Public Abstract

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Title:Influence and Authority of Information Sources in the Highlands: Exploring the Immigration Debate During the Scottish Independence Referendum

This dissertation examines the role of the mass news media as an influencer of opinions on immigration through an examination of information sources used by host, Highland community members. There is an extensive range of research exploring the experiences of immigrants and policy responses in the UK, but little is known about how host communities process and respond to increasing cultural diversity. Addressing the latter is essential to overcome the assimilation tendencies in discourses about the integration of immigrants. Critical discourse analysis was used to analyze newspapers and interviews in this mixed methods study conducted in the year prior to the Scottish Independence Referendum. Findings of this study revealed the negative and homogenizing portrayal of immigrants in the mass news media, the importance of first and second hand experiences as sources of information on immigration in Scottish Highland communities, and the influence of sociocultural factors on how people establish authority of information sources. Findings suggest the need for stronger institutional infrastructures to address increasing diversity in the UK. Of particular interest is the context of this research, during a time of crisis, which reveals that the act of decision-making is based on the often unconscious, ontological construction of information behaviors through the worldview of participants.