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Media coverage and migration policy attention in Kosovo: Television, public perceptions, and the political agenda

Abstract

This study examines how television coverage of emigration in Kosovo (2008–2024) contributes to the political salience of migration in a small-state, post-conflict context. Drawing on 19 semi-structured interviews with television editorial representatives and researchers/professionals, the analysis identifies three interrelated mechanisms: dominant human-interest framing, heightened public sensitivity through emotionally resonant storytelling, and symbolic institutional responsiveness. The findings indicate no direct causal link between television coverage and specific policy decisions. Instead, migration becomes politically salient through mediated agenda-building processes

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that shape public prioritisation and institutional positioning. By empirically grounding these dynamics in professional perceptions from both media producers and external experts, the study contributes to media and social policy research through a context-sensitive model of mediated political attention in a transitional democratic setting. The study also highlights how sustained television visibility, emotional storytelling, and narrative framing contribute to maintaining migration as a socially sensitive and politically visible issue within Kosovo's public discourse.

Keywords: television, emigration, agenda-setting, framing, policy attention

1. Introduction

Population migration has been one of the most persistent and socially sensitive processes shaping Kosovo's post-independence development. Alongside fertility and mortality, migration constitutes one of the principal drivers of demographic change (Poston & Bouvier, 2010). In this study, migration refers specifically to long-term emigration, understood as the movement of individuals from Kosovo to another country with the intention of changing their usual place of residence for at least 12 months, excluding temporary travel such as tourism, short-term visits, pilgrimages, or medical treatment. Since Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, emigration has remained a recurring issue of public concern, becoming particularly prominent during the 2014–2016 migration wave and the period surrounding visa liberalisation.

Across Europe, migration has become one of the most politically and socially contested issues, particularly following the 2015 refugee crisis, which intensified public, political, and media debates on migration and mobility. While these debates have focused largely on immigration, border control, and integration, emigration from transitional and post-socialist societies has received less attention. Comparative research suggests that emigration increasingly intersects with broader development-related and institutional concerns, extending migration debates beyond individual mobility decisions (Careja, 2013).

Recent studies suggest that migration-related issues extend beyond formal governmental decision-making and become embedded within broader political agendas and public debates (Matuszczyk, 2025). Moreover, migration becomes politically salient not only through formal governmental decision-making but also through processes of mediatisation and politicisation, in which media visibility and public discourse shape political agendas and public understandings of migration (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018).

Comparative research further indicates that media narratives and representations contribute to shaping public perceptions and broader social understandings of migration through framing and varying levels of salience and media sentiment (Dhëmbo et al., 2021; Eberl et al., 2019). Emigration has remained an important demographic and social phenomenon in Kosovo throughout the post-independence period. According to the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, international emigration refers to persons who leave Kosovo to reside abroad for reasons such as employment, family

reunification, marriage, long-term studies, or permanent relocation. These estimates are produced as part of Kosovo's official population statistics and are based on demographic estimation procedures that combine population estimates, census data, administrative records, and international statistical sources from the principal destination countries of Kosovar migrants (KAS, 2025). Migration outflows fluctuated over time, reaching particularly high levels during the 2014–2015 migration wave, when more than 119,000 citizens were estimated to have left the country (Government Authority for Migration, 2018). More recent estimates indicate that 37,451 persons emigrated in 2024, equivalent to approximately 2.3% of Kosovo's resident population (KAS, 2025). Previous research suggests that emigration is especially pronounced among younger and economically active population groups, generating concerns related to labour-force depletion, demographic ageing, and brain drain (Gollopini, 2016; OECD, 2022). These developments underline the significance of emigration not only as a demographic process but as a social policy issue with long-term implications for social and economic development. In this context, Kosovo represents a relevant case for examining how television coverage shapes public sensitivity and political attention toward emigration.

While migration in Kosovo has been analysed from demographic, economic, and policy perspectives, less empirical attention has been devoted to its communicative dimension. Existing research has focused primarily on migration drivers, demographic consequences, and policy challenges, while limited attention has been devoted to how television narratives shape public meanings of emigration and its political salience in transitional democratic contexts. Migration is not only a structural or demographic process but also a mediated phenomenon whose public significance is shaped through media narratives (Entman, 1993; Happer & Philo, 2013). In Kosovo, television continues to occupy a central role in the public sphere as one of the widely used and trusted sources of political information (Voltmer, 2006; IREX, 2024). Through topic selection, repetition, visual framing, and emotionally driven storytelling, television contributes to constructing interpretative frameworks through which migration is understood, evaluated, and socially prioritised (Entman, 1993; Chong & Druckman, 2007).

Media representations influence whether migration is perceived as a rational strategy for improving living standards, a response to structural economic constraints, or a symptom of institutional shortcomings. Beyond its demographic and economic dimensions, emigration also constitutes an important social policy issue. Public narratives surrounding migration may influence how citizens perceive opportunities abroad, particularly when media coverage presents migration primarily through success stories, economic advancement, or improved living conditions. In such cases, incomplete or idealised representations may contribute to unrealistic expectations regarding life in destination countries. These concerns have become increasingly relevant in the global politicisation of migration, where public debate is often shaped by selective information, competing narratives, and emotionally charged representations. Moreover, persistent emigration and brain drain may generate significant social policy challenges for countries of origin, including labour shortages, demographic ageing, as well as pressures on public services and human capital development. Therefore, understanding how migration is

communicated and publicly interpreted is relevant not only for media studies but also for broader debates in social policy research. In this sense, migration acquires political relevance due to its demographic and socio-economic implications, and also the ways in which it is publicly narrated, interpreted, and discussed within media discourse. In transitional democratic contexts characterised by evolving institutions and strong reliance on television as a primary source of information, understanding the interaction between media discourse, public perceptions, and political agendas becomes particularly important.

Research has documented the socio-economic drivers of migration, demographic consequences, and policy challenges associated with population mobility in Kosovo (Gollopeni, 2016; OECD, 2022). However, limited empirical attention has been devoted to examining how television coverage interacts with public perceptions and contributes to the political salience of migration. The relationship between media discourse and political attention is rarely direct or linear; rather, it operates through mediated processes in which visibility, emotional narration, public sensitivity, institutional attention, and public responses interact (McCombs, 2004; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Oo & Dai, 2025).

This study, therefore, examines how television coverage of migration in Kosovo between 2008 and 2024 shapes public perceptions and indirectly influences the positioning of migration within the political agenda. In this paper, migration policy attention refers to the political salience of migration and its positioning within political agendas, rather than to the evaluation of specific migration policy instruments. The central research question guiding the study is: How has television coverage of emigration in Kosovo (2008–2024) shaped public perceptions and contributed to migration's political salience and agenda positioning?

To address this research question, the study aims to examine how television in Kosovo constructs dominant migration narratives, how these narratives are perceived to shape public perceptions and social sensitivity, and how they contribute to the positioning of migration within the political agenda. It also explores how editorial representatives, researchers, and professionals interpret the indirect relationship between television discourse and institutional attention to migration. To achieve these objectives, the study draws on 19 semi-structured interviews conducted with four editorial representatives from four national television stations (RTK, RTV21, KTV, and Klan Kosova) and 15 researchers and professionals from the fields of media studies, communication, sociology, psychology, migration studies, and related disciplines. By analysing professional perceptions regarding dominant narratives, framing structures, and perceived mechanisms of influence, the study reconstructs the mediated pathways through which television shapes public sensitivity and political attention toward migration.

The analysis is situated within three complementary theoretical perspectives: agenda-setting and agenda-building theory, media framing theory, and public sphere theory. Together, these frameworks provide an analytical framework for examining how media visibility, narrative framing, and communicative processes contribute to the political salience of migration. Rather than claiming direct causal influence on

specific policy outcomes, the study focuses on how television coverage contributes to mediated political attention, shaping the communicative environment within which migration becomes a publicly debated and institutionally acknowledged issue.

1.1. Media coverage of migration and research gap

Following Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, migration has remained a recurrent and politically sensitive topic in national public discourse. Its visibility intensified particularly during the period 2014–2016, when one of the largest emigration waves in the country's recent history coincided with heightened media attention (Gollopeni, 2016). During this period, television news coverage expanded substantially, reflecting, and amplifying public concern regarding large-scale departures.

Several studies have examined media coverage of migration in Kosovo, particularly around the 2014–2015 migration wave, including the themes emphasised in reporting and the information conveyed to prospective migrants. Qerimi (2015) finds that media reporting on emigration in Kosovo was predominantly informative, superficial, and reactive. Articles on mass departures dominated, while relatively few investigative and analytical articles examined the causes of emigration and the circumstances of those departures. Socio-economic and local issues received the most attention, whereas other factors directly affecting emigration were rarely addressed.

Official data indicate that more than 119,000 citizens emigrated during 2014–2015 (GAM, 2018), including 74,434 in 2015 alone (KAS, 2016), marking a critical moment in Kosovo's demographic trajectory.

Reports by the European Training Foundation (2021) link this migration wave to facilitated routes across the Serbia–Hungary border and the activities of smuggling networks. Media coverage during this period often portrayed these routes as accessible and attainable, potentially contributing to the perception of migration as a feasible short-term strategy. Supporting this interpretation, a study by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2015) found that 77% of respondents reported being informed about emigration opportunities through media sources, with television coverage playing a prominent role in shaping awareness of migration pathways.

Subsequent research has highlighted how narratives surrounding visa liberalisation and life in European Union member states contributed to idealised perceptions of opportunities abroad. Blakaj and Boomgaarden (2025) argue that emotionally resonant reporting reinforced expectations of improved living standards, strengthening migration aspirations. In transitional media systems such as Kosovo's, where television remains among the most trusted sources of information (IREX, 2024), such narratives may acquire heightened persuasive and agenda-setting potential.

From a broader regional perspective, OECD (2022) reports identify migration in the Western Balkans as a phenomenon influenced not only by economic dissatisfaction but also by the circulation of misinformation through media and social networks. Kosovo is frequently cited as a context in which inaccurate information regarding asylum procedures and employment prospects circulated widely during the 2014–2015 period. Möllers et al. (2015) and Krasteva et al. (2018) further document how

misinformation and speculative reporting were associated with irregular migration flows and increased asylum applications.

Several studies illustrate these broader patterns. Dhëmbo, Çaro, and Hoxha (2021), examining migration discourse within Albanian media, demonstrate that media representations contribute to constructing distinct perceptions of migrants and migration experiences. Similarly, comparative findings from the European Media Migration Report suggest that migration coverage across European countries varies considerably in terms of salience, sentiment, and framing, particularly during periods of intensified migration debates (Eberl et al., 2019). This finding also resonates with Bruzelius (2025), who argues that emigration-related issues often struggle to maintain sustained political visibility within broader policy discussions, while research in Central and Eastern European contexts indicates that migration narratives often employ security-oriented and negative frames that contribute to broader processes of politicisation and public interpretation of migration-related issues (Kovář, 2023). These broader European patterns provide an important comparative perspective for understanding how television media in Kosovo may contribute to shaping migration-related perceptions and political attention.

Despite these valuable contributions, existing research has largely focused on migration drivers, statistical trends, and socio-economic determinants, while comparatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding how media narratives contribute to broader processes of public visibility and political salience. In particular, relatively little qualitative research has examined how media professionals and external experts themselves interpret the communicative mechanisms through which migration becomes publicly debated and institutionally acknowledged within transitional contexts. This gap is particularly significant in transitional media systems such as Kosovo's, where television continues to occupy a central role in shaping public discourse and where migration has repeatedly emerged as a politically salient issue. Understanding how media professionals and field experts interpret the relationship between television narratives, public perceptions, and political attention may therefore provide important insights into the communicative dynamics through which migration enters public and institutional agendas.

Motivated by this gap, this study examines the professional perceptions of editorial representatives from four national television stations (RTK, RTV21, KTV, and Klan Kosova), as well as researchers and professionals from relevant disciplines. By focusing on perception-based qualitative evidence, the study reconstructs the mediated pathways through which television coverage shapes public perceptions and the political salience of migration within Kosovo's public sphere.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study draws on three complementary approaches: agenda-setting theory, media framing theory, and public sphere theory. This choice reflects the study's aim of examining how television coverage shapes public perceptions and contributes to the political salience of migration. From this perspective, migration

acquires political salience not solely because of its statistical magnitude, but through the ways in which it is narrated, framed, and debated in the media (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Happer & Philo, 2013; Blakaj & Boomgaarden, 2025; Karabuva, 2021). Together, these theories provide an analytical framework for understanding how mediated visibility and narrative framing contribute to the positioning of migration within the political agenda.

2.1. Agenda-setting and agenda-building theories

Agenda-setting theory, initially formulated by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that the media influence not what people think, but what they think about. By selecting, prioritising, and repeatedly covering certain issues, media shape perceptions of salience and define the hierarchy of public concerns. When individuals lack direct experience with a phenomenon, their understanding of social reality is largely mediated through media representations (Happer & Philo, 2013). In this sense, agenda-setting operates as a cognitive mechanism through which visibility becomes synonymous with importance. Recent research confirms that media attention continues to influence the prioritisation of issues within public and political agendas in contemporary communication environments, often indirectly through mediated salience and public opinion dynamics (Boswell & Smellie, 2023; Lecheler et al., 2019; Oo & Dai, 2025).

Subsequent theoretical developments expanded agenda-setting into a broader agenda-building perspective, emphasising the interaction between media, public opinion, and political institutions (McCombs, 2004; McCombs, 2005; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Rather than assuming a linear transfer of influence, agenda-building conceptualises issue salience as the outcome of reciprocal dynamics in which media attention, public sensitivity, and institutional responsiveness reinforce one another. Hence, sustained media visibility may increase the likelihood that an issue enters institutional deliberation, particularly in political environments where public pressure shapes policy priorities.

Within the field of mass communication, national television occupies a particularly influential position due to its wide reach, audiovisual immediacy, and perceived credibility. Research indicates that issues receiving prominent placement in television news are more likely to become subjects of collective discussion and political attention (Gerguri, 2017). The durability of agenda-setting effects across political and cultural contexts, as noted by McCombs and Shaw (1972), underscores the continuing relevance of television as a central agenda-setting actor, even in increasingly hybrid media systems.

Empirical studies further demonstrate that repeated exposure to specific media topics increases their perceived importance and may influence both cognitive evaluations and behavioural orientations (Liao, 2023). In the context of migration, Ureta (2011) suggests that media representations may function as informational cues by transmitting narratives about destination countries, opportunities, and perceived living standards. Regardless of their empirical accuracy, such representations can shape aspirations and expectations, contributing to the social construction of migration as a viable or necessary life strategy.

These dynamics are particularly salient in contexts where media serve as primary interpretative frameworks. In Kosovo, where television remains a major source of public information, migration narratives may influence how migration is perceived and prioritised. Dekker and Scholten (2017) conceptualise media as “mediating actors” that organise public communication and exert indirect pressure on political institutions by maintaining attention on specific issues. Through this process, migration may move from the public to the political agenda through cumulative visibility rather than direct institutional intervention.

Recent research further highlights that migration is particularly susceptible to agenda-setting effects due to its emotional resonance and its capacity to mobilise collective concerns (Lecheler et al., 2019). Television, through visual storytelling and narrative dramatisation, can intensify perceptions of urgency, thereby increasing the political salience of migration-related issues. Studies compiled in *The SAGE Handbook of Media and Migration* (Smets et al., 2019) reinforce the idea that television media function as intermediaries between public opinion and political deliberation, especially in smaller or transitional democracies where political institutions are sensitive to shifts in public mood.

Within this framework, agenda-setting and agenda-building theories constitute the primary analytical perspective of the study. Rather than assuming direct causal influence on policy outcomes, the research examines how media professionals and field experts perceive the indirect mechanisms through which sustained television coverage shapes public perceptions and contributes to the political salience of migration in Kosovo. The theory, therefore, serves as a conceptual guide for interpreting the relationship between media visibility, public sensitivity, and institutional reflection. At the same time, the application of agenda-setting theory in transitional political environments requires critical consideration. In contexts characterised by fragmented political institutions, uneven public trust, and highly competitive media systems, media salience may function less as a direct pathway to policy change and more as a form of symbolic or discursive pressure. Rather than producing immediate policy outcomes, sustained media visibility may primarily influence the communicative environment within which political actors position themselves in relation to publicly salient issues.

2.2. Media framing theory

Media framing theory, initially conceptualised by Goffman (1974) and further developed by Entman (1993), examines how the presentation of a phenomenon shapes its interpretation by the public. Framing refers to the process through which media select certain aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in order to promote particular definitions of problems, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and potential remedies (Entman, 1993). In this sense, framing operates at the level of meaning construction rather than mere issue visibility.

Although closely related to agenda-setting, framing represents a distinct analytical dimension. While agenda-setting concerns the salience of issues, framing addresses the interpretative structures through which those issues are understood. As McCombs

and Valenzuela (2020) argue, issue selection and issue interpretation are interconnected processes: the prominence of a topic is frequently accompanied by specific narrative patterns that shape how audiences interpret its causes and implications.

Chong and Druckman (2007) further emphasise that frames structure public understanding by defining social problems, attributing responsibility, evaluating actors, and implicitly or explicitly suggesting courses of action. In the context of migration, television coverage may highlight economic hardship and unemployment, portray emigration as an opportunity for personal advancement, or frame it as a consequence of political dissatisfaction and institutional weakness. These narrative choices influence how migration is socially interpreted – whether primarily as a rational individual strategy, a structural socio-economic outcome, or a symptom of governance challenges.

Empirical studies indicate that media representations of migration often combine economic, humanitarian, and security-related frames, shaping public evaluations of migration as both a collective social issue and an individual life strategy (Lawlor, 2015; Milioni et al., 2017). Through such framing practices, television does not simply reflect demographic realities; it contributes to constructing shared interpretative meanings that shape public debate and influence how social problems are perceived and prioritised within political discourse.

Within the framework of the present study, framing theory serves as a conceptual tool for interpreting how interviewed media professionals and field experts perceive dominant narrative patterns in television coverage of migration. Rather than measuring frames quantitatively, this research explores how professional actors describe the ways migration has been presented and how such narrative structures are perceived to shape public understanding and political salience. Therefore, framing is approached as an interpretative and mediated process linking media discourse, public perception, and institutional reflection in Kosovo.

2.3. Public sphere theory

Public sphere theory, most prominently articulated by Habermas (1989), conceptualises the media as a central arena in which social issues are articulated, debated, and potentially transformed into matters of political relevance. Within this framework, media function as an intermediary space connecting citizens, political actors, and institutions, facilitating the circulation of ideas and the formation of public opinion. Political salience emerges not solely from objective social conditions, but from communicative processes through which issues are publicly discussed and legitimised.

Zapata-Barrero and van Dijk (2007) highlight the interdependence between public narratives and policymaking, arguing that political responses are often shaped in relation to dominant public discourses. Similarly, Ureta (2011) conceptualises migration as an interpretable social reality, where meanings constructed within public communication influence collective attitudes and policy orientations. From this perspective, migration acquires political relevance not only because of its demographic magnitude or economic implications, but through its articulation and interpretation within the public sphere.

In the context of Kosovo, television has functioned as a prominent space in which migration-related concerns have been publicly expressed and circulated. Through news reports, debates, and human-interest narratives, television has reflected diverse viewpoints, including those of citizens, experts, and institutional representatives. While such interactions do not necessarily constitute structured deliberation in the normative Habermasian sense, they contribute to maintaining migration as a visible and socially sensitive topic within public debate.

Media systems, as noted in comparative communication research, mediate the relationship between public opinion and political institutions by translating societal concerns into politically relevant issues (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Strömbäck & Aelst, 2013; Voltmer, 2006). Rather than directly determining policy outcomes, media contribute to shaping the communicative environment within which political reflection occurs. Through sustained visibility and narrative construction, television may enhance the legitimacy of migration as an issue requiring institutional attention.

Taken together, agenda-setting, framing, and public sphere theories position media as a central actor in the mediated relationship between public perceptions and political consideration. International research supports this interpretative approach. Benson (2013) argues that dominant media narratives can legitimise certain policy orientations, while Eberl et al. (2018) demonstrate that emotionally charged reporting may influence political attitudes and issue prioritisation. Van Gorp (2010) further conceptualises framing as a symbolic process through which collective meanings are constructed and reproduced within the public sphere.

In the present study, public sphere theory serves as a conceptual lens for interpreting how interviewed media professionals and field experts describe the interaction between television discourse, public sensitivity, and institutional reflection. Rather than assuming that media directly shape policy decisions, this research examines how participants perceive television as a communicative arena in which migration is publicly articulated and indirectly incorporated into political discussions in Kosovo.

Furthermore, the normative assumptions of Habermas' public sphere model – particularly the ideal of rational-critical deliberation – may not fully correspond to media systems characterised by political polarisation, market fragility, and competitive news routines. In such contexts, media discourse may function less as a deliberative arena and more as a space of symbolic contestation, where visibility and emotional resonance outweigh structured policy debate.

3. Methodology and data

3.1. Research design

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive research design to examine how television coverage of migration is perceived to influence public perceptions and indirectly shape political attention in Kosovo. Given the study's focus on professional perceptions

and mediated processes rather than measurable policy outcomes, semi-structured interviews were selected to generate in-depth, context-sensitive insights.

The research design is perception-based and exploratory. Rather than establishing causal relationships between media coverage and policy decisions, the study examines how media and academic experts interpret the narrative construction of migration and its implications for public discourse and institutional attention during the period 2008–2024.

3.2. Sampling strategy and participants

The study employed purposive expert sampling. Participants were selected based on their professional involvement and expertise in television media, communication, migration research, public discourse, and policy-related analysis. This sampling strategy ensured that participants possessed relevant expertise and professional knowledge of how migration is represented, discussed, and interpreted within Kosovo's public sphere and its broader social and policy dimensions. Participants were identified through their professional roles, contacted individually, and invited to participate in the study. Participant characteristics were organised by professional background and years of experience.

The final sample comprises 19 participants:

- Editorial representatives from four national television stations in Kosovo (RTK, RTV21, KTV, and Klan Kosova);
- Fifteen researchers and professionals from the fields of media studies, communication, sociology, psychology, migration studies, and related disciplines.

The four television stations (RTK, RTV21, KTV, and Klan Kosova) were selected because they represent the principal national broadcasters in Kosovo and collectively provide a diverse range of editorial perspectives. RTK operates as the public service broadcaster, while RTV21, KTV, and Klan Kosova are major commercial television networks with nationwide reach and substantial audiences. These broadcasters remained continuously active throughout the entire period analysed in this study (2008–2024). Unlike several television channels that entered the media market at later stages, these stations covered the full study period, providing a consistent basis for examining long-term television coverage of migration. Collectively, they constitute a significant segment of Kosovo's television landscape, play an important role in shaping public debate and political communication, and represent the principal national television news providers in Kosovo, constituting a substantial share of the country's television news audience. Including both editorial representatives and external experts enabled the study to capture complementary perspectives on how migration is constructed in television narratives and how these representations are interpreted within broader academic and policy-related discussions.

The sample size was determined according to the principle of thematic saturation. During the later stages of data collection, recurring interpretative patterns began to appear across interviews, indicating that additional interviews were unlikely to produce substantially new analytical insights. The characteristics of the interview participants are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of interview participants

Code	Participant category	Organisation/Field	Experience	Interview period
M01–M04	Editorial representatives	RTK, RTV21, KTV, Klan Kosova	16–25 years	February 2025
R01–R15	Researchers/professionals	Media, communication, sociology, psychology, migration studies, and related disciplines	10–25 years	February 2025

3.3. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Institute of Sociological, Political and Juridical Research at Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje.

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage of the research process. Participants provided informed consent prior to the interviews.

To ensure confidentiality and protect participants’ identities, identifying details were removed from interview transcripts and findings are reported in anonymised and/or aggregated form. Respondents were anonymised using a coding system for analytical reference: television editorial representatives are identified as M01–M04, while researchers and professionals are coded as R01–R15. This coding system serves solely for analytical purposes and does not indicate hierarchy, institutional importance, or order of participation.

The research followed the British Sociological Association’s Statement of Ethical Practice (2017), including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, responsible data handling, and ethical procedures throughout data collection, transcription, storage, and analysis.

3.4. Data analysis

The interview data were analysed using a thematic approach combining deductive and inductive coding strategies. This analytical approach was appropriate to the interpretive design of the study, which seeks to reconstruct perceived mechanisms of mediated influence rather than measure causal media effects.

In the first phase, deductive coding was conducted based on the theoretical framework, particularly concepts derived from agenda-setting theory, media framing theory, and public sphere theory. Initial coding categories therefore included issue salience, narrative framing, public sensitivity, and institutional responsiveness.

In the second phase, inductive coding was applied to identify patterns emerging directly from the interview data. During open coding, recurrent references to “personal stories”, “family motivations”, and “individual decisions” were grouped under the broader analytical category of human-interest framing. Similarly, statements describing

the “creation of an atmosphere”, the “normalisation of departure”, or “increased public concern” were coded and later consolidated into the theme of perceived social sensitivity.

The analytical procedure involved repeated reading of interview transcripts, open coding, grouping codes into thematic clusters, and cross-case comparison between editorial representatives and researchers/professionals. The analysis focused on convergent patterns, areas of divergence, and cumulative descriptions of mediated influence to achieve analytical depth rather than statistical generalisation.

3.5. Data collection

All interviews were conducted in February 2025, and each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Separate semi-structured interview guides were developed for editorial representatives and researchers/professionals while maintaining a shared focus on television narratives, public perceptions, institutional reflection, and perceived mechanisms of indirect media influence. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed in full for analysis.

3.6. Analytical limitations

This study relies exclusively on perception-based qualitative data derived from semi-structured interviews and does not include triangulation with quantitative media content analysis or public opinion surveys. As such, the findings reflect professional interpretations rather than direct measurement of media effects or policy outcomes.

Nevertheless, the interpretive research design is consistent with the objectives of the study, which aim to illuminate perceived mechanisms of mediated influence and to understand how professional actors interpret the role of television within Kosovo’s public sphere.

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings derived from 19 semi-structured interviews conducted with four television editorial representatives (M01–M04) and 15 researchers and professionals (R01–R15). As described in the methodology section, editorial representatives are coded as M01–M04 and researchers/professionals as R01–R15 in order to ensure anonymity.

The analysis identifies both convergent and partially divergent perceptions of how television coverage narrates migration, shapes public perceptions and collective sensitivity, and indirectly contributes to the political salience of migration in Kosovo during the period 2008–2024. Within this study, public perceptions refer to broader interpretations, attitudes, and social understandings of migration emerging through television narratives.

Consistent with the study objectives, the findings are organised around three central analytical dimensions that emerged from the thematic analysis:

- dominant narrative patterns in television coverage of migration;
- perceived influence of television coverage on public perceptions and social sensitivity;
- indirect mechanisms linking television discourse to political attention and institutional responsiveness.

Rather than suggesting direct causal influence on specific policy decisions, the findings highlight mediated and cumulative pathways – including visibility, emotional narration, interpretative framing, and institutional responsiveness – through which interview participants perceive television coverage to shape public perceptions, collective sensitivity, and ultimately the political salience of migration.

4.1. Dominant narrative patterns in television coverage

The first analytical dimension concerns how migration has been narrated and framed in television coverage according to the perceptions of interview participants. Both editorial representatives and researchers/professionals described recurring narrative patterns that shaped how migration was presented to the public.

While editorial representatives tended to describe these patterns in relation to newsroom routines and audience engagement, researchers, and professionals more often interpreted them analytically in terms of framing effects and interpretative consequences for public understanding.

Three dominant patterns emerged from the interviews: (1) the framing of migration through individual and family narratives; (2) the prevalence of emotionally resonant storytelling and visual immediacy; and (3) temporal variation in media attention linked to migration waves and politically salient moments.

4.1.1. Migration framed as individual opportunity and family strategy

A notable convergence across interviews concerns the prominence of human-interest narratives in television coverage of migration. Editorial representatives explained that newsroom decisions often favour concrete personal stories because they are perceived as more accessible and emotionally engaging for viewers. As a result, migration was frequently portrayed through narratives of families leaving the country, parents seeking employment abroad, or young people pursuing opportunities in European countries.

Participants further indicated that during periods of intensified migration, reporting focused predominantly on personal decisions and family motivations, while broader structural explanations received comparatively less attention. Audience-oriented editorial logic was described as reinforcing personalised narratives and human-interest storytelling (M02; M03).

Researchers and professionals more frequently interpreted television migration narratives as emphasising opportunities abroad and aspirations for a better future.

The media has primarily promoted the positive aspects of migration, while the challenges and difficulties faced by migrants have not been adequately addressed (R15).

Several participants argued that repeated television coverage of large-scale departures, together with narratives highlighting better prospects abroad, contributed to shaping public perceptions of migration as a realistic and socially acceptable response to limited opportunities in Kosovo. Participants further suggested that the cumulative exposure to such narratives contributed to the gradual social normalisation of migration, particularly during the 2014–2016 migration wave (R04; R09; R11; R14).

Taken together, the interview data suggest that migration in Kosovo's television coverage was often framed through narratives centred on individual agency and family protection. Even when structural factors were implicitly acknowledged, the dominant narrative lens tended to emphasise personal decision-making and future-oriented aspirations.

4.1.2. Emotional storytelling, visual immediacy, and limited structural depth

The second dominant pattern concerns the centrality of emotionally resonant storytelling and visual immediacy in migration coverage. Across interviews, editorial representatives described this as a practical consequence of television journalism, where images, immediacy, and human-centred scenes are prioritised. Researchers/professionals did not dispute these newsroom logics, but more often emphasised their cumulative interpretative implications, particularly regarding the relative absence of sustained structural explanation.

From the perspective of editorial representatives, migration coverage was described as becoming increasingly visually driven during periods of intensified departures because television journalism relies heavily on concrete events, observable situations, and emotionally engaging visual material. Participants further emphasised that newsroom routines and daily production practices often prioritise immediate and visible situations over broader structural discussion (M01; M04). Researchers and professionals acknowledged the role of emotional storytelling in attracting audience attention but more frequently emphasised its implications for public perceptions of migration. *The media's portrayal of migration has created unrealistic expectations while neglecting the challenges migrants face (R11).*

Several participants argued that repeated exposure to emotionally framed migration stories contributed to shaping public perceptions and, over time, reinforced the social normalisation of migration by portraying emigration as an increasingly familiar and understandable response to wider social and economic constraints (R06; R13).

Overall, the interview data indicate that emotionally resonant storytelling was generally not perceived as inaccurate or fabricated. Instead, the difference between the two groups lies in emphasis: editorial representatives framed emotional narration as an effective journalistic form aligned with television logic, whereas researchers and professionals more often highlighted how repetition may privilege micro-level experiences over macro-level explanations.

4.1.3. Temporal variation and episodic reactivation of migration coverage

The third pattern concerns temporal variation in the visibility of migration within television agendas. Both groups consistently identified the 2014–2016 period as the moment when migration became most dominant in television news, while other years were described as more episodic, with renewed attention triggered by socially or politically salient events.

Editorial representatives consistently described the 2014–2016 period as a phase of exceptionally high media visibility during which migration became a dominant topic across news cycles. Researchers and professionals similarly perceived this period as representing heightened public sensitivity and intensified media attention, suggesting that sustained reporting amplified broader perceptions of urgency and social relevance (M02; M03; R02; R14). By contrast, participants described earlier years as featuring more intermittent coverage, and later years as characterised by periodic reactivation – particularly around moments of intensified public discussion, high-profile incidents, political debates, or developments related to European mobility.

Taken together, the findings suggest that migration's media salience was not constant across 2008–2024. Instead, visibility intensified during high-departure periods and decreased in comparatively stable phases, yet could be reactivated in response to events that renewed public and institutional attention.

4.2. Perceived influence on public perceptions and social sensitivity

The second analytical dimension concerns how participants perceived television coverage to shape public perceptions and collective sensitivity toward migration. Both groups described television as influential primarily through visibility and repetition, rather than through direct persuasion or behavioural determination. At the same time, researchers/professionals more often emphasised cumulative effects on perceived social reality, whereas editorial representatives more frequently described television as reflecting an already existing social phenomenon.

Three themes emerged: (1) visibility as a mechanism of salience; (2) perceived social reality and normalisation; and (3) emotional engagement and collective sensitivity.

4.2.1. Visibility as a mechanism of salience

Across interviews, there was strong convergence that television visibility and repetition elevate migration as a socially salient issue. Editorial representatives described this mechanism in practical terms (prominence and frequency), while researchers/professionals linked it to agenda-setting dynamics.

Participants across both groups consistently described television prominence and frequency as mechanisms increasing issue visibility and social relevance. Sustained exposure was perceived as contributing to broader public discussion and increasing migration's salience within public discourse (M01; M04; R03; R12).

This interpretation was illustrated by participants from both groups. As one editorial leader observed, (...) *both the media and the public interact in the same social, political, and economic context* (M01), suggesting that migration gains salience through the reciprocal relationship between media coverage and broader societal developments. A similar perspective emerged among researchers, one of whom argued that *The media hold a certain power in shaping social reality. When television broadcasts messages suggesting that everyone is leaving or that a large number of people are emigrating, it influences those who feel hopeless or consider migration as a potential option* (R04). These accounts further illustrate how repeated television visibility contributes to making migration a prominent issue within public discourse.

Importantly, participants did not describe visibility as automatically changing opinions or directly driving decisions. Instead, visibility was perceived as shaping what citizens recognise as important and discuss collectively. In this sense, migration becomes prioritised within public discourse when it is repeatedly foregrounded in television coverage.

4.2.2. Perceived social reality and normalisation of departure

Another subject concerns the perceived role of television in shaping a sense of social atmosphere around migration. Researchers/professionals more frequently interpreted repeated coverage as contributing to the construction of a broader social atmosphere surrounding migration and to perceptions of widespread departure, while editorial representatives more frequently emphasised the reflective role of television journalism.

Several researchers perceived intensive and repeated television coverage as contributing to the construction of a broader social climate surrounding migration. Participants suggested that sustained exposure reinforced collective perceptions of migration as an increasingly familiar and socially accepted phenomenon, thereby contributing to its gradual social normalisation (R06; R10). Editorial representatives generally adopted a more reflective interpretation, emphasising television as responding to ongoing social realities rather than generating migration itself (M02; M03). This difference reflects contrasting interpretative perspectives: editorial representatives tended to emphasise representational responsibility and newsworthiness, whereas researchers more frequently highlighted cumulative meaning-making effects. Overall, the interview data point to a nuanced perceived mechanism: while participants do not attribute structural causality to television, repeated and emotionally resonant coverage may contribute to the social validation and normalisation of migration as a familiar and publicly recognisable phenomenon.

4.2.3. Emotional engagement and collective sensitivity

The third argument concerns the relationship between emotional narration and collective sensitivity. Participants across both groups linked human-interest storytelling to audience engagement and to the sustained emotional intensity of migration as a public topic.

Editorial representatives generally described emotional narration as important for audience engagement, indicating that viewers respond more strongly to individual experiences and human-centred narratives (M03). Researchers/professionals interpreted emotional resonance as a mechanism through which migration becomes socially sensitive. Across interviews, emotionally charged stories – especially those involving families, youth, and departure scenes – were described as contributing to heightened public concern and ongoing discussion.

Editorial representatives also emphasised the importance of emotional presentation in migration reporting. As one participant explained, television coverage may: (...) *use visual content to evoke emotions or highlight specific aspects of migration* (M01). A similar interpretation emerged among researchers. As one researcher explained: *From a psychological perspective, media reports can have a dual effect. On one hand, by portraying life abroad as more stable and full of opportunities, they increase individuals' self-confidence... On the other hand, they may also increase uncertainty* (R08).

These observations suggest that emotionally resonant television reporting contributed to maintaining migration as an issue of sustained public concern and sensitivity, particularly through its influence on public perceptions and emotional engagement. In sum, emotional storytelling was perceived not merely as a stylistic choice, but as part of the process through which migration remains an issue of high sensitivity within public discourse, even when direct behavioural effects are not claimed.

4.3. Indirect mechanisms linking television discourse to political salience

The third analytical dimension focuses on how television discourse is perceived to contribute to political salience and institutional responsiveness. Across interviews, participants did not claim that media directly determine policy decisions. Instead, both groups described indirect mechanisms through which sustained media visibility generates expectations of institutional acknowledgement, discursive positioning, and symbolic responsiveness.

Two themes emerged most clearly: (1) symbolic institutional responsiveness; and (2) political salience as discursive positioning rather than policy adoption.

4.3.1. Symbolic institutional responsiveness

A central finding across both groups is that sustained public visibility creates expectations that institutions will respond – at least communicatively. Editorial representatives described this as a common institutional dynamic: when an issue dominates public debate, institutions cannot remain silent.

Participants across both groups consistently described sustained public visibility as generating expectations for institutional responsiveness. Interviewees perceived that when migration becomes highly visible within public debate, institutions may feel increased pressure to acknowledge the issue publicly or position themselves in relation

to it (M01; M04; R02; R08). Taken together, findings suggest that political salience is perceived less as immediate policy change and more as institutional acknowledgement, public positioning, and symbolic responsiveness to issues that gain strong mediated visibility.

4.3.2. Political salience as discursive positioning

Participants consistently differentiated between media salience and policy determination. Migration was described as becoming politically unavoidable through its sustained presence within public discourse, rather than through media demands for specific policy solutions.

Participants generally differentiated between media salience and direct policy determination, describing migration as becoming politically unavoidable through sustained public visibility rather than through media demands for specific policy solutions (M03; R12; R14). Overall, the findings indicate that political salience emerges at the level of discursive positioning: institutions are expected to address migration rhetorically, justify stances, and signal responsiveness, even when concrete policy outcomes remain contested or limited.

4.4. Analytical convergence and divergence among interviewees

The final section summarises the main points of convergence and divergence between the two participant groups. Both editorial representatives and researchers/professionals broadly agreed on the mediated nature of television influence, while differences emerged in how they interpreted the locus and consequences of that influence.

4.4.1. Convergence: a shared understanding of mediated influence

A strong convergence across both groups concerns the perception that television influences migration salience primarily through mediated and cumulative pathways, not through direct causality.

Across interviews, four shared propositions emerged:

- television structures public attention through visibility and repetition;
- human-interest storytelling intensifies engagement and sustains social sensitivity;
- sustained coverage generates expectations of institutional responsiveness;
- no direct causal link was claimed between television coverage and specific policy decisions.

These shared perceptions support a consistent interpretation of television influence as indirect, cumulative, and operating through agenda-building dynamics within the public sphere.

4.4.2. Divergence: reflective versus constitutive interpretations

Divergence emerged primarily in interpretative emphasis. Editorial representatives tended to stress television's reflective role, framing coverage as responding to social reality rather than shaping it.

Editorial representatives generally described television as reflecting ongoing social realities rather than generating migration itself, positioning journalism as primarily descriptive and reactive (M02; M03). As one television editor explained, *We follow the phenomenon but do not set the agenda* (M03).

Researchers and professionals, by contrast, more frequently highlighted the cumulative meaning-making consequences of repetition and emotional narration. By contrast, one researcher argued that: *the media in Kosovo has played a strong role in normalising the idea of migration as the only viable escape from economic insecurity and lack of perspective* (R14).

Their perspectives suggest that, although television does not generate migration as a structural phenomenon, repeated exposure to television narratives may contribute to shaping public understandings of migration, reinforcing its social normalisation and influencing how migration is collectively perceived and discussed (R06; R10; R14).

Thus, divergence concerns the perceived locus of influence – external structural causes versus internal interpretative construction and social normalisation.

4.4.3. Synthesis: mediated pathway linking television coverage and political salience

Across the interviews, participants described a coherent mediated pathway through which migration becomes politically salient within public discourse and institutional debate. Although respondents did not attribute direct causal influence to television coverage, both editorial representatives and researchers/professionals identified cumulative communicative processes through which migration acquires heightened visibility and political relevance.

The interview data suggest that television coverage constructs migration through a combination of human-interest framing, emotionally resonant storytelling, and fluctuating levels of issue visibility. These narrative practices contribute to shaping how migration is publicly interpreted and discussed, often emphasising personal experiences, family strategies, and aspirational mobility.

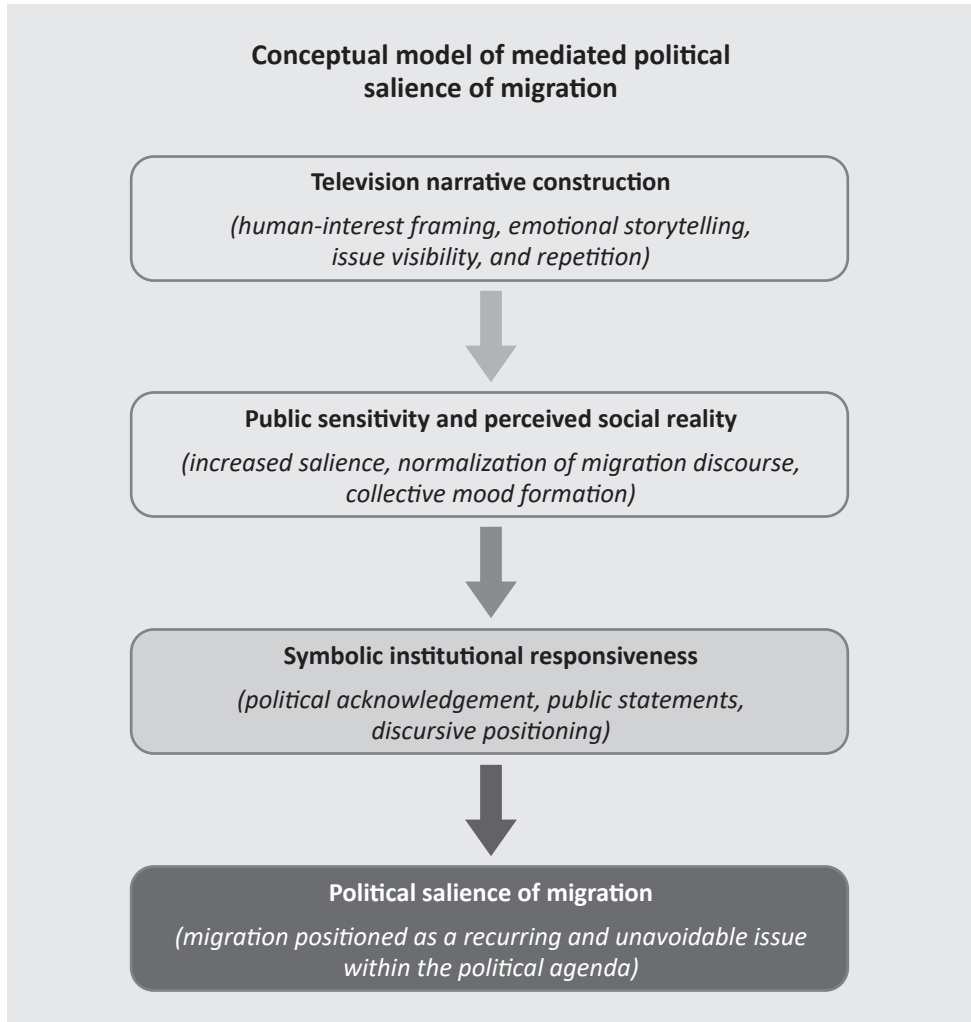
Participants further indicated that repeated prominence of migration coverage contributes to increased public sensitivity and to the formation of a perceived social reality in which migration becomes widely recognised and collectively discussed. In this sense, television does not generate migration decisions directly but shapes the interpretative environment in which migration is socially understood.

As public sensitivity increases, institutions may face growing expectations to acknowledge and address migration as a publicly debated issue. Interviewees described this process as generating forms of symbolic institutional responsiveness, including political acknowledgement, public statements, and discursive positioning in relation to migration.

Through these cumulative agenda-building dynamics, migration becomes politically salient as a recurring and unavoidable issue within Kosovo's public sphere and political agenda.

Figure 1 synthesises this empirically derived pathway linking television coverage, public sensitivity, and political salience of migration.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of mediated political salience of migration



The model illustrates four sequential stages identified through thematic analysis of the interviews. At the first level, television constructs migration narratives through human-interest framing, emotional storytelling, and sustained issue visibility. At the

second level, repeated, emotionally resonant coverage contributes to heightened public sensitivity and the formation of a perceived social reality surrounding migration.

At the third level, increased public visibility generates symbolic institutional responsiveness. Political actors may feel compelled to acknowledge migration, respond through statements, or position themselves discursively in relation to the issue.

Finally, through cumulative interaction between television discourse, public sensitivity, and institutional reaction, migration becomes politically salient within Kosovo's public sphere. In this sense, influence operates primarily through mediated attention and discursive institutional positioning rather than deterministic causality or direct policy control.

Migration thus emerges as a publicly debated issue that institutions are expected to acknowledge and address, even when specific policy outcomes cannot be directly attributed to television coverage.

5. Discussion

The findings show how television coverage of migration in Kosovo shapes public perceptions and indirectly contributes to migration's political salience. Drawing on interviews with television editorial representatives and researchers/professionals, the study identifies mediated pathways through which migration becomes a socially sensitive and politically visible issue.

Rather than suggesting a direct causal relationship between media coverage and specific policy decisions, the findings indicate that television influence operates primarily through visibility, narrative framing, and cumulative public attention. This supports the view that media influence on policymaking in transitional contexts is predominantly indirect and discursive.

The findings resonate with agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) emphasising the role of media in structuring public attention and determining which issues are perceived as socially important. Participants consistently highlighted that repeated migration coverage increases its visibility within public discourse. As described by both editorial representatives and researchers, when migration becomes a leading topic in television news it tends to become widely discussed within society. This dynamic illustrates how issue salience emerges not from the objective magnitude of a phenomenon alone, but from its sustained visibility in public communication.

The findings also support broader arguments concerning migration governance beyond state-centred perspectives. Matuszczyk (2025) suggests that migration-related issues increasingly extend beyond formal governmental decision-making and become embedded within broader political agendas and public debates.

Recent work similarly highlights the growing role of communicative and institutional actors (Matuszczyk, 2026). This broader governance perspective is also consistent with Weinar and Mendes (2026), who highlight the growing political salience of emigration and its increasing integration into broader governance debates.

Although the present study does not examine migration intermediaries directly, the findings suggest that television shapes the communicative environment in which

migration gains social visibility and political attention. This interpretation also complements Bruzelius (2025), who argues that emigration has increasingly become a matter of political attention and governmental response. In the Kosovo case, however, this responsiveness appears to be expressed primarily through symbolic acknowledgement rather than immediate policy change.

At the same time, the findings extend the agenda-setting perspective by emphasising the importance of mediated agenda-building processes. Rather than assuming a linear transfer of influence from media to policy outcomes, participants described a cumulative mechanism in which television visibility contributes to heightened public sensitivity, which in turn generates expectations of institutional responsiveness. In this sense, migration enters the political agenda primarily through discursive positioning and symbolic acknowledgement rather than through immediate policy adoption. This interpretation is also consistent with Kyriazi et al. (2023), who emphasise the importance of examining how emigration is framed, publicly debated, and politicised by different societal actors.

The study also highlights the importance of narrative framing in shaping how migration is interpreted within public discourse. Consistent with framing theory (Entman, 1993; Chong & Druckman, 2007), television coverage was predominantly structured around human-interest narratives emphasising individual experiences, family-related motivations, and aspirations for improved living conditions. Such framing personalises migration and foregrounds individual agency rather than broader structural and institutional explanations.

From a framing perspective, this narrative orientation shapes how migration is socially understood. Rather than foregrounding structural constraints, television coverage tends to present emigration as a rational life strategy pursued by individuals and families through aspirational and future-oriented narratives. The findings further suggest that repeated emotionally resonant storytelling may gradually normalise emigration as a socially recognised response to economic and institutional constraints, consistent with previous studies highlighting the role of media framing in shaping collective interpretations and the perceived legitimacy of mobility decisions.

Similar patterns have been identified in broader European research on migration narratives and mediated political attention. Studies by Eberl et al. (2018), Kovář (2023), and Roos et al. (2025) indicate that emotionally resonant reporting shapes not only public perceptions but also broader processes of politicisation and issue salience. Recent work by Kyriazi et al. (2022) similarly highlights the importance of examining how emigration is framed, publicly debated, and politicised across different European contexts. This interpretation is further supported by research on the politics and governance of emigration in Europe (Weinar, 2017; Weinar & Mendes, 2026), which emphasises the growing political salience of emigration and its increasing integration into broader governance debates. Research from Central and Eastern Europe further demonstrates that migration coverage frequently employs security and cultural frames that influence public interpretation and political debate.

The findings further support public sphere theory (Habermas, 1989) by highlighting television's role as a communicative arena in which migration becomes publicly articulated and debated. Through news coverage and human-interest reporting,

television connects individual experiences with broader social concerns and sustains migration as a visible and socially sensitive public issue. The Kosovo case therefore reflects broader communicative dynamics identified in migration research, where media visibility contributes to political salience beyond direct policy mechanisms.

The study also reveals subtle differences in how media practitioners and external experts interpret these dynamics. Editorial representatives emphasised the reflective role of journalism, describing television coverage as primarily responding to events and social developments. In contrast, researchers and professionals more frequently highlighted the cumulative interpretative effects of repeated narratives, arguing that sustained coverage may shape perceptions of social reality and contribute to the normalisation of migration discourse. These differing perspectives illustrate the complex relationship between representation and interpretation in mediated communication.

The conceptual model presented in this study synthesises these empirical insights into a mediated pathway linking television narratives, public sensitivity, and political salience. According to this model, television first constructs migration through narrative practices characterised by human-interest framing, emotional storytelling, and issue visibility. These narrative patterns contribute to heightened public sensitivity and to the formation of a perceived social reality in which migration becomes widely recognised and socially discussed. Increased public attention then generates symbolic institutional responsiveness, reflected in political acknowledgement, public statements, and discursive positioning by political actors.

In this sense, migration becomes politically salient not because television directly determines policy outcomes, but because it shapes the communicative environment within which political actors operate. Political institutions may respond publicly when migration becomes a socially sensitive issue.

These findings contribute to research on media, migration, and policymaking by showing how mediated influence operates in a small-state, post-conflict context characterised by transitional democratic institutions and high public reliance on television. In such contexts, media influence is less likely to produce immediate policy change and more likely to operate through symbolic and discursive mechanisms shaping public perceptions and political positioning.

The findings additionally contribute to ongoing debates on the politicisation of migration by demonstrating that migration may become politically salient through cumulative media visibility and symbolic responsiveness rather than direct policy mobilisation. Unlike studies primarily examining direct media effects or migration determinants, the present findings suggest that television contributes indirectly to migration-related political attention through communicative processes that gradually increase public visibility and institutional sensitivity.

The study demonstrates that television coverage plays a significant role in shaping the political salience of migration in Kosovo through mediated agenda-building processes. By structuring public attention, framing migration narratives, and amplifying collective sensitivity, media coverage creates communicative conditions under which migration becomes an unavoidable topic within public debate and institutional discourse.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how television coverage of emigration in Kosovo between 2008 and 2024 shaped public perceptions and contributed to the political salience of migration within the country's public sphere. The findings identify three interrelated mechanisms through which television coverage is perceived to matter: dominant human-interest framing, heightened public sensitivity through emotionally resonant storytelling, and symbolic institutional responsiveness. The findings show that television coverage shapes public perceptions by making migration more visible, emotionally resonant, and socially discussable. Through repeated reporting, personalised narratives, and visual storytelling, migration is framed not only as a demographic or economic phenomenon, but also as a socially meaningful and publicly recognisable issue. In this way, television contributes to shaping how migration is interpreted by audiences, particularly as a rational life strategy, a family-related decision, or a response to broader socio-economic constraints.

The findings further suggest that television contributes to migration's political salience indirectly rather than through direct influence on specific policy decisions. Migration becomes politically salient when sustained media visibility intensifies public sensitivity and generates expectations that institutions will acknowledge and position themselves in relation to the issue. Thus, the contribution of television lies primarily in shaping mediated political attention and discursive institutional positioning rather than determining concrete policy outcomes. Taken together, these findings answer the central research question by showing that television coverage of emigration in Kosovo contributes to public perceptions through framing, repetition, and emotional narration, and contributes to agenda positioning through cumulative agenda-building processes that increase the visibility and political relevance of migration.

Beyond the Kosovo case, the findings suggest broader implications for understanding migration as a communicative and socially constructed phenomenon. Similar to findings from broader European contexts, migration-related issues may acquire political salience through mediated processes involving visibility, public sensitivity, and symbolic institutional responsiveness rather than solely through direct policy mechanisms. The study contributes to ongoing discussions on mediated political attention and the role of television in shaping migration narratives within transitional democratic contexts. By situating classical media theories within the context of a small-state, post-conflict democracy, it extends migration communication research through a context-sensitive interpretation of mediated political salience. Unlike studies that focus primarily on media effects or migration determinants, the findings illustrate how television may contribute indirectly to political visibility through cumulative communicative mechanisms.

6.1. Limitations and future research

This study is based on qualitative interviews reflecting professional interpretations of mediated processes related to migration coverage in Kosovo during the period

2008–2024. As such, the findings reconstruct perceived mechanisms of influence rather than directly measuring media effects or establishing direct causal relationships between television coverage and specific policy outcomes. The study relies on perception-based qualitative evidence derived from interviews with television editorial representatives and researchers/professionals and does not incorporate systematic media content analysis, public opinion surveys, or longitudinal policy tracing. Consequently, while it offers insights into mediated political salience, it does not directly assess measurable changes in audience attitudes or formal policy outcomes, and the findings should be understood as a context-specific interpretation grounded in Kosovo's media and political environment.

These limitations point to several directions for future research. Future studies could combine qualitative interviews with systematic media content analysis, public opinion data, and institutional policy analysis to examine more directly how communicative salience interacts with concrete policy development. Comparative research across different phases of migration governance, particularly in the post-visa liberalisation period, may also help clarify whether television narratives shift when migration moves from crisis-oriented framing toward patterns of mobility normalisation, labour migration, and transnational opportunity.

7. Data availability statement

The qualitative interview data analysed in this study contain sensitive professional information and cannot be made publicly available. Anonymised excerpts or non-identifiable data may be provided by the authors upon reasonable request, subject to ethical approval and confidentiality requirements.

8. Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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