

PROMOTING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH ETHNIC MEDIA

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Abstract: Ethnic media, defined by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (for the ethnic program specifically) as “one, in any language, that is specifically directed to any culturally or racially distinct group other than one that is Aboriginal Canadian or from France or the British Isles” (CRTC, 1999), are emerging to offer new communicative civic spaces to ethno-cultural citizens. Studies, however, suggest that while they may not be completely disconnected from broader society, they remain largely “distinct from the dominant public sphere” (Karim, 2002). The majority are focused on a single ethnic group and develop in isolation of each other to cater to their specific group’s interests. Such an isolationist tendency is a concern in multicultural societies in that it can potentially intensify political, socio-economic, and cultural divides among older and new populations and develop “parallel societies” (Hafez, 2007) and a fragmented citizenship. Whether or not ethnic media will lead to hindering immigrants’ civic integration by raising citizens of communities rather than citizens of the broader society needs to be empirically validated. This paper, therefore, explores the distinction between mainstream and ethnic media through a comparative content analysis on coverage of the October 14 2008 Canadian federal election in English and Korean press in British Columbia, Canada. The findings suggest that in-group orientation is in fact more distinct in English media with significantly low attention given to ethnic minorities either as candidates or voters. Ethnic media, on the other hand, undertake significant citizenship education by delivering step-by-step “how-to” information about the election to immigrants who are less familiar with the Canadian political system to assist them in exercising voting rights.

INTRODUCTION

The participation of Canadian immigrant communities in public debates and their level of engagement with political processes has been a central preoccupation of recent studies (Howe, 2007; Karim, 2002). Immigrants¹ in Canada traditionally have shown higher naturalisation rates than other countries and significantly higher participation rates than those of native-born

citizens (Howe, 2007, p. 615). There is higher likelihood for older immigrants to participate in elections, political rallies, and debates, and commit to paying taxes, learning the official languages (English and French), voting or informing themselves about political affairs, and obeying the law (Statistics Canada, *Ethnic Diversity Survey*, 2003; Kymlicka, 2007, p. 75).

According to the Canadian Ethnic Diversity Survey, the rate of voter turnout for immigrants (77.6%) is almost the same as non-immigrants (78.8 %) (Jedwab, 2006). There is, however, a difference within the immigrant group: 53% of first-generation immigrants who have come to Canada since 1991 voted in the 2000 federal election, while 83% of those who arrived before 1991 voted in the same election (Statistics Canada, 2003). Some recent studies argue that recent arrivals are less politically-integrated than earlier arrivals. Tolley finds such a gap is due to:

...differential access to the financial resources and social networks that are needed to win elections, a lack of knowledge or information on how political processes function, an inability to penetrate political parties, a lack of familiarity with political norms and party culture, discrimination, and linguistic and mobility challenges (2003, p. 15).

The media may be implicated in all of these barriers to newcomers. In an article comparing the level of political engagement of UK and Canadian immigrants, political scientist Paul Howe (2007, p. 636) discusses the importance of ethnic media in the total communication environment, concluding that high-quality ethnic media have the potential to supplant mainstream news sources. A 2006 syndicated study of 3,000 new Canadians' reading habits in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver confirms the possibilities raised by Howe. This study found that 31% of Chinese respondents read only in their own language and 17% did not follow news in either their mother tongue or English. Nineteen percent followed news in two languages, while 33% only relied on English sources (Murray, 2008).

There are at least two methodological approaches to be considered for the study of the relationship between political communication in ethnic media and the level of political participation of immigrants in Canadian society (e.g., through election participation). On the one hand, a study of media content can facilitate an understanding of the media's framing of different stories and issues, as well as their agenda-setting ability. On the other hand, perhaps as a follow-up study, audience research can help us to understand media consumption and political behaviours. Between these two approaches, this paper focuses on the former by investigating the coverage of the 2008 Canadian federal election in Vancouver's English and Korean newspapers. We have selected Korean newspapers for this study since the growth of Korean media in general and Korean print in particular was most significant among the twenty-two language groups we had tracked in our earlier study (Murray, Yu, and Ahadi, 2007). The overarching research questions for this paper are: (1) *Which specific issues and concerns were addressed in each of the language groups?* (2) *How is election covered?* (3) *Were there any blind spots or gaps in election coverage in each of the language groups?*

The first part of this paper will review the theoretical influences on our research, specifically minority political participation and communication infrastructure as a means to facilitate such participation. The second part will outline the ethnic media sector in Vancouver to provide background for this study. Finally, the third part will discuss the findings of content analysis of newspaper articles covering the 2008 election, followed by discussion and conclusions.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Minority² political rights are a recent phenomenon in Canada. Chinese, South Asian, and Japanese immigrants were excluded from voting in political elections until 1947, when a formal definition of Canadian citizenship³ was established (Abu-Laban and Gabriel, 2002). With a gradual political involvement of minorities, recent studies find that there is a positive relationship between minority voting rights and social cohesion as the former signifies the improvement of immigrants' social status (see for example, Hooghe, Reeskens, and Stolle, 2007). This echoes Kymlicka's (2001, p. 171) concept of multicultural citizenship⁴ that "recognizing minority rights would actually strengthen solidarity and promote political stability by removing the barriers and exclusions that prevent minorities from wholeheartedly embracing political institutions."

This is particularly important in Canada's three major metropolitan centres and also most favoured immigration destinations (Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal), where visibility of minorities has become significant (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2001). In the city of Vancouver alone, for example, visible minorities have reached 40% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2006e). However, does growing recognition and participation of minority voters⁵ correspond to growing political readiness of these voters? How well equipped are these interested minority voters with political knowledge? What is their source of information? How is that different by socio-economic variables such as ethnicity, income, education (in Canada or abroad), and, more importantly, by language proficiency?

A study of minority voters in the US has attempted to answer some of these questions. Võ's study of the Asian-Latino-Filipino-America (ALFA) Voters League (2004) suggests that Asian-Americans' ability to deliver votes is still questionable, although the 1975 U.S. Immigration Act contributed to increasing the number of Asian-American voters. They may have the right to vote, but their unfamiliarity with the political system (as it may be their first time voting, particularly for those who are from non-democratic regimes) could prevent them from properly exercising their rights. Thus in order to establish the actual power of such coalitions, Võ further argues that generating disciplined votes is critical.

How then would the barriers and exclusions that prevent minorities from wholeheartedly embracing political institutions be removed? How would these interested minority voters obtain political knowledge? What are the routes of information, especially for those who are more comfortable with their own mother tongue? As a way to manifest minority rights for immigrants (polyethnic rights), Kymlicka (1995) suggests "societal culture"⁶ of ethno-cultural citizens be created within mainstream institutions. This refers not to "re-creating a separate societal culture, but rather of contributing new options and perspectives to the larger Anglophone culture, making it richer and more diverse" (p. 78).

In the case of media, this can take the form of multicultural communication infrastructure either by having existing ethnic media linked to mainstream media or by having a space secured for ethnic narratives within mainstream media. This integrative yet intercultural approach that maintains existing institutional structure while securing ethno-cultural societal culture is important. The idealisation of multicultural citizenship and minority rights without a functioning communicative means for civic engagement is meaningless. First, how are we going to communicate the "rights and responsibilities" to citizens? Second, how are we going to invite "active" participation from the majority of economically, politically, and/or linguistically

limited people? Third, what is the meaning of “political community” as the foundation of good life when the first two are not guaranteed? Lastly, how can we “morally” sustain the community according to the “General Will” when the visible minorities are effectively “invisibilized”? These questions emphasise the “centrality of language to the idea of the public sphere” (Cormack, 2007, p. 11) which makes the communication infrastructure essential for civic engagement of ethno-cultural citizens.

Thus it is important to look into communication systems (available within immigrant communities) that minority voters can resort to if they wish. Studies on ethnic media have identified various roles from entertainment to political mobilisation (see for example, De Leeuw and Rydin, 2007; Downing, 1992). Among these roles, this paper looks into ethnic media in a broader communication context as an important venue for fostering civic engagement and sense of belonging.

MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE: FROM PUBLIC SPHERE TO PUBLIC SPHERICULES

Ethnic media are often discussed independently as media entities. However, they need to be understood in a broader community context. One of the important reasons for this is that ethnic media are by nature expected to play a role in addition to the normative role of mass media. They deliver not only “what” is happening in the country of settlement, but also “why” and “how” that came to happen – this is often overlooked (or assumed to be known) in the dominant public sphere where people share a common history and language (Kymlicka 1995) – in their own cultural idioms. This happens more or less in collaboration with community organisations as a broader community project.

Ball-Rokeach’s concept of “Communication Infrastructure” illustrates this point. It consists of a web of community organisations and media outlets that function as “connective tissues,” facilitating communication between immigrant communities and broader society (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001, p. 398). Without the existence of well-functioning communication infrastructure, it becomes more difficult for immigrant communities to form and function both as a socially and physically concrete entity and as units within the larger dominant culture (Matei, Ball-Rokeach, Wilson, Gibbs, and Hoyt 2000; Marques and Santos, 2004). Through this culturally and language friendly infrastructure, minority voters make sense of the host country if they wish to.

As such, the new multicultural realities in Canada (and other immigrant-receiving countries) propose a more nuanced approach to the conventional understanding of the public sphere. Canadian society has become composed of not only the dominant public spheres of the English and French-language media, but also a diversity of smaller public spheres or sphericules. Operating in a “third space” distinct from the “hegemonic public sphere,” these “sphericules” carry stories, values, and attitudes from the country of settlement as well as the country of origin (Karim, 2002, p. 231). Also, often operating through interpersonal, group, or mass mediated communication – such as autonomous ethnic media – these sphericules offer innovative solutions to immigrant groups who feel marginalised from the greater society (ibid.). Not only do these sphericules provide a space for the ethnic groups to “achieve a visible presence” (ibid.), but they also become the distributing centres for civic discourse about public affairs within which members of ethnic communities can express thoughts, desires, and aspirations.

In this context, we propose a multicultural communication infrastructure model. Multicultural communication infrastructure is grounded in the literatures of the “cultural pluralism” school of thought (Fraser, 1992; Kymlicka, 2007; Taylor, 1994; Young, 1995, 2000; Walzer, 2003). Particularistic cultural affiliations are celebrated. To ignore them is equivalent to denying humans the right to engage in social, economic, and political processes as they see fit. Young (1995, p. 176) argues that “despite the fact that many immigrants acquire full citizenship rights, many ethnic groups remain excluded from the bourgeois public sphere, and are reduced to second-class citizens.” The process of socio-cultural integration, as well as economic and political adaptation of immigrants, is made possible by the existence of a sustainable communication infrastructure. Kymlicka’s (1995) multicultural infrastructure model further advances the discussion of communication infrastructure. This goes beyond the creation of ethno-cultural sphericules and aims to link them to or create a space for them within broader society. This model can be highly intercultural if these sphericules can be active agencies of ethnic narratives. In the next section, we will look at the communication infrastructure, especially media, formed for and by immigrants in Vancouver, and examine the potential for multicultural communication infrastructure as a model for broader Canadian communication system.

BACKGROUND: THE ETHNIC MEDIA LANDSCAPE OF VANCOUVER

A functioning communication infrastructure is critical for immigrants in multicultural cities like Vancouver. Canadian Census data indicates that more than 40% of Vancouver’s population is not of Canada’s two official languages. The 2001 Census categorised 725,655 people as belonging to a “visible minority” (Statistics Canada, Census 2001). This number rose to 875,295 in 2006, an increase by 8.2%, and greater than that experienced in either Toronto or Montreal (Statistics Canada, Census 2006e).

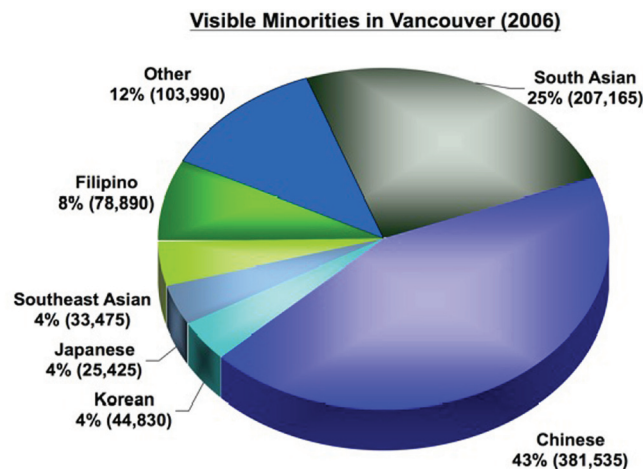


Figure 1: British Columbia’s Ethnic Composition (Statistics Canada, 2006)

Such diversity in population is also observed in communication infrastructure. Our earlier study of the ethnic media landscape in British Columbia, Canada, in partnership with the Department of Canadian Heritage (Murray et al, 2007), identified 144 media outlets,⁷ print and broadcast, serving 22 language groups (see www.bcethnicmedia.ca). Among these language groups, unexpectedly high incidences were found of Korean print media.⁸

Furthermore, the findings from content analysis of a three-week media archive of Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Punjabi, and English print and television material revealed that

the multicultural flow of media outlets in Vancouver is much more complex and extensive than anticipated prior to the research. The trans-local flow of culture is indeed measurable (see for example Sassen, 2002): new information technologies (satellite and the internet) are sources through which programs are imported and appropriated in whole or part for Vancouver's market. Our study showed that one-third of ethnic media content in the Vancouver area had its production origin outside of British Columbia. This implies a penetration of the Vancouver ethnic media market with material (news, entertainment, and advertising) that is not necessarily concerned with issues that affect the local aspects of immigrant communities. As Figure 2 indicates, the geographical focus of news items (50%) leans heavily towards "international news from home-country."

Geographic Focus	Total	English	Non-English	Cantonese	Mandarin	Punjabi	Korean
		Total	Total				
	(% within each language)						
Local-regional	11	5	13	-	11	19	13
Local-in-group	12	-	16	13	10	28	6
Local-out-group	12	17	11	22	12	6	10
Provincial	5	9	3	5	7	2	2
National	16	43	7	7	18	1	6
International-in-group	24	12	28	19	13	19	52
International-out-group	20	14	22	34	29	25	10
Other	1	2	-	-	-	1	-

Figure 2: Geographical Focus of the News in British Columbia (% of Content)

Our findings confirmed an historical trend identified by other scholars of ethnic media (Lin and Song, 2006; Ball-Rokeach, Kim, and Matei, 2001; Matei et al 2000). However, this Vancouver case study further suggested an under-representation of national and provincial news in ethnic media (10%). The numbers vary for different language groups. Korean media seem to have a greater emphasis on international in-group news or news from home (52%) while Cantonese media have a significantly lesser focus on this news category (19%). One hypothesis is that immigrant communities that are relatively new to the country still have a greater connection to the country of origin. The Korean community in Vancouver is part of the newer wave of immigrants, with only 40 years of organisational history in British Columbia (Yu and Murray, 2007). This in turn may partially explain a lesser focus on national and provincial news, and more focus on international in-group news in the Korean media.

These significant findings from our 2007 study raised a number of key questions: If ethnic media are less interested in national and provincial news, where would ethnic communities turn to for their news coverage of domestic (non-local) affairs? Considering the high degree of in-group orientation of ethnic media, especially that of Korean media, is it possible to argue that Karim's (2002) *public sphericules* model is contributing to more segmentation and isolation of ethnic communities, and a lesser degree of intercultural collaboration and understanding? Are these results consistent? In other words, would ethnic media "behave" differently during a provincial or national "hot-topic" event? One of our recommendations in the report was to conduct textual analysis of media coverage of particular events, debates, or "breaking news"

to investigate ethnic media's "behaviour" during election times so as to better understand the type of issues that get covered. In response to this recommendation, this study analyses the content of English and Korean press during the 2008 Canadian federal election.

METHODOLOGY

For a comparative content analysis, we sampled approximately 300 election-related news items from selected English and Korean newspapers in the six week period between September 23 and October 30, 2008 around the October 14, 2008 Canadian federal election. We chose four local newspapers with the highest circulation in their respective language; two English (*The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province*) and two Korean local dailies published four to five times a week (*The Vancouver Chosun* and *The Korea Daily*). For the area of investigation, we continued testing some of the protocols from our earlier study (Murray et al., 2007): length of article, dominant construction of media item, genre, geographical focus, news source, news actor, and journalist (gender, ethnicity). In addition, we also developed new protocols to cater to the specificities of the election coverage: primary and secondary themes (equivalent to news agenda); location of article; party coverage; tone of party coverage; coverage of party leader; and tone of coverage of party leader. For statistical analysis, we used Excel for data entry and then SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for descriptive statistics, and allowed variances of not less than 10% as the likely reportable threshold.

FINDINGS

To adequately answer the three overarching questions, that is the depth and breadth of election coverage, as well as blind spots/gaps in the two language papers, we carefully selected and re-grouped the protocols that yielded statistically significant findings: news topic (themes, news source, geographic focus); coverage of visible minorities (news actor, location of article, ethnicity of journalist); and style of coverage (genre, party coverage). Besides these, for the areas concerning citizenship education and developing intercultural initiatives by Canadian political establishments, we took a qualitative approach to content to identify the differences in the kind of information or advertising between the two languages.

The findings were consistent with that of recent ethnic media studies (Karim, 2002; Cheng, 2005; Lin and Song, 2006; Murray et al., 2007). There was a distinction between mainstream and ethnic media in that ethnic media were sufficiently connected to broader society to cover the election, but largely distinct in the overall communication system so as to focus on the agenda of their own interests separate from that of English media. What is newly discovered through this study, however, is that such a distinction is more heightened by English media than by ethnic media, with significantly less intercultural efforts; visible minorities were nearly invisible in English media, either as voters or candidates. On the other hand, significant citizenship education was carried out by Korean media, providing step-by-step "how to vote" information for Korean-Canadians who might be less familiar with the Canadian political system. We will discuss such distinctions in the following areas: news topic; coverage of visible minorities; style of coverage; and citizenship education and intercultural initiatives.

NEWS TOPIC

The distinction in the news topics between English and Korean papers was obvious (see Figure 3). Among the dominant news topics related to the election, "voting outcome" (24%) generally

received most attention followed by “economy” (17%) and “government budget/spending” (9%). By language, however, “voting outcome” and “government budget/spending” appeared relatively more frequently in English papers, whereas “economy” appeared more frequently in Korean papers (e.g., “Who is Canada’s best economic manager?” “Action needed on economic development”). Considering the fact that Koreans have been the top source of entrepreneurial immigrants since 1999 (32% of the British Columbia total in 2001), surpassing immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan (B.C. Statistics, 2001), the impact of election results on the national economy may have been of particular interest.

Besides these common topics, topics of varied interests such as the environment, health, tax cuts, sub-cultures (e.g., women / women’s rights, gays / gay rights) were discussed in English papers, whereas fewer of these topics appeared in Korean papers. Instead, Korean papers focused specifically on the details of the election: “How to vote” such as “voting rules” (e.g., “A guide to exercising your right to vote,” “Advance polling is possible”) and “candidacy” (e.g., “Five most contested ridings”). Also, topics that are directly pertinent to the Korean community such as “election support” (e.g., “Mrs. Harper supports the election,” “Korean veterans come together”) and “minority” issues (e.g., “Martin, send a strong message to Ottawa”) were discussed. By contrast, English papers covered only 2% of the news items (equivalent to three out of 198 items) that were relevant to “minority” issues (e.g., “Immigrants aren’t as law-abiding, Calgary Tory claims,” “Power of the immigrant vote”), which explains the level of attention given to the visible minorities as a subject of discourse in this election.

	Total	English	Korean
	n=289	n=198	n=91
	(% within each language)		
Voting outcome	24	31	8
Economy	17	15	21
Government Spending/Budget	9	11	3
Voting rules	7	3	14
Environment	5	7	2
Proposals/Plans	5	5	7
Candidacy	5	2	11
Minorities	4	2	11
Election support	4	-	14
Health	2	4	-
Tax cuts	2	3	-
Subcultures	2	3	-
Crime	1	2	1
Other (e.g., culture/arts, Afghanistan)	11	14	7

Figure 3: News Agenda (% of Content)

Such directed focus on the election in Korean papers reflects the community’s special interests in the 2008 election, attributed partly to having Yonah Martin (a Korean Conservative candidate from a Vancouver suburb) from the community running in this election. Particularly, the special emphasis on “voting rules” and “candidacy” can be interpreted as an effort to elicit informed, disciplined participation from the community. It is, however, important to recognise that the articles related to “election support” (14%) in Korean papers included not only the support from the community for Yonah Martin, but also the support for parties in general (e.g., “Conservatives strong in B.C.”), offering translation of Canadian Press (a Canadian news

agency) items to the community.

In regard to geographic focus, ethnic media “behaved” differently during the election time. Unlike the apparent lack of national and provincial news coverage in ethnic media during non-election times (Murray et al., 2007), the election was well covered at all geographic levels, both through in-house reporting (47% national and 26% provincial) and Canadian Press items (72% national and 25% provincial). The portion of national and provincial news in Korean papers (82%) and English papers (77%) was almost the same.

COVERAGE OF VISIBLE MINORITIES

Another distinction between the two languages was coverage of visible minorities. Comparing the ethnicity of news actors,⁹ English papers dedicated only 5% of the news to “visible minority” when Korean papers dedicated 21%. This becomes more apparent when the location of the news items is compared (see Figure 4). Significantly less visible minorities appeared on the front page of English papers (4%) than that of Korean papers (27%). Only some star candidates made it into English papers (e.g., “Dosanjh survives a scare to beat Conservative,” “Liberal Dhaliwal holds on in a squeaker,” “Alice Wong scores an upset victory”). Those 21% of news items in Korean papers, on the other hand, are mostly related to Yonah Martin (e.g., “Enrich multicultural communities by voting,” “Thanks to supporters”) and also to community support for Yonah Martin (e.g., “Let’s elect the first Korean MP,” “Let’s write a new Korean history”). This, however, conversely means that a majority of the election news dealt with so-called mainstream actors (candidates or others).

One good example is a weekly series called “Choice 2008, Canadian Federal Election Sites: Five most contested ridings” by *The Vancouver Chosun*. Three articles from this weekly series were sampled during our six-week sampling period. Each discussed the issues in the Quadra, Burnaby-Douglas, and North Vancouver ridings respectively, comparing the candidates as well as demographic profile of each riding (September 27, October 4, and October 11 2008). The candidates who, like Yonah Martin, ran for the Conservative Party, (e.g., Ronald Leung, Burnaby-Douglas) or those who competed against Yonah Martin in the same riding (Black of NDP; Smith of Green; and Hassen of Liberal) appeared relatively more frequently in Korean papers than others as they often attended the same press conferences with Yonah Martin (e.g., *The Korea Daily*, October 1 and October 2 2008; *The Vancouver Chosun*, October 3 2008).

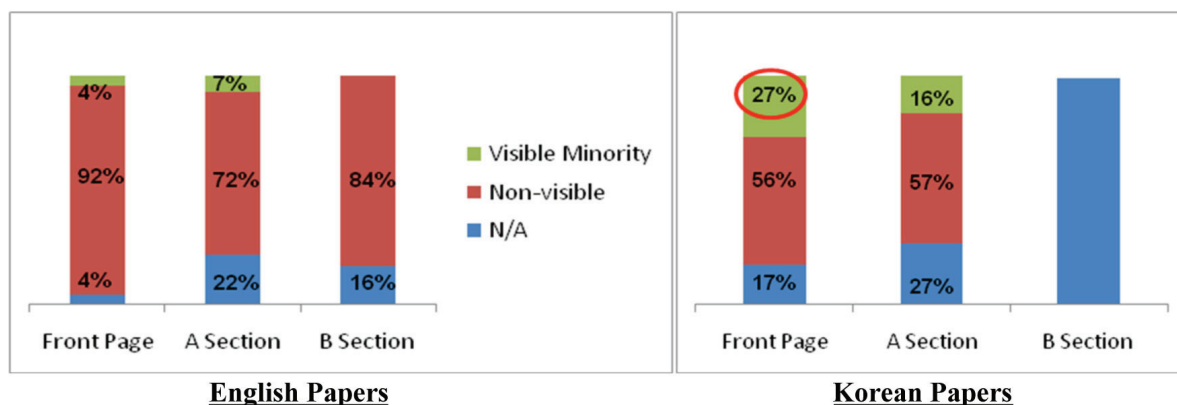


Figure 4: Coverage of Visible Minority by Location within Papers

Relatively higher visible minority coverage in Korean papers also reflects an increase of in-house reporting. Sixty percent of the news items in Korean papers were written by staff writers, and this is, in fact, twice as much as the everyday news reporting of the Korean papers (31%) (Murray et al., 2007).

STYLE OF COVERAGE

Similar to the news agenda, there was also a distinction in the news genre and party focus between languages. It is generally understood that ethnic media have less ideologically loaded content and more hard, “factual” news.¹⁰ This was clearly the case in both of our studies. While the election was generally covered as “hard news” (65%), this was more so in Korean papers (81%) than in English papers (57%) (see Figure 5). Such difference lies in the fact that English papers covered the election more in diverse genres such as Analysis / Feature (e.g., “Why aren’t Canadian politics sexy?”), Editorial (e.g., “Electoral system partly to blame”), and Letters to the Editor (e.g., “Who is Ottawa’s main “customer”?”). Such diversity was not completely absent in Korean papers. Some Korean examples include aforementioned feature columns such as “Choice 2008, Canadian Federal Election Sites: Five most contested ridings” by *The Vancouver Chosun* and “Choice 2008! 10.14 Federal Election” by *The Korea Daily*. In fact, there were more special interviews in Korean papers such as the ones with Yonah Martin (*The Korea Daily*, October 1 2008, A1) and with Barry Devolin (*The Vancouver Chosun*, October 9 2009, A4). There were, however, no Letters to the Editor, thus an absence of feedback from readers.

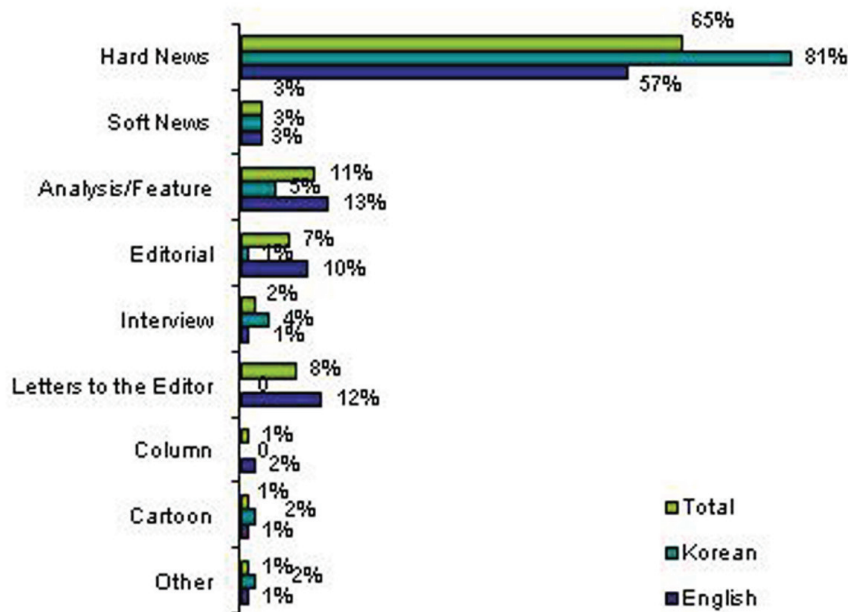


Figure 5: News Genre by Language

Another difference in the style of coverage was the party focus (see Figure 6). While the Conservative Party, the ruling party, was given the most attention regardless of language, English papers were more likely to cover a single party in a single story (78%) whereas Korean papers tended to cover multiple parties in a single story (53%). What is important to note is that half of the Korean items that covered multiple parties (“all parties” and “mix of parties” combined) were written by staff writers and the other half were provided by the Canadian

Press. There was also no single story on the Green Party and Bloc Quebecois. Such patterns of reporting may imply a limited access to news sources or general difference in editorial practices and news values of Korean media that require further investigation into the day-to-day practices of media professionals. Furthermore, the question of “ethnic voting” (which is often discussed when members of different ethnic communities behave similarly during elections) was not valid in the Korean community as there was no clear sign of political leaning towards a single party when compared with English-language papers.

	Total	English	Korean
	n=289	n=198	n=91
	(% with each language)		
Conservative	35	39	25
Liberal	13	17	7
NDP	6	8	3
Green	1	2	-
Bloc Quebecois	1	1	-
All parties	16	17	14
Mix of parties	16	5	38
No party mentioned	12	13	12

Figure 6: Party Coverage by Language (% of Content)

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND INTERCULTURAL INITIATIVES

What really differentiated Korean papers from English papers was their coverage of ethnic-related issues about the election customised for Korean-Canadian voters. First, the two Korean papers together dedicated 20% of the pre-election news to “voting rules” (e.g., “Koreans, this is how to vote,” “A guide to exercising your right to vote,” “Three ways to vote in the federal election”) by providing step-by-step information on voting procedures for inexperienced voters. As the day of the election approached, the papers also promoted advanced polling (e.g., “Advance polling is possible,” “More than 1 million participate in advance polling”) for those who may not be able to participate on the election day. Considering that Koreans are the second largest self-employed class in British Columbia (B.C. Statistics, 2001), the information on advanced polling could have been useful to some and potentially increased participation.

In a broader communication infrastructure context, Korean media’s collaboration with community organisations was also something to watch. The details of election-related events hosted by community organisations made it into the bulletin section of papers, and after those events had taken place, the summaries of the events were also made available through the papers. For example, Corean Canadian Coactive Society (C3)¹¹ organised a seminar on voting rules with the self-claimed intention to “increase awareness of and participation in the federal election” (*The Vancouver Chosun*, September 23 2008, A3). This event also invited four candidates of the Tri-cities riding (where Koreans are concentrated), and shared their pledges on immigration, health, transportation, education, and the environment with the community (*The Vancouver Chosun*, October 2 2008, A3; *The Korea Daily*, October 2 2008, A1).

Aside from community-level promotion, some cross-language, cross-cultural promotion initiated by Canadian political establishments was also observed. During our sampling period, Election Canada placed half-page ads in Korean papers (in translation) which contained a fair amount of information about the election from the Voter Information Card to Voter Identification at the polls.

Second, as discussed earlier, Korean papers provided not only the details of “how to vote” and “where to vote,” but also an ample amount of information about “who to vote for,” introducing candidates from various parties and ridings. Good examples of these are aforementioned special feature columns such as “Choice 2008, Canadian Federal Election Sites: Five most contested ridings” by *The Vancouver Chosun*, a summary of the C3 seminar (*The Vancouver Chosun*, October 2 2008, A1; *The Korea Daily*, October 2 2008, A1), and a summary of the major pledges of each party (e.g., “The 14th, the date to choose the representative”). In fact, most news items categorised under “candidacy” (11%) discussed more about candidates in general than Yonah Martin in particular.

Intercultural initiatives were again observed on this end. Conservative, Liberal, and NDP placed a total of six ads (of candidates) on Korean papers during our sampling period, which were unseen in English papers. Five of the six ads promoted individual candidates and their pledges (Lorne Mayencourt, Conservative, *The Vancouver Chosun*, October 7 2008, A2 and October 11 2008, C4; Dawn Black, NDP, *The Vancouver Chosun*, October 9 2008, A9; Don Bell, NDP, *The Vancouver Chosun*, October 10 2008, B8 and October 11, B2). Only one ad promoted multiple candidates from the same party (Dawn Black and Bill Siksay, NDP, *The Korea Daily*, October 11 2008, A20). Such intercultural initiatives may imply growing recognition of ethnic voters as well as ethnic media. The effectiveness of these ads is, however, beyond the scope of this research; it may be of interest to both the government and ethnic media for future placement.

DISCUSSION

Is Ethnic Media Connected to the Greater Public Sphere?

Ethnic media, as part of a multiple model of “public sphericules”, offers a sense of belonging to groups largely alienated from the dominant public sphere. They are, however, not alternatives to the mainstream public sphere, but work to bridge the gap between marginalised groups and mainstream society. The findings of this study are consistent with that of Karim’s (2002) study of South Asian press in Vancouver. Ethnic media are not isolated from public discourse. Issues that concern the rest of society also concern ethnic minorities.

One of the strengths of ethnic media is in its ability to reach audiences in their own cultural idioms, instead of the language used in the mainstream public sphere (Karim, 2002, p. 239). Aforementioned special feature columns on different ridings are good examples of this. The issues in each riding were discussed from Korean-Canadian perspectives. Another strength of ethnic media confirmed in this study is its ability to complement mainstream media by covering the type of news that specifically matters to the community. As discussed, some of the minority issues or visible minority candidates/voters discussed in Korean papers were nearly absent in English papers. Ethnic media, thus, should not aspire, nor be encouraged to operate on the margins. Instead, they should aspire to act as players in the larger public sphere where most politics and government affairs operate.

This is, however, an uphill battle; many ethnic media markets struggle to gain such recognition. A large number of ethnic media operate within a national framework and the quality of these national ethnic media could be evaluated based on Iris Young's (2000, p. 73) model of "offensive" (change-oriented) and "defensive" (interaction oriented) publics. While it is true that the "story-telling" aspect of ethnic media is important to provide cultural translation and highlight issues that are generally excluded from the mainstream public sphere, the value of such practices is in its ability to translate this "ethnic storytelling" into a sense of agency and collective movement. Gamson (2001, p. 68) also argues that "narrative and experiential knowledge as a discourse does not translate into agency unless collective actors exist to tie the lessons of such stories to public policies." This brings the discussion back to Kymlicka's argument on creating ethno-cultural societal culture within mainstream institutions. For ethnic media to become an active agency in the broader public sphere, there should be a legitimate means to secure ethnic narratives within mainstream media. As far as the findings of this study are concerned, however, there was neither a sign of such value-added actions nor collective actors to enable that. Thus the multicultural communication infrastructure as a model for broader communication systems is still an ideal rather than a reality.

In this regard, national ethnic media is still struggling. Nevertheless, some of these barriers can be gradually lifted through greater access to the political and economic spheres (by way of access to sources), increased media subsidies for capacity building, and a self-monitoring and regulatory system that ensures standard practices (based on a "social responsibility" model of media). With such supports, ethnic media can work towards becoming recognised as "new options" of the larger public sphere, and operate in such a way as to change the dynamics and power relations within the mainstream.

Is Ethnic Media Promoting Political Education and Awareness?

We find it extremely difficult to provide an answer to this question. Such difficulty stems from different understandings in academic and policy circles of what political involvement means. The complexity of exercising democratic choice is challenging for new immigrants, especially those coming from countries with limited or no tradition in democratic practices or institutions. A news editor of a leading ethnic media outlet in Vancouver states that some immigrants from non-democratic regimes need to be educated about Canadian government structure, beginning with three levels of government (Murray et al., 2007). This model of political participation can be classified as partisan and bound to electoral processes of democracy. Thus, if the question being asked is about ethnic media's potential contribution to educating new citizens on basic political knowledge or to advancing the practice of citizenship on the part of old citizens, the answer is yes.

This study also finds that Canadian political establishments have a significant program of outreach to the Korean community, and likely to other ethno-cultural communities such as the Chinese and South Asian communities, the two largest ethnic communities in British Columbia (Statistics Canada, 2006d). As Karim (2002) argues, the voting power of large concentrations of minority ethnic groups in immigrant-heavy neighbourhoods becomes significant during elections: "When politicians attempt to reach these electorates in their own cultural idioms, ethnic media becomes key vehicles" (p. 239). In other words, during election time, the parties (especially the federal Conservative party) are fairly advanced in reaching out to the electorate and their media in other languages, while other "non-partisan" policy information is not available.

This was clearly the case for Korean papers which placed a number of political ads from major political parties. Thus again, if the question being asked is about ethnic media's potential contribution to facilitating cross-ethnic exposure (although this may be one-way), the answer is yes. However, there are many more questions to be answered. For future research, it would be interesting to probe whether politics has the centre stage in-between elections. Is it the case that the ethnic democratic engagement is passive while governments are in office, and re-emerges only during election times when there seems to be some perception of inter-group rivalry for recognition? Of course, more comparative research is needed to probe this question.

CONCLUSION

The media distinction hypothesis is once again validated through this comparative study on coverage of the 2008 Canadian federal election. The findings of this study, however, challenged the conventional understanding of ethnic media's in-group orientation. As far as this election goes, in-group orientation was much more distinct in English papers. There was significantly less coverage of visible minorities and minority issues in English papers. What this lack of intercultural exposure to visible minorities among the non-visible or invisible majority may lead to is problematic. This may lead to gradual disappearance of visible minorities in the dominant public sphere and discourses, and to fragmentation of citizenship as claimed by the media distinction scholars, a process that seems to be driven by mainstream media.

Korean media, on the other hand, "behaved" differently during the election period by providing election-related news at all geographic levels. Although their limited access to mainstream news sources and insufficient coverage of certain issues remains a concern, their coverage of basic "how-to" information (which is often excluded in English papers) complements information blind spots in English media. What may be interesting to probe in future studies is how effective such information was in generating directed, disciplined votes. Furthermore, it is undeniable that the community's own candidate could have increased the level of interest toward this election. Therefore, it would be interesting to measure the degree of influence the Yonah Martin factor had on intercultural coverage, and to what extent it sparked advertising competition among candidates in the same riding.

This study confirmed the complementary role of ethnic media, particularly during national "hot-topic" events such as the election: they co-exist with mainstream media while being reasonably connected to and interculturally engaged with broader society. Given such parallel existences and the complementary role of ethnic media in the national communication system, what remains is to turn these reasonably isolated sphericules into active agencies beyond their ethnic boundaries to play an integrative role in a broader public sphere. This requires linking "ethnic storytelling" to the broader communication system, and this is where immediate policy attention should be given.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Statistics Canada defines immigrants to be "people who are, or have been, landed immigrants in Canada. A landed immigrant is a person who has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Some immigrants have resided in Canada for a number of years, while others have arrived recently. Most immigrants are born outside

Canada, but a small number were born in Canada” (Statistics Canada 2006a).

- 2 Statistics Canada defines minority (or “visible Minority”) to be “persons who are identified according to the Employment Equity Act as being non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” This includes Chinese, South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sri Lankan), Black (e.g., African, Haitian, Jamaican, Somali), Arab / West Asian (e.g., Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Moroccan), Filipino, South East Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese), Latin American, Japanese, Korean, and Other. Non-visible minority, on the other hand, includes aboriginal and white (Statistics Canada, 2006b). Immigrant and visible minority are often used interchangeably; however, the term “immigrant” concerns one’s legal status in Canada, and therefore, includes white, while “visible minority” concerns one’s ethnic origin. As of 2006, there are 6,186,951 immigrants and 5,056,090 visible minorities in Canada (Statistics Canada 2006c, 2006d). The term “visible minority” is problematic particularly in Canada’s major metropolitan centres where the visible minority is on a par with the majority in number. In this discussion of minority political participation, we limit visible minorities to Canadian citizens.
- 3 “Citizenship means more than the right to vote; more than the right to hold and transfer property; more than the right to move freely under the protection of the state; citizenship is the right to full partnership in the fortunes and future of the nation” (cited in Abu-Laban and Gabriel, 2002, p. 43).
- 4 Multicultural citizenship demands the recognition of differentiated rights, entitled to different cultural groups (national minority and polyethnic minority) and emphasises the need for more directed attention to citizens’ cultural orientation and the process by which they integrate into broader society.
- 5 Canada introduced the “point system” in 1967, which officially ended the Canada Exclusion Act 1947 and set the path for neoliberal immigration policies such as the Business Immigration Programme in 1986 and restrictive refugee legislation in 1987 to accept more family-class intake. All of these policies, to a certain degree, had minority votes in mind, along with economic contribution from immigrant entrepreneurs (Abu-Laban and Gabriel, 2002).
- 6 According to Kymlicka (1995, p. 76), societal culture is “a culture which provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres.”
- 7 Note that just fewer than 10 outlets – mostly regulated and established as special formats by the CRTC–were multilingual, such as Shaw’s Multicultural Channel and Rogers’s Omni.
- 8 One of the most convincing hypotheses may be that of Zhou, Chen, and Cai (2006) that ethnic media are becoming one of the ethnic businesses.
- 9 News actors are “people mentioned in the news (e.g., participants in an event and / or victims)” (Murray et al., 2007, p. 179).
- 10 Hard news refers to ““on-topic,” timely, or breaking news” (Murray et al., 2007, p. 176).

11 C3, founded in 2003, is one of the few community organisations led by and for the 1.5-generation (those who were born in Korea and followed their parents to Canada in their early ages) and second-generation Korean-Canadians in B.C. Yonah Martin was a founding member, and served as Chair until recently.

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