Public Abstract
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Title: The effects of modality, English language proficiency, and length of stay on immigrants learning from American news about politics

This dissertation explored how well immigrants in the United States learn from American political news. Predictions in this online experiment were based on a 1990 survey in which Korean Americans with lower language proficiency and shorter length of stay in the U.S. demonstrated higher political knowledge scores when they reported relying on television news instead of print news. To test the findings of the 1990 study, news media were operationalized through modality as two symbol systems: words, which need to be learned to be understood, and pictures, which need to be recognized. One-hundred-forty-six individuals born in 52 countries completed the study in which each participant was exposed to one of the three conditions representing either television or radio or print news. Data demonstrated that immigrants with lower self-reported language proficiency correctly recognized more multiple-choice answers to questions about stories from television news in comparison to print news. This finding establishes a causal relationship between the presence of pictures in television’s two-channel stream and better outcomes of memory about news for immigrants with weaker English language skills. Years of education in the U.S. emerged as the only reliable predictor of comprehension. Furthermore, in the television condition, immigrants with higher language proficiency correctly recognized about half-an-answer fewer than did immigrants with lower language proficiency. Findings suggest that television news is indeed beneficial for immigrants’ learning about American politics, yet it becomes less beneficial once immigrants’ competence increase.