Cultural identity and ethnic newspapers in Las Vegas

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Introduction

Culture is “a vehicle or medium whereby the relationship between groups is transacted” (Jaeckson, 1983, p. 34), and media play an important role. As globalization engages culture, media discourses are important aspects of the globalization process (Ratanen, 2005; Hackett & Zhao, 2005; Giddens, 1990 & 1991). By means of semi-structured interviews with print and electronic media, this study considers the following questions:

- Are ethnic newspapers ownership and management priorities similar to electronic media? Do ethnic newspapers serve the target audience in cultural pluralism? Do they encourage cultural assimilation? Do these media, by virtue of their institutional ethics, revenue models, and contents serve the target audience in unanticipated ways?

Methods

- Selected newspapers publish periodically with local news, editorial, and advertising content. Ethnic newspapers target people sharing common characteristics of country of origin, migratory status, race; language, or dialect; religion; shared traditions, values, and symbols, and social, folklore, food preferences; settlement and employment patterns (Thermon, 1980, p. vi).
- Eighteen newspapers participated in the study through qualitative interviews conducted by means most convenient to individual respondents, including face-to-face, telephones, or e-mail interviews.
- Eighteen individuals represented Las Vegas ethnic newspapers, answering questions about the newspaper's origins, goals for establishing the paper, and reader benefits.
- Interviews were described as publisher, owner, or CEO of the newspaper or business manager (2); as reporters (2); and as readers.
- Independent the authors use the constant comparative method (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 12) to generate themes, exceptions, and frameworks within the data.

Findings

Publication

- Frequency: Weekly (7), Two to Three issues per week (2), One issue every two weeks or One issue per month (2)
- Format: Newspapers use broadsheet folds and tabloid folds, publishing from one to three columns per issue. Language approaches include English and homeland language, or a blend of homeland language with English.
- Distribution: Newspapers are available in Las Vegas for free, with home delivery at subscription prices in three cases. Distribution takes place through public locations, including markets, restaurants, mechanic shops, gas stations, by bus stops, churches, libraries, educational facilities, tribal offices, and government buildings. Readers sometimes queue outside newspaper offices, waiting for the paper.
- General Content: Regional, national, and international stories are common for the newspapers, some with press-service sources beyond the immediate confines of Southern Nevada. Local news is not featured in all ethnic newspapers; however, local business advertisements and promotions are shared characteristics of all newspapers in this sample.

News Sources

- Publishers rely on community organizations as sources of news and information, and community members are regular sources of news and information.

Perceived Functions

- Language Reprintation & Assimilation: Homeland language can attract readers to the newspaper, especially for readers who have difficulty with English or are new to the community.
- Perceived functions: newspapers in Las Vegas provide readers with language-learning opportunities.

Distribution & Information Source

- In communication, ethnic newspapers perform dual roles, providing information to the community and embodying the community. Interviews describe newspapers as "fire voices," "the arm," and "the eye, the lips, the ear" of a community.

Generating Journalistic Ideas

- Interviews reveal individual connections with journalistic ideas and principles, identifying personally held ideas like truth, verification, correction when necessary, and balanced viewpoint in content.

Language Reprintation & Assimilation

- Ethnic newspapers are alternative to the mainstream, historical documents, and promoters of community values. Some provide niche information, which may position the newspaper uniquely in a community. Some ethnic newspapers work with mainstream newspapers. Examples include mainstream inserts into ethnic newspapers as a print venture, and cross-media ventures as ethnic newspapers communicate through radio and television.

Community Voice & Information Source

- Ethnic newspapers provide trustworthy information when communities deal with government. Coordination with consulate visits to Las Vegas, immigration columns, and promotion of the 2010 US Census exemplify this function.

Discussion

We are confident in saying that local ethnic newspapers in Southern Nevada impact ethnic identity. Discussions with local newspaper staff reveal passion and belief in serving their communities, even when originally established to capitalize on business opportunities. Interviews speak freely about how local media contribute to a blending of cultural influences in communities. Electronic media in Southern Nevada work within Anglo business practices and offer niche programming serving specific demographics while other demographics remain underserved (Traudt & Springer, 2009). Ethnic newspaper representatives describe, unapologetically, an embodiment of community. We anticipated stronger community loyalty in print media, which is supported in this research.

Reinforcing Cultural Identity

Ethnic newspapers reinforce cultural identity at least in two ways – as opportunities for intra-cultural communication spanning generations, and as trans-cultural voices and political ties to the larger community. If language reflects cognition and informs perception, then newspapers printing in languages other than English serve as linguistic reinforcement for newer immigrants, or counter-assimilative efforts for older immigrant groups. In some cases, reinforcing cultural identity balances with cultural pluralism.

Regardless of language used, editorial and advertising content target long-term and short-term opportunities of language use are important spheres. It is noteworthy that 9 of the 11 newspapers were printed in English or some blend. Liaison roles of ethnic papers often served in bridging the local gap between members of the ethnic group and government officials surrounding issues like immigration and naturalization.

Masthead Collage

Further Research

Las Vegas and Southern Nevada are a representative American region of changing ethnic composition. This qualitative study provides markers for the roles played by electronic and print media in dynamic interplay between culture and ethnic identity.

Our next goal is content analysis of representative samples of imported and locally-created print and electronic media serving ethnic communities. This furthers research into relationships between media use, ethnic identity, and audience perceptions of assimilation and pluralism.

References