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# The Educational Role of the Digital Media in the Integration of Immigrants in Spain: *elmundo.es* and *elpais.com*

El papel educativo de la prensa digital ante la integración de los inmigrantes en España: *elmundo.es* y *elpais.com*

## ABSTRACT

The objective of the present study is to highlight the importance of online newspapers in the formation of public opinion, by discovering whether they promote positive or negative attitudes towards immigration or contribute to increasing awareness about the impact of the digital press in educational and developmental terms. With this in mind, we carried out a comparative study of the digital versions of the two widest selling, broad-based daily newspapers in Spain: *el mundo.es* and *el pais.com*. We used the same methodology as that used in Comparative Education, analyzing the content of articles published between January 2009 and June 2010. Although there are many similarities between the two newspapers and both coincide in supporting the process of integrating immigrants into Spanish society, they differ in the strategies to be followed for achieving the sought-after goal of peaceful coexistence between migrants and the host community. «El Mundo» tends to favour adopting strategies that encourage immigrants to adapt to the established norms and guidelines of the host society; in the articles of «El País», on the other hand, the requirement for them to adapt is not regarded as necessary. However, the various ideological lines expressed in the articles that we analyzed enable us to draw the conclusion that they do not coincide to a significant degree with the editorial line of the newspaper publishing them.

## ABSTRACT (Spanish)

El objetivo del presente estudio consiste en poner de relieve la importancia de la prensa digital en la formación de opinión que tienen los ciudadanos, detectando si fomenta actitudes positivas o negativas en torno al hecho migratorio y coadyuvando a una mayor toma de conciencia sobre la incidencia educativa y formativa de la misma. Con esta pretensión se ha realizado un estudio comparado de las ediciones digitales de los dos diarios generalistas de pago con mayor tirada en España (*elmundo.es* y *elpais.com*), utilizando la metodología propia de la Educación Comparada y el análisis de contenido de los artículos publicados entre enero de 2009 y junio de 2010. Aunque son numerosas las similitudes halladas entre ambos diarios y coinciden en su apoyo al proceso de integración de los inmigrantes en la sociedad española, difieren en las estrategias a seguir para alcanzar la deseada convivencia. «El Mundo» se muestra más bien partidario de la adopción de estrategias que pasen por una adaptación de éstos a las normas y pautas establecidas en la sociedad de llegada. Mientras que en los artículos de «El País», esta adaptación no se contempla como un requisito imprescindible. Sin embargo, las diversas líneas ideológicas puestas de manifiesto en los artículos analizados nos permite inferir que no muestran un significativo grado de coincidencia con la línea ideológica del diario que los publica.

## KEYWORDS

Informal education, stereotypes, readers, media education, digital press, immigration, social media, information society.

Educación informal, estereotipos, lectores, prensa digital, inmigración, medios, sociedad de la información.

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, the importance and impact of informal education are beyond all doubt; it could equally well be called diffuse action since its aim and intention is not just didactic, even though this is an unexpected consequence. Since it arises without its aim or intention being simply didactic, even if its consequences are. Its magnitude and potential are such that it deserves proper study and appraisal. Once we become aware of its possibilities and drawbacks, it could be used beyond the narrow confines of school systems as a complementary support medium, in conjunction with other forms of education, to help shape a more just and equitable society, and thereby move beyond the reductionism inherent in traditional school systems that are overly focused on education of a merely mechanical nature.

The transmission of values, the formation of opinions and the dissemination of attitudes and interests through the press and other mass media go beyond the informative role, and even the formative potential of school institutions. Carpenter and McLuhan had already drawn attention to the sheer quantity of the information flow from the mass media which has cracked open the very walls of the classroom: «today we are beginning to notice that the new media are not simply mechanical gimmicks for creating worlds of illusion, but new languages with new and unique powers of expression» (Carpenter & McLuhan, 1974: 236). If many people concurred with this pronouncement in the Sixties when the mass media were far less developed, the statement can only be reiterated with greater force now that the so-called knowledge society is at its height.

In fact, without wishing to pursue the matter of the well-known gulf between «school system» and «education system» too far, we do want to draw attention to the increasing significance of the huge number of educational factors that do not feature in school systems or the education that everyone –whatever the generation, young or old– receives. Among these factors, the mass media occupy a prime position and they have acquired such a dominant role that they occasionally expose the fallacy of the schools' alleged monopoly of education. In the words of Garcia Galindo (1999: 10): «In recent years, «Educommunication» has arisen as a new scientific space, not just the place where education and communication intersect... but increasingly perceived as a distinct space altogether, detached from its common trunks, and concerned with the transfer of information and knowledge».

In recent decades, the societies of Western

Europe, in general, and Spanish society, in particular, have become increasingly multicultural in character. As countries receiving immigrants, they have been adopting significant measures to improve the integration of immigrant populations. The Lisbon Treaty, which came into force on December 1, 2009, reinforced the European Union's commitment to design a common immigration policy, stating specifically that it would promote appropriate measures in the matter of immigration and «respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity (...)» (Official Journal of the European Union, 2010: 17). Despite this common policy, each country is developing its own strategies, causing a proliferation of different measures of a national, state, regional and local flavor. There is nevertheless one general common denominator: hardly any thought has been given to the adoption of measures aimed at the receiving population, among whom the foreign citizens have to live. And it is precisely in this regard that the formative action of the press takes on such great importance.

Combining immigrant cultures with the host country's is not always easy, particularly in those aspects considered to be fundamental. Strategies must be devised and promoted to overcome the possible isolation of foreign groups and cultures, since that would be undesirable. At the same time, we should not be so naïve as to overlook the fact that every culture is going to ensure that it retains its own identity.

Inevitably, the role of the mass media in constructing ways of thinking about immigrants and the migratory phenomenon is a key element in creating and shaping the mindsets, attitudes and opinions of the receiving population, and helping or hindering the integration of foreign groups. For the vast majority of Spanish citizens, once they have left school, their main source of information is the media, especially the press. The education that every individual receives plays a fundamental role in his development as a person, his concept of society and his relationship with others. Today the idea of lifelong learning is more relevant than ever; indeed, the education that we all acquire throughout our lives has a direct impact on the way we conceive of the «other», of those who are «different». The media play a significant role in the citizen's education, particularly now that they are so influential. Furthermore, since most digital press is free and easy to access, its influence, while already great, continues to grow.

From April 1, 1995, when the daily newspaper *Avui* unveiled its digital version, the Spanish press struck out in a new direction. Printed newspapers,

along with others offering an online edition only –pioneered by «La Estrella Digital» [The Online Star]– gradually swelled their numbers. On the threshold of the twenty-first century and at the height of the crisis in the sector, there was a surge in the growth of digital newspapers, at the same time as business strategies were being redefined in search of the best returns possible from digital editions.

The aim of this study is to highlight the importance of the online press in shaping people's opinions, and to find out whether it fosters positive or negative attitudes about the migratory phenomenon. With this in mind, we carried out a comparative study of the digital versions of the two biggest-selling daily newspapers in Spain (elmundo.es and elpais.com), in which content analysis was particularly relevant, showing the growing importance of this kind of press and contributing to raising awareness of its educational and formative impact.

## 2. Material and methods

After selecting the subject matter relating to the field of study –articles on immigration– and defining what the unit of comparison was going to be –limited to the digital editions of the daily newspapers «El Mundo» and «El País»– we analyzed all articles published on the subject in these two editions between January 1, 2009 and June 30, 2010, that is a total period of a year and a half. Any article during this period that included the terms «educación» [education] and «inmigrantes» [immigrants] was selected.

344 articles met these conditions in elpais.com and 133 in elmundo.es. Content analysis was applied objectively and systematically to all the articles in the study. A selection was made of the categories employed, of the units of analysis and of the system for counting the information obtained. This technique with its qualitative characteristics, which certainly does not exclude quantitative ones,<sup>1</sup> enabled us to codify different parts of the message emitted and transform them into analyzable data by drawing up exclusion categories. Once the content analysis had been effected, a comparative study was performed using the methodology appropriate to Comparative Education. The starting point was the conceptual approach of Professors

García-Garrido and Llorent, who view Comparative Education as an education science characterized by the study of education systems using the comparative method.

Given that this research has an obvious social bias, the interdisciplinary nature of it must be stressed. Using the methodological approach developed by Professors García-Garrido (1991: 150-162) and Ferrer (2002: 95-104), we then followed each of the stages for carrying out a comparative research study proposed by Professor Llorent (2002).

In the latest «Estudio General de Medios» [Gene-

**Constructing social reality is the responsibility of everyone; nonetheless, certain social agents and the mass media wield a considerable amount of influence, with the press having a major share. «El País» and «El Mundo» are among the Spanish daily newspapers with the greatest influence on public opinion; they have a considerable impact on shaping both public and published opinion in so far as the attitudes to be adopted towards new groups who comprise our multicultural society are concerned.**

ral Media Survey], published on April 7, 2011, «El País» was top of the list of paid-for generalist newspapers by a considerable margin, with a daily average of 1,997,000 readers, followed by «El Mundo», with 1,245,000 (prnoticias, 2011). In fact, «El Mundo» and «El País» are the two generalist daily newspapers with the highest sales and circulation in Spain. Although «El País» has the edge in its printed format, it is not the case with the digital version, since elmundo.es is the Spanish-language digital newspaper that receives the most visits; it occupies eleventh place on the list of most-visited web sites, and is first among generalist newspapers in Spain. Elpais.com, on the other hand, is twelfth and second, respectively (Alexa, 2011).

In 1990, «El País» became the second Spanish newspaper to offer an electronic version. Its pioneering system of payment, introduced on November 18, 2002, caused a sharp drop in the number of visits, to such an extent that, in June 2005, it returned to its previous system of free access. However, since then,

and until the present day, «El Mundo» –whose electronic version started in October 1995 with free access from the outset– took the lead among Spanish digital editions (Delgado, 2009), outstripping its main competitor, *elpais.com*. In short, both newspapers' digital editions have a great impact in the media.

### 3. Results

To analyze the results, a series of categories were established that were to be of assistance in understanding the comparative study. First of all we focused on the aspect that immediately attracts the reader's attention: pictures. The use of pictorial representations to illustrate the content of an article is a powerful tool for conveying information and, is therefore, an educational medium of great interest. 46.6% of the articles analyzed in «El Mundo» were illustrated and 33.4% in «El País». In the latter paper, pictures of immigrants (27%) and political figures (23.5%) appeared most frequently; likewise in «El Mundo», the pictures were of similar kinds, although photos of politicians assumed greater significance (41.9%) to the detriment of the immigrants themselves (24.2%). In the same political vein, we noticed that political figures or parties were frequently named, or otherwise referred to, in the texts of both dailies: 72.9% in the case of «El Mundo» and 71.5% in the case of «El País». These data lead us to consider that the topic of immigration is, to a certain extent, politicized. Analysis of the pictures used to illustrate articles showed that more than half of them gave a neutral view of migration (54.9% in «El Mundo» and 56.6% in «El País»), although the percentage of cases reflecting a positive (32.2% and 30.4%) and a negative (12.9% and 13%) viewpoint, respectively, is by no means negligible.

Secondly, we focused on the view of the migratory phenomenon that was transmitted by the two digital newspapers. A majority of articles mentioned some particular group –either from the society of origin or the host society– that was directly affected by the news story: 65.4% in «El Mundo» and 72.1% in «El País». A careful search for terms or adjectives associating the immigrant community with negative values revealed only a minority of instances, in both *elmundo.es* (8.3%) and *elpais.com* (13.1%).

In the Spanish welfare state, where the national economy is one of the chief concerns of citizens, it came as a surprise to discover that the dailies we analyzed made relatively little connection between immigration and the current economic crisis. In fact, a link was established in only 22.6% of cases in «El Mundo» and 24.1% in «El País». Nonetheless, we did

find a link between immigration and the wellbeing of the population, in the sense that the majority of the analyzed articles stressed the prosperity that the native-born population enjoyed in comparison with immigrant groups; this emphasis was more pronounced in the case of *elpais.com*.

On numerous occasions, issues have arisen –relating to the use of religious symbols in schools and public places, clothing, the construction of buildings for worship, and so on– where religion has been linked with immigration. These issues have in fact been sources of controversy with considerable impact on public opinion; however, we found that 96.2% of the articles in «El Mundo», and 84% of those in «El País» did not focus on the religious aspect and when they did refer to it, the treatment was not negative in «El Mundo» and there were only sporadic negative references in «El País» (just 27 articles).

The last indicator analyzed in this category was the differential treatment between men and women immigrants; we found no difference of treatment in 94.7% of the articles in «El Mundo» and 94.8% in «El País». In the rare cases where a distinction was made, it was almost always in favor of women (85.7% and 72.2% respectively).

The third category of analysis focused on the integration of immigrants in the host society. The data obtained showed that this process was supported in 69.2% of the articles analyzed in *elmundo.es*, while the figure in *elpais.com* was 50.6%. However, when we looked further into how integration should be accomplished, we found that 84.7% of the 98 articles published in «El Mundo» on this topic expressed the view that the wished-for coexistence between immigrants and the native-born population had to be achieved by the former adapting to the norms and standards of the host society; by contrast, 171 articles referred to the topic in «El País» and 53.8% of them did not consider adaptation to be a prerequisite.

The two newspapers again showed differences in their views of the coexistence between immigrants and the host society. A relative majority of articles in the online edition of «El Mundo» adopted a positive standpoint towards the topic; on the other hand, those in «El País» took a largely negative stance. Pursuing the topic further, we noted that although a very high proportion of articles did not associate immigration with criminal activity (91.7% and 87.2%), we found a small, but not insignificant, proportion that did make this analogy. Finally, we point out that a similar percentage of articles in both papers were based on official sources (39.8% and 43% in «El Mundo» and «El País», respectively).

#### 4. Discussion

The long-standing but unresolved debate about whether journalism can be objective is beginning to be superseded by the increasingly widespread concept of social responsibility. It is totally unrealistic to isolate a news item from its context, eschewing its interpretive and evaluative dimension. We would not even presume to suggest that we were absolutely neutral in planning, developing and later analyzing this research; it is simply impossible to be completely objective. Nevertheless, the journalist has to stick as closely as possible to the facts and avoid distorting them at all times, while freedom of opinion, on the other hand, should never be called into question.

The necessary utopia of an objective journalism in which there is complete transparency of information must be the compass guiding journalistic activity. But this indispensable guide cannot make us forget that it is difficult to describe the bare facts exactly as they happened. From the relativistic approaches of Protagoras and the interpretive ones of Nietzsche, who told us «There are no facts, only interpretations» (Nietzsche, 1980: 315), to the Talmud when it states «We do not see things as they are; we see things as we are» leaves us in no doubt that each observer perceives reality differently. Even the words used to communicate a news item, the approach used, the author's intentionality, the place occupied by the item in the newspaper, and

so on, are imponderables that are difficult to make neutral. However, the absence of pure objectivity must not distance us from the desire to remain impartial when reporting, which does not in any case have to be at odds with committed journalism.

Furthermore, not only does every journalist see things from a different point of view, but his or her cognitive structure—consisting of experiences and knowledge acquired over a lifetime—is a mental neurophysiological support system to which new information is constantly being added, while undergoing continuous assimilation and adaptation<sup>2</sup>. This implies a unique personal subjectivization of the news. A similar process occurs when the reader reads the news. So the reader should not expect to be presented with a single true reality; even if he were, he would inevitably take it upon himself to give it his own personal interpretation. For a person to acquire knowledge, an interpretive process must take place which prevents the existence of an ontic reality far removed from man's here-and-now existence: «Objectivity is the illusion that observations can be made without an observer» (Heinz von Foerster in Watzlawick & Krieg, 1994: 19). In any case, hermeneutic ontology did away some time ago with any suggestion that the objectivist principle of reality could be taken seriously.

None of this need prevent the journalist—conscious of this reality and faced with the difficulty of eli-

	ELMUNDO.ES		ELPAIS.COM		
	f.	%	f.	%	
Articles analyzed	2009	6	57.9	279	81.1
	2010 first six months	56	42.1	65	18.9
	Total	13	100	344	100
Where there is a picture, who is in it?	Political Figures	26	41.9	27	23.5
	Immigrants	15	24.2	31.	27.0
	Allegorical	11	17.7	6	5.2.
	Others	10	16.1	51%	44.3
The effect on the society of origin	Positive	61	45.9	12	37.5
	Negative	41	30.8	167	48.6
	Neutral	31.	23.3	48	13.9
The impact on the host society	Positive	60	45.1	126	36.6
	Negative	53	39.8	180	52.3
	Neutral	20	15.1	38	11.1.
There is more emphasis on the wellbeing of the population	Native-born	62	46.6	240	69.7
	Immigrant	51%	38.3	91	26.4
	Neutral	20	15.1	13	3.9%
Is it a question of religion?	Yes	5	3.8	55	16.0
	No	128	96.2	289	84.0
If the answer is yes, what is the attitude expressed?	Positive	3	60.0	19	34.5%
	Negative	0	0	27	49.1
	Neutral	2	40.0	9	16.4
What view is offered of the coexistence between the immigrants and the host society today?	Positive	60	45.1	111	32.3
	Negative	45	33.8	213	61.9
	Neutral	28	21.1	20	5.8

Table 1: Other results of interest.

minating ideological elements and connotations—from respecting a minimal code of ethics and leaving the reader, as far as possible, to be free to process the information received. We consider that, even though it is practically impossible to achieve complete objectivity, the journalist's subjectivity should be no excuse for distorting the news. Moreover, it is no less true that when most of us read a newspaper, we expect to find particular ideological positions expressed in its pages.

Constructing social reality is the responsibility of everyone; nonetheless, certain social agents and the mass media wield a considerable amount of influence, with the press having a major share. «El País» and «El Mundo» are among the Spanish daily newspapers with the greatest influence on public opinion; they have a considerable impact on shaping both public and published opinion in so far as the attitudes to be adopted towards new groups who comprise our multicultural society are concerned. This is particularly so if we agree with Montesquieu (2010) when he declares: «We receive three educations: one from our parents, one from our teachers, and one from the world. The third contradicts all that the first two teach us».

The immigration question is neither trivial nor minor, but an issue that affects an enormous number of people. The United Nations' report on migration and development on June 6, 2006 (UNO, 2006) pointed out that there were 191 million immigrant citizens on the planet, of whom 64 million were in Europe. Therefore, if we wish to construct the European Union and Spain in a realistic way, it is essential that we take into account this huge group of immigrants who currently live in both territories, without forgetting those who will arrive in the near future.

In Spanish and European societies increasingly characterized by multiculturalism, it is essential for people to learn to live alongside the «other», those who are «different». The way to achieve this is to take the actual situation as the starting point and the best way to find out Spanish opinions on the matter is to use the survey on Attitudes to Immigration, carried out by the Center for Sociological Research (CIS) in 2009. The following responses are of particular interest (CIS, 2009):

- The first question asked: «In your opinion, what is the main problem in Spain today? And the second? And the third? After unemployment and problems of an economic nature, immigration came third with 19.1%.

- In Question 9, respondents were asked to rank the importance of particular aspects that should be taken into consideration when allowing a foreigner to come and live in Spain. The most frequent response was that the immigrant should be prepared to accept the country's way of life.

- Question 36 asked: «In your view, what basi-

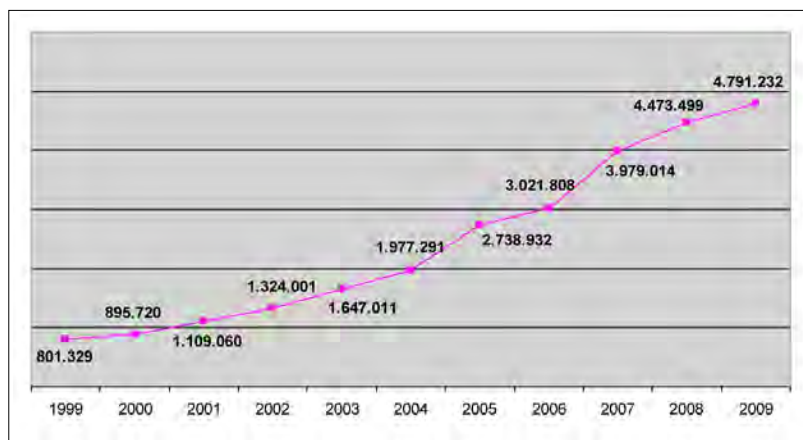


Figure 1: Foreigners in Spain with a registration certificate or a valid residence card. (Ministry of Labor and Immigration, 2010).

cally influences people's opinions about immigration?» After indicating personal experience as the main influence, the second one was the news in the mass media (19.8%).

- Question 37 asked the respondent «Do you think the image projected by the mass media is...?». Most responded that it tended to be negative (46.3%), whereas only 21% answered that it tended to be positive.

The growing importance of the use of the Internet in recent years is unquestionable. For this reason, it is enough to briefly highlight some data for 2010:

- The total number of dwellings with access to the Internet in Spain was 9,039,764 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2010a).

- 57.4% of Spanish homes (nearly 8.8 million dwellings) had a broadband connection to the Internet, which represented an increase of nine hundred thousand homes over the previous year (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2010b).

- The number of Internet users grew by 7.1% in the last year, to more than 22.2 million people (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2010 b).

The considerable difference between the two newspapers in the number of articles analyzed –344 in *elpais.com* and 133 in *elmundo.es*– may be due to the relative importance each attached to the phenomenon. Given that newsworthy events often have a negative character, when we analyzed the pictures used to illustrate the articles, we were struck by the clearly positive slant that both «El Mundo» and «El País» put on immigration. This, together with other results, indicates quite a trend in the editorial line of these newspapers.

When we looked into whether the migratory question transmitted in the news was evaluated as positive or negative towards the societies of origin of the immigrant groups, we discovered a substantial difference between the two newspapers. We observed that there were more positive connotations than negative ones in *elmundo.es*, while in *elpais.com* the reverse was true; there were more negative than positive connotations. The outcome was similar when we checked for the type of effect that it had on the receiving society. In «El Mundo» the positive outweighed the negative, whereas in «El País» the results were reversed, with the negative accounting for 52.3% of the articles on this particular topic.

The small, but real, percentage of articles that associate criminal activity with immigration are a cause for concern. Without doubting the veracity of the correlation in particular instances, care should be taken lest part of the readership extrapolate the information and use it to form undesirable opinions.

Both newspapers support the process of integrating immigrants into the host society, but differ to a certain extent in the strategies that should be followed to achieve the coexistence they are looking for. «El Mundo» tends to favor employing strategies that require the immigrants to adapt to the established norms and standards of the host society, while this is not regarded as a necessary prerequisite in the articles in «El País». There are, moreover, considerable differences in the way each newspaper views coexistence between immigrants and the host society, with «El País» being much more negative than «El Mundo».

There are numerous points of similarity between the two daily papers. In percentage terms, they both coincide in their use of official sources, the relative absence of negative connotations concerning immigrants, the influence of this group on the welfare of the native-born population, the fact that immigrants are seen as having little connection with the economic crisis, the dearth of references to religious questions, and so on.

Although it is perfectly clear that the selection of newsworthy events is not only closely related to the objectivity of the facts, but also, in this case, to the different views and interests of the editors, the various ideological lines that appeared in the articles analyzed enabled us to conclude that they did not coincide significantly with the ideological stance of the newspaper that published them. Truthful information not distorted by political and economic interests must become the driving force of a society that seeks to have free citizens with a respect for cultures other than their own. An education based on equality and pluralism must be the pillar on which any society that claims to be fair and democratic rests (Ruiz Echeondo, Medina & García, 2001).

In our analysis of the informational discourses, we reaffirm the existence of different contextualizations, interpretations and evaluations of reality, demonstrating the impossibility of maintaining a so-called neutral stance. Isolated events cease to exist when they come into contact with the senses and minds of both journalist and reader; their interpretations place us squarely in the field of hermeneutics.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although, Berelson, the founder of content analysis, would state that this is «a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communication» (Berelson, 1952: 18).

<sup>2</sup> We agree with Jean Piaget, who pointed out that our intelligence is constructed on the basis of our biological inheritance, which limits its existence and at the same time makes it possible. In this, there is a continuous process of adaptation whereby two complementary processes are produced simultaneously: A. Assimilation of the external world to our mental structures B. Accommodation of the mind to new knowledge. Both involve continuous cognitive restructuring, through which our mind is constructed and our thoughts are shaped.

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