

Intersectional Analysis of Media Representation of Immigrants in Norway: the Case of “The Local (Norway Edition)” Online Newspaper

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Abstract

The study is intersectional analysis of media representation of immigrants in Norway. It is conducted based on stories reported by the online newspaper named The Local (Norway edition). To investigate the issue, the study employed content analysis of two news articles and a (“how-to”) feature article. The articles are selected purposively in terms of their contents and time of publication. Finally the study found out that in writing about immigrants (and their issues) the selected online newspaper employs intersection of representation mechanisms. It dominantly uses different classificatory terms, polemic representation, thematic anchoring and representations in antinomies.

Keywords: Media representation; Immigrants; Intersectionality; Constructed reality

Introduction

Considering the dynamism and complex webs of social interactions, media might not manage to cover everything happening in the human kingdom [1]. On this basis, one can argue that media messages by definition are re-presentations of selected realities [2]. And, by selected realities, it would mean, the realities of/about people or things that are represented in the media are probably framed and constructed according to concepts of realities perceived by the media people [3,4]. Consequentially, realities of different subjects of media discussions, for instance, things, individuals and groups of people would be treated stereotypically (positively or negatively) and even distortedly [1]. Of which, immigrants (mostly categorized as “others” by different actors) and their issues might be among the typical areas of discussion to show the workings of media representation. Likewise, the theme of this paper emphasizes on the analysis of media representation of immigrants. However, here, practices of media representation are analyzed along with the concepts of intersectionality. The writer believes the issue of representation and/or construction of identities of “others” would not be determined by a single reference point [5,6]. There would rather be integration(s) of categorical values that media consciously or unconsciously use while ascertaining otherness. The purpose of this paper is thus to understand the intersectionality of different factors regarding media representation of immigrants in Norway based on selected news and feature articles from the online newspaper entitled The Local: Norway (edition).

In terms of organization, the paper has three parts. The first part presents the basic analytical concepts – media representation and intersectionality – to deal with the essence of the discussion. The second part of the paper discusses the research question(s) and the method used to answer them. The third part of the paper deals with critical analysis of how media representations of immigrants are infused with different aspects or intersection of (identity) typifications. Finally, the conclusion highlights the theme of the paper by synthesizing summarized points from the discussions.

Analytical Concepts

Media representation

According to Stuart Hall, representation refers to an activity that involves “using language to say something meaningful about, or to

represent, the world meaningfully, to other people” [7]. This definition of representation does have socio-psychological theme that emphasizes on the integration of language and culture in discussions concerning what links individuals with social contexts [7]. Apparently, it leads us to the concept of social representation theory.

According to social representation theory, representations “are always related to social, cultural and/or symbolic objects [;] they are representations of something” [8]. On this basis, if we adapt this concept to the media context; one can investigate “how the media naturalizes social thinking and generates collective cognition” (Ibid). Therefore, media representation would refer to a process and an act of portraying a particular idea, topic, people or things in a certain value perspective [3]. From which it is possible to deduce that media in many ways do not present us the whole essence of “reality” in a direct manner. They rather construct their own “reality/realities” in line with certain perspectives or ideologies [4,9].

Hence, “representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects” (Said, p. 22). Accordingly, as Moscovici discusses, representations “conventionalize objects, persons and events” by establishing them as “distinct and shared cognitions” quoted [8]. On this basis, media representation would involve power – the power of media institutions to determine contents and “groups who wield power in a society to influence what gets represented through the media” [10]. And, to put all these aspects into action, representation employs mechanisms such as anchoring and objectifying. Anchoring – with such mechanisms as naming, emotional anchoring and thematic anchoring – according to Höjjer, refers to an action of making the “unknown known by bringing it into a well-known” phenomenon or context [8]. As Höjjer furthermore states, some of the mechanisms of anchoring such as naming would strongly be connected to stereotyping. This is

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because naming and classifications of people and things in the media and occasional communications would be "suffused with affection or dislike" [8] Moreover, objectifying – using techniques of emotional objectification and personification – "makes the unknown known by transforming it into something concrete" [8].

When we discuss about representation of minorities or sub-groups and "others" such as immigrants, in addition to the foregoing mechanisms/politics of representations (anchoring and objectifying), we can also have other types of representations, namely, emancipated and polemic representations [3,11]. According to Moscovici emancipated representations "are the outgrowth of the circulation of knowledge and ideas belonging to subgroups" [3]. Polemic representations, on the other hand, are "generated in the course of social conflict [and] social controversy" (Ibid) and media would present the sub-groups/the "others" as if a given society as a whole does not accept them.

In sum, media representation of different issues and people substantially guided by the aforementioned mechanisms in order to infuse messages they dispatch into different social arenas and to convert the realities they construct into social realities [3] Media produce "systems of representations that serve to prefer particular interests and identities over others" (Ibid, p. 11). In specific terms, as Lippmann states, newspaper contents, for instance, provide the unknown to their readers; they simultaneously confirm and disconfirm the "reality" they portray [12]. In the process the construction of realities by the media would be the results of intersection of different factors. The ensuing sub-topic presents how intersectionality of identities/typifications works in the arena of media representation.

Intersectionality

As mentioned in the previous sub-topic, media do not present to us direct experience of "realities". Much of what we know about our surroundings and/or social realities is believed to be influenced by the ways media construct and represent them. And such representations, one can argue, would be the outputs of intersection of factors/categories. People as subjects of media representation can be identified with different labels/categories – like gender, locale, nationality, religion, skin color, phenotype, education status, ability, race, ethnicity, age/generation, socioeconomic class, physiology, language, sex, migration status, etc. All these make us who we are intersecting "multiplicatively or in synthesis not additively" [6] on the basis of exclusive categories.

Even though the concept of intersectionality has a long history as far back as to the late 1960s and early 1970s in issues like feminism and socialism as well as post-colonial feminism [5] the term "was coined in 1989 by American critical legal race scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw ..." [13]. Intersectionality can be defined as "a theory to analyze how social and cultural categories intertwine" [5]. Accordingly, as Hankivsky states, one of the tenets of intersectionality is that because "lived realities are shaped by different factors and social dynamics operating together; human lives cannot be explained by taking into account single categories, such as gender, race, and socio-economic status" [13]. Likewise, in order to clearly understand the practices of media representation of different subjects, "the relationships between gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class, nationality [and other categories]" should be examined [5] on multiple levels [6].

Generally speaking, as Knudsen aptly states intersectionality is used to analyze "social and cultural hierarchies within different discourses" [5]. Thereby, based on this essence of the term the study tries to examine how media nuance different identities/categories of

people, places and other subjects in order to represent or depict them (i.e. the people, things and other news subjects) via their texts. Most importantly, the critical view of intersectionality "on becoming the "other" in a normative setting within a general Western culture" (Ibid), would help to analyze representations of immigrants and/or their issues by different (western) media in a multi-dimensional manner.

Research Question(s) and Method

Based on the aforementioned analytical concepts, thereby, the study basically seeks to address the following inter-related research question(s):

RQ: How are immigrants in Norway represented in the online newspaper called *The Local, Norway (edition)*? Correspondingly, how does the medium integrate categories like, religion, social status, economic status, etc. to portray immigrants?

To address these inter-related question(s), the study employs qualitative content analysis (of the sampled news and feature articles). Among the different types of qualitative content analysis, it uses directed content analysis; thereby, the analytical concepts discussed above help to focus the research questions and to determine themes or categories of analysis [14].

Sample size, sampling technique and scope

Inter alia, because of the limited number of words allotted to this work, the study analyzes only three pieces/articles (two news articles and one "how-to" feature article). The two news articles are selected from the January and April, 2016 news editions of the sampled online newspaper. The "how-to" feature article selected for this analysis was also published on May 16, 2016. The articles are selected purposively on the basis of their contents and timing. Content wise, all articles are selected because they directly or indirectly discuss about immigrants. In terms of timing, the writer deliberately selects articles published in this first half of 2016, for the reason that he needs to understand the practices of media representations of immigrants (in Norway) amid the "drastic" increase in migration in recent years.

Finally, it is better to note that the term immigrant in this paper consults the definition of migration given by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). IOM defines migration as "a process by which non-nationals move into a country for the purpose of settlement" [15]. Hence, immigrants in this paper refer to non-nationals that move into a foreign country (in this case to Norway) to live permanently.

Analysis

Under this topic the writer presents the critical analysis of representation of immigrants in the selected medium. The analyses are presented thematically. The three articles sampled for the study are analyzed in three different themes.

Essentialising categories, voicing the powerful and polemic representation

As mentioned elsewhere above, media representation involves the construction of realities on the basis of different factors/categories. Accordingly, when we talk about media representations of immigrants we can mention different labeling criteria, such as, religious affiliations, ethnicity, socio-economic status and others that media would use to essentialize their topics of discussions. Inter alia, excessive and inappropriate usage of these Essentialising categories would probably

portray the groups described with as if they are different and without commonalities with the general public [11]. The result of such representation would be the construction of realities that reiterate the presence of polemic groups. And the process can be taken as polemic representation. Likewise, some of the contents of *The Local* – online newspaper – are pressed with such mechanism of representation.

Quoting a report from Norway security agency about Muslim immigrants, *The Local* wrote a story headlined: "Muslim influx brings problems". In this news report, it is possible to pinpoint effective applications of some of the basic aspects of essentializing mechanisms, the inclination of voicing the powerful and polemic representations. Primarily, the article is inundated with quotes from the main source of the story – Marie Benedicte Bjørnland, the head of the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST). Hence, the writer believes, though, it is not sufficiently analyzed with the points of the writer, as long as the newspaper decides to dispatch the message, it is assumed that the gist of the article substantially reflects the stand of the paper. Hence, this by itself indicates the favor this online newspaper extends for the powerful to set the agenda regarding (Muslim) immigrants.

Furthermore, based on important selections of quotes from its source, the article presents Muslim immigrants as mutually exclusive groups to the general public. For instance, the article states that the head of PST "warned ... of the "unfortunate" consequences that come with large numbers of refugees and migrants from Muslim countries" [16]. In this statement, immigrants from Muslim countries are represented with the sense that they are unfriendly to other groups in the country, thus, claimed to be sources of different "unfortunate" consequences. And this can be termed as polemic representation [8]. This is because, as stated above (see sub-section 1.1), in this kind of representation sub-groups would be represented as they are in a course of social conflicts with other groups [3]. In the same realm, this news article presents migrants and refugees from Muslim countries as triggering factors for the "growth of parallel societies, radicalization and extremist environments" [16]. In this sense Muslim immigrants are antagonists to the rest of different groups in the destination country. Therefore, the depiction of immigrants from Muslim countries reckoned as "others" not only because they are foreigners but also because their identity is essentialized as Muslims, in turn, they are apparently sources of extremist environments.

Referring to the head of PST, the newspaper, furthermore states that "large numbers of foreigners can lead to violent clashes and the growth of far-right extremist groups" [16]. By selectively presenting these words of the source, the article tries to objectify the challenges of immigration to the country – by turning the influx of immigrants into concrete realities – such as extremism and violent clashes. In due course, as the main subjects of the article, Muslim immigrants are represented with intersection of essentializing categories, i.e. as problematic group of immigrants, as foreigners, and as Muslims (thus triggering factors for the creation of parallel societies). Hence, the intersectionality of these different essentializing categories, in one or another way, typify immigrants from Muslim countries as a sub-group in a course of conflicts with others, thus, it might frame/construct the ways in which readers should perceive them.

Generally speaking, these are among the basic ways of representations of "others". If we discuss more deeply, however, we have other common ways by which media construct meanings to their readers/audiences. Of which the application of different expressions and terminologies is worth to mention. Duly, the ensuing part deals

with discourse analysis of another article to show the multifaceted nature of media representation.

Discoursing to confirm/legitimize views about immigrants

According to Holdcroft, Saussure writes "language is a system of signs" [17] in which meanings are constructed and represented with. Similarly Hall aptly states that "representation is the production of the meaning of ... concepts in our minds through language". Concurrently, if we extend this line of argument to this discussion, one can find many similar instances that *The Local* appropriating expressions/terms in order to produce meanings about realities it represents and to confirm/legitimize them to its readers.

If we proceed to the case, for instance, on the 16th of May, 2016, *The Local* publishes (a how-to feature) under the headline: "How to celebrate May 17th, Norway's National Day". The intent of the article is to provide a general guideline for foreigners how to join the celebration without feeling exclusion. Yet, some of the terms and their meanings would rather remind and confirm otherness of foreigners such as immigrants.

In explaining the general arena of the celebration to immigrants, for instance, the newspaper writes "... it's easy to suspect that recent immigrants to the country are only grudgingly invited to the party" [18]. This statement, in many ways, exacerbates the sentiment of otherness of the immigrants to the country in general and to the celebration in particular rather than helping them to feel they are part of the society. This is because, primarily, for using the term "recent" it represents/labels immigrants as foreigners not only with reference to native Norwegians, but the otherness of "recent" immigrants is indirectly compared with immigrants that relatively stay long in the country. For this reason, it might be possible to argue that the newspaper intends to use this word in order to confirm the existence of dichotomous outlooks from the public towards immigrants viewing them as recent comers and immigrants that relatively stay long. Apparently, the term "grudgingly" indicates the recent immigrants are groups that are invited to the celebration inhospitably. Therefore, grounded on the two terms – "grudgingly" and "recent" – the newspaper tries to infuse the perception that as they are inundated with influx of immigrants for many years, Norwegians are becoming unreceptive to those who came lately. Hence, from this it is possible to understand that the ways and contexts in which media use words and expressions can shape the manner in which audiences perceive realities.

In the same article, *The Local*, furthermore, writes "Norwegians love the odd non-ethnic Norwegian kid in the children's parades..." [18]. In this statement, too, the newspaper tries to confirm the "otherness" of non-ethnic Norwegian kids by branding them as "odd". And this discourse of branding/labeling can be taken as a politics of media representation which is known as naming that involves making the "unknown known by bringing it into a well-known" [8] phenomenon or context. In this case – linking the previously unknown name of non-ethnic Norwegian kids – "odd" – to the well-known occasion – the May 17th Celebration could confirm the "non-Norwegianess" of the immigrant kids. Hence, for using this expression, the newspaper tries to produce the meaning of non-Norwegianess in the minds of its readers.

In sum, from the aforementioned instances we can discern that the representation of immigrants is designed on the basis of the intersection of discourses to construct their identities/realities. The strangeness of the immigrants to the general public in general and to the celebration (of May 17th) in particular, for instance, is confirmed/

legitimized in different ways. For some immigrants being recent comers is an identity for their otherness. Simultaneously, being non-ethnic Norwegian is also a manifestation of oddness within the mainstream culture. Hence, obviously, this newspaper is portraying a certain reality about immigrants. Most importantly, it is also confirming this reality by discoursing on it. Thus, this indicates that media representation is a complex intersection of different factors which involve socio-cultural and other important typifications (Berger and Luckmann) within different discourses.

Intersectionality of thematic anchoring, ideology and representation in antinomies

According to Hoijer representation can take place at thematic levels by using underlying categories of meaning or antinomies. Most importantly, Hoijer states that thematic representation would be displayed on the basis of "common sense thinking or taken-for-granted ideas in a society ... [such as democracy, human rights and equality]" [8].

Similarly, based on a research report on immigrants' integration, The Local wrote an article entitled "Norway "best in Scandinavia" at integration. Under this headline, The Local reports that "Norway beats Denmark and Sweden as well as a series of other EU countries on figures for immigrant education, employment and income" [19]. In this statement one can pinpoint the application of thematic anchoring/representation on the basis of taken-for-granted perceptions towards the country such as substantial socio-economic developments nuanced with ideological angles. For this reason, the issue of representation in this article advances beyond telling the tangible conditions of the immigrants to the action of glorifying the country for its performances in the integration processes. Thereby, the ideological essence of thematic representation takes place by using indirect mechanisms of displaying the country's good economic performance stating that "immigrants in Norway ... earn more than their Scandinavian counterparts ..."; (according to the intent of this statement), solely because of the general higher wages in the country [19]. Not also because of considerable efforts of the immigrants. Hence, this statement while glorifying the country for its achievements, it sidelined the efforts of the immigrants.

On top of the above discussed thematic representation, as Markova [8] states, sense making in communication within the arena of social representation would also be founded on the essence of making distinctions (among ideas, people, goals, issues and so forth), thinking in opposition, polarities and/or antinomies (such as we/them, hope/fear and other dualistic representations). For instance, The Local reports "... 37 percent of immigrants in Norway are in higher education – the highest level in Scandinavia ..." [19]. In this statement the measure of success does not accentuate whether this percentage is adequate in line with the number of immigrants in the country. It rather emphasizes on eccentric conception of representation between "we" and "them" – in the sense that this report indicates Norway is doing well in integrating immigrants not by the net performance in fulfilling the demands of the immigrants but for simply doing better than the rest of Scandinavia in figures.

Moreover, in antinomy representation, media would also display hope and fear simultaneously. In the same report The Local, reports that many immigrants are employed in Norway than it is so in Denmark, Sweden or many other European countries [19]. This vividly shows hope for immigrants. Simultaneously, the report obscures the hope by stating that young migrants "in the age range 15-34 are more likely to become marginalized than ethnic Norwegians" [19]. Thereby, this indicates the representation of hope and fear simultaneously.

Generally speaking, the discussion under this sub-topic tries to show that media representation substantially founded on different typifying mechanisms of issues/subjects. The story analyzed under this sub-topic, for instance, is presented by the selected medium constructed based on amalgamation of ways of representations – such as synthesis of ideological display of immigrants' status, thematic glorification and solidification of Norway's effectiveness in immigration integration. Therefore, this shows that even within a single story, media do have the power to depict realities from different angles. And the writer believes it is such synthesizing quality of different features of realities that empower media to influence their audiences.

Conclusion

In this paper attempts are made to analyze how immigrants (living in Norway) and/or their issues are represented in the online newspaper named The Local (Norway edition). By discussing the basic tenets of media representation and the concepts of intersectionality, the paper tried to show how media representation is a complex process and a final product of intersections of different classificatory and typifying (such as stereotyping) mechanisms.

Inter alia, as the analysis (based on the sampled articles) shows, the otherness of immigrants is presented overstatedly or stereotypically. In some instances, immigrants are described with phrases like "odd non-ethnic Norwegians"; while those who recently arrived are also typified as groups inhospitably invited by the people. Immigrants from Muslim countries, particularly, are hastily generalized as a sub-group that is to be blamed for the rise of parallel groups in the hosting country. Moreover, when there are "positive" stories regarding the immigrants, such as their integration with the mainstream culture, it is only the effectiveness of the country is amplified. This, in some way, indicates the politics of media representation which can be taken as favoritism towards the powerful.

In sum, as the analysis reveals, to cover issues about immigrants in Norway, The Local, employs intersection of labeling values. The sampled articles show this online newspaper constructed realities regarding immigrants by employing mechanisms such as thematic anchoring, discourse of stereotyping and polemic representations. Hereby, it might be possible to conclude that this online newspaper would be taken as an example to remark how media construct "realities" in line with certain perspectives or ideologies; and to understand how realities depicted in the media demand intersection of analytical categories to comprehend the messages as clearly as possible.

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