuela and the suspension of local communication services provided by humanitarian agencies; (b) barriers to accessing information about rights and basic services, such as education, health, work, and shelter, given the reduction of communication channels and the closure of reference centers supporting refugees; and (c) increased exposure to fake news, scams, and hate speech in social media platforms and message apps, generating disinformation and enhancing risks of exploitation and marginalization of refugees.

Keywords
citizen communication; communication rights; Covid-19; digital inequalities; Venezuelan refugees

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Media and Migration in the Covid-19 Pandemic: Discourses, Policies, and Practices in Times of Crisis" edited by Vasiliki Tsagkroni (Leiden University), Amanda Alencar (Erasmus University Rotterdam), and Dimitris Skleparis (Newcastle University).

1. Introduction

With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, one of the solutions found to live the "new normal" was the digitalization of human relationships in various scenarios and experiences. However, the disparities in access, domain, and use of ICTs in Brazil unveiled the bigger picture of digital inequality among vulnerable social groups, such as people in situations of forced displacement. In the current context of social and digital inequality aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic, the present article focuses on the exercise of the right to communication, through the experiences of Venezuelan refugees living in Boa Vista, the capital city of Roraima, which is a Brazilian state located in the Amazon region within the Brazil–Venezuela border.

Between 2017 and 2021, 305,000 Venezuelan forced migrants arrived in Brazil (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2021), expanding the transnational route of this migration through the state of Roraima. The arrival of Venezuelans has produced spatial and human transformations that revitalize the debate around

migrant (in)mobility and the struggle for life, challenging methodological nationalism based on border containment (Velasco et al., 2021).

The cross-border movement in Northwestern Brazil established an institutionalized migration governance through the so-called "Operação Acolhida" (Operation Welcome), coordinated by the Brazilian army responsible for border planning processes, reception (related to shelter management), and relocation, which consists of providing mobility of refugees to other regions of Brazil. The operation relies on the work of actors from local governments, UN agencies, INGOs, and civil society organizations. As part of the Brazilian response to Venezuelan displacement (IOM, 2021), two "regularization" routes allowed Venezuelans to apply for a residency permit or refugee status, reflecting the complexities that drive human mobility and challenge the refugee/migrant binary. Despite awareness of the problematic application of these political categories and their implications on people's lives, the use of the term "refugee(s)" in this article is intended solely as a reference to the legal situation of the research participants.

Among the challenges faced by forced migrant populations, the access to continuous and reliable information, communication, and digital connectivity is a key issue in a context where one in two Venezuelans does not feel sufficiently informed and 69% do not have access to Wi-Fi (R4V, 2020). The report published on the information and communication needs of Venezuelan refugees in Boa Vista (REACH, 2018) reveals a general lack of accurate information on various services such as education, health, shelter, and humanitarian assistance—a situation that exposes this population to risks of exploitation and marginalization. Relevant evidence suggests that only 20% of the participants reported receiving reliable information from migration service providers, generating frustration as many stated that more and better communication channels should be provided (REACH, 2018).

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), refugees are 50% less likely than the general population to have a telephone with internet access and 29% of refugee families do not have a telephone (Grandi, n.d.). An expanding literature has emphasized the critical importance of digital media for enabling refugees opportunities for education (Díaz Andrade & Doolin, 2018), employment (Alencar, 2017), health (O'Mara, 2012), and sociocultural interactions (Witteborn, 2018). Considering that 85% of refugees around the globe are in developing countries, many of whom are in extreme poverty (UNHCR, 2018), it is possible to understand the concern of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, stating that "connectivity is not a luxury, it is a lifeline for refugees" (WEFORUM, 2017). Although UNHCR has reflected in numerous reports on the relevance and forms of access to different kinds of information technologies and connectivity for refugees, in practice, fundamental issues about the right to communication remain to be accomplished when it comes to people in situations of social vulnerability. In Roraima, for example, none of the fourteen shelters for Venezuelans has access to connectivity or fixed spaces for phone calls (Cogo et al., 2021). Taking these factors into account, it is important to highlight that the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 for people on the move also generated restrictions regarding this common and vital right for all: the right to communicate.

Considering that communication and mobility, in contexts of forced displacement, walk the same path, the first restriction on Venezuelan mobility imposed by the Brazilian Government was the closure of Brazilian borders as a sanitary measure to prevent the spread of coronavirus (Martuscelli, 2021). Between March 2020 and June 2021, visas were excluded and additional reservations for Venezuelans were imposed, not allowing, for example, those who were outside Brazil, even with a residence visa or family members living in Brazil, to enter the Brazilian territory (Jarochinski Silva & Jubilut, 2020, p. 422). This episode was just one of the many contradictions and distortions that the Brazilian government successively adopted during the pandemic.

Against this background, this study builds on both online and face-to-face interviews with 12 Venezuelan refugees in Boa Vista, to explore inequalities related to the access and use of ICTs among Venezuelans and how this shaped their migration trajectories in Brazil in the context of the pandemic. No previous academic study has investigated how Venezuelan refugees navigate growing digital inequalities characterized by reduced connectivity and exacerbated (online) vulnerabilities during Covid-19 to engage in transnational family communication and obtain information, resources, and rights in their host society. Considering the theme of the thematic issue, it is hoped that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of the pandemic on refugees' communication rights in Latin America and beyond.

2. Right to Communication, Citizenship, and Human Mobility

The right to communication is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights enacted in 1948 by establishing, in article 19, that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" (United Nations, n.d.). Over the last decades, communication has also been claimed as a fundamental human right by institutions such as UNESCO. In the 70s, UNESCO led the debate about a "new world information and communication order," which resulted in the publication, in the 80s, of the report *Many Voices, One World: Communication and Society Today and Tomorrow*, also known as the MacBride Report (United Nations, n.d.). The document formulates a diagnosis and proposes alternatives to the

concentration of communication and media worldwide, to the imbalances in information flows and technological inequalities between the so-called developed and developing countries.

The right to communication belongs to individuals as well as to their groups and communities. In Freire's (1983) seminal work *Liberation Pedagogy*, the right to communicate is linked to an understanding of communication that is not only granted, transmitted, or imposed, but one that is socially constructed and shared. Freire supports the view of communication as a human vocation in its sociocultural and political dimensions, while at the same time calling attention to inequality processes that cut across communication experiences aiming at promoting dialogue, participation, and reciprocity. In this sense, Freire's conception takes on an ethical, humanitarian, and citizen dimension that emphasizes the need for a fair social distribution of resources, including technological assets, which are required for the exercise of the right to communication (Cogo, 1998; Freire, 1983; Lima, 1981).

The theoretical perspective of Paulo Freire inspired experiences and practices of citizen communication developed by popular sectors and movements in Latin America under the different designations of popular, community, dialogic, participatory, and resistance communication (Lima, 1981). Research shows that, in the context of citizen communication, practices that took place in Latin America, especially in the 1970s, social movements began to focus on communication as a human right, such as education or health (see Suzina, 2021). This perspective on communication highlights the idea of social participation in the appropriation, management, production, and distribution of communication resources, in particular those related to media communication technologies, as summarized in notions like citizen communication (Cogo, 2010; Mata, 2006).

Building on Freirian ideas, citizen communication practices sought to promote a shift in the model characterized by vertical mass communication, including the banking model of education that prioritizes the diffusion of contents and the effects of these contents on recipients. These practices privileged a perspective that considers communication as a process in which different social sectors have a voice and act not only as recipients but also as producers of citizen media content developed in relation to the lived experiences and knowledge of these sectors. Here communication is understood and exercised as a horizontal and participatory process situated in the framework of broader political disputes for social change and struggles for equality and democratization of Latin American societies (Cogo, 1998; Peruzzo, 2021). In the Latin American perspective, exercising the right to communicate takes on specific contours when it comes to the experiences of displacement and refuge as this exercise relates to the existence of horizontal spaces of refugee participation in the design and implementation of projects concerning access and uses of communication technologies in forced migration contexts. It is about a form of participation that further implies recognition of refugees' voice and agency, as their own migratory condition leads them to live through continuous precarity and systematic exclusions that undermine their right to speak (Spivak, 2010). Being denied the rights of formal citizens which are given by the government, Leung (2018, p. 26) argues that refugees engage in informal, flexible modes of citizenship, or "bottom-up citizenship," through acts of participation and agency mediated and shaped through digital technologies to claim and expand rights in their communities.

The institutionalization of migration governance through the work of supranational organizations, such as UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations, in collaboration with national and local governments has, in a limited way, allowed the adoption of horizontal processes of participation in refugee reception and integration dynamics. In his research on development communication for social change, Tufte (2013) reminds us that most agencies emphasize the development of vertical spaces of participation where "target populations" through strategic communication interventions are "invited" to engage, obtain knowledge, deliberate, and take part in debates and behavior changes (p. 63). Despite the ability of refugees to exert agency (Lacomba Vázquez & Moraes Mena, 2020; Mezzadra, 2015), the action of international organizations towards migrants has been characterized by power asymmetries and mismatches between institutional approaches that define and control refugees' access and uses of technologies and spontaneous and deviant practices and tactics of technology appropriations by refugees, which are more aligned with their desires, needs, and situated realities. In the framework of an epistemology of migrations, Mezzadra (2015, p. 13) had already highlighted the tensions between structural forces and the subjective capacity for migrant agency, reinvidicating special attention to "the way in which the subjection tools and the subjectivation (coercion and freedom) come into play in the constitution of the field of migration experiences." Further, the author argues for the importance "to bring to light subjective practices of negotiation and contestation of power relations" in specific contexts whereby migratory dynamics unfold (Mezzadra, 2015, p. 13).

By analyzing digital inclusion initiatives in the context of Latin American migration, Cogo et al. (2015) already demonstrated existing discrepancies between the supposed necessities and desires of social groups underpinning these initiatives and the concrete experiences of digital appropriations by end receivers. A focus on the digital practices of Latin American migrants in the cities of Barcelona (Spain) and Porto Alegre (Brazil) allowed the authors to identify creative and "spontaneous" tactics (De Certeau, 1984) in which migrants often dribbled the challenges of access or the lack of knowledge through alternatives that were not foreseen by public policies of digital inclusion. Examples of these creative

tactics are the sharing of technological devices, the use of phone booths and internet cafes, as well as dynamics of informal digital media learning through family members and friends. Specifically focusing on mobile phone appropriations, de Souza e Silva and Xiong-Gum (2020) introduce the concept of "mobile networked creativity" to refer to creative practices emerging from the tactical uses of phone devices by displaced and emplaced populations in the face of digital deprivation and hardships. The authors contend that "mobile networked creativity" as a survival strategy has the potential to challenge power asymmetries and foster community solidarity and care through networks of socio-technical relations (de Souza e Silva & Xiong-Gum, 2020, p. 15). The studies carried out by Alencar (2020), Smets (2018), and Wall et al. (2017) showed how precarious living conditions for Venezuelans in Brazilian shelters and Syrian refugees in Turkish and Jordanian camps shaped the collective sharing of mobile phones among the community as a form of social support, highlighting their agency and resilience in diverse sites of forced displacement.

Cogo et al. (2015, p. 179) suggest that the desire, motivations, and ways in which migrants understand and aspire to technological advantages and appropriations should be a starting point for the development of initiatives and policies of digital inclusion. In this regard, Van Deursen and Van Djik (2014) note that internet advancement reflects many of the socioeconomic aspects and cultural relations shaping the world, including those related to inequalities. Although social inequalities have always existed, the authors highlight that the expansion of the internet has deepened the social gap, turning itself into an active reproducer as well as a potential catalyzer of these inequalities. The consequences of this gap can be seen in the greater access that better-off social groups have to information resources. This gap can increase even more if we consider different social, political, economic, and health sectors where there is a growing supply of online information and services which presuppose the existence of equality in access and distribution of digital resources in society.

From the perspective of democratizing the internet as an aspect of the human right to communication, it is worth noting that the digital divide has deepened in the world because of the Covid-19 pandemic, also highlighting inequalities within social groups such as between men and women, riskier and poorer sectors, residents of rural and urban areas and among migrants and nationals. The inequalities in the access and use of technologies can be observed in the creation and publication of content, participation, and presence of Latin American social sectors in the networks, as well as in the development of skills for using the internet and digital devices. A Covid-19 special report released in July 2021 by the Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean indicates that more than 66.2 million homes in 14 countries in the region do not have an Internet connection. In the specific case of Venezuela, results of the Global Internet Speed Index, published in February 2020, placed the country as the one with the lowest internet speed among Latin American nations (Vasquez & Laya, 2020).

The importance and originality of this study are that it explores in greater detail the impact of digital inequality on the lives of Venezuelan refugees in Northwestern Brazil and how the Covid-19 pandemic has aggravated the condition of digital deprivation for these populations, affecting their communication rights. By examining how Venezuelan refugees cope with limited (or lack of) connectivity throughout the pandemic period, this study aims to contribute new insights into refugees' experiences with ICTs in the context of their migratory trajectories.

3. Methodology

This study used semi-structured and unstructured interviews with twelve Venezuelan refugees living in the city of Boa Vista, conducted by the first author of this article, between May and July 2020. The researcher has been actively working on a range of initiatives aiming at improving refugees' access to ICTs, which helped them engage with the community, explain their role as researcher, invite them to participate in interviews, and provide details of the research study to them.

The selection of participants considered differences based on gender, age, educational levels, marital status, and socioeconomic situation. Rather than aiming for a representative sample, this study considered the diversity and multiplicity of views and experiences from participants' perspectives. In total, seven women and five men were recruited to take part in the study, aged between 19 and 54 years, and living in Brazil between two months and three years. At the time of the research, eight participants were unemployed, and four participants reported being self-employed as day laborers (two men and two women). The interviews took place in the context of Covid-19, in which partial restrictions were imposed by the local government in terms of face-to-face encounters. For this reason, and also taking into account that six participants (Marcos, Ana, Luci, Merlina, Bruno, and Diana) had a smartphone, their interviews were conducted online through WhatsApp. These participants were recruited initially through the researcher's established networks with the Venezuelan community from previous studies. A message was sent via WhatsApp asking if they would like to take part in the research. Those who accepted the invitation were offered phone credits to participate in the interview call. The other six interviews with Venezuelan refugees (Angelina, Dolores, Benjamin, Leonansky, Glivory, and Eduardo), who did not own digital devices, were carried out during an initiative organized by the university as part of its social impact activities, together with Pastoral dos Migrantes (Pastoral for Migrants) and the IOM, to offer digital devices with connectivity and assistance in the registration process for the emergency benefit from the Brazilian Government.

Participants in the face-to-face interviews were recruited on a voluntary basis. When they sought the social service to register themselves for the government's emergency support, at the end of the process, they were asked if they would like to participate in the study. All participants were properly informed about the study goals and scope and that the information they shared with the researcher would be used for academic purposes. During the interviews, participants were asked about the opportunities and challenges of digital access, communication with family members, and obtaining information about services and rights. The first researcher is fluent in Spanish, making it possible to establish direct communication with participants without the intervention of a moderator in the interview process. Interviews lasted 30–45 minutes and were either recorded or annotated after obtaining participants' written and/or oral consent. The names mentioned in the article are pseudonyms in order to protect the privacy of the participants. Ethics approval for this study was granted by the Ethics Review Board of the Federal University of Roraima.

The interviews were transcribed and subsequently subjected to manual coding following the principles of thematic analysis (Boeije, 2009). As a starting point for the analysis of participants' interviews, we relied upon Freire's framework of communication rights as well as empirical understandings of refugees' agency in negotiations of technology use and access in various sites of forced displacement. These insights provided general guidelines and references for interpreting the empirical materials while facilitating engagement with nuances in meaning. Finally, the researchers' engagement in the study of digital media and forced migrations with a specific focus on the agency of refugees as well as on the development of digital projects with and by displaced populations was also considered when analyzing issues of digital and social inequalities in unequal and diverse contexts such as the case of Brazil.

4. Results

In this study, digital inequalities that affect Venezuelans' everyday lives in Brazil are outlined in three themed categories: (a) reduction of digital communication interactions and affective networks; (b) barriers to accessing information, services, and migratory rights; and (c) increased exposure to fake news, hate speech, and dangerous information online. In the following sections, we elaborate on each of these themes.

4.1. Reduction of Digital Communication Interactions and Affective Networks

The first scenario of digital inequality experienced by Venezuelan refugees relates to the decreased use of ICTs in their migratory trajectories in Brazil. The participants stated that they had less access to digital devices such as smartphones and desktop computers, interfering in their communication with their affective networks consisting of family and friends who live in Venezuela. Previous research has established that maintaining transnational family relationships can help refugees deal with the difficulties of life in their new place while regaining a sense of safety and hope (Leurs, 2014; Twigt, 2018). During the pandemic, migration services were constrained and, on some occasions, suspended (Martuscelli, 2021), including access to communication services provided by the public university's technology center and the Red Cross in Boa Vista. For Eduardo, a 44-year-old self-employed respondent who used to work as a mason in Venezuela, the closure of phone service centers resulted in the disruption of communication with his mother in Venezuela. Before the pandemic started, he said he could spend at least a few minutes talking to her using the phone of these centers. As he said: "The last time I spoke to my mother was before the pandemic when the phone services were still working….It's been two months since I heard from her."

Despite increased connectivity limitations, participants devised workarounds to tactically overcome communication constraints with family members (Leung, 2018), engaging in "mobile networked creativity" (de Souza e Silva & Xiong-Gum, 2020). The "creative" uses of mobile phones helped them alleviate their concerns about their families' health situation in the face of Venezuela's precarious responses to the pandemic. In the case of Glivory, a 33-year-old woman living with her son in one of Boa Vista's spontaneous settlements, she commented that the humanitarian actors never offered communication services where she lived, so she used to access the tablets at the university when this service was still available. With the pandemic, Glivory mentioned that she looked for other ways to stay in touch with her family in Venezuela: "Now that people where I live own a phone, they lend it to me and I can quickly talk to my family members to check on their health and if they are protecting themselves from the virus."

At the same time, Venezuelan refugees also link their limitations in terms of family communication to the deterioration of connectivity and energy services in Venezuela (Vasquez & Laya, 2020). The precarious communication infrastructures of public services, according to participants, generate digital inequalities that limit the possibilities of transnational modes of living for refugees, especially regarding transnational family relationships. For example, Bruno, a 31-year-old man, self-employed, who wants to raise money to move to another Brazilian state, shared that it is very difficult to find a state in Venezuela where you have continuous and reliable access to electricity and internet unless you are from a very wealthy family. He still remembers the power outage that hit Venezuela in 2019, when some cities were left without electricity for more than five days, which, according to him, was triggered by the lack of government investment in the energy sector. Glivory added:

> The internet got a lot worse in Venezuela; the signal is very bad, and it is more difficult to communicate. When I manage to borrow a phone to call my family through WhatsApp, the internet is very weak there and it is not possible to talk.

With the worsening of public services of internet and electricity during the Covid-19 pandemic, participants also reported that it became very difficult to send money to Venezuela, and in some cases, they were prevented from having access to bank transfer websites. "We can no longer transfer money in 'real value' using the bank system so that our relatives can receive this money in 'bolivares'; we do this through other people who provide this kind of service," said Benjamin, a 33-year-old man, graduated in Computer Science but currently unemployed. Acknowledging the agency of refugees in developing tactical uses of ICTs in response to increased digital inequality due to the pandemic outbreak provides the opportunity to critically assess the role of unreliable and fragile digital infrastructures in deepening the digital divide for refugee populations (Mezzadra, 2015), and hindering their rights as communication citizens (Cogo, 1999; Freire, 1983).

4.2. Barriers to Accessing Information, Services, and Rights During the Pandemic

In the city of Boa Vista, the reduction of communication channels and closure of refugee support centers during the pandemic created obstacles to obtaining reliable and quality information about rights and basic services, such as education, health, work, and shelter for refugees. Increasingly more central to the humanitarian response, the digitization of activities related to the management of migrants' daily lives gained momentum during the pandemic. This advancement, however, did not account for both inequalities of digital access and the different levels of digital literacy and participation among target audiences of emergency actions, that is, people in situations of social vulnerability (Cogo, 1999; Tufte, 2013). For Madianou (2019), digital innovation in migration contexts can strengthen power asymmetries between refugees and humanitarian agencies, generating inequality and dependency in a structure that dates back to colonial power. At the outset of the pandemic, a significant amount of training, education, and entrepreneurship courses began to be offered online to Venezuelan refugees, generating a feeling of exclusion among those who did not have access to ICTs. This was particularly the case of Leonansky, a 23-year-old man who came to Brazil in search of a job to be able to send resources to her mother in Venezuela. Leonansky said he was unable to attend a training course offered by a humanitarian agency, whereas Glivory shared her young son's feeling of sadness for not being able to follow the school's remote teaching due to the lack of a smartphone:

> I have seen an administration course for refugees offered by the Jesuit Service, but I don't have a smartphone or a computer. I think a lot of people were interested in the course but, because of these inconveniences, they won't do it either. Some have a telephone but no internet, others have internet but no good phone. It gets boring, I was really willing, but I don't have the conditions. (Leonansky)

> I go to school to get the material for my son to study and sometimes I ask someone at the shelter to borrow their mobile phone so that he can follow his classes. He doesn't have the teacher's WhatsApp to answer questions, and I can't help because my Portuguese is not good. It's much harder for him, he's sad about it. (Glivory)

Aside from digital exclusion, asymmetry and dependency also appear as key issues deriving from the digitalization of migration processes and that have become more visible during the pandemic (Madianou, 2019). Here, asymmetry and dependency are related to the challenges brought by top-down communication channels that are aimed at facilitating the work of humanitarian and Brazilian government agencies, instead of reducing (digital) barriers for refugees to access information about their rights and basic services. This finding further corroborates the ideas of Leung (2018), who states that the absence of official citizenship rights among refugees is filled with a condition of precarity when accessing information and digital technologies. Some participants reported having difficulty filling out public digital forms, both due to the lack of access to ICTs and the fact that these documents are only available in Portuguese. Others highlighted the challenges they faced when asking questions using one-way communication apps offered by UN agencies. For instance, Luci, a 54-year-old woman living in one of Boa Vista's refugee shelters, unemployed, commented that she was once part of a WhatsApp group of the Help Platform (UNHCR) and decided to leave the group because no one except for the administrator could write messages in the group. As she said:

> The group did not look good because we need to know a lot of things and want to ask them, especially now in this pandemic….I also left the group because I don't have much phone data and I need to choose what I download.

Another participant expressed the anguish of not being able to denounce human rights violations behind closed doors of public institutions. The comment below illustrates this:

> The company offered us a job and did not deliver what it offered in the relocation process. We never signed a document and now they have told us

> that, because of the pandemic, we will only work until the end of May; all the whistle-blower bodies are only working online. They [Operation Welcome] brought us to Boca do Acre [Northern state of Brazil]. I need a contact from UNHCR, IOM, or the military. I would like them to hear my family's story, many Venezuelans can still be deceived. (Marcos, 37 years old, man, migrated to Brazil with his two teenage children and his pregnant wife; unemployed)

In the context of vertical communication processes by international agencies and the challenges to access ICTs among refugees, it is important to highlight the commitment of small civil society organizations that, through a strategy closer to the reality of vulnerable communities, offered digital services during the pandemic. As mentioned above, initiatives like those of the Pastoral dos Migrantes in partnership with the public university offered connected devices and help with the registration of the telephone chip in the Federal government app called Emergency Assistance. The program was created by the Brazilian government in April 2020 to support workers and the unemployed during the Covid-19 crisis. Registration in the program was only possible through the website or application of a Brazilian government bank. As reported by Eduardo:

> We came here to register for emergency assistance from the Brazilian Government. But since we do not have a phone, we had to buy the chip for R$10.00 *reais* [$2.00 US dollars]; it's expensive. After registration, we will put it on a friend's cell phone to see the code and withdraw the money. If I didn't have to spend the money on food, I'd buy a phone.

Consequently, the experiences shared by participants revealed how digital responses by humanitarian actors can generate a verticalization that is inaccessible to the basic human right, defined here as the act of communicating. It is noteworthy that the right to communication—perspective postulated by Freire (1983)—relates to the understanding of communication as knowledge not only granted, transmitted, or imposed, but socially constructed and shared. This conception thus has an ethical, humanitarian, and citizen dimension that highlights the need for a fair social distribution of resources, including technological resources, necessary for the exercise of the right to communication (Cogo, 1998; Freire, 1983; Lima, 1981).

4.3. Increased Exposure to Fake News, Hate Speech, and Dangerous Information Online

The challenge of obtaining accessible and specific information on Covid-19 as a fundamental right exacerbated Venezuelans' vulnerability to fake news and rumors on social media platforms and message apps, generating misinformation and enhancing the risks of exploitation and marginalization of refugees (Camargo & Alencar, 2020). In this study, some participants said they received fake news via WhatsApp, on behalf of the UN, WHO, the World Bank, offering food stamps, in dollars, to Venezuelans. As one participant said:

> I saw this news about aid in dollars to buy food. It's very frustrating to receive this kind of news right now, because if you need help for food, even if it looks like it's a lie, you are in doubt and want it to be true. I don't understand why people like to cheat those in need. (Marcos, 37 years old, man, petroleum engineer, who moved to Boa Vista in search of a better way of life for him and his wife, after losing his job in Caracas)

Others commented that they received regular WhatsApp messages prescribing medicine and diets against the coronavirus: "I think some of these medicines are good and help protect ourselves; I, for example, heard that eating lots of sugar makes you more susceptible to be infected, so I stopped eating sugar" (Diana, a 19-year-old single woman from Zulia State, unemployed, living in Boa Vista for eight months).

In Brazil, WhatsApp is leading the rank of the most downloaded app with the highest number of users. The Reuters report on digital news consumption indicates that 83% of Brazilians use WhatsApp more than any other platform. The app is also used by 48% of Brazilians for news consumption, as well as 57% who see the platform as an important source of information. WhatsApp has been, however, a central source of dissemination of disinformation in Brazil, especially from a part of the far-right represented by President Bolsonaro in the context of the 2018 presidential elections (Soares et al., 2021). In a study on disinformation about Covid-19 in WhatsApp in Brazil, Soares et al. (2021) highlight that the pandemic has not been addressed as a public health issue but framed as a political-ideological polarized debate between "us" versus "them." Disinformation was used to strengthen a narrative in favor of the actual president Bolsonaro in a moment of crisis for the government. Besides, the authors observe that conspiracy theories, oftentimes rooted in opinions, were the most common type of disinformation spread in the messages shared on WhatsApp.

At the same time, Venezuelans reported being the target of false news and xenophobia on Facebook and WhatsApp. Their experiences involve, for example, viewing xenophobic memes on Facebook, with content opposing the right of refugees to receive emergency aid from the Brazilian government, or Facebook posts accusing Venezuelans of congesting the public healthcare system and disseminating the virus. In this regard, Martuscelli (2021, p. 12) showed that previous incidents of discrimination or the fear of being discriminated against led many refugees to avoid accessing public health services even if they got sick during the pandemic.

Similar to the dissemination of hate speech on social media, threats containing serious risks were directed at refugees in the context of their digital experiences during the pandemic. Exposure to virtual scams was particularly prominent in the interview data. Participants highlighted the existence of WhatsApp groups with themes of chains and financial pyramids, which in Brazil are configured as illegal practices. Another reported problem was the lack of information about the entry of Venezuelans into Brazil during the pandemic since the country closed its borders to nonnationals. This created much uncertainty, mainly because many Venezuelans had family members living in Brazil and had to look for information about alternative routes to enter the country. According to participants, there were WhatsApp groups that offered information and rates for the crossing between Santa Elena de Uairén (Venezuela) and Pacaraima (Brazil) through *las trochas* (trails), known as alternative paths, which do not have migratory control of governments, located between the border of Brazil and Venezuela:

> My husband stayed in Brazil and I came to Venezuela to leave my children with my mother because we lost our jobs to the pandemic. My financial benefit from Bolsa Família [social assistance program of the Brazilian government] is available, but my husband cannot withdraw the money. I don't know to who I have to explain my situation so that they can allow me and my kids to cross the border. I received messages via WhatsApp that offer services to go through *las trochas* on foot, but it must be at least R$600.00 [Brazilian currency]. They say it's reliable, but it's also dangerous, but we manage to cross. I need to go back to Brazil with my children. (Ana, a 26-year-old woman, mother of three children, self-employed)

5. Conclusion

This article considered Freire's perspective on communication rights to analyze the impact of digital inequalities on the everyday lived experiences of Venezuelan refugees in Brazil during the Covid-19 pandemic. The current study found that Venezuelan refugees faced increased levels of digital precarity in terms of family communication, access to information about services, rights, and exposure to misinformation online. First, we highlighted how the suspension of communication services as part of humanitarian responses to the pandemic in Brazil combined with unreliable technology services in Venezuela undermined refugees' rights as communication citizens. Furthermore, the digital infrastructures put in place by government and humanitarian organizations amid Covid-19 contributed to enhancing social exclusion and marginalization of refugee populations through the adoption of technology solutions that bypassed the realities and priorities of Venezuelans living through a pandemic. Finally, it was argued that refugees' access to precarious information landscapes online not only affects their well-being and health, but also hinders safe pathways to mobility during and beyond the pandemic.

These results are in accord with recent studies indicating that top-down technology solutions can potentially enhance discrepancies and reinforce power imbalances between refugee and governance actors (Cogo et al., 2015; Madianou, 2019). In Brazil, the lack of information adapted for culturally and linguistically diverse communities (Martuscelli, 2021), as well as problems related to connectivity, usability, design, and functionalities of government websites and digital services systems can deprive refugees of accessing relevant information about their rights and services. In the case of the government financial assistance due to Covid-19, members of civil society organizations often act as translators or mediators in assisting refugees to access digital services, as many do not have a phone device and a SIM card registered in their names for obtaining this benefit. Despite the relevance of NGOs and migrant-led organizations in providing digital support to refugees during the pandemic and beyond, we still do not know much about the role of these small organizations and refugee communities in filling the gap between top-down institutionalized digital governance and technology deprivations faced by refugees. This is an important issue for future research. At the same time, this study provides some support for the conceptual premise that the development of communication spaces and practices among the forcibly displaced is increasingly shaped through the technological infrastructures available both locally and transnationally. In this regard, Venezuelans' practices of mobile phone sharing emerge as agentic forms of exercising their right to communicate and a response to migration systems that use technology as a tool of oppression and exclusion (Mezzadra, 2015). Further research should be undertaken to investigate the potential of refugees' creative and effective adoptions of technologies as acts of self-governance both at the individual and collective level, with the potential to mobilize resources beyond their personal uses and needs and that can shape the future of their own communities.

Although the current study is based on a small sample of participants, the findings offer valuable insights into refugees' media use experiences to negotiate their social, economic, and cultural conditions amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The urgency of understanding the impact of digital inequalities on refugees' migratory experiences is increasingly becoming more pressing, and yet the Covid-19 pandemic and the effects of lockdown around the world have configured dynamic trajectories for engagement with ICTs, such as increased digitization of social relations and daily lives. In a moment, post-Covid-19 crisis recovery is also envisioned around current and future potentials of digital technologies and systems. This study, therefore, reinforces the need to call attention to power relationships that mediate and emerge within opportunities for and barriers to ICT

adoption in order to move away from techno-centric approaches that do not fully engage with the sociocultural and political situatedness of refugees' digital experiences. While Covid-19 sharpened the relevance of this issue, the challenge of understanding the complexity of digital inequalities in forced migration is a problem that requires evidence-based policy directions, especially considering South–South migration contexts.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Venezuelan refugees who shared their life stories with us.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2022, Volume 10, Issue 2, Pages 241–252
https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i2.4942

Article

The Refugee Issue in the Greek, German, and British Press During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Submitted: 14 October 2021 | Accepted: 21 February 2022 | Published: 30 June 2022

Abstract
The media hold an essential role in circulating information, disseminating knowledge, constructing representations, shaping ideologies, and influencing contemporary societies. Since the outburst of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, their attention has been mostly paid to the protection and the health situation of citizens worldwide. Although millions of refugees are also exposed to a new risk with their vulnerable position being deteriorated, the refugee issue in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic seems to have been downgraded. In this regard, the current article explores to what extent the refugee issue was salient in the Greek, German, and British press during the pandemic. At the same time, it looks at how the media outlets in all three countries addressed it, focusing on the key topics reported and the interpretive schemata of the pertinent coverage. We use a qualitative content analysis, examining a sample of newspaper articles that were published between 1 January 2021 and 1 May 2021. The results presented by this article suggest that the epidemiological developments or other health aspects related to local populations seem to overshadow the situation of refugees. Yet, media outlets mostly perceive refugees as victims of the pandemic, underlining their vulnerability and marginalisation in health, economic, and education terms. The findings seek to feed the public discussion, providing a fruitful approach to the media narratives and representations of refugees during the Covid-19 crisis.

Keywords
Covid-19; frame analysis; media discourse; media representations; pandemic; refugees

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Media and Migration in the Covid-19 Pandemic: Discourses, Policies, and Practices in Times of Crisis," edited by Vasiliki Tsagkroni (Leiden University), Amanda Alencar (Erasmus University Rotterdam), and Dimitris Skleparis (Newcastle University).

1. Introduction: Conceptual and Methodological Framework

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to an unparalleled health crisis, exerting dramatic pressure on the public health care systems and societies worldwide and driving global economy to a major recession (International Labour Organization et al., 2020; OECD, 2020). Meanwhile, when an infectious disease emerges, not everyone is affected the same way, and Covid-19 is not an exception (Edmonds & Flahault, 2021). Social inequality and exclusion have been exacerbated, while the most marginalised and vulnerable populations in society have faced disproportionate hardships when it comes to access to healthcare (Shomron, 2021).

Refugees constitute one of the most vulnerable population groups (Mouzourakis et al., 2017), being exposed to a new risk due to Covid-19, especially those among

them who live in densely populated centres or camps, many of which with inadequate health and sanitation infrastructure face insurmountable obstacles when it comes to physical distancing, access to face masks, public health services, clean water and soap, among others (UNHCR, 2021a). Yet, reporting by mainstream media outlets across Europe on refugees and migrants is considered marginal (European Commission, 2021).

The media hold an essential role in circulating information, disseminating knowledge, constructing representations, shaping ideologies, and influencing contemporary societies (e.g., de Vreese et al., 2010; Fairclough, 2010; Walter, 2017). In fact, the salience of media coverage and news framing on migration exerts influence on associated attitudes and perceptions as well as on voting behaviour (Jacobs & Hooghe, 2015; Koopmans, 1996). According to van Dijk (2000), media propagate stereotypes, prejudices, and eventually racism. Not only does this create an unfavourable condition for the reception of refugees, but it also hardens societal integration in a medium and long-term perspective (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017).

This article explores to what extent the refugee issue is salient in the Greek, German, and British press during the pandemic (RQ1). For the purposes of this article, we understand salience of the refugee issue in times of Covid-19 to be the number of articles attributed to refugees in conjunction with the references to the pandemic. Put differently, how much coverage refugees received from media outlets, when it comes to the situation they live in or the challenges they experience in the face of the pandemic. The wording "refugee issue" is used to refer to the humanitarian emergency of what has become known as the "refugee crisis." Since the outburst of the Covid-19, media outlets' attention has been mostly paid to the protection and the health situation of citizens worldwide (Pearman et al., 2021). Although millions of refugees are also exposed to a new risk with their vulnerable position being deteriorated, the refugee issue seems to have been downgraded in European media agendas.

At the same time, we look at how the media outlets in all three countries addressed it, focusing on the main frames and the interpretive schemata of the pertinent coverage (RQ2). The article aims to both identify how the sampled newspapers in the aforementioned countries perceive the refugees during the pandemic and provide a preliminary analysis of the (sub-)frames used by journalists when reporting on the issue. The article does not entail a large-scale analysis of the media coverage of the refugee issue as a whole. Rather, it focuses on refugee news that mention Covid-19, delving into six broadsheets, three tabloids, and three regional newspapers from Germany, Greece, and the UK. In this regard, it is sought to feed both the public discussion and social dialogue, providing a fruitful approach to the media narratives and representations of refugees used in relation to the Covid-19 crisis.

In Section 2 of the article, we discuss extant research on the most relevant content-based findings on the refugee issue. First, we provide a non-exhaustive overview of research on the salience of refugees in media outlets across Europe. After that, we refer to the key findings of the literature on news framing. Section 3 of the study refers to the methodology. Section 4 presents and analyses data, processing them in a quantitative way while applying qualitative frame analysis. We searched online databases for refugee and Covid-19 related articles, applying a Boolean string in German, Greek, and English language. We address the question of visibility, exploring over a period the number of articles reported generally on the pandemic itself and the proportion of news items that mentioned Covid-19 in conjunction with the refugee issue. Last but not least, we present the main topics of the media coverage on refugees and the interpretive schemata used by journalists.

2. Immigrants and Refugees in the News

2.1. Salience and Framing

The media coverage of refugees and migrants in terms of both salience and framing has attracted considerable attention from several scholars. Extant research in salience focused on the absolute share or relative number of media reports referring to migration or certain migrant groups (Eberl et al., 2018). It concerned the amount (e.g., Akkerman, 2011) or level of intensity (e.g., Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009) of news stories on migration, which were likely to be dictated by the general political agenda, such as elections or other real-world events (Triandafyllidou, 2017). In this regard, in times of terrorist attacks, reporting on migration seems to have been intensified (Jacobs et al., 2018).

In the UK, there seems to be an increase in newspapers' coverage related to migration since the election of the Cameron–Clegg coalition government in 2010 (Allen, 2016). In recent years, the increasing number of refugees' arrivals to Europe has led to a surge in the salience of the migration-related discussion all over the EU (Knight, 2017). The frequency of migration-related news has been positively correlated with the likelihood of voting for right-wing populist parties (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009). Both Golden Dawn in Greece and Alternative for Germany (AfD) seemed to have gained votes in national election contests when there was a reported increase of refugees' arrivals (Dostal, 2017; Steinmayr, 2017; Vasilakis, 2017). While most migrant groups were underrepresented in the media and the public sphere, in particular before the so-called "refugee crisis," it was shown that the most visible group in news coverage tended to be the refugees or asylum seekers (Eberl et al., 2018; Strömbäck et al., 2017).

When it comes to news framing, most scholars have explored the valence of economic, social, cultural, or security frames vis-à-vis migration, reflecting and

analysing several aspects of the issue itself (Heidenreich et al., 2019). For instance, the British and Canadian press have portrayed migrants as a security or an economic threat in the past (Balch & Balabanova, 2014; Lawlor & Tolley, 2017). Gabrielatos and Baker (2008) also record negative representations of migrants within the UK's media outlets. The verbs "fleeing, sneaking, and flooding" are between the most frequently employed (Baker et al., 2008). Another similar repertoire of refugees that has appeared frequently in the British and Australian press is that of "unwanted invader" (Parker, 2015, p. 5). In a study on German media, Cinalli et al. (2021) show that certain news outlets, in particular the tabloid *Bild Zeitung*, were negatively biased towards migrants.

The same study shows that, over time, Danish newspapers have increasingly become more critical in their reporting on immigration, unlike Swedish outlets that have used victim-frames (Cinalli et al., 2021). In Austria, administrative aspects related to the arrivals and narratives of security threat and economic burden are more prominent than humanitarian viewpoints and background information on the condition of refugees (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). In a seminal article, Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017) find that the reporting within eight European countries is also negatively biased towards refugees, as the media outlets of the sample correlated terrorism, economic crisis, and antipathy of Islam to them. Thus, Esses et al. (2013) speak about dehumanising media coverage that considers refugees potential threats to the host societies.

Elsewhere, refugees and migrants are portrayed as "an undistinguishable group of anonymous and unskilled outsiders who are either vulnerable or dangerous" (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017, p. 22). Thus, some studies reach fewer negative conclusions on the issue, considering refugees "persons in need" (e.g., Kluknavská et al., 2019). They identify stories reported by media outlets through a more humanitarian approach (McAuliffe et al., 2017). Refugees are perceived "as victims of the civil war in Syria, helpless and desperate," with media outlets focusing, inter alia, on "the tragic issue of child refugees" (Fotopoulos & Kaimaklioti, 2016, p. 276).

2.2. The Covid-19 Pandemic

Although much ink has been spilled on the refugee crisis since 2015, there is only a low number of studies researching and analysing the issue in times of Covid-19. In fact, a recent study demonstrates that the references of Turkish news media are largely scarce during the pandemic (Yücel, 2021). In Israel, there are references talking of a dichotomy between migrants as a threat to security and migrants in danger (Shomron, 2021). Media outlets identify the challenges they face, but they also symbolically annihilate them, representing migrants and refugees as diseases carriers and spreaders that do not adhere to health protocols and regulations. Besides, it is not the first time that they have been blamed for being a considerable threat to public health. On some occasions, they have been considered responsible for spreading infectious diseases, cancer, and "polluting the air" (Esses et al., 2013; Mahmoud & Al Atrash, 2021). In contrast, issues related to migration received much attention in the Indian press during the confinement (Raj et al., 2021). Reporting is attributed to the migrants' situation, including availability of food and shelter and the government's initiatives and public support.

3. Research Design and Methods

The empirical research applies a cross-national approach, exploring three national cases, namely Germany, Greece, and the UK, between 1 January 2021 and 1 May 2021 (see Table 1). We selected the print and online editions of two mainstream newspapers, a regional one, and a tabloid from each of the countries mentioned above to explore to what extent the refugee issue was salient during the pandemic (factual news items, editorials, and op-eds). Subsequently, we analysed the media items' content. More concretely, we looked at the most mentioned topics and the most eminent frames.

We focused on single news articles as the units of analysis. If there were conflicting frames, we still considered and coded the most prominent one. Having identified the main applied frames and explored the raw textual data, we secondly defined the sub-frames that were mostly used.

The selection served the purpose of covering countries of different geographical regions (EU North–South). Another feature that leads to the selection is the fact that Greece is a first country of asylum (first entry point), with Germany hosting one of the highest numbers of refugees of any country worldwide (UNHCR, 2021b). The particular country selection also includes different types

Table 1. The media outlets of the sample.

	Type			
Countries	Centre-right	Centre-left	Tabloid	Regional
Germany	*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*	*Süddeutsche Zeitung*	*Bild Zeitung*	*Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*
Greece	*I Kathimerini*	*Efimerida ton Syntakton*	*Proto Thema*	*Peloponnisos*
UK	*The Telegraph*	*The Guardian*	*Daily Mail*	*London Evening Standard*

of traditional media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Greece's media system belongs to the polarised pluralist model; in Germany, a democratic-corporatist media system can be observed, while the UK has a liberal model. In this context, the study achieves generalisability. Existing research claims that different types of media systems across countries might result in a variation in the levels of news content diversity (Esser & Umbricht, 2013). We test this variable in an exploratory and moderate way without necessarily having robust theoretical expectations that it will have a catalytic impact on the newspapers' coverage about Covid-19 and refugees.

Turning to the selection of the news outlets, it features multiple dimensions: ideological leaning (centre-right/centre-left), distribution (national/regional), and readership (broadsheet/tabloid). In this regard, we entail various political, ideological, linguistic, and geographical variables, testing in a comparative way whether these generate different perspectives on the issue under discussion. The decision on the classification of the newspapers' political affiliation is based on authors' judgement and methodological categorisations conducted by similar research in the past (Boukala & Dimitrakopoulou, 2017; Salgado & Nienstedt, 2016).

For the most part of the period of the analysis, the countries of our sample experienced a large spike in Covid-19 infections and imposed lockdowns to reduce transmission. In addition to the outbreaks/epidemics, in winter 2021, the countries received the first batches of Covid-19 jabs, rolling out their vaccination programmes. The relevant discussion on media revolved around these issues.

Applying a Boolean string in German, Greek, and English language, we collected data on the refugee issue and Covid-19 through electronic copies (Factiva and through individual subscriptions) or newspapers' hard-copies. Factiva constitutes a tool of research and business information, which aggregates content from both licensed and free sources, and combines over 32,000 sources to provide its users access to premium content from 200 countries in 28 languages.

We compared the number of these articles to the overall news items about the pandemic itself. While the study processes the data in a quantitative way to identify the amount of the pertinent coverage, it applies qualitative frame analysis to capture the way journalists portrayed the discussion around the refugee issue and the pandemic.

A frame is an interpretative scheme, providing meaning to entities, objects, and situations (Van De Steeg & Risse, 2010). Frame analysis unfolds the main arguments/interpretive schemata on a given issue, showing whether they converge or diverge. It also gives information regarding their simultaneity (Pfetsch & Heft, 2015). The authors of the study coded the frames of reference, interpretative schemata, and meaning structures in a comparative typology. In shorthand, a judgment is usually contained within the frames. Often, refugees are portrayed by the media outlets of the sample as victims (frame), living in overcrowded centres with poor health and sanitation infrastructure (sub-frame). The frames consist of catchphrases, metaphors, stereotypes, latent messages, etc. (Van Gorp, 2005). Van Gorp (2005), focusing on Belgian newspapers about the asylum issue, notices that both an "intruder" and a "victim" frame is applied by the press. Similarly, Benson (2009, p. 408) measuring frame diversity in migration-related news in France and the US, identifies 10 frame categories, including portrayals as victims, heroes, and a threat.

The coding was performed jointly by the three researchers, adopting a qualitative approach. The coding scheme was developed both inductively and deductively. First of all, based on extant research on frames/viewpoints regarding migration (e.g., Benson, 2013; Masini & Van Aelst, 2017), we distinguished between three types of distinct viewpoints that are used to characterise migrants in the reporting:

- Negative viewpoints: Characterisations of refugees and/or view of them as a threat (e.g., they pose a health danger).
- Victims' viewpoints: Migrants are portrayed as victims (e.g., they lack a decent health and sanitation infrastructure; they are vulnerable and marginalised, facing the risk of not being vaccinated; etc.).
- Positive viewpoints: Characterisations of refugees and/or view of them as an opportunity.

In order to obtain a more fine-grain analysis of how newspapers reported on immigrants in the Covid-19 context, we aimed at generating subcategories of the abovementioned main viewpoints. To this end, we followed an inductive approach, using a constant comparative method for content analysis (Boeije, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As Zhang and Wildemuth (2009, p. 4) put it, "the essence of the constant comparative method is the systematic comparison of each text assigned to a category with each of those already assigned to that category, in order to fully understand the theoretical properties of the category." The scholars argue that this method is not only suitable to create original insights but is also indicated to pinpoint differences among categories. Hence, by using this method, we expected to gain an in-depth understanding of cross-country and cross-media differences in the portrayal of immigrants. As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), we ensured that subframes were internally homogenous and externally heterogeneous. As the approach to devise the subcategories of viewpoints is inductive, the inferences will be drawn from the coding of the data.

4. Results

The amount of articles dedicated to Covid-19 and refugees was scarce in Germany, Greece, and the UK.

Out of more than 150,000 articles reported on the pandemic, only 225 in total referred to the refugees. Converting this to percentage gives us 0.15%. Despite certain fluctuations across the countries of the sample, variants/mutations and outbreaks/epidemics were by far the most reported subjects related to Covid-19 (Figure 1). Domestic politics and immunisations also turn out to be visible talking points. Certainly, this amount of coverage does not concern procedural actions related to the refugee issue (e.g., relocation), the number of arrivals, shipwrecks, or rescue operations that were reported throughout this period.

In a more detailed outlook, Figure 2 reflects country- and media-specific variations in the number of attributed articles to the refugee issue in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Pertinent coverage is slightly more prominent in Germany (83 articles) and Greece (79 articles) than in the UK (63 articles). Before elaborating on the results, it is important to note that as Factiva does not entail content from Greek-language

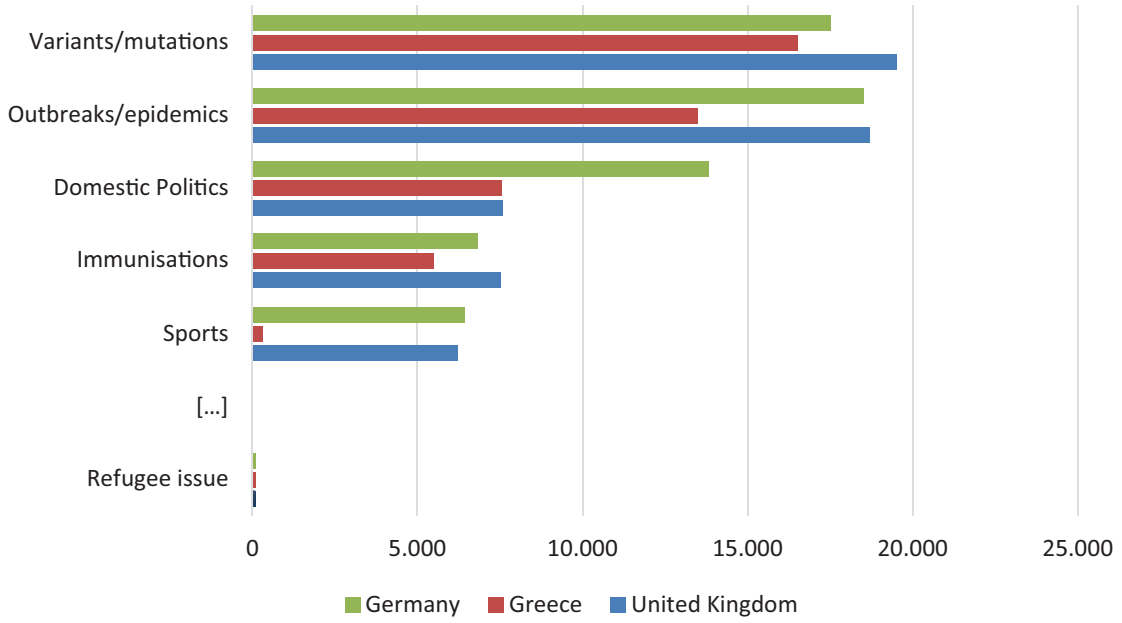

Figure 1. Most mentioned subjects related to Covid-19 (number of articles). Source: Authors' own compilation through Factiva.

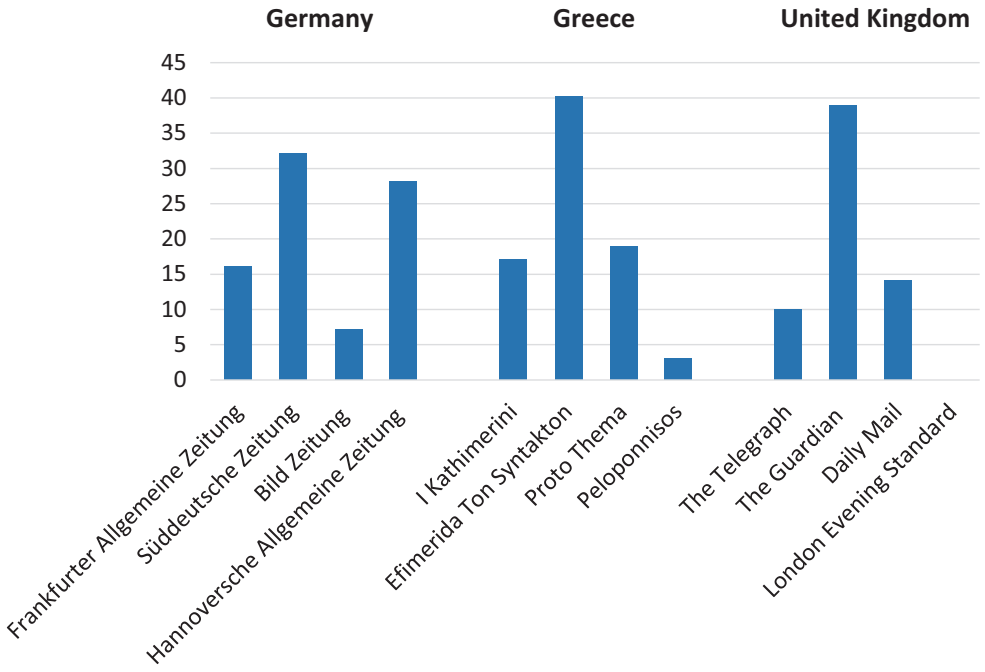

Figure 2. Coverage on the refugee issue and Covid-19.

newspapers and news sites, thus being limited to provide these data, we used the English edition of Kathimerini as a proxy. In this media outlet, we identified the ratio of the most mentioned subjects related to Covid-19 —variants/mutations (223), outbreaks/epidemics (182), domestic politics (102), immunisations (74), and sports (4)—to the number of articles dedicated to refugees/migrants (1). We then multiplied each number of the figures mentioned above by the overall number of articles referring to refugees (74).

With the exception of Germany, where *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung* attributes relevantly much coverage to the issue, national presses tend to report more than the regional newspapers do. For example, in the UK, the *London Evening Standard* does not devote any article to the topic. However, the situation could be different if we selected more than one regional newspaper or a newspaper from a region, where large numbers of arrivals of refugees can be observed or several reception and identification centres are located. Looking at the broadsheets from all three countries in our sample, the centre-left press publishes the largest share of articles concerned with refugees in relation to Covid-19, outweighing the centre-right press. Lastly, the Greek and British tabloids report more news items than the German tabloid, *Bild Zeitung*.

Regarding the way media outlets refer to the issue and the viewpoints they use, Figure 3 shows that the portrayal of refugees as victims is the most common category: 87.8% in the German case; 66% in the Greek case; and 81.6% in the UK. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Efimerida Ton Syntakton*, and *The Guardian* exert the highest number of this interpretative scheme with *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *I Kathimerini*, and *The Telegraph* following. The centre-left newspapers in our sample seem to have relatively higher portrayals of refugees as victims, than the centre-right media. Tabloids and regional press—apart from *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*—make substantially less use of this characterisation.

While we identify factual news items which do not use any particular frame on refugees in the context of the pandemic, negative viewpoints about them are also present; yet, to a far lesser degree than the most frequent perception (as victims). Last but not least, there are a few positive perceptions in Germany.

Table 2 gauges the sub-frames of the coverage by the newspapers in our sample related to the main frames of the research that is victims, positive, and negative viewpoints. Turning our attention to them, refugees are perceived, inter alia, as vulnerable, exposed to a higher risk of being infected as they live in overcrowded centres with poor health and sanitation infrastructure. More concretely, the German newspapers, in particular *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*, underline that contact restrictions cannot be implemented in large accommodations, reporting on the Covid-19 outbreaks that occurred within them. In this regard, they are described as "potential coronavirus hotspots." The British newspapers, mainly *The Guardian*, discuss the situation at the Napier barracks site in Kent, which accommodates several refugees, referring to allegations of inadequate conditions, poor food quality, and exposure to racist abuse. The Greek press, notably *Efimerida Ton Syntakton*, writes that thousands of refugees try to survive at the centre of Lesvos, where they experience miserable conditions.

Refugees are also considered some of the most marginalised people that withstand the worst of the pandemic. In Germany, attention is paid to the alleged increase of the refugees' difficulties due to Covid-19, when it comes to their integration and the linguistic barriers they face. German and Greek news outlets write that the pandemic has increased inequality,

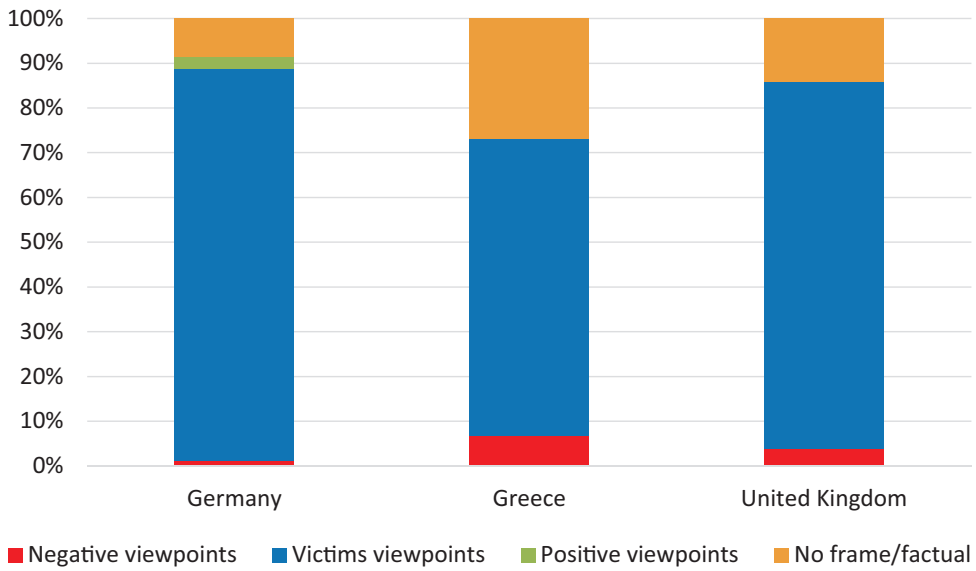

Figure 3. Distribution of viewpoints on refugees.

discrimination, and oppression against refugees, quoting the Amnesty International Annual Report 2020/21. In this regard, focus is given to the address of UN Secretary-General Guterres, who expresses the ascertainment that refugees are severely and disproportionately affected by Covid-19. The British press discussing their personal stories quotes them regarding the way their life has deteriorated.

Meanwhile, German and Greek media outlets, mostly *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*, and *Efimerida Ton Syntakton*, touch upon the issue of the education of refugee minors, perceiving Covid-19 an insurmountable obstacle to this. It is widely written that the refugee minors are left out of distance learning, as they do not have tablets or computers nor is there internet in the centres where they are hosted. In this context, they are described as "children of a lesser God" (Angelidis, 2021). Another sub-frame related to victims' viewpoints and reported by the newspapers in the sample is that refugees and displaced persons are vulnerable, facing the risk of not being vaccinated.

Mainly tabloids or centre-right press quote different actors, who describe the refugee issue as a health threat/problem. Trains in India are filled with migrants, who threaten to further disperse Covid-19 into smaller towns and villages, the Greek tabloid *Proto Thema* notes. For its part, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* points out that the reception centre in Giessen constitutes a focal

Table 2. Main sub-frames of the refugees in total, per country and per newspaper, in percentage.

Main Sub-Frame	Total	Germany				Greece				United Kingdom			
Refugees are vulnerable, exposed to a higher risk of being infected due to the situation in reception/ detention centres	35.1	Total: 33.8				Total: 16.5				Total: 55			
		FAZ	SZ	BZ	HAZ	Kath	Ef. S.	Pr. Th.	Pel.	Tel.	GRD	DM	LES
		25.5	35.1	10.9	28.5	8.4	91.6	0	0	15.1	72.7	12.2	0
Refugees are some of the most marginalised people that withstand the worst of the pandemic	20.1	Total: 24.1				Total: 24.6				Total: 11.7			
		FAZ	SZ	BZ	HAZ	Kath	Ef. S.	Pr. Th.	Pel.	Tel.	GRD	DM	LES
		30	45	5	20	11.1	66.7	22.2	0	14.3	85.7	0	0
Covid-19 subverts the education of refugee minors	7.4	Total: 4.8				Total: 17.5				Total: 0			
		FAZ	SZ	BZ	HAZ	Kath	Ef. S.	Pr. Th.	Pel.				
		0	50	0	50	7.7	92.3	0	0				
Refugees and displaced persons are vulnerable, facing the risk of not being vaccinated	5.7	Total: 2				Total: 6.8				Total: 8.3			
		FAZ	SZ	BZ	HAZ	Kath	Ef. S.	Pr. Th.	Pel.	Tel.	GRD	DM	LES
		0	50	0	50	20	40	40	0	50	50	0	0
Refugees as a health threat/problem	5.1	Total: 3.6				Total: 6.8				Total: 5			
		FAZ	SZ	BZ	HAZ	Kath	Ef. S.	Pr. Th.	Pel.	Tel.	GRD	DM	LES
		33.3	0	66.7	0	40	20	40	0	33.3	0	66.7	0
Refugees as an opportunity	0.8	Total: 2.4				Total: 0				Total: 0			
		FAZ	SZ	BZ	HAZ								
		0	50	0	50								

Notes: FAZ stands for *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*; SZ stands for *Süddeutsche Zeitung*; BZ is for *Bild Zeitung*; HAZ is for *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*; Kath is for *I Kathimerini*; EF.S. stands for *Efimerida ton Syntakton*; Pr.Th. is for *Proto Thema*; Pel. Is for *Peloponnisos*; Tel stands for *The Telegraph*; GRD is for *The Guardian*; DM is for *Daily Mail*; LES is the *London Evening Standard.*

point of crime. Yet, there are also positive sub-frames, which consider migration an opportunity. For instance, *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*, reporting on the negative prospect of demographics in Germany estimated by the Federal Statistical Office, quotes one official from the Federal Institute for Population Research, who correlates the stagnation of the number of the population with the decreasing refugees' arrivals due to the pandemic and the associated travel restrictions.

When examining Figure 2 and Table 2, one may observe that, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, convergence or divergence of the pertinent reporting is more contingent on ideological leaning rather than media's nationality or the type of a traditional media system. For instance, there seems to be a convergence of the coverage of the centre-left newspapers when it comes to the (sub-)frames used. The same applies to the centre-right press across the countries. Instead, although *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Bild Zeitung* belong to the same media system (democratic corporatist), their coverage on the issue is likely to be considered divergent enough. A similar trend occurs in Greece and the UK when comparing *Efimerida Ton Syntakton* with *Proto Thema* and *The Guardian* with the *Daily Mail* respectively.

Centre-left newspapers showing more sympathy or empathy towards refugees seem to identify largely the challenges they face during the Covid-19 pandemic, attributing the biggest share of articles concerned with refugees in relation to Covid-19, as mentioned above. The centre-right newspapers and tabloids of our sample also touched upon these issues, yet to a shorter extent. In fact, in some cases, they applied negative viewpoints, portraying the refugees as a health threat. This angle was almost absent in the centre-left media outlets. Apart from Germany, where *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung* reports much on the issue, adopting victims' viewpoints and relevant sub-frames, the regional press tends to attribute less coverage rather than the national newspapers do, limiting the scope of their content to factual (sub-)frames. Certainly, relying on one regional newspaper per country, the research carries the risk of overgeneralisation in this regard.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

Through this analysis, we aimed at exploring the extent that the refugee issue was salient during the pandemic in the Greek, German, and British press. First, we identified and compared the number of articles reporting on the pandemic itself with the proportion of news items that mentioned the Covid-19 outbreak in relation to the refugee issue. Our results reinforced the assumption that epidemiological developments or other health aspects related to local populations seemed to overshadow the situation of refugees who were also exposed to this new threat (RQ1). The pertinent coverage dedicated to Covid-19 and refugees was scarce in the countries of our sample. However, it varied at the country and newspaper level, with the centre-left newspapers reporting more than the centre-right, the regional, or tabloids. The British press published the least number of articles. However, looking at *The Guardian*'s coverage on the issue, or comparing newspapers of the same origin (*Süddeutsche Zeitung* with *Bild Zeitung*), one may find that visibility is more contingent on political affiliation, rather than media's nationality or the type of a traditional media system.

Second, we focused on the main frames/viewpoints. The results showed that they diversified across the countries and newspapers' type in our sample. Victims' viewpoints was the most common category, entailing different sub-frames (RQ2). Centre-left newspapers in our sample showed more sympathy or empathy towards refugees, identifying to a large extent the challenges they face during the covid-19 pandemic. Other aspects that have been considered positive and related to the potential—economic, social, or other—benefits of migration by extant research (Van Gorp, 2005)were hardly mentioned. The context of the pandemic itself could explain this development.

Media outlets underlined the refugees' vulnerability and marginalisation in health, economic, and education terms. As mentioned above, political alignment seemed to have played a role in this regard, as centre-left newspapers along with *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung* mainly used the particular sub-frame. An ideological and a political dimension could interpret the development. While centre-right ideology is likely to be associated with stronger anti-migrant positions (Downes et al., 2021), one could argue that the centre-left newspapers, in particular in Greece and the UK, implicitly criticised the countries' centre-right governments for the status of refugees within the reception centres. Finally, yet importantly, our results pointed out that mainly tabloids or centre-right press quoted different actors, who described the refugee issue as a health threat/problem.

Although our article is one-off and focuses on a time-limited period, we believe that it makes a relevant contribution to the literature on the refugee issue and media studies. First, the empirical research applied a cross-national and comparative dimension, which encompasses countries belonging to different media systems and newspapers of different types and political affiliations. Second, we showed that the media outlets in our sample scarcely referred to refugees, when reported on Covid-19. Refugees constitute one of the most vulnerable population groups, facing disproportionate hardships when it comes to access to healthcare (Shomron, 2021). Yet, the epidemiological developments or other health aspects related to local populations seem to overshadow the situation of refugees, whose position seemed to be further marginalised by the low media salience.

Third, we displayed the frames/viewpoints that journalists used in order to portray the refugees during the pandemic and provided a preliminary analysis on the aspects they focused on. This is particularly important

when considering that the salience of media coverage and news framing on migration exerts influence on associated attitudes and perceptions as well as on voting behaviour (Jacobs & Hooghe, 2015; Koopmans, 1996). Besides, in some cases, media have propagated prejudices, stereotypes, and eventually racism (van Dijk, 2000), promoting negative or antisocial perceptions through the process of constructing irrational collective representations. As migration is likely to stay and anti-immigrant parties are expected to fuel political discourse in the years to come, in particular ahead of elections, it is important to acquire a thorough knowledge about media's content on the refugee issue, exploring the potential motives behind it and its effect on public opinion. Finally, our approach provides an inclusive opportunity to rethink with openness how, through the media coverage, the cultural, social, or historical background of each country determines the reproduction of the previous "social constructions." Apparently, a challenging question remains open: Among national, political, and ideological factors, which is the most influential in this process?

However, we should mention certain limitations of our study that might be overcome by future research in the field. As this comparative, qualitative analysis of the news coverage of refugees in the context of Covid-19 is limited in time, future research should widen the period examined. At the same time, due to language limitations, we were not able to include in the analysis media outlets of the so-called group of Visegrád countries whose national governments have expressed their skepticism about the refugee issue. Meanwhile, we focused on two kinds of media, namely print and online press, rather than including audiovisual news items or social media. For instance, considering the importance of television or Twitter in formulating public opinion about the refugee issue, it would seem advisable for future studies to analyse the content of these sources. A recent study, focusing on social media users' perceptions of Asians in the US during the Covid-19 pandemic, has found prejudice and fear toward this population group (Croucher et al., 2020). In addition, relying on one regional newspaper per country, one could argue that the research does not entail the potentially different regional peculiarities within the countries of the sample. In this context, the situation when it comes to salience or media frames could be different if we selected more than one regional newspaper or a newspaper from a region where large numbers of arrivals of refugees can be observed or several reception and identification centres are located. Lastly, we did not address other potential factors that could reflect quantitative (number of articles) and qualitative (content diversity) differences between newspapers, namely structures of media ownership.

It is clear that the present article cannot cover the whole spectrum of the media concerning the issue of representations articulated in the bipolar "refugee issue and Covid-19 pandemic." Nevertheless, it offers a contemporary view of how the media faced the refugee issue in the Covid-19 period updating figures and facets from an extremely complicated context. Additionally, it remains crucial to both map out and decode the views and figures presented in the public and social sphere in order to understand the orientation of the public perceptions that are formed. It is certain that each country has its own national characteristics and cultural peculiarities, and this is reflected in the way, through which the media formulate their strategy in the public sphere. However, among different countries, we should seek for a common ground to interpret all the *elective affinities* that are likely to co-form a solid and rational approach in the context of common European values. In a rapidly changing world, this could ultimately lead towards a more united and solidary Europe.

Conflict of Interests

The views set out in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the EU. Neither the EU institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2022, Volume 10, Issue 2, Pages 253–264
https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i2.4990

Article

Framing Migration During the Covid-19 Pandemic in South Africa: A 12-Month Media Monitoring Project

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Submitted: 29 October 2021 | Accepted: 14 April 2022 | Published: 30 June 2022

Abstract
Assumptions surrounding the origins of Covid-19, the relationship between human mobility and the spread of the virus, and the pressure that the pandemic has placed on communities, have exacerbated xenophobic tensions globally, including in South Africa, a country long-associated with xenophobia. Previous research exploring how the South African media frames migration, and research investigating the framing of migration during Covid-19 in other contexts, has found that the media tends to frame migrants in terms of (un)deservingness and blame them for the spread of disease. Our findings, however, identify different concerns. This article discusses findings from a 12-month study exploring how migrant and mobile populations in South Africa were framed in the media as the pandemic developed during 2020. A news aggregator—Meltwater—was used to scrape the internet for English language text-based media published globally in 2020 that met a search with key terms Migration, Covid-19, and South Africa. A total of 12,068 articles were identified and descriptively analysed. Informed by previous approaches, a framing analysis was then undertaken of a sample of 561 articles. Findings illustrate how articles published by outlets based in the US and UK have a far greater reach than locally or regionally produced articles, despite local and regional outlets publishing far more consistently on the topic. Consistent and sympathetic engagement with issues of migration by South African publications was seen across 2020 and suggests that those writing from the region are aware of the realities of migration and mobility. Findings show that rather than centring migrants as the locus of blame for failures of the South African state—as has been done in the past—the state and its failure to adequately respond to both Covid-19 and migration are now being clearly articulated by media.

Keywords
Covid-19; media; migration; South Africa; xenophobia

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Media and Migration in the Covid-19 Pandemic: Discourses, Policies, and Practices in Times of Crisis" edited by Vasiliki Tsagkroni (Leiden University), Amanda Alencar (Erasmus University Rotterdam), and Dimitris Skleparis (Newcastle University).

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the fore and exacerbated underlying inequities globally, including in South Africa, particularly in relation to health and well-being (Dorward et al., 2021; Hofman & Madhi, 2020). Migrant and mobile populations—including both those who move within and across the country's borders—have been particularly affected by South Africa's response to the pandemic, which has, to date, failed to be migration-aware and left many behind, including in the country's vaccine roll-out (de Gruchy & Vearey, 2022; Mukumbang et al., 2020; Mulu & Mbanza, 2021; Mutambara et al., 2021; Vearey et al., 2021). In October 2021, the National Department of Health initiated a pilot project with the aim of improving access to the vaccine for migrant and

South African populations without identity or migration documentation in the major urban areas of South Africa (Stent, 2021). At the time of writing (February 2022), however, little is known about its implementation, challenges, or successes. In addition, due to the pressures that the pandemic and responses to it have placed on communities and political leaders in South Africa, xenophobia and xenophobic violence have, in some contexts, been exacerbated (Gatticchi & Maseko, 2020) and there are also signs that the pandemic has been used to justify the further securitisation of borders and the management of immigration (Vearey et al., 2021).

In this article, we define xenophobia as "attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity" (Workshop Group on Migration and Trafficking, 2001), and make use of Misago and Mlilo's (2021) definition of xenophobic violence as "an act of violence targeting one or more person due to their geographic or national background. An incident can result in one or more categories of victimisation and can affect several individuals" (p. 2). In addition, although we understand "migrant" and "migration" to refer to both internal and cross-border migrants and mobility, in our findings the terms were most often used to refer to cross-border migration and migrants. As such, unless otherwise indicated, the terms refer to cross-border migration and mobility, and non-citizen populations and communities.

As the pandemic developed globally, instances of xenophobia and racism—often directed at Asian populations and migrant communities—intensified (e.g., Esses & Hamilton, 2021; Reny & Barreto, 2020). Given the role that the media has been argued to play in exacerbating xenophobic tensions in South Africa (Banda & Mawadza, 2015; Smith, 2011), the Migration, Gender and Health Systems project—a collaboration between the Universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and the South African National Department of Health—initiated a media monitoring project to explore the ways in which migration and migrant groups were being written about in relation to Covid-19 in South Africa.

We wanted to understand: (a) how the media were reporting on migration and migrants during the pandemic, with a focus on where media articles were being written and produced, and by whom; and (b) how migration and migrants were being framed through this process. Our aim was to explore: whether there were patterns in publication; whether specific kinds of articles were more likely to get republished and reach a broader audience; how migration was being written about in relation to the unfolding pandemic and the resulting stresses the pandemic was placing on individuals, communities, and South Africa as a whole; and whether there was any relationship between the articles that were more likely to get republished and how those articles framed migration. In this article, we present our key findings and outline the ways in which the South African media is renegotiating how it has traditionally portrayed and framed migrant and mobile populations.

2. Method

To explore these questions, we developed a two-pronged approach. First, we undertook a quantitative assessment of what was being produced globally by English language media about Covid-19 and migration in the South African context over the course of 2020. This included text-based media that was published online and included newspaper articles, press releases and reports, opinion editorials, blogs, and websites. Social media—user-driven platforms that enable online engagement between people, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Aichner et al., 2021)—have been shown to play a key role in the ways in which xenophobia is publicly expressed and through which xenophobic violence is planned (Bezuidenhout, 2020). Social media content was not, however, included in our research as we were interested in the ways in which media outlets were framing migration and migrant and mobile populations, and our methodological approach was tailored to this.

Second, after excluding re-published articles (i.e., duplicates), we undertook a framing analysis of a 10% sample to explore the ways in which migration and migrants were framed by the media during the development of the pandemic in South Africa. This approach allowed us to develop a clear picture of what was published on migration and migrants in South Africa in relation to Covid-19 during the first year of the pandemic, by whom, and how this content changed as the pandemic progressed.

2.1. Quantitative Assessment

To conduct the quantitative assessment we used Meltwater, an "automatic news aggregator" which operates by "using a search engine that automatically indexes copies of the articles it scrapes from the Internet, compiles headlines and excerpts, while providing a link to the original source" (Quinn, 2014, p. 1192). While the primary focus of the platform is to allow "businesses to get real-time information about their brand's online impact as well as their customers' sentiments" (Chang, 2020), "Meltwater comes with a powerful research engine that scans all major social channels as well as over 300,000 global online news sites." This search engine and associated analytic tools that the platform provides make Meltwater a convenient choice for research that looks to examine the production of news content on a particular topic.

A total of 12,068 results were found for the period 1 January–31 December 2020 using Boolean search:

> (((migration OR mobility OR refugee* OR "asylum seeker*" OR migrant* OR "cross-border" OR "cross

border" OR "cross* border*" or "border cross*" OR "crossing the border" or "across the border" OR migrate) near/25 ("South* Africa*")) and (coronavirus OR "covid-19" OR covid19 OR "covid-19'' OR "novel coronavirus" OR "corona virus" OR "SARS-CoV-2'')) not ("Car of the year")

To assess the changing ways in which migration and migrant and mobile groups were being framed in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa, we approached each quarter of 2020 as a unit of analysis. More details about the results from each quarter can be found in the Supplementary File. The results from each quarter were analysed using functions within Meltwater and supplemented by further analysis in Excel once the results had been imported using a CSV file. The results were then compared across quarters in Excel, allowing us to answer key questions of interest, specifically where online media articles were being written and produced, and by whom.

2.2. Framing Analysis

Following the quantitative assessment of the results of our search, a framing analysis was undertaken of 561 articles—a 10% sample of the search results excluding duplicates (5,581, see Figure 1).

A review of approaches to content framing in the media (e.g., Goffman, 1974; Linstrom & Marais, 2012; Phillips, 2019; Van Gorp & Vercruysse, 2012), including recent publications exploring media framing in relation to Covid-19 (e.g., Jordan et al., 2020; Legate et al., 2020; Poirier et al., 2020; Venkateswaran, 2020), was undertaken by two of the co-authors (Thea de Gruchy and Jo Vearey). Following this, it was decided to explore the use of six common frames in analysing the sample (Linstrom & Marais, 2012). The six frames are informed by those attributed to Neuman et al. (1992, as cited in Linstrom & Marais, 2012) and Semetko and Valkenburg (2000, as cited in Linstrom & Marais, 2012, p. 28), details about which can be found in Table 1.

The sample for analysis was generated by downloading the search results for each quarter, dividing the searches into geographic regions, removing duplicates, and then using a random number generator to select articles to create a 15% sample that reflected the geographic breakdown found in the results. If the title of the article selected was found to refer to sport, business, or finance, the content was promotional or "unavailable in your country," or there was sufficient reason to believe that the article had nothing to do with South Africa and/or migration and/or Covid-19, it was excluded, and another article was selected through the random number generator. The articles for each quarter were then analysed by two authors (Thea de Gruchy and Jo Vearey in Quarter 1, and Thea de Gruchy and Thulisile Zikhali in Quarters 2, 3, and 4), each of whom analysed 50% of the articles and a further 10% of the articles analysed by the other to verify results. During the analysis process, additional articles were excluded when the body of the text revealed that they did not in fact deal with South Africa and/or migration and/or Covid-19 or meet the above exclusion criteria. After the analysis had been verified, if the articles analysed constituted less than 10% of the research results (excluding duplicates), additional articles were selected through the random number generator and analysed to ensure that a 10% sample was analysed for each quarter. While the frames applied were

Process	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2020
Results from Meltwater	1,545	4,966	2,634	2,924	12,068
Sample excluding duplicates	688	2,124	1,457	1,312	5,581
15% sample size	103	319	219	197	838
# of articles excluded during analysis	39	109	89	79	316
Additional articles added	5	3	16	14	38
Final sample size	69 (10.47%)	213 (10.03%)	146 (10.02%)	133 (10.06%)	561 (10.03%)

Figure 1. Sample for analysis.

Table 1. Overview of the six frames applied.

Frame	Description	Examples
Human interest	Bringing "a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue or problem" (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, as cited in Linstrom & Marais, 2012, p. 28)	Stories that outline specific challenges faced by communities; Stories that create an emotional angle, including the use of inflammatory language and xenophobia
Attribution of responsibility*	"Presenting an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for causing or solving to either the government or to an individual or group" (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, as cited in Linstrom & Marais, 2012, p. 28)	Human mobility or migrant groups being framed as responsible for the spread of Covid-19
Power(lessness)*	"The dominance of forces over weak individuals or groups" (Neuman et al., 1992, as cited in Linstrom & Marais, 2012, p. 28)	The power of Covid-19; The power the state has to implement lockdowns; The powerlessness of many migrant groups in South Africa
Conflict*	"Conflict between individuals, groups, institutions or countries" (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, as cited in Linstrom & Marais, 2012, p. 28)	National government in conflict with local government; State in conflict with migrant groups; South Africa citizens in conflict with non-citizens
Economic impact	"The preoccupation with profit and loss" (Neuman et al., 1992, as cited in Linstrom & Marais, 2012, p. 28)	Impact of the pandemic on livelihoods reliant on mobility; Impact of the pandemic on the mining industry
Moral values	"Morality and social prescriptions" (Neuman et al., 1992, as cited in Linstrom & Marais, 2012, p. 28)	Sympathy for migrant groups; Xenophobia; Assertions of inherent value of specific organisations

Note: * These three frames were applied separately during analysis but are presented together in the findings due to their interconnectedness and the benefits of reading them together.

determined through a preliminary analysis of Quarter 1, their subsequent application was subject to continued discussion throughout their use.

While this research was not risky in the sense that there were no ethical concerns about research participants, researchers conducting this kind of research should implement appropriate online security measures, for example, agreeing at the outset of a research project not to click through on unsecured links. By way of example, during one period of analysis, the links associated with one site took the two co-authors to a pornography site. It was unclear whether the links were faulty or the website itself had been hacked. In addition, link rot or death—the process through which "a Web page is moved, taken down or reorganised" (Link Rot, 2017)—is a reality of this research approach. As such, research of this nature is time sensitive and may be difficult to replicate.

3. Findings

3.1. Descriptive Analysis

Analysis of the results from our Meltwater search pointed to two key, interrelated findings, namely (a) patterns in publication corresponded to the development of the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa, and (b) peaks in publication numbers can be attributed to the rapid republication of articles by US-based media platforms.

3.1.1. Patterns in Publication Correspond to Developments of the Pandemic in South Africa

Across 2020, the volume of publications (which can be seen in Figure 2)—as well as their content—corresponded to the development of the pandemic

in South Africa (more details can be found in the Supplementary File). Between January and March (Quarter 1) the volume of articles reflecting on Covid-19 and migration in South Africa grew as the pandemic moved from being a distant threat to a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020, and then saw the implementation of a National State of Disaster in South Africa on 15 March 2020 as a growing number of cases were recorded in the country. During this period, 1,545 articles met our search criteria. During Quarter 2 (April–June), a growing number of cases were reported while those in South Africa were subjected to a hard lockdown which included the shutting down of several economic sectors, school closures, and the suspension of international and internal travel for all but essential purposes. During this quarter, 4,966 articles met our search criteria reflecting the way in which Covid-19 now dominated South African society. In July (the start of Quarter 3; July–September), South Africa reached the peak of its first Covid-19 wave. This was followed by a steady decline in the infection rate and, as such, the subsequent easing of lockdown measures, reopening of the economy and national reckoning with the impact of the pandemic and the existing inequities and issues of corruption that it had exacerbated. Two thousand, six hundred thirty-four articles were published during this quarter that met our search criteria. During the final quarter of 2020 (October–December), South Africa enjoyed a brief respite from lockdown, followed swiftly by the beginning of the second wave of Covid-19. During this quarter, 2,924 articles met our search criteria.

The location of publication mirrored geopolitical and social interest in and ties with South Africa. Additionally, due to the focus on English language media in the research, countries and regions that publish news in English dominated our sample. Although 113 countries featured in our results, the US, South Africa, and to some extent the UK were consistently the largest producers of news that met our search criteria, while only 73 articles that met our search criteria were published in Central and South America, accounting for only 0.6% of our results.

Due to this, when we looked at the results by geographic region to create the sample for the framing analysis, we looked at search results for those three countries, Africa (excluding South Africa), Asia, Europe (excluding the UK), the Middle East, South and Central America, and North America (excluding the US).

Of the 561 articles analysed, 374 (66.67%) were examined from their original source, while 187 were analysed as republished pieces. Two hundred and eleven of these articles did not clearly attribute the piece to a specific author or organisation, while an additional 45 were attributed to organisations or government bodies. Twenty-five of these 45 articles were directly attributed to UN agencies.

Within the sample of 561 articles, six journalists were found to have authored articles more than twice—five of whom are based in South Africa, the sixth being based in Zimbabwe. This points to a key finding, which we expand on below, that while a significant number of search results came from places outside of South Africa, specifically the US, South African publications and journalists wrote about migration and migrants in relation to Covid-19 consistently throughout 2020.

3.1.2. Peaks in Results Are Driven by Republication in the US

In Figure 2, defined "peaks" can be seen in the number of articles published throughout 2020. These peaks by and large correspond to the rapid republication of specific articles, usually by online media platforms based in the US. On 2 June 2020, for example, the largest peak is seen with 886 articles published that day. Examining the results shows how 821 of the 886 (92.66%) are republications of the same 11 articles. Of those 821 articles found to be republications, 798 (97.2%) were found in US-based publications.

Due to this pattern seen across 2020, the US accounts for a significant proportion (30.44%) of articles included in the search results. However, once duplicates are accounted for, US publications only account for 15.7% of results. South Africa's portion on the other hand increases once duplicates are removed, suggesting that articles are more likely to be original and less likely to be republished in South Africa. The same can be said more broadly of the African region. When duplicates are included in the results, South Africa and Africa account for 28.18% and 12.71% of the results respectively. However, once duplicates are removed, South Africa accounts for 35.03% of the search results, and the rest of the African continent for 17.69%.

In addition, while Meltwater data indicated that publications based in the US and UK had a bigger "reach" and were read, or at least opened, by more people, the publications that produced the highest volume of articles that met our search criteria consistently were predominantly South African or based in Southern Africa. These included *AllAfrica.com*, the *Daily Maverick*, and MSN South Africa, all of which are based in South Africa. In addition, *Bulawayo24* and *Club of Mozambique*, based in Zimbabwe and Mozambique respectively, were also regular producers of search results.

Finally, peaks in article republication did not necessarily correspond to developments in the pandemic in South Africa. In the first quarter, for example, on 14 March an article titled "Virus Cases Spread Across Africa, Nations Prepare for More" was republished 235 times creating a peak that did correspond to growing case numbers across the continent and in South Africa. Several days later, however, a press release titled "The IHUBApp Digital Experience Platform Launches NeedServ App to Help Millions During Covid-19 Pandemic," which mentioned South Africa and migrants in passing, was republished 101 times creating

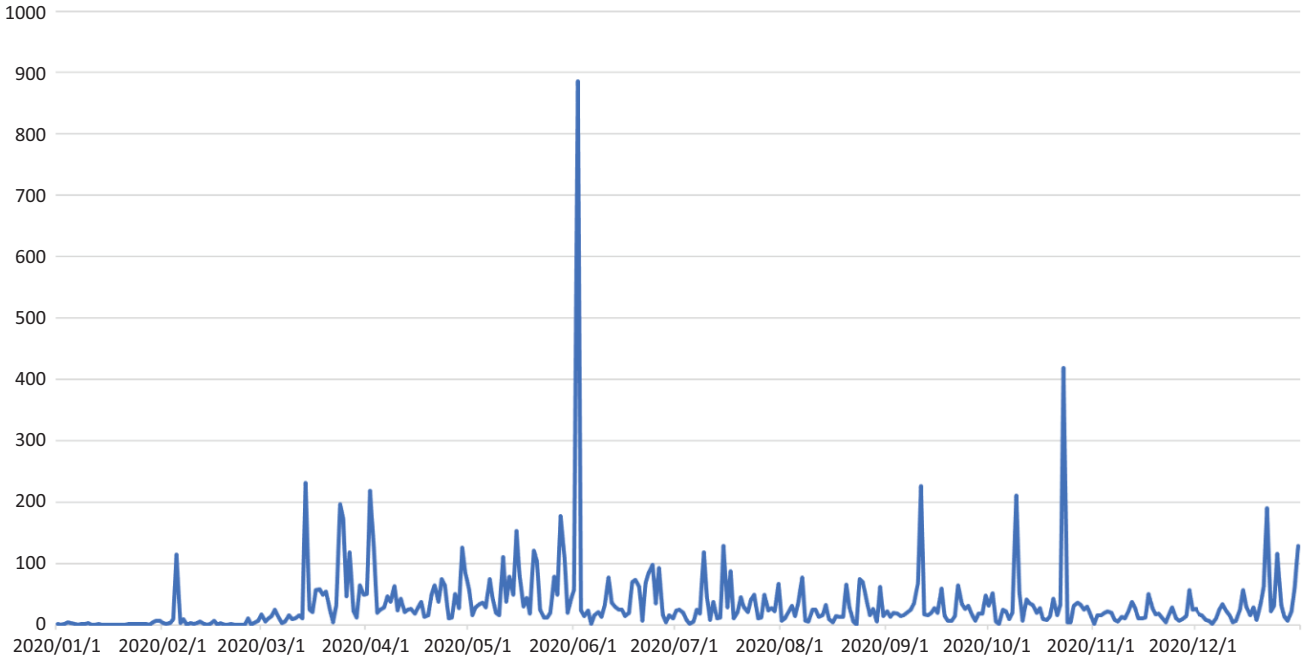

Figure 2. Volume of search results across 2020.

another peak, with no correlating development in South Africa's pandemic.

Developments in the publication of articles about migration and Covid-19 in South Africa can therefore be understood to be related to the development of the pandemic, intersecting geopolitical interests and language, and publication trends in the US that are, in many ways, separate from the previous two factors.

3.2. Framing Analysis

As outlined above, six deductive frames (Linstrom & Marais, 2012) were identified and used to conduct a framing analysis of 561 articles. The findings related to these frames are discussed in detail below.

3.2.1. Human Interest Frame

Most stories across all four quarters did not have a "human face" or "emotional angle," even when the impact of Covid-19 on communities, including migrant communities, was outlined. Only 88 of the articles analysed (15.69%), for example, included quotes from migrants themselves. Although in the minority, however, there was consistent publication of stories that did present a human face employing either extensive quotes and stories or visceral descriptions to do so. Key examples include articles outlining the impact of the pandemic and lockdown on blind migrants in Johannesburg (Q4_075), the experiences of migrant mineworkers, and the challenges faced by refugees kept in camps in Cape Town (Q3_039, Q4_055). In addition, articles in which personal reflections on life in the pandemic were given by middle-class individuals that used migrants and refugees as a comparison to their own anxieties around the pandemic provided a constant emotional angle throughout 2020:

> I think of Nelson Mandela and his 26 years of imprisonment. I think of human rights defenders, migrants, homeless people, or the Bangladeshi garment factory workers who now have no economic lifeline. I know I'm fortunate, but somehow that doesn't calm my racing mind. (Q2_052)

The role of South African media in contributing to the xenophobic climate in South Africa has been well documented (Banda & Mawadza, 2015; Danso & McDonald, 2001; McDonald & Jacobs, 2005; Muswede & Mpofu, 2020; Pineteh, 2017). As a result, we had anticipated identifying publications that were inflammatory and xenophobic in nature and that included inaccurate information about migrant and mobile populations. Interestingly, however, only 25 articles (4.46%) were flagged during analysis as expressing xenophobic ideas. Some of these articles argued quite explicitly that non-citizens should be excluded from the economy (Q3_139) or that "illegal" migrants would put South Africans at risk of Covid-19 (Q2_036, Q2_090). While others used the term "illegal" uncritically (Q3_034, Q3_045), implying "both criminality and difference…[in addition to] a close connection with crime and criminal acts" (Peberdy, 1997, as cited in Pineteh, 2017, p. 6).

In addition, in only 14 articles (2.5%) did researchers note concerns about inaccuracies in the data presented. Articles that were identified included the inflation of numbers, specifically in relation to non-citizens in informal settlements and in the economy (for example,

Q2_072, Q2_132, Q2_104) and the incorrect use of the term "human trafficking" (Q2_185, Q2_188, Q2_175). However, contrary to previous media analyses, these kinds of incorrect or misleading comments about migrants were not widespread as the pandemic developed in South Africa.

3.2.2. Responsibility, Power, and Conflict

During analysis, the power, responsibility, and conflict frames were applied separately to ensure that nuances in framing were captured. Analysing the application of frames and analysis itself, however, made clear the interconnectedness of these three frames and the benefits of reading them together. Through this process, five themes emerged as key to our understanding of how migrants and migration were being written about and framed in the media.

The first was that Covid-19 was consistently portrayed as a disruptor—a black swan event—that was responsible for the increased precarity of many, including migrants. Given the powerful role played by the pandemic, states and communities were consistently portrayed as in conflict with Covid-19.

Given the close association between mobility and the spread of Covid-19, the framing of human mobility as powerful and important within the Southern African region was a second finding. Mobility—including local mobility within cities—was consistently presented as a key way in which Covid-19 spreads (for example, Q2_105, Q2_183). Travel bans and restrictions were therefore framed as a logical response to the pandemic. However, in writing about the effects of travel restrictions on communities, articles clearly articulated the power of mobility in the lives of many in the region by showing how without the ability to move many lost their jobs, livelihoods, and food security:

> Zivhu says the coronavirus has put many cross-border traders in a dire situation. Many live a hand-to-mouth existence and must sell goods to earn money, he says. Closing the border with South Africa has left the traders and workers who support them vulnerable and without money to pay for rent, school fees or even food. Zivhu likens it to a natural disaster. (Q2_081)

Within this context, the reasons why mobility persists—even when it involves breaking the law—are clear. Through this framing of mobility, the powerlessness of migrants and those reliant on mobility for work and well-being is clearly pushed to the fore and emerges as a third finding. This is additionally supported by the framing of these individuals and groups as being in conflict with policymakers and law enforcement globally. As the acute phase of the pandemic came to an end—towards the end of 2020—articles began to highlight the opportunity the pandemic had provided to states to stop asylum systems and create additional financial and logistical barriers to documented mobility. The use of Covid-19 certificates is a clear example of this:

> To stop the spread of Covid-19, the South African government requires all foreigners, including Basotho, to produce a Covid-19 certificate showing they tested negative for the disease. The problem, however is that such a certificate does not come cheap. A Covid-19 certificate costs a staggering M1 350 [approx. 89 USD at the time of writing] at a private clinic in Maseru, a fortune for most Basotho who survive on less than US$2 a day….Without a Covid-19 certificate, some Basotho have chosen to cross the border at illegal points along the river such as the one in Maputsoe, risking their lives as they do so. Last week, one woman fell off the inflated mattress and drowned. (Q4_065)

The use of the pandemic to further state-sanctioned xenophobia was a key component in the framing of the state across 2020. The South African state was portrayed as powerful through its ability to impose and enforce lockdowns, the general callousness displayed towards vulnerable groups, including refugees in Cape Town, and displays of force. Simultaneously, however, the state was portrayed as powerless in the face of Covid-19 and to put a stop to human mobility. While there was little consensus on how the government should respond to either Covid-19 or migration, the state was seen as failing to respond to both adequately, in addition to being responsible for a plethora of related issues. Within this framing, the South African state was seen as being in conflict not only with migrants, but also with its own citizens, industry, Covid-19 and, most interestingly, itself. In various articles, different parts of the South African state are seen in conflict with one another—a key example of this being in relation to the refugees in Cape Town:

> Home Affairs and the City of Cape Town are engaged in a blame game over who should shoulder the responsibility for the repatriation or deportation of refugees and asylum seekers who have been left in limbo….The City of Cape Town…said it was not within the legal mandate of the City and that refugees and asylum seekers remained the responsibility of the department [of Home Affairs]. (Q2_024)

Finally, and often because the state is framed as reneging on its responsibilities towards migrants, the primacy of UN agencies and humanitarian organisations is asserted throughout the articles. This is in part due to the number of articles written by UN agencies themselves promoting their work with migrants during the pandemic. Twenty-five articles in our sample were written by UN agencies, primarily the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (n = 6) and the International Organization for Migration (n = 8), and often republished

by other outlets. While this contributes to only 4.46% of the sample, these articles, in addition to other articles referencing them, created a body of work that inextricably linked these organisations to the well-being of migrant and mobile communities, and vulnerable communities more broadly in the Southern African region. This link reaffirms the power and importance of the humanitarian status quo in the region and when thinking about migrant and mobile populations.

3.2.3. Economic Frame

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a disruptive impact on economies. As such, it was unsurprising that many of the articles analysed included reflections on the economic impact of the pandemic and the economic consequences of responses to the pandemic. Articles by and large framed the economic impact of Covid-19 and pandemic responses interchangeably—few differentiated or tried to differentiate between the effects of the pandemic and those of the state responses. Those that were critical of state responses due to their economic impact rarely highlighted the pandemic itself as a disruptor or outlined the economic impact that different responses to the pandemic may have had.

Economic effects were framed in three ways. The first involved highlighting global and national recessions. The second was in relation to industries and the economic impact—the loss of profit and business—experienced by these industries, specifically in South Africa. Finally, the economic effects of the pandemic on communities and individuals were highlighted. The loss of livelihoods and jobs because of the pandemic and various stages of lockdown for migrant and mobile populations were written about across 2020. These articles often linked the loss of income to food insecurity, highlighting the reliance of many in the region on cross-border mobility for food security. They also showed how travel bans and restrictions, and the cost of Covid-19 testing and certificates, affected life for those reliant on cross-border mobility, particularly those without documents—the quotes attributed to Q2_082 and Q4_065 highlight these concerns.

3.2.4. Moral Values

Various moral values and perspectives underpinned the articles analysed. Fifty-nine of the articles, just over 10% of the sample, were found to share information without any specific moral values attached. For example, articles providing information about where to access a social grant. However, 90% of the articles analysed gave some indication of the assumptions and assertations underpinning the article.

Three perspectives appeared consistently in relation to migrants and migration across 2020. Primarily articles were sympathetic to migrant and mobile populations. While a few were explicitly xenophobic or uncritical of the xenophobic statements they were reporting, on the whole articles highlighted the difficulties faced by these communities due to the pandemic and poor state responses to migration.

The second perspective related to the importance of UN agencies and humanitarian agencies for migrant and mobile populations. As noted, 25 articles analysed were written by UN agencies themselves, outlining the work that they did across 2020 for "vulnerable communities" (Q2_198). This ranged from United Nations Children's Fund training community health workers (Q2_125) to the International Organization for Migration offering Covid-19 screening at their cross-border Occupation Health Centre in Ressano Garcia (Mozambique; Q3_037) and assisting with voluntary repatriation of non-citizens from South Africa (Q4_013). All of which assert the centrality of these organisations to responses to migration.

Finally, the importance of mobility for lives and livelihoods, which—specifically in the fourth quarter—often included a critique of current approaches to border management, particularly between South African and Zimbabwe, frequently underpinned the stories being told about the implications of the pandemic for migrant and mobile populations.

4. Discussion

Reflecting on the portrayal of immigrants in the media globally, Moyo and Mpofu (2020b) write:

> Understanding how the media report immigration and its consequences, including xenophobia, is critical in today's world, where the majority of global citizens do not "experience" immigration and xenophobia first-hand but mostly through secondary sources, including…the media….What has often been referred to as the "migration crisis" in Europe and the USA, for instance, has largely been "witnessed" by many through the media, which play the role of "primary definers" in naming and describing the phenomenon….This, however, does not suggest that the media are all-powerful since the mediation process does not exclude listeners, readers or viewers who also have power in negotiating social meanings. (pp. 4–5)

Our findings differ from much of the existing literature exploring how the media portrays migrants and migration in South Africa. Previous research argues, very convincingly, that the media have played a key role in the proliferation of xenophobic ideas in South Africa, and in xenophobic violence itself (Banda & Mawadza, 2015; Danso & McDonald, 2001; McDonald & Jacobs, 2005; Muswede & Mpofu, 2020; Pineteh, 2017). This has allowed "democratic thinking," popular and populist ideas within South African society, to define how migrants and migration are framed (Moyo & Mpofu,

2020a, p. viii). Although the causal link between newspaper articles and xenophobic violence has been contested both academically and legally (Smith, 2011), the role of the media in contributing to the xenophobic climate in South Africa is seldom disputed.

Our research, however, suggests that the media is renegotiating its framing of migrants and migration in South Africa. The framing of migrants and migration as a threat to South Africans was far less prevalent than in findings from previous research. Rather, migrants were given a human face through the publication of articles that detailed the difficulties they were experiencing due to the pandemic and the state's failure to develop responses to Covid-19 that did not render migrants and those reliant on mobility additionally vulnerable. Previous research has outlined how the media has in the past been a key avenue for the framing of migrants and migration in populist and xenophobic ways. For example, framing the use of the healthcare system by migrants as a key reason why South Africans face barriers when trying to access healthcare (Muswede & Mpofu, 2020). Our findings, however, suggest that the failure of the state with regards to both Covid-19 and migration and the implications of both this failure and the pandemic on communities—both migrant and South African—is of far greater interest to the media now.

Across our sample, there was consistent publication of migrant interest stories that explicitly linked the experiences of migrants to state action or inaction. For example, the loss of life and danger experienced by Basotho nationals due to the requirement of an exorbitantly priced negative Covid-19 test to cross the border into South Africa. These articles reflect the importance of mobility for many in the region and are critical of the South African state's current approaches to migration management. While our study does not allow us to determine the cause of this shift, it appears that the Covid-19 pandemic has created opportunities for these changes in framing to take place—our findings suggest that the English language media in South Africa is contesting "democratic thinking as a framework for understanding the foreign Other" (Moyo & Mpofu, 2020a, p. viii).

5. Conclusion

Our findings show that patterns in the publication of articles on the topic of migration and Covid-19 in South Africa broadly corresponded to the development of the pandemic in South Africa in 2020. However, although local and regional journalists and outlets published on the topic consistently, articles from US- and UK-based publications were more likely to be rapidly republished—leading to peaks in the search results—and had a larger reach. This suggests that much of the information about and framing of migration in relation to Covid-19 in South Africa is not being produced by local media. However, our findings indicate that framing across both local and global media was, on the whole, consistent.

Drawing on frames informed by the existing body of literature on media analysis enabled us to think more critically about the assumptions underpinning articles and the literary devices utilised by journalists to convincingly frame their arguments and perspective. Importantly, however, articles that framed migration or migrants as a threat or as detrimental to South Africa and South Africans were far fewer in number than articles that were sympathetic to the difficulties experienced by migrants. Recognition of the centrality of mobility to both the spread of Covid-19, and responses to it, and the lives and livelihoods of many in South and Southern Africa was a key feature of the framing of migration and migrants across 2022. The framing of those reliant on mobility as powerless in response to travel restrictions and the use of the pandemic to further state-sanctioned xenophobia was an additional key feature. An important example of both was the use of the pandemic by the Department of Home Affairs to justify closing the applications process for visas and permits in March 2020, and only beginning to assess applications for permanent residency again in January 2022, 22 months later (VISA Immigrations SA, 2022). Examples such as this point to one of the key findings that emerged from reading the responsibility, power, and conflict frames together—the state is clearly framed across 2020 as failing to take responsibility for migration and migrants. Such framing also supports the idea that UN agencies and humanitarian organisations are essential in responses to migration as they fill the gaps left by the state.

The social ramifications of the pandemic and responses to it are naturally intertwined with its economic impact. This impact has been felt by individuals and communities, industry, and business, and by the country as a whole. The wide-scale loss of jobs and rising unemployment were used to frame calls to close access to the economy and job opportunities for non-citizens. However, this kind of anti-migrant sentiment was not widespread in our sample.

Given that media reporting around migration and migrants in South Africa has historically been anti-migrant and fed into xenophobic narratives, our findings suggest that English language journalists and publications are currently renegotiating how they portray migrants and migration. What the implications of this renegotiation, of contesting "democratic thinking," will be are currently unclear. As xenophobic reporting is understood to have contributed to xenophobia and xenophobic violence in the past, will reporting that is sympathetic to migrants and migration similarly encourage South Africans to be more accepting of migrants and less xenophobic? Or will readers move away from media that challenges their beliefs about migrants and migration, and find alternative sources for information? Will social media—which in 2020 played a role in exacerbating xenophobia and co-ordinating xenophobic violence (Bezuidenhout, 2020)—fill this gap, and what might the long-term implications of this be for South

Africa? Additional research is needed to respond to these questions, including research that expands beyond the English language and looks at the increasingly important function played by social media sites.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge and thank the members of the Migration, Gender and Health Systems project who were not directly involved in the pilot project, but who provided insights and guidance during its conception and the writing of this article—Lucy Gilson, Karima Manji, Langelihle Mlotshwa, Moeketsi Modisenyane, Jill Olivier, and Helen Walls. We would like to thank Lenore Longwe and Kwandakwethu Ndaba of the ACMS for administrative support throughout the project. In addition, we would like to thank Nadine Schenk and the team from Meltwater for their assistance during this project.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2022, Volume 10, Issue 2, Pages 265–275
https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i2.5014

Article

Between Conflict and Solidarity: Pandemic Media Coverage of Romanian Intra-EU Labour Migrants

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Submitted: 29 October 2021 | Accepted: 9 March 2022 | Published: 30 June 2022

Abstract
The Covid-19 pandemic affected Romanian intra-EU labour migrants in a particular way and challenged the established themes associated with and the social roles assigned to them in news discourses. During the first wave of the pandemic, Covid-19 hotspots were reported abroad in Romanian migrant communities, the most notorious example being at the Tönnies factory in Germany. The pandemic brought to prominence the precarious working conditions of labour migrants employed in agriculture and especially in the food industry. Wider discussions, conflicts, and solidarity actions were generated around this topic. In the present study, we identify the main themes and topics present in the Romanian media coverage of Romanian labour migrants, as well as the way foreign, particularly German, media perspectives were integrated into and domesticated in the Romanian coverage. Findings show that both the Romanian and German media used, to a certain extent, the media coverage of this exceptional pandemic situation to invite reflection on the general social costs of migration and on the responsibility of political actors in the migrants' country of origin, in their country of destination, and at the level of EU institutions. However, the perspective of the migrants was underrepresented in the media coverage.

Keywords
diaspora; international news flow; intra-EU migration; labour migration; news representations

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Media and Migration in the Covid-19 Pandemic: Discourses, Policies, and Practices in Times of Crisis," edited by Vasiliki Tsagkroni (Leiden University), Amanda Alencar (Erasmus University Rotterdam), and Dimitris Skleparis (Newcastle University).

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic affected Romanian labour migrants in a particular way. A significant number returned home at the beginning of March 2020 from foreign countries, especially from Italy, where they faced a dramatic health crisis and sudden unemployment. The Romanian government was thus put under pressure to find solutions to prevent the spread of the virus in the returning migrants' home country. Furthermore, in search of new job opportunities, they travelled during the lockdown to work in the agriculture and food industries in other countries, where Covid-19 hotspots were reported in Romanian communities. In May 2020, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on European protection of cross-border and seasonal workers in the context of the Covid-19 crisis (European Parliament Resolution of 19 June 2020, 2020).

On 17 June 2020, disturbing news caused concern in Germany and abroad. The largest Covid-19 hotspot in Europe at that time was discovered at the Tönnies slaughterhouse, in North Rhine-Westphalia, where most workers are migrants. The international media, the German media, and the media in the workers' countries of origin, including Romania, focused heavily on this story. The growing cases of infections in the countries of destination represented the context in which media attention focused on the situation of the foreign workers. Although

poor working conditions in the meat-processing industry were nothing new, the pandemic sparked wider discussions, conflicts, and solidarity actions.

Before the pandemic, Romanian and foreign media coverage of Romanian labour migration focused primarily on issues related to the freedom of movement for workers, specifically in the contexts of Romania's joining the EU and of Brexit. Romanians abroad also tended to appear in foreign news published in Romania as witnesses of extraordinary events such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters, as criminals, or, to a lesser extent, as local celebrities, as was the case with Romanians running for a mandate in local or national institutions abroad (Mogoș et al., 2021). At the same time, in the domestic political arena, the diaspora gradually acquired a positive role as a social actor, featuring in public discourses as voters for parties representing pro-European values and even playing a decisive role in elections (Kolumban, 2020.) The pandemic not only posed new challenges but also added new thematic dimensions to news coverage of Romanians abroad, particularly concerning labour migration.

In the EU, Romania has one of the highest rates of intra-EU migration, a complex and dynamic phenomenon. The most common destinations are Western European countries such as Italy, Spain, France, Germany, and the UK (Anghel et al., 2016). Among new member states, Romania and Poland are the countries of origin of the largest intra-EU migrant groups (OECD, 2018). Some Romanians are circular migrants, working temporary or seasonal jobs in other countries, whereas others have decided to permanently leave their country. Labour migration has a large economic, political, cultural, and social impact on the whole of Romanian society (Balaban & Huțuleac, 2021; Vasile, 2014). Moreover, domestic media discussions of this phenomenon contribute to both the construction of labour migrants as social agents and the justification of policy measures (Mădroane, 2016). Understanding the media coverage of labour migration, especially during a crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, is therefore central to comprehending the wider media and political discourses surrounding labour migration, with implications beyond the discursive construction of labour migration, including the representation of domestic, foreign, and EU actors and institutions in the news.

Considering migration as a transnational field (Levitt & Schiller, 2004), the present research aims to identify the main dimensions along which the topic of Romanian intra-EU labour migration was reflected in Covid-19 pandemic news coverage in Romania, the migrants' country of origin. Germany was one of the preferred destinations for Romanian workers in the period between March and July 2020, and several events that received wide coverage in the Romanian media took place in Germany and were covered with reference to German media. The most notorious event was the above-mentioned Covid-19 outbreak at the Tönnies meat factory. The international media, the German media, and the media in the workers' countries of origin, including Romania, covered this story. The high number of infections represented the context in which media in the countries of destination focused on the situation of the foreign workers. Although poor working conditions in the meat-processing industry were nothing new, the pandemic sparked wider discussions, conflicts, and solidarity actions related to this issue. In our research, we focused on how the perspectives of German media were integrated into domestic Romanian coverage. Thus, we aim to contribute to the research on labour migration in times of crisis by concentrating on how news media covered a transnational phenomenon and acted as an agent of international news flow.

2. Theoretical Framework

In today's world, migration is a complex issue that affects different levels of society in both the home and destination countries of migrants. Research on the motives underlying migration within the EU has revealed a diverse mix of economic, family-related, social, cultural, and educational factors (Man & Verwiebe, 2010). Even though Romanians were already migrating to Western Europe before the fall of communism in 1989 (Diminescu, 2009; Șerban & Voicu, 2010), the largest outflow of migrants has occurred over the last three decades, as barriers to intra-EU migration were gradually removed for Romanian citizens. This "migration within Europe" is systematically supported, both directly and indirectly, by legislation, economic agents, and existing networks of migrants. EU programmes based on the principle of freedom of movement and the recognition of foreign qualifications have contributed to the migration of the labour force between EU member states (Verwiebe et al., 2014). However, there is no single "prototypical" intra-EU migrant (Castro-Martín & Cortina, 2015). The current migration situation cannot be described by the traditional long-term migration model (Eisenstadt, 1953), and Romanian intra-EU migration can, in many cases, be better described as a "back-and-forth" circular pattern (Marcu, 2011). Although previous research highlighted the benefits of circular migration, especially for the economy, there are also downsides (Eberl et al., 2018). Seasonal workers are often confronted with access inequalities, poor working conditions, and pay gaps between migrants and non-migrants (Faist, 2008).

Most Romanians who have decided to work abroad were influenced by factors such as unemployment, unsuitable jobs, lack of money, housing problems, the desire to offer a better life to their families, the belief that work is more appreciated abroad than at home, and social imitation. Push factors for the economic migration of Romanians moving to other EU countries are both internal and external and include the following: the poor business environment; the lack of public policy measures supporting the employment of graduates and lower efficiency or improper implementation of such existing

measures; the lack of coherence between employment policy and wages; low living standards (Vasile, 2014, p. 741); and the desire for better work opportunities, better income, and a better life for families left at home. Driven to countries such as Italy and Spain by a high demand for low-skilled labour force, Romanians took jobs in unpleasant conditions on the unregulated market (Balaban & Huțuleac, 2021; Bleauhu, 2007). Most Romanian migrants in Italy and Spain work in agriculture and the construction industry (Hanganu et al., 2014; Ricci, 2015). The Romanians working abroad in these sectors are often confronted with the downsides of circular migration. Pull factors include existing migration networks (Mara, 2012), bilateral agreements (e.g., between Italy and Romania), and labour recruitment agencies (Ban, 2012).

The media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion about immigration in Europe (Eberl et al., 2018). Levitt and Schiller (2004), studying migration as a transnational social issue, have noted that media coverage involves several actors with different agendas, from both the sending and receiving countries of labour migrants. This conceptualization enables us to analyse the connection between the country of origin and the country of destination (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). Furthermore, as Meltzer et al. (2017) stress, the media can shape public debates on migration issues. Studying the media coverage of immigrants is thus important given the effect of media coverage on citizen perceptions and attitudes towards the immigrants. Even if there are differences in how different migrant groups are framed by the media, coverage in receiving countries is often negative and conflict centred. In addition, intra-EU migrants are often underrepresented in the media of the country of destination (Eberl et al., 2018).

In the last decade, the Romanian media has focused on Romanian intra-EU migrants from different perspectives, framing labour and circular migration as a public issue. Media coverage has proved to be important because it encouraged public actions (Beciu et al., 2017). Moreover, local and regional authorities developed special programmes and communicated them to the public with the help of the media, aiming not only to deal with the negative effects of labour migration but also to strengthen the relationship between migrants and their home country (Balaban & Huțuleac, 2021).

Mădroane (2016) analysed the media construction of the remitting practices of circular migration and its multiple challenges for Romanian society as an indicator of the migrant–non-migrant relationship. Remittances played a central role in the domestic media coverage of Romanian intra-EU migrants (Mădroane, 2016). Besides their financial component, remittances also possess social, cultural, and political dimensions (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011), and lead to ties and power relations in transnational social fields. Romanian labour migrants were portrayed by the Romanian media in terms of solidarity, social recognition, and heroism. They were called saviours of the economy, and remittances were seen as a "survival strategy against the backdrop of austerity, unemployment and the absence of institutional support" (Mădroane, 2016, p. 236). In the context of an incapacitated Romanian state remittances not only play a significant role for the wealth of migrants' families left at home but also contribute to regional economic development (Ciocea & Cârlan, 2012).

The Romanian media instrumentalised migration for various purposes (Beciu et al., 2017). In recent years, both traditional and digital media outlets have addressed the "new diaspora" in the context of election campaigns in which Romanian political parties targeted Romanian intra-EU migrants, highlighting the idea that they can contribute to a change in society by disseminating ideas, values, and practices that they encountered in countries with strong democratic traditions (Dolea, 2018; Gherghina & Soare, 2020; Voicu & Comşa, 2014).

Media coverage instrumentalized labour migrants concerning their impact on the economy, the development of policy initiatives, the impact on the family life of the migrants, the impact on Romania's image as a country, political representation, and the civic engagement of the migrants. Except for the costs of family separation, the public dimension of remittances was overall positive before the pandemic (Mădroane, 2016). The pre-pandemic domestic discourse on Romanian migrants describes them in positive terms. In the new context of the Covid-19 pandemic, our research focused on how the media portrayed Romanian intra-EU migrants and sought to answer the following research question:

> RQ1: What were the predominant themes and voices that defined the Romanian media coverage of Romanian intra-EU labour migration in the context of the outbreak of the pandemic?

Migration is considered a transnational social field, a "set of multiple interlocking networks of social relations" (Levitt & Schiller, 2004, p. 1009), where local, national, transnational, and global structures intersect. Intra-EU migrants can be integrated into their host country but still have a certain attachment to their native country. In this context, the media plays an important role in problematizing transnational experiences (Beciu et al., 2017). This theoretical perspective allows a broader understanding of how media discourses, in both the country of origin and destination, are articulated in a transnational perspective. Thus, "media discourses activate modes of engagement at a distance and provide resources for the articulation of cultural and political belonging to various communities (national, local and diasporic), fashioning themselves as sites of symbolic power" (Beciu et al., 2017, p. 258). Hence, analysing media representations of Romanian labour migrants involves looking at a transnational social actor present in both the domestic space and abroad. This poses challenges concerning sources and angles of coverage for media institutions

and correspondents, who, especially in times of crisis, like the pandemic, only have mediated access to the migrants' world, and need to domesticate (Clausen, 2004) foreign media voices and representations to cover a partly domestic social actor. In this context, voices represented in the media coverage are important because social actors who get a voice can influence how events are interpreted (Beckers & Van Aelst, 2019). However, refugees' and migrants' voices are barely represented in media coverage (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017).

Previous research highlighted the role of media in shaping public debates about immigration (Burscher et al., 2015; Chauzy & Appave, 2014). Recent studies focusing on the framing of migrants in the news unveiled diverse perspectives, from innocent victims claiming solidarity to conflictual actors posing a threat to culture and security (Beckers & Van Aelst, 2019). In general, associating immigrants with crime is a common practice (Jacobs et al., 2018).

Romanians as intra-EU immigrants are not frequently covered in Western news media (Eberl et al., 2018). The extended media coverage of Romanians' access to the UK labour market in 2014 not only is the exception but also provides an example of how media coverage works in transnational social fields. Romanians and Bulgarians were negatively depicted as a threat to the economy and welfare system, especially by tabloid media (Balch & Balabanova, 2016). The prominent media frames emphasized in the British tabloids were the economic frame, the social benefits frame, and the employment frame. On the other hand, other media frames, such as the educational frame related to Romanian students in the UK, the EU-policy frame related to the freedom of movement, and the cultural frame related to immigrants' integration, were present in the quality media (Cheregi, 2015; Eberl et al., 2018; Helbling, 2014).

The media tends to portray migrants collectively, as a social group, a single entity, separated from others (Baker et al., 2013). This is problematic in the case of the Romanian diaspora as well, as it is a very heterogeneous group in terms of motivations, social status, immigration status, education level, job security, and social security. Considering migration as a transnational social field and having in mind the Covid-19 hotspots in Germany with Romanian labour migrants involved, we posed the following research question:

> RQ2: How were foreign media perspectives integrated into Romanian news coverage of pandemic labour migration?

3. Methodology

Our methodology combines quantitative and qualitative content analysis, aiming to identify the predominant themes and discursive patterns of the media coverage. We analysed articles published from 1 March to 30 July 2020, the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe, by the leading Romanian online news outlets, selected based on audience ratings by the Romanian Audit Bureau of Circulations (https://www.brat.ro/sati): *Stirile Pro TV* (https://stirileprotv.ro), *Libertatea* (https://www.libertatea.ro), *Adevarul* (https://adevarul.ro), *Digi24* (https://www.digi24.ro), and *Antena 3* (https://www.antena3.ro). These sites include news portals of the leading daily papers as well as the news sites of television stations, reflecting the structure of the Romanian public sphere, where televisions are a predominant news source and are engaged in cross-platform distribution, operating major news portals. The sample (n = 201) contains articles that included the Romanian terms for "pandemic," "coronavirus," and "Covid-19" combined with the Romanian terms for "working abroad," "seasonal workers," and "diaspora."

Our coding scheme was defined during an initial round of inductive coding, which resulted in the following topics: "cases of Covid-19 infection," "return to Romania," "travel abroad for work," "lack of workforce abroad," "domestic economic impact," "working conditions," "safety regulations," and "conflict." We then coded the whole sample for the presence of these topics, using multiple coding, as each article could touch upon several of these. Second, after identifying the frequencies of these topics, in line with previous research (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017), we also grouped them using principal component analysis, interpreting the resulting factors as the main themes of the coverage. The distribution of these topics was also explored along the dimension of "geographic coverage," operationalized by coding the target country of labour migration, including the EU and its institutions as a separate value along with the target states.

We also identified and coded the presence of the "voices" of the following: migrants, Romanian officials, foreign officials, employers, intermediaries, multiple voices represented by Romanian and foreign officials, and others, such as foreign journalists. We also coded for "collectivization," that is, whether migrants were referred to as individuals or as a collective.

To answer our second research question, we identified the sources cited by the articles and grouped them by their geographic origins, using a combination of manual coding and computer-assisted named-entity recognition, and analysed the co-occurrences of source groups with the topics coded during the content analysis. After these quantitative steps, we selected all articles in the Romanian sample that reported on events that occurred in Germany (n = 40), the most frequently mentioned country in the articles analysed. Where it was possible, we identified the possible sources referred to in the text and accessed the original articles. We then compared Romanian news reports with sources referenced to identify discursive patterns of domestication.

4. Results

4.1. First Research Question

The present analysis covers the first five months of the Covid-19 pandemic. This period is characterized by a prevalence of news stories about the pandemic. Among them, the topic of Romanian intra-EU migrants achieved prominence due to several events that generated dramatic scenes and images. The media presented large crowds gathered at the western Romanian state border to enter the country and lines of cars with migrants directed to special quarantine places destined mainly for those who were returning from Italy and Spain. Due to the pandemic, many Romanian labour migrants were left without housing since it was in many cases linked to their employment contracts. Starting in April 2020, outgoing seasonal workers came into the media's focus. Although at that time travelling restrictions were already in place, Romania had decreed a state of emergency, and a strict lockdown had been implemented; seasonal workers who received special permission to travel to host countries such as Germany gathered in large numbers at the international airport in Cluj-Napoca. Given the increased media interest in migrants during this first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, we can consider Romanian labour migrants and the pandemic as an important chapter for the domestic media, a chapter similar in terms of media attention to others, such as the economic and financial crisis of 2009–2011 (Mădroane, 2016) or the involvement of the diaspora in electoral campaigns for general elections, but especially presidential elections.

The most prominent topic identified during the coding process was that of pandemic-related safety regulations, which was present in 59.5% of the analysed articles. Under this category, we coded references to measures that were in force and applied to Romanians travelling abroad or coming back to Romania during the analysis. This topic was followed by concerns about the poor and unsafe working conditions of Romanian migrants abroad (50.7%). Cases of Covid-19 infections among Romanian migrants working abroad, including in hotspots, were present in 41% of the articles we analysed. During the period of the analysis, the media presented, on the one hand, Romanian labour migrants travelling abroad despite the lockdown (31.7%), and, on the other hand, labour migrants returning to Romania (25.9%). The motivation for workforce movement was also highlighted by the media, focusing on both the lack of workforce abroad (25%) and the domestic economic impact (22.4%), the pull and push factors that contributed to labour migration. Conflict was identified in 16.9% of the articles. Conflicts can occur, for example, between local Romanian communities and migrants returning home and between local communities or local authorities in the country of destination and the migrants.

Travelling abroad for work (31.7%) was primarily discussed by focusing on the special conditions created by the Romanian government together with other public institutions from different Western European countries such as Germany and Austria. Travelling restrictions under pandemic conditions challenged the freedom of travel throughout Europe. In the case of the Romanian media and public discourses, this intersected with several locally specific frames. On the one hand, the agreements between Romania and foreign governments to allow seasonal labourers to travel to alleviate labour shortages were sometimes cast in terms of "selling" or "exporting" citizens. The issue of the responsibility of the government was cast both as a causal responsibility, with government incompetence causing scenes like the ones at the Cluj airport, where large crowds gathered without respecting the safety measures in effect, and as a solution responsibility, that is, the government is an actor responsible for solving the issue.

The reasons for travelling and working abroad during the challenging first months of the pandemic were explained by the lack of workforce abroad in 25% of the articles. The target countries needed seasonal migrants, especially in agriculture and the care service sector. In addition, the domestic economic impact of labour migration was highlighted in 22.4% of the articles, mostly focusing on families left at home that relied on financial support from working migrants.

The working conditions and working rights of seasonal labourers were widely discussed throughout Europe, including at the level of the European Parliament. The domestic discussion in Romania partly reflected the international debate, taking over articles from the German media on working conditions and on protests of German labour unions and NGOs trying to improve those conditions. Concerning working conditions, migrant labourers generally appeared as victims of abuse and neglect, but also as beneficiaries of transnational solidarity. In terms of the domestic economic impact of migration, readers were reminded both of the economic impact of the money traditionally sent home by the diaspora, as well as of the human cost of migration, for example, the impact on children left behind. At the same time, especially in domestic political discussions, the workers were also recurrently assigned causal responsibility, for example, for not reading their contracts.

The predominant voices present in the media coverage of Romanian intra-EU migrants were those of Romanian officials (39.5%), multiple voices represented by Romanian and foreign officials (26.7%), those of foreign officials (5.3%), foreign employers (2.4%), representatives of intermediary agencies (0.5%), and others, such as foreign journalists (13.1%). The analysis highlighted that Romanian media paid special attention to foreign journalists. This is not new: The image of the country abroad and news of Romanians abroad are recurrent themes in the Romanian news media, but, in the context of the pandemic, these topics gained particular prominence as a primary filter for the coverage. The voices of Romanian migrants were represented in only 18% of the

articles. Routes to having a voice for the migrant workers were the traditional ones: Other newsmakers with specific media management practices, like NGOs, might give them a voice. We have also noted some new routes, including diaspora media, as the diaspora has local news outlets that until now were not covered by the national media. Social media could also provide a platform for giving a voice to migrants; the media turns to such sources primarily in conflict situations. Also, we have noted that migrant voices were strongly mediated by the Western media, being primarily cited via foreign news sources.

These results are in line with the tendencies noted in the literature on the media coverage of migration in general (Baker et al., 2013; Beckers & Van Aelst, 2019). Thus, Romanian labour migrants during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic were presented mostly as a collective, and they tended not to possess a voice in the media. This was the most evident along the topic of return migration, where voicelessness was prominent. Moreover, the idea of incoming crowds posing dangers to public health was reiterated a few weeks after the pandemic's outbreak in the media coverage. In the early days of the pandemic, migrants were portrayed as agents who came home, bringing the dangerous virus into their local communities. This marked a major shift in the discourse in the Romanian media, which until this time had tended to present the positive role of the diaspora in the domestic social and political arena. The topic of returning to Romania was one of the issues with the strongest emotional overtones, both in the appeals made by authorities and the president for the diaspora not to return home for Easter, as well as in the recurrent suggestion that by returning home they were exposing themselves as well as their families and the public to health risks. This argument sometimes degenerated into outright scapegoating. This theme also intersects with the securitization discourse we are familiar with from the so-called refugee crisis (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017; Vincze et al., 2021.)

Table 1 presents the weight given to migrant voices and the prominence of the discursive practice of collectivization along with the various topics.

Three major themes were identified using factorial analysis with principal component extraction. This type of data analysis was used in line with previous research (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). The purpose of performing this type of analysis is to identify the frequencies of dominant frames. The following factors resulted after using Oblimin rotation: (a) migration motivation (lack of workforce abroad, travel abroad, and domestic economic impact), (b) conflict (working conditions and conflict), and (c) working conditions (working conditions and safety regulations). These three factors explained 32.15%, 19.99%, and 18.99% of the variance, respectively. Factor loading is presented in Table 2.

We analysed the prevalence of the Western European destination countries in the media coverage in relation to certain topics. The EU and major European institutions such as the European Commission and the European Parliament were also taken into account in the analysis. Some of the identified topics were significantly associated with particular countries, such as the lack of workforce abroad ($\chi^2(11) = 37.67$, $p < 0.001$, $\Phi = 0.428$), which was mostly discussed in the broader EU context and in relation to the UK, Germany, and Italy; returning to Romania ($\chi^2(11) = 26.07$, $p = 0.006$, $\Phi = 0.357$);

Table 1. The weight of migrant voices and collectivization along with the various topics (percentages of total articles coded with each topic).

Topics	Migrant voices	Collectivization
Conflict	26.47%	79.41%
Domestic economic impact	22.22%	86.67%
Infection	14.46%	78.31%
Lack of workforce abroad	19.61%	86.27%
Return to Romania	11.54%	82.69%
Safety regulations	20%	77.50%
Travel abroad	20%	86.15%
Working conditions	23.53%	75.49%

Table 2. Factor loading for topics based on principal component extraction with Oblimin rotations.

Factor/Topic	Migration motivation	Conflict	Working conditions
Lack of workforce abroad	0.818		
Travel abroad	0.823		
Domestic economic impact	0.746		
Working conditions		0.49	0.901
Safety regulations			0.457
Conflict		0.871	

Note: Loading <0.45 is suppressed.

travelling abroad during the pandemic ($\chi^2(11) = 35.88$, $p < 0.001$, $\Phi = 0.418$); and the domestic economic impact ($\chi^2(11) = 21.66$, $p = 0.027$, $\Phi = 0.325$). These issues were mostly discussed in the broader EU context and in relation to Germany and Austria. The issue of working conditions ($\chi^2(11) = 27.97$, $p = 0.003$, $\Phi = 0.369$) was mostly covered in the case of labour migrants working in Germany, and the need for EU intervention was emphasized. Topics such as reported cases of Covid-19 among Romanian migrants working abroad ($\chi^2(11) = 16.05$, $p = 0.140$, $\Phi = 0.140$), safety regulations ($\chi^2(11) = 12.32$, $p = 0.340$, $\Phi = 0.245$), and conflicts ($\chi^2(11) = 11.78$, $p = 0.381$, $\Phi = 0.240$) were not significantly associated with a particular country of immigration.

4.2. Second Research Question

During the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic (from 1 March to 30 July 2020), the Romanian media often referred to and relied on foreign media sources when reporting on issues related to Romanian intra-EU migrants. Most of the articles that were based on foreign sources were related to Covid-19 infections and the emergence of epidemiological hotspots ($n = 19$), the issue of poor working conditions abroad ($n = 22$), and safety regulations ($n = 22$). The most prevalent source was the German media, followed by the UK media. These findings are primarily associated with the preferred destinations of labour migrants during this period. Table 3 shows in detail the association of topics with international media sources.

In the early months of the pandemic, most Romanian media outlets had a small number of foreign correspondents, and, if they had any, travel restrictions were applied to them. Therefore, most of the analysed articles that referred to the situation of Romanian labour migrants working abroad relied on foreign media. On closer inspection, we found that the news about Romanians in Germany, the country most often mentioned in the media coverage of intra-EU Romanian migrants, was based on various sources, including news agencies such as Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA), the websites of television news channels such as *Euronews* (https://www.euronews.com), news portals such as *Deutsche Welle*, online editions of weekly magazines such as *Der Spiegel*, business newspapers such as the *Financial Times*, and even online editions of the German tabloid *Bild*. Regional media outlets were also mentioned. Thus, regarding the Tönnies slaughterhouse case in North Rhine-Westphalia, the regional publication *Westfälischer Anzeiger* and the news portal *Ruhr 24* were quoted in the Romanian media. The diaspora newspaper *Ziarulromanesc* was also quoted.

The topic of working conditions in the meat-processing industry was extensively covered in the regional press from North Rhine-Westphalia. The events unfolding at the Tönnies factory, and the following political decisions were the subject of a series of articles published from 8 May to 29 July 2021, providing a chronology starting with the first cases, to the establishment of quarantine for employees, and then to putting the whole region in quarantine. The Tönnies hotspot was an extremely important moment because it brought to the forefront of public opinion the inappropriate working conditions in Germany's meat-processing industry, which mainly employed immigrants, a large part of them coming from Romania. According to the chronology presented by German regional media, the problem was exposed in the media, NGOs protested and demanded better conditions for the employees, and political actors were forced to act at the federal level. The federal minister of labour intervened with a legislative proposal. According to the regional media, the cause of the problems was that "the current system makes workers, mostly from Romania and Bulgaria, dependent on subcontractors. Occupational health and safety, minimum wages and minimum standards for housing are often circumvented" (Guboff et al., 2021, July 29 update). Working conditions are poor and the workers face "high pressure at work not to make any mistakes. If mistakes were made during the shift, one would have to reckon with insults" (Guboff et al., 2021, July 28 update). The cited German media reports highlighted the idea that the strong pressure put on ensuring low consumer prices for meat and meat products was one of the main reasons that led to the problems in this industry. The reasons workers accept these conditions have to do with the domestic economic impact. The economic support given to those left at home in Romania is rarely discussed in the German press.

In the German media, we also find the major themes identified in the Romanian coverage: safety measures, working conditions, and Covid-19 cases. The media coverage from Germany that was cited in the Romanian media focused in particular on meat-industry workers and seasonal workers in agriculture. The massive

Table 3. Co-occurrence of topics with foreign media sources.

Source type	Conflict	Domestic economic impact	Infection	Lack of workforce abroad	Return to Romania	Safety regulations	Travel abroad	Working conditions
British media	0	1	4	7	0	6	6	4
German media	5	2	13	2	2	11	3	13
Other foreign media	1	5	2	6	2	5	5	5

quarantine of 7,000 employees at the Tönnies factory in Gütersloh, most of them from Eastern Europe, including Romanians, due to a Covid-19 outbreak, which led to the quarantine of the Gütersloh and Warendorf regions, was reported in both national presses. Articles in *Der Spiegel*, *Bild*, and the regional *Westfälischer Anzeiger* were taken over by the Romanian media.

These media reports were used by the Romanian outlets to cite the voices of local authorities, sometimes matching them with Romanian ones, primarily that of the Romanian ambassador to Germany or the Romanian foreign ministry. The voices cited tended to be securitizing ones, talking about the health risk posed by labour migrants and cases of breaching quarantine. Reports of conflicts between migrant and local communities, brought about by the news of infections among the former, also regularly appeared in the Romanian media, in line with the long-time preoccupation of the Romanian media with the image of the country abroad. This preoccupation was also reflected in the fact that a German businessman's suggestion that it was the sociable culture of Romanians that caused the spread of the virus among them was extensively reported.

The German media was also used as a filter to report on news from other regions of Europe as well. One of the go-to sources of Romanian media reporting on pandemic labour migration was the *Deutsche Welle* news portal, and we will examine a piece titled "No hands to harvest strawberries in the Spanish coronavirus lockdown" (2020) to illustrate the discursive strategies used to integrate foreign sources and perspectives into Romanian coverage of pandemic labour migration. The article, published in the business section of the *Deutsche Welle* website, was taken over by Digi24, in its foreign news section, with the title "Another European country cries after Romanian workers. 'It is a dramatic situation'" ("Încă o țară din Europa plânge," 2020). The Romanian outlet's primary domestication strategy involved shifting the focus to Romanian workers in the title, while the "hands" referred to in the original include all migrants working in Spain, and the piece opens with an image captioned "African workers in Spain for harvesting strawberries." Even though both outlets use a Getty Images photograph to illustrate the article, the African worker is replaced in the Romanian piece by a generic image of strawberries. This discursive move, verbal and visual, is indicative of a wider representational strategy: The connections of the plight of Romanian migrants with those of non-EU ones are not present at all in our corpus of texts and are absent from this piece as well. Both pieces end by describing the steps the Spanish government is taking to amend the situation, but the target of government action changes in the process of transfer from one news report to another in the Romanian article: In the Romanian case, the focus is on finding a way for "permitting the entry of the workforce from abroad," whereas the *Deutsche Welle* piece ends with the hope expressed by a local voice that the situation, so difficult for the local economy, might be the beginning of changes in the structure and working conditions offered by the economy.

Even though the calls for changes in the structure of the economy and shopping habits based on a cheap migrant workforce did not make it into the Romanian media, the plight of migrant workers reflected in the news from abroad did, even though often in the securitizing contexts of health risks or violent conflicts with locals. At the same time, reports in the German media about the working conditions of migrants constituted a new topic for Romanian media, which did not have a tradition of reporting on the everyday living and working conditions of the diaspora. When reporting on this topic, voices of NGOs and labour union representatives also made it into the news, adding new elements to the traditional set of actors and voices covered in foreign news.

5. Conclusions

During the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic (from 1 March to 30 July 2020), Romanian migrants were in the spotlight of the domestic media. Especially in the first month after the pandemic's onset in March 2020, media coverage underwent a narrative shift. Thus, migrants, who in the domestic discursive arena had acquired a positive social role, either in terms of value preferences or economic impact, suddenly became a danger to public health by bringing home the virus to their loved ones. As opposed to the media coverage during the economic crisis, when, except for the negative consequences for the families left at home, Romanian circular migrants were portrayed in a positive manner (Mădroane, 2016), in the context of the pandemic, our study showed the presence of strong negative overtones. In the following months of the pandemic (April–July 2020), migrants were portrayed as beneficiaries of special conditions, who were able to travel to other countries despite the lockdown, while their fellow compatriots could only leave their homes with a written statement certifying well-founded reasons.

The main themes of the coverage were the motivations for migrating, conflict, and working conditions, which mark both continuities with and changes from the previous coverage. Conflict is of course a time-honoured news value, and safety regulations as well as conflict around the perceived health risks, with their securitization component, also constitute a continuity with other migration discourses, like those of the refugee crisis.

At the same time, the pandemic brought to prominence the issue of the precarious working conditions of labour migrants working in agriculture and especially in the food industry. These have been thematized in the pandemic context not only by the media in Romania, but also in other countries, especially in Germany. Thus, both the Romanian and German media used, to a certain extent, the media coverage of an exceptional situation, the Covid-19 pandemic, to invite reflection on the general social costs of migration and on the responsibilities

of political actors in the country of origin, the destination country, and at the level of EU institutions. Prominent examples in this sense are the missions of Romanian officials in Germany and the European Parliament resolution of 19 June 2020 on European protection of cross-border and seasonal workers in the context of the Covid-19 crisis.

Some aspects of the media coverage of migrants were not significantly changed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Not having a voice means not having the opportunity to set the narrative. The Romanian news media turned to foreign sources for covering Romanian labour migrants, a domestic social actor, and in doing so the voice of the migrants continued to be underrepresented in the media coverage, mediated by foreign actors.

While these results are partly descriptive and exploratory, the findings of our study should provide a useful starting point for further research exploring the media coverage of intra-EU migrants and the logics of representation shaping their media coverage. This will need to be explored both longitudinally, to see whether the tendencies of coverage identified here will be maintained and constitute long-term changes brought about by the pandemic, and comparatively by analysing comparable corpora and exploring the changes in international news flows and topical sensibilities between other source and target countries.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank the editors of the issue and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions on the earlier draft of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2022, Volume 10, Issue 2, Pages 276–286
https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i2.5169

Article

Urban Refugees' Digital Experiences and Social Connections During Covid-19 Response in Kampala, Uganda

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Submitted: 7 December 2021 | Accepted: 27 May 2022 | Published: 30 June 2022

Abstract
The Covid-19 crisis and its aftermath challenged economies and societal sectors globally. Refugees in developing countries are particularly vulnerable to the socio-economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. In Uganda, refugees significantly compose the marginalized urban population, dependent largely on the informal sector, and are severely affected by the crisis amidst limited social protection interventions. This article draws on key informant interviews with refugees and refugee-led organizations to examine the diverse ways through which social capital within refugees and host communities in Kampala enabled and shaped digitally mediated responses to sustain livelihoods, social wellbeing, and access to information and economic resources in the wake of the pandemic. The findings indicate that digitally enabled and mediated social networks and/or connections through bonds, bridges, and links are crucial in supporting refugees to cope with crisis effects. Networks of friends, families, and institutions are sustained by digital spaces that support the everyday lives of urban refugees through communication, social protection, livelihood continuity and recovery, and service improvisation during and after the crisis. The fragmented digital infrastructure, digital divide, limited government support, language barrier, and circulation of fake news challenged the utility of digital social networks in mobilizing support for refugees during the crisis. Digital technologies offer opportunities to strengthen social support and potentially mobilize refugee livelihoods in cities with fluid programs for displaced communities. The best practices around sustained multi-platform communications, technological innovations, data collection, and robust community engagement should be leveraged to garner the opportunities offered by technologies towards stimulating inclusive crisis responses.

Keywords
Covid-19; digital technologies; social connections; social networks; Uganda; urban refugees

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Media and Migration in the Covid-19 Pandemic: Discourses, Policies, and Practices in Times of Crisis" edited by Vasiliki Tsagkroni (Leiden University), Amanda Alencar (Erasmus University Rotterdam), and Dimitris Skleparis (Newcastle University).

1. Introduction

Cities are vital to the contemporary study of forced migration, with processes of expulsion, transit, and arrival inherent to their character. Refugees and internally displaced persons increasingly move from village-based camps and conflict-stricken localities to towns, municipalities, and cities, which in turn influence the creation and expansion of urban centers defined by formal neighborhoods and self-established informal settlements.

Currently, more than 60% of refugees and 80% of all internally displaced persons are living in urban areas across the world (Park, 2016). Despite being periodically overwhelmed by the sudden mass influx of populations due to migration in all its forms, the economic growth and development possibilities or opportunities of cities facilitate the absorption of people on the move. However, the structural urbanization challenges in the Global South compromise the capacities of cities to assume greater roles in protecting, assisting, and promoting durable solutions for refugees (Muggah & Abdenur, 2018). Community-based mechanisms often spring up to address the needs of displaced communities, especially when support from existing governance structures and organization is limited. The Covid-19 crisis has added a layer of complexity to cities trying to mainstream inclusive response strategies targeting urban populations, including refugees. The urban-centric character of the Covid-19 pandemic has compromised socio-economic interactions (Lall & Wahba, 2020; UN-HABITAT, 2020), increasing all forms of inequality amongst urban populations.

Digital communications and service improvisation emerged as an appropriate strategy to support urban communities in response to Covid-19 and adherence to containment measures and guidelines (Mukwaya et al., 2022). Yet, digital inequalities (in terms of mobile phone and internet access and literacy) in Uganda have subjected refugees to exclusion and alienation while responding to Covid-19 (Sachs et al., 2020; Sekalala et al., 2020). Despite the varying levels of exposure and access to digital technologies, refugees have put in place locally contextualized digital responses to the Covid-19 crisis through a set of networks. This article draws on the concept of social capital to provide exploratory accounts of how digital responses and/or networks intersected with and shaped the actions and initiatives developed by different actors during the Covid-19 crisis response amongst Somali, Congolese, and South Sudanese refugees in Kampala city. We apply the social capital domains of bonds, bridges, and links to identify digital processes that enable networks to garner support and response actions for urban refugees. In so doing, this research contributes relevant insights into the mediating role of social capital on the impact of digital technology on urban forced displacement during the pandemic. The article also adds value to existing literature by engaging with perspectives from different urban refugee communities regarding their use of digital media for addressing pandemic-related challenges.

2. Contextualizing the Situation of Uganda's Urban Refugees During the Pandemic and Beyond

Uganda has long pursued an "open-door policy" for refugees fleeing their countries of origin and, currently, the numbers are significantly rising (Ahimbisibwe, 2019). To date, Uganda hosts over 1.4 million refugees, which is one of the world's highest, mainly originating from the neighboring countries of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia, and South Sudan (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2020). Since the late 1990s, Uganda has adopted multiple policies for refugees, including the Self-Reliant Strategy, the Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR), and the 2006 Refugee Act. Whereas the Self-Reliant Strategy integrated service provisions into public structures, land allocation, and free access to health and education (Hovil, 2018), the DAR fostered the development of partners' engagement, facilitated national development in planning integration, local capacity-building, and mainstreamed connections with UNHCR programs. However, by restricting freedom of movement, neither DAR nor the Self-Reliant Strategy addressed the ambiguity and precarity of refugees moving into urban areas (Bernstein, 2005; Hovil, 2007). Yet the decreasing food rations, small land size allocations, and inadequate meaningful refugee and host community integration continue to prompt refugees to move into urban areas. The Refugee Act continues to influence refugee settlement, with minimal (if any) assistance to urban-based refugees, but also created opportunities for the free movement and right to work of refugees.

The increasing number of refugees continues to intensify existing socio-economic, political, and environmental challenges, including involvement in the informal sector, security threats, and natural resources degradation (Lwasa et al., 2021; Twinomuhangi et al., 2022). Such challenges have combined with the rising mobility of refugees into different urban areas and shrinking resources to support humanitarian response. Moreover, it is estimated that urban refugees compose one-third of the total number of refugees (over 4.6 million) in the country, and these stretch the capacities of urban authorities. Current urban refugee programs are very different in character and scope in contrast to those in rural camps/settlements. Currently, over 100,000 registered refugees are believed to be part of the Kampala city population. The Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) adopted the Strategic Response to Displacement, Migration and Resettlement to mainstream multi-stakeholder support to the city's marginalized and displaced residents. Lately, actions have focused on refugee registration and access to services like education, health, legal assistance, and social protection. However, refugees in urban areas are not provided with solutions to basic necessities, such as food and shelter, but instead must find ways to become self-reliant (Easton-Calabria & Pincock, 2018). In the absence of adequate social protection, urban refugees have sought livelihood in the informal sector, which has been largely hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite global calls for inclusive, equitable, and just Covid-19 responses, less research focus has been given to urban migration, especially on refugees during the pandemic (Panwar & Mishra, 2020).

Most urban refugees in Kampala continue to be disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 crisis and its vast socio-economic effects. The prolonged shutdowns, partial lockdowns, curfew, and the restriction of specific business operations led to psychological stress and compromised the livelihoods of refugees. According to Bukuluki et al. (2021), urban refugees lost sources of survival, accumulated debts, and experienced feelings of numbness, isolation, and hopelessness. Access to adequate crisis-related social protection amongst refugees in Kampala was limited, save for a few who had contacts with international relief agencies (Lozet & Easton-Calabria, 2020). Besides weakening livelihoods, the Covid-19 crisis affected the physical social networks of urban refugees (Bukuluki et al., 2021), compelling them to seek alternative social connections through digital spaces. In the next section, we turn to the social capital concepts of bonds, bridges, and links within the digital refugee livelihoods crisis response.

3. Social Capital Bonding, Bridging, and Linking for Digital Covid-19 Crisis Response in Refugee Communities

Early work on social capital was instrumental in establishing it as a form of currency or resource not dissimilar to building environmental or financial capital (Vallance & Rudkevitch, 2021). Bourdieu and Richardson (1986) define social capital as an important variable determining an individual or group's social mobility, while Coleman (1990) refers to social capital as intangible social resources based on social relationships that one can draw upon to facilitate actions and to achieve goals. Moreover, Putnam (2000) argued that community prosperity could be realized through the quality of local social networks. Generally, all these postulations portray that strong individual and group(s) connections are necessary to mobilize resources across and within networks during the pursuit of desired outcomes. In such a context, social capital has been and continues to be utilized to explain outcomes, including, among others, community development, status attainment, economic growth, advocacy, exploration, and attainment of new opportunities. According to Ritchie (2012), the stock of social capital lies in the connections among individuals and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that ascend from them. Social capital is thus derived from an individual's observations, attitudes, and behaviors, identification with or in networks through participation and civic engagement, community activities, connections in work, religious and political environments, volunteering, social movements, and online platforms, as well as through symbolic relations of exchange.

Mudwari et al. (2021) state that recent scholars of social capital have expanded the concept to allow for more nuanced interpretations of bonds, bridges, and links (see also Putnam, 2000). Bonding social capital emerges from supportive relationships between people within a family, group, or co-ethnic community as a form of belonging. On the other hand, "bridging social capital" is built by relationships within heterogeneous groups, like workmates and between members of differing socio-cultural and ethnic communities, that facilitate access to valuable sources of knowledge and skills and inform one's belonging within the host population (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017). "Linking social capital" makes references to networks across different social hierarchies represented in public institutions and agencies, possessing posts and positions of authority and power like NGOs, government agencies, and the private sector (Healy, 2002). Contextualized in refugee communities, social capital works to stimulate social connections of belonging among the refugees themselves, their relationship with host communities, and the opportunities and resources offered to them through their engagement with state institutions and civil society (Elliott & Yusuf, 2014). Though the connection between refugees and their loved ones (their families) can be strongly undermined by displacement, due to the very experience of displacement most refugees become key network actors, especially in environments and situations of deep constraints, such as the case of Kampala's urban settlements during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The importance of technologies in shaping different forms of social capital for refugees has been emphasized in the academic literature. Many studies have focused on the dynamics underpinning the networks formed by families and friends (strong ties) within the studies of transnational family relations (Miller & Madianou, 2012), migration and diaspora (Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2014), refugee journeys (Gillespie et al., 2018), and intercultural studies (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2019), highlighting the role of digital technologies in sustaining networks. In addition, refugee-led organizations increasingly mobilize humanitarian support and opportunities through digitally mediated responses and networks (Easton-Calabria & Wood, 2021; Pincock et al., 2021). Previous research has also focused on the different uses of digital technologies as resources to help refugees rebuild social capital, agency, voice, and a sense of community (Xu & Maitland, 2017), and to mitigate language barriers (Brown & Grinter, 2016), leveraging social connections to bridge the socioeconomic digital divide in displaced environments. Whereas Calderón Gómez (2020), Ragnedda (2018), and Hampshire et al. (2015) indicate that a high level of digital capital and techno-socialization improves one's quality of life and reinforces societal relevance amongst individuals, the digital divide constrains access to, use, and transformative experience with digital spaces which culminates into loss of socio-economic, political, health, cultural, and personal opportunities within networks. A less optimistic view of the impact of digital technologies on the experience of refugees recognizes issues brought up by unstable information and communication environments that can limit refugees' agency in the use of digital media (Wall et al., 2017). In this

regard, it is also important to emphasize the part played by digital networks in the propagation of disinformation, hate speech, and forms of control in forced migration contexts (Gillespie et al., 2018), enhancing social exclusions and vulnerability among refugees.

To the best of our knowledge, no studies have investigated the nexus between social capital and digital media as a phenomenon involving multiple urban refugee communities and their daily realities amidst crises in the Global South. This research, therefore, seeks to address this gap by examining how social connections forged by refugees—not only within host communities but also within their own national, cultural, and religious networks—are enabled and shaped by digital technologies to sustain their livelihoods and well-being, and promote access to information and resources in the specific context of Covid-19 responses in an urban setting.

4. Methodology

The present study was undertaken in Kampala city from October to November 2021, in settlements including Kisenyi (Central division), Kilombe (Makindye division), and Kawempe (Kawempe division), which significantly host Somali, Congolese, and South Sudanese refugee communities respectively. A total of 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with refugees (n = 12) and high-level representatives of refugee-led organizations (n = 3), which included the Congolese Community Association, the Somali Community Association, and the Norwegian Refugee Council. The interviews were conducted by graduate researchers (one of which co-authored this article) from the Urban Action Lab of the Makerere University, together with one community researcher from each of the refugee settlements in Kampala. Each of the interviews ranged between 1 to 2 hours. The community researchers were helpful in research participant selection and provided translation services where necessary. Data collection took place in the respective refugee settlements. The selection of respondents prioritized diversity in terms of gender, age, and education level, as well as engagement in informal business enterprises as critical components to define interviewee identification. Overall, the research participants included eight (8) female and seven (7) male respondents distributed across youthful, middle, and old age groups.

The interviews enabled the capture of information on digital livelihoods, social support and responses to the pandemic, socio-economic impact of the pandemic on informal livelihoods, everyday life/routines, aspirations, plans, and social assistance, stakeholders in refugee protection, and perceptions around government support, control of mobility, and digital responses. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed for appropriate data analysis using NVivo. A thematic content analysis approach was used to develop themes from the collected data. The most significant themes from the data revolved around issues related to (a) digital health communications, (b) digital livelihoods and social wellbeing, and (c) challenges and possibilities of developing digitally mediated forms of social capital in response to the Covid-19 crisis.

Researchers secured research ethics approval and clearance from the Urban Action Lab of the Makerere University. Prior to data collection, researchers identified community researchers, introduced the research, and made courtesy calls to local governance structures and refugee organizations in each of the settlements. Each community researcher was engaged in following their respective community. The researchers/authors of this article acted as outsiders, whereas refugee community researchers were insiders who acted as a conduit for community penetration, respondent identification, and brokers of trust for the study. Community researchers were categorically insiders since they were part of the refugee communities under study and shared a similar refugee way of life and linguistic characteristics. Although most of the interviews were conducted in English and/or local dialects as preferred by the participants, community researchers offered to translate interviews that were exclusively conducted in Swahili and Arabic languages. Whereas university researchers transcribed interviews conducted in English, community researchers transcribed non-English interviews and generated reflection narratives about the entire research insights. Researchers sought informed consent from each of the participants and stipulated that all the information collected from the respondents was for only academic purposes. Further, the confidentiality of participants was guaranteed by ensuring participants that none of their details would be shared with anybody and having all direct quotes anonymized. Such experiences enabled researchers to gain access respectfully and collaboratively to refugee communities and willing participants, capturing an elaborate context of the subject matter while at the same time embracing trust and community engagement that are essential to foster care and respect in refugee research.

5. Findings

In the sections that follow, we articulate how digitally mediated spaces of social capital facilitated digital health communications, livelihoods and social wellbeing sustenance, and responses to social injustices and hate speech across refugee communities in Kampala city.

5.1. Digital Health Communications for and Within Urban Refugee Communities

Like the case across the world, the Government of Uganda responded to the Covid-19 crisis through the institution of mobility restrictions to curb the spread and transmission of diseases, mass awareness campaigns, and the use of various digital platforms to provide essential services, especially attending to health-related

complications. Digitally entrenched mechanisms were put in place by the government for emergency services provision and response, enforcement of measures, and continuous mass awareness or sensitization about the situation regarding the pandemic. As such, digital media platforms—including social media and mainstream television, radio, newspapers, and e-papers—have been widely used by government actors to respond to the crisis. The findings revealed that public entities like the Ugandan Ministry of Health and the KCCA put in place toll-free communication lines to facilitate reporting of emergency cases and suspected Covid-19 patients within refugee communities and households. The government also partnered with telecommunication companies and service providers like Airtel Uganda, Africell Uganda, and Mobile Telecommunication Network that frequently shared mobile short messages on health information dissemination and awareness to influence behavioral change. Further, information on vaccination centers, type of vaccines, and the relevance of getting Covid-19 jabs was reported to have been shared across different social media platforms and refugee online networks. A youthful 21-year-old female research participant from Somalia elaborated on mediated digital government support in crisis response as follows:

> We were able to receive messages on Airtel and MTN [Mobile Telecommunication Network] SIM lines. The messages showed and reminded us of the SOPs [standard operating procedures] and other information related to symptoms and precaution measures….We were able to contact the [Ugandan Ministry of Health] toll free number for help especially when the whole family was coughing.

At the same time, top-down digital communications from governance actors also work to reinforce inequalities regarding access to valuable information resources in refugee settings (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2019). This can be seen in the case of digital initiatives by humanitarian agencies and government bodies that fail to account for the specificity and diversity of refugees' digital realities and experiences (Madianou, 2019). In this study, while it is acknowledged that the government extensively raised awareness about Covid-19, the modalities of the generated information and its dissemination were exclusively appealing to the native Ugandans, as such information was packaged in English and in the predominant native languages spoken in the country, curtailing the refugees' right to information concerning protection, prevention, and transmission of Covid-19. The Somalis and South Sudanese refugees participating in our study mainly speak Arabic, while their Congolese counterparts mostly communicate in French and Swahili. Our interviews showed that the predominance of such non-native languages reportedly limited comprehension of governmental directives, public health messages as well as information, education, and communication messages across all refugee communities. In this regard, Bukuluki et al. (2020) and Ssali (2020) stressed that the lack of culturally and linguistically accessible information and services contributed to further the exclusion of urban refuges from efforts to contain the pandemic. Language barriers and limited literacy skills widened refugee inequalities and exposure to risks associated with the enforcement of Covid-19 measures in Kampala. The interviews with different urban refugees revealed that they mostly faced arrests, beatings, and extortion from security personnel enforcing directives due to miscomprehension of messages aired on different digital media platforms. According to the refugee community leaders interviewed, some refugees do not know how to read and use much of the information on different media platforms, as most of them operate in English, which is not known by many refugees.

In a bid to address linguistic and literacy challenges, refugee associations were actively involved in creating viable communication channels to translate official information on Covid-19. Previous studies that have noted the importance of digital technologies to support refugees' access to healthcare emphasize the role of refugee-led community networks in promoting and sustaining digital health services in the community (Talhouk et al., 2017). For instance, there was an emergence of locally grounded initiatives by those who know English to translate and circulate information amongst the different refugee WhatsApp groups. This, coupled with the distribution of voice notes, SMS, and information streaming live on Facebook, facilitated the communication made around the pandemic. When asked about these channels, community leaders said that their associations had WhatsApp groups for the different refugee communities in Kampala city, interpreting and sharing official information with refugees in the languages they know. Other initiatives included reaching out to the refugee community through phone calls or going around the villages telling people to adhere to standard operating procedures and measures. As the leader of the South Sudanese community stated: "You know we are in different groups, some can live in Kampala on their own, but there are some who are badly off and cannot afford a phone, those are the people we are trying to reach out." In line with findings from previous research (Brown & Grinter, 2016), our study established that refugee-led organizations bridged social capital to interpret the communications made to the public during the fight against the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The Congolese Association and some Congolese nationals reportedly interpreted the presidential speeches on Covid-19 in French and Swahili dialects that were shared across the different social media platforms for the Congolese people in Kampala. In the same spirit, the Somali Community Association also translated information delivered on Covid-19 in Uganda and beyond into Arabic and Somali languages that were shared on Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp digital platforms for Somalis in Kampala. Further, the

Somali Community Association also put in place a team to monitor, track and respond to questions raised by the Somalis during the crisis:

> Our WhatsApp and Facebook accounts were useful because, after receiving information from television, we could interpret the information [in] our languages [Somali and Arabic] and share it on our digital platforms. In turn, our people may ask questions or seek clarity, and we promptly answer them through the same platforms. (male youth participant from the Somali community)

Within this context, it is also important to highlight those mediated forms of social capital that shaped changes in community dynamics and relationships during the pandemic (Betts et al., 2021; Dodd et al., 2021). The interviews revealed that non-state actors, including the Uganda Red Cross Society, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and the Refugee Led Associations in three communities, developed technological interventions through the engagement of displaced persons to identify health-related complications and collection of data to inform decision making on Covid-19 response within refugee communities. Specifically, the creation of toll-free communication lines and telephone numbers linked to WhatsApp was identified by respondents to have enabled meaningful information collection, management, sharing, and decision-making amongst support organizations and the refugees in Kampala. The respondents from the Somali community indicated that such a strategy facilitated the timely removal of suspected Covid-19 cases to isolation centers and health facilities across different localities in the city. Moreover, the Congolese said that information about refugee associations was largely spread through networks online and that this helped the community develop an understanding of the latest updates on Covid-19. As a male respondent from the Congolese community said: "Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram helped us to continue updating our people on the status of Covid-19 in the country [on] standard operating procedures like social distancing, face masking, sanitization or handwashing, and lockdown restrictions."

Despite the relevance of digital media in facilitating support and assistance through social bridges and links, our study found that users of social media platforms (mostly Facebook and WhatsApp) spread fake news about Covid-19 and how to prevent it across different digital networks of refugees and host communities (self-care therapies like steaming with local herbs, drinking of lemon and ginger, and other locally manufactured herbal fluids). While fake news about Covid-19 is a global concern, it is a particularly pervasive problem across marginalized communities like refugees (Mukwaya et al., 2022). Examples of misinformation reported by our respondents included allegations that eating vegetarian food can protect against the virus, warm weather can kill the virus, and perceptions that Africans are immune to the virus. At the same time, there was and is a lot of misinformation about the vaccination initiatives on different social media. The affected refugee communities developed different strategies to tackle such misinformation, which often combined online and offline tactics of resilience (Lloyd et al., 2017), defined in this study as a relevant form of social capital. Refugee organizations reportedly confronted misinformation by maintaining digital networks with civil society partners and government agencies to continuously seek accurate and reliable information for sharing and raising awareness. For example, the Somali Community Association indicated to have used digital platforms to source information on Covid-19 across the world to inform refugees.

5.2. Digital Livelihoods and Social Wellbeing Responses Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic Shock

It is well established that the Covid-19 situation aggravated existing structural inequalities and created new forms of exclusions for refugee populations in diverse contexts (see Martuscelli, 2021), especially under circumstances where social protection support systems are limited. In Kampala, our findings showed that refugees' economic lives were largely affected due to lockdown measures imposed by the Ugandan government to control the spread of the virus. Many research participants reported closing their small businesses (e.g., hair salons, cosmetics businesses, selling handcraft, making snacks, etc.) and having to use all their savings for basic household needs. Somalis' businesses were particularly hit during the crisis following the closure of non-food selling businesses and the shutting down of borders. In addition, interviews revealed that some households (the majority of which were South Sudanese and Somalis) were evicted for not being able to pay rent during the prolonged lockdown periods. To this end, refugees reportedly depended on digital platforms to garner support for livelihood sustenance and social wellbeing amongst the most impoverished individuals, households, and settlements.

The results indicated that social links were formed by humanitarian agencies like UNHCR, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and the Urban Refugees Organization to mobilize financial resources through digital cash transfers to refugees during the first wave of Covid-19. However, the digitally induced support mobilization depended on one's positionality or relationship with workers in such agencies. For instance, some of the respondents mentioned that they had to have connections with insiders working in humanitarian agencies to be able to access financial resources. A female South Sudanese reported having received a call seeking her "mobile money number" from a friend working in the UNHCR who knew about her impoverished livelihood during the lockdown. She then indicated to have received UGX 300,000 (USD 82.47) from the UNHCR,

which she used to purchase food items and household essentials during the crisis. Similarly, Somali, Congolese, and South Sudanese respondents mentioned that some community members received digital cash transfers from humanitarian agencies on their mobile numbers to help them cope during the crisis. Such transfers were more pronounced within the Somalis and Congolese communities, which had historically developed stronger organized networks with humanitarian agencies compared to South Sudanese. Yet, in their accounts of the events, South Sudanese participants also highlighted the influential role played by their community leader in obtaining material support from international humanitarian agencies through the use of digital technologies: "Our leader has a smartphone and she is literate….I think she writes emails to find ways we can get funds to help us out" (South Sudanese male respondent, 45 years). The variation in digital use, exposure to and experiences of, and in livelihood support mobilization directly relates to the ideas of Calderón Gómez (2020), who underscored economic capital as the most basic form of digital inequality consequently resulting in access barriers across networks and connections.

Besides financial transfers from humanitarian agencies, refugees had to develop and rely greatly on their friends, relatives, and refugee-led organizations in resource mobilization to facilitate response and coping with the Covid-19 shock. Accordingly, refugee-led organizations have played a major role in providing different kinds of support and resources for refugees during the pandemic and beyond (Betts et al., 2021). Our results showed that Young African Refugees in Development, Somali Community Association in Uganda, and the South Sudanese Association lobbied for resources such as personal protective gear (e.g., facemasks, sanitizers) and food from partners, individuals within the community, and from local and international networks. The Somali Community Association, for example, was reported to have links with the Urban Refugees Organization to support female business entrepreneurs in the community. Specifically, the community WhatsApp group facilitated the mobilization and identification of severely affected business enterprises, and later the screening of qualified enterprises was done by leaders within the community. Such findings highlight how digital social connections have been leveraged to reduce gender inequalities arising from the pandemic. Moreover, social networks have been found to bridge the social and economic divide (Yerousis et al., 2015). The deployment of digitally mediated modalities in determining recipients of recovery funds indicates the strength of online social networks to facilitate the sharing of opportunities amongst refugees. In the case of the Congolese community, they were found to have created WhatsApp groups based on the five divisions of Kampala where targeted support was appropriately mobilized and distributed. A 36-year-old businesswoman from Congo said she learned that the Congolese association was distributing food to the community from her connections in WhatsApp groups. Similarly, a Somali woman, 21 years old, also mentioned that she was in contact with members of the Somali community association through digital platforms and that they used Google maps in their WhatsApp group to locate refugees who needed relief support during lockdowns. A respondent from the Somali Community Association indicated as follows:

> We tried to use digital platforms to mobilize support, both locally and internationally, and across donors, individuals, relatives, and the private sector. The private sector however didn't help much due to the losses incurred during the crisis, and we launched and scaled up a relief mobilization campaign named "Harambe." This is a campaign where the Somalis gather efforts to collectively help those in need….Through the "Harambe" campaign, Covid-19 crisis-related challenges of rent dues, health, and food were ably addressed amongst the severely affected households and individuals, especially during the lockdown.

Furthermore, the connections of refugees with friends and relatives within and outside Uganda through digital means enabled them to access monetary support to help them respond to crisis-related challenges. In our study, the Congolese, Somalis, and South Sudanese said that they communicated with friends and relatives in Norway, Britain, Canada, and the US through WhatsApp and direct phone calls, and narrated their ordeal during the crisis, prompting monetary transfers via digital financial technology. Locally mobilized digital financial resource flows were reported to have been common amongst South Sudanese from a different ethnic group and a higher socio-economic class (living in affluent settlements of Kansanga), who had friendly and similar nationality connections with their poor counterparts residing in informal settlements in Kawempe division. Such social networks built around kinship and friendship bearing local and diasporic bonds and bridges helped refugees address livelihood hardships during the pandemic. The use of digital tools is increasingly recognized as central to community interaction and organization, realized through virtual bonding and bridging (Golan & Babis, 2019). Similarly, resource mobilization through digital communities created in host countries has been found to strengthen social capital amongst refugees (Wijaya et al., 2018). The Somalis respondents also reported having initiated online communications with relatives and friends in Kenya who wired cash to them during the lockdown periods of the crisis.

Our study also highlighted varying experiences in digitally mediated social capital responses during the crisis. In the case of South Sudanese refugees, respondents reported not receiving much support from initiatives by the refugee community. A South Sudanese male respondent, 53 years old, reported: "South Sudanese are

united and love each other….However, there was no such initiative for resource mobilization at [the] community level…only at [the] individual level." The lack of a strong organization amongst the South Sudanese community subjected several refugees to alienation regarding possibilities offered by digital responses compared to the Congolese and Somalis who had created stronger online networks with friends, relatives, and civil society. On the other hand, the wide digital divide in access and connectivity to digital communications infrastructures like smartphones, laptops, and the internet worsened the situation within the South Sudanese community. The findings also indicate that the existing internet tax limited the use and utilization of digital platforms to extend and mobilize support across urban refugees in Kampala. This reflects Bryant et al.'s (2020) arguments that marginalized groups are already at risk of being excluded by digital approaches exacerbated by the deployment of such tools remotely as necessitated by the Covid-19 crisis.

5.3. Digital Responses to Social Injustices and Hate Speech

Digital platforms also acted as channels through which social injustices between the refugees and host communities were circulated and addressed during the Covid-19 crisis. Our findings showed that the adoption of digital responses to the Covid-19 crisis by government, city authorities, and non-state actors came along with digitally influenced social injustices against refugees. Such was revealed to have mostly manifested through xenophobic sentiments and extortion by some members of the host community and security forces that enforced curfew and lockdown directives. While the Congolese community reportedly experienced xenophobic actions during the response to the pandemic, extortion by security forces was widespread, cascading across all refugee populations and host communities. The interviews revealed that there were awareness campaigns that advocated for the arrest of Rwandese and Congolese nationals as perceived importers and potential spreaders of Covid-19 across the city. Since Covid-19 is highly perceived as "imported," refugees were assumed to be potential transmitters, consequently exposing them to stigma and isolation (Bukuluki et al., 2020). Such perceptions were revealed to have subjected most Congolese, Rwandans, and South Sudanese refugees to arrests, exclusion, and beatings during the enforcement of Covid-19 restrictions, especially lockdowns and curfew directives. Consequently, such information was widely spread across social media platforms especially Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, creating negative attitudes towards refugees within host communities. The Congolese people who participated in this research said that they have depended highly on different WhatsApp groups as a way of linking social capital to profile cases of mistreatment amongst refugees, which they in turn used to seek justice, and truth against refugee stereotyping and aggression. Indeed, people with pain use digital peer-support groups to connect with similar others as a way of deriving benefits from feeling validated and heard (Merolli et al., 2014). The representative from the Congolese Community Association highlighted the use of digital platforms to mitigate the injustices associated with Covid-19 response: "The digital platforms were useful….We were able to register many cases of refugees that were beaten during the lockdown and curfew through our WhatsApp groups….Our digital platforms helped to get/share such information across our communities.''

Attempting to seek justice and protect themselves from stereotypic communication, the Congolese reportedly engaged with the office of the Resident City Commissioner (RCC) that was charged with matters of security and coordination of all Covid-19 pandemic response activities within the city. It was indicated that the RCC took legal action and reprimanded the perpetrators of such xenophobic communications, as the respondent from the Congolese Community Association remarked:

> We went up to the RCC of Makindye Division and found out it was not KCCA. It was found out that one man known as Kasozi [was] amongst those who were doing the publicization. We resolved to drag him into the courts of law. He was remanded for four months and later forced to ask for forgiveness, which we granted to him.

Social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp were more effective in disseminating information about the misconduct amongst security forces through extortion of money from and beating of both refugees and host community members. The interviews with refugees indicated that a number of video footage and audio clips were captured by mainstream media, and social media users, and shared widely across different social media groups and institutional social media handles for government and civil society organizations, highlighting the importance of linking social capital online to promote social justice within the community (Elliott & Yusuf, 2014). Our study found that the frequent footage of local defense unit officers battering people led to widespread advocacy about such acts that in turn translated into the government's decision to totally withdraw local defense units from the enforcement teams within different communities of the city. The widespread advocacy against the social injustices committed by the local defense units influenced changes in government position regarding the enforcement of curfew and lockdown directives.

6. Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic challenges have shed further light on the relevance of digitally mediated forms of social capital for refugees. During the Covid-19 outbreak,

constraints to physical mobility in the host country led to more dependence of refugees on the help of their ethnic community groups for obtaining information and access to resources to be able to sustain livelihoods through the pandemic and mitigate the Covid-19 shock. In our study, social connections included capital built around humanitarian organizations, NGOs, refugee-led organizations, and networks online and offline. This research showed that different typologies of social capital and connections played a crucial role in supporting refugees to face the pandemic effects and that the development of these connections, coupled with the respective support are in many instances enabled and mediated by digital technologies. These connections become the tools by which urban refugees mobilize or practice a form of (digital) support, sustain communication, and enable service improvisations, becoming key to their survival. Adequate response from digital technological platforms has been established through networks of families, friends, and connectivity to institutions at various levels, providing opportunities for increased engagement in digital economies, new avenues of social protection, resource mobilization, and increased virtual networking.

Moreover, it was possible to observe that limited linkages with government support can function both as a catalyst and a barrier to accessing support among refugees in Kampala. While refugees resort to connections both online and offline in response to the lack of government support and exclusion of refugees from official communication and assistance, precarious digital connectivity and unstable use and experience with infrastructures (i.e., internet and devices) may prevent these urban displaced populations to look for help from bridges, bonds, and links. Further, several challenges emerged from refugees' use of technology to respond to the pandemic, such as language barriers, low levels of literacy, fragmented digital infrastructure, and circulation of fake news and hate speech on social media throughout the entire period of the crisis. Nevertheless, the pandemic has augmented the rising role of digital technologies, especially under circumstances where a city like Kampala lacks a well-defined strategy for refugee integration programs. The applied best practices showcased around sustained multi-platform communications, technological innovations, data collection and robust community engagement need to be embraced by a diversity of stakeholders to garner the opportunities offered by technologies towards stimulating inclusive crisis responses.

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the financial support provided by the Department of Media and Communication of Erasmus University to conduct this research. Further graduate researchers, namely Mr. Disan Byarugaba and Ms. Lillian Asingura, and refugee communities are strongly appreciated for their assistance and participation in the completion of data collection activities in Kampala city.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2022, Volume 10, Issue 2, Pages 287–300
https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i2.5213

Article

Migrants as "Objects of Care": Immigration Coverage in Russian Media During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Submitted: 26 December 2021 | Accepted: 9 June 2022 | Published: 30 June 2022

Abstract
For over 20 years, Russia has been within the top five most attractive countries for immigrants. Before the pandemic, the federal policies that stimulated the immigration of cheap workforce contradicted the public perception and the media coverage of immigrants as problematic communities. Unlike labor immigrants, the EU refugees from the Middle East were depicted as a challenge for the disunited and unhospitable EU, and re-settlers from Donbass were portrayed highly sympathetically. These differences remain virtually unstudied. We explore the coverage of immigrants and refugees in Russia during the Covid-19 pandemic to see whether, under its impact, the coverage was equal and humanistic rather than different and politically induced. Based on content analysis of 12 Russian federal and regional textual media and four TV channels in 2020, we show that the differences described above have persisted and even intensified during the pandemic, supported by pro-state media, with only marginal counterbalancing from oppositional news outlets. The discourse about labor immigrants pragmatically focused on immigration-related problems for businesses and the state, channeling the authorities' position on immigrants as "objects of proper care," while the EU refugees were depicted as "objects of improper treatment." In both discourses, immigrants were equally deprived of their subjectivity. In general, the immigration-related issues were not a major focus, especially for regional media, and the pandemic has not led to the re-humanization of immigration coverage.

Keywords
Central Asia; Covid-19; European Union; migration; migration crisis; migration coverage; Russia

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Media and Migration in the Covid-19 Pandemic: Discourses, Policies, and Practices in Times of Crisis," edited by Vasiliki Tsagkroni (Leiden University), Amanda Alencar (Erasmus University Rotterdam), and Dimitris Skleparis (Newcastle University).

1. Introduction

For over 25 years, Russia has been among the top five most attractive countries for immigrants (UN, 2019). Over two-thirds of the newcomers were labor immigrants who mostly came from the post-Soviet area and China. The three largest exodus zones included Belarus/Moldova/Ukraine, Caucasian states, and Central Asia. After the major inflow of the early 2000s, from 2008 to 2019, with the economic recession and political crises, including those in the Crimea and Donbass, immigration slowed down. 2020 and 2021 have seen a rapid drop in official immigration statistics, with 5.58 million registered immigrants, as of August 2021, and 7.8 million in 2020, compared to 14.9 million in 2019 (Tarasenko, 2021). Thus, the pandemic has created conditions for a re-assessment of relations between Russia and its immigrant populace.

Before the pandemic, the Russian federal policies stimulated immigration of a cheap workforce, i.a., by the abolition of entrance visas and programs of cultural adaptation. This contradicted the public perception

and the media coverage of immigrants as a public threat and their communities as hotbeds of crime and diseases (Bodrunova et al., 2017). Labor immigrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia did not have a voice in public media (Fengler & Kreutler, 2020) or on social networking platforms (Bodrunova, Litvinenko, & Blekanov, 2016) as they did not belong to the mainstream socially-mediated publics.

Such coverage was strikingly different from that of refugees. Even before the early 2022 crisis at the Polish–Belarusian border, EU refugees had often been on Russian news, mostly television, their coverage linked to the discussion of the EU's weakness and disunity. Additionally, reporting on refugees focused on people escaping Donbass in 2014–2015, whose resettlement was covered via personalized stories, with sympathy directed toward the Russian-speaking Donbass population.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed reporting on immigrants and refugees, but it remains unclear to what extent and how exactly. Here, one may form two opposite sets of expectations. First, the crisis might have opened perspectives for the humanization of immigration-related discourses, as immigrant communities in cramped dwellings with reduced medical care have been truly vulnerable to SARS-CoV-2. Second is the opposite perspective of further objectivation, dehumanization, and political abuse that might intensify due to growing social, political, and international tensions, including dropping living standards and increasing distrust in government. Thus, it is important to see whether Covid-19 has recently dominated immigration coverage and whether the media of various types and political standings differed in their coverage, given the polarized state of the Russian media market. Moreover, it would be important to know whether the division between the two groups of immigrants (labor migrants and refugees) persisted during the pandemic and whether those discourses were politicized rather than humanized.

To partly address these questions, we look at the immigration coverage in the Russian media within the whole year of 2020. With the help of Integrum, the largest database of Russian-language media texts, and web scraping, we have collected 2,548 coverage items from newspapers, online media, TV websites, and social media accounts. The dataset was coded for eight variables on publication metadata and content. To these datasets, descriptive statistics and interpretive reading were applied.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on media and immigration before Covid-19, while Section 3 summarizes the pandemic-related changes. Section 4 sets the research questions, and Section 5 describes our methods, including data collection, the codebook, and data analysis. Section 6 provides the results. We conclude by discussing them against the previous state of migration coverage in Russia and establishing a wider political perspective for its current assessment.

2. Coverage of Immigration Before the Pandemic: Russia and Beyond

2.1. Immigration Coverage, Autocratic Politics, and Media Bias

Immigration coverage across the globe has been affected by structural media biases such as negativism, political parallelism, territorial disparities, and dependence on elite discourses on immigration. The World Migration Report (Allen et al., 2018, Chapter 8) stated, "[e]ven in countries with high levels of media freedom, the news often reflects the language and topics that governments and other powerful groups prefer" (Allen et al., 2018, pp. 2–3). The report also highlighted high levels of similarly negative coverage in more and less developed countries, including dehumanizing metaphors and narration practices that divide host and immigrant communities. It also emphasized that local press may bring on less generalization (subject to national context) and that portraying immigrants as either victims or a threat may depend on an outlet's political bias. Our own earlier study showed that on Twitter in the 2010s, left-liberal German media and liberal-oppositional Russian media were the main carriers of neutral discourse that opposed the nationalistic/anti-immigrant one (Bodrunova et al., 2019). Thus, for Russia, we expect a difference in the coverage by state-affiliated and liberal-oppositional media. However, due to the lack of previous research, we cannot formulate more precise expectations.

Additionally, in democracies, political populism and immigrants' dehumanization are causally related (Esses et al., 2013). In the climate of uncertainty on the costs and benefits of accepting immigrants, populist politicians radicalize anti-immigrant talk to their advantage, and the resulting public discourse becomes stereotyped and defensive. However, in more autocratic regimes, in the absence of sound political competition, the linkage between state-induced discourses, media coverage, and public perceptions of immigrants may be very different. Moreover, as individuals, people with authoritarian attitudes are more likely to participate in blatant dehumanization (Kteily et al., 2015). In countries with autocratic trends, the state and radical communities, not marginal politicians, are expected to promote anti-immigrant views. The counterbalancing pro-immigrant discourses may simultaneously be rejected by the population and oppressed by the state, which may de-stimulate objective and human rights-oriented coverage due to the double risks. Besides this, "[d]ehumanizing language is closely connected to…political climate or economic stability" (Haslam, 2006; Warnock & McCann, 2019, p. 50). In countries such as Russia, where stability is declared by the authorities as a key goal of macro-economic development, the immigrant populace may be seen as either fostering or threatening stability, making the coverage depend upon the state's position on immigration that emphasizes the immigrants' roles in the national

economy without featuring them as a vulnerable social group. Moreover, dehumanization tends to increase during crises (Weiner, 2012), which may also be true across cultures. Summing up, we may expect that the immigration coverage in Russia depends on the state discourse and has complications in fostering the human rights perspective, while the necessity of the human rights approach has been emphasized by two UNESCO studies of immigration reporting during the pandemic (Fengler & Lengauer, 2021; Posetti & Bontcheva, 2020).

2.2. Immigration to Russia in the 21st Century

As stated above, Russia has been a major immigration attractor, predominantly from the post-Soviet space, with the migrant populace hovering around 8% from 1990 to 2015. A large immigrant flow from 1995 to 2005 was the heritage of the *perestroika* period of the 1980s; "Russia's contemporary migration issues have been strongly influenced by the USSR's policies on migration and their subsequent semi-abolition" (Bodrunova et al., 2017, p. 3246). Additionally, two military campaigns in Chechnya and the Nagorno Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan fostered Caucasian immigration, mostly to Moscow, St. Petersburg, and South Russia, resulting in tensions with the local communities. Later, the relatively prosperous 2000s triggered a wave of labor immigration, mostly from Ukraine, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan (Bessudnov, 2016). The growing number of re-settlers led to violent clashes between locals and immigrants, including those in Kondopoga (2006) and Moscow (2010 and 2013), which spurred hatred on social media (Bodrunova et al., 2019) but were covered predominantly in a news-like style, without meaningful public discussion.

Since 2016, the inflow of post-Soviet immigrants has gradually been diminishing, mostly due to the natural exhaustion of ethnic Russians' resettlement, re-orientation of younger generations toward the USA and the EU, and fluctuations in exchange rates of the Russian currency. Russia ceased to be an acceptable host country for many Ukrainians after 2014. Thus, for Russia, the pandemic only spurred the existing trend: From 2020 to 2021, the number of registered immigrants nearly halved, with the share of Central Asian labor immigrants rising to 75% (WCIOM, 2021).

The dropping levels of immigration have become more of a problem for Russia, as the country relies on a cheap workforce. Most citizens of the post-Soviet countries (except for the Baltic states and Georgia) are granted a visa-free entrance to Russia for anything from 60 days to an indefinite time. However, the Moscow and St. Petersburg authorities, the cities with the highest numbers of re-settlers, have continuously accentuated the criminality of immigrant communities and publicly argued for the introduction of visas for the post-Soviet labor immigrants (Hutchins & Tolz, 2015). Contradictions between the federal-level welcome of immigrants, on the one hand, and their poor settlement conditions, lack of adaptation, the rising hostility in host communities, and disempowering treatment by local authorities and security forces, on the other hand, have created grounds for unfair and disempowering coverage of immigrants in Russian media.

2.3. Public Attitudes to Immigrants

With the growth of the planet-wide migration flows, hostility to migrants has also been rising (Inglehart et al., 2018). In Russia, xenophobia towards labor migrants, which was rather high throughout the 2000s, declined slightly after 2014 and rose again since 2017. From 2017 to 2019, under economic stagnation, the share of those supporting limitations on labor immigration increased from 58% to 72%. However, "not all immigrants are equally unwelcome" (Bessudnov, 2016, p. 567). The largest immigrant groups, namely Caucasians and Central Asians, evoke the highest levels of hostility (Bodrunova et al., 2017; Skrebtsova, 2015) compared to those from Ukraine/Belarus/Moldova.

Negative public stereotyping of the post-Soviet re-settlers includes issues of legality, security, public health, and communication (Skrebtsova, 2015). Awkward campaigns of immigrants' adaptation by local governments often added to stereotyping, negativism, and even blatant dehumanization, such as the 2012 "guide of conduct" for immigrants that portrayed them as instruments of manual labor and the locals as people (Mavliev, 2012). Populist politicians and radicalistic groups have been active, even if only marginally influential, in constantly deploying anti-immigrant rhetoric in the 2000s and 2010s. In 2020, the polls conducted before the parliamentary elections detected that immigrants' taking people's jobs was a serious concern for Russians, which surprisingly went unnoticed by national and regional media.

Social media studies complemented polling by showing that, since the late 2000s, the Russian-speaking Internet has experienced a rise in hostile discourse (Salimovsky & Ermakova, 2011). However, we have shown that hostility towards various ethnic groups on social media content varied highly, both by region and by social networking platform (Bodrunova, Blekanov, Maksimov, 2016; Bodrunova et al., 2017). In particular, bloggers from southern regions of Russia demonstrated higher hostility to incomers of Caucasian origin and depicted life there as full of micro-conflicts between Russians and multiple other ethnicities of the region. Tensions in certain Russian regions evident from social media content, though, did not concern the national media if not for the aforementioned violent clashes. Our studies (Bodrunova et al., 2017; Smoliarova et al., 2017) have revealed an institutional vacuum in protecting migrants' interests in the online discourse.

2.4. Media Coverage of Immigration to Russia Before Covid-19: Regional Disparities, Xenophobia, and Politicization

The very state of the Russian media system has been a factor affecting immigration coverage. The politically relevant media segments, namely public affairs textual media and television, are split into two distinct clusters: state-owned/state-affiliated media and private media. The former includes all national public affairs TV channels such as Pervy Kanal (The First Channel or Channel One), Rossiya 1 (Russia 1), and other channels of the state-owned audiovisual corporation VGTRK, Gazprom-affiliated NTV, and Channel 5, as well as several major radio stations, the national daily *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (*The Russian Gazette*), a myriad of regional and local newspapers published by local municipalities, and a range of online media that affect agendas conveyed via major news aggregators such as Yandex and Mail.ru in a noticeable way. The private media include national entertainment channels such as STS or TNT, business media such as the RBC or Kommersant multichannel holdings, regional and local newspapers and journals of personal stance (rarely politicized, depending on the relations of their owners with the local administrations), as well as multiple online media of both non-political and liberal-oppositional stance (mostly recognized as foreign agents by 2022). There is also a growing sector of media published by industrial corporations in the Russian regions, rising as a de-facto definer of agendas, workplaces for journalists, and self-censorship practices.

Thus, the decisive features of the Russian media system are the significant share of state ownership in national and local media (especially television) and paradigmatic polarization along value lines, including "liberal-cosmopolitan/pro-Western vs. patriotic/post-soviet'' attitudes (Bodrunova & Litvinenko, 2015). The left–right polarization of the Western media is substituted by the pro-/anti-westernization cleavage, which implies differences in the use of sources, standards, and reporting styles; mechanisms of public accountability, and the levels of, and reasons for, self-censorship, etc. Moreover, while one part of the media system aligns with the interpretations offered by the state authorities, the other, even if they follow the principles of autonomy and balance when questioning the discourse suggested by the authorities, is labeled oppositional and criticized for having a politicized lens. In such a polar climate, issue coverage gets easily instrumentalized and politicized. Online, the value cleavage translates into platform-wide echo chambers even despite the omnipresence of media with opposing political positions. Thus, according to our results, Twitter has been home to hostile nationalist discourse (Bodrunova et al., 2017, 2019), while Facebook was more of a liberal echo chamber in which hate speech and ethnic prejudices were less frequently spread. In this respect, the most popular Russian social network VKontakte (InContact), with over 46 million daily users (47% of daily Internet users in Russia), comes closest to representing the ethnic attitudes at large; this is why we chose the VKontakte accounts of TV channels for our sampling on TV.

The recent Russian media coverage of immigration, especially illegal labor immigration, has been criticized by researchers for several reasons.

First, Hutchins and Tolz (2015) found that TV content on migration follows state policies. However, the problem was that the policy itself, "waver[ing] between protectionist and liberal *laissez faire* approaches" (Malakhov, 2014, p. 1062), had not been resolute enough on the public status of immigrants, fluctuating between seeing them as workforce and a problem to tackle. This led to TV reporting on ethnic tensions being hesitant to choose a slant in reporting that led to immigrants being depicted as neutral statistical units. Other aspects of politicization included subjecting the immigration coverage to election cycles, growing pressures upon human rights watchers who had no chance to counterbalance the official talk, and discursive reproduction of official rhetoric of analytical reports, civil servants, and governmental press releases on both the regional (Nam et al., 2017, pp. 170–171) and federal level. Thus, the problematization of immigration is also "statist," made from the state's viewpoint rather than that of citizens or citizen groups.

Second, traditional media have been largely criticized for reinforcing ethnic stereotypes. By the mid-2010s, the dominant media narrative had, similar to the authorities' discourse, intertwined immigration with concerns about security, legality, and public health (Ruget & Usmanalieva, 2021). For years, the habitual elements of the negative coverage of labor immigrants have been gender, culture, and class stereotypization; the limited choice of contexts in which they are portrayed; and, in particular, depersonalization (Ablazhey, 2012; Ivleva & Tavrovsky, 2019). Depersonalization and objectivation of immigrants in media is a universal problem (Fengler & Kreutler, 2020); in Russia, though, it is not counterbalanced in public communication. In their media representation, "migrants are not self-standing social actors but an unanimated mass, a flow, a workforce reservoir" (Yakimova, 2020, p. 29). Like in other countries with a significant immigrant populace, the metaphors of "inflow/outflow," "working hands," unarticulated "dark mass," and "migration boom/explosion" are widely employed (Dyatlov, 2009, p. 150; Skrebtsova, 2007, p. 116) turning immigrants into "de-facto invisibles, with neither faces nor voices" (Varganova, 2015, p. 89). The human dimension of labor immigration was rarely found in media content, and no strong pro-migrant discourse similar to that of the left-liberal European press was present to oppose dehumanization. A narrow stream of human rights publications in liberal-oppositional and activist outlets such as *Novaya Gazeta* (*The New Gazette*), *Mediazona* (*Mediazone*, coming from "media" and "detention area"), or *Meduza* (published

in Latvia; all three assigned the foreign agent status by 2022), was not resonant enough for the general public. Immigration appeared in media nearly exclusively in relation to law enforcement and the application of legislation (Nam et al., 2017, p. 166). Interestingly, the concept of "our country" within this discourse has, vice versa, been "humanized" since Russia has been depicted as a benefactor, a patron, and even a "nursing mother" (Yakimova, 2015).

Third, negativity in media content was not constrained by editorial guidelines. Unlike in, e.g., Germany, Russian media lacked guidelines on disclosing criminals' ethnicity, which some media have been doing since the 1990s (Malashenko, 2011), contributing to the formation and exploitation of the images of dangerous *kavkaztsy* (Caucasians) and "Chechen terrorists.'' Until recently, the media coverage of the authorities' immigration-related statements openly accentuated immigrants as problematic, including the illegality of their stay, non-native command of Russian, and non-Christianity (Komarova, 2019). The social roles ascribed to immigrants were often "invaders" (linked to ousting ethnic Russians from the labor market and seizure of the Russian cities), "enemies" ("an army" that "advances"), "provocateurs" (organizers of fights and riots), "criminals," while rarely "victims" and—extremely rarely—"professionals" (Yakimova, 2020), despite the high number of immigrants from Central Asia having a higher education. Malashenko (2011) highlighted the role of mediatized popular culture, from films to TV shows, in fostering the post-Soviet immigrants' image as both "evil doers" and "our smaller brothers" (as animals are usually referred to). However, the city folklore, usually highly responsive to social tensions and, since the Soviet times, full of *anekdoty* (short humorous stories) on ethnicities like Chukchi or Armenians, has not created significant text corpora on Central Asians or Caucasians, which might signify that public wariness towards them is more media-induced than genuine.

Fourth, significant disparities exist in the volumes of coverage by federal and regional/local media (Varganova, 2015, pp. 82–83). This may be linked to the politicization of the immigration-related agenda on the federal level and local authorities' unwillingness to support coverage of "problematic" communities in the municipal press, but this connection is still unproven by research. According to the local press, Russian industrial regions are interested in having a highly-qualified workforce. However, the immigrants as a group are represented nearly as negatively as in the federal press. In parallel to it, though, individual immigrants are described as unpretentious and being in demand.

2.5. Coverage of Refugees: The EU Migration Crisis and the Donbass Re-Settlers

As the European Journalism Observatory study showed (Fengler & Kreutler, 2020), the word "refugee" is mostly used in Russian media to describe the so-called "European refugee crisis," and sometimes to mark those fleeing the Ukrainian conflict zone. As Gabdulhakov (2016) states, before its direct involvement in the armed conflict in Syria, Russian media portrayed Syrian refugees in Europe as tragic victims of external intervention in the internal affairs of Syria and the greater Middle East. It linked the refugee inflow to the consequences of failed policies of the USA and NATO. As soon as Russia joined the Syrian conflict, though, the Russian state-affiliated television, including RT, was deployed to influence opinions in Europe by spotlighting the inflow of Syrian refugees as Europe's political failure. The MENA refugees were depicted as threatening, alien, barbarian, illegal, and terrorists. Moreover, even the humanitarian perspective was used to highlight the EU's weakness: In depicting the refugees as war victims, the EU's failure to help them was a core moment. The refugees were unwanted in the EU—but they were the EU's responsibility (Moen-Larsen, 2020). This also "domesticated" the refugee crisis by latently comparing the "inferior" (disunited and incapable) EU to the "superior" Russian state, which cared for, e.g., Central Asian immigrants to Russia. Thus, the instrumentalization of the coverage made it fluctuate between victimizing immigrants within an unfair system (Thorbjornsrud, 2015) and securitization (depicting them as a threat to regional security) by political, not humanitarian, or journalistic logic.

In the textual media, the pro-state/liberal-oppositional cleavage had specific contours. Newspapers of both camps portrayed the refugee crisis as dangerous for the political and social stability of the EU and mostly an external issue for Russia. They all focused on refugees as a source of crime, a potential threat to European economies, Europe's unwillingness to accommodate them, the illegality of their border crossing, and their struggle for survival. However, a "blaming gap" between the pro-state and oppositional narratives was seen: *Novaya Gazeta* depicted the refugees as saving their lives while inevitably becoming a problem for host communities, whereas *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* saw them as seekers of benefits who used the war as an excuse to improve their living standards. We expect these differences to remain in the Covid-affected discourse of textual media.

Immigration from the Donbass unrecognized republics after 2014 was another yet significantly smaller focus for media, despite the number of people displaced to Russia reaching over 800,000 by UN estimates. During the wave of resettlement from Donbass, no sharp rise in anti-immigrant attitudes was detected (Bessudnov, 2016). Unlike in Central Asia and Caucasus cases, the TV talk was highly compassionate, accentuating the traditional Russian hospitality and injustices caused by the Ukrainian regime. The Donbass refugees had a victimized image of Russian-speaking compatriots oppressed in Ukraine because of their Russian origin and language, being a toy in Ukrainian, European, and American political games.

This depiction has sharply contrasted with the dehumanized portrayal of the labor immigrants and the threatening rhetoric on the EU migration crisis. In 2014, it was the Donbass conflict that broke through to the local media of small towns (Anisimov & Tumanov, 2017).

3. The Advent of Covid-19: Media and Immigrants During the Pandemic

3.1. Immigration to Russia and Immigrants in 2020

In Russia, the pandemic was, from its very start, catastrophic for foreign workers (Ruget & Usmanalieva, 2021, p. 1). The data shows that it was primarily job losses that "squeezed out" the labor immigrants from Russia (WCIOM, 2021), causing the remittance flows dry up. According to several studies, 40 to 45% (estimates by Dmitry Poletaev in WCIOM, 2021) or up to 54% (estimates by Varshaver, 2020, p. 135) of immigrants lost their jobs or were sent to compulsory "vacations," Russians being notably less endangered (10% to 25% or up to 32%, by the same respective sources). Sixty-nine percent of Central Asian labor immigrants in Russia felt a drop in their families' living standards (International Organization of Migration, 2021); the drop was so sharp that 57% could not pay for housing, and 38% had no money for food (estimates by Sergey Ryazantsev in WCIOM, 2021).

Nonetheless, negative expectations that the immigrants' compact dwelling would foster the spread of Covid-19 and the levels of crime would rapidly rise never came true (Ivanova et al., 2020, p. 79), even if the immigrants' access to medical care was severely complicated by the absence of insurance, their illegal status, and lack of financial aid (Ruget & Usmanalieva, 2021). The immigrant communities became large-scale networks of mutual assistance, which did not permit others to die from starvation, as immigrants were largely unsupported by both the exodus and host state authorities in the early months of the pandemic. Thus, in April 2020, 91% of Tajik respondents were not helped at all; in 2021, 43% stated they received help from their compatriots, employers, or NGOs but not from the authorities (WCIOM, 2021). The immigrants also faced longer working hours, growing numbers of police checks, and closure of dormitories for quarantine. The governmental intervention was more juridical: Immigrants' working licenses were automatically prolonged, and newcomers could get jobs without them.

3.2. Coverage of Immigrants in the First Phase of the Pandemic

So far, there is only scarce evidence on how immigration coverage has intertwined with reporting of Covid-19, and how it reflected the state policing and the immigrants' social and economic vulnerability. The existing works have detected a rising anti-immigrant information flow that, since as early as mid-April 2020, spilled over from nationalist blogs to federal-level media such as the tabloid *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (*The Komsomol Truth*, where Komsomol is an abbreviation from "Communist Union of Youth") or "patriotic" *Zvezda* (*The Star*, historically linked to the red star, a USSR symbol; Abashin, 2020). The rise of negative expectations, including those stated above, has made the Russian media "insinuate that jobless and desperate migrants would be forced to steal, sell drugs, or even consider joining the Islamic State" (Ruget & Usmanalieva, 2021, p. 1). According to the Ferghana news agency, once the Covid-19 virus started to spread in Russia, online media featured sensationalistic and misleading headlines.

The "blaming gap" seems to have spread to Russian re-settlers. Thus, *Novaya Gazeta* became nearly the only source to present pro-migrant narratives openly and regularly raise awareness of the immigrants' suffering. At the same time, the state-owned *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* described immigration mostly as an economic necessity in complicated circumstances of closed borders (Ruget & Usmanalieva, 2021, p. 6). However, whether the media, in general, supported the hostile discourse, largely ignored the immigrant communities, or developed a more humanistic tone remains unanswered.

This is why the focus of our article is twofold. First, we assess whether and to what extent the coverage of migration was linked to Covid-19 in various types of media. Second, we examine whether the pandemic opened the opportunity to re-humanize the coverage. However, based on the pre-pandemic coverage, we expect to still find a major split between the pragmatic discourse on labor immigration and the coverage of the EU refugees, but with levels of negativity and the slants chosen by various media being unclear.

We have chosen to focus on traditional media, especially newspapers and TV, as they stand at the political core of the media systems even after the recent rise of online-only and social media. The latter have been eliminated from our research for this article as, due to the non-editorial nature of the data and its potentially much greater volume, they demand very different, preferably automated methods of textual analysis. This would make the results incomparable with those presented in this article.

4. Research questions

Considering everything described above, we have formulated the following research questions:

RQ1: Is coverage of immigration linked to covering Covid-19, and to what extent?

RQ2: Do media of varying type, reach, and political position cover immigrants and Covid-19 differently?

RQ3: Are there differences in how Russian and European immigration is portrayed during the

pandemic? Does the politically-induced difference still stay?

RQ4: Are immigrants objectivated, or have they been re-humanized due to the impact of Covid-19 as a universal threat to all social groups?

We have not stated any strict hypotheses here, as our research is more of exploratory nature; nonetheless, we did form expectations via preliminary reading, which shaped the methods we chose.

5. Methodology

5.1. Data Collection and the Datasets

To tackle the RQs, we had to have a dataset that would comprise federal and regional media of three types (newspapers, TV channels, and news portals/agencies) and various political positioning. We selected Moscow as the federal center and three other regions (St. Petersburg as a major attractor city, Stavropol Krai bordering the Caucasus, and Amur Oblast close to the Chinese border and the pandemic epicenter) to cover both federal and regional agendas. Then, for Moscow, we selected 18 federal-level media based on their type, market share, political standing, history of immigration coverage, and the "Medialogia" media citation ranking service. For the three other regions, we chose four local outlets per region, as four outlets were exhaustive in terms of consumption share. To collect the data for textual and online media, we used Integrum, a database of the Russian media texts. We searched for items using the keywords "migrant*," "im/migration," "refugee*." For TV, we scraped the channel websites and their VKontakte accounts.

Of 18 Moscow-based media, six brought insignificant results (only several items each), and thus they were excluded from our sample to avoid distortions in the data. Among them was, e.g., an ultra-right newspaper *Zavtra* (*Tomorrow*) which we expected would focus on immigrants, but it was not the case. For the regions, only one news outlet remained, which tells of significant gaps in regional migration coverage. The final dataset included 16 media, from which we collected 2,548 coverage items, including 446 from five newspapers, 1,709 from seven online media, and 393 from four TV channels. The dataset included pro-establishment, liberal-oppositional, and neutral/mixed media (see Supplementary File for the full description). For RQ1 and RQ4, we formed a sub-dataset of the publications entirely focusing on migration, not just mentioning immigrants (1,410 publications of 2,548, or 55.3%).

5.2. The Codebook and Coding

In our codebook, we partly followed the logic of the European Journalism Observatory project (Fengler & Kreutler, 2020), which, i.a., saw the immigrants' destination country as a proxy for discourse orientation and the presence/absence of direct/indirect quotes by immigrants as indicating their empowerment/dehumanization.

The items were coded for technical data (title, date), item metadata (media, type, reach, bias), and content variables. The latter included: the presence of Covid-19 reporting (central, mention, absent), immigration/immigrants as a central topic (yes/no), immigrants' destination area (Russia, Europe, other), and immigrants' speech (direct, indirect, absent). Direct quotes of pro-migration NGO representatives were coded as indirect speech. Eight coders were employed, and Kappa testing was performed for each content variable, with results ranging from 0.68 to 1 per pair of coders.

5.3. Data Analysis

Our main data analysis methods were descriptive statistics (including correlation analysis with the Spearman's rho) and interpretive reading of media texts. We consider them appropriate for an exploratory study. We did not employ semi-quantification and strictly separated the quantitative and qualitative parts of our research. We indirectly employed the comparative perspective: Thus, we never strictly compared national/local media, newspapers/TV, or pro-state/oppositional media due to volume inequality of the respective datasets (and weighting could further distort the results), but have made some cautious conclusions on these differences from the descriptive statistics.

6. Results

6.1. Research Question 1

In our data, the immigration coverage was only partly put into the Covid-19 context. For print papers, it was true for roughly 44% of publications (see Figure 1). With the exceptions of TV Dozhd and RBC, only one of five TV reports and one of four texts in online media referred to Covid-19. The proportions only slightly increase even if we consider only the publications that directly focus on migration (45.5%, 33%, and 30.2%, respectively). This shows a surprisingly low impact of the pandemic upon the immigration coverage, given the omnipresence of the Covid-19 context in 2020. The differences between newspapers and TV may be explained by the respective Russian and European focus (see Section 6.3).

The aforementioned absence of immigration coverage in regional media was further aggravated by how the immigrants were covered. In a significant share of publications (57.2% for newspapers, 46.6% for online media, and 21.4% for TV), they were just mentioned or listed along with other vulnerable or dangerous social groups.

We identified only five topics in which immigration was covered in relation to Covid-19:

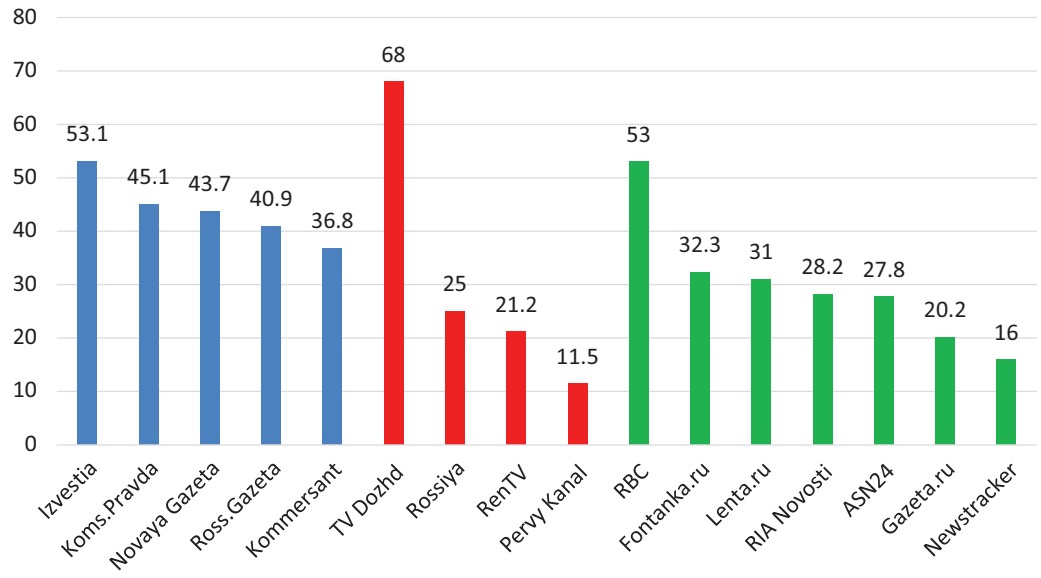

Figure 1. Percentages of publications on immigration that also discuss Covid-19. Notes: Blue = newspapers; red = TV channels; green = news portals and news agencies; Koms.Pravda = *Komsomolskaya Pravda*; Ross.Gazeta = *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*.

1) Shortage of immigrant workforce in construction, agriculture, and service industries; statistics and opinions of elites on the effects of immigration upon the labor market (41.7%);
2) Regulation of stay of foreign citizens, including immigrant workers (21.5%);
3) Crime rates among migrants: officials' and experts' predictions on their rise and data by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (19%);
4) Support measures for labor immigrants, including addressing representative offices of donor countries, diasporas, and grassroots immigrants' associations (16.1%);
5) Immigrants' problems with leaving Russia (15.8%).

The frequent themes portrayed immigration as an issue of concern for the state, while less popular topics conveyed more sympathy for immigrants. The bulk of the immigration coverage was never linked to the humanitarian issues of survival and job losses. Labor immigrants were discussed as workforce and objects of pragmatic care by the state, which needed to both resolve immigration-related problems in the Russian economy and be alert for any potential rise in crime. Mostly, migrants were covered in relation to statements by major politicians or crime statistics. Representatives of several immigration-related NGOs gave expert interviews to legacy media; however, their position was more of a mediator between the immigrants, the state, and broader audiences than an immigrants' protector and empowerer. Thus, even President of the Federation of Migrants of Russia Vadim Kozhenov explained the immigrants' logic during the pandemic as a conventional economic logic, with no reference to the rapidly growing pressures:

> [There is], say, a waitress who does not want to go to agricultural work. On one hand, because it's harder. But first of all, because she is not ready to leave the metropolis for a town or village. She just got out of there. That is, among the immigrants, there is a large stratum of people who come here with an eye on staying. They like the convenient infrastructure; they want to live here, to become citizens. (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, September 16, 2020)

Thus, immigration coverage was only partly linked to the Covid-19 context. However, the latter still provided chances for a paternalistic discourse, mainly in the state-affiliated media, with generalizations and the focus on describing the support measures rather than explaining the structural factors behind the immigrants' sharp decline in living standards.

6.2. Research Question 2

The immigration coverage did not follow any clear pattern regarding its volume in various media. For example, Moscow-based RenTV published ten times more reports mentioning migrants than Pervy Kanal. However, we clearly see that liberal-oppositional media interlinked Covid-19 and immigration much more tightly than the pro-state media (see Figure 2), which demands further research.

For newspapers, Spearman's correlations show that Covid-19 is linked slightly more to coverage of immigrants into Russia (0,138**). However, no further pattern was discovered: The volume of attention to Covid-19 was linked neither to reach nor to the political stance of the papers. Figure 1 hints that regional media outlets (*Fontanka*, *ASN24*, and *Newstracker*) avoided putting

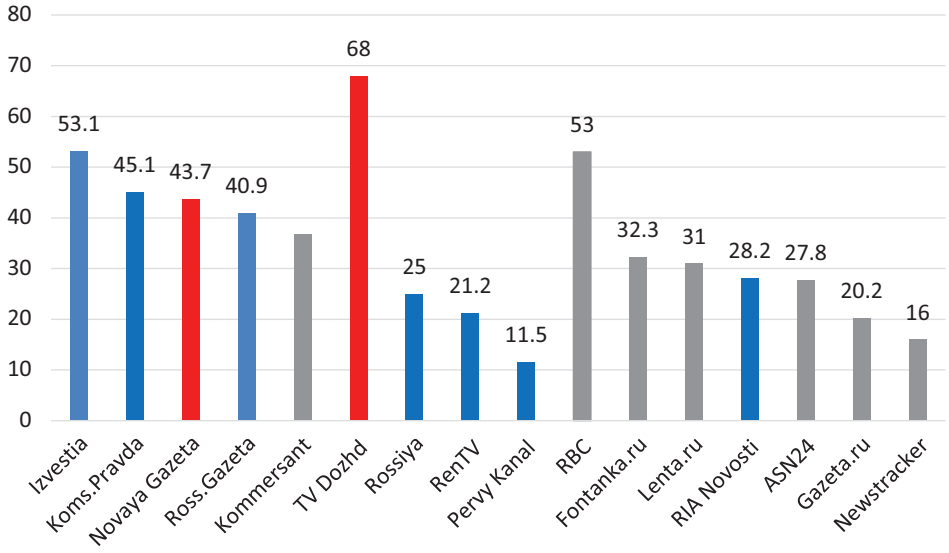

Figure 2. Percentages of publications on immigration that also discuss Covid-19. Notes: Blue = pro-state media; red = liberal-oppositional media; grey = neutral/independent/undecided; Koms.Pravda = *Komsomolskaya Pravda*; Ross.Gazeta = *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*.

their immigration coverage in the Covid-19 context, but the data is too scarce for firm conclusions.

On TV, though, the volume of Covid-19 reporting within the coverage of immigration differed depending on the particular channel (0.170**), with TV Dozhd having significantly more (0.269**) and RenTV significantly less (0.116*) Covid-related coverage than others, despite its overall huge amount of news on immigration. For TV channels, covering how immigrants struggled with the Covid-19 depended upon political standing (0.165**).

The difference between newspapers and TV was significant for all the content variables, including immigration destinations (Russia/EU) and providing a voice to re-settlers. Online media have been shown to focus the most on migration as the main topic (0.364**) but the least on Covid-19.

The volume of migration coverage in regional media was much smaller than in federal media, focused on labor immigrants, almost entirely criminal, and often not linked to the pandemic. Only *Fontanka* of St. Petersburg wrote several times about the spread of the disease among migrants. The low number of publications in regional media has not allowed for proper checking of the federal vs. regional dimension of the immigration coverage; however, the critically small amount of data is a finding too. As regional media were focusing nearly completely on immigration into Russia (see Figure 3), they have the potential to become arenas of substantial public discussion on immigration in the post-Covid times.

6.3. Research Question 3

During the pandemic, the coverage of European issues only slightly diminished and, by 2021, regained its habitual volumes. Comparing the number of publications on immigration into Russia and Europe, we have defined four media clusters (see Figure 3): pro-state outlets, neutral business/online dailies, liberal-oppositional media, and regional media. Pro-state media were generally more likely to dedicate their time and space to the EU migrants, while three other clusters were clearly more interested in domestic immigration. The pattern of the liberal-oppositional media repeats in the regional media and is also true for RBC and *Kommersant*, which have shifted from oppositional to a more neutral tone after 2014. Expectedly, media from the regions that encountered the largest migration inflows focused more on them than on European refugees, dedicating most of their coverage to local immigration issues. However, the repeated pattern in business, oppositional, and regional media shows that pro-state media's attention to covering the European migration might have been caused by factors external to the real-world agendas in immigration vs. Covid-19.

Figure 3 shows that liberal-oppositional media dealt with Russian immigrants, while many pro-state media covered Europe as intensely as the situation at home, which contradicts the logic of seeing oppositional outlets as "foreign agents" and pro-state media as patriotic. The oppositional media focused on local immigrants and their problems (e.g., TV Dozhd 0.162**), while state-affiliated new outlets continued to construct the discourse of the European migration (e.g., RenTV – 0.172**) as a sign of the EU's weakness when faced with new barbarians.

Overall, the division between covering immigrants in Russia and Europe has persisted. The "default" immigrants into Russia have been Central Asian workers. The coverage of European immigration continued to focus on the EU migration crisis nearly exclusively.

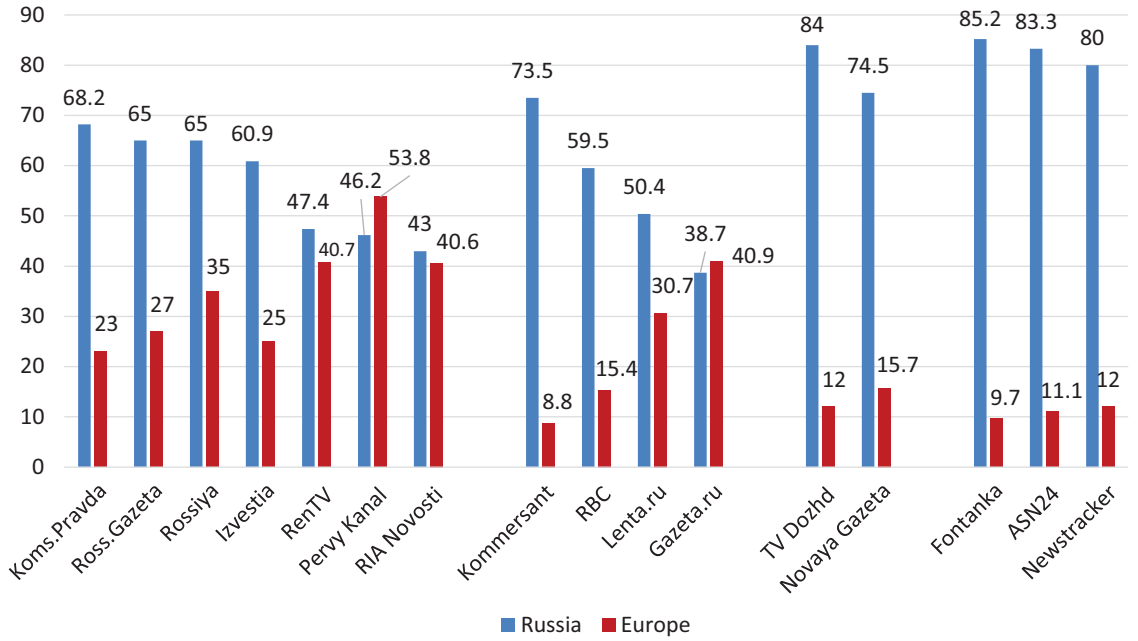

Figure 3. Percentages of publications dedicated to immigrants into Russia and Europe. Notes: The four groups (left to right) = pro-state outlets, neutral business/online dailies, liberal-oppositional media, and regional media; Koms.Pravda = *Komsomolskaya Pravda*; Ross.Gazeta = *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*.

Contrary to our expectations, Russian media did not link the danger of "refugees rushing to Europe" (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, March 14, 2020) to the potential spread of Covid-19. Instead, they went on with the narrative of "the clash of civilizations'; thus, our results are consistent with the previous research and demonstrate that even the pandemic could not make the coverage humanitarian.

However, we have noticed a change in the tone towards the refugees. Instead of being portrayed as victims, they were often depicted negatively, more as uncivilized tribes. News about the migration crisis illustrated how the EU in general and its individual states failed to protect their borders from the hostile masses of re-settlers, and therefore their citizens were forced to defend themselves on their own: "Bulgarians are proud to say about Dinko: 'He alone did what the whole European Union could not. He has cleared the border of Bulgaria of migrants' (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 15, 2020).

This tone sharply contradicted the heated compassionate discourse on the conflict on the Polish-Belarusian border in early 2022. This difference signals the high level of instrumentalization of the coverage of the EU migration crisis.

6.4. Research Question 4

Objectivation of immigrants, as our data show, was high. As stated above, in many publications, immigrants were only mentioned as either disadvantaged or problematic, predominantly in the plural. They were presented as passive objects of Russian migration policies and labor market regulation. If the migration policy changed in favor of labor migrants, the media put them into the position of recipients of benevolence of the Russian government: "Migrants were given a wide amnesty because of the coronavirus" (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 20, 2020).

Out of 446 publications in the five newspapers, 26 quoted some representatives of migrants, mostly NGOs; only 11 contained direct quotes. Most publications with quotes covered the stories of Central Asian labor migrants stranded in the Russian capital's airports after the borders were closed. As for TV, the voices of migrants into Russia were heard almost exclusively on the oppositional channels, *Novaya Gazeta* and TV Dozhd (see Figure 4). In 2020, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, Pervy Kanal, Rossiya channels (Rossiya1+Rossiya24), and RenTV did not publish one single direct quote by an immigrant. Neither neutral business outlets such as *Kommersant* nor RBC did so; of regional media, *Fontanka* published one quote. As for the EU refugees, their direct and indirect quotes were found in only seven publications of 435 that discussed them.

Both pro-state and oppositional media quoted labor migrants while covering their problems leaving Russia. However, the titles in the pro-state media framed them more as objects of state care rather than subjects of will. Their discourse used "ethnicization" framing, employing, i.a., famous quotes, anecdotes, or movie titles, thus equating the Covid-19 risks to habitual ethnic practices: "The Gypsy camp leaves: How migrants are sent home from Kinel" (*Izvestia*, August 25, 2020, the first part of the headline comes from the title of a Soviet movie *The Gypsy Camp Leaves for the Skies* depicting the 19th-century Roma stereotypically traditionally, even if compassionately).

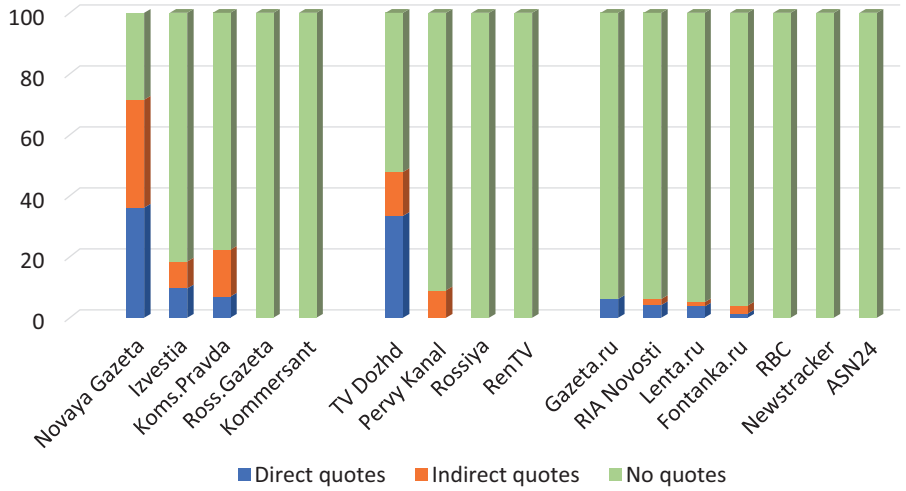

Figure 4. Percentages of publications focusing on, and giving voice to, immigrants into Russia. Notes: Three groups of media, left to right—newspapers, TV channels, online media; Koms.Pravda = *Komsomolskaya Pravda*; Ross.Gazeta = *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*.

While giving voice to immigrants in a compassionate way, *Izvestia* depicted them more like an outgroup community being helped: "'I used to work on the fields in Volgograd,' Zhallie shared her account….After people had started to get sick, there was no more work" (*Izvestia*, August 25, 2020).

Novaya Gazeta covered a similar story, also drawing clear lines between the immigrants and the authorities while more advocating from the position of immigrants: "We were told the borders would be closed on September 20" (*Novaya Gazeta*, September 9, 2020).

The correlations have shown that Covid-19 contributed to the dehumanization of immigrants in the press: If the probability of finding Covid-19 in a text grew, that of finding immigrants' speech diminished (−0.217**), regardless of the paper type. On TV, though, it was the other way round: Covid-19 coverage would slightly foster (in)direct speech by immigrants (0.267**). Strongly dependent on particular TV channels (0.368**), the probability of direct speech was higher for TV Dozhd (0.589**) and lower for RenTV (0.309**).

7. Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, we have explored the Russian discourse on immigration during the pandemic period. Its pre-existing negative features mostly remained; in general, the pandemic has not led to the humanization of migration coverage. Federal state-affiliated TV covered immigrants during the pandemic significantly less and in a more depersonalized manner than the liberal-oppositional outlets or neutral newspapers. Only the State Duma elections in September 2020 spurred the TV to talk about immigration. The overall picture that partly corresponds to our expectations looks like "less stereotyping, but even more depersonalization." However, media type and especially values-based political positioning crucially mattered for how much Covid-19 was covered within the immigration coverage, for focusing upon domestic immigration, and for giving voice to re-settlers.

The expectations of state dependence on the labor immigration coverage and complications of fostering the human rights perspective have mostly been supported, with the marginal exception of the oppositional press. In particular, covering internal immigrants in a de-personalized manner, as statistical units at best, went in line with the style of official reporting on crime and social spending. As objects of governmental "care," immigrants were dehumanized, especially by the official *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and, to a lesser extent, by the federal TV channels. The absence of Caucasian or Chinese immigration in both federal and media agendas was also striking, and regional outlets did not even contain sufficient data for research. This demonstrates the ongoing disinterest of both federal and local media in the life of each 12th person in the country. The pandemic has not provided for addressing the problems of the migrant population; moreover, it moved migration as an issue to the agenda backyard. In an attempt to counterbalance the state discourse, the oppositional news outlets often over-emphasized personalized narratives of individual immigrants while taking a neutral tone when speaking of the refugees politically supported by the state. None of the sides systemically conducted a thorough economic analysis or took a universal humanitarian perspective. Taken together, this deprives the Russian coverage of immigration of the necessary analytical depth, which is especially needed during crises such as the pandemic.

Our research complements earlier studies of immigrants' speech in media (Fengler & Kreutler, 2020) by showing that giving voice to immigrants might not always be positive. In more autocratic contexts, the provision of direct speech to immigrants may, in some cases, work as a cooptation/policy support strategy when the

"us/them" division is constructed as a "helpers/helped" dichotomy. During crises, such "compassionate cooptation" may become a disempowerment tool.

The discursive split in the coverage of labor immigrants and the EU refugees has clearly remained. Labor migration in Russia and the Russian migration policy attracted the largest proportion of media attention, followed by the "migration crisis" in Europe. The changes in both discourses were superficial. The immigrants into Russia were further "fixed" as cogs in the Russian economic machinery, while the EU refugees were portrayed mostly negatively, which seems to be less the case before the pandemic (with a U-turn in early 2022, during the Polish–Belarusian border crisis). In both cases, immigrants' real-world troubles were not the major focus of Russian reporting. Thus, our research also questions how a human-centric approach to reporting on immigrants, especially refugees, may be guaranteed in non-democratic public spheres that instrumentalize and politicize the coverage of social issues. In fact, as in the case of Donbass refugees, it is morally hard to reproach pro-state media for constructing compassion towards them; however, the legitimacy of using compassion as a political tool in reporting should become a matter of concern for human rights watchdogs. We have also shown a difference between pro-state media, on the one hand, and business, oppositional, and regional outlets, on the other, providing evidence of politically-induced agendas still being present in the coverage of immigration, even in times of major world crises.

Acknowledgments

This research has been supported in full by the project "Center for International Media Research" of St. Petersburg State University, Russia, project #92564627.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183-2439)

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