

# Media Influence on Brain Drain Perceptions: An In-Depth Examination of Framing Dynamics

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the profound impact of media on shaping public perceptions of brain drain, a globally significant issue with far-reaching implications for politics, society, and the economy, particularly in developing countries such as Albania. Focusing specifically on skilled professionals' migration in pursuit of enhanced opportunities, the research scrutinizes how media influences their decisions to emigrate, analyzing news coverage and perspectives on migration as factors influencing economic status and quality of life.

Against the backdrop of a burgeoning body of scholarly research highlighting the media's substantial influence on public perceptions and attitudes toward migration, this study contributes by delving into the intricate relationship between media narratives and brain drain perceptions. It examines news coverage and occupation trends, paying special attention to potential stereotypes reinforcing the dichotomy of "skilled leaving" versus "unskilled staying." The analytical framework integrates concepts from framing, agenda-setting, social constructivism, and critical discourse on globalization perspectives.

Empirical data have been collected from a comprehensive sample of 50 Albanian news articles specifically related to brain drain. The synthesis of theoretical approaches and existing scientific studies in this domain complements the data collection. The findings shed light on the media's capacity to shape perceptions of migration, particularly its influence on professions and quality standards. The study emphasizes the imperative of balanced and objective framing in media discourse to mitigate biases against professionals opting to remain in their home countries. Anticipated contributions include nuanced insights into the complex relationship between media, brain drain, and public perceptions, adding depth to the existing literature.

**Keywords:** Brain drain, media, migration, perceptions.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Migration has perennially been a salient demographic phenomenon in Albania, impacting the lives of over 4.5 million Albanians dispersed across international borders, while approximately 2.79 million remain domiciled within, as delineated by [INSTAT \(2022\)](#). Recent discernible shifts in Albanian migration dynamics prompt an acute consideration. The Albanian Institute of Statistics and the International Organization for Migration conducted a meticulous study in 2020, revealing that since 1990, an astonishing 1,684,135 individuals have departed Albania. Notably, 47% of individuals with higher education qualifications have emigrated since 2020, signaling potentially deleterious repercussions for Albania's economy and society. Furthermore, Albania surpasses its regional counterparts, such as Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, in per capita student migration for education abroad. These disconcerting figures foreshadow a challenging economic trajectory, given that surveys consistently underscore Albanians' migration motives, wherein foreigners are perceived as genuine opportunities

for professional, educational, and socio-cultural fulfillment. An EU Observation, as reported by [Phillips and Manaj \(2023\)](#), reveals a disconcerting sentiment wherein 83% of Albanians manifest a desire to depart from their homeland. Notably, 50% of respondents explicitly underscore the deficiency in favorable governmental employment policies as the primary impetus behind their inclination to emigrate. Should existing trends persist, Albania could encounter a substantive crisis in the medium term, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of brain drain.

From a historical perspective, the term “brain drain” originated in 1963 to delineate the emigration of British scientists to North America. Subsequently, its usage expanded, becoming synonymous with migration from economically disadvantaged regions to the Western world. Over time, scholarly discussions predominantly focused on this directional migration, relegating the migration of skilled individuals within developed countries to a secondary concern. This shift in emphasis is noted by [Freitas et al. \(2012\)](#). [Kaempf and Singb \(1987\)](#) specify that UNESCO’s 1980 definition characterizes brain drain “as an atypical form of scientific exchange marked by a unidirectional flow favoring more advanced countries.” Within international economic discourse, economists and policymakers articulate this phenomenon as an asymmetrical transfer of productive resources, encompassing technological expertise and human skills, from developing countries to more developed ones. They underscore how this perspective highlights the consequential limitations on the capacity of developing countries to pursue independent development. Skilled migration, often construed as a pernicious phenomenon both consequent to and perpetuating underdevelopment ([Freitas et al., 2012](#)), has attracted escalating scrutiny within the Albanian context, eliciting concern from international bodies such as the United Nations for over three decades. [Kaempf and Singb \(1987\)](#) articulated these apprehensions during an executive board meeting in Paris on August 27, 1987, underscoring a sustained preoccupation with the persistently elevated migration rates among highly qualified personnel from developing countries. The disquieting contours of this scenario transcend mere political implications, permeating diverse sectors of the national milieu.

In this context, the media plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of brain drain and promulgating perspectives during news coverage, warranting systematic exploration. The central inquiry hinges on the media’s influence in shaping perceptions of brain drain and the characteristic perspectives that animate news reporting on this phenomenon. Several factors underscore the pivotal role of the media in this discourse.

The media wields considerable sway in shaping public perceptions of brain drain through linguistic choices, headline selection, and image usage, all of which contribute to the framing of the issue. Media coverage may, for instance, foreground negative aspects, accentuating the exodus of talent and skills from the home country, or emphasize positive facets, such as opportunities and benefits for those opting to migrate. As elucidated by [Saxenian \(2005\)](#), media narratives predominantly underscore the advantageous aspects of migration for highly skilled individuals, potentially cultivating an environment that encourages their migration, irrespective of the long-term implications for their home country’s economy and society.

Additionally, the media is vested with the prerogative to set the agenda, determining the facets of brain drain that receive prominence in news coverage. The selection of specific narratives for reportage and the prioritization of particular issues endow the media with the power to shape public awareness and understanding of the brain drain phenomenon, thereby influencing public opinion, policy discussions, and governmental actions. [Docquier and Rapoport’s \(2012\)](#) study corroborates the positive impact of media coverage on policymakers’ decisions to implement policies aimed at retaining highly skilled workers in developing countries.

Moreover, the media frequently accentuates personal narratives and human-interest stories within the domain of brain drain, spotlighting individual success stories of professionals who have emigrated and achieved noteworthy accomplishments in their adopted countries. These narratives cultivate a positive perception of brain drain, casting it as a conduit for individuals to pursue improved opportunities and augment their quality of life ([Faist, 2013](#)). Such depictions may engender a mindset that fosters the migration of highly skilled workers, thereby contributing to the phenomenon of brain drain.

Furthermore, media coverage of brain drain may be influenced by economic and political considerations, aligning with the interests of target audiences, advertisers, or political affiliations. This may culminate in biased reporting, where the portrayal of brain drain is molded by the media’s specific agenda or prevailing economic and political ideologies. [Vogel and Zillien’s \(2018\)](#) emphasis on the critical role of media framing in shaping public perceptions of migration underscores the diversity in how migration is framed by different media outlets based on their political orientations.

Additionally, media platforms routinely invite experts, policymakers, and researchers to furnish analyses and commentaries on brain drain. The selection of these experts by the media, coupled with the framing of their opinions, can wield considerable influence over the overall narrative surrounding

brain drain (Schmidt-Catran & Steinmetz, 2020). The import of balanced and accurate media coverage of migration, particularly concerning brain drain, cannot be overstated, especially considering the potential for media framing to be influenced by political ideologies.

While other factors such as education, social groups, communities, personal experiences, and social circles undoubtedly exert significant influence over the shaping of perceptions on brain drain, the media's approach, portrayal, and framing ought not to be understated. This paper seeks to meticulously unravel the intricate dynamics characterizing the relationship between the media and public perceptions of brain drain in Albania, cognizant of the nuanced interplay of various factors in shaping opinions on this pivotal issue. Jałowiecki and Gorzelak (2004) undertake an exploration of diverse theoretical perspectives, encompassing the Push-Pull Framework, Human Capital Theory, and Social Network Theory, within their article. They aim to delve into the intricacies of both brain drain and brain gain. Through the lens of these theoretical frameworks, the authors provide distinct approaches for comprehending the multifaceted nature of highly skilled migration. These frameworks enable an analysis of the motivations, factors, and outcomes associated with the migration of talented individuals. The perspectives offered by the Push-Pull Framework, Human Capital Theory, and Social Network Theory shed light on the economic, social, and individual dynamics inherent in the phenomenon of brain drain and brain gain.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The discourse on brain drain has garnered extensive attention in foreign literature, offering diverse perspectives and theories. In the Albanian context, however, a discernible gap persists in studies explicitly investigating the media's impact on perceptions of brain drain. Presently, the bulk of literature draws heavily from foreign authors. Notably, Dhëmbo *et al.*'s (2021) study, titled "'Our migrant' and 'the other migrant': migration discourse in the Albanian Media, 2015–2018", serves as a notable exception, contributing substantially to mitigating this research lacuna. This empirical inquiry into the Albanian case critically examines how migration is portrayed in the media, shedding light on the potential of media-induced fragmentation to shape public opinion. Dhëmbo *et al.*'s work not only enriches our comprehension of how migration is depicted in the Albanian media but also provides a valuable empirical dataset for a specific period.

When employing media framing theory to scrutinize brain drain, the focus centers on comprehending the mechanisms and strategies employed by the media to shape the narrative and presentation of information regarding this phenomenon. The diverse frames employed by the media yield varying outcomes in terms of public perception and opinion on the issue (Entman, 1993). Likewise, agenda-setting theory underscores the importance of drawing attention to brain drain and determining which facets of the issue receive emphasis in the news narrative (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The portrayal of brain drain in the media is contingent upon the nature of the news and the salient aspects that are accentuated. Both theories underscore the pivotal role of the media in shaping public perceptions of brain drain through their selection, framing, and portrayal of information, ultimately influencing public sentiments. McChesney (2008) introduces an economic perspective on media policy, emphasizing two primary drivers, namely, management structures and advertising revenues, which contribute to shaping the media's tone when covering brain drain. The depiction of brain drains, whether as a consequence of globalization or a lower standard of living, is contingent upon the viewpoints of media executives and advertising agencies. Social constructivist theory further accentuates the need to analyze the media's influence on perceptions of brain drain within the broader context of other factors. This theoretical framework acknowledges the potency of the media and its ability to shape public opinion through its portrayal of the phenomenon (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Hagan *et al.* (2010) conducted a study that revealed how media representations of brain drain, among other factors, impact the decision-making process of highly skilled migrants. Social constructivist theory provides a valuable framework for understanding this intricate process. Additionally, Social Network Theory, as outlined by Granovetter (1973), posits that the effects of media and information dissemination can be analyzed through social networks, aiding in identifying influencing factors in the complex issue of brain drain and its impact on public opinion.

A substantial body of research underscores the influential role of the media in shaping public opinion, particularly concerning migration issues like brain drain. Yet, within academic circles, an ongoing debate and diverse perspectives persist regarding the specific mechanisms and forms of media influence on public perception. Several studies conducted by scholars such as Seo and Cho (2020), Sahoo and Maharaj (2019), Ratna and Tripathy (2019), Ilie and Milner (2018), Miller and Nownes (2018), Dhingra and Machin (2018), and Christofis and Demertzis (2014) align in asserting that media coverage significantly impacts public perceptions of brain drain. Within the broader literature exploring the nexus of media, migration, and urban spaces, Papadopoulos *et al.* (2008) underscore

the influential role of the media in shaping public perceptions, thereby influencing political, social, and cultural dynamics. However, Grubel and Scott's (2016) study posits that media representations of brain drain often oversimplify the issue and fail to recognize the benefits of highly skilled migration for both source and destination countries, calling for a more nuanced understanding. Conversely, Shih and Fu's (2012) study suggests that individuals perceive media influence on others to be greater than its influence on themselves. Examining the Albanian case during the communist period and the accidental transmission of Italian TV to Albania, Argan and Cheysson (2023) analyze the media's propensity to enhance the flow and perceptions of emigration. Nevertheless, a critical evaluation of the level of influence that the media can exert on these matters is warranted. Balabanova and Balch (2010) challenge assumptions and stereotypes about the media's influence on public opinion, advocating for a comprehensive assessment of its actual impact.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The methodological framework employed in this study centers on a rigorous content analysis of 50 news items sourced from diverse online newspapers and television media outlets. Media sources were selected through a randomized process, prioritizing content relevance over specific outlets. The primary criterion for news item inclusion was its direct pertinence to the subject of brain drain. The content analysis aimed to scrutinize various dimensions, encompassing linguistic and tonal attributes in news coverage, headline structures, news composition, and the incorporation of visual elements such as images or videos.

In addition to content analysis, an investigative phase was implemented to assess the frequency of news production concerning brain drain. This approach sought to unravel the primary factors influencing media outlets and journalists in their coverage of this phenomenon. Another facet of the methodology involved the systematic collection and subtle analysis of public reactions and perceptions stemming from the disseminated information on brain drain. A comprehensive case study was conducted, meticulously analyzing 586 public comments sourced from various online platforms.

To augment the primary data, secondary data extracted from relevant literature facilitated a comparative analysis, providing a broader contextualization of the Albanian scenario with findings from analogous studies conducted across diverse global contexts. The study is anchored by two principal research inquiries:

1. *How is brain drain depicted in media narratives?*
2. *To what extent does media reporting shape public opinion and influence perceptions regarding brain drain?*

This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of the media's role in shaping perceptions of brain drain, encompassing both the content disseminated by media outlets and the ensuing public discourse that unfolds in response to these narratives.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of Dhëmbo *et al.*'s (2021) study confirm that the Albanian media exhibits a significant interest in covering migration-related issues. When it comes to portraying immigrants, the focus is primarily on highlighting the successful integration of Albanian immigrants in their host countries. However, in cases involving negative incidents concerning Albanian immigrants, the main concern revolves around the potential impact on the public perception of Albania and its diaspora. This indicates that the Albanian media is particularly attentive to reporting on Albanian migrants, as it directly links their portrayal to the overall image of Albania and its people.

The depiction of brain drain in Albanian media narratives is characterized by specific attributes, primarily related to the main drivers behind media coverage, the tone adopted in reporting, the portrayal of brain drains, the framing techniques employed, and the potential emergence of stereotypes resulting from the reporting process.

The study's analysis of the article's content reveals that four primary factors drive the media's coverage of brain drain news. The first factor pertains to the accomplishments of Albanians in foreign nations, which constitutes the largest proportion of news reporting at 41%. Interestingly, this aligns with one of the seven key recommendations made by the IOM (2018) to journalists, emphasizing the importance of avoiding the victimization of migrants and highlighting positive aspects. Grubel and Scott (2016) note that media portrayals of brain drain often oversimplify the matter and fail to acknowledge the advantages of highly skilled migration for both the countries of origin and destination.

The second factor revolves around the dissemination of reports and studies conducted by national or international organizations such as INSTAT or IOM, which primarily involves reporting on the report's contents (INSTAT *et al.*, 2020). This approach is employed in 29% of cases and aligns with journalistic principles regarding the obligation to provide public information based on official data released by public and international institutions. However, journalistic integrity must go beyond mere numbers and figures provided by these institutions and utilize them as a starting point for further investigation. As Meyer (2002) argues, this type of journalism is what we truly need, emphasizing the importance of preserving professional standards.

The third factor pertains to events covered by foreign media that involve Albanian migrants, with a focus on delivering content from the perspective of these foreign media sources. This factor constitutes 17% of the news reports. Foreign media coverage of Albanian migrants predominantly adopts negative tones, and unfortunately, this negativity is often replicated in a copy-paste manner by Albanian media outlets. The impact of foreign media influence can be illustrated by the news coverage titled "*They are always one step ahead: Albanian gangs have found new ways to traffic migrants!*". This news report was originally published by the British media outlet "The Sun" and later translated and disseminated by the Albanian television channel ABC News on February 6, 2023. Such reporting poses a potential risk of reinforcing stereotypes, even within the Albanian community, and shaping biased perceptions about one another.

The fourth factor pertains to news articles that arise from opinions, statements, and political positions, constituting 11% of the overall reporting. Even in such cases, it is essential to consider the recommendations put forth by Meyer (2002), emphasizing that professional journalists are distinguished by the strength of their arguments, presentation of factual information, and utilization of credible sources. Relying solely on the statements made by various actors indicates the initial signs of lazy journalism.

Although it represents a smaller percentage compared to the aforementioned factor, 2% of the articles emerge as a result of treating information in the form of comments or opinions as a journalistic product. In certain instances, institutional reports or political stances can serve as catalysts for delving deeper into the analysis of the phenomenon. An illustrative example of this situation is the article titled "*Comment: How Can Albania Finally Part Ways with the Brain Drain Phenomenon,*" published by Exit.al, an online Albanian media (Canka, 2021).

The tone of news reporting is influenced by the subject matter and the information source. When covering success stories, the tone is informative, focusing on the individual's accomplishments. The reporting provides relevant details about the events in a straightforward manner, allowing the audience to share their comments and opinions. In some instances, the reporting maintains a neutral position by presenting facts, creating a formal news reporting style. This tone demonstrates respect and dignity for the achievements of Albanian immigrants.

A significant aspect of the analysis is the headline of the news, which sets the main direction and essence of the article. The headline reflects the tone and style of the entire piece, as well as how the event will be portrayed to the public. Headlines related to brain drain often exaggerate departure rates and perpetuate stereotypes, contributing to the stigmatization of those who choose to remain in the country. An example of this is the headline from the newspaper Telegraf, dated October 29, 2018, which reinforces prejudices about the phenomenon: "*Albania is emptying, 52% of people flee. Young people, graduates, specialists, and scientists leave, while the uneducated and politicians remain*" (Telegraf, 2018).

The overall structure of news articles is often closely tied to the underlying themes introduced by the news headline. When the headline adopts a negative tone, the article's structure is reinforced by the inclusion of various sources of information and data, illustrating the factors that contribute to the emigration of professionals. These articles provide information and data regarding the preferred destinations for Albanians and the most sought-after professions. In some cases, perhaps unintentionally, the media shapes the market for destinations and professions by guiding the public toward the trends and demands of the international job market. Licenji (2023), a communication professor, explains that media coverage of favored destinations and professions has even influenced students' preferences for higher education, as they tend to pursue studies in fields such as nursing, medicine, construction engineering, and IT due to their ease of integration abroad. Media reports provide additional insights that further reinforce the preconceptions surrounding the notion that "*individuals earning over 1000 euros prefer to emigrate, leading to an increase in the emigration of educated people*" (Telegraf, 2018). Thus, it becomes evident that poverty and unemployment are not the sole influencing factors, but the lack of prospects also plays a significant role. Through the portrayal of information, the media sometimes suggests to the public that individuals without promising prospects should consider emigrating. Bregu (2020) emphasizes the importance of maintaining professionalism in news reporting, adhering to ethical standards, and avoiding exaggeration. By placing undue emphasis on specific causes

or explanations for an event, the media can shape the audience's understanding of the underlying root causes.

News images and videos serve as visual aids that often reinforce the media's intended message. Frequently, the images chosen depict individuals walking contemplatively, people carrying suitcases, or individuals with despondent expressions. Nevertheless, instances occur where the images used lack relevance in providing additional context. Moreover, the image presented in [Fig. 1](#) attempts to support the narrative but stands out due to the distinct characteristics of the people, their clothing, and their demeanor, raising questions about its relevance to the depicted scenario. It is a photo that does not accurately represent Albanian society nor reflect the concept of brain drain. As [Bregu \(2020\)](#) explained, when utilizing images and videos in news articles, it is crucial to ensure their authenticity and credibility. In cases involving statistical data, charts, graphs, or infographics can be employed to visually represent the information. Maintaining professionalism in news reporting entails using a formal and neutral tone.



Fig. 1. Illustrative image of an article in an Albanian news media (Source: Telegraf, October 29, 2018).

The media may not explicitly encourage the departure of skilled individuals, and its direct influence on Albanians' decision to emigrate may be limited. The portrayal of news and information to the public can act as a motivating factor or even a decisive influence in the decision to emigrate. Through analyzing the relationship between news articles and public comments, a connection is observed between the number of comments and the tone of the news headline. There is a tendency for more negative comments to arise when the news title and its structure convey a sense of negativity. Conversely, when success stories of Albanian professionals in foreign countries are featured, the comments tend to be positive. However, some of these positive comments also reflect a note of pessimism regarding the situation in Albania, which primarily stems from the undervaluation of educated and intellectual individuals. From the analysis of 586 public comments on the selected articles, it is noteworthy that 38% of the commenters, influenced by the news coverage, view emigration as an opportunity for professional growth and advancement in foreign countries. This predisposition is also observable in media articles, indicating a correlation between media coverage and public reactions. Approximately 26% of commentators appreciate the media for disseminating information about brain drain, considering it an important element in improving the global perception of Albanians. Another 25% of commentators express their frustration with the "incompetence" that has remained in Albania, conveying a negative perspective on the country. Furthermore, 11% of commentators react based on the political and economic situation in the country, identifying them as the primary factors contributing to the loss of professionals. It becomes clear that the media can influence public reactions through their news coverage. It is worth noting that the highest number of commenter reactions is observed when success stories of professionals are presented, albeit accompanied by pessimistic remarks about the situation in Albania.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon of brain drain garners substantial attention in the Albanian media, shaped by diverse influences such as the depiction of successful stories of Albanian professionals abroad and the dissemination of study reports, political statements, and individual initiatives by media entities or journalists. The frequency of reporting on brain drain is predominantly propelled by four principal factors. The media must recognize their pivotal role as catalysts for positive change in Albania, actively engaging in public discourse on brain drain and contributing professionally by presenting viable

alternatives to address emerging challenges. Studies by Christofis and Demertzis (2014) and Musa (2016) underscore the potential influence of the media's portrayal and treatment of brain drain on policymakers' perspectives. Presently, the Albanian media appears to fall short of fully assuming this responsibility.

The media's impact as a communicator and information provider holds paramount importance, especially when addressing sensitive subjects like brain drain. For the Albanian media, adopting a formal tone in line with ethical journalism standards during news reporting is crucial. Furthermore, refraining from the promotion or reinforcement of negative stereotypes about professionals involved in brain drain is essential. Such practices not only contribute to unfavorable perceptions of specific social groups but also perpetuate an unobjective model of news reporting. The media's emphasis on particular ideas or models is likely to strengthen corresponding public perceptions.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that they do not have any conflicts of interest.

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