

Apr 15th, 1:00 PM - 2:30 PM

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Traudt, Paul J. and Ferm, Michele A., "Cultural identity and ethnic newspapers in Las Vegas" (2010). *Graduate Research Symposium (GCUA) (2010 - 2017)*. 14.

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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” (Jameson, 1993, p. 34), and media play an important role. As globalization engages culture, media document important aspects of the globalization process (Ratanen, 2005; Hackett & Zhao, 2005; Giddens, 1990 & 1991). By means of **semi-structured interviews with principles of Las Vegas ethnic newspapers**, this study considers the following questions:

Are ethnic newspaper ownership and management priorities similar to electronic media? Through digital technology do ethnic newspapers serve diverse audiences economically and culturally, while metropolitan dailies topple?

Do ethnic media in Southern Nevada reinforce homeland cultural identities? Do they emphasize cultural pluralism? Do they encourage cultural assimilation? Do these media, by virtue of their ownership, 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; literature, folklore, and music, food preferences; settlement and employment patterns (Thernstrom, 1980, p. vi).

•Twelve newspapers participated in the study through **qualitative interviews conducted by means most convenient** to individual respondents, including face-to-face, telephone, or e-mail interviews.

•Eighteen individuals represent Las Vegas ethnic newspapers, answering **questions about the newspaper’s origin, goals for establishing the paper, and reader benefits**. Interviewee roles are described as publisher, owner, or CEO (9); as editor (4); as business or sales managers (3); as reporters (2); and one as webmaster.

•Independently the authors use the **constant comparative method** (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 12) to generate themes, exceptions, and frameworks found 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 (3)

Format

Newspapers use broadsheet folds and tabloid folds, publishing from one to three sections per issue. Language approaches include English only, homeland language only, or a blended use of homeland language with English.

Distribution

Newspapers are available in Las Vegas for free, with home delivery at subscription price in three cases. Distribution takes place through public locations, including markets, restaurants, mechanic shops, gas stations, tour busses, 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 a shared characteristic 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. Reader feedback is often informal and occurs when participating in community activities, as when attending religious services or when speaking with long-time acquaintances. Reader feedback is more direct when a section or issue is omitted or missing. During this study, one newspaper ceased publication, receiving mainstream media coverage and eliciting varied reader responses.

Perceived Functions

Language Reinforcement & Assimilation

Homeland language use can attract readers to the newspaper, especially for readers who have difficulty with English or are new to the community. Homeland language in newspapers provides readers with language-learning opportunities.

Community Voice & Information Source

In communication, ethnic newspapers perform dual roles, providing information to the community and embodying the community. Interviews describe newspapers as “the voice,” “the arm,” and “the eye, the lips, the ear” of a community.

Upholding Journalistic Ideals

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

Alternative to Mainstream Newspapers

Ethnic newspapers are alternatives 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 joint venture, and cross-media ventures as ethnic newspapers communicate through radio and television.

Government Liaison

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.

Southern Nevada Newspapers: Language, Ethnicity & Founding History

Newspaper Name	Publication Language	Intended Audience Ethnicity	Founding History
<i>US-Asian Chronicle</i>	---	---	---
<i>Las Vegas Sentinel Voice Newspaper</i> *	English	African American	African American founders, now incorporated
<i>Las Vegas Chinese Daily News</i> *	Mandarin	Chinese	Chinese founder, privately owned
<i>CDN Las Vegas News</i> *	Chinese	Chinese	Trial publication, corporate owned
<i>Vegas Chinese News</i> *	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese founder, privately owned
<i>Asian Journal</i>	English	Filipino	---
<i>Filipino Guardian</i>	---	Filipino	---
<i>Philippine News</i> *	English	Filipino	Filipino founder, now incorporated
<i>Nevada Examiner</i> *	English, Tagalog	Filipino	Founder unclear, corporate owned
<i>Philippine Times of Southern Nevada</i>	English	Filipino	---
<i>Planet Philippines</i>	English	Filipino	---
<i>Tribune USA</i>	English, Tagalog	Filipino	---
<i>La Voce</i> *	English, Italian	Italian	---
<i>Jewish Reporter</i> *	English, Hebrew	Jewish	Jewish Federation founder, now closed
<i>Las Vegas Israelite</i>	English	Jewish	---
<i>Korea Times of Las Vegas</i>	Korean	Korean	---
<i>Korean News USA</i>	Korean	Korean	---
<i>Kyocharo America</i> *	Korean, English	Korean	Founder unclear/Publication name adopted from Korea, corporate owned
<i>Las Vegas Ilyo Newspaper</i> *	Korean	Korean	Korean founder/Publication name adopted from Korea, corporate owned
<i>El Mundo</i>	Spanish	Latino	---
<i>El Tiempo</i> *	Spanish, English	Latino	Review-Journal publication, corporate owned
<i>Indian Voices Newspaper</i> *	English, Spanish	Native American	Native American & African American founder, privately owned

Note. * indicates a participant newspaper and --- indicates data were not collected



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.

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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. Interviewees 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, unprompted, 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 in at least two ways – as opportunities for **intra-cultural communication** spanning generations, and as **trans-cultural voices** and political liaisons 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 efforts.

Regardless of language used, editorial and advertising content target and reinforce the importance of community, particularly when actors and actions from the local scene are the focus. Ethnic-community groups and citizen journalists are valued for **community dialogue** as on-the-street reporters and as opinion leaders – a feedback function largely absent in larger, metropolitan newspapers. Publishers and editors of ethnic newspapers are among the community’s visible powerbrokers in Southern Nevada dealings, including interactions with politicians, business leaders, and mainstream media.

Assimilation

As a community anchor for solidifying ethnic identity, ethnic newspapers are also important agents for assimilation into the mainstream. As language informs perception, economic 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 trust gap between members of the ethnic group and government officials surrounding issues like immigration and naturalization.

Masthead Collage