

Chapter 22

Cyber Behaviors of Immigrants

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st Century, due to development of transportation and communication technology, people are living in a more globalized world than ever before. International migration, with changing dynamics, is achieved at high speed and on a large scale. As new media are gaining popularity, the authors are curious about the way immigrants behave in the cyberspace and the consequences their cyber behaviors bring about. In this article, the authors trace the historical development of research on cyber behaviors of immigrants, explore important research topics, examine existing studies, and predict future trend in this area.

INTRODUCTION

Research on the cyber behaviors of immigrants lies at the intersection of immigration studies and studies of computer-mediated communication (CMC). In general this field explores the immigrants' use of new media such as the Internet from different theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. The research area includes immigrants' usage patterns of new media, the motives and other factors affecting their usage and behavior, the role of new media usage in their immigration and the effects of cyber behaviors in their life.

OVERVIEW

International migration is a process that occurs when an individual moves from the home country to live--temporarily or permanently--in the host country (Chen, 2006). There is a long tradition in examining the role of communication and media use in the cross-culture transition process of immigrants. As stated in the Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation, adaptation, in essence, is communication-based phenomenon, encompassing multiple stages and dimensions of adjustment (Kim, 1987; 1988;

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2001). Following this line of thought, a bulk of research explored the way immigrants use different types of communication media to form and maintain interpersonal and mass communication, the way it impacts their intercultural adaptation, and the way the environment forces and personal predispositions exert influence on this process in various social cultural contexts (Kim, 1977; 1978; 1987; DeFleur & Cho, 1957; Hur, 1981; Lee & Tse, 1994; Ryu, 1976; Shah, 1991; Subervi-Velez, 1986; Walker, 1999; Zeigler, 1983).

With the rapid diffusion of the new media, the cyberspace has gradually been recognized as a useful platform for interpersonal and mass communication and information retrieval since 1990s. Researchers began to examine cyber behaviors of immigrants in their studies of communication and immigration. Some studies investigated the use of new media with other traditional media (print press, satellite TV, radio, and telephone) among immigrants (Ali, 2006; Hwang, 1999; Lee, 2005; Louie, 2003; Qian, 2009; Yang, et al., 2004; Zhang, 2007; Zhou & Cai, 2002). Other studies investigated new media consumption exclusively of immigrants (Beom, 2002; Chen, 2010; 2011; Cemalcilar, et al., 2005; Fan, 2008; Kim, et al., 2009; Weiskopf & Kissau, 2008; Kong, 2006; Lee, et al., 2011; Liu, 1996; Melkote & Liu, 2000; Smith & Shwalb, 2007; Tsai, 2006; Wang, et al., 2009; Wang & Sun, 2009; Ye, 2005; 2006a; 2006b).

According to Kim (2001), out of the cross-culture transformation emerges an “intercultural identity” in immigrant. In the realm of immigration research, the conceptualization of this “identity” is forever evolving and is with mounting discussion. With advances in long-distance communication technologies, it is of increasing ease for immigrants to maintain social and cultural ties with the homeland. So instead of a complete decoupling from the old society and a thorough convergence with the new culture, an immigrant is constantly constructing a new self according to his/her psychological, social-cultural, economic and political states in the transitional process. There is increas-

ing awareness to conceive immigrant identity as a multi-dimensional and dynamic construct.

Previous studies on the notion of identity illuminate the importance of spatial location in defining identity, as one’s cultural and social experiences are sensitive to one’s location and the way one is able to negotiate his/her existence in the place (Mitra, 2005). When stepping into the era of globalization inspired by telecommunication and transportation advancements, we witness the increase in scope and speed of the flow of people on a global scale. The concept of “a fixed location” of an individual is undergoing disruption. And this process is fueled by the Internet as it offers a virtual space for people to interact where territories no longer exist. This has great implications for discussions concerning immigrant identity formation. In cyberspace, immigrants converse about experiences in the host society with natives and fellow immigrants, discuss life in different geographical areas with people in and out of the home country, exchange and share information with individuals for a common social, economical, educational, cultural, or political cause. These cyber behaviors further enrich the multiplicity and fluidity of the immigrant identity. Thus identifying the relations between the cyber behaviors and the formation of a hybrid identity of an immigrant is increasingly practiced in the community (Emily & Paul, 2009; Elias, Lemish & Khvorostianov, 2007; Elias & Lemish, 2009; Ignacio, 2000; Lillie, 1998; Mitra, 2008; Georgiadou & Kekkeris, 2007; Zhao, 2005).

The birth and bloom of online communities enact and empower the emergence of “collective identity”, voicing the specific pursuits of a certain immigrant group. Hence there is also a growing need to probe the behaviors of online communities of immigrants and the impacts on the host society, the home country, as well as the globalized world. The studies of cyber behaviors of immigrants are progressively merging into a variety of areas in immigration research. As in studies of diaspora and transnationalism, increas-

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