

BORDERLINES & HEADLINES:
AUDIENCE REACTION TO MIGRANT NEWS
IN EL PASO, TEXAS

By
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A THESIS

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The majority of Americans get their news from social media. They are not learning from journalists, but rather internet personalities and influencers. This content analysis observes user behavior. It looks at what social media users comment under migrant-related news published in El Paso, Texas. It follows three network-affiliated news sources (ABC, FOX, and NBC), two independent news organizations, and one lifestyle-based profile. Over 8,000 Instagram comments were sorted into themed categories to identify common rhetorics about immigration law and politics. Results show that the lifestyle (non-journalist) page received the most engagement while a local newspaper received the most accusations of political bias. Comment sections also serve as a platform for users to react and discuss news stories. Results also indicate that there is a shift in news consumption habits because more users engaged with an unaccredited news source. This project is one of the first to explore social media journalism in this manner, and can act as a first step into developing a stronger understanding of how newsrooms can adapt to this shift.

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Introduction

El Paso is known for its rich culture that bleeds through its ports of entry to Mexico. These bridges make El Paso a hotspot for immigration-related news and politics. While many local news stations scramble to shoot live shots from the border, many El Pasoans turn to a particular Instagram page for updates.

FitFam El Paso (@therealfitfamelpaso on Instagram) started as a fitness inspiration page. After posting outrageous videos of El Pasoans engaging in bar fights, public indecency, and other crimes, it grew an unimaginable audience. Its follower count stands at 607k. Its obscene content (mostly submitted by followers) led to Instagram banning the page several times, but it always re-appears under a new username. Its raw and engaging content continues to attract followers. While it doesn't identify as a news source, its success dominates local algorithms, meaning El Pasoans are more likely to see a FitFam post before a local news post. This exposure drives a cycle of high engagement and some users refer to FitFam as a more reliable news source because of its speed. Today, local news stations occasionally use FitFam's content in its newscasts, websites, and social media posts.

This project was inspired by my community where I constantly heard: "Don't act stupid. Don't end up on FitFam." This study aims to start a conversation about an ongoing shift in news consumption habits. It goes into extra depth into user behavior and interactions. However, it doesn't answer *why* people are choosing influencers over journalists, but it aims to start that conversation. It shows a unique example of users preferring to learn from internet personalities.

Literature Review

To investigate how comment sections serve as a platform for news reaction, it is easier to digest findings by narrowing the research topic. The news organizations observed in this study are based in El Paso, Texas. Given the city's proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border, immigration and migrant news often makes headlines. Additionally, understanding the political context to most of these news stories is important.

Social media platforms have become primary sources for news consumption, especially with the rise of mobile devices and vertical video. Comment sections serve as forums where individuals share opinions, debate, and reflect on polarizing topics like immigration and political affiliation. Observing how immigration is discussed in these comment sections is crucial because it provides insight into public sentiment, confirmation bias, misinformation, and audience reaction.

The Migrant Situation in El Paso, Texas

El Paso, Texas, borders Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Industrial capitalism, migration, and state power shaped El Paso-Juárez as the “largest binational, bicultural community along the U.S.-Mexico border.”¹ According to the city of El Paso's official website, a “migrant crisis” has been ongoing since 2018 with occasional surges. The city of El Paso says Customs & Border Patrol reports an average between 1,500 to 2,000 migrant encounters per day. It also reported that more than 60% of migrants are from Venezuela due to its “economic devastation and

¹ Wilson, Andrew, *El Paso* (Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History, 2023).

crime.” Other groups migrate from Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Cuba because El Paso is “currently the safest place to cross the Rio Grande into the United States.”²

Xenophobia during Trump’s first term stems from one of the first migrant surges when a caravan of Central and South American migrants entered the U.S. in 2018.³ The Trump Administration began separating children from their parents, which increased the demand for shelters. As shelters became overcrowded, immigration officials released migrants into public spaces in El Paso by the hundreds.⁴ The Trump Administration then established the Migrant Protocol Program, or “Wait In Mexico,” which forced asylum seekers to wait in Mexico until their hearing with an immigration judge. The MPP kept migrants from accessing “more robust support system[s]” in the U.S.⁵ The MPP, like previous attempts, placed “an unjust strain and congestion on border communities...to provide shelter and food for the surge of migrants notwithstanding that they may be unable to host them in the first place.” Overcrowded shelters prompted ICE and Border Patrol to improvise shelters under El Paso’s international bridges to Juárez.⁶ Outside of government control, caravans continued to release migrants into El Paso and Juárez’s streets. Non-Governmental Organizations hosted migrant groups by paying for hotel and motel rooms, a costly commitment of up to \$10,000 per night.⁷

Dirvin Garcia, the director of El Centro de Atención Integral al Migrante (CAIM, or Comprehensive Migrant Care Center in Juárez) said, “Mexico does not have a homogenous immigration policy to be followed at their borders as opposed to the United States.”⁸ Officials

² Ibid.

³ Ayala-Candia, Jesus, *Neither Here nor There: An Immigration Case Study on the Juárez-El Paso Border* (The Measure: An Undergraduate Research Journal, 2020).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

from both countries had the right to interpret and implement different responses to migrant surges. Thus, inconsistencies between the two countries' policies heightened complications and overcrowded shelters in El Paso. In addition, churches in El Paso provided shelter and healthcare for migrants. The increased traffic at the El Paso-Juárez borders caused economic losses in trade (up to \$4 billion in 2019) and increased wait times to cross (Ibid).

Within the past year, the migrant situation (in and beyond El Paso) has made national headlines. The most recent key events include the U.S. Supreme Court blocking SB4, a Texas immigration law that allows police to arrest people illegally crossing from Mexico, according to the *BBC*; and former president Biden signing an order that closes the border for asylum seekers, according to *The New York Times*.⁹ Because the topic has made headlines multiple times, many users continue to contribute their reactions and opinions.

Social Media Growing as a Primary News Source

Other studies have already started the conversation about the rise of social media journalism. According to the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report (2023),¹⁰ users pay more attention to personalities (celebrities, influencers, etc.) than mainstream news outlets and journalists regarding conversations about news.

Reuters reported that 52% of its Instagram user sample pays more attention to personalities while 42% pay attention to mainstream news outlets and journalists. Beyond that,

⁹ Sandoval, Edgar, and Reyes Mata III, "Biden Issues Executive Order to Temporarily Seal the Border to Asylum Seekers," *New York Times*, June 8, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/08/us/biden-executive-order-mexico-border.html>.

¹⁰ Newman, Nic, *Digital News Report 2023: Executive Summary* (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism 2023).

smaller or alternative news outlets, such as local news, have an attention rate of 31%.¹¹

Similarly, the Pew Research Center found that “just over half of U.S. adults (54%) say they at least sometimes get news from social media,” with about 20% saying they refer to Instagram.¹²

Immigration Stories in Media and Politics

As the migrant situation garnered national attention in 2019, President Donald Trump inflated anti-immigration discourse and described it as a humanitarian and security crisis. Trump’s concerns focused more on security for American citizens and he claimed that more Americans died from drugs than the Vietnam War.¹³ Trump’s dehumanizing description of South American migrants: “aliens with criminal records,” violent, “vicious coyotes and ruthless gangs,” justified and encouraged anti-immigrant values. Analysts found that the terrorist attacks on 9/11 “was the stimulus for much racialized animus toward immigrants, and Latino people in particular.”¹⁴ Essentially, fear of threats to national security often vindicates anti-immigrant messages in politics and news. Varvel analyzed how popular news organizations framed South American immigrants with a focus on language. Varvel found that news organizations, including *Fox News*, *Vox*, *Time*, and *the National Review*, used “tropes of illegality, statistics, and visuals” to paint the migrant situation as a humanitarian and security crisis.¹⁵ Elements of anti-

¹¹ Nic Newman, *2023 Digital News Report*, (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2023), 13.

¹² *Social Media and News Fact Sheet*, (Pew Research Center, 2024).

¹³ Varvel, Matthew P., *Framing the Border: Crisis Rhetoric at the US–Mexico Border* (CEA MID-ATLANTIC 2022).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

immigration representation hold the power to “convey information” and “shape[s] thoughts and feelings about [migrants].”¹⁶

With Trump running as the Republican candidate for the 2024 presidential election, he continued to capitalize on the fear of immigration by embracing anti-immigration rhetorics throughout his campaign. In his first debate against Democratic candidate Kamala Harris, Trump twisted several non-immigration-related talking points into anti-immigration concerns. For example, when asked about the January 6, 2021, insurrection, he “avoided talking about his supporters who stormed the U.S. Capitol and said migrants who are killing people should be prosecuted.”¹⁷ He also made false claims that Haitian migrants in Springfield, Ohio, were “eating the pets of the people that live there.” This strategy of deflecting criticism by feeding anti-immigrant fears highlights how central immigration remains to Trump's political narrative, and even overshadows other critical issues. As his campaign progressed, these tactics continued to shape misleading narratives about immigration in America.

Dehumanizing language can also present an “us vs. them” rhetoric.¹⁸ Otherness emphasizes differences and focuses on a socially constructed inferiority. In this context, American news organizations and audiences are spectators of the “other”: migrants.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Castillo, Andrea, *Trump and Harris Debate Immigration and Border* (Los Angeles: 2024).

¹⁸ Jaramillo-Dent, Daniela, and María Amor Pérez-Rodríguez, *#MigrantCaravan: The border wall and the establishment of otherness on Instagram* (New Media & Society 2021).

Confirmation and Negativity Bias

More well-known than negativity bias, confirmation bias is the tendency to support messages that align with a reader's pre-existing attitudes.¹⁹ Readers will also reject any information that contradicts their beliefs. Confirmation bias encourages selective exposure to news that aligns with a reader's bias. Such habits impact views "ranging from politics to science and education."²⁰

Negativity bias is a fairly new concept. It may "foster anxiety about societal issues among news audiences."²¹ News organizations often rely on "bad news" because it attracts more consumer attention. Indeed a "pessimistic outlook increases the likelihood of self-selection of more negative and episodic headlines over positive."²² An overwhelming influx of bad news can lead to news avoidance and biased perceptions of reality.²³ Simply put, if users are constantly exposed to bad news, they will stop engaging with *all* news to avoid any negative stories.

¹⁹ Knobloch-Westerwick, Silvia, Cornelia Mothes, and Nick Polavin, *Confirmation bias, ingroup bias, and negativity bias in selective exposure to political information* (Communication research 2020).

²⁰ Kappes, Andreas, Ann H. Harvey, Terry Lohrenz, P. Read Montague, and Tali Sharot, *Confirmation Bias in the Utilization of Others' Opinion Strength* (Nature Neuroscience, 2020).

²¹ Andersen, Kim, Monika Djerf-Pierre, and Adam Shehata, *The scary world syndrome: news orientations, negativity bias, and the cultivation of anxiety* (Mass Communication and Society 2024)

²² van der Meer, Toni GLA, and Michael Hameleers, *I knew it, the world is falling apart! Combatting a confirmatory negativity bias in audiences' news selection through news media literacy interventions* (Digital Journalism, 2022).

²³ Andersen, Kim, Monika Djerf-Pierre, and Adam Shehata, *The scary world syndrome: news orientations, negativity bias, and the cultivation of anxiety* (Mass Communication and Society, 2024).

Comment Sections and User Interactions on Social Media

Comment sections allow users to interact with content, publishers, and other followers in a digital space. In a journalistic context, comments can influence public opinion.²⁴ Hard news, or news that is timely and consequential (i.e., politics and business), is more likely to encourage discourse in comment sections. Users with a stronger interest in hard news are more likely to comment on social media news.²⁵ Under immigration news, comment sections are more filled with political disagreements. Motivations behind commenting on news stems from wanting to share an opinion. Interactions between users come from a need for entertainment. In addition, users are more likely to comment on news relevant to their existence, such as events near a user's geographic location.²⁶ On top of proximity, users determine the worthiness of a news story based on sociologist Johan Galtung and political scientist Mari Holmboe Ruge's list of news values.

According to Galtung and Ruge, 12 factors explain how events become news.²⁷ These include, timeliness, conflict, proximity to the audience, and unusualness.²⁸ References to elite nations and people (i.e., the United States and Trump) can indicate a connection to readers.²⁹ Like negativity bias, Galtung and Ruge found that references to negative news are unexpected, an additional value.³⁰ Overall, an event capable of being news must follow the criteria of relatability and importance to a reader's location and interest.

²⁴ Toepfl, Florian, and Eunike Piwoni, *Public spheres in interaction: Comment sections of news websites as counterpublic spaces* (Journal of Communication, 2015).

²⁵ Kalogeropoulos, Antonis, Samuel Negredo, Ike Picone, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, *Who shares and comments on news?: A cross-national comparative analysis of online and social media participation* (Social Media & Society, 2017).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Harcup, Tony, and Deirdre O'Neill, *What is news? Galtung and Ruge revisited* (Journalism Studies, 2001).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Given the background, this thesis aims to open a discussion about the shift in media consumption habits driven by social media. More specifically, how this shift affects local newsrooms. There is little research on this topic and this thesis will be the first of its kind.

With a focus on local news and El Paso, the research question will focus on migrant-related news and how audiences discuss it. Because immigration politics was one of the driving points of the 2024 presidential election, and El Paso's ports of entry, migrant news is prevalent in the city's newsrooms. These elements inspired the following question:

(RQ1): How do comment sections on Instagram serve as a platform for political discourse on immigration, and what sentiments are most prevalent in these discussions?

Methods and Procedure

The main focus of this thesis is to identify recurring sentiments about the migrant situation in El Paso, Texas. This project consisted of mixed research methods, starting with a quantitative count of data and a qualitative analysis. It follows six news sources based in El Paso: three network-affiliated news sources (ABC, FOX, and NBC), two independent news organizations, and one lifestyle-based profile. The distinguishing factors between these two categories depends on whether the organization identifies itself as a traditional news channel, such as a newspaper or broadcast channel. The lifestyle-based profile has primarily lifestyle posts, such as local events, restaurants, and culture. Instagram was the best social platform for this project for the following reasons:

1. Users use Instagram to express their opinions about post topics, which can be a valuable source to analyze the opinions of each profile's audience.
2. Instagram is the only platform where all six profiles are simultaneously active.
3. Instagram has clear markers for when posts and comments were added, and how many likes and replies were gathered.

Profiles were selected based on their relevance to El Paso's storytelling scene. Five profiles are verified news sources with a specialized medium (i.e., broadcast, newspaper, digital news site). One profile, FitFam El Paso, is a social page. Its content primarily focuses on community updates. Other El Paso-based social pages have similar content to FitFam, but FitFam was prioritized due to its frequent updates on immigration-related news. Including a

social page is relevant to discuss the impact of social media on media literacy, as FitFam is run by two non-journalists.

Data Collection

I composed two data sets to serve as references to answer the primary research question. Table 1 summarizes each news source's presence on Instagram, including primary media, follower count, and comment count, as indicated on Instagram. This model follows a similar breakdown used in *The News User on Social Media*, which measured media organizations' audience engagement on social media.³¹

³¹ Larsson, Anders Olof, *The News User on Social Media: A Comparative Study of Interacting with Media Organizations on Facebook and Instagram* (London: Journalism Studies, 2018), 2230-2231.

Figure 1 (Last updated Mar. 31, 2025)

Profile	Primary Medium	Follower Count (Sept. 2024)	Follower Count (Mar. 2025)	Total Posts (Nov. 2023-24)	Total Comments (Original) ³²
KVIA (ABC)	Broadcast	57.1K	60K	6	< 201
KTSM 9 (CBS)	Broadcast	34.3K	39.2K	33	< 1,072
KFOX14 (FOX)	Broadcast	63.1K	73K	14	< 256
El Paso Times (Independent)	Newspaper	80K	85.5K	31	< 3,207
El Paso Matters (Independent)	News Site	28.9K	36.7K	17	< 700
FitFam El Paso (Independent)	Social	498K	574K	33	< 26,613

Table 1 allows us to understand the level of each Instagram page's purpose and engagement while providing the quantitative framework to answer RQ2. The follower count is the total number from the last day of data collection. The amount of comments were calculated based solely on the posts collected for this research, which was immigration-related content.

The second data set comprised a total of 134 Instagram posts and over 8,049 comments across the six accounts. Only posts and comments relating to migrant news in the El Paso area were sampled for this thesis. Relevant news to this study expands beyond El Paso County, hence

³² Some comments were unexpectedly deleted throughout the thesis timeline.

the focus on the El Paso *area*, or the “Borderland.” Some news sites report in cities including Las Cruces, New Mexico; Deming, New Mexico; Santa Teresa, New Mexico, and Juárez, Mexico. Immigration-related news content covers multiple categories: national immigration law/policy (including changes), migrant surges at the El Paso-Juárez border, Border Patrol pursuits and arrests, human trafficking/smuggling attempts, etc. Each post and its comments were saved via a total of six Microsoft Excel files to avoid any lost data in case any accounts were suspended — a particular recurrence with FitFam El Paso. Public comments were manually sorted by Instagram page and discussion theme on a digital spreadsheet (via Excel). Data collection spanned a total of one year, starting on November 17, 2023, and ending on November 30, 2024, to observe a 25-day reaction to the United States’ 2024 presidential election results and its impact on the migrant situation.

Using Calculator.net’s sample size calculator, 273 comments were required for a 90% confidence rate. The sample size was calculated by adding all pages’ follower counts, posts, and comments (related to this project). This added up to a total population of 788,111.

Variables in Main Analysis

The qualitative analysis for RQ1 follows a variable system found in *Are Social Media Worth it for News Media*, which identifies popular discussion points in comment sections based on a social media post’s features.³³ Using the variables, as broken down in Table 2, helped identify language sentiments and understand comment sections as a platform for political discourse.

³³ Kim, Dam Hee, and Meera Desai, *Are Social Media Worth It for News Media?: Explaining News Engagement on Tumblr and Digital Traffic of News Websites* (Saint Gall: International Journal on Media Management, 2021), 12-15.

Figure 2

Criterion Variables	Predictor Variables	Control Variables
Comments and Replies	Follower Count	Publisher
Likes	Content Uniqueness	Post Type (Video, Image, etc.)
Prominent Discussion in Comments	Post Topic	Original or Reposted Content

Identifying Intention

To determine the intention of users' comments, this thesis applies a methodology from Leslie G. Holt's thesis titled *News Outlets in Social Media: Aggression in Comments* to my research. Holt measured and sorted aggressive online comments into each category as follows:³⁴

Harassment: comments that targeted or blamed a specific person(s).

Provocative Aggression: comments that were defiant but didn't address specific person(s).

Passive Aggression: comments that provoke negative feelings.

Codebook

For this thesis, intentions were measured by sorting comments into four categories: Blame, Reactive Aggression, Provocative Aggression, and Concern. In order to account for positive and sympathetic comments, Holt's categories were broadened as follows:

³⁴ Leslie G. Holt, *News Outlets in Social Media: Aggression in Comments*, (Master's thesis, Rowan University, 2016), 14.

Blame: the user's comment targets or blames specific people or groups for the migrant situation.

Reactive Aggression: the user's comment is hostile toward the topic, but doesn't blame specific groups or people.

Provocative Aggression: the user's comment provokes negative feelings or calls to action, regardless if their concepts are hypothetical.

Concern: the user's comment did not directly react to immigration politics and policy, but rather a result of the migrant situation.

Colors associated with each category have no significance to definitions and were selected to easily differentiate analysis results.

Repetitive sub-themes emerged from test studies. For the Concern category, a list of sub-themes reflected recurring sentiments about the migrant situation. This list will provide insight into how users use comment sections to express political beliefs and how they support their arguments. Furthermore, some sub-themes note how users contribute non-political reactions to migrant news, such as jokes. The Concern sub-themes are as follows:

(Q)uestioning: Skepticism or criticism of the publisher's reporting.

(E)conomic Concern: Criticism about where taxpayer money and government funding goes.

(M)aterialism: Criticism or response to resource distribution (i.e., sheltering, phones, transportation).

(S)ympathy: Sympathy towards migrants

(R)ebuttal: User shares resources (statistics, web links, etc.) to rebuttal arguments or calls out a flawed argument; the user insults or diminishes an argument by pointing out the other's political views.

(N)arrative: Personal experiences with migrants or the immigration process.

(J)okes/Snark: Sarcastic comments related to the topic.

(I)rrelevant: Comments that point out irrelevant details; includes non-political insults to other commenters.

To identify the most-recurring sub-theme for each profile, comments were labeled with its respective letter label (R, Q, etc.) based on the sub-themes' criteria. The WordCloud software calculated the amount of times each label was repeated. The finished list, along with the top ten most recurring keywords in each profile was sorted into the following format:

Profile	Sub-Themes by Popularity	Top 10 Words (via WordCloud)
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Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis for RQ1 was determined using the Structural Topic Model (STM), which gives a “birds-eye view” of prominent themes of discussion in comment sections³⁵. An STM, or sub-theme, defined an umbrella term for each theme. Afterward, a feature selection

³⁵ Kelling, Claire, and Burt L. Monroe, *Analysing Community Reaction to Refugees through Text Analysis of Social Media Data* (Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 2023), 504-507.

method defined distinctive words within each theme³⁶. By using the feature selection method, this project identified which sub-themes are most-recurring in each profile.

To determine distinctive words and sub-themes, comment sections under each post went through the online WordClouds tool, which pulled out repetitive keywords. Keywords were then categorized by a sub-theme, as seen in this template.

Theme (STM)	Distinctive Words (via WordClouds)	Examples
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After collecting 134 Instagram posts across six profiles, a codebook consisting of four categories and nine sub-themes identified each comment used for analysis. The categories — Blame, Reactive Aggression, Provocative Aggression, and Concern — identified the intention of a user's comment. If applicable, a sub-theme — Questioning, Economic Concern, Materialism, Sympathy, Rebuttal, Narrative, Jokes/Snark, or Irrelevant — identified prominent themes. Sub-themes only applied to comments that fell under the Concern category.

A codebook reference ensured consistency when categorizing and identifying themes.

³⁶ Ibid.

Findings

Pre-Research on Profiles and Engagement

While the remaining profiles cover traditional news stories, FitFam’s content casts a wider net. FitFam describes itself as “El Paso’s top platform & social media buffet,” with local ads, “shout outs” for locals’ accomplishments, memes, weather and traffic alerts, and — most notably — “red meat” content.

From police pursuits, shop robberies, police reports, and reckless drivers, FitFam is notorious for publishing unusual content. Buzzzed Podcast, an El Paso-based podcast, mentioned FitFam’s “people power” through user-submitted content. With “raw” content from locals, FitFam has grown instill trust from many El Pasoans as a reliable news source.³⁷



netnavi.exe Of course. Eyes everywhere means instant reporting of incidents as they occur. It’s much more efficient than waiting on a news crew to hear about the story and wait till the 9 o’clock news.



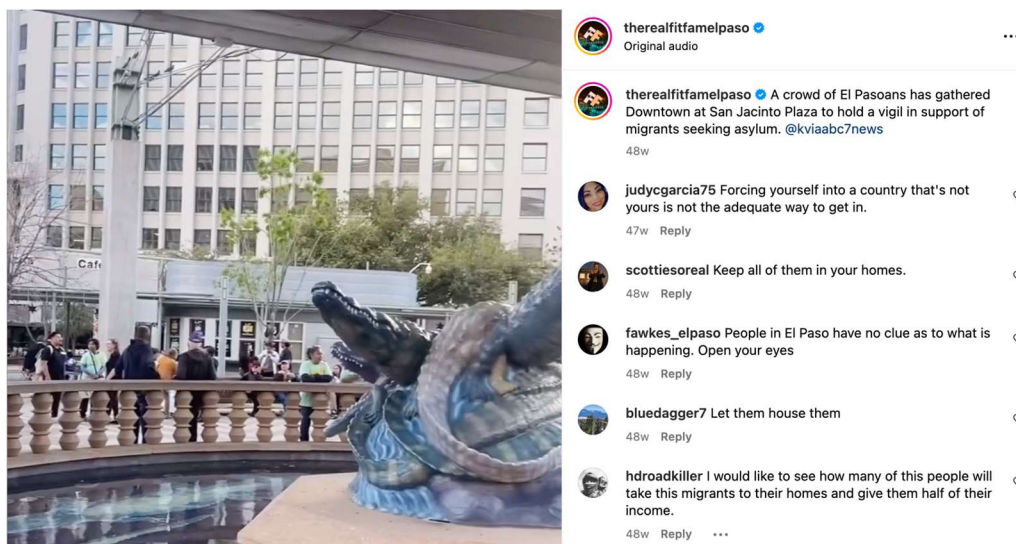
1w 92 likes Reply ...

*Source: Instagram*³⁸

As Galtung and Ruge found, unusual, shocking, and seemingly negative stories hold a value over competing news stories. Because of FitFam’s reputation as a raw and unfiltered storyteller, most followers engage with posts that shine a negative or controversial light on local issues rather than casual news stories.

³⁷ Buzzzed Podcast (@buzzzedpodcast), “Do you agree with @thekinggrizz that people power is the ultimate power? Is Fit Fam better than your local news station?” Instagram video, published 3 months ago, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DGJH7APJ-la/>.

³⁸ A comment from Buzzzed Podcasts’ post about FitFam on Instagram.



The first image, a post about a dust storm, curated 7,776 likes and 47 comments. The second image, a post a vigil for migrants, curated 7,090 likes and 829 comments.³⁹ Although the

³⁹ Source: FitFam on Instagram

second post has less likes than the first, it set a stage to discuss immigration politics and surpassed the first post's comment count.

Similar to the sample above, FitFam's comment count skyrocketed on posts relating to the migrant situation due to the topic's controversial nature. With FitFam's advantage being a lifestyle-based page with loyal followers, its comment sections in this study fell under more discussion-based sub-themes compared to the remaining pages.

Analyzed Profiles & Content

Figure 1 (Last updated Mar. 20, 2025)

Profile	Primary Medium	Follower Count (Sept. 2024)	Follower Count (Mar. 2025)	Posts (Nov. 2023-24)	Original Comments ⁴⁰	Analyzed Comments
KVIA	Broadcast	57.1K	60K	6	< 201	117
KTSM	Broadcast	34.3K	39.2K	33	< 1,072	526
KFOX	Broadcast	63.1K	73K	14	< 256	238
El Paso Times	Newspaper	80K	85.5K	31	< 3,207	1,298
El Paso Matters	News Site	28.9K	36.7K	17	< 700	375
FitFam El Paso	Social Media	498K	574K	33	< 26,613	6,400
				Total: 134	< 8,049	8,954

Figure 2: Media Topics & Types by Profile

Profile	Media Type(s)	Media Source(s)	Language(s)	Topic(s) Covered
KVIA	Video Broadcast Clips	Camera Crew Broadcast	English	Illegal Crossings Migrant Surges

⁴⁰ Some comments were unexpectedly deleted throughout the research timeline.

				SB4 Migrant Services Law/Policy
KTSM	Photo Video Broadcast Clips	Camera Crew Staff Photographers Broadcast Reposted Content	English	Illegal Crossings Migrant Surges SB4 Stash Sites Smuggling Mar. 21 "Riot" Border Security Military Action Violence Trespassing Migrant Rescues Law/Policy
KFOX	Photo Video Broadcast Clips	Staff Photographers Broadcast Reposted Content	English	Migrant Surges Migrant Services Smuggling Stash Sites Hiding Migrant Rescues
El Paso Times	Photo Video Headlines	Staff Photographers	English Spanish	Migrant Surges Community Action CBP Narratives Mar. 21 "Riot" Border Security Military Action Law/Policy SB4 Migrant Deaths Migrant Narratives Crossings Data Stash Sites 2024 Election
El Paso Matters	Headlines Video	Staff Photographers	English	Migrant Services Mar. 21 "Riot" Migrant Narratives SB4 Migrant Deaths Migrant Surges Law/Policy Community Action
FitFam El Paso	Video Headlines Photo Screenshots	User-submitted Reposted Content	English	Smuggling Law/Policy Border Security Apprehensions Illegal Crossings Migrant Services Migrant Surges SB4

				Mar. 21 “Riot” Community Action Military Action Violence Migrant Deaths
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Illegal Crossings: subjects illegally crossed the border through fences, storm drains, etc.

SB4: the enforcement and discontinuation of Texas Senate Bill 4.⁴¹

Migrant Services: shelters and transportation services.

Law/Policy: updates and information about immigration laws, policy, and rules.

Stash Sites: discoveries of stash houses and vehicles hosting migrants.

Smuggling: subjects are arrested for (or attempting to) smuggling migrants into El Paso.

Mar. 21 “Riot”: a large group of migrants gathering at the El Paso-Juárez border on March 21, 2024, which led to mass arrests. Includes dismissed riot cases.

Border Security: enhanced border security, such as vehicle searches and surveillance blimps.

Military Action: military presence at the border, including the National Guard.

Violence: attempted murders and fights involving migrants.

Trespassing: migrants trespassing El Paso homes and schools.

Migrant Rescues: first responders saving migrants from drownings, dehydration, injury, etc.

Hiding: migrants found hiding in river banks, vehicles, storm drains, etc.

Community Action: protests or providing migrant resources and support.

CBP Narratives: Customs & Border Patrol agents’ involvement in the migrant situation.

Migrant Deaths: migrant deaths from travel, detention center fires, etc.

Migrant Narratives: profiles focusing on migrants’ experiences while immigrating.

⁴¹ This bill prohibits “sanctuary cities” that protect undocumented people from prosecution (Austin: Texas Legislature Online, 2017).

Crossings Data: updates on border crossing rates into the United States.

2024 Election: presidential candidates and their plans for addressing the migrant situation.

Apprehensions: CBP agents arresting migrants.

Results

Using the categories, sub-theme codebook, and the WordCloud software, recurring discussion themes were identified. WordCloud identified the top ten most recurring words and provided the number of times each word was repeated. This was done for each profile.

To provide insight into how keywords and sub-themes appeared in analyzed comment sections, some examples were randomly selected and put into the tables below.

STMs & Recurring Words by Profile, according to WordCloud

Figure 2: KIVA

Theme (STM)	Distinctive Words (via WordClouds)	Examples
Provocative Aggression Reactive Aggression Blame	Border (19): Demands to close the U.S.-Mex border; blaming the Biden Administration for border policies.	"CLOSE OUR BORDERS NOW!!!" "TRUMP 2024...CLOSE THE BORDER" "Quit saying BIPARTISAN close the dam border NOW" "There should be no other discussion but "close the border." USA 1st and then talk about other dills. 915 LEXIT -> Voting Trump 2024" "This wouldn't of had to happen if our commander in chief and mayorkas would enforce laws and do the job they are being paid for. Even more Mrs. Harris since.the border was put as her task."
Rebuttal Reactive Aggression	Law (11): Discussing border policy and law; encouraging migrants to follow the law;	"They are unlawful trespassing our borders why should we pay for it if we don't help our

	mentions of law enforcement.	veterans? Time to say no more" "So you make this about skin color, not about the actual subject matter of people that are breaking the law and it now being able to be better enforced??" "Legal immigration, I am a first gen from Mexico myself and support this law! I came in the right way as did a bunch of others, we don't like line cutting cheats!"
Provocative Aggression	Send (6), Back (9), Deport (6): Advocating to deport migrants Illegals (7): Referring to those who immigrate illegally, including migrants; "correcting" publications who refer to subjects as "migrants."	"Can't fix roads, but there \$\$ for the migrants.. send them back." "If your not Mexican go back" "Send them back" "Deport all illegals!" "Stop the migrants, deport them, send them back please!!!" "You said it wrong their Illegals"
Reactive Aggression Blame Rebuttal Economic	Bill (5): Discussing border-related bills. Money (5): Criticism of how taxes fund migrant resources; concerns about government spending.	"+89 Billion that doesn't go to the border on a border bill. All that money gives overseas. NO ONE should support this "border bill"." "i think it was the GOP who wrote the border bill and then stopped it from passing so they can use the border issue to try help your daddy and their daddy Trump get elected" "No more taxes money for migrants." "Now all these ppl coming in with open doors and giving them money when some of us have had to go through process, time and lots of money to be here."
Reactive Aggression	Good (6): Praise for government or Border Patrol action.	"Good" "Good, who knows who's lurking around to cause harm or damage."
	People (8): No significant pattern found; used to reference subjects in arguments.	"Immigrants crossing and lawyers taking money from people fixing papers the right way" "So you make this about skin color, not about the actual subject matter of people that are breaking the law and it now being able to be better

		enforced??” “Astounding to me on how many people are against illegals as if this country wasnt formed by immigrants”
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Figure 3: KTSM

Theme (STM)	Distinctive Words (via WordClouds)	Examples
Reactive Aggression Blame Rebuttal Materialism	People (46): No significant pattern found; used to reference subjects in arguments.	“people want everything handed to them instead of earning it.” “Are the people who voted for this administration happy?” “we let random people into the country all the time, only difference is they have money.” “Like if that is gonna stop these people.”
Blame Reactive Aggression Narrative	Border (29): Blaming the Biden Administration and its border policies; encouragement to close the U.S.-Mexico border; praise for Border Patrol action or urge for more BP action; discussing the impact of the migrant situation on El Paso schools next to ports of entry.	“Border patrol and national guard need freedom in opening fire” “So when are people going to see the immigrant crisis is putting the kids on all border schools.” “Sh’t I know a few Bowie hs grads that became border patrol agents because that craziness is wack. Not acceptable there or anywhere else” “God bless our border patrol. May they all come home safe.” “Coming to a community near you thanks to your friendly Congresswoman and her local puppets and the #bidenborderinvasion #bidenbordercrisis”
Provocative Aggression Narrative Rebuttal	Back (17): Advocating for deporting migrants. Illegal (18): Referring to migrants as “illegal immigrants” or “correcting” publications who refer to subjects as “migrants.” Right way (22): Insisting migrants enter the U.S. legally. Immigrants (19): Referring to subjects, regardless of immigration status, to support an	“Hold the line! You have support out here!!! Push them back!!” “They need to take a train ride back home.” “Their sill illegal” “If they’re illegal they shouldn’t be here, sorry!!” “you come in to this great country the right way. End of fucking story.” “My parents did everything the

	argument.	right way.” “Wherever I go there are immigrants, panhandling including panhandling inside my local Walmart where I’ve been approached by eastern European immigrants and others from south America.” “This defeats the purpose of us legal immigrants who took our families decades to get US Citizenship. These ppl are getting a free pass geez”
Blame Reactive Aggression	Biden (20): Criticizing Biden’s policies and actions.	“Go Joe Biden.. you have more blood on your hands old man!!” “Biden’s border crisis continues” “Imagine what Biden-Harris could have done 3 years before they actually did.” “Can we do a recall and get Biden out of here early?”
Reactive Aggression Questioning	Country (25): Advocating for legal immigration into the U.S.; questioning how the publisher frames subjects of a story. National (19): Discussing national security; praise for the National Guard’s presence at the border	“INVADING a country ILLEGALLY is no different.” “Why is the media only putting the "supposably innocent immigrants" welfare as a concern?” “they have the right to do it filling the right paper work. Not invading a country illegally!!” “Great job to our national security” “Thank you national guard” “Why don’t you guys show the real footage?! Just trying to make our national guardsmen look like the bad guy. GO SEE THE VIDEOS AT @therealfitfamelpaso”
Reactive Aggression Economic Provocative Aggression	Good (17): Praise for government or Border Patrol action.	“Good job” “GOOD.” “Finally our taxpayer money going to good use. It’s not an invasion until you see ac-130s bringing troops” “Good let’s do more of this !”

Figure 4: KFOX

Theme (STM)	Distinctive Words (via WordClouds)	Examples
Sympathy Blame Materialism Reactive Aggression	People (19): Support and sympathy for migrant stories; used to reference subjects in arguments.	"They should use it for veterans or homeless people trying to better themselves" "Why did they come here with no plane? Oh yeah, the place is to come to U.S.A. and live off the government! US, THE PEOPLE! Veronica Escobar, come for constituents..." "aren't migrants also people trying to better themselves??"
Reactive Aggression Provocative Aggression Blame Rebuttal Materialism	Back (12): Advocating for deporting migrants; actions. Country (11): Criticizing government action. American (8): Referring to American citizens or Native Americans to support an argument.	"Send them back!" "So DT was right!!! Is coming back" "New danger in stash houses, as back then a stash house had little to one or two individuals coming in and out acting normal." "So...we're gonna go back to taking care of the U.S.A? Nice!!" "Our borders are starting and country honestly like middle eastern countries and other countries! Our government/ country is not doing s!!! For us it is NOT OK" "This happens when u vote for that person in the White House. That does nothing for the country" "And if you were born here you're American. You are not an immigrant sorry." "What about the American homeless and the veterans that are cold and need a motel to stay out the cold ?"
Narrative Rebuttal Sympathy Materialism Reactive Aggression	Family (8): Users use personal narratives about their family's immigration status to support their argument. Help (8): Advocating for government actions to help American citizens first; sympathy for migrants who need help.	"oh and my family were founders of the US. The came here close to 400yrs ago." "I already told you, your family, my family and your wife's family, we ALL are legal immigrants, unless you are a NATIVE AMERICAN, whether you like it or not. We have to thank our ancestor who walked the walk"

		for us!" "Give teachers a raise and help citizens in El Paso, how bout that" "there are so many of us who want to help our less fortunate brothers and sisters regardless of the plot of land they were born in." "We need control and help other countries so we won't have these issues honestly they don't want to leave there country!"
Materialism Economic Rebuttal	Money (12): Concerns on where taxpayer or personal expenses play a role in the migrant situation.	"All that money and that's the building? Can u say money laundering" "he's putting the money in the pockets of all of the BILLIONAIRES he has appointed and they will make billions more from TAX CUTS to the rich and the people who voted for Trump will pay large taxes. #fafo" "you're more than welcome to spend your money on them the rest of us shouldn't have to"
Sympathy Rebuttal Narrative Blame Provocative Aggression	Migrants (13): Sympathy for migrant stories; referring to migrants in pro or anti-migrant arguments. Immigrants (9): Sympathy for immigrants; criticizing the Biden Administration for immigration policies.	"Just met an immigrant at the airport. Apparently migrants that get captured in NM are being released and given a cell phone with free airplane ticket to go to Oregon or Minnesota." "oh and America was built on migrants that came over and got processed into the USA." "Joe Biden fault ,he allowed many immigrants to break the law" "ok, so then you're not immigrants but are invaders who came to appropriate of land it wasn't yours. Let's leave it like that." "yall but they immigrants are desperate and will do anything for safe live and it's not even safe here"
Reactive Aggression Provocative Aggression Materialism Economic	Good (17): Praise for government or Border Patrol action; used to describe	"Good lsend them back to their country" "Exactly!!! They don't have good intentions!! But of course that's

	subjects' intentions or migrant resources/programs.	never talked about!" "Another pursuit that the finest DPS agents didn't stop! Lucky no INOCENT citizens were hurt! Keep up the good work good for nothings" "as long as our tax money ain't being wasted or illegals it's all good"
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Figure 5: El Paso Times

Theme (STM)	Distinctive Words (via WordClouds)	Examples
Economic Sympathy Questioning Reactive Aggression	People (153): No significant pattern found; used to reference subjects (often migrants) in an argument.	"WOW!!! The heartless comments from people!!! and with those last names, I was gonna say, I hope you don't have to go through the same ever, but I remembered my sister in law, a naca named gamez, and you know what? you deserve what's coming to you all." "This is such bull! How is it possible that these people come from other countries, get hurt, and get to have several surgeries, and don't have to worry about paying Jack!" "So now it's trumps fault ? Lol smh this is why @therealfitfamelpaso is the only real local source for news in El Paso, people are tired of this biased reporting and headlines" "The wall is there for a reason just like at peoples homes."
Provocative Aggression Rebuttal Questioning Reactive Aggression	Border (92): Calls to action to increase border security; blaming the Biden Administration for increased illegal immigration.	"We need to protectout border....period" "he problem isn't the border wall, the problem is this administrations total failure at securing the border and the million of issues a mass migration causes within this country, and it's impact on its citizens and our pockets." "The wall along the El Paso Juárez border went up during the Obama administration. You're showing your bias

		@elpasotimes” “Biden inherited the border. Nothing here is new. Your Grandma did this in the 70s and never went back. Shut up.” “Secure the border Dems are allowing record sex and drug trafficking as well as costing tax payers 450 BILLION a year.” “When Trump was in office, the border was far more secure and the pathway to citizenship was attainable. You can ask anyone who works in border patrol and they’ll tell you the stark difference between administrations.” “Protect our borders from both domestic and foreign... Go Abbot”
Provocative Aggression Rebuttal Blame Reactive Aggression	Trump (90): Supporting Trump’s presidential campaign; rebuttals about Trump’s border policies from his last term. Biden (60): Blaming Biden for the migrant situation; rebuttals about Biden’s current border policies. Vote (45): Advocating for either Trump or Biden as president; theories that Biden’s open border policy is to bring in more votes for his re-election; responding to the publisher’s poll on whether Trump can secure the Latino vote.	“They always have to blame Trump. Trump 2024” “Guess they should have listened to trump, it’s their fault for trying against the facts.” “Typical libs blaming Trump for everything” “Biden open border is at fault for every one if these deaths! Their blood is on Biden Kamala and Mayorkas hands!!” “Vote Biden out, he caused this.” “The Biden administration really wants to destroy this country.” “VOTE BLUE!!!!” “Vote red, secure our border, make people accountable, lower prices” “Latinos in Texas have been brainwashed so yes Trump will win the Latino vote” “Not whilst Biden is importing millions of votes across the boarder”
Rebuttal Reactive Aggression	Country (68): Advocating for legal immigration; referring to the U.S. in an argument. Texas (57): Criticizing or praising local government action;	“Texas is arguably the best state in the country, and that’s all thanks to being red” “go through the process just as we do when we want to enter another country.” “Come on man there are hard working people in this country that have paid their dues. For

		these people just to come and get hand outs nah son it don't t work like that." "Migrants entering illegally. Smh. Supreme Court was on Texas side. That the federal level. Texas have the right to defend and protect the state from the border." "You ever notice everyone around abbott is white. Texas is full of minorities with no representation!!!!"
Reactive Aggression Provocative Aggression Materialism	Right (58): No significant pattern; discussing civil and human rights; advocating for the "right way" to immigrate legally. Law (44): Praise and criticism of local and federal immigration law.	"We have a Constitution the abide for basic human rights regardless which country you came from. Abbott the dictator can not rewrite the Constitution of America" "Deport them all every single one of them. They are not migrants they're illegal immigrants get it right people enough is enough to get them out of here." "What civil rights??? These freeloaders expect free housing, free food, free healthcare and much more." "How about doing it the right ? Money should go to our citizens like our homeless and our veterans" "Dear Feds, Sue away! Let's keep this law and enforce it to the maximum. As a Texan I proudly support it. At least our Governor is doing something about this issue." "Wait till they at the front door of our homes and then I'm sure ppl will start wanting the law to be in effect ." "He dismissed the cases because the migrants will be facing federal charges. The Texas law is problematic. Same result less of a mess."
Economic Materialism Reactive Aggression	Money (45): Criticizing where taxpayer and government money goes toward in regards to the migrant situation.	"This not helping, instead of jailing and using tax payers money and crowding jails, why not just deport them assist them getting a plane back, cheaper

		that charging with what they want pay or using our enforcement and jail” “Coming with no money for rent or groceries and no job lined up is just foolish.” “They are already violating them... spending tax payer money on people who dont belong here... dahhhh” “Gotta fill those prisons up!! Your tax money down the drain.” “Money should go to our citizens like our homeless and our veterans” “Money money money. Close the border!”
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Figure 6: El Paso Matters

Theme (STM)	Distinctive Words (via WordClouds)	Examples
Reactive Aggression Rebuttal	People (56): No significant pattern found; used to reference subjects (often migrants) in an argument.	“Abbott is married to a Hispanic woman. He has zero ill will towards people of color.” “We have a problem when over 16 million people have crossed the border illegally and we have no idea who’s crossing over, and you better believe it’s not just our paisas, some of who’s pouring over are enemies.” “What a poor judgment of you saying “poor people”. Illegal aliens are breaking the law and yes u will be scared too when something happens to your family. Good luck in ur “DO NOT BE AFRAID” march.” “The district can’t even afford to have enough people managing the traffic, how will they protect our children from the potential dangers of the migrant shelter?”
Provocative Aggression Reactive Aggression Rebuttal	Border (41): Calls to action to close the border; discussing open-border policies.	“Close the border... problem solved” “just as unlawful as crossing the border illegally. But I guess we pick and choose what laws are beneficial on an individual basis.”

		"If leftists want open borders the no-whites will have to be questioned. Why? Whites /Europeans aren't crashing the border by the millions in 2023. How else would anyone tell you apart from illegals. Keep voting Democrat tho." "Illegal aliens don't have constitutional rights when breaking the law. Governor Abbott did what he had to do to keep this influx of illegals overflowing our borders."
Blame Materialism Reactive Aggression Rebuttal Sympathy	Illegal (32): Describing migrants' immigration status; discussing migrant resources. Law (41): Discussing how new immigration laws would impact the community; advocating for legal immigration. Rights (24): Concerns about SB4 violating civil rights.	"What's being done for our homeless veterans and mentally ill? Where are they staying if those shelters are being used for illegal migrants?" "This means more illegal crossings, more people risking their lives jumping the border, more people falling victims to human traffickers because they won't be able to do it the legal way that sooo many U.S citizens want them to do it." "Any democrats volunteering to put up their house properties for bond. So your illegal immigrants can be out in free the next day." "Illegal means illegal" "racial profiling is against the law. Not sure where you got that from" "Maybe they stop breaking the laws and follow directions when they are in someone else's facility. The f\$&k around and found out." "Just enforce the damn law jeez" "Not everything signed into law is constitutional. It's not about laws being broken, it's about trampling over civil rights." "That's the point of being in this country, right? Having certain rights and freedoms? Not being surveilled and consequently racially profiled/discriminated against." "Illegal aliens don't have constitutional rights when breaking the law."

Reactive Aggression Blame Rebuttal	Texas (27): Criticism or praise for local government action.	"Nobody in Texas benefits from illegal migration besides the politicians buying up land and property being used for Migrant Mitigation Centers." "States rights is what I'm hearing? So is Texas finally gonna stop to meddle with the affairs of people visiting other states for health care?" "Soy Hispano nacido en Texas y apoyo a el Gobernador Abbott y a esta ley! Countries need borders is nog about hate or racism is about enforcing the laws, whatever happened to legal migration?" "Fortunately blue states like California don't mind using tax dollars to give them all free health care so they should be grateful to Texas for financing their trip to states like New York and California." "Why should Texas citizens be burdened with taking care of migrants...NEW YORK wanted them. They can keep them and take care of them. Don't blame TEXAS."
Narrative Economic Blame Rebuttal	Immigration (26): Discussing how immigration policy impacts the community; criticizing "unfair" law enforcement. Asylum (25): Questioning whether migrants are seeking asylum; discussing asylum policy.	"Growing up in El Paso in the 70's anytime we went to CD Juárez to shop or visit family and friends upon our return we would be hazzaled by the Immigration agents. We were teens and the only ID we had was our high school ID and some had a driver's license, but we were American Citizens. Now is a worry and concern? Illegal aliens don't have any American issued documents and get a free pass." "Such a pissing contest. Let's waste more money while complaining about how much immigration costs us." "Pos si, with what's happening now...it was an embarrassment of the immigration system given the millions Brandon has let in carte blanche" "If it were asylum they would

		have stopped in the first country that they entered. Why didn't they seek asylum in Panama or Costa Rica? Because they are economic migrants and not asylum seekers." "And asylum can be seeked at any location, at any time. The only time crossing is "illegal" is if they go through that tunnel and NEVER ask for asylum. So yes, as long as they get on america soil and ask for asylum its legal, even if they do that through a tunnel or jumping a fence" "As far as the "illegally", you sound way too smart to not understand that 99% of these cases ARE NOT true asylum cases, that the only thing that is happening is that, the immigration system is being flooded."
Provocative Aggression Rebuttal Reactive Aggression	Stop (24): No significant pattern found; calls to action regarding the migrant situation.	"Undocumented immigrants" stop with the euphemisms, they are illegal." "Stop spreading misinformation. He's doing his job" "Stop fear mongering. They would be going to be stopping those who they literally would be walking over because they are seeing them commit a crime. Our border issue needs control." "At one point you have to put a stop to this"

Figure 7: FitFam El Paso

Theme (STM)	Distinctive Words (via WordClouds)	Examples
Blame Reactive Aggression Economic Provocative Aggression	People (862): No significant pattern found; used to address certain groups to support an argument.	"And people still voted Democrat." "Why don't you people start blaming the illegals & smugglers instead of law enforcement??" "Escobar and the people just voted back in are doing this" "Cartels will always find a way to cross them over so at this point"

		just make it easy for people to get their citizenship so they don't have to illegally cross" "The worst part is these people are being paid to cross our border to be paid to live here. We the people are paying for this too." "Democrats or Republicans neither have control of the boarder... people have been coming into the US for years and years. They will continue coming no matter what story's you hear or see!" "VOTE REPUBLICAN... Trump had executive orders in place to send people back the their country of origin..."
Blame Provocative Reaction Reactive Aggression Rebuttal	Border (436): Discussing the migrant situation in El Paso; calls to action to close the border. Country (361): Referring to the United States; national security concerns over the migrant situation; referring to migrants' countries of origin.	"This is why we need the borders closed" "Why would Border Patrol and DPS chase "migrants"?? Are you real sure these weren't illegal aliens???" "They will be out in the streets today with permits , waste of border patrol time" "Harris, she will not close the border , she opened it on purpose! It will be even more unlivable and scary here." "Im judging and no sympathy Illegally have distorted our country and all I see here at the border are illegal men coming into this country" "They are most likely criminals who can't come through the easy way and need to sneak into our country. They don't want to walk across and get onto a b.p bus and be vetted because they would be deported." "The PD is ran by dems that want these illegals to flood our streets. Dps is ran by a red-blooded American who can't stand to watch his state and country get over run by these illegals" "they decided the money was more important than their country. Strip them if their

		citizenship and boot them out. Consequences for their actions"
Reactive Aggression Provocative Aggression Sympathy Rebuttal Economic Materialism	Immigrants (230): Discussing immigration status; how the migrant situation affects the community. Illegal (227): Discussing migrant resources; identifying migrants' immigration status.	"Send all their asses back! Build the damn wall, and don't let them invade! Idc if this country was made thru immigrants, it's THE PROCESS OF those immigrants from which our ancestors came! GET THE RIGHT DAMN PAPERS! IF U CANT AFFORD, TOO DAMN BAD!" "is a big difference between legal and illegal immigrants" "The Social Security Administration estimated in 2010, for example, that such immigrants contribute \$12 billion per year more to the Social Security system than they take out, he noted." "You just like the guy up top "we're all immigrants", im not talking about the 1500,1600,1700s. Im talking about now. You not citizen/resident. Gotta send ya ass back. Stop making those irrelevant arguments." "I'm not worried about immigrants trust me ik immigrants benefit this country more than hurt it, but recently there has been waaay to many coming in, there is a crisis sadly. I mean look at the hotel downtown..." "Funny way of saying illegal immigrant" "humans can't be illegal. This term is used for objects, like weapons or substances or actions." "Illegals are taking my benefits! Meanwhile GOP constantly makes cuts to social welfare programs" "lol I'm an illegal and so are my parents can you tell me where to find this free house??"
Blame Provocative Aggression Reactive Aggression	Trump (366): Advocating for Trump's re-election; discussing	"most of us voted for Trump since last election we weren't idiots picking sleepy Joe just

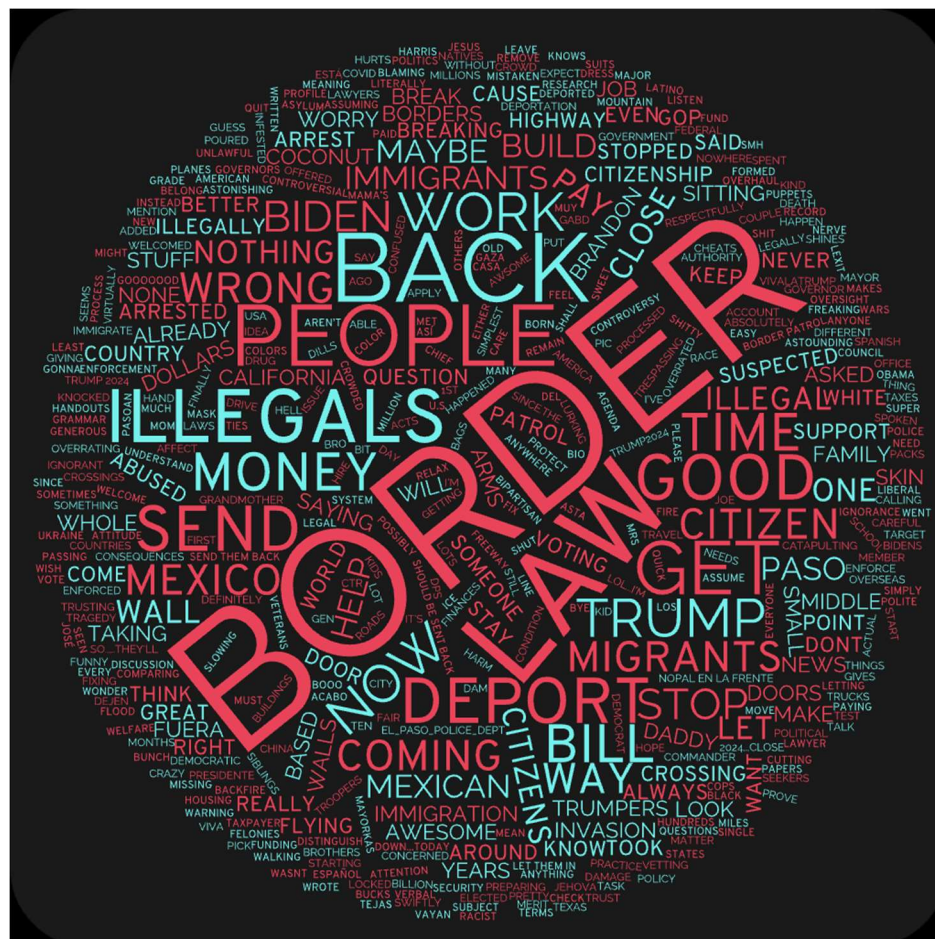
	Trump's actions from his last term. Biden (220): Blaming Biden for the migrant situation; discussing Biden's actions while in office.	have to pay the consequences of ppl that don't do research for politics" "Remember democrats and republicans came to an agreement to increase funding but TRUMP TOLD REPUBLICANS TO VOTE AGAINST IT SO BIDEN DOESNT GET A WIN BEFORE THE ELECTION" "Trump 2024 vote" "Now I wanna vote trump so bad." "When trump was in office, he didn't do shit!" "Biden is already loving they neighbors with his broken Border policies" "If only Biden, Mayorkas & Veronica Escobar had the balones to enforce the law." "We can thank our Cadaver and Chief Biden for this...." "“Nuestros derechos” Biden really made them believe they're entitled to rights without having citizenship #letsgoBrandon"
Provocative Aggression Reactive Aggression Irrelevant	Right (366): Advocating for legal immigration; discussing civil rights; political affiliation; filler words. Back (298): Advocating for deporting migrants; advocating for Trump's re-election; filler words.	"Do it the RIGHT WAY!! Like everyone else has been doing it for YEARS!" "They have the right to go to prison like everyone that breaks the law and attacks government officials" "honestly, a lot of these people come from very religious and right leaning countries with conservative views" "the people that defend the illegals the border patrol are human too and have EVERY RIGHT TO DEFEND THEMSELVES" "For the past decade Democrats have been trying to do away with voter id laws. Let me say this rn I'm not left or right leaning." "you are right cus your son is a lazy ass" "Good and did they send them back to where they belong??!!!" "We need Trump back asap!!" "If these people get a smidge of

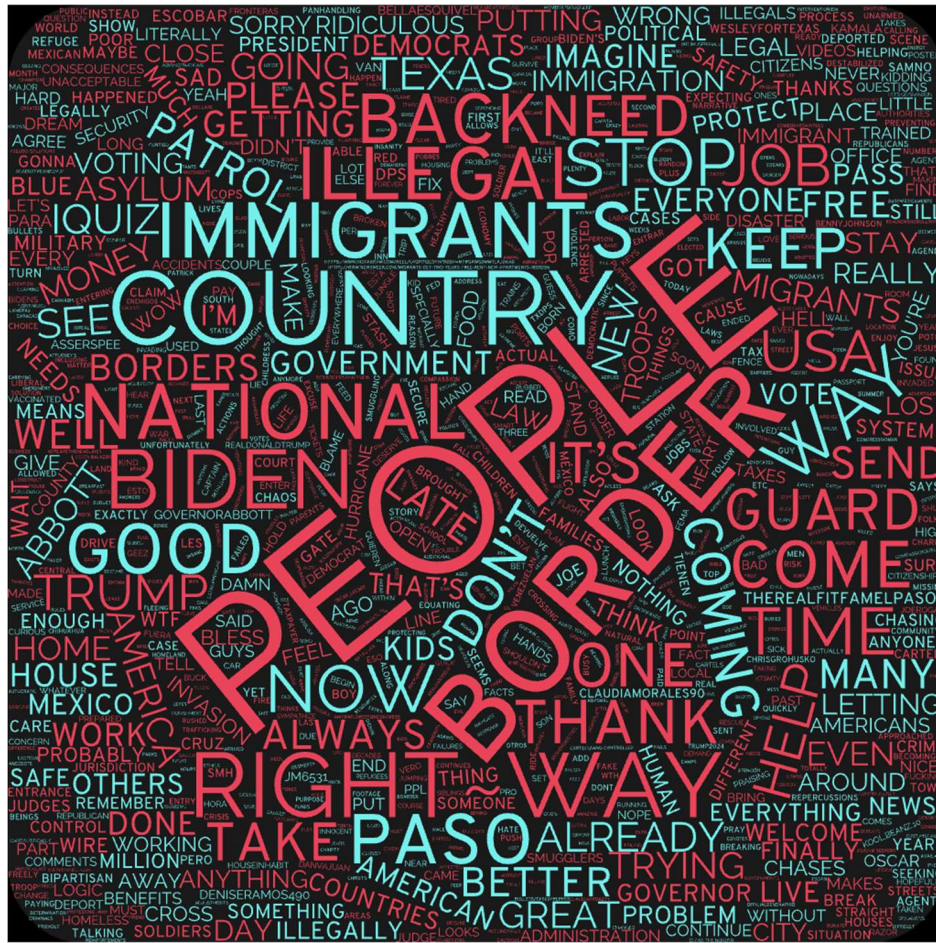
		support, there will be less "criminal" behaviour (like stealing to eat), and a better willingness for them to give back to society." "Sure, let's bring back a dictator who hates hispanics." "You wanted to let them in. Now you get to sit back and enjoy the fruits of your labor."
Reactive Aggression Provocative Aggression	Good (230): Praise for DPS, Border Patrol, and government action.	"Ty Good for trump" "Good job State Troopers, stay safe" "Literally drove past them when they were still in pursuit good job boys" "Good send@them all back lol" "Good job BP!! Keep up the good work"

Word Clouds of the Most Recurring Words by Profile

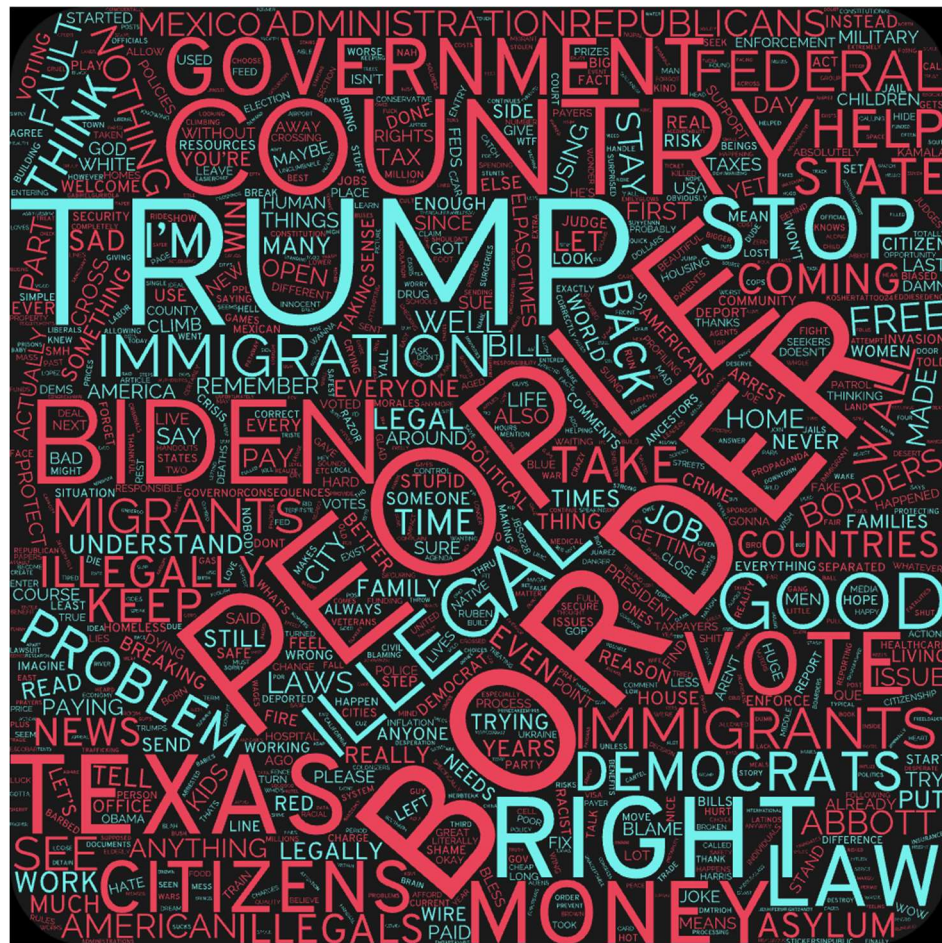
Using the WordClouds software, I constructed visual depictions of the most-recurring words found in each profile's comment section. These word clouds are specific to a particular content area (migrant-related news) and do not reflect profiles' audience reaction to its general content.

KVIA









El Paso Matters



The table below summarizes the quantitative results of recurring keywords and sentiments across all pages. In the second column, Sub-Themes by Popularity, concern sub-themes are ranked by popularity for each page. The number listed after the sub-theme represents the amount of comments that met its definition. In the third column, Top 10 Words, the most-recurring keywords are listed based on the data gathered by the WordCloud software. The number following the keyword represents how much the word is repeated.

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comment sections were identified, along with how often each word appeared. In addition, the tool calculated the frequency of each sub-theme across the profiles analyzed. As shown in the table below, the Rebuttal sub-theme was the most dominant. This suggests that a large portion of user engagement took the form of direct exchanges — users actively replied to one another, and shared information. These conversations indicate that comment sections serve as informal forums for public dialogue, especially on polarizing topics like immigration. Additionally, these findings showcase how FitFam’s audience engagement rate significantly outperformed the other profiles.

Figure 8: Top Sentiments and Sub-Themes by Profile

Profile	Sub-Themes by Popularity	Top 10 Words (via WordCloud)
	The data in this column represents how many comments (from each profile) within the concern category reflected each sub-theme	The data in this column represents how often comments (from each profile) used certain words
KVIA (117 comments analyzed)	Rebuttal - 10 Narrative - 5 Jokes/Snark - 4 Irrelevant - 3 Economic - 3 Sympathy - 2 Materialism - 1 Questioning - 1	1. Border (19) 2. Law (11) 3. Back (9) 4. People (8) 5. Illegals (7) 6. Deport (6) 7. Good (6) 8. Send (6) 9. Bill (5) 10. Money (5)
KTSM (526 comments analyzed)	Rebuttal - 36 Jokes/Snark - 28 Materialism - 19 Irrelevant - 17 Questioning - 16 Sympathy - 14 Economic - 12 Narrative - 8	1. People (46) 2. Border (29) 3. Country (25) 4. Right way (22) 5. Biden (20) 6. Immigrants (19) 7. National (19) 8. Illegal (18) 9. Back (17) 10. Good (17)

KFOX (238 comments analyzed)	Irrelevant - 17 Jokes/Snark - 15 Materialism - 12 Sympathy - 11 Rebuttal - 10 Questioning - 9 Economic - 8 Narrative - 8	1. People (19) 2. Good (17) 3. Migrants (13) 4. Back (12) 5. Money (12) 6. Country (11) 7. Immigrants (9) 8. American (8) 9. Family (8) 10. Help (8)
El Paso Times (1,298 comments analyzed)	Rebuttal - 84 Questioning - 73 Jokes/Snark - 62 Sympathy - 47 Economic - 40 Materialism - 38 Narrative - 16 Irrelevant - 12	1. People (153) 2. Border (92) 3. Trump (90) 4. Country (68) 5. Biden (60) 6. Right (58) 7. Texas (57) 8. Money (45) 9. Vote (45) 10. Law (44)
El Paso Matters (375 comments analyzed)	Rebuttal - 68 Jokes/Snark - 32 Irrelevant - 25 Materialism - 10 Narrative - 9 Economic - 7 Sympathy - 5 Questioning - 3	1. People (56) 2. Border (41) 3. Law (41) 4. Illegal (32) 5. Texas (27) 6. Immigration (26) 7. Asylum (25) 8. Rights (24) 9. Stop (24)
FitFam El Paso (6,400 comments analyzed)	Rebuttal - 864 Irrelevant - 764 Jokes/Snark - 418 Materialism - 310 Sympathy - 247 Narrative - 188 Economic - 168 Questioning - 34	1. People (862) 2. Border (436) 3. Country (361) 4. Right (366) 5. Trump (366) 6. Back (298) 7. Immigrants (230) 8. Good (230) 9. Illegal (227) 10. Biden (220)

Across all profiles the most recurring concern was the Rebuttal sub-theme, except for KFOX (had the Irrelevant sub-theme). Rebuttals consisted of users interacting with each other in the comment section, often exchanging factual information or sharing political beliefs. The

Rebuttal sub-theme is a prime example of how comment sections serve as an effective space for political discourse. Users are able to share links to sources they refer to in their argument (such as links to news articles), have one-on-one conversations with specific users through comment threads, and observe multiple perspectives on immigration topics as a spectator. Through rebuttals, users agreed, challenged, and added new information. Note that evidence offered in these comments were not proven to be reliable, as the analysis focused on the *intention* of the comment.

While Rebuttal focused on comments that offered evidence (reliable or not), the Narrative sub-theme focused on personal experiences. For example, some Rebuttal comments shared links to news articles or statistics of people who cross the border without proper documentation. Narrative comments share “I” statements to prove their point. Narratives are personal testimonies shared by a user and include testimonies witnessed by a friend or family member. For example, a common Narrative under FitFam’s comment sections was similar to the following: “My parents did it legally. Those kids will grow up and still be illegal. Dreamer’s that’s not good for them,” and, “Meanwhile, I been here for most of my life, 17 years out of 22 and they don’t want to do shit to help me fix my citizenship even though my dad is an American citizen.”⁴² Users used Narratives to offer anecdotal evidence to support their argument on the migrant situation, most of which were anti-migrant. By arguing that legal immigration benefited their lives, they believe migrants are less deserving of benefits or entry into the United States because of the user’s struggles to immigrate legally. Some users also shared their interactions with migrants in the El Paso area. These comments framed migrants in a negative light. One

⁴² From a FitFam post about a “caravan of at least 6,000 migrants continues to make its way to the southern border of the United States, with many headed to El Paso.

comment said, “I was asked for TEN BUCKS by a couple of migrants. I instead offered some work and they took off as if I was the black death.”⁴³ Another said, “Meanwhile off Emory [Rd] in west El Paso, illegals are walking the ditches behind the houses and breaking into houses.”⁴⁴ These testimonies serve to validate users’ perspectives, reinforcing anti-migrant sentiments by portraying migrants as undeserving or even threatening. Through lived experiences, users use anecdotal evidence to support their arguments about the migrant situation and its impact on the El Paso community.

Following Rebuttal, the second-most recurring sub-theme consisted of Jokes/Snark. These comments had sarcastic or unserious tones regarding the migrant situation. For example, KTSM posted a story about police in Juárez, Mexico, investigating a Venezuelan migrant’s assault. KTSM said Juárez police “are waiting for a Venezuelan migrant to recover from injuries to ask who assaulted him, wrapped him in a blanket and left him near the Rio Grande, assuming he was dead.” One user commented: “And now they gonna ask ‘asilo de protection,’” or asylum. In another post by KFOX, a user commented: “Everyone cheering like the money is going to their pockets” under a story about El Paso County’s Migrant Support Services’ closure due to uncertain funding. Throughout similar Jokes/Snark comments, users joke about taking action against migrants (“Great, thanks for the info. Lemme call ICE”).⁴⁵ Others use sarcasm to criticize institutional action related to the migrant situation (“Border Patrol = Uber”).⁴⁶

⁴³ From a KVIA post about City Council voting against declaring a state of emergency in El Paso regarding migrant services.

⁴⁴ From an El Paso Matters post with the headline “El Paso County joins ACLU in lawsuit challenging SB 4.”

⁴⁵ From a FitFam post, which was a repost of a KTSM article titled “Thousands of migrants headed to El Paso”

⁴⁶ From a KVIA post about CBP agents encountering “several migrants at the border wall.”

The third most recurring Concern varied between profiles. Interestingly, the Questioning sub-theme consisted of critiques on content quality. The El Paso Times received the most criticism for its reporting, with users frequently accusing the paper for having a left-leaning bias. On a story titled “After record-breaking years, migrant crossings plunge at US-Mexico border,” users commented critiques including: “Lies,” “Fake news again,” “Reported for false news,” “El Paso pushing the blue agenda,” “I’ll take s*** that hasn’t happened for \$5,000.” On other pages, users shared that they heard about featured migrant stories from FitFam first. For example, on a KTSM post covering the March 21st riot, a user commented: “Why don’t you guys show the real footage?! Just trying to make our national guardsmen look like the bad guy. GO SEE THE VIDEOS AT @therealfitfamelpaso.” Similar comments supporting FitFam over verified local news sources reinforce users’ preference to learn about news from non-journalists. As aforementioned, El Paso users often favor FitFam for its genuine reputation, especially in a time of news uncertainty on a politically controversial topic.

The Materialism and Economic sub-themes both collected comments with direct community concerns. Materialism-concerned comments often mentioned unfair resource distribution. Most comments under this sub-theme criticized charities and institutions providing housing, money, transportation, and cell phones for migrants at no cost. Furthermore, these comments framed migrants as undeserving and argued other U.S. citizens in crisis, such as houseless people and veterans, should receive those resources instead. For instance, a user commented, “Right on that’s what I like to hear all that aid that could go towards our wounded vets that are homeless or the people that live here that can’t afford health care need that more.”⁴⁷ Some comments also used the materialism argument to passive-aggressively diminish users who

⁴⁷ From a post by KFOX about the closure of the El Paso Migrant Support Services Center.

expressed sympathy for migrants. Comments, such as “It appears to me that you’re more than willing to give up space in your house for them. So how many are you housing,” push a rhetoric that migrants literally take up space in our community at the expense of U.S. citizens. To the majority of users, one group – legal citizens – are more deserving than the other – migrants.

A similar rhetoric is found in economically-concerned comments. Under this sub-theme, most users criticize how institutions use taxes to execute actions against the migrant situation. A common complaint is the distribution of medical care to migrants through taxpayer money. On a story by KTSM covering a rescued injured migrant, who fell from the top of the border wall, a user commented, “Our friggin tax dollars hard at work...” Like materialistic comments, economically concerned comments argued that revenue from taxes should be redistributed to citizens in need, as expressed by a user who said, “Guess who’s paying for them to have shelter, food, wifi etc?? Us!! But we don’t get no tax breaks! Our veterans that are homeless don’t get this kind of help!”⁴⁸

Lastly, the only sub-theme with majority pro-migrant sentiments was Sympathy. Sympathetic comments offer empathetic, emotionally-driven input to the migrant situation. Some comments argue that migrants come from situations out of their control and deserve the help they receive. Others argue that migrants greatly contribute to the U.S. economy. A common pattern in sympathetic comments include calling out a lack of compassion in comment sections about migrant news. Interestingly, while all profiles have bilingual comments, sympathetic comments had more Spanish than other sub-themes. For example: “Comments rude af. La gente necesita mas compasión. Es todo por un sueño. Por el simple valor que le a puesto la humanidad e

⁴⁸ From a post by FitFam on the “seemingly never-ending border crisis.”

gobierno a las fronteras.” (Translation: “People need more compassion. It’s all for a dream. For simply the value that humanity and the government has put on borders”).⁴⁹ However, as aforementioned, comments expressing sympathy were sometimes met with a materialistic user passive-aggressively, often prompting sympathetic users to take action for their concerns. Similar to the previous example, these passive-aggressive comments suggested that sympathetic users share their address to house migrants.

⁴⁹ From a post by FitFam about a “caravan of at least 6,000 migrants continues to make its way to the southern border of the United States, with many headed to El Paso.

Discussion

This thesis is the first of its kind. It's a case study showcasing the impact of a social media-driven shift in media consumption habits. As people learn news from internet personalities, newsrooms are losing audience retention. Social media is a powerful platform that provides tools for multimedia journalism.

The data and analysis do not provide concrete answers as to *why* users are gravitating toward influencers and internet personalities for news. They also cannot provide answers to *how* newsrooms can adapt to this shift. Overall, they can generate discussion and research toward helping newsrooms optimize techniques of lifestyle-based pages to rebuild audiences and engagement.

El Paso is one of the busiest border cities in the United States. Immigration politics was one of the driving points of the 2024 presidential election, during which El Paso was frequently used as an example. From the analysis, it's clear that the majority of users used comment sections as a platform to express community concerns relating to the migrant crisis. Rebuttal was the most common sub-theme, where users expressed their political affiliations, insight, and feelings about the migrant situation affecting El Paso. Furthermore, analyzing how users engage with migrant news in El Paso can help newsrooms identify news topics that drive engagement. FitFam grew its audience and engagement through unusual content — bar fights, car chases, etc. — which encouraged users to share their thoughts through comments. FitFam also grew by sharing content captured by followers. User-submitted content shaped FitFam's "raw" reputation that many of its followers praise. Upholding a "raw" reputation naturally attracts audience trust, which is likely a contributing factor to the shift in media consumption.

The prevalence of the rebuttal sub-theme supports the idea that comment sections serve as a platform for users to discuss immigration law and policy. Furthermore, comment sections are outlets for information sharing. The more users engage with comment sections, the more social media algorithms will favor the publisher’s profile — hence why FitFam outperformed the other profiles. Furthermore, FitFam’s content often contained more unusual and extreme images of migrants. Such images include arrests, military presence preparing barbed wire at the border, and migrants hiding in storm drains. FitFam carries a shock factor when it produces content, which is exactly how it went viral in the first place. Today, this has transformed FitFam’s audience from seeking entertainment to finding truthful, “shocking” news other organizations fail to share at the same speed. When users see FitFam’s username on their feed, they likely expect an unusual story.



A CBP Agent apprehends two migrants found trespassing in an El Paso home. Posted by FitFam, video source not mentioned.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ From a FitFam post consisting of multiple videos of the migrant situation around El Paso. Captioned “Border Update.”

Limitations

This thesis is a social media-based content analysis. Algorithms are a crucial key to understanding engagement rates. These findings can guide researchers into future projects that dedicate more quantitative analysis to understanding the numerical workings of digital content creation. Due to the subjects' analytics being inaccessible, this thesis drew conclusions from public data, including the amount of followers and comments.

Furthermore, the themes and sub-themes created for this project were inspired by recurring patterns from the early stages of data collection. Other researchers may have different ideas for identifying such patterns (i.e., including a “national security” sub-theme). Again, as social media becomes an increasingly powerful tool in the news industry, future researchers may conduct similar, more in-depth studies to unpack similar rhetorics.

All data was collected from Instagram because it was the only social platform where all six profiles are consistently active. Some profiles may have a larger following on other platforms, such as Facebook. Each profile used a mix of content format (vertical video, horizontal broadcast clips, static images, etc.) which could prompt further research on how media format could affect engagement levels. One factor to keep in mind is that not all followers may live in the El Paso/Borderland region. Some users may have moved out of the region and continue to follow the profiles to stay up to date on an old community.

Lastly, this thesis involved over 8,000 comments. Due to the limitations of the IG [Instagram] Comment Exporter tool, many original comments were not included into the study due to formatting issues. Instagram has a feature where users can comment GIFs. The IG Comment Exporter tool could not read such data. The tool did not connect comment threads.

This limited the ability to trace back-and-forth discourse between users unless a username was mentioned.

Conclusion

Largely driven by rebuttals, the majority of users reinforced polarized perspectives on the migrant situation. Users engaged in sharing facts to challenge others' views. Sarcasm was a recurring form of engagement expressing users' defiance towards institutional action towards the migrant situation, often mocking results. Users aggravated by unfavored distribution of resources comment rhetorics that frame migrants receiving resources as undeserving. Materialistic comments often replied to sympathetic comments with negativistic tones, further suggesting that migrants are not worthy of any resources.

FitFam's engagement levels greatly outperformed the other profiles. Because of its social nature, more users interacted with each other through rebuttals. Its popularity led to some users referring to FitFam as a more reliable source, despite its lack of journalistic purpose. On verified news pages, users shared their favor for FitFam's timeliness and transparency. Users expressing their preferences led to the El Paso Times receiving the most criticism for their reporting on the migrant situation.

The shift in media consumption habits in the United States are reflected in these findings. lifestyle-based platforms like FitFam have earned more public trust than traditional news sources. Online political discourse (amongst these profiles) about the migrant situation is largely driven by rebuttals and supporting anti-migrant views.

Local news organizations may consider investing in social media strategy departments and employees to optimize their presence. If users imply their trust in FitFam lies within user-submitted content, news organizations can open opportunities for audiences to share anecdotes or

testimonies. Social media is rapidly expanding power in information sharing. As this media consumption shift favors social and mobile media, it is crucial for newsrooms to plan for adaptation.

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