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MODEL OF ASSIMILATION/INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS

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Abstract

The article aims to familiarize the scientific community with one of the results of a qualitative case study investigation that employed ethnographic methods of gathering data on Russian-speaking immigrants in the Brisbane region, Queensland, Australia, conducted in 2016-2017. The study, titled "Perceptions of Russian-speaking immigrants: A case study in Australia," was held in response to one of the most pressing and challenging questions on the agenda of many public administration offices around the world – "What can be done for better integration/assimilation of immigrants into host communities?" It set itself to identify factors affecting the processes of assimilation and integration of Russian-speaking immigrants into Australian society. The research not only pointed out alleged obstacles such as (1) employment, (2) education, (3) healthcare, (4) government assistance, and (5) discrimination but also suggested the theoretical Model of Assimilation/Integration of Immigrants (MAI). The proposed model could explain not only why immigrants cannot integrate easily into the host society but also some other futures of their behavior. The model indicates the possibility for quantification of assimilation/integration itself and thus, provides an opportunity for further comparison of degrees of assimilation in between population groups.

Keywords

Assimilation, Australia, Behavioral Model, Ethnography, Immigrants, Integration, Perceptions

1. Introduction

Research that resulted in the development of the model was conducted in response to one of the most pressing and challenging questions on the list of many government offices around the world: "what has to be done for better integration and assimilation of immigrants into host communities?" Different approaches (targeted, networked, and institutional) to understanding and managing migration do not seem to be very successful in answering this question (Yilmaz, 2019). Therefore, the researcher offers a new one, suggesting immigrants themselves should be able to provide the answers. After all, they are the ones who, according to Shovkovyy (2018), often 'bogged down in the past' and captured by own prejudices perceive things differently, which, in turn, finds its reflection in and predetermines difficulties as well as the complexity of integrational processes. Because certain things are not said out loud, especially to the outsiders, using the factor of belonging to the same ethnicity, the researcher decided to become an insider to the Russian-speaking community; thus, the eight months qualitative ethnographic study was conducted. The research provides a unique opportunity to look at the question of integration through the eyes of the immigrants themselves, thus, from a different perspective.

Studied, were the individuals of different age groups, without any differentiation on the base of gender, faith, ethnicity, social status or country of origin, immigrants in the first and second generations, most of whom are residents of Brisbane region of Australia. The backbone of the research was formed by multiple written reports of unstructured interviews with 27 immigrants conducted at different places, times, and under various circumstances. Of all respondents, 16 were men and 11 women aged 22 to 65, 25 of whom were immigrants of the first generation. Among the interviewed were pensioners, housekeepers, janitors, general laborers, factory and production workers, builders, engineers, doctors, investors, taxi drivers, and business owners. Professions of 23 respondents were different from what they did before arrived in Australia, whereas 20-degree holders (education qualifications were received in the country of origin) were employed in low-skilled jobs. As for the legal status, 10 were Australian citizens, 8 had a residence permit, and 9 were in the country on different long-term visas. All interviewed "non-citizens" were at various stages of obtaining Australian citizenship. All but four respondents had similar or not-so-excellent income levels. Additionally, the field notes were taken from several research sites in the area, where approximately 170 immigrants were observed in their natural settings of residence and work.

Unique opportunity to observe and actively participate in the life of Russian-speaking communities for a quite prolonged period, allowed the researcher to notice various difficulties and

problems that impede the integration of immigrants into the host society. Subsequent analysis of the data from interviews and observations suggested that it was happening due to at least two circumstances. Firstly, it is immigrants' inability to quickly and painlessly part with stereotypes and habits from the past. Secondly, it is the presence of real obstacles that lead to the formation of negative perceptions towards the host country and thus do not support integration processes. While the first belong to the inner world of immigrants, the later represent the outer. This observation allows concluding that assimilation/integration must be a function of at least two variables, one of which represents the internal and another external factor. This interpretation is quite similar to how numerous behavior models group all factors contributing to an individual's behavior under two main categories: internal and external forces (DeSimone and Werner, 2012). Whereas one of the constituents of those inner forces, according to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), is the perceptions, studied in this research. The importance of studying the perceptions of immigrants for a better understanding of what affects assimilation/integration is indicated in the studies by Brown and Bean (2006), and by Hendriks and Burger (2019). According to Hendriks and his colleague, a better understanding of immigrants perceptions opens a promising pathway to further development and improvements in the domain of assimilation and integration.

Definitions: The researcher defined immigrants as those who changed the country of residence and intended to build their future with Australia. It also applies to migrant workers, asylum seekers, and refugees with similar intentions to remain in the country. The words assimilation and integration used in the research interchangeably, to describe the extent of self-identification by immigrants, or how much do they consider themselves as of being a part of the host society. Similarly, to how it was done by Schacter et al. (2011), the perceptions of immigrants are assumed as their interpretations of reality, surrounding, physical and emotional sensations, feeling, and experiences.

2. Theoretical Support

The rightness of the idea that individual perceptions predetermine behavior finds its confirmation in various cognitive theories of motivation and behavioral models used in social science. Especially interesting concerning this study is the use of behavioral models in organizational research, that deals with the causes of individuals' behavior and performance as well as corporate citizenship. The possibility of drawing analogies between sound organizational citizenship concepts and general citizenry reports the research by Cohen and Vigoda (2000). According to scholars, there is a direct

relationship between general citizenship and organizational behavior. Based on this fact, the researcher suggests the appropriateness of using organizational behavioral models to study the behavior of individuals in society.

According to DeSimone and Werner (2012), despite the presence of numerous factors contributing to an individual's behavior, all of them could be grouped under two main categories: external and internal forces. The main constituent of those inner forces in DeSimone and Werner's behavior model presented in Figure 1 is the individual's attitudes (strongly simplifying – perceptions, Bahamonde-Birke et al. (2017)), or what one thinks about the given object. The model of employee behavior proposed by scholars assumes that both forces must interact simultaneously and jointly to produce a given action. In this model, both factors, attitudes, and perceptions are incorporated into a single internal force. This idea of the contextual or multidimensional performance of individuals depends on a combination of internal and external forces getting strong support in recent behavioral research that is concerned with 'good citizenship' (Campbell et al., 2000; Hoffman et al., 2007; Werner, 2000).

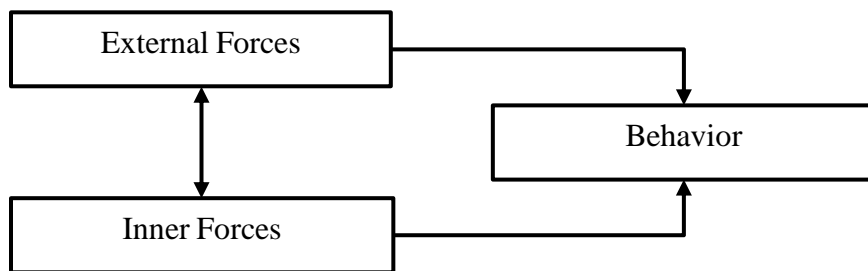


Figure 1: DeSimone and Werner (2012) Individual Behavior Model

There are two things that the researcher does not agree within this model: 1) the presence of the direct link between forces and behavior, and 2) the *static* nature of the model itself, something that does not correspond with the reality. Taken that in the case of immigrants, the seeking behavior will be an assimilation/integration, it is logical to conclude that once immigrants, led by the external and internal forces, have moved to a target country, they will have no other option but to assimilate. Unfortunately, the findings suggest quite the opposite. And here, where another interpretation of the behavior comes to the rescue. In their theory of reasoned action model, presented in Figure 2, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) proposed to treat one's behavior as a function of behavioral intentions to perform the behavior.

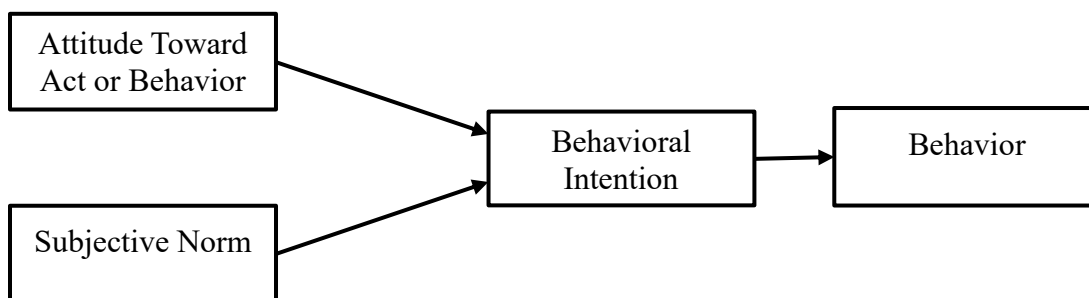


Figure 2: Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action Model

It looks like, suggested by the model delay between behavioral intentions and the action itself, makes up for the shortage of the previous model. In the case of immigrants, it means, that seeking assimilation/integration will not be happening implicitly right after immigrants made up their minds to change affiliation and country of residence. While the given model improves the understanding of some processes behind assimilation, it still failed to explain irrational or unconscious behavioral decisions (Kholoud and Ghaith, 2013). With regards to immigrants, it could be a situation when they actively resist further assimilation/integration and even returning to the country of origin. These thoughts made the author assume that assimilation/integration should be a function not only of one but several variables. In a way, such interpretation correlates with the definition of the adoption proposed by Shovkovyy (2015) in his comprehensive model of adoption, the simplified version of which is shown in Figure 3.

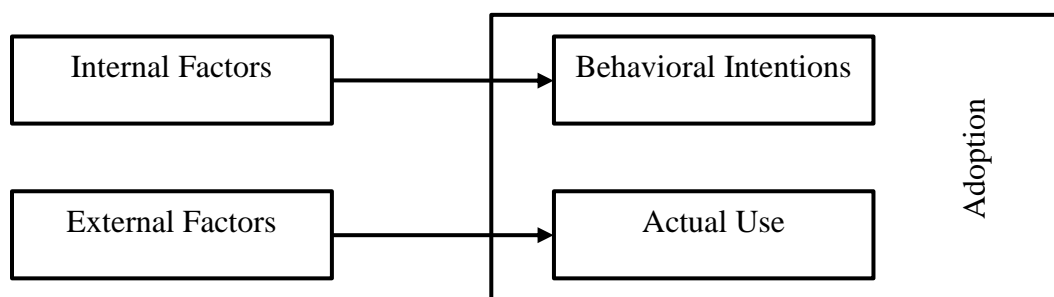


Figure 3: Simplified Model of Adoption

Source: developed from comprehensive model of adoption by Shovkovyy (2015).

According to the scholar, the comprehensive model of adoption considers both variables, behavioral intentions, and actual use as two dimensions of the higher-order factor of adoption. According to Shovkovyy (2015), real adoption is a result of the interpolation of two variables. For adoption to occur, both variables must be positive; the adoption is unlikely to happen if this condition

is not met. On analogy with this, and with an eye on the earlier models, the author offers his interpretation of assimilation/integration as an interpolating function of two variables – behavioral intentions and individual perceptions. The first variable represents internal factors, and another – external, however not directly, but through the prism of cumulative experience and via individual perceptions. The latest is an essential improvement to all previous interpretations of external factors as it allows us to account for the continuous development of immigrants' attitudes. As such, the changes in individual perceptions predetermined by cumulative experience, whereas external factors could stay unchanged.

3. Model of Assimilation/Integration of Immigrants (MAI)

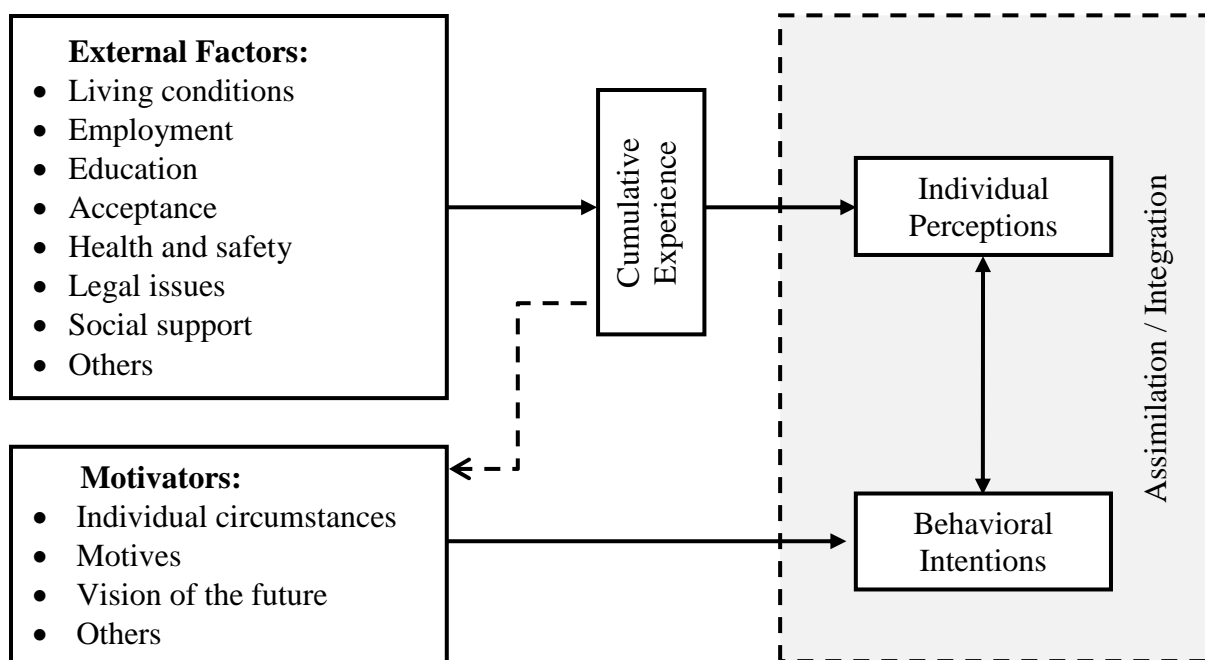


Figure 4: Model of Assimilation/Integration of Immigrants (MAI)

Internal Factors: The behavioral intentions of individuals to act in one or another way predetermined and subsequently retained by individual motivators, which, in the case of the immigrants very likely to be the initial desire to change citizenship and country of residence. These motives were backed up with individual circumstances, reasons, a vision of the future, and others. The research data suggests that in the case of interviewed Russian-speaking immigrants, among such motives were recalled various economic circumstances, desire to live in a safer environment,

predictability of the future, and others. The reasons were quite different for any individual or family. Whatever it is, it leads to the same ending – behavioral intention to immigrate, and in the longer run, to become a fully-fledged member of a society of the target country. Thus, on one side of the model, we have very positive behavioral intentions to immigrate. To fulfill the model's assumption for the occurrence of assimilation/ integration, we would need to have positive individual perceptions on the other side. And indeed, all interviewed agreed that initially, personal attitudes towards the country of immigration, were very positive Shovkovyy (2020). The reason for this was a lack of real-life experience of living in the target country as well as superficial ideas regarding difficulties that immigrants may face in their new homeland as well as the consequences of dealing with these problems. According to the model, the presence of positive dimensions of the higher-order factor of assimilation/integration is a good prerequisite for behavior to occur. Recalling the definition of assimilation/integration used by the research as self-identification of immigrants, it is possible to conclude that full assimilation may happen even right on arrival. Indeed, almost all interviewees confirmed the presence of a sense of unity and affiliation with a new homeland right on coming. The correctness of the interpretation of integration used by the research reinforced not only by the findings but also in the literature. For instance, Zander (2004) calls self-identity a "vital part of the process of integration," whereas Mol (1976) speaks of self-identities as integral parts of the group display.

Considering the finite time frames allocated for the alleged assimilation by the receiving party, the model assumes the motivators' constancy. However, it does not mean they will stay constant forever. Eventually, with an accumulation of negative experience, sooner or later, internal motivators will change (a dashed line in Figure 4 shows this distant time relationship), which will undoubtedly affect behavioral intentions. In Figure 4, the dashed line indicates the primary channel for receiving information about external factors at the first stage of immigration. The proposed time-dependence of motivators could explain re-immigration cases to the country of origin, those whose way negative commutative experience led to a revision of initial motivators in the opposite direction.

External Factors: Following the logic of the model, the individual perception of migrants towards external factors (accordingly towards the host country) is a function of time-dependend accumulated experience. Therefore, something that initially seemed good, with time, may no longer be the same. This is happening because, at the initial stage of immigration, the individual perceptions of the receiving country are mainly based on incomplete theoretical knowledge, guesses, and often naive assumptions about the insignificance of the difficulties associated with this risky undertaking.

However, upon arrival, under the constant pressure from everyday challenges related to landscaping in a new place, individual perceptions of the host country are changing. As it confirms by findings, the direction of such change for Russian-speaking immigrants is usually negative, which means that initially bright image of the host country is starting to blur out. As a result, the perspectives for assimilation/integration are diminishing. This basically could explain why, even after many years of residence in the country, and the fact of having Australian citizenship, many immigrants still do not identify themselves to be a part of this society. Similarly, no positive experience (such as exceptional living conditions) will result in or will not contribute to full assimilation/integration if the immigrants' behavioral intentions are not aimed at the same. Such an interpretation can easily explain why immigrants, whom the host countries provided with all kinds of support, subsequently commit various types of unlawful acts, all sorts of atrocities, and even terrifying terrorist attacks against their new compatriots.

3. Conclusions

The idea that immigrants themselves could point out the obstacles to integration turned out to be fruitful, allowing the researcher to identify the five factors which affect perceptions of immigrants towards the host country in a negative way, namely 1) employment, (2) education, (3) healthcare, (4) government assistance, and (5) discrimination. Guided by the idea that willingness to integrate depends on individual perceptions, which in turn tends to be disproportionately influenced by evaluatively negative characteristics of the target (Martijn et al. 1992), the researcher concludes, that harmful in its essence inability to integrate is predetermined by evaluatively negative perceptions towards reported factors; factors that are delaying the onset of integration. Later, these factors, in the form of a variable denoting external forces, in the attempt to explain their work, were incorporated into the model of assimilation/integration of immigrants. The model not only acts in the same paradigm as many behavioral and motivational predecessors but also supplements them with the idea of interpolation. Thereby, it significantly improves the accuracy of explaining and predicting such complex behaviors as integration and assimilation. It easily explains different life situations and provides the way for further quantification of levels of assimilation/integration, thus comparing those in-between population segments. The model offers a 'lively' approach to assessing assimilation/integration, which never remains unchanged, but is under the constant influence of its constituent forces.

The similarity of MAI with different behavioral models and De Simone and Werner's model used in human resources management research permits the researcher to hope that it may find its application not only in various behavioral-centered investigations but also in organizational and behavioral studies of 'good corporate citizenship. The distant resemblance of the model with the TAM-based comprehensive model of adoption by Shovkovyy (2015) suggests its use in studies dedicated to various aspects of technology adoption, use, and acceptance.

The author sincerely hopes that the proposed model aroused the keen interest of the cross-readers and the scientific community, which may lead to further development and improvements as well as intensive use in various scientific studies of sociological and behavioral disciplines.

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