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## The Portrayal of Illegal Migration in the Media

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Irregular migration is a global challenge in the development process. It is defined as a major trend that has the potential for causing serious global impact. Some critics have called this period the 'Age of Migration' because; the number of people moving internationally has increased than ever before. The United Nations estimates that there were around 234 million international migrants in 2013 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2013). The Council of Europe announced that migration is an ongoing crisis across Europe. In Australia, the government estimated that in 2012 about 61 000 persons were in an irregular situation. Therefore, the international community has paid greater attention to this irregular situation and called upon governments to address this issue.

It is extensively acknowledged that the electronic media can have a visible impact on overall social attitudes from the nature of the messages broadcast by them. I argue in this paper that portrayals of migrants is plentiful in today's media throughout the world, but in Sri Lanka, the portrayal of illegal migration in media is insufficient. The research questions of the study are: How is migration portrayed in Sri Lankan media? Is there any space to influence the public perception of migration in this portrayal? Is there any room for a more balanced and considered approach to information on migration? The study intends to identify the role of the media in migration, identify the effect of media on the public's perception of migrants and migrants' decision making, recognize the framing of migration in the media and finally, classify the thematic content of media messages during the period of study.

I analyze the thematic content of media messages in covering the topic of illegal migrants through a period of six months. Text analysis is used as the main research methodology in this research. The study aims to evaluate the influence of such media messages on the attitudes or the perceptions among the audience.

**Key words:** *irregular migration, media portrayal, text analysis*

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