The Media’s Portrayal of Immigration

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Abstract

- This study analyzed representations of immigration in three Iowan newspapers between November 2015 and November 2016, focusing on three types of news organizations with different audiences: the *Iowa State Daily*, the *Ames Tribune* and the *Des Moines Register*.

- Representations of immigrants were often marked by negative connotations and labels – illegal immigrants, discrimination, marginalization, etc. These news mediums, however, enacted minimal effort to cover in-depth stories about immigration based on more diverse samples and sources, facts, and angles.

- The dominant image of immigration and related topics shaped in Iowa through the media may, in turn, influence how other states perceive immigrants and immigration because of the messages received from the media’s political coverage and news framing styles.

- This analysis lends support to the literature on the effects of media framing on the population.
I AM AN AMERICAN

● Media shape people’s opinions and ideas, as audiences trust journalists to provide them with the news.

● The way Iowan media portray immigration is significant because people’s perceptions here are seen as representative of a larger population; due to its first-in-the-nation status, Iowa serves as an early indicator for the rest of the country of which political candidate might win the national convention nominations.

● Iowa carries so much media power during these times, so focusing on Iowan newspapers and how perceptions of immigration are formed here could determine how those perceptions are also shaped elsewhere.

● The purpose of this study was to analyze how different newspapers covered stories on immigration – such an important and far-reaching topic – to see if media portrayals promoted understanding through a neutral tone, in-depth coverage and a diversity of views.
IF I AM ILLEGAL, THE HOUSE WHERE YOU LIVE AND THE FOOD YOU CONSUME, ARE ALSO
• A textual analysis to analyze the content of communication rather than its structure in the Iowa State Daily, the Ames Tribune and the Des Moines Register

• Keyword in search results = “Immigration”

• Systematic selection of every 9th story in the Iowa State Daily and every 30th story in the Ames Tribune, and a random selection of stories in the Des Moines Register.

• The final sample consisted of 10 out of 92 articles in the Iowa State Daily and 11 out of 330 in the Ames Tribune from November 7, 2015 to November 8, 2016, and 10 out of 640 articles overall in the Des Moines Register.
Research Questions

• **Research Q1.** How do student, local, and regional newspapers in Iowa differ in their framing of immigration?

• **Research Q2.** How do student, local, and regional newspapers in Iowa differ in their treatment of immigration stories (episodic v. thematic coverage)?

• **Research Q3.** How does coverage of immigration differ in tone across student, local, and regional newspapers in Iowa?

• **Research Q4.** How does coverage of immigration differ in source attribution across student, local, and regional newspapers in Iowa?
• **RQ1.** The three newspapers generally developed a **human-interest angle**, focusing on the community and students.

• **RQ2.** The three news mediums generally focused on **episodic framing** of immigration in response to current news or political climate surrounding the topic.

• **RQ3.** The tone across the three news media was generally that of an **emotional appeal/pathos**

• **RQ4.** They relied heavily on **opinion stories** and **editorials**, which were largely in response to the current political climate.
Findings

- The *Iowa State Daily* focused mainly on **student perspectives**, especially of those directly affected by negative portrayals of immigration. Evidently, because it is a student publication, it is necessary to adopt this angle for the greater good of such a diverse campus population.

- The *Ames Tribune* focused on **local, national** and **international** news more often than the *Daily* and the *Register*. It utilized multiple external sources and diverse story angles. Although all three newspapers strongly used **episodic framing**, the *Ames Tribune* stood out slightly in striving to include alternative facts, research and statistics about immigration, sometimes adopting a **thematic** approach in framing immigration news.

- The *Des Moines Register* focused more on **editorials** more than the *Iowa State Daily* and the *Ames Tribune*. 
The media has the power to make or break perceptions on immigration...
Conclusions

• With the increased commercialization of media in U.S. society, journalists will be more inclined to embrace immigration stories that appeal to central news values of conflict, emotion and drama. Angles, such as possible threats to the country, promoted by the government will also carry a lot of weight in determining what receives more media attention.

• Iowa plays a prominent role in the political discourse and the media here are powerful tools that affect public opinion across the nation. Political candidates have the opportunity to jump right into the primary season by making a memorable impression on caucus-goers. It is important for caucus-goers to be knowledgeable about campaign rhetoric, what is being presented by candidates, and how deep they dive into the issues presented. In this study, several frames of immigration were presented, often negatively.

• Rather than promoting coverage as anti-immigrant or pro-immigrant, the media should focus on how well it enables citizens and policymakers to understand the significance, causes and consequences of immigration, in addition to the backlash against it. It should also include ample research and expert analysis to strengthen angles, perspectives and sources.