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THE ATTITUDE TO THE EU INTEGRATION OF ETHNIC AZERBAIJANI WOMEN OF GEORGIA

Abstract

Since the early years of independence, Georgia's foreign and domestic policies have been primarily focused on achieving European integration. Substantial reforms are necessary in nearly every field, as well as public support for the EU's development and a greater knowledge of European values, in order to fulfil the undertaken obligations. The importance of European integration and cooperation, as well as the opportunities they bring, should be understood by every member of society, including women and minorities.

The paper analyses the factors that influence attitudes towards the EU integration of ethnic Azerbaijani women in Georgia. The study's primary research question is how knowledge of the official language, education, innovation, and activism influence attitudes towards the EU integration of ethnic Azerbaijani women of Georgia, and activism was used as a mediator variable between state language knowledge and attitudes towards EU integration. A total of 380 people participated in the survey. The poll was conducted in a hybrid fashion, with the questionnaire being delivered in regions of Georgia (Marneuli, Gardabani, Bolnisi, and Dmanisi), where the ethnic Azerbaijanis compactly live, in June 2022. A structural equation model (SEM) via Smart PLS was used to analyse the data and check the hypotheses. The research found a significant positive relationship between attitudes to EU integration and education on EU-related issues, knowledge of state language, innovation, and activism.

Furthermore, it was confirmed that activism mediates the relationship between state language knowledge and attitudes towards EU integration. Therefore, the study recommends the enlargement of the minority integration programs in the regions, primarily directing the grants for programs that increase minority women's activism. In addition, regional Civil Society Organisations' (CSO) involvement in minority issues and training in minority languages are advised.

Keywords: Attitude to the EU integration, activism, SEM, SMART-PLS, ethnic Azerbaijani women, minority

Introduction

Starting in 1996, Georgia made European integration a primary focus of both its foreign and internal policies. As a result of their achievements in a number of domains, Georgia and the European Union (EU) signed the Association Agreement in 2014, containing the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) component, that allows Georgia (together with Ukraine and Moldova) to access some sectors of the European Single Market. However, in order to accomplish the duties outlined in the treaty mentioned above, significant reforms are required in almost every area, as well as public support for the EU's expansion, which, in turn, is linked with an increased understanding of European values. Each person ought to be aware of the significance of European integration and cooperation and the opportunities they present. Unfortunately, the Russian media's

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disinformation has erected intellectual barriers on Georgia's path to Europe, and these barriers are most vivid when it comes to the ethnic Azerbaijani women in Georgia, who, in addition to the majority population's difficulties, lack sufficient proficiency in the state language. In order to have a complete sense of what lies ahead for the Georgian population, including ethnic Azerbaijani women, they need to be well-informed about the EU, the prospects of its further expansion, and the fulfilment of the Association Agreement. According to studies conducted by numerous organizations, the general public is pro-European (NDI Poll, 2022; Panchulidze, 2017), yet, despite a certain interest in the association process, the general public is not entirely informed about the EU-Georgia relationship and its characteristics (Samwel & Muradashvili, 2021).

The paper focuses on the ethnic Azerbaijani women who live in Georgia and are frequently seen as the most disadvantaged in the community because they bear the dual burden of belonging to a historically marginalised gender and, at the same time, an ethnic and religious minority (intersectionality). Religion affects the gender roles ascribed to men and women throughout the Caucasus, but Azerbaijani women face particular challenges because of the rigid gender norms prevalent in Muslim societies (Mehrabov, 2016; Javakhishvili et. al., 2020; Javakhishvili, 2021; Hajiyeve & Javakhishvili, 2022). There is little question that the majority of ethnic Azerbaijanis today view Georgia as their country and desire their children to participate more in the advancement of Georgian society, even though political involvement among this group is still minimal (Kandelaki, 2020; Hajiyeve, 2021). Increased knowledge about Georgia's social and economic potential has influenced people's willingness to integrate. This, together with recent initiatives to broaden language instruction for young people from ethnic minorities, provides cause for, at best, guarded optimism over the future of ethnic Azerbaijani women in Georgia.

Nevertheless, poor command of the state language, which further restricts the ability of Azerbaijani women (and Azerbaijanis in general) to fully exercise their constitutional protections under Georgian legislation, including equal land ownership, is a problem that is strongly related to their lack of state language knowledge. The perception that Azerbaijani minority women frequently serve in local councils as nominal representatives but do not perform substantive duties can be related to Azerbaijani minority women's ignorance of the official language. Local analysts claim that usually, men perform the majority of the political effort in Azerbaijanian families. According to Peinhopf (2014), the finding that ethnic Azerbaijani woman could not describe her responsibilities in the local council, corroborated the notion that women's involvement in politics is still primarily formal.

According to estimates from several civic society organizations' (CSOs) research, between 30 and 78.3 per cent of Azerbaijani minorities do not speak Georgian (The Institute of Social Studies and Analysis, 2012). Today, ten years later, the situation has improved, but only among the young Azerbaijani population who have gone to study at the capital city's universities. The majority of Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Georgia reside in rural, monoethnic communities in the south and east of the country. The language divides them from the rest of Georgian society the most; just 74% of native Azerbaijani speakers and 51% of native Armenian speakers are fluent in Georgian. Minorities prefer to work and study in Baku or Yerevan (or in Russia) as opposed to Tbilisi, and there is a significant emigration rate (Civil.ge, 2021). At the same time, most Azerbaijanis have a friendly perception of the Georgian language, demonstrating a keen understanding that proficiency in the official language is a requirement for social and economic success. The government of Georgia introduced a special language educational program for ethnic minority representatives who want to study in Georgian universities. The prospective ethnic minority students might choose to study Georgian for a year before starting bachelor's level courses. Thus, the "1+4" program was established and brought the increase of the Azerbaijani young population with university education in Georgia (Gelovani et al., 2017).

In order to secure the establishment of a positive widespread attitude towards Georgia's European integration among the population, including minorities, it is essential and opportune to counter the rising anti-Western propaganda by engaging in a particular and intense public discourse. First, however, by educating minorities, including the Azerbaijani minority women in Georgia, about European values. The difference between a concept (European integration in our case) and its realisation in practise is studied in the current paper, which looks at the factors that influence attitudes towards EU integration and the methods for promotion of it, particularly among minority groups.

The present study addresses multiple gaps and, in doing so, makes significant contributions: first, the study extends the understanding of attitudes towards EU integration among minority intersectional groups outside the EU. Second, the study contributes to the literature on the impact of social factors on attitudes towards EU integration, and third, to the study of Georgia's Azerbaijani minority populated regions.

2. Literature Review

Most studies do not consider gender to be a significant factor in predicting attitudes towards the EU, and rather than being used as an explanatory component, gender is frequently used as a control variable (Noe, 2016; Favero, 2020). Although few studies have explored the gender gap in attitudes towards the EU (Nelsen and Guth, 2000; Mau, 2010), almost all of these works concentrate on Western EU member states, ignoring the altered political and economic environment that EU membership has brought to women in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (Słomczyński and Shabad, 2003; Noe, 2016). In the vast majority of these academic works regarding how EU attitudes are formed, it is claimed that women are generally less supportive of EU integration. These conventional theoretical justifications frequently cite a number of causes for this disparity, including women's political interests, economic preferences, and vulnerability (Liebert, 1997; Nelsen and Guth, 2000). More recent research offers a more diverse and even conflicting perspective on gender-based support for the EU. Moreover, most studies on gendered support for European integration in CEE nations contend that there are no significant gender differences in popular support for and perceptions of the benefits of European integration (Słomczyński and Shabad 2003; Schlenker 2012). The current paper aims to address this issue by investigating women's attitudes towards the EU. Furthermore, it touches upon intersectionality via studying attitudes of Azerbaijani women, representing ethnic and religious minorities in Georgia.

Most research on ethnic minority women has focused on career opportunities (Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006), health issues (Bryant-Davis et al., 2009), political spheres (Mügge et al., 2019), and economic aspects (Ram & Jones, 2008). In the case of Georgian ethnic minority women, awareness of rights and social and political integration into Georgian society has attracted considerable attention in the frame of the Georgian EU integration process. Early works in this field were primarily concerned with the integration problems of Georgian ethnic minorities, such as dealing with minorities who do not speak the official language, which impedes their integration (Wheatley, 2009; Yilmaz and Ögütcü, 2016; Hajieva, 2021); or analysing ethnic minorities in the context of Georgia's European integration (Samkharadze, 2018; Kakhishvili 2020). However, these studies covered ethnic minorities within the country in general, including ethnic Armenians, males, etc., and ethnic Azerbaijani women were not studied as a specific group within this context. According to Robert Dahl (1994), to engage effectively in a democracy, individuals must be aware of and knowledgeable about the political system. According to recent Caucasus barometer polls, Georgia's EU integration problem begins here, because awareness of the EU, its institutions, and its system is generally extremely poor among the Georgian minority (CRRC, 2021). As a result, it can be concluded that the minority is uninformed and unaware of the EU's integration process.

Notwithstanding the interest in the ethnic minority problems in Georgia (Grigoryan, 2015; Shavtvaladze, 2018), none of them considered minority women's awareness of the EU and attitudes to EU integration. The attitude towards EU integration is also a topic of discussion in EU countries. According to Cosse (2007), the mere existence of information sources is insufficient to raise awareness of a topic. Analyzing the attitudes of citizens as beneficiaries would have made no sense at all if the citizens do not appear to be engaged in the EU integration discussions. According to Cunico et al. (2021), a different trend is followed by the more recent EU members, such as Poland, Estonia, Romania, Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia, and Bulgaria. They showed an increasing awareness after they entered the EU, but later, these trends started to diverge considerably. Upon reaching a peak, knowledge in some nations, such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia, eventually begins to decline, as it did in the former member states. Estonia displays a sharp diminishing pattern immediately after beginning. Ultimately, the growth of Latvia, Poland, and Hungary reaches a point where it stabilizes and fluctuates.

There are some attempts and projects to increase EU awareness, especially among young people. With the implementation of a new parliamentary form of youth and youngster participation, Könczöl (2019) examines the possibility of reviving EU decision-making and discovers that young Europeans have the chance to participate in a consultative form of political activity, though with a limited impact on decision-making (Gherghina & Geissel, 2017). Thus, it appears that the abilities the participants acquired during the process are more akin to advocacy-related skills. By considering the potential avenues for participation, young people have the choice of being presented with a list of unanswered questions, taking part in a national consultation, or helping to develop the questions themselves, primarily through the European Youth Forum and in accordance with guidelines set by the youth ministers of the EU Member States. There is no way to undervalue these types of participation. Through such communication avenues, authorities may increase young people's "knowledge" of the EU and

provide opportunities for individuals engaged in European politics to get experience and form national and international networks. This successful example demonstrates that considering possible causes of lack of EU awareness and EU integration understanding leads to developing corresponding, relevant measures to address these causes. Thus, factors influencing attitudes towards EU integration should be thoroughly studied in the context of Georgia's ethnic and religious minority women.

Education in the EU related issues and knowledge of state language

Inadequate knowledge and awareness, as a condition of not knowing things and being powerless to control them, does not simply apply to people who are under the control of others. Being ignorant also puts a person in the position of being forgotten, unconsidered, and out of sight. In this case, education is seen as a process that enlightens people, enabling them to go from ignorance to knowledge and from inferiority to superiority—in other words, the process of emancipation (Szkudlarek & Zamojski, 2020). In this sense, all segments of society, including minorities and women, should be well aware of the processes going on in the country where they live that affect them. Favero's (2020) study suggests that well-educated women are more inclined than men to support EU integration. According to Tchelidze et al. (2021), there exists a significant interest in the EU, and it is independent of the particulars and dynamics of the bilateral interactions. Most of the time, individuals just learn simple facts through television. The authors propose that a new approach to organising an information campaign aimed at promoting European values and, more broadly, relations between the EU and Georgia, on the one hand, and improving instruction of the Georgian language in ethnic minority-populated areas, on the other, would be an excellent solution. It is also clear that providing school students with more thorough information on Europe via their history and civic education classes might be another solution. Thus, education of the population in general and ethnic minorities in particular, in EU-related issues, as well as knowledge of the state language, might be considered as factors influencing the willingness of EU integration.

In some remote and poor regions of Georgia, where schools have few or no funds, boys tend to leave schools at an early age to work and earn money. This case frequently occurs among ethnic Azerbaijani communities living in Georgia, however, with girls instead of boys. Parents may attach little importance to the education of girls, and in cases of early marriage, girls could leave school as early as age 13 or 14 (Group & Karaia, 2019). The issue of transferring information on ongoing processes in Georgian society, especially relations with the EU for minority groups, especially to its vulnerable part, which is the ethnic Azerbaijani women of Georgia, is still under question.

Activism

Activism is a way to influence social, political, economic, or environmental processes in order to transform society for what is thought to be the greater good. Scholars differentiate many forms of political activity, including writing letters to the editor of local newspapers, organising community meetings, marching on city streets, participating in sit-ins or hunger strikes, running for office, or contributing to a political campaign. Activism, thus, can be considered a synonym for political participation and involves a number of important factors, one of which is possessing the necessary cognitive abilities and up-to-date knowledge to engage in informed discussion of challenging social issues (Dee, 2020). Education is found to be strongly associated with political participation, both for women and for men (Sahu & Yadav, 2018). Burns, Schlozman, and Verba (2001), claim that activism helps people grow as individuals in a variety of ways: by learning about their community and society, developing lifelong civic skills, and developing a deeper understanding of others' concerns and interests as well as those of society as a whole. Therefore, it can be concluded that the engaged or activist woman is the one who is educated and well aware of social and political processes taking place in society. In this case, it can be said that if ethnic Azerbaijani women actively participate in the socio-political life of Georgia, they must be aware of and have a positive attitude towards the country's EU integration. Mehrabov, 2016, found four forms of activism among women in Azerbaijan – traditional oppositional political activists, religious Islamic activists, feminist activists, and liberal activists. However, political activism should not necessarily be oppositional, such as in our case—supporting EU integration is in line with the official political discourse of Georgia (Georgian Centre for Security and Development, 2017, Gvalia et al. 2013; Javakhishvili et al. 2021).

Innovation/Usage of new technologies

Technological innovation has societal implications, according to Van der Have and Rubalcaba (2016, p.1924). According to Thakur, et al. (2016, p. 2765), there is a strong correlation between technological innovation and individual innovation. Innovative individuals, those, who are able to use new technologies, are more susceptible to risks and innovations because of their personal characteristics of curiosity and innovation search. Considering that the concept of technological innovation is closely related to the concept of social innovation, it can be assumed that there is a positive relationship between individual innovation and social innovation. Tracey and Stott (2017, p.56) outlined a framework for social innovation typology, indicating that research considers digital solutions to social issues as social movement organisations make significant investments in digital technology. Rahman et al. (2018, p.242) examined social innovation through the lens of technological innovation and found that the innovation of individuals can be considered as a predictor of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of technological innovations with a social aspect. Moreover, Osipov et al. (2022) claim that digital learning, a higher education innovation, is a practical, cost-effective, and highly effective way to make higher education more appealing to young people, and the growth of digital learning will result in an increase in the number of young people enrolling in higher education. Therefore, it can be concluded that innovation—that is, the ability to use modern technologies and the internet and be aware of modern developments—would increase the general awareness of ethnic Azerbaijani women about the EU and their willingness to integrate.

The central question of the study is *what factors affect the attitudes to the EU integration of the ethnic Azerbaijani women of Georgia*, thus, the roles of four possible factors are studied. Also, as discussed above, according to the corresponding literature, state language knowledge is a potential way to activism, which, in turn, leads to improved attitudes to the EU integration, therefore, this potential path is also examined.

Accordingly, the following hypotheses were tested:

H1: The level of knowledge/awareness (Education) about the EU, knowledge of the official language, women's activism and innovation/usage of new technologies are positive predictors of the attitude to the EU integration.

H2: Activism mediates the association between official language knowledge and attitudes to the EU integration. Official language knowledge is directly associated to attitudes to the EU integration (hypothesis 1), however, the link is stronger through activism.

3. Methodology

Study tool

The study utilises a correlational design, where data is collected using a questionnaire survey approach. The technique was chosen because it is widely utilized and makes it possible to reach a sizable portion of the research population for a relatively low investment (Taherdoost, 2019).

The variables listed in the conceptual model were used to generate the questionnaire items. The questionnaire contains two sections: the demographic characteristics of the respondents are covered in the first section, while the study's variables are covered in the second. The questionnaire was developed in the Azerbaijani language to facilitate its administration. A pilot study was carried out prior to data collection to ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Study participants recommended several adjustments to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was updated in response to comments made by the participants in the pilot study, following the accepted methodology (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

The answers are rated on a 7-point Likert type scale, with the answers ranging from 1 “strongly disagree,” to 7 “Strongly Agree.” Each of the five variables—four predictors and one outcome variable—was measured by three items. A sample item for innovation/usage of new technologies is the following: “I use advanced gadgets to access or transfer information”; for attitude to the EU integration: “I believe that Georgia EU integration is positive for Georgia”; for education: “Education enhanced my understanding of EU policy toward Georgia”; for state language knowledge: “I speak Georgian language”; and for activism: “I participate in street actions for Georgia EU integration”. After establishing the reliability of the scales, each variable's composite score was calculated by averaging answers to three corresponding questions.

Sample

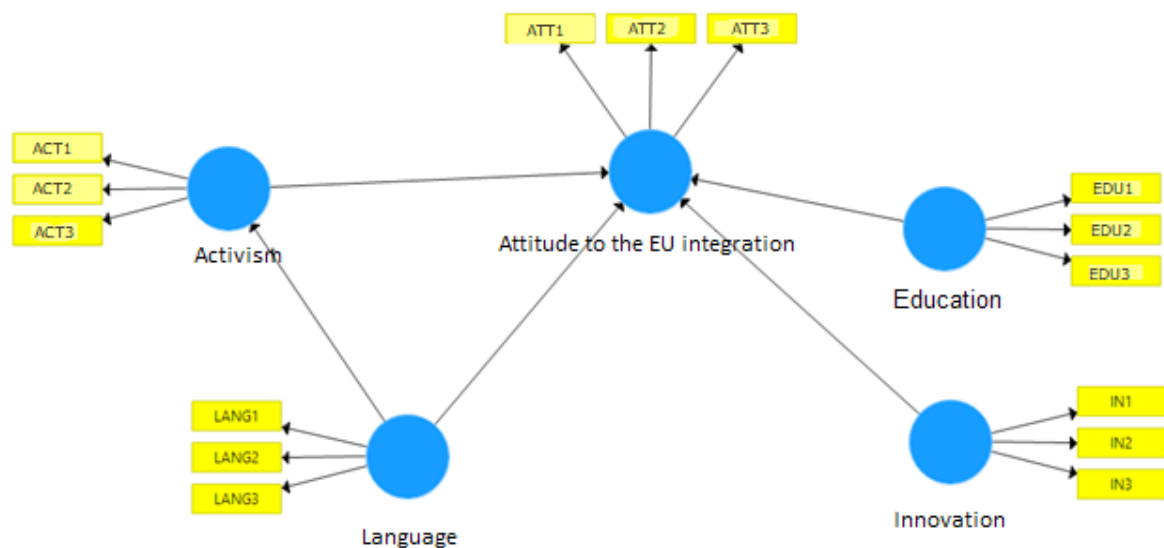
The survey respondents were chosen using a multistage sampling technique from Azerbaijani women's minority groups, mainly on Facebook. Women from the Azerbaijani minority group who resided in Georgia's four districts mostly inhabited by ethnic Azerbaijanis — Gardabani, Marneuli, Dmanisi, and Bolnisi — received a total of 400 questionnaires both online and in person. 380 respondents participated in the survey (out of 400 contacted). The poll was conducted in a hybrid fashion, with the questionnaire being delivered in regions where the ethnic Azerbaijani population lives, in June 2022.

3.5 Data processing

The data was processed using a structural equation model (SEM) in the SMART-PLS program. The advantage of using SEM to make the construct apparent and streamline the investigation is that it allows researchers to test the idea by assessing how variables relate to one another (Urban & Mayerl, 2013). The SEM technique is appropriate for simultaneously forecasting a set of equations and establishing the relationship between variables (Davari & Rezazadeh, 2013). SEM-PLS is a second-generation method (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004). PLS is built on the component analysis principle, which describes model parameter changes.

The structural model is shown in Figure 1. By calculating model fit parameters, reliability and discriminant validity of the scales were ensured, and by examining the path coefficients among the elements, the structural model was tested. The structural model describes the links (including mediational chains) among latent constructs, items united under the corresponding observed variables.

Figure 1. Structural Equation Model specification diagram



4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Measurement model results: The reliability of the elements in the SEM construct, which is scale scores, was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite ratios. Cronbach's Alpha value is greater than 0.7 based on the results for all factors, which is compelling proof that the data obtained using Nunnally's methodology are reliable (1978). The Composite Reliability ratio (Table1) confirms the indicators' dependability, which shows that all of the variable scores are greater than 0.7, which is considered appropriate (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is greater than 0.5 and the rho A is greater than 0.7 (Chin, 1998), supporting the accuracy and dependability of the data.

Table 1. Loadings, Reliability, and Validity

	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
ATT1	0.862	0.891	0.891	0.933	0.822
ATT2	0.942				
ATT3	0.914				
ACT1	0.894	0.825	0.83	0.896	0.742
ACT2	0.807				
ACT3	0.880				
IN1	0.920	0.898	0.909	0.936	0.83
IN2	0.925				
IN3	0.887				
EDU1	0.937	0.925	0.926	0.953	0.87
EDU2	0.939				
EDU3	0.922				
LANG1	0.759	0.731	0.764	0.844	0.643
LANG2	0.806				
LANG3	0.839				

The outcomes of the Discriminant Validity test, which was conducted following the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, are shown in table 2. The sub-factors of each structure should be distinct from those of other composites. By representing the diagonal line of standards that encircles the square root of the AVE, the values in Table 2 create associations. The diagonal line in the table yields discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations and Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Attitudes to the EU integration	Activism	Innovation	Education	Language
Attitudes to the EU integration	0.907	0.784	0.419	0.746	0.461
Activism	0.674	0.861	0.437	0.722	0.431
Innovation	0.379	0.378	0.911	0.327	0.272
Education in the EU related issues	0.679	0.628	0.302	0.933	0.392
Knowledge of state language	0.387	0.351	0.234	0.338	0.802

Note: Values in bold represent the square root of AVE. Below the diagonal elements are the correlations between the variable values. Above the diagonal elements are the heterotrait-monotrait ratios of correlation values.

4.2 Structural model results

The paths proposed in the research concept are reflected in the structural model. A structural model is evaluated based on the R², and the importance of the routes. According to Briones Peñalver et al. (2018), the robustness of each structural path determines the model's suitability, and the value of R² for the predictor variables should be equal to or greater than 0.1 in order to be significant (Falk & Miller, 1992). Table 3's SEM analysis illustrates how the suggested hypothesis 1 was confirmed. As a statistical conclusion criterion, a value of 0.05 ($p = 0.05$) is used as a significance level of the pathways defined within the structural model. Table 3's findings demonstrate that all R² values are greater than 0.1. Consequently, the capacity to predict is formed.

The results confirmed the H1 hypothesis ($\beta = .392$, $t = 7.768$, $p = .000$). The findings show that knowing the *official language* is a significant positive predictor of attitudes to the EU integration ($\beta = .107$, $t = 2.829$, $p < .005$), as well as *Women's activism* ($\beta = .351$, $t = 6.051$, $p < .000$), and *innovation* ($\beta = .103$, $t = 2.596$, $p < .009$) confirming hypothesis H1.

Table 3. Direct relationship test results

	Path Coefficient	SD	t value	p-value
Education -> Attitudes to the EU integration	0.392	0.050	7.768	0.000
Language -> Attitudes to the EU integration	0.107	0.038	2.829	0.005
Activism -> Attitudes to the EU integration	0.351	0.058	6.051	0.000
Innovation -> Attitudes to the EU integration	0.103	0.040	2.596	0.009
R ² Attitudes to the EU integration=0.583				

In order to check H2, a mediating analysis was performed. The findings (Table 4) revealed the significant mediating role of women's activism between the official language knowledge and attitudes to the EU integration variables, confirming H2.

Table 4. Mediation analysis results

Specific Indirect Effects	Path Coefficient	SD	t value(bootstrapping)	p-value
Language knowledge -> Activism -> Attitudes to the EU integration	0.123	0.025	4.832	0.000

4.3 Discussion

The present study ascertained the inter-relationship among attitudes to EU integration, official language knowledge, education in EU related issues, activism, and innovation. The study discovered that education/awareness in EU-related issues has a significant impact on attitudes towards EU integration. The results of the study are similar to the findings of Zhang (2020) in the case of China, where the author argues that the studies, projects, and spreading general knowledge have made important scholarly contributions to academic debate and have been helpful in providing policy recommendations relating to a positive attitude towards the EU. This shows that the general spread of knowledge through different sources (mass media, education, social networks, etc.) positively enhances attitudes towards EU integration among citizens, including minorities.

The study found that official language knowledge is a significant positive predictor of attitudes towards EU integration, which is consistent with the findings of Giannakopoulos (2019), who found that as the level of knowledge of the official language among Turkey's Kurdish minority increases, so does their knowledge of rights, access to trending information, and knowledge of international organizations.

Furthermore, the study also ascertained the significant impact of minority women's activism on attitudes towards EU integration. The importance of minority women's activism was also demonstrated in the work of Kobakhidze (2021), who stresses the fact that minority women's engagement can improve society's view of legitimacy, which is suffering greatly as a result of the current political divisiveness and instability. Honesty, integrity, and modesty—qualities that are frequently exploited in a patriarchal environment—can also help build public confidence in politics and Georgian politicians. Many of the difficulties facing women in politics now must be overcome by giving them more influence. The same idea is proposed by Mehrabov when considering women's activism in Azerbaijan (Mehrabov, 2016).

The results revealed that the innovation among minority women lead to positive attitudes towards EU integration. The wide distribution of smartphones among the Georgian public, social media in general, and YouTube in particular, have a considerable and ever-increasing impact on minority women's opinions, enhancing access to information about the EU. The results are in accordance with the findings of Park & Chung (2020).

The study also demonstrated the mediated impact of activism between official language knowledge and attitudes towards EU integration. From the mediation analysis, it was deduced that activism is a significant factor between knowledge of the state language and attitudes towards EU integration, since only with the knowledge of the official language it is possible for minority women to actively engage in political, social, or economic activities. Thus, knowledge of the official language enhances activism, which, in turn, leads to getting involved with the activities and issues that are in trend. Additionally, minority women can only gain awareness of the EU and other ongoing issues through active participation, not only in person but also through social media.

5. Conclusion

This paper presents one of the earliest attempts to develop and test an integrated model that links social variables such as education in EU-related issues, state language knowledge, activism, and innovation to attitudes to EU integration among ethnic Azerbaijani women of Georgia. This research adds to the literature by exemplifying that education in EU-related issues, official language knowledge, activism, and innovation as positive predictors can significantly enhance attitudes to EU integration. The significant mediating role of women's activism between official language knowledge and attitudes towards EU integration variables highlights the importance of official language knowledge in motivating minority representatives to actively participate in a country's political life on the one hand and active participation in forming attitudes on the other.

The data has been analysed using the symmetric PLS-SEM technique. The SEM findings of this research show that all the predictor variables are significant and positively associated with attitudes to EU integration. The relations among the variables have been demonstrated in a sample of ethnic Azerbaijani women, who represent an intersectional group of ethnic and religious minorities in Georgia.

These findings suggest to enlarge the minority integration programs in the regions, especially directing the grants for programs that increase minority women's activism. More involvement of regional civil society organizations (CSOs) working on minority issues and providing training in minority languages is advised. Despite the fact that the "1+4" program plays an enormous role in the integration of minority women, the payment for learning the official language should be covered by the state. Another suggestion is to give information about attitudes to EU integration and conduct contests among minority women relating to EU issues through regional TV and mass media.

In the body of research on issues affecting women in minority groups, this study is one of the few to combine symmetrical techniques in SEM. Future research might benefit from using this strategy as well. Future research may apply the approach to other minority populations, while this study focused on ethnic Azerbaijani women in Georgia. The data for the model's tests was gathered from Georgia's four regions. Future research may test the model in other emerging and developed nations and may compare the results further to determine the

impact's importance. The current study only evaluated how EU integration was perceived; future studies may also evaluate the importance of political or economic aspects.

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