The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal Volume 16, Number 1, April 2016

Adult Immigrants` Media Usage and Its Function in Host Language Training Opportunities: A Path Analysis

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# **ABSTRACT**

Media promotes to what extent immigrants learn the host language and cultural values. Consequently, the overall aim of this paper is to identify predictors among adult immigrants in language training and its effect on host language training. The participants (n=186)—many of them refugees—were recruited purposefully for the study from one learning centre. In the first part of the analysis, an OLS-regression estimated the effect of age and education on media usage. In the second part of the analysis, the path model was estimated to test if media usage mediated the effect of age and education on host language training. The study confirms previous findings that there is a generation gap between immigrants. The study finds a negative effect of higher education on immigrants' media usage. Furthermore, the study confirms that age and education impacts media usage, and in turn media usage impacts immigrants' host language training.

### INTRODUCTION

Successful economic, social, and civic integration of adult immigrants depend on various individual and contextual factors, but a critical ingredient of immigrants participation in the host country are their language skills and knowledge of cultural values (Adamuti-Trache, 2012). Language and cultural values of the host country are learnt by formal training (e.g. language programmes) and through informal learning (e.g. media). Current studies suggest that media usage helps immigrants to integrate into the new society (Khvorostianov, Elias, & Nimrod, 2012). The news media provide immigrants with topics that can lead to either ice-breakers or in-depth discussions with other people and thus encourage participation. Consequently, the usage of host media functions to facilitate immigrants' host language training and thus their learning about or adapting to the new society. This process has been called 'bridging social capital' by Putnam (2000), and he considers it a prerequisite for sociocultural participation or integration into the host society. Although there is a substantial amount of research available, mostly in form of content analysis and discourse analysis, on ethnic minorities and media, the bulk of it is mostly concerned with the ways in which these ethnic minorities are portrayed in the media, and little effort has been made to identify what predictors can explain adult immigrants in language training media use (see, for example, Woll & Miller, 1987, for a bibliography; Beaudoin & Thorson, 2004; Halse, 2012). Consequently, the first contribution of this study is to identify predictors that can help us to explain media usage among adult immigrants in language training. The second contribution of the present study is to advance the current state of knowledge on immigrants' media usage by modelling how age and education impact media usage, but also how media usage mediates

Swedish language training for immigrants. Consequently, the study does contribute to our understanding of the process of media usage in promoting host language training.

Adult immigrants' media usage is important because media usage affects informal language learning and knowledge about the host culture. Cultural knowledge allows an individual to communicate with neighbours, employers, and colleagues, whereas the growing language competence also increases immigrants' ability to fully participate in Sweden's everyday experience (Carlson, 2002; Sandwall, 2013; Norlund, 2014; Zachrisson, 2014). Therefore one question is what predicts immigrants' media usage. Another question is how media usage can promote opportunities for language training.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: first, I will provide background on language training for adult immigrants in Sweden. Second, I will present the aim of the study. Third, I will review previous research and theories and then state the main predictions of the study. Fourth, I will discuss the variables and method of analysis. Finally, I will present the findings of the study and end with a discussion on the main conclusions.

#### BACKGROUND: LANGUAGE TRAINING FOR IMMIGRANTS IN SWEDEN

In Sweden, adult immigrants get their formal language training at SFI (=Swedish for immigrants). Adult immigrants in Sweden have the right to free basic language tuition up to a level corresponding to 'Level B1' as described in the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe 2001). The goal of the SFI programme, as presented in the SFI syllabus, is to 'provide students with linguistic tools for communication and active participation in everyday situations in society and in their working lives' (Skolfs, 2009, p. 2). The programme should be flexible and organised so as to facilitate the combination of SFI studies and employment, work placement, or other education. The programme is state-funded but it is the responsibility of the different municipalities to provide SFI as part of the municipal adult education programme or to commission private tutors. Since the 1990s, the number of participants in language training has increased, and in 2013 there were more than 113,600 students enrolled in the SFI programme. Most of the students speak Arabic at SFI and their ethnic origins can be traced back to Iraq, Somali, and Syria. Moreover, the majority of the students are between 25 and 39 years old. There are more women than men in immigrant language training (Swedish Agency of Education, 2015). No Swedish studies to date have identified predictors of informal language training for immigrants' via media usage. This brings us to the aim of the study.

# Aim of the study

The overall aim is to identify predictors among adult immigrants in language training and their function in host language training.

More specifically, the research questions guiding the study are:

- 1. To what extent does age impact host media usage among adult immigrants in language training?
- 2. To what extent does education impact host media usage among adult immigrants in language training?
- 3. Does media usage mediate the effects of age and education on host language training among adult immigrants in language training?

Since several studies have demonstrated the effects of age and education on host language training among adult immigrants in other countries, I think it would be of interest to examine whether the same would be true in Sweden (cf. Lee, 2005; Gezduci & d'Haenens, 2007). In addition, it is of interest to examine if media usage actually increases the

participation in the host culture—that is, if media usages function as 'bridging social capital' (Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Bourdieu, 2008).

### Research review

In this section, I will discuss previous research on (a) the effects of age and education on immigrants' host media usage and (b) how host media usage affects social integration. Based on previous research I derive predictions in the form of hypothesis.

### Media Usage: Immigrants, Age and Education

Continuity theory holds that as immigrants get older they are less likely to read newspapers or watch TV in the host language (Atchley, 1999; Gezduci & d'Haenens, 2007). That is partly because home country mass media functions as a catalyst for immigrants to cope with feelings of insecurities and uncertainties of living in the host society and preservation of their original cultural identity (Georgiou, Bailey & Harindranath, 2007; Elias & Shoren-Zeltser, 2006; Georgiou, 2006). Therefore elder immigrants prefer home country media because it helps them to cope with the new life change of migrating to a new culture. Consequently, researchers have found that there exists a generation gap between young and old immigrants regarding the media usage, e.g. Lee (2005) found that the young well-integrated Korean immigrants in the U.S. orient themselves towards newspapers and other media in the host language. Single and younger Koreans consume more U.S. and Korean media and are more integrated than married and older respondents (Lee, 2005). The results are in line with Gezduci and d'Haenens (2007) who found that young Turks in Belgium prefer Dutch or French media outlets while older Turks tend to watch and read about all kinds of news in Turkish.

HYPOTHESIS<sub>1:</sub> As age increases, media usage decreases.

As mentioned above research has identified a generation gap between young and old immigrants (Gezduci & d'Haenens, 2007). Consequently, I predict an age effect based on previous research. There, the direction of the coefficient should be negative. This is because older immigrants are less prone to use media in the host language.

However, innovation theory criticises continuity theory because the latter neglects innovation (Nimrod & Kleiber, 2007; Gezduci & d'Haenens, 2007). One predictor of innovation is *education*. Education makes people more innovative because it gives them new perspectives on life. Therefore, education can positively moderate the effect of age on media usage. That is because education can give people new perspectives and make them more innovative throughout different life-phases. Innovation theory suggests that elderly educated immigrants spend less time on leisure activities that demand physical effort and more to those that demand a cognitive effort (Nimrod & Kleiber, 2007).

Gezduci and d'Haenens (2007) found that media outlets and news content in Dutch or French were preferred by Turks with a higher *education* and those Turks who were longer-term residents or were born in Belgium. Moreover, the more affluent Turks tended to orient themselves more towards newspapers and Internet sites in the host language.

HYPOTHESIS<sub>2a</sub>: *Higher education increases media usage.* 

HYPOTHESIS<sub>2a</sub>: Higher education moderates the effect of age on media usage.

From Peeters and d'Haenens (2005) and Gezduci and d'Haenens (2007) we know that education can have an impact on media usage among specific immigrant groups. More specifically, higher education implies increased media usage.

As can be seen several studies have investigated the impact of age and education on immigrants' media usage. However, there is still knowledge to be gained not only about predictors of media usage but also about the function of media usage in promoting host language training.

# Media Usage: Language Opportunities and Contacts in the Host Culture

Researchers have demonstrated the significant function media usage plays in social integration when immigrants have difficulties getting enough information or making friends in the host culture (Peeters & d'Haenens, 2005). When immigrants encounter the host culture, they may be confused since behaviours and values from their home culture may prove maladaptive in the host culture. Furthermore, many aspects of life are unfamiliar to them, and they experience uncertainty. As this uncertainty decreases over time, immigrants tend to have an increased understanding of the cultural values of the host society. According to bridging social capital theory, the mass media plays an important function in alleviating the integration process (Putnam, 2000). Moon and Park (2007) investigated the effects of American and Korean mass media on Korean immigrants' integration process. They used structural equation modelling and hierarchical regression modelling to evaluate how exposure to mass media is related to the integration process. They found that exposure to American mass media was a positive predictor for the acceptance of American cultural values and a significant negative predictor of the affinity for Korean cultural identity. Lee (2005) also investigated Koreans' media usage, or, more specifically, the relation between mass media usage patterns of Koreans living in Kentucky and their degree of integration. He found that there were some positive relationships between the degree of integration and English proficiency, and between the consumption of U.S. media and integration. Lee's study also revealed that there was a significant negative relationship between integration and usage of the Korean language on the Internet. This is also in line with Peeters and d'Haenens (2005) who found that there was a positive correlation between integration in the Netherlands and media use. The less successful the integration was, the more time was spent watching television, in particular programmes with a 'homeland' slant. Well-integrated immigrants turned to Dutch media more often. The results are in line with Gezduci and d'Haenen (2007).

HYPOTHESIS<sub>3a:</sub> Media usage mediates the effects of age on Swedish language training.

HYPOTHESIS<sub>3b:</sub> Media usage mediates the effects of education on Swedish language training.

It is reasonable to assume that the effect of age on host language training is mediated by media usage. Consequently, based on previous research, I make a prediction about the indirect effect of age and the direct effect of media usage. This is because media reduces emotional anxiety and cultural uncertainty (Kim, 1995; Walker, 1999). Moreover, immigrants with less education may be more reluctant to accept the host culture, but I expect media usage to reduce such opposition.

### **METHOD**

In this section, I will present how the participants were sampled. Thereafter, I will discuss the variables used in the study, which were derived from the survey. Finally, I will discuss the strategies used for the data analysis.

# **Participants**

The participants (n=186)—many of them refugees—were recruited purposefully for the study from one learning centre and thus were non-random. The purpose was to sample a hard-to-reach population, meaning that the participants in the study are typically non-respondents in general household surveys. Therefore, one cannot administer a random sample survey to the study population and expect a high and unbiased response rate. To clarify, some of the participants had never seen a survey before. Other participants were illiterate or lacked the language skills to comprehend the survey. Accordingly, most Swedish previous studies of the immigrant population tend to be qualitative because of the difficulties in reaching the population with household surveys (e.g. Carlson, 2002; Lundgren, 2005: Shaswar, 2014; Sandwall, 2013).

In order to reach the participants, I administrated the survey to them at the learning centre, and a teacher who was a native speaker—Somali and Arabic—had to verbally translate the survey for them. Consequently, several of the participants would never have completed a survey administered to their household. Furthermore, snowball sampling would not have resolved the problem of sampling. This is because immigrants' friendships tend to be restricted to their ethnic groups (Lundgren, 2005). Therefore a snowball sample would have only successfully sampled specific ethnic groups.

# Variables

Media usage was measured using an index composed of three survey items (Table 1). The first was 'How often do you read newspapers in Swedish?' the second was 'How often do you watch television in Swedish?', and the third was 'How often do you listen to the radio in Swedish?'. The survey items were measured on a semantic differential scale ranging from 1 to 7. The differentials were 'always' and 'never'. The items were summed, divided by the theoretical maximum of 21, and multiplied by 100. The Cronbach's alpha was acceptable ( $\alpha = .67$ ). The measure did not distinguish between digital and non-digital media usage, but this distinction was not relevant to my research question. The purpose of the measurement was to capture variation in media usage in Swedish among adult immigrants. When interviewing the participants, I validated that the respondents interpreted 'How often do you watch television in Swedish?' as watching television on either the computer or TV. For example, the participants identified kids' shows as a favourite on-the-web broadcast. This is because characters spoke slowly and used more frequent Swedish words on these shows. Consequently, programmes for kids were easier to understand.

Language training was measured using six items (Table 1). The survey items were measured on a semantic differential scale ranging from 1 to 7. The differentials were 'always' and 'never'. The items were 'During leisure time how often do you speak Swedish with your friends?', 'During leisure time how often do you speak Swedish with your neighbours?', 'During leisure time how often do you speak Swedish with your children's peers?', 'During

leisure time how often do you speak Swedish with your children's peers' parents?', 'During leisure time how often do you speak Swedish with your children's teacher?', and 'During leisure time how often do you speak Swedish when attending association meetings?'. The items were summed, divided by the theoretical maximum of 42, and multiplied by 100. Cronbach's alpha was good ( $\alpha = .88$ ). The purpose of the index was to capture a variation in host language training opportunities. Such measures approximate sources of 'social capital', i.e. learning the host language with help from other people. Such language training opportunities can be seen as the 'bridge' to participation in society and thus as a contribution to social integration (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000, 2001; Bourdieu, 2008).

Age was measured using the self-reported age (Table 1). Education was measured using the self-reported number of years in education. Two control variables were added. Sex was measured by a dummy variable coded 1 for male and 0 for female since I wanted to control for sex differences. In addition, I wanted to control for the number of children because the more children one has, the less time one has available for leisure activities such as media usage. Moreover, there were few missing values. Consequently, missing values were dropped out of the analysis.

<b>Table</b>	1.	Descriptive	statistics.
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Variable	Mean	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	Min	Max
Media usage	69.518	22.198	14.285	100
Language training	53.095	27.730	14.285	100
Age	34.719	9.264	20	65
Education				
Higher education	79%			
No higher education	21%			
Years of education	8.140	5.640	0	22
Number of children				
0	33%			
1	47 %			
2 to 3	27 %			
3 to 4	7 %			
5 or more	18 %			
Sex				
Male	48 %			
Female	52%			

# Strategies for data analysis

The first step of the analysis was to compare group differences between immigrants who had attended higher education and those who had not. Therefore, I conducted a t-test assuming unequal variance between the two groups. The t-test assumed normal distribution because media usage was non-normally distributed. I used bootstrapped stand errors for 1,000 replications.

The second step of the analysis was to run a linear regression model of media usage. In the model, I regressed media usage on age and higher education. The model controlled for

sex and number of children. Media usage was non-normal distribution and hence failed to meet the assumptions for estimating linear regression. Consequently, I ran the model with bootstrapped stand errors for 1,000 replications.

In the third step, I wanted to estimate a path model. The idea of the path model was to model a process where media usage mediates the effect of age and years of education on host language training opportunities. Because path models cannot be estimated with categorical measures, I used number of years as a continuous measure.

To improve the interpretation of the coefficients, I supplemented the analysis with field notes coming from onsite interviews conducted with participants during the survey administration. However, I chose to not include interview transcripts or present a formal interview data analysis. The reason for not including an interview analysis is that the interviews were conducted for a different purpose than the present study, and an in-depth analysis in relation to the present study would not be plausible. Finally, all statistical analyses were performed in STATA® 13 using the following commands: 'ttest', 'reg', and 'sem'.

# **RESULTS**

In this section, I will first present a t-test of the differences between immigrants who have enrolled in higher education and those who have not. The analysis will be followed by a linear regression analysis. In the next step, I will estimate a path model of the effect of media usage on host language training.

# The effects of age and education on media usage

A t-test, using bootstrapped stand errors and assuming unequal variance, found that there was a significant difference at 2.5% between immigrants with higher education and those who did not have higher education (t= .380, S.E.= 1.069). The difference was small- to medium-sized (d=.419).

After establishing that there were differences depending on education, a linear regression model was estimated. There,  $\beta$  is the coefficient and  $\varepsilon$  is the error term.

$$mediausage = \beta_0 + \beta_1 age + \beta_2 highereducation + \beta_3 number of children + \beta_4 sex + \varepsilon$$

The analysis in Table 2 showed statistically significant effects of both higher education and age. Therefore, there was support for hypothesis<sub>1</sub>. First, age had a statistically significant effect within the 5% margin of error. The effect of education was also statistically significant within the 5% margin of error. As expected, for each additional year of age, media usage decreases by .529 percentage points. Accordingly, in accordance with the predictions made based on continuity theory, the result of the regression model suggests that there does exist a generational difference between younger and older immigrants in media usage in the host language (Atchley, 1999; Gezduci & d'Haenens, 2007). The older immigrants were more reluctant to use media in the host language (see Figure 1).

However, the direction of the coefficients was unexpected for higher education and hence disconfirms the predictions made in hypotheis<sub>2a</sub> and hence the predictions of innovation theory (Nimrod & Kleiber, 2007). In model one, attending higher education did decrease media usage by 10.293 percentage points. This finding was surprising because previous

research suggests the exact opposite direction of the coefficient. That is, previous research inspired by innovation theory suggests that immigrants with higher education are more likely to use media in the host language (Gezduci & d'Haenens, 2007). One plausible explanation of the coefficients is that these immigrants reason that, since they have lived for such a short time in Sweden, they do not have either a sufficient Swedish vocabulary or sufficient prior culture-specific knowledge to derive meaning from Swedish news. Consequently, they turn to independent English media. In the onsite interviews, it was revealed that they watched or listened to the BBC. Another plausible explanation is that highly-educated immigrants—many of them refugees—reason that their stay in Sweden will not last for a long time and that they will probably return home in some years. Consequently, educated immigrants are not motivated enough to learn Swedish because they lack incentives to do so. Yet another plausible explanation is that they live in an ethnically concentrated neighbourhood and reason that they get enough news from their neighbours (cf. Tubergen & Kalmijn, 2008). A final plausible explanation is that immigrants are frustrated by the lack of recognition of their professional credentials and, therefore, become alienated from the Swedish society and, consequently, are not interested in Swedish news (cf. Beaudion, 2007). Such explanations would support continuity theory and not innovation theory.

More problematic is that the magnitude of the effect of age and higher education was low. This is because the predictors only capture 6% of the variance. Although the size of a model is important, the amount of variance explained is nevertheless not sufficient as a criterion for a good explanation.

Although not the focus of the study, the control variables were both non-significant. Neither the number of children nor the sex of the participants seems to matter for immigrants' media usage. Therefore, the common prejudice against female immigrants with many children as passive media consumers can be rejected (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1995).

**Table 2.** OLS-regression for media usage with bootstrapped stand errors and unstandardized coefficients.

Dependent variable: Media		
usage		
Predictors	Model 1	Model 2
Age	426*	529*
	(.189)	(.215)
Higher education (ref. none)	-10.293**	-8.908*
	(3.946)	(3.921)
Number of children		
1		2.470
		(6.008)
2		-3.384
		(4.405)
3		4.669
		(7.273)
4		8.300
		(5.818)

Male (ref. female)		.834
		(3.600)
Constant	86.951***	88.578***
	(6.711)	(7.077)
R-square	.061	.092

<sup>\*</sup>Significant at 5%, \*\*Significant at 1%, \*\*\* Significant at .1%,

Adding an interaction between age and education decreases rather than increases media usage (see Figure 1). Indicating that in this study continuity theory is supported but not innovation theory (hypotheis<sub>2b</sub>).

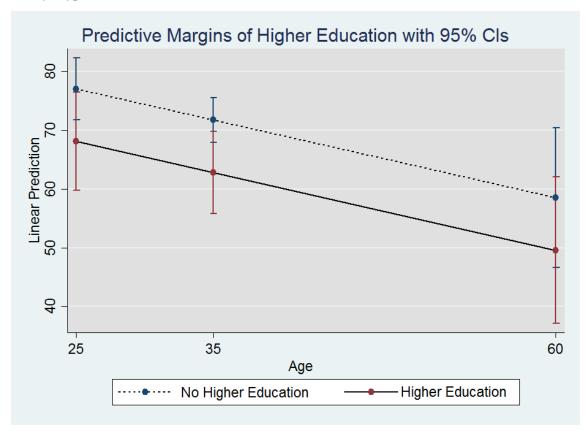


Figure 1. Marginal effects of age on media usage by education.

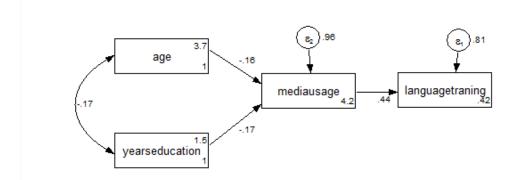
# Age, years of education, media usage, and host language training

In the next step, I estimate the path model, in which  $\alpha$  is the coefficient of the intercept,  $\beta$  is the coefficient of the slope and  $\varepsilon$  is the error term:

$$mediausage = \alpha_1 + \beta_1 age_i + \beta_2 yearsofeducation + \varepsilon_2$$
  
 $languagetraining = \alpha_2 + \beta_3 mediausage + \varepsilon_1$ 

The path model suggests that media usage does mediate the effect of age and years of education on language training in the host language as can be seen in Figure 2. Figure 2 demonstrates the path model of two processes. The first process is that as immigrants get older, their media usage decreases by .16 standard deviations, but media usage does increase their training opportunities in the host language by .44 standard deviations. The effect is statistically significant at the .1% level. The results confirm hypothesis<sub>3a</sub>. Therefore, media usage is important to integrate older immigrants into the Swedish society. One plausible

interpretation of the first process is that it is more difficult for older immigrants to get integrated in the Swedish society. By listening to news or by reading newspapers, they learn both new words and information about our society. Consequently, they have topics to discuss with their neighbours.



**Figure 2**. Path model with standardized regression coefficients for the effect of age and education on media usage and language training.

The second process is that immigrants with increasing number of years of education decrease their media usage by .17 standard deviations. But, as in the previous process, media usage does increase their training opportunities in the host language by .44 standard deviations. Consequently, the same pattern can be observed again because the results disconfirm hypothesis<sub>3b</sub>. Although education does have a statistically significant effect within the 5% margin of error, the direction of the coefficient contradicts the predictions made. One plausible interpretation of the second process is that, as discussed previously, highly educated immigrants lack motivation to learn the host language because they lack incentives. Alternatively, highly educated immigrant may also be more frustrated about the lack of recognition of their professional credentials. Consequently, they feel alienated from Swedish society and are not interested in Swedish news.

However, in both cases, media usage functions as a source of 'social capital', as indicated by the increased opportunities for speaking the host language. Meaning that the results favour bridging social capital theory (Putnamn, 2000). Bridging social capital is important in becoming integrated into society by attaining a sense of community and identity. The main explanation is perhaps that media usage strengthens immigrants' ability to participate in conversations because media provides them with conversational topics and language proficiency in interactions with neighbours, their children's friends, the friends' parents, and their children's teachers.

Before moving to the conclusions, a word of caution to the reader concerning Figure 1 is that the standardized coefficients are not directly comparable to one another, as they have different original scales.

# DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The overall aim of this study was to identify predictors among adult immigrants in language training. More specifically, the study examined the impact of age and education on media usage among adult immigrants in language training. As I maintained in this paper, there is a scarcity of research on predictors of media usage and informal language training opportunities for adult immigrants. Identifying predictors is critical because we need to know what impacts adult immigrants opportunities to train their language skills and thus learn the

cultural values of the host society (Adamuti-Trache, 2012). Previous research has focused on sociodemographic predictors such as age and education. My argument has been that mass media usage is a key to understand how adult immigrants get informal learning opportunities in the host language. Consequently, the study examined how media usage "bridges" the effects of age and education on host language training.

Five hypotheses were tested derived from continuity theory, innovation theory and bridging social capital theory (Atchley, 1999; Gezduci & d'Haenens, 2007; Nimrod & Kleiber, 2007; Putnamn, 2000). The analysis showed statistically significant effects of both higher education and age. The effect of education was also statistically significant. Moreover, the path model suggested that media usage did mediate the effect of age and years of education on language training in the host language. The effect was statistically significant. Therefore, media usage is important to integrate older immigrants into Swedish society.

Overall, the results both confirm and disconfirm previous research. The study confirms previous findings that there is a generation gap between immigrants in support for continuity theory (Peeters & d'Haenens, 2007). Younger immigrants are more likely to use media in the host language, whereas older immigrants are less likely to use media in the host language. Furthermore, the study also confirms that although age and education impact media usage, media usage also impacts immigrants' building of social capital. Thus the study's find support for bridging social capital theory. Research on social capital theory has demonstrated support for the positive association between media usage and various indicators of bridging social capital (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2004; Shah, Kwak & Holbert, 2001). Media usage can promote a sense of community identity, bringing people closer together. Moreover, media usage provides people with ideas and information that can facilitate communication with their neighbours, their children's friends, the friends' parents, and their children's teachers (cf. Beaudoin, 2007).

However, the study disconfirms findings from previous research that predict a positive effect of higher education on immigrants' media usage (Gezduci & d'Haenens, 2007). Although education does impact media usage, the present study found a negative impact, a result that seems to favour continuity theory. The result contradicts innovation theory that predicts a positive effect of education and a positive moderating effect of education and age on media usage (Nimrod & Kleiber, 2007). The results may seem somewhat surprising given the predictions made, but there are several possible 'retrospective explanations' for the outcome. First, highly educated immigrants may lack motivation to learn the host language because they lack incentives to do so. Second, highly educated immigrants may feel alienated from the host culture because their professional credentials are not being recognized by the host culture. Third, highly educated immigrants may simply get the news they need from independent media, e.g. BBC.

### **Policy Implications**

If we want immigrants to get information on what is happening in Sweden and increase their participation, then it is important to promote media literacy in them. By promoting immigrant media literacy, we can offer them insight into what is going on in their local community and around the world, and then they can form an opinion and question what they read, hear, and watch. Furthermore, the immigrants get conversational topics from media.

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