

Media Construction of the Image of the Immigrant: Specifics of Discourse Strategies (Based on the Content of a *Facebook* Group and Articles in the *Daily Mail*)¹

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Abstract. This paper discusses the issue of discursive construction of an immigrant image in media discourse on the basis of the content on the *Immigrants in EU* Facebook group and *Daily Mail* publications. Through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the authors claim that the image of the immigrant can be viewed as a discursive construct, and the main discursive strategies involved in its construction include the reference strategy and the prediction strategy. As a result of the analysis, the so called CDA categories (topic blocks) underlying the formation of the immigrant figure, are identified and illustrated through examples, the need for further study of the social media discourse as part of critical discourse analysis is justified.

The relevance of such study is due to the growing research interest in discursive construction of the figure of the immigrant in media discourse, since it underpins the definition of discourse as a form of social practice, not only reflecting processes in the society, but also exerting a reciprocal effect on them. The use of both verbal and non-verbal means in the media texts under study reflects the intention of the authors of the messages to use all possible communication channels when constructing the image of the immigrant. The results show that the dichotomy of “friends and foes” is being formed and maintained by the British *Daily Mail* newspaper, while the members of the *Immigrants in EU* group try to mitigate the conflict between immigrants and indigenous people.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, political discourse, immigrant, discursive strategies, stereotypes

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The study of political communication has not lost any of its relevance in modern society, since, in a democratic social structure, an adequate interpretation of political issues in the language affects the solution of many political problems. Professional political discourse is a kind of institutional discourse and refers to a special type of communication that deals primarily with and is driven by the struggle for power. Viewed from this perspective, professional political discourse is understood as a discursive practice that imposes a certain system of views and relations on society in the form of a normative prescription from a given social institution (Dieckmann 1981; Dijk 1985; Dijk 1997; Fairclough, Fairclough 2012). Professional political discourse is described as a complex dynamic communicative phenomenon taking place in a given context, whose tasks include “studying the world that is beyond the material world that can only be penetrated through language” (Minyar-Belorucheva 2015: 61). An analysis of professional political discourse is needed in order to study the complex interaction of discourse and society, and this can only be correctly interpreted if we take the “combination of linguistic and sociological approaches” into account (Wodak 2006). Mass media, as a product created by political, economic and cultural forces, is becoming an important social resource in professional political discourse (Fowler 1991). The media plays a special role in that it places an emphasis on certain fragments of reality, constructs attitudes, opinions and stereotypes, thus shaping people’s perceptions of any given situation (Fairclough 1989).

Literature Review

The overwhelming majority of works on the recursive interaction of discursive practices and social processes focus on an analysis of the ways in which people create and maintain stereotypes of different social groups (Cheng 2015; Eriksson 2015; Kilby, Horowitz, Hylton 2013; Mellouki 2015; Strom 2015; Toft 2014), the construction of national identity (Richardson 2013, Wodak et. al. 2013), and the discursive reproduction of racial stereotypes, prejudices and biases towards people of different nationalities (Baker, McEnery 2013; Engel, Wodak 2013; Gavins, Simpson 2015; Malmqvist 2015; McGlashan 2013; Musolff 2013). The influence of discursive practices on the formation of social and political reality is one of the main objectives of research within the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA). The present article focuses on the features of constructing the image of immigrants in media discourse, since, despite the wealth of research carried out within the CDA paradigm, some issues relating to the specifics of the formation of such a discourse in the media have, in our opinion, been presented in a one-sided manner.

Research into this issue typically focuses on the situation of immigrants in EU countries and the development of topics related to immigrants in the media. The CDA approach to studying the media usually involves relaying news not as a reflection of reality, but rather as a product created by political, economic and cultural forces (Fowler 1991). According to Norman Fairclough, “the constant doses of ‘news’ which most

people receive each day are a significant factor in social control, and they account for a not insignificant proportion of a person's average daily involvement in discourse" (Fairclough 1989: 50).

In the context of critical analysis, access to media discourse is identified with access to power. For decades, researchers have pointed to the role that the media plays in the formation of stereotypes in the mass consciousness, as well as to the dialectical relationship between discourse and sociocultural reality. Thus, linguists who build their research on the basis of CDA and related fields stress that any analysis of discursive practices should focus not on simply describing discursive structures from the point of view of their functioning in social processes, but rather on explaining and interpreting their implementation in the sociocultural space (Ledeneva 2017; Malyuga, Tomalin: 2017; Fairclough et al. 2011; Wodak, Meyer 2009; Khosravini 2010)².

To summarize the above, we can say that, as a rule, researchers focus on the figure of "the immigrant" and the influence of state media on the formation of stereotypes in the public psyche towards this figure. The media has traditionally been a focus of interest for researchers in the field of CDA, and this is connected with the understanding – backed by evidence – that media discourses play a crucial role in the construction of attitudes, opinions and stereotypes, shaping people's perception of reality. However, the manner in which the state media, with the help of social media, constructs the image of "the immigrant" is beyond the scope of these studies. It is, however, the focus of this paper.

Proceeding from the understanding of discourse as a phenomenon that constitutes social reality, we argue that reality and real relationships are reproduced and changed not only through media discourse, but also through virtual groups and social networks (Kharkovskaya, Krivchenko 2017; Khosravini 2014). The appearance and popularization of interactive digital media has made it necessary to define common basic concepts when conducting critical research, in particular, such concepts as "audience," "producers" and "consumers" of texts and, most importantly, the linear model of communication. The linear one-to-many communication model that is characteristic of traditional media is being replaced on social media by many-to-many or interactive communication models, and this undermines, to a certain extent, the influence of official media discourse on the public consciousness (Khosravini 2014).

While the media elites still have exclusive and active access to and control over the text, as well as the exclusive responsibility for manipulating the minds of readers, the emergence of new channels of communication is changing the essence and direction of messages in the modern sociopolitical order. The increase in the number of discursive practices on the internet and the influence of social media on various

² See also: Ledeneva S.N. 2004. *Metody psiholingvisticheskoy ozenki effektivnosti rechevogo vozdejstviya* [Methods of Psycholinguistic Assessment of the Verbal Impact Efficiency]. (Abstract of the Doctoral thesis). Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia. (In Russian).

political, cultural and business aspects of society determines the high level of interest in this type speech practice on the part of scholars whose research interests focus on a socially oriented critical approach to communication. “New media” and the social impact it has on the audience require a new type of thinking, especially within those critical research areas that are associated with the concepts of discursive power, such as critical discourse analysis.

Research methods

Our analysis of the manner in which the media constructs the image of “the immigrant” is carried out within the framework of the discursive-historical approach proposed by Ruth Wodak. The discursive-historical approach focuses on the study of political discourse as a form of social interaction, a tool for reproducing social dominance that allows power structures to exercise their rule over society, create national identities, and oppose representatives of society on the principle of “friend or foe” (Wodak et al. 1999). Proponents of this approach focus on determining the content of discourse, identifying its linguistic characteristics and the features of its implementation in its diachronic and synchronic aspects in various linguistic and sociopolitical contexts. According to Wodak, the necessary steps in the study of the relationship and conditionality of the semiotic structures of discourse by social structures are: a) collecting all available information about the historical setting in which the discursive “events” are embedded; and b) identifying and explaining types of genre and discourse (Reisigl, Wodak 2009; Wodak, Meyer 2009). It thus follows that the questions “what?” and “how?” can be answered by examining the linguistic content of the text, while the answer to the question “why?” can only be obtained after contextual analysis, that is, after studying the links between the text being analysed and the sociopolitical context (Khosravini 2010).

According to Wodak and Reisigl, the following analytical categories need to be taken into account when carrying out a detailed textual analysis:

- a referential (or nomination) strategy, whose purpose is to differentiate various social factors;
- a predication strategy aimed at evaluating social actions, as well as objects, events and processes, followed by the categorization of “us” and “them” (Reisigl, Wodak 2009: 104).

Both strategies are aimed at identifying the relationship between factors and their actions and imply attaching more or less positive or negative labels to social factors, condemning or approving their actions, and their negative or positive stereotyping.

In addition to these, the main discursive strategies, according to the classification system developed by Wodak and Reisigl, include:

- an argumentation strategy (or argumentation schemes) based on certain *topoi*, through which social factors try to justify and legitimize political inclusion or exclusion, discriminatory or preferential treatment;

- a perspectivization strategy that is used to characterize a social factor or group from the point of view of the speaker/writer;
- an intensification/mitigation strategy, which modify the illocutionary force of an utterance in order to increase or decrease its intensity (Reisigl, Wodak 2009: 104).

Analysing discursive strategies provides answers to the following questions: Does the speaker intend to convince someone of something (the realization of persuasive communication)? Or is he/she simply stating facts and events? Or is he/she attempting to convey factual information about an event by describing actions, states, characteristics, places where the events took place, etc.? The implementation of certain discursive strategies and the choice of linguistic, pragmatic and rhetorical means of transmitting them depends on the intentions and goals of the communicant (Malyuga, Popova 2018; Parshutina, Popova 2018).

In terms of material used for the study, we took data from the *Immigrants in EU* group on Facebook, as well as excerpts from articles printed in the *Daily Mail* newspaper in the United Kingdom. Our selection of sources was guided by the following principles. *First*, the Facebook group had to have been created by immigrants themselves and have a large number of members. The *Immigrants in EU* group has benefitted from having good administration, promotion and networking since its creation in August 2013 and currently has over 4000 members (as of the time of writing). *Second*, the newspaper we would be analysing had to be popular among a significant portion of the audience. The *Daily Mail* online receives approximately 53 million visitors per month³. We used the online version of the newspaper⁴. We can thus state that the amount of information obtained from the selected sources was sufficient to provide us with a comprehensive understanding of the construction of the figure of “the immigrant” in the media discourse.

Results and Discussion

In the context of our analysis, the publication of messages is of interest to us as a discursive practice, a way of constructing an image of immigrants on a social network and in the pages of a printed publication. What is more, approaching the problem from the standpoint of critical discourse analysis requires testing it as a methodological tool for analysing factual material not only in the press, but also on social networks.

Today, few would doubt the fact that many semiotic characteristics of discourse, such as headings, topics, lexical units, rhetorical devices, etc., depend on such an abstract and general phenomenon as social relations. In this regard, it seems appropriate

³ Top 15 Most Popular News Websites [Online Source]. *eBizMBA*. URL: <http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/news-websites> (accessed June 5, 2020).

⁴ The Daily Mail [Online Source]. URL: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/index.html>.

to start our analysis of media discourse with a study of the categories that form the foundation of the discursive strategies used to construct the image of “the immigrant” in news reports in a UK newspaper and on the forum of a social media group. In their article “Fleeing, sneaking, flooding. A corpus analysis of discursive constructions of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press, 1996–2005,” Costas Gabrielatos and Paul Baker define discourse topics as important CDA-informed categories (Gabrielatos, Baker 2008). Identifying thematic blocks of discourse, or CDA categories, allows us to understand the cognitive model in which the representation or figure of “the immigrant” is reproduced.

The choice of discursive strategies and the categories underlying their implementation points to the author’s concept of social reality, the kind of discursive practice in maintaining social order and social change he or she is trying to recreate for the recipient. Depending on the research topic, the specifics of the social context and genre, certain discursive strategies may be more significant than others in terms of their use in discourse construction. Studying which discursive strategies are most effective in political communication is undoubtedly of great interest, for a number of reasons. Among these reasons is the need to gain a deeper insight into the essence of the phenomenon with due account of the information that is already available in the field of linguistics, as well as the need to look at discursive strategies from a new angle in order to understand the semiotic potential of the language of politics in the discursive reproduction of certain social situations.

In our opinion, the discursive strategies and the categories that form their basis are unlikely to be as varied in discussions on social media as they are in print media. For example, members of the *Immigrants in EU* group on Facebook almost never use argumentation strategies that allow for an open and frank discussion. The page demonstrates a clear bias towards defending immigrants and is primarily a place where like-minded people who have similar view on specific situations can come together and discuss them. Arguments are thus expressed in the form of statements that are seen as self-evident facts that are commonly known and widely used by group members.

The *Daily Mail*, on the other hand, tends to structure its arguments on immigrants according to the following pattern: *assertion* – immigrants must be stopped, or their flow into the country must be slowed down; *statistics* – immigration costs too much; *argument* – if a given activity costs too much, then something must be done to reduce expenditures; *refutation* – this is not always the case, but it often/normally happens; *modifier* – this is usually the case; and *support* – EU experience shows... Unlike the articles and blogs that appear on the *Daily Mail* website, where authors have sufficient space and time, and/or where the laws of the genre dictate that the writing be more reasoned and informative, the political communication of the *Immigrants in EU* dictates that information be summarized, and that the authors express their own, mostly biased, judgements.

The genre of discourse determines the choice of discursive strategies. It is, of course, rather difficult, if not impossible to characterize a genre of discursive practices

on the internet, which are marked by informality and remoteness in space and time. That said, the informal style of discourse, coupled with the various types of internet practices – for example, the simultaneous browsing several webpages, the multimodal nature of communication, etc. – make linguistic sloppiness common among group members in their comments.

Our analysis of the *Immigrants in EU* group revealed that the implementation of the referential strategy used to represent immigrants is based on the following CDA categories (Table 1): *references to human rights* – used to describe the rights of immigrants in the European Union; *popular slogans* – used to describe immigrants’ fears and anxieties about their social status; *demands to put an end to racism* – used to describe the reproduction of racist ideas about immigrants through discursive practices (*hereinafter, the original wording used by the group members is preserved*).

Table 1. CDA categories underlying the implementation of the referential strategy used to represent immigrants in the Immigrants in EU Facebook group

Representation of immigrants	Personal pronouns: – We, Us, I Nouns: – Immigrants – Humans – Muslim world References to human rights: – Free immigration is basic human right. – Every human have right to wear whatever want. – Every human have right to use every language want. – Every human have right to choose the education for his kids. – Free movement of humans is one of the 4 basic values of EU (free movement of humans-goods-capital services). – Every human must have the right to believe and say everything, and to live every way of life want – (even if this is against him), except to take away the personal freedoms of other humans. – Every human should have the right to choose the medical method who he wants. Populist slogans – Immigrants of the EU, unite! – Immigrants are humans too, and need to have equal rights! – Citizenship for all immigrants now! – If humans-goods-money-services don't cross borders, armies will! – Democracy is not only elections. – Democracy basically is protection of human rights and personal freedoms! Demands to put an end to racism: – Immigrants pay taxes, need to follow the laws, but not have right to vote, and the State can throw them out whenever want. Stop islamophobia now! – Racism era finished!
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Table 2 shows the CDA category of the predication strategy used by members of the *Immigrants in EU* group. The predication strategy involved in the formation of the image of “the immigrant” was based on the category of *democratic freedoms*, which points to the political and legal norms that determine where immigrants stand in EU countries.

Table 2. CDA categories underlying the implementation of the predication strategy used to represent immigrants in the Immigrants in EU Facebook group

Representation of immigrants	Democratic freedoms: – EU needs common immigration politic, common euro-citizenship, and common euro-documents. – EU needs immediately enlargement and to become common country. – Stability in muslim world will be only if EU accepts Turkey as full member, if opens borders to immigrants, and if stops discriminations against muslims. – Not only those who born, but every human who permanent live in one country, need to receive citizenship, in order to have equal rights. – Free movement of money? Yes. Free movement of goods? Yes. – Free movement of services? Yes. So, why no to free movement of humans? – Citizenship must not have relation with religion- nation-language-origin-racial. – Not exist free economy and free market, without free movement of humans. – Not exist democracy without equal rights. – Not exist democracy without multiculturalism (accept of diversity).
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Our analysis of the *Daily Mail* allowed us to identify the following CDA categories that underlie the implementation of the referential strategy in the formation of the image of “the immigrant” in the newspaper: *country of origin* – used to denote the countries where immigrants come from; *arrival and reception* – used to refer to the process of immigrants entering the country and how they are received; *place of residence* – used to denote the places where immigrants typically live in the host country. The categories underlying the implementation of the referential strategy are summarized in Table 3. The establishment of a hyponymic and hypernymic connection between the concepts of *immigrants* and *illegal* and the use of metaphorical constructions – for example, the referential metaphorical representation of immigrants as an uncontrolled flow (*waves of illegal immigrants*, *tides of illegal immigrants*, *flood of illegal immigrants*) all contribute to the creation of a feeling of fear in the reading audience.

Table 3. CDA categories underlying the implementation of the referential strategy used to represent immigrants in the Daily Mail newspaper

Representation of immigrants	Nouns: – Immigrant – Migrant Country of origin: – Syrian refugees – Palestinian refugees – Iraqi refugees Arrival and reception: – Enter – Come – Arrive – Cross – Trying – Stay away – Fence – More than 860 immigrants pour into Britain – Waves of illegal immigrants – Tides of illegal immigrants – Flood of illegal immigrants – Mass expulsion – Runaway immigration
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Representation of immigrants	Place of residence: – Mass around – Set up temporary home
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Table 4 shows the CDA category of the implementation of the predication strategy in the *Daily Mail* newspaper. These include: *breaking the law* – used to describe illegal acts committed by immigrants and conflicts between immigrants and the police/authorities; *threat* – immigrants are depicted as lawbreakers, and their movement into the country is depicted as a crime; *plight* – used to indicate the reasons why immigrants leave their countries and the dangers they face; *assistance* – used to describe the assistance provided to immigrants and drumming up sympathy for them. The conceptualization of immigrants as a threat allows power structures to legitimize the most difficult decisions that entail significant socioeconomic costs for society. Comparative references to the past, lessons in history, comparing past events and days with what is happening today, reminding readers of the greatness of Great Britain – all this implies that immigrants are lawbreakers who represent a threat to the social environment, the housing situation, “our” country, education, employment, norms, values, habits, and the English language. Our analysis of *Daily Mail* articles suggest that the modern British press makes deliberate use of certain phrases as a way to evoke ethnic stereotypes and prejudices at the level of discourse and push the “us against them” mentality. In other words, the linguistic content of the discourse is closely related to the mechanism of reproducing dominance relations, where all forms of illegal actions are reflected, consolidated and produced with the help of language. This, in turn, serves as a means of persuasion and manipulation of public consciousness (Fairclough et al. 2011; Wodak 2013; Dijk 2015).

Table 4. CDA categories underlying the implementation of the predication strategy used to represent immigrants in the *Immigrants in the Daily Mail* newspaper

	Breaking the law: – Run away – Arrest – Enter illegally Threat: – Steal jobs – Real terrorist threat – Destruction of the economy – Crisis – Danger – Risk – Terrorism – Chaos Plight: – Conflict – War – Poverty
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Immigrants	Assistance: – Help – Aid – Welcome – Support
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In the study of discourse, in addition to verbal means, special attention should be given to other means of communication through which the semantic structures of discourse are produced and transmitted. As a semiotic process involving the production of a set of statements on a certain topic, including the attitude of the author to this topic, discourse can be represented not only through verbal, but although through visual, elements. The present article focuses on the speech implementation of discursive strategies for constructing the image of “the immigrant.” However, in order to get a complete picture of the ongoing discursive processes that exist in media discourse, we must also take the multimodal phenomena of communication into account. While media discourse has come to be mostly considered by contemporary scholars as a multimodal discourse, for example, in advertising or political communication, it can also be argued that the emergence of social media and social networks has made the analysis of discourse multimodality within the framework of CDA a top priority (Kress, Leeuwen 2001). As David Barton and Carmen Lee put it, “In understanding language online, we are also trying to understand how different modes work together to form coherent and meaningful online texts” (Barton, Lee 2013: 29).

Our study revealed that these communication channels in the *Immigrants in EU* Facebook group include semiotic media, such as illustrative material (posters, memes, videos, photographs, etc.), audio media (songs, music, sound bites, etc.), and extra-linguistic means such as hyperlinks as a means of implementing intertextual links, through which all types of interaction between verbal and non-verbal components can be combined into a single text. Another component of the communicative process in the Facebook group is the spelling used in discursive practice. Spelling variation is a common feature of online language and can include the use of acronyms and initialisms, word reductions, letter/number homophones, stylized spelling, emoticons, and unconventional/stylized punctuation (Barton, Lee 2013: 5). Our analysis of the comments in the Facebook group and the news reports published in the *Daily Mail* suggest that there are numerous options when it comes to choosing the type and size of font, transliteration system, spelling variations, codes, and expressiveness, which not only reflect the personal characteristics of users and the author of a given piece, but are also used to achieve their respective goals. The visual aspect of communication thus plays a vital role in the transmission of information, both in the print media and on social media. All this allows us to conclude that verbal and non-verbal components, in close

relationship, are one of the ways in which an author can convey his or her opinion in an elaborately coded fashion. "... A 'biased' description of reality leads to the creation, first, of a 'necessary' picture of the world, and, finally, to 'correct' actions of individuals as objects of discursive influence" (Dijk 2015: 10).

Members of the *Immigrants in EU* group are well aware that they can use social media to express their opinions. Because immigrants are concerned about preserving their identity and being positively represented in the world's media, they use the power of social media to spread information they deem important (Boyd 2011: 46). We can assume that they have no influence whatsoever over how they are represented in traditional media discourses, as they do not have interactive access to that media and thus cannot control how they are represented. While immigrants are frequently a topic of political discourse in the print media, this form of passive access is unlikely to be controlled by the minority group itself (Dijk 1993). Immigrants thus see social networks as a space where they can challenge the official discourse, resist it and try to fill create a positive image of themselves.

Conclusion

The present study obviously does not cover the entire range of communication practices employed both by immigrants themselves on social media and by newspaper journalists. The results of this study of the *Immigrants in EU* Facebook group and articles published in the UK newspaper the *Daily Mail* show that, in both cases, the image of "the immigrant" is constructed using two main strategies – the referential strategy and the predication strategy. However, despite the commonality of discursive practices, the CDA categories underlying them are different. In the *Immigrants in EU* group, three categories were identified that form the basis for the implementation of the referential strategy (*references to human rights, populist slogans and demands to put an end to racism*), and one category was identified that forms the basis for the implementation of the predication strategy (*democratic freedoms*). Meanwhile, the *Daily Mail* uses three categories in the implementation of the referential strategy (*country of origin, arrival and reception, and place of residence*) and four categories in the implementation of the predication strategy (*law breaking, threat, plight, and assistance*).

Our analysis of the linguistic content of the discourse in the *Immigrants in EU* Facebook group shows that defending one's rights and, consequently, one's identity, is of paramount importance for the members of the group, as it determines their rhetoric and serves as the main motivating factor in the use of discursive resources to promote and protect their rights. As this study shows, the desire of immigrants to draw attention to themselves at the sign-symbolic level can be explained by the desire to resist the official discourse, where immigrants are represented in a light that is acceptable for the symbolic elites. The *Daily Mail* articles draw attention to the fact that immigrants are portrayed as a threat to European security, and this creates fear among readers. Depersonalization, references to immigrants in terms of numbers and generalized nouns,

associating the arrival of immigrants with natural disasters and social problems are the linguistic means that form a negative image of immigrants in the UK newspaper. In addition to verbal means, the image of “the immigrant” in the texts we looked at is also constructed using non-verbal means. Illustrative material, audio, hyperlinks, and spelling variability indicate the desire of the authors to use all possible channels of information transfer to achieve a given communicative goal.

While the representation of immigrants outside the European community in the *Daily Mail* reveals the tendency of journalists to place immigrants in opposition to the indigenous population, to form attitudes of intolerance and opposition to “them” as “our” enemy, members of the *Immigrants in EU* group oppose the conflict between immigrants and indigenous residents. The image of immigrants in the context of the European community shows the intention of the group’s members to stress what they have in common with European people, focusing the reader’s attention on a set of unifying features.

Whatever justifications there may be for explicit discursive expressions of intolerance towards minorities, the open expression of nationalism creates fertile ground for the growth of populist and authoritarian discourses based on the belief in one’s own superiority and exclusivity (Wodak et al. 2013). All this forces immigrant to take a stand against their negative representation in official discourse through social media.

The desire of immigrants to defend their rights on an equal footing with the indigenous population often leads to acts of disobedience, which in turn deepens the ideological division of the mass audience into “us” and “them.” Because immigrants do not have access to the production of news and are thus denied the opportunity to participate on an equal footing in discussions, their only recourse is to become active actors in constructing their image on social media.

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The authors declare the absence of any conflicts of interests.

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