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Article

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Abstract

This study seeks to understand the role of representation in news media, trust in news, and participation in multicultural audiences' sense of belonging to society. A multimodal survey combining online, CATI, and CAPI methods was conducted in Australia at the end of 2021 and early 2022 (N = 1,084). The top five non-English language communities in Australia (Arabic, Cantonese, Italian, Mandarin, and Vietnamese) were included in the survey, of which n = 851 were born overseas. The findings reveal a significant link between the perception of sufficient representation in Australian news media, trust in news, confidence to participate in society, and sense of belonging. When multicultural audiences see themselves fairly and adequately represented in the news, they are more likely to trust the news and participate in the community by discussing the news and current affairs. This, in turn, leads to a stronger sense of belonging to society. We also found confidence in English and time spent in Australia were important factors contributing to perceptions of representation. While the length of stay has a positive impact on the perception of representation among those with high confidence in English, this perception is significantly lower among those who have lower confidence. This result confirms the significant role language proficiency plays in migrants' experiences in the host country.

Issue

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1. Introduction

Media can play a critical role in audiences' sense of belonging to a community or society. This is because media, particularly news, can fulfil the information needs of citizens thus facilitating more opportunities to participate in society. Those who are connected through media are more likely to be informed about their community, which can make people more aware of collective problems as well as ways to solve them (Kim & Kim, 2021; McLeod et al., 1999). Communication is, therefore, the essential ingredient of participation in society, and, in highly interconnected societies, the flow of information is more fluid (Rojas et al., 2011).

Those who actively participate in the community are more likely to have a stronger sense of belonging, with belonging being an important element of social cohesion (Markus, 2021). Social cohesion is characteristic of "a cohesive society [that] works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility" (OECD, 2011, p. 17).

Despite the important link between media, participation, and social cohesion, the specific role of news in people's sense of belonging to society is an understudied area. This article seeks to understand the relationship between representation in news media, trust in

news, participation, and multicultural audiences' sense of belonging to society. In line with extant studies that connect news and community connection, we explored how audiences' perceptions of news representation can impact their confidence in participating in society as a citizen, as well as their sense of belonging. We focused on five multicultural communities—Arabic, Cantonese, Italian, Mandarin, and Vietnamese—which are the top five languages other than English spoken in Australia according to the 2016 census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

The findings suggest that representation in the news and confidence to participate in the community and society are strongly related to audiences' sense of belonging. When multicultural audiences see themselves fairly and adequately represented in the news, they are more likely to feel they belong to society. This is because those who have a higher sense of belonging are more likely to trust the news media and have the confidence to participate in discussions of issues facing society. The length of time in Australia is an important factor contributing to these relationships.

2. Literature Review

2.1. News Representation and Trust

It is well established that the diverse make up of Australian society is not adequately represented by the Australian news media (Bahfen & Wake, 2011; McGuinness et al., 2023). Scholars have argued that the overwhelming whiteness of Australian television is "wired in" (Rogers, 2020), with patterns of racist reporting in news being historically established (Jakubowicz et al., 1994; McCallum & Holland, 2010), linked to ingrained social attitudes (Dunn et al., 2004) and ongoing friction between political discourses of otherness, social cohesion, national unity, and integration (Gardiner, 2003; Nolan et al., 2016; Poynting & Noble, 2003). Ethnic and cultural minority groups are often excluded from the news production process (O'Shea, 2022). And when they become the focus of coverage it is often through the lens of "problem groups" that are depicted as failing to integrate and as the cause of crime and disruption (Windle, 2008).

News outlets routinely prioritise legal, political, and police sources, reinforcing a criminal discourse and limiting the presence of sources from affected communities themselves (Horyniak et al., 2016). Ethnic groups are discursively constructed in news as out-groups that are the object of news stories rather than active voices or participants in the reportage (Teo, 2000).

Studies have found poor representation of those from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds in visible presenter or reporter roles in the news. A content analysis of approximately 19,000 news and current affairs items broadcast on Australian TV news revealed that fewer than 12% of presenters, commentators, and reporters were of non-European or Indigenous backgrounds (Arvanitakis et al., 2020). Off screen, newsrooms are similarly dominated by Anglo-Saxon middle-class Christian males (Hanusch, 2016; McGuinness et al., 2023).

The under- or misrepresentation of non-White audiences through stereotyping and profiling (Downing & Husband, 2005; Oh & Min, 2023; Ross et al., 2020) can reinforce inequalities, continue to marginalise, and maintain the status quo. This can have impacts on social cohesion and experiences of belonging by falsely representing the true make up of society (Hall, 1977). Implicit stereotypes portrayed in the media can also have a detrimental impact on ethnic minority audiences' self-esteem and sense of empowerment (Appel & Kronberger, 2012; Ramasubramanian et al., 2017; Swim et al., 2003; Ward, 2004).

The exclusion of voices from diverse cultural communities has the effect of driving those audiences away from mainstream news and towards diasporic news media or news media aimed at ethnic minorities—often in their own languages (Ewart & Beard, 2017). Australians from diverse cultural backgrounds are less likely to use mainstream domestic news sources and may rely on online and social media sources (Rodrigues & Paradies, 2018). This may further fragment communities and disconnect audiences from critical information and resources needed to navigate work, education, and civic processes in Australia.

Perceptions of fair and adequate representation in the news are strongly related to the trust audiences place in the news (Newman et al., 2021; Park et al., 2021). Given that trust is an essential element of community attachment (Hanitzsch et al., 2018; Manzo & Perkins, 2006), this lack of trust may lead to disengagement among those who believe they are not adequately represented in the media. Studies have shown those who use media for information tend to have higher social or interpersonal trust (de Zúñiga et al., 2017; Himelboim et al., 2012). Informational uses of media have an impact on trust, which is related to stronger community connection. However, if there is not enough information or news that multicultural audiences can relate to and feel represented by, they are less likely to engage with the news or the broader society.

2.2. Social and Political Participation

The relationship between news consumption, engagement with news, and engagement with society has been confirmed by many studies. Communication is the essential ingredient of civic engagement and participation, where engagement occurs at both the societal level through media consumption and at the individual level through interpersonal conversations, which are both amplified by social ties within a given community (Rojas et al., 2011). Localised use of media increases trust in the local community and encourages civic participation (Kwon et al., 2021).

Studies have found that those who pay attention to news and engage in political talk are more likely to participate in civic activities and even more so when they have a stronger tie with their networks. The increased activity is not because of the connections themselves but the potential increase in the flow of information through larger networks (Rojas et al., 2011). Through discussions, people become more aware of collective problems (McLeod et al., 1999). Discussions about civic and political issues with others can be a catalyst for civic engagement (Shah et al., 2017). Similarly, the integrated connectedness to community storytelling networks determines the community engagement of individuals (Kim & Kim, 2021). Those with highly integrated connectedness to community storytelling networks are more likely to be informed of what is happening in their local community and pay attention to common issues. Those who are connected are also more likely to have access to information and resources to address problems in their community.

News is known to contribute to the knowledge that enables citizens to feel more competent to participate in society, and therefore it is an important element of political efficacy (de Zúñiga et al., 2017). To participate in society, in addition to having access to information through community networks, citizens must also be confident that their voices will be heard. Political efficacy is defined as "beliefs about one's own competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics" (Niemi et al., 1991, p. 1407). These social and political efficacies influence citizens' willingness to participate in society (Balch, 1974).

Yamamoto et al. (2015) use the differential gains model to explain why certain citizens are more actively engaged in politics than others. Political discussions increase meaningful political learning and enable citizens to relate news to other aspects of their lives, learn different perspectives, and foster political engagement. Those who engage in online political expression are motivated to seek deeper political knowledge as they anticipate using it for future online expressive activities, therefore they are more engaged with the news.

2.3. Sense of Belonging

Concepts of belonging and community participation have a long history in communication research and have been found to be related to media use (Friedland, 2001; Shah, 1998). Community attachment is an identification with the community combined with an affective tie. Attachment means feeling a part of the community and having a sense of agency and belonging. This sense of belonging is associated with positive emotions (Leonard et al., 2016). Community involvement is a combination of cognitive and active interaction between self and community. Conversation is an essential catalyst for community integration and cohesion, as well as a focal mediator of media influence on participation (Shah et al., 2017).

Community attachment is a function of multiple factors. People feel they belong to their local area based on their interactions with neighbours, involvement in local organisations, and the belief that they have influence over what happens in their community. The feeling of social connectedness is a combination of understanding what others think and feel, the volume and quality of interaction, feelings of togetherness and reciprocity, and shared interests and ideas (van Bel et al., 2009). Accordingly, the media plays an important role in strengthening community ties.

According to Noble (2005), belonging includes ontological security—feeling settled—and confidence or trust in the world around us. This sense of security has several dimensions: material well-being and economic security; a capacity to both operate and be welcomed within various social networks and sites of interpersonal exchange; a confident knowledge of and familiarity with one's surroundings, contributing to a sense of environmental comfort; and a familiarity with, and comfort in, the particular idioms, objects, and customs that are characteristic of particular social spaces (Nolan et al., 2016).

McMillan (1996) suggested four components to having a sense of community involvement: membership, mutual influence (opportunities for participating in community life, wherein one's decisions are affected by the community), fulfilment of personal and collective needs, and the sharing of emotional connections between members. These components reflect active participation in a community as well as trust that the community will fulfil its members' needs.

2.4. Ethnicity and Language

Ethnic and cultural identities are subjective concepts and are defined by an individual's perception rather than through objective measures. Whether or not people can be counted as an ethnic or cultural group is for the members of that group to decide and not for outside observers. It is typically associated with shared culture, history, and traditions, and sometimes involves a distinct language or religion, although these are not universal features (Schneider & Heath, 2020). Nationality, religious tradition, and language are the core indicators of a group's shared history, ethnic origin, and culture. Further indicators of similarity for cultural and ethnic groups relate to the social distance between groups, as exemplified in the sociological concept of panethnicity (Silke & Heath, 2020). Acknowledging the complexity of ethnic identity, in this study, we use the term "multicultural" audiences to reflect both cultural and language backgrounds of audiences.

Multicultural audiences' language preferences for media are influenced by a wide array of factors including length of residence, educational level, and need for information (Lee & Tse, 1994). For migrants who are not fluent in the host country's language, ethnic-language media is an important means of keeping them informed

and connecting them to their ethnic community (Zhou & Cai, 2002). Proficiency in the host country's language is an important factor that determines the ability to participate in society. However, it is not the sole factor.

Language is often tied to a person's identity. For example, spoken language was the most important dimension of ethnic identity, over cultural background or geographical region (Giles et al., 1977). This is why regardless of their language proficiency, migrants may prefer ethnic language media to preserve their ethnic heritage and may choose to consume both mainstream and ethnic media, regardless of language proficiency (Ramasubramanian et al., 2017). Sui (2023) applied Knobloch-Westerwick's (2015) selective exposure self and affect management model and Slater et al.'s (2014) temporarily expanding boundaries of the self model, and found ethnic audiences tend to prefer media outlets in a language that is indicative of their most salient cultural identity.

Studies have shown that language proficiency plays a pivotal role in the social integration and life satisfaction of migrant communities (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Chiswick, 2002). Amit and Bar-Lev (2015) further recognised that there are multiple and contextual influences of language proficiency on sense of belonging, highlighting the need for a greater understanding of the role of language as perceived by immigrants integrating into a host country. Miglietta and Tartaglia (2009) suggested linguistic competence is essential for cultural knowledge acquisition which, in turn, is enhanced by host-culture media consumption. Consuming media in the local language can promote a sense of belonging to the surrounding ethnic community as well (Flores & Coppock, 2018; Miglietta & Tartaglia, 2009).

Another important factor that influences the adjustment of migrants is the length of stay in a host country. Empirical evidence has shown that length of stay in a country is related to migrants' adaptation (Ward et al., 1998) as well as a factor that strengthens emotional attachment to the host country (Miglietta & Tartaglia, 2009).

3. Hypotheses

This study poses an overarching research question of the impact of news consumption on sense of belonging among multicultural audiences. We examined these relationships within the context of the broader society (host country of migrants) and within multicultural communities. Based on previous research, we set up the following hypotheses.

Hypotheses 1 focus on news representation, trust, and participation:

H1a: Representation in news will have a positive relationship with trust in news.
H1b: Those who feel adequately represented in the news are more likely to have higher social and political efficacy.

Hypotheses 2 focus on representation, trust, participation, and belonging:

H2a: Those who feel adequately represented in the news will have a stronger sense of belonging to society.
H2b: Trust in news will have a positive relationship with sense of belonging to the society.
H2c: Social and political efficacy will have a positive relationship with sense of belonging to society.

Hypotheses 3 focus on language proficiency, length of stay, and belonging.

H3a: Confidence in English will have a positive effect on social and political efficacy.
H3b: Confidence in English will have a positive effect on sense of belonging to society.
H3c: Time spent in Australia will have a positive effect on social and political efficacy.
H3d: Time spent in Australia will have a positive effect on sense of belonging to society.

4. Methodology

A survey of N = 1,084 multicultural audience members in Australia was conducted between 1 December 2021 and 14 January 2022. In this study, we defined multicultural audiences as those who speak a language other than English. While this overlaps with ethnicity, country of origin, and cultural background, it is a broader and more inclusive definition. We used a screening question ("Do you regularly speak a language other than English?") and offered the survey to those who replied "yes" to this question.

We adopted a multimodal method using online (n = 704, 65%), face-to-face (CAPI, n = 227, 21%), and phone (CATI, n = 153, 14%) surveys. This was to reflect the diversity within the target population and to be inclusive of those who are not online or not willing to complete an online survey. We targeted the top five non-English languages spoken in Australia (Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Italian, and Vietnamese) based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017) census of 2016 data and set a quota of at least n = 200 for each language group. The questionnaire was offered in six languages, including English, and the respondents were able to choose their preferred language to complete the survey. In the sample, 851 respondents were born overseas.

To ensure the quality of the translation, we worked with a research company that specialises in multilingual surveys. First, the English version of the survey was approved and programmed. Then, the English questionnaire was reviewed by professional translators and double-checked independently by a second professional translator. The questionnaire was reimported including translations and checked by the company's multilingual team member for accuracy and flow. The fieldwork was

conducted by McNair yellowSquares including their multilingual panel. We set quotas within each language for age, gender, and region. The mean age of respondents was 42. A summary of respondents is in Table 1.

4.1. Variables

To measure belonging, we adapted McMillan and Chavis (1986)'s sense of community concept for multicultural audiences. The theory identifies four elements of a sense of community: membership, influence, meeting needs, and a shared emotional connection. We asked a set of questions on a scale from 1 to 5 ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*: (a) "My needs are met because I am part of Australian society"; (b) "I feel 'at home' in Australian society"; (c) "I have influence over what Australian society is like"; (d) "Members of Australian society care about each other." Cronbach's alpha of the measure was 0.84.

To gauge the participation level of respondents, we measured social and political efficacy by asking the level of agreement to two statements: "I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political and social issues facing Australia" and "I consider myself well-informed to participate in social and political debate about Australia" on a five-point Likert-type scale. Cronbach's alpha score was 0.859.

News representation is defined as how audiences feel about news coverage related to the respondents' cultural background. We examined three aspects of news representation: the volume and fairness of coverage, reporter/journalists representing people from respondents' language or cultural community, and respondents' perceptions of how well the news covers their language or cultural community, asked on a scale from 1 to 5 ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Cronbach's alpha score was 0.885.

We define news trust as the degree of trust people place in the source of the news. We measured trust in Australian news by asking them to rate on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is *do not trust at all* and r5 is *trust a lot*.

English confidence was measured by asking respondents how comfortable they feel with four dimensions of English skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. This was measured on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is *not comfortable at all* and 5 is *very comfortable*. We used the mean score of the four categories as the variable. Cronbach's alpha score was 0.954.

For time in Australia, we used a dummy variable, 1 being those who lived in Australia for more than 10 years and 0 being 10 years or less.

4.2. Data Analysis and Model Fitness

We conducted structural equation modelling using IBM SPSS AMOS 27. The global model fit was assessed using several indices, which showed a reasonably acceptable model fit: $\chi^2 = 289.204$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.953, NFI = 0.944, TLI = 0.923, IFI = 0.953, RMSEA = 0.068. These are all above the threshold of the recommended values of CFI, NFI, TLI, and IFI (greater than 0.90). RMSEA is recommended to be under 0.05 but acceptable up to 0.08 (Byrne, 2016). These goodness-of-fit results indicate that the measurement models are adequate.

5. Results

We examined individual path coefficients that predict belonging to Australian society. Figure 1 shows that representation in Australian news had a positive correlation with trust in the news ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$) and political and social efficacy ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$). H1b and H1b were supported.

Table 1. Summary of respondents.

| Variable	Attribute	n	%
Gender	Male	458	42
	Female	619	57
	Non-binary	1	0.1
Time in Australia	Less than five years	174	16
	Five to 10 years	202	19
	More than 10 years	465	43
	Born in Australia	243	22
Confidence in English	Low/moderate confidence	325	30
	High confidence	301	28
	Perfect confidence	458	42
Main language	Arabic	220	20
	Cantonese	210	20
	Italian	215	20
	Mandarin	222	20
	Vietnamese	217	20
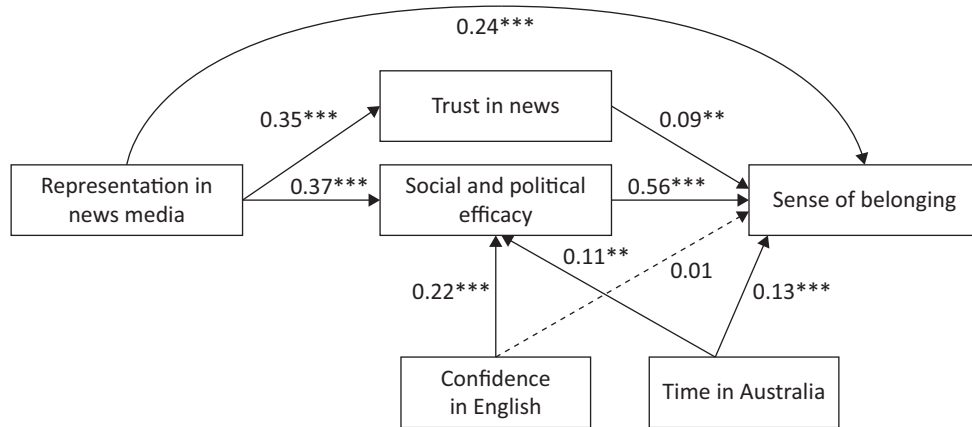
Figure 1. Sense of belonging to Australian society. Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

There was a positive association between trust in news media and sense of belonging ($β = 0.09$, $p < 0.001$). Social and political efficacy had a greater impact on the sense of belonging ($β = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$). Representation in Australian news media was positively associated with belonging ($β = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$). H2a, H2b, and H2c were supported.

Confidence in English and time spent in Australia both had a positive relationship to social and political efficacy ($β = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$ and $β = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$ respectively). However, confidence in English was not related to sense of belonging, whereas time in Australia did have a positive and significant relationship to sense of belong-

ing ($β = 0.13$, $p < 0.001$). H3a and H3c were supported but H3b and H3d were not.

While confidence in English and time in Australia both had positive and significant relationships with social and political efficacy, confidence in English did not have a direct relationship with belonging. To explore this somewhat puzzling result, we further conducted an ANOVA to see if there might be an interaction effect between language and length of stay. Figure 2 demonstrates that the relationship between time spent in Australia and perceptions of news representation differs depending on the level of confidence in English. For those with high confidence, there is no significant difference in their
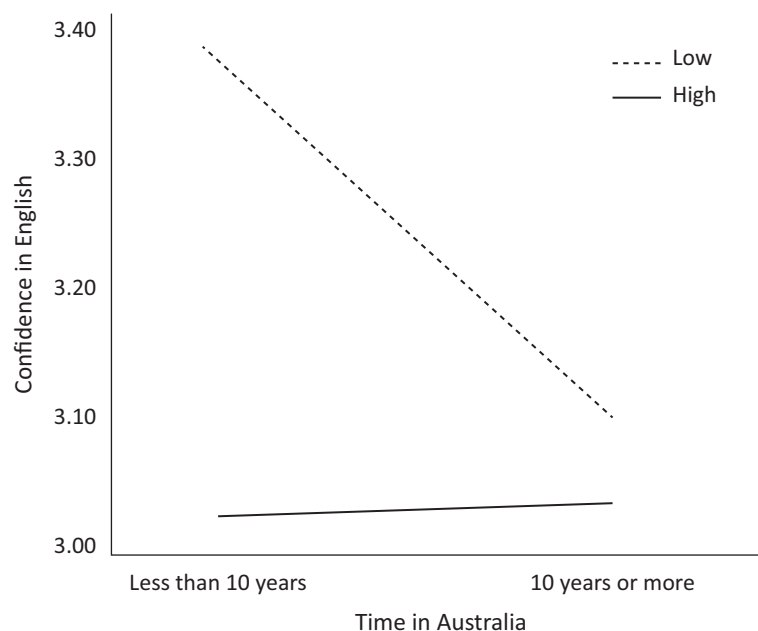
Figure 2. Interaction between confidence in English and time spent in Australia on representation. Notes: The four categories of confidence in English were recategorized into "high" (high/perfect confidence) and "low" (low/moderate confidence) groups; for low confidence and time spent in Australia of 10 years or less, $n = 154$ ($M = 3.40$); for low confidence and time spent in Australia of more than 10 years, $n = 154$ ($M = 3.13$); for high confidence and time spent in Australia of 10 years or less, $n = 222$ ($M = 3.01$); for high confidence and time spent in Australia of more than 10 years, $n = 311$ ($M = 3.02$); respondents who were born in Australia were excluded from the analysis.

perception of representation based on their length of stay. However, among those with low confidence, the perception of representation is significantly lower for those who lived in Australia for 10 or more years, compared to those who are more recent migrants (less than 10 years). This implies that, to feel represented by the news in the longer term, both confidence in English and length of stay are important factors.

6. Conclusions

The findings reveal a significant link between perceptions of adequate representation in Australian news media and multicultural audiences' sense of belonging. Those who feel represented in the news are more likely to trust it and participate in the community by discussing the news and current affairs. This, in turn, leads to a stronger sense of belonging to society. Confidence in English and the time spent in Australia were important for migrants to be able to participate in mainstream society.

The mere fact of acquiring language proficiency does not seem to exert a direct influence on the perception of the sense of belonging. However, our study shows it helps increase a person's ability to participate, which has a considerable impact on the sense of belonging. This result is consistent with previous studies showing the significant role of language proficiency in migrants' integration and adaptation processes (Berry et al., 2006; Chiswick, 2002; Vedder & Virta, 2005). It is also worth noting additional analysis reveals that language proficiency was not related to confidence to participate within multicultural communities. English language proficiency is particularly important in a migrant's ability to participate in broader society, resulting in a stronger sense of belonging.

The length of time in Australia is an important factor contributing to an increased ability to participate in society and perception of belonging. Additional analysis indicates that the gap in the perception of sense of belonging to Australian society between those with high confidence in English and those with low confidence widens as the length of stay increases. Those who have stayed in Australia longer but still lack language proficiency, find it much harder to feel they belong. Amit and Bar-Lev (2015) asserted that the length of stay in the destination country and language proficiency are important parameters that affect migrants' sense of belonging. While it is not possible to know the longer-term effects within a cross-sectional survey, we can infer from these results that those who do not have confidence in English are less likely to access news in English, which has a compounding effect on their social and political participation.

The study is not without limits. We used "language other than English" to recruit respondents for this study. However, we acknowledge that language is only one of many dimensions that define a person's ethnic identity. Ethnicity is essentially self-defined and typically associated with shared culture, history, and traditions,

and sometimes involves a distinct language or religion, although these are not universal features (Schneider & Heath, 2020). While this study aspired to capture as much as possible a diverse representation of multicultural communities in Australia, by conducting the survey on the largest linguistic groups, further investigation on different ethnic contexts and social conditions is needed in the future to refine the findings and deepen our understanding of the diversity within multicultural communities. We also note that most of the respondents in the current study had relatively high levels of confidence in English. It would undoubtedly be of interest to examine the model of this study among multicultural communities with lower levels of language proficiency. Second, the role of diasporic media is complex. Media is related to identity formation and reinforcement. Studies have found that consumption of both ethnic and host country media influences the acculturation and adjustment of migrants (Jeffres, 2000; Park, 2009). Cultural identity is not a binary concept. Migrants can have bicultural attributes that are often not mutually exclusive (Park & Ahn, 2010). Third, we were unable to explain the differences and nuances across the five language groups in this study. These are very different communities in terms of their migration history, culture, and settlement in Australia. This study was a snapshot of a range of communities. Further research is needed to investigate the nuances between and within language communities. Finally, the measures used in the survey are all based on self-reports and cannot be exempt from subjectivity, particularly around measures about English proficiency. Further research is needed to deepen understanding of the relationship between news and migrants' sense of belonging.

Nevertheless, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on how news can play an important role in social cohesion. Those who are adequately provided with relevant news about society and feel they are well-represented are more likely to be informed about the current issues within society. Their sense of belonging is driven by their ability to participate in those issues. This has significant policy implications, for how news media can assist in the process of migrants' settlement more effectively.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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