Does American and Korean Sport Media Consumption Help Korean Immigrants’ Acculturation into the US Culture?

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Poster

Media consumption has long been identified a powerful socializing influence (Arnett, 1995; Coakley, 2003). In fact, it has been estimated that individuals in the US are exposed to an average of 1800 mediated messages every day (Pritchard, 1997). The media serves as an important initial source of information about the host culture for many immigrant populations. Sport media, in particular, is recognized as providing information that can be easily used in conversations among diverse individuals. Sport has a significant presence within American media and, unsurprisingly is an integral part of American culture, reflecting its norms, values, and conventions. Consequently, it would be expected that sport media consumption would provide immigrants with insight into the social meanings embedded in the American cultural context (Schirato & Yell, 2000). Yet, few studies have attempted to explore the processes by which sport media consumption impacts on immigrants’ ability to acculturate. This study uses a qualitative, grounded theory approach to examine Korean immigrants’ sport media consumption and its potential impact on their acculturation.

Purposive sampling was used to identify 15 Korean immigrants. Participants ranged in age from 31 to 61 (M=38.46). They had lived in the US a minimum of 4 years and a maximum of 22 years (M=11.66). All participants were employed full-time. In-depth interviews were conducted with all participants over a 4 month period to examine: (1) their use of American sport media sources, (2) their use of Korean sport media sources, and (3) potential effects of sport media on Korean immigrants’ acculturation. Interview transcripts were reviewed multiple times after transcription to extract phrases, words, concepts, and meanings that were pertinent to the media consumption of sport in the U.S. as a Korean immigrant. Interviews were coded via open and axial coding procedures, and theoretical memos were used to record ideas about emerging theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998).

As a result of the analysis, 28 themes were associated with immigrants’ consumption of American sport media. Preference in a particular sport, presence of local professional team, performance of local professional team, curiosity of game result, viewing highlights, entertainment, prior experience with sports, conversation piece, skill development, stress release, star player (American), frequent exposure of sport clips in the media, participation in sport, support of local team, broadcasting’s technical advancement, to view the high level of skills, getting information, fun, no pressure to understand English, past time, preference of favorite sport team, big event, viewing sports as a leisure activity, Koran star player, break down of skill, winning of favorite team, getting relaxation more than drama, enjoyment. Themes associated with a lack of consumption of American sport media included: lack of local profession team; lack of time due to work, spouse, children; lack of star soccer player and local team; English; and pop-up ads on the internet.

Alternatively, 17 themes were identified for Korean sport media consumption: Curiosity of Korean player’s performance, cheering of Korean player, curiosity of Korean player’s result, desire of witnessing Korean prestige, big event related to Korea, accessibility of internet, nostalgia of Korea, no need of English, Korean star player news, life refreshment, depth of Korean player information, highlight, keeping tack of Korea player’s performance, interest in Korean player, conversation piece with another Koreans, Nationality, vicarious achievement. Respondents did not identify any impediments to their consumption of Korean sport media.

Eight factors affecting acculturation via American sports media consumption were identified: Stress release, conversation piece at work, improvement of language, learning of social customs, communication piece with business partner, fan identification (attachment with local University team), belongingness as local fan (sub-cultural attachment), refreshment. Korean sports media consumption affected acculturation by providing topic of conversation with fellow coworkers, and through the role modeling effect of Korean international star players. Korean star players affected Korean immigrants’ acculturation in two ways. First, Korean star players showed immigrants that they too could have success in their life in the host state. Second, the Korean stars’ success stimulated Korean immigrants’ sense of achievement.
In summary, consumption of both American and Korean sports media can assist in the acculturation process. However, it seems that each works in a slightly different manner. Consumption of Korean sports media provides Korean immigrants with confidence that can be incorporated into their lives and interactions beyond the Korean community. American sports media consumption provides numerous links to the host community. Most importantly, it facilitates identification with the local sports teams which, in turn, provides a sense of community and belongingness with the broader local community. In effect, consumption of American sports media can provide an important point of attachment to the local community.

These findings, while exploratory in nature, suggest that acculturation processes are not solely influenced by American media consumption. While the socialization inherent in host country media consumption is important, consumption of home country media consumption plays a complementary role in the acculturation process. This research has implications for the acculturation process of immigrant populations. Beyond the importance of sport media for acculturation, this research also suggests potential new markets for sport organizations. It also provides a first effort at identifying the benefits Korean immigrants obtain via their sport media consumption. It also provides insight into potential audience characteristics for sport broadcasts and advertising. Future research should explore the generalizability of these findings for other immigrant populations, particularly other Asian immigrant populations.