Irregular Migration in E-Newspapers: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Readers' Comments

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ABSTRACT: With the rising rate of Internet penetration in Morocco, e-newspapers, which have become a popular tool in the spread of news, have given voice to their audience to have their say in what is reported. Yet, despite the popularity of such digital platforms, little is known about their interactive communication process. It is also undeniable that, from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective, it is very important to study the process of news discourse as it is a site in which ideology and unequal power relations reside. Accordingly, this study critically investigates readers' comments in the most popular Moroccan e-newspaper, *Hespress*, in the way they represent the issue of irregular migration in the country. The methodological framework is a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative research methods which are used to analyse the thematic choices used in *Hespress* readers' comments to represent the issue of irregular migration. The overall findings of this investigation show that *Hespress*' readers represent the issue of irregular migrants as a threat to the Moroccan society. Accordingly, the scenario of 'Us' versus 'Them' is emphasised in *Hespress* readers' comments. Furthermore, the finding that the readers' comments talk negatively about the issue explains that e-newspapers have empowered their audience by giving them space to produce knowledge that can challenge the news producers.

KEYWORDS: Critical Discourse Analysis, E-Newspapers, Readers' Comments, Irregular Migration, Morocco

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of electronic communication has altered the landscape of information production and consumption from the traditional top-down or one-to-many model of communication into an interactive two-way model. In the latter model, information producers and receivers are both active participants in the communication process. In other words, the exclusive domain of information production once preserved only for media professionals has been transformed into a vibrant sphere of interaction and participation. E-newspapers, or interactive newspapers, are a good example for such media that allow their users to react on a wide variety of issues (Hermida et al., 2011). Among the many types of audience participation generated by electronic newspapers are readers' comments. In order to explore the way *Hespress'* readers react to the issue of irregular migration, Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) is specifically chosen as the most appropriate approach. According to Fairclough's (1992), CDA clarifies how discourses normalize relations of domination between social groups by relating a text to its context. That is to say, a society's beliefs and values will be apparent in the selected language items such as the selected themes and lexicon people use to express their thoughts.

As an e-newspaper, *Hespress* has become the most frequent source of information people rely on to be informed about different issues around the globe (Alexa, 2019). Its accessibility and interactivity that provide much space for audience response and participation, yet the interactive communication among its producers and readers has not attracted enough attention. There is a research gap in the analysis of e-newspapers discourse which is still a fertile soil to be explored due to its scarcity, if not complete inexistence in the Moroccan context. The idea that there is a knowledge gap in interactive newspapers' research is backed up by Boyd (2018) who states that though some research has tried to sketch the representation of social issues on the online press, audience participation has been relatively lacking and invisible.

This study, therefore, is an attempt to answer this question of departure:

- How do *Hespress* readers react to the news about the issue of irregular migration in Morocco from September 9, 2013 to December 11, 2018?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To situate this study within the context of its related literature and academic traditions, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks which examine news discourse are needed.

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2.1. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

2.1.1. E-newspapers in Morocco

With the rapid rise of Internet penetration in Morocco, social media and digital newspapers have become increasingly important. The modern technologies that are available today in Morocco, the nationwide distribution of the Internet and the development of e-newspapers have helped Moroccans to move from information consumers to information producers. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Internet percentage rate in Morocco grew from 52 percent in 2010 to nearly 62 percent in 2017. For Lamzouwaq (2019), early 2010 saw an explosion in the number of news websites in Morocco. Many news websites have made headway in this emerging media ecosystem and are expected to grow as readers switch from traditional offline formats to online media. For instance, pioneer examples of these news organisations are the daily Arabic-language *Akhbar Alyawm Almaghribia* which allows citizens to take part in making the news on a daily basis through a rubric called *Arraay* and the free French-language *Au Fait*, which provides an online-based platform for people to create blogs, in addition to other examples from both written and online press. There are also many social media and communication services including You Tube, Facebook, and Twitter which are available in Morocco.

Morocco has also witnessed an outstanding advancement in the practices of commenting on electronic newspapers in the last few years leading to a transformation in the Moroccan news media. According to the Arab Social Media Report in 2015, 86% of all social media users in Morocco have a Facebook account. Moroccan Facebook users read and share news articles from *Hespress* and other indigenous Moroccan news websites, along with those from traditional Moroccans newspapers that have established websites. While the number of news-oriented bloggers is estimated at one thousand, 524 e-journalists including publishers, editors, correspondents are registered. With some news websites accounting for the majority of Internet traffic, the challenge for these news sites is to determine how to attract and maintain the attention of digital users. Though different in their digital designs and editorial orientations, news websites have one thing in common: they are pioneers when it comes to providing local news. These news websites perform different functions because they offer different news content to different news consumers. They publish daily local news that reflects the everyday lives of ordinary Moroccans in specific communities (Ibahrine, 2020).

Websites that discuss controversial views, such as the disputed territory of the Moroccan Sahara, the Amazigh minority and Islamists groups, are also accessible. Moroccans openly discuss controversial social issues and political events on social media. However, the government still maintains control over the information landscape through a series of restrictive laws and censorship that can require the closure of outlets and the removal of news content (El Kadoussi, 2016).

2.1.1.1. Hespress as a Case Study

One of the first Arabic written e-newspapers is the Moroccan support *Hespress*. It is an independent e-newspaper that was launched on February 25, 2007 by the brothers Hassan and Amine Guennouni. *Hespress* started as a blog gathering articles from different writers in one support. The support was through time modified into an information website with different sections (politics, sports, economy, languages, society, culture, media, high-tech, opinion, religion) which has nowadays its own journalists and correspondents. On its official website, *Hespress* presents itself as the first Moroccan news website that provides local and national news content for online readers in Morocco and abroad as its data analysis shows (Alexa, 2018). *Hespress* reflects the perspective of a privately-owned and independent national newspaper which aspires to cultivate democratic values by serving and informing the public objectively and professionally. It defines its mission statement as a news platform which provides independent, impartial news for audience and to offer a voice with no taboos to a diversity of perspectives. With a mission statement which is clearly seeking to promote freedom of speech of the general public, *Hespress* obviously tenets the involvement of its audiences as central to its mandate.

As an e-newspaper, *Hespress* comes to challenge the traditional news delivery methods where information is delivered through a top-down or one-to-many communication model that does not include the readers' feedback. In traditional newspapers, the only way readers can express their opinions is to write a letter to the editor with no certainty it would be published or even read. In the interactive newspaper model, however, there are more opportunities for readers to assume more active roles and participation in their news consumption experiences.

2.1.2 The New Migration Policy 2013

Because of its geographical location within the Euro-African migration zone system, only fourteen kilometres away from Spain, Morocco has turned from a country of emigration and transit to a destination of immigrants. Morocco has become acknowledged a country of emigration as many migrants decide to stay in the country as a second-best option, should their attempt to venture into Europe fail (Lahlou, 2003; De Haas, 2005). According to Bilgili and Weyel (2009), since around 2000 the numbers of migrants have grown dramatically in Morocco in response to civil wars, political unrest and economic downturn. The UNHCR estimates that there are about 100,000 migrants and refugees in Morocco (UN DESA, 2019), of which approximately half are female, but no official estimates of the number of irregular migrants exist and some estimates suggest there are several hundred thousand irregular migrants (El Ghazouani, 2019).

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On September 10, 2013, Morocco's King Mohamed VI held a meeting with his Minister of Home Affairs and a number of human rights representatives to initiate a new migration and asylum policy for foreign residents of the kingdom, especially aimed at irregular migrants. Therefore, in a joint communiqué released by the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Justice, the King called for a new vision for a national migration policy that is humanist in its philosophy, responsible in its approach, and pioneering at the regional level. The new migration policy plan aimed to ensure equal opportunities for the migrants, improving their access to economic, cultural and political rights changing the perception of migration in society. The government encouraged public and private institutions to pursue programmes facilitating this integration (Debbarh, 2014b).

The new migration policy is founded on three main objectives:
- To facilitate the integration of the irregular migrants into the Moroccan society
- To grant the right of asylum to a greater number of asylum seekers in Morocco.
- To manage migration flows in a way that maintains respect for human rights.

2.1.3. Irregular Migration in the News Media

Previous academic research and literature investigations on the topic of media representation of minority groups have shown that there has been a binary framing of these people as either objects of humanitarian concern, or objects of security risk (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). According to Horsti (2016), there is a pro-migration representation which victimises the migrants and an anti-migration representation which problematises their presence in host societies. That is to say, on the one hand, irregular migrants emerge as victims of geopolitical conflict who are in need of protection. On the other hand, however, they appear as a threat to the hosting community. This symbolic instability of the irregular migrants, shifting between victim and threat, lies at the heart of critical scholarship on irregular migration representation. In general, representations of irregular migrants tend to sit within complex discourses of problematization and victimization within which they are predominantly framed as either objects of fear as potential terrorists, security risks, and a threat to the hosting society or as victims, helpless, suffering and innocent people seeking safety from catastrophes, wars and persecution**.**

2.1.4. News Discourse

News is a late Middle English word which means new information about recent events (Reah, 2002). This definition indicates that news includes any happening anywhere in the world over the last 24 hours. However, according to Fowler (1991), this is not the case since news does not include everything. Decisions about what to include and exclude in a specific newspaper have to be made. These decisions are usually seen as editorial decisions. Editors, among other news producers, include the news items which they consider suitable and of interest to the target audience and exclude those which are of little interest to them. More importantly, news is managed by many news workers, such as journalists, editors, printers, camera operators, and sound technicians, and is selected to reflect the social and economic interests of the owners of the news institution and the political party whom the owners support.

Fowler (1991) stresses the fact that news are shaped and framed according to their social context. For him, "the media do not simply and transparently report what are newsworthy in themselves. News is the end product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories" (p. 12). That is to say, news producers do not only write articles; instead, they construct news stories with structure, order, viewpoints and values which eventually shape ideas and perceptions of the social realities of the world and this is the rationale behind saying 'news stories' (Reah, 2002), where emphasis is put on the way the event is presented as a structured account. In the same vein, Watson and Hill (2012) state that this mediation of information involves selection of what to report, edition of the raw happening, placement of emphasis on some sections and even manipulation of event representation. Accordingly, despite the anticipated neutral stance which is said to be the primary objective of the news media dictated by professional values such as integrity, objectivity, and newsworthiness, news articles and reports, however, play important roles in reproducing power relations and ideologies.

2.1.5. Interactive Communication

With the rise of the digital era, traditional news media faced many challenges in transmitting the messages to their audiences. This change in delivering news to certain target groups brought the transformation of the top-down model of journalism, with writers as gatekeepers of information, to a decentralized system where the audience have a more active role in the formation of news. From a communicative point of view, the interactive model of communication is radically different from the traditional one (KhosraviNik, 2017b). In traditional newspapers, there is a linearity of the way a text is produced and consumed with the news as the product of a very specific group of people (opinion leaders/ media elite) and the general public as passive consumers. On interactive platforms, however, this linearity of communication does not exist. Instead, there is an interactive way of communication in which anybody can be producer and distributer of a text.

For Jenkins, a pioneer of participatory culture and social media theory, the rigid gatekeepers and old-hierarchies pervaded the mass-mediated age are shifting as now there is more participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). For Jenkins (2006), new trends are developing in the media industry. While gatekeepers and hierarchies still exist, there is now less room to differentiate between those producing media and those consuming them and that 'read only' media culture is being opened up for more 'read/write' participation among media audiences. According to Habermas (1991), digital platforms provide a global, low cost and instantaneous system of

two-to-many communications. A communication system that promises greater participation and freedom of information access that can promote democracy as it enhances citizens engagement in the public sphere.

2.1. Theoretical Background

To closely examine the discourse *Hespress'* readers use in their comments about the irregular migration issue in Morocco, a theoretical framework that gives insight of language as a form of social practice is used. Therefore, this study's research problem is looked at from the lens of the following theories as they hold a great significance to mediated communication.

2.2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis is a multidisciplinary framework, a fundamentally critical social research aimed at revealing the relationship between ideologies and discourses by paying close attention to semantic properties of texts that can have some effect to reproduce or maintain social, political or institutional power in society. CDA is concerned with power and struggle over power as there is a strong connection between language and power within society. For Fairclough (1992), CDA aims to uncover the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias by relating the text to its context. Scholars engaged in CDA are driven by a critique towards a social phenomenon reproducing and maintaining unequal power relations through the use of language. They also characterise their work as explicitly critical and as a political orientation to studying discourse (Potter, 2012).

CDA practitioners agree that discourse is a social practice which is influenced by the relationship between discourse and human life. It is this relationship between discourse and human interaction where CDA gets the term Critical because CDA is not just about the analysis of discourse, but is also about the discourse's prominence in the social relations and power structures where the discourse originates (Caldas-Coulthard, 1997). Critical discourse analysts focus on "discursive manifestations of hegemonic oppression within a particular network of practices such as education or the media" (Weninger, 2012, p. 147); therefore, in their scope of analysis, there are news texts, political speeches, documents published by government agencies, institutions, or international organisations (Potter, 2012).

2.2.2. Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is an important theory within the scope of this study as it is used to explore the hidden ideologies which reside in the linguistic features of a certain text. This study makes use of Halliday's (1970) SFL in order to examine how Hespress' readers use language to talk about the issue of irregular migration at the textual level of their discourse. SFL holds a view that language is functional in that it is used by people to achieve social goals. For Halliday (1978) language provides its users with a system of linguistic options to choose from and that the choice of certain linguistic features over others holds ideological propositions.

Halliday (1970) explains the nature of language in terms of social structure:

why is language as it is? The nature of language is closely related to the demands that we make on it; the functions are specific to culture... the particular form taken by the grammatical system of language is closely related to the social and personal needs that language is required to serve (p.142).

That is to say, language is a system network consisting of a number of sub-systems from which people take choice to express their meanings.

2.2.3. Securitization and Orientalism Theories

Both securitization and Orientalism theories provide important background knowledge to explain negative representations of irregular migrants. Securitization is commonly defined as the 'sustained strategic practice aimed at convincing a target audience to accept [...] the claim that a specific development is threatening enough to deserve an immediate policy to alleviate it' (Balzacq, 2005, p.173). This discourse constructs irregular migrants as problematic and as a potential security risk that threatens the hosting society (Ibrahim, 2005). This stance is closely linked to the need to protect the country's borders from the irregular migrants. The discourse of sovereignty is often used as an exclusion strategy by relying on categorizations of refugees and asylum seekers as problematic, illegal and, therefore, a threat (Pickering, 2001). Similarly, Edward Said's Orientalism theory (1979) provides a framework through which to understand how and why dehumanisation of the "Other" occurs and proves particularly applicable due to the distinctly negativity in talking about migrants. For him, dehumanizing migrants occur via Orientalist discourses by presenting them as a threat to security and values and as economically burdensome. The "Other" is homogenised and framed in fixed representations depicting them as strange. Orientalist narratives include portrayals of the "Other" as mysterious and exotic at best, and at worse – uncivilised, barbaric and a threat to its antithesis, the West which purportedly represents civilisation, democracy and a vast array of other virtuous principles (Said, 1979).

2.2.4. Participatory Culture and Social Media Theory

Since its inception, mass communication research has been concerned with the power that the media have on audiences (Williams, 2003). According to Madianou (2009), audiences have been construed as either passive recipients of media messages, or as active agents capable of producing their own meanings. Thus, "the study of the audience and effects of the media is the most active and well-supported area of investigation in media studies" (Williams, 2003, p. 165). Central to the argument of participatory culture and

social media is the idea that media was a one-way communication and that the flow of communication was from the media producers to the audiences or receivers and that media institutions had dominant powers on media production. This simply means that consumers had no say or any other form of participation over the content produced by mainstream media.

The emergence of the internet, however, has brought a huge turnaround strategy in terms of how content is produced. Recent technological advances allow citizens with internet access to not only actively interpret and interact with web-based content, but also to broadcast their own interpretations of events (Thurman, 2008). The result is user-generated content, the "product of active Internet contributors, who put in a certain amount of creative effort which is created outside of professional routines and platforms" (Van Dijck, 2009, p. 41). One popular form of user-generated content is the comment fields that accompany many newspaper articles published online. Commenters often challenged articles' content while providing new ideas and arguments (Graham & Wright, 2015). In the world of social media, the public is given the authority to create content and encourage public debate because consumers are given more active stake in the culture that is produced. This turnaround shift of consumers having the online authority to present themselves as producers has brought about what is today considered participatory culture. That is to say, while early mass media theories forgrounded the power of media agencies to have a direct and strong effect on passive audiences, social media theorists like Jenkins (2006) believe that interactive media or social media have made a shift in power to the benefit of audiences as they are given communicative power to participate and have a say in what is reported.

The interactive communication paradigm of e-newspapers affords a convergence space through which readers are both the consumers and producers of media content which causes blurred boundaries between grassroots bottom-up and top-down institutional discursive content. The participatory nature e-newspapers dissolves the traditional passive role displayed by (traditional) news consumers that was once proclaimed by the pro-typical transmission linear or one-to-many model of communication (Shannon & Weaver, 1949); to an interactive many-to-many model of communication depending on the prosumers (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) who actively and powerfully engage in mediated meaning-making.

2. METHODOLOGY

To capture the complex and multidimensional nature of Hespress readers' comments on news articles, an in-depth qualitative investigation is adopted. However, in order to address the data in terms of its latent as well as its manifest content, there has been the incorporation of some quantitative analysis.

2.1. Research Design

The study starts by a Thematic Analysis in order to identify and categorise the dominant themes used to represent the issue of irregular migration in Hespress readers' comments. To overcome the criticism placed upon Thematic Analysis as being too vague in its method, the six stages of Thematic Analysis proposed by Braun and Clark (2006) are adopted. The six stages are: to familiarise oneself with the data, to generate initial codes, to search for themes, to review the themes, to name the themes, and then to describe the findings in tables. Accordingly, the starting point of Thematic Analysis is through the grouping of the Hespress readers' comments which helped to identify themes that are important to the research questions by exhibiting "patterns of meaning" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.86). Once the data was collected, it was analysed to identify a coding scheme. A coding scheme is a list of codes and their associated definitions, beneficial for the organization of the data in a systematic and meaningful manner that helps prepare the dataset for analysis. In this study, a mixture of deductive and inductive approaches is used, thus allowing space for new themes to emerge. Deductive coding was used during the preparatory phases of the coding scheme as it was based on pre-existing literature on migration and news media analysis. This research is inspired by one particular work which focused on the construction of migration narratives and it was conducted by Garcia-Blanco and Moore (2015). Their study analyzed the most frequently occurring themes in the news coverage about migrants in the European Union, in which they used a deductive coding process. Their themes helped structure the coding schemes for this study, given that previous literature showed that press narratives about migration often underlined different feelings about the migrants, which are mainly positive and negative feelings.

The second cycle of scrutiny is that of Frequency Analysis which aims to count the emergent themes' frequencies. This is done with the help of the Excel software. Quantitative content analysis is conducted for a systematic and objective method for providing a quantitative description of any such communication. This quantitative investigation is also meant to bring a scientific aspect to this study by reducing the researcher's subjectivity; a limitation of qualitative research which is often criticised for not being rigorous enough, and of being biased or selective with data (Maxwell, 2013).

The third cycle of analysis is that of Fairclough's three dimensional framework. This framework allows the analysis of the internal linguistics properties of discourse as well as their external contextual properties in order to uncover the hidden ideologies within Hespress readers' discourse and show how language exercises power.

The integration of these three cycles of analysis in this research paradigm helps this study to benefit from the strengths of each method and mitigate their weaknesses. That is to say, these three methods complement one another for a rigorous and reliable analysis.

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2.2. Data Collection and Sampling

To focus on readers' comments, a body of data corpus was collected from Hespress official website archive. Similar to Holst and Bingöl (2016), the data collection was done through the selection of news articles which contain specific keywords as search parameters. *Hespress* integrated search engine was used by typing the following keywords: Morocco, migration reform, integration policy, new migration policy 2013, irregular migration, refugees, asylum seekers. Each of these keywords was used individually and then several combinations of key words were used in order to make the search of related news articles as extensive as possible in *Hespress*. This variety of keywords was utilized in order to access all possible texts that were written about irregular migration in Morocco during the time under study.

Therefore, *Hespress* website www.hespress.com was consulted for published news articles about irregular migration in Morocco from September 13, 2013 to December 11, 2018. The timeframe selected for this dissertation starts from September 9, 2013 to December 11, 20180. This six years' time frame is chosen because it represents six spike periods that have marked the main reforms brought by the new irregular migration policy. The prominent event of the adoption of the new migration integration policy was issued in September 9, 2013. The years 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 have all very significant reforms and important events about the new migration policy and 2018 marks the end of the reforms and also marks the time when the new law was in effect. This renders the analysed data more meaningful in the light of broader contemporary socio-political events (Khosravinik, 2009).

The aim of developing readers' comments data is twofold. First, analysis of the text consumption processes is an integral part of a comprehensive understanding of social meanings and ideologies in a text. Second, one of the research objectives is to investigate the way *Hespress* readers react to the news articles concerning the issue of irregular migration. In order to maintain consistency and manage the vast amount of readers' comments, no more than the first 10 comments would be considered inclusive of the replies and the oldest comments would be shown first as they are the initial reactions to the article, which gives the total of 360 comments. Besides, the number of ten comments has helped to reach sample saturation and sample redundancy as the same information gets repeated.

In this study, a purposeful sampling technique is used. This means that the sampled readers' comments are intentionally selected in a way that allows the researcher to deeply focus on and examine certain phenomena or issues (Flick, 2009). The rationale behind the purposeful sampling is that it allows the researcher to meaningfully select ones' own texts which is the most relevant to fully answer the research questions. As the present study is carried out within a research project targeting irregular migration representation in news discourse, the sampling method was designed to match this objective. Therefore, *Hespress*' readers' comments were purposefully selected following some inclusion and exclusion data collection criteria as the next table shows:

Table 1. Criteria for data collection inclusion and exclusion

Inclusion Criteria	Origin	*Hespress*
	Country	The issue of irregular migration in Morocco.
	Time Period	From September 9, 2013 to December 11, 2018.
Exclusion Criteria	Origin	Other sources than *Hespress.*
	Country	The issue of irregular migration in other countries than Morocco.
	Time Period	Articles that are beyond the specified time frame.

The included readers' comments are the ones originated originated from *Hespress*, issued during the timeframe from September 9, 2013 to December 11, 2018, dealing with the issue of irregular migration in Morocco, and containing at least ten comments. The excluded readers' comments, however, are the ones which originate from other news sources than Hespress, the ones issued beyond the specified time frame, the ones dealing with the issue of irregular migration in other countries than Morocco, and the ones which contain less than ten comments.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Thematic Analysis

Despite being widely used in qualitative research, there was a lack of clear conceptualisation and explanation of thematic analysis processes in most of the literature (Boyatzis, 1998). In order to overcome the criticism placed upon thematic analysis as being too vague in its method (Holloway & Todres, 2003) and give this study more reliability and rigour, the analytical process in this study adopts the six stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013).

Findings from Thematic Analysis has led to the identification of the following anti-migration themes as the table shows.

Table 2.Overview of overarching themes and theme

Overarching Theme	Themes
Anti-migration	Blaming the Government Theme
	Economic Burden Theme
	Threat Theme

The dominant themes in Hespress readers' comments are anti-migration themes, they involve the following themes:
- Blaming the Government Theme which stresses ideas criticising policy makers for adopting the new migration policy.
- Economic Burden Theme which emphasises the economic costs caused by irregular migrants.
- Threat Theme which stress the danger and menace caused by irregular migrants to the Moroccan society.

3.2. Frequency Analysis
After categorising the identified themes as defined by the previous thematic analysis, the quantitative description of Hespress readers' comments is conducted. The focus here is on the frequencies of the emergent themes in the readers' comments during the specified time frame. This provides an objective and systematic description of the manifest or surface content of the readers' comments. With the help of the excel software application, tables and figures are designed in order to clearly display counts of theme frequencies falling under the categories of anti-migration discourses as sampled in the methodology chapter. The purpose of this numerical analysis is to provide the reader with a comprehensive view of the analysed readers' comments by discussing the data in the form of numbers and frequencies before moving to a more in-depth discursive analysis.
The following table and graph show the frequency distribution of anti-migration themes during the sampled time frame.

Table 3. Distribution of anti-migration themes in Hespress readers' comments

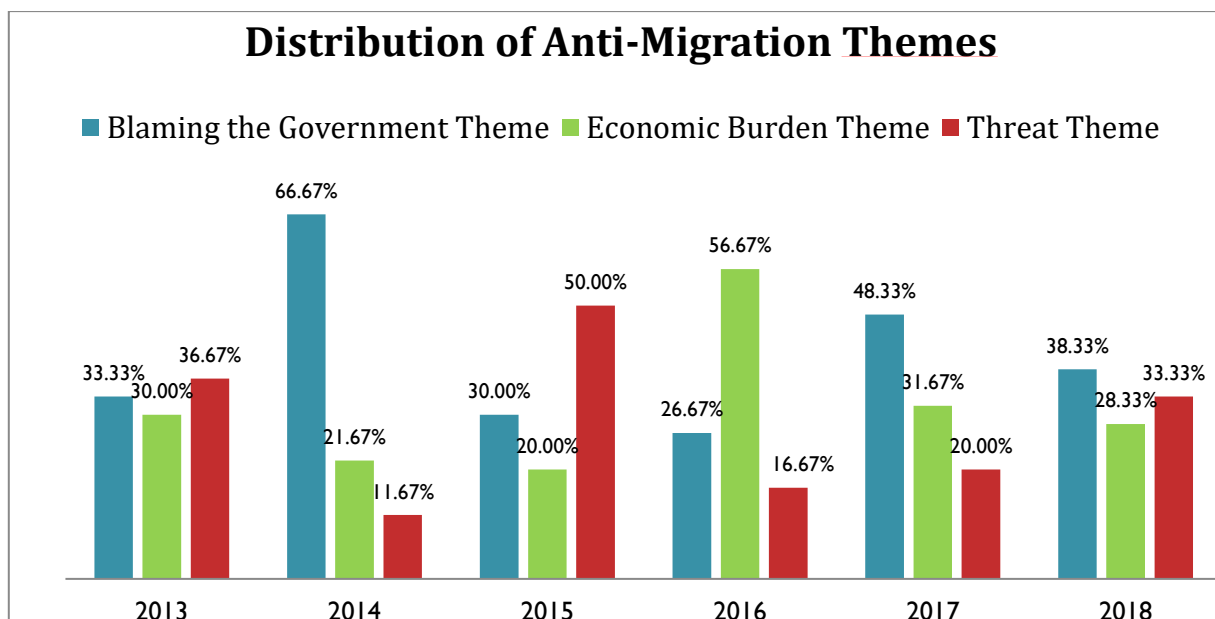| Year	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Blaming the Government	20	33,33	40	66,67	18	30,00	16	26,67	29	48,33	23	38,33	146
Economic Burden	18	30,00	13	21,67	12	20,00	34	56,67	19	31,67	17	28,33	113
Threat	22	36,67	7	11,67	30	50,00	10	16,67	12	20,00	20	33,33	101

Figure 1: Anti-migration themes in *Hespress* readers' comments

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Findings from the Frequencies Analysis have quantitatively described the data. The table and bar chart shows the distribution of anti-migration themes in Hespress readers' comments, it has been found that the highest frequency rate goes to Blaming the Government theme with 40.55% (N=146) frequency rates, the Economic Burden had 31.38% (N=113) rates, and the Threat theme showed 28.05% (N=101) rates.

3.3. Fairclough's Three Dimensional Analysis

With the critical perspective being adopted, Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework is employed to analyse *Hespress* readers' comments with the aim of detecting ideology and power relation that reside in the readers' discourse. Mapping on the thematic analysis and quantitative descriptions laid in the previous sections of the present study, this section intends to provide a critical analysis to *Hespress* readers' comments. In keeping with this project critical agenda, data analysis involves a great deal of meticulous work on the textual, discursive and social practice levels.

For Fairclough (1992), text represents only one part of a broader discourse and context is its other part. This is depicted in the following three boxes:
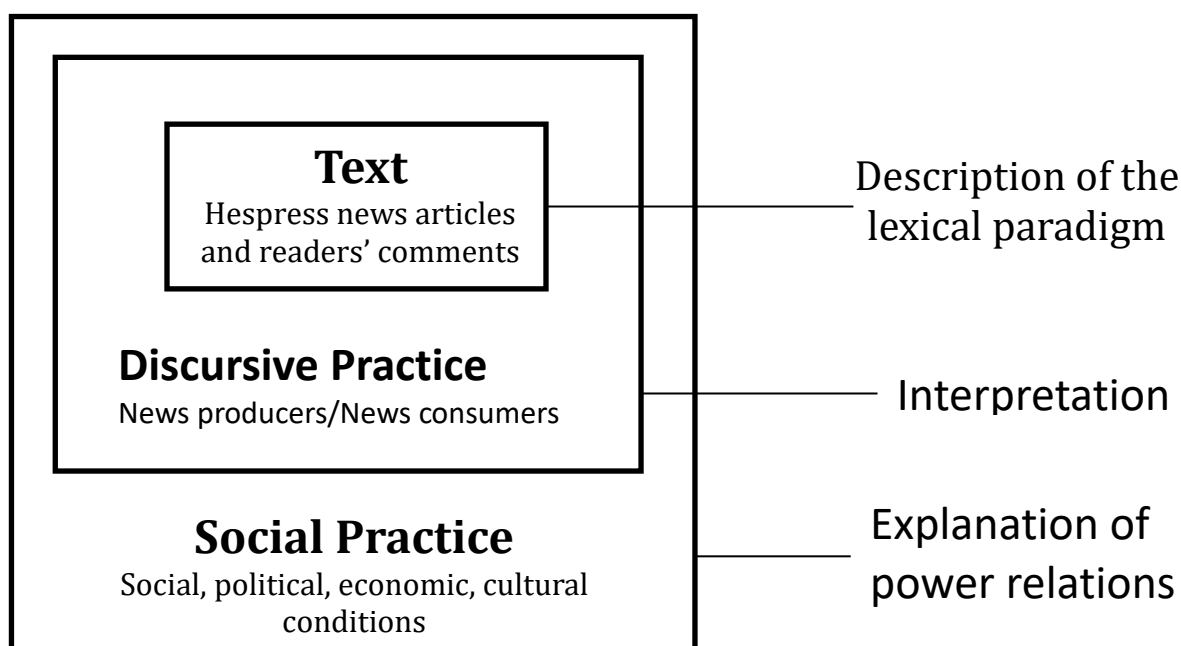
Text
Hespress news articles and readers' comments

Discursive Practice
News producers/News consumers

Social Practice
Social, political, economic, cultural conditions

Description of the lexical paradigm

Interpretation

Explanation of power relations

Figure 2. Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse (Fairclough, 1992, p. 93)

4.3.1. The Textual Level

The first level of Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical framework is concerned with the "formal properties of text" (Fairclough, 1989 p. 26). During the textual description of Hespress readers' comments, it has been found that the readers have resorted to a lexical paradigm which is in opposition to the issue of irregular migration.

There is the dominance of negative lexis like crisis, menace, burden, diseases, poverty, and unemployment. Hespress readers represent the irregular migrants as causing chaos, being connected to crime and, thus, not deserving any help. The readers have often resorted to a lexical paradigm in their comments such as: economic crisis, threat, security, and danger. This discourse constructs migrants as a threat to Morocco, validating the need for urgent and practical security measures. This problematizing discourse is also characterised by terms such as crisis and disaster, which are the most common words used to describe the situation in of irregular migration in Morocco. Such words have a very strong negative connotation of something which needs to be dealt with urgently; fitting into the securitization theory of threat construction which postulates the need to secure ones' borders from strangers. This creates an even stronger image of migrants as a security danger issue. In other words, in the readers' comments, irregular migration is referred to as a crisis and a problem; legitimizing the emergency measures that should be taken by those who are responsible.

These negative representations are also framed by describing the increased number of irregular migrants as an invasion of Morocco. They are frequently constructed as a different 'Other' who threatens and abuses Morocco's stability. That is to say, they are depicted as people against whom one's own identity can be defined, and against whom one's social practices, conventions, customs, values and beliefs can be contrasted. Consequently, the Moroccan culture and the culture of the irregular migrants are depicted as being too different to co-exist in one society. The fear from a different culture, a different religion and sets of values is clearly expressed and cultural misunderstandings will inevitably lead to collisions and negative outcomes. Examples like:

- I swear to God, this ministry and government are responsible for this disaster.

بالله على هذاه الوزارة و الحكومة وكل مسؤل عن هذه الكارثة)

/abāllh ʾli hḏāh al-ūzārï ū al-ḥkūmï ūkl msuʾl ʿn hḏh al-kārṯï/).

- This government is insane.

هاذ الحكومة مصطية) /hāḏ al-ḥkūmï msṭïï/).

- We will become much poorer, we'll get more diseases, and we'll be much more ignorant.

سوف نزداد فقرا على فقر أمراضا على امراض و جهلا على جهل)

/sūf nzdād fqrā ʿāi fqr amrāḍā ʾli amrāḍ ū ğhlā ʾli ğhl/).

- Their stay in Morocco is often accompanied by theft and drugs trafficking.

بقائهم في المغرب دائماً يكون مصحوبا بالسرقة والتشرد في الطرقات أو تجارة المخدرات)

/bqāʾihm fī al-mġrb dāʾimāْ īkūn mṣḥūbā bālsrqï wāltšrd fī al-ṭrqāt aū tğārï al-mḫdrāt/).

Overall, the findings from the textual analysis show that *Hespress* readers' comments portray a negative image of irregular migrants which centres on notions of anti-migration and securitization discourse.

4.3.2.   The Discursive Level

This level of analysis focuses on the second dimension of Fairclough's (1992) analytical framework which is the discursive practice. This stage of the analysis focuses on the interpretation of how the text is produced and consumed. It has been found that thanks to Hespress interactive format, its readers have become not only news consumers but also producers of feedback content. *Hespress'* commentary sections have allowed the readers to see beyond the representations and categorizations provided by the news media producers and that professional news organisations no longer have a monopoly over the production of meaning for public issues but they blend with users' perspectives in new, hybrid texts. Accordingly, Hespress readers have become able to discuss and challenge the content of the published news article by expressing their views and reacting to them.

The contextual background behind the readers' comments production is very important. It has been found that the readers' comments were produced in a time when the Moroccan socio-economic sectors suffered from serious problems. Morocco suffers from significant regional disparities, a poor educational system and high unemployment rates, especially among young Moroccans and even degree holders. Besides, the socio-economic deprivation and the lack of opportunities are key drives not to accept the new migration policy. There is also a big shortage of secure jobs in the formal employment sector which represents a key challenge to Morocco's economic growth which can carry the risk of breeding social unrest.

4.3.3.   The Social Level

The third level of analysis is the social practice. This level tries to explain why *Hespress'* readers communicate the way they do and why the negative discourse is dominating their comments.

The negative discourse justifies and legitimizes the need to protect 'Ourselves' from the threat of the irregular migrant causing to the country. Therefore, it can be argued that the discourses drawn on here construct a battle of 'Us versus Them' via the representations of culture clash between the readers and migrants. The lexis that dominates the readers' comments is: theft, illegal, dirt, garbage, delinquent, Moroccan identity, rape, burglary, begging, violence, crime, threat to security, beggars, pickpockets, fearful criminals, a threat which needs to be controlled, carriers of the HIV and AIDS disease and swine flu, Ebola, attack, suspicious, disturbance, uninvited outsider, different culture, black, and Christians. The extracts from Hespress readers' comments are instances of such negative representations which dehumanise irregular migrants as they completely consider them as a different 'Other'. These negative representations are also framed by describing the increased number of irregular migrants as an invasion of Morocco. They are frequently constructed as a different 'Other' who threatens and abuses Morocco's stability. That is to say, they are depicted as people against whom one's own identity can be defined, and against whom one's social practices, conventions, customs, values and beliefs can be contrasted. Consequently, the Moroccan culture and the culture of the irregular migrants are depicted as being too different to co-exist in one society. The fear from a different culture, a different religion and sets of values is clearly expressed and cultural misunderstandings will inevitably lead to collisions and negative outcomes.

The narrative raised by the *Hespress'* readers has reflected the socio-economic problems Morocco suffers from as their contextual background. Therefore, they refused the new migration policy and its reforms which, according to them, will worsen the situation in Morocco. The readers also consider the new migration policy as largely driven by geopolitical factors that serve the interests of the most powerful and influential members of the country. To express their opposition to the integration of the migrants into the Moroccan society, the readers stressed on the dichotomy between 'Us' and 'Them' and made reference to how each group contradicts the other. The extracts from *Hespress* readers' comments also hold hegemonic language and negative implications over the irregular migrants as a minority groups with a different culture (Said, 2003). The previous examples from the readers' comments data are all instances which dehumanise the irregular migrants by considering them as a different and dangerous 'Other'. That is to say, the migrants are depicted as people against which one's own identity can be defined, and against which one's social practices, conventions and customs, values and beliefs can be contrasted. Such representations reveal that the news producers and news readers work as the primary actors or performers, whereas the irregular migrants are the passive beneficiaries.

Irregular Migration in E-Newspapers: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Readers' Comments

Though Hespress' readers often challenge the journalistic viewpoints by airing oppositional views, *Hespress*' editorial team is still the one to steer and guide audience's participation because they effectively tell them what to discuss about. Nevertheless, despite this interactivity, *Hespress'* news producers are still the ones who control the discussion because they set the topics for the readers to discuss and comment on. In other words, it is the institution of *Hespress* that sets the agenda for the readers by creating the context of discussion. For Manosevitch and Walker (2009) interactivity has enabled the readers to discuss topics in a pre-determined context since the articles they are connected to mark the subject of discussion. Thus, Hespress sets the agenda for discussion on different issues, and its readers further discuss those issues and express their different perspectives about them. As Reich (2011, p. 98) notes, "comments leave the journalist in the traditional position of the lead singer, while audience members generally play the minor, faceless and reactive role of the chorus".

The finding of Fairclough's CDA framework has shown that the analysis of the internal micro-level properties of *Hespress* readers' comments discourse and its external macro-level properties portray ideological and unequal power relations that exist between the readers and the irregular migrants.

4. IMPLICATIONS

An important implication of this critical study is its "rich learning" (O'Leary, 2014, p. 61) which deepens one's understanding of social issues (irregular migration representation) in a particular context (Moroccan e-newspapers). This will contribute to the academic debate on the quality of the socio-cultural knowledge being circulated by the most prominent Moroccan e-newspaper, Hespress.

This study has helped to uncover the power dynamics involved in the representation of irregular migrants in Hespress readers' comments. From a critical perspective, the securitization discourse which predominates Hespress readers' comments holds hegemonic functions that promote the stereotypical image of superior and subordinate. Also, Hespress readers use some communication techniques and linguistic strategies (its choices of certain lexis) that subordinate irregular migrants by showing them as a different "Other" which eventually reinforce particular ideologies. In other words, the lexical tools used to represent the issue of irregular migration embody non-balanced power relations between the commenters who are doing the representation and those being represented.

Another important implication of this study is that *Hespress* interactive aspect has given discursive power to its readers as they can challenge the news producers' main premises in their comments. Hespress commentary sections have allowed the readers to see beyond the representations and categorizations provided by the news media producers (different themes). That is to say, news organisations no longer have a monopoly over the production of meaning to the public. Now they blend with readers' comments in new interactive and hybrid texts. Therefore, another important implication of this study is how to make online newspapers' editorial team and journalists benefit from their readers' feedback. It is a good thing that online newspapers have given space to their readers to express their views; however, as far as these comments are not taken into consideration, this would make the interactive way of communication not genuine. Hespress publishers should benefit from their readers for a better quality reporting.

5. CONCLUSION

The multidisciplinary approach to *Hespress* discourse analysis has stressed the strong interconnection between the text and its context which should never be dissociated from one another if the aim is to achieve a deep and better understanding of how a phenomenon is communicated within a society.

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