Mediated Communication and Integration of Diasporic Communities: Toward a
Theoretical Model

By

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that traditional investigations of the relationship between community integration and media use have suffered from an inadequate conceptual framework. Typically, research examining the community integration hypothesis has been preoccupied with the integrative capacity of mass media, principally newspapers, in effecting integration in spatially defined communities. The concern here is with the integrative impacts of both mass and demassified media on demassified audiences, in particular diasporic populations. The conceptual content of mass and demassified audiences and media is elucidated. Additionally, occupancy of a defined geographical space as a necessary attribute of community is shown to be problematic. An explanatory typology of media use is proposed. A number of hypotheses are posited, and uses, and gratifications suggested as an appropriate theoretical foundation for empirical investigations.

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Introduction

Global migration has imposed new cultural conditions on millions of people while distancing them from cultures of origin. The dimensions of the contemporary diasporic diffusion are suggested by a few specific examples. In Germany, an estimated nine percent of the population, 7.3 million people, are émigrés, the largest share, 26 percent or about 2 million, Turkish (http://www.ekg.gp.bw.schule.de/projekte/immigrations/germany.htm). It is estimated that about 20 percent of the French population is of ethnic or non-French origins. In 2004, some 140,000 people emmigrated to France, over 90,000 of them from Africa (http://www. Migrationinformation.org/datahub/countrydata). In Britain, about half the population increase of from 1991-2001 was attributable to foreign-born immigration. In 2006, the largest groups of people granted British citizenship were from India, Pakistan, Somalia, and the Philippines (http://www. homeoffice.gov.uk). In 2006, 37.5 million immigrants entered the United States, mostly from Latin America and Asia (http://www.migrationinformation.org; http://www. washingtonpost.com). In 2006, as well, about three million immigrants were living in Italy (http://demo.istat.it). And in Spain there were something in excess of four million foreign residents in January 2007, including roughly 500,000 Moroccans, an equal number of Ecuadorians, and substantial populations of Romanians and Colombians (http://www.ine.es/inebase/cgi/axi?)

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Historically, diasporic communities have been an outgrowth largely of a loss of social or physical sustainability within a geographical context. Wars, religious and other forms of persecution have contributed. So have limited opportunities for productive employment, frequently precipitating migration from historical homes to urban areas, where dominate cultural paradigms may be unintelligible. Insufficient aerable land or absence of other necessary natural resource have contributed to population dispersal. Among the commonalities of the diaspora are the desire to maintain a connection with the culture of origin, and the need to construct a relationship with a new, unfamiliar set of social conditions.

This paper examines the role of mediated communication in responding to both. It is argued that the explanatory potential of the community integration hypothesis, positing a relationship between mass media use and community integration, has fallen victim to an inadequate conceptual framework. Hypothesis testing has traditionally examined relationships between mass media engagement and integration of individuals in spatially delimited, culturally homogeneous communities. To move forward theoretically and empirically, the idea of community needs to be divorced from occupation of a defined geographical space. Coupled with that reconsideration, attention needs to be turned to the uses, and gratifications sought and received from demassified media addressing diasporic, or demassified, audiences, and how they complement or conflict with integrating effects of mass communication (Chaffee and Metzger, 2001; Payne, 1993). That the two media types are qualitatively different is clear.

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Mass media reinforce a national identity, addressing heterogeneous audiences that may be culturally different in many respects (Schejter, Kittler, Kuok, Douai, and Balaji, 2007). Demassified media serve audiences that, because of their cultural homogeneity, can be described as demassified. These include diasporic populations, whose identity is embedded in a shared culture from which they may be physically absent (Toffler, 1980, 1970; DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1982, p. 157; Ball-Rokeach and Cantor, 1986, p. 11; Cantor and Cantor, 1986). Given the functional differences in the two media types, it is reasonable to postulate that they address differing integrative needs for dispersed populations faced with the complexities of enacting dual roles. Demassified media accommodate the need to maintain an affiliation with cultural origins. Mass media provide assistance in navigating the unfamiliar territory of a new social milieu. The differences are unrelated to technology. Content type and characteristics of consumers are definitive, not the scope or mechanisms of distribution. The distinction is important, because the uses to which the two are put, along with gratifications expected and received may be quite different.

A further conceptual concern relates to the common but arguable assumption, that ethnic and disaporic media are functionally isomorphic. It may be that the two are distinct types of demassified media, responding to different use motives. Clearly not all ethnic media serve diasporic populations. In many instances, ethnic media serve long-established populations having an historical association with a geographical location.

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Literature Review

Research on the influence of mass media in community integration has a venerable history in the United States. Park (1929) demonstrated that newspaper readership was related to community organization membership. In 1951, Schramm and Ludwig surveyed readership of 10 weekly community newspapers in Iowa and Minnesota, and concluded that they contributed to community integration by fulfilling a voyeuristic need among readers to "look out into their community and into the lives of their friends and acquaintances," (p. 314). Evidence for the effectiveness of the community newspaper as a catalyst in integrating individuals and groups into communities has also been claimed by Edelstein and Larsen (1960). Janowitz (1967), in an examination of newspapers circulated in Chicago suburbs, found they facilitated social cohesion and community consensus. Similar results were produced by Stamm and Weis in their study of a church community in Seattle (1986). Ties to the community were found to be positively correlated with subscription to the diocesan newspaper. A more recent study found local print news readership to be a good indicator of community participation as indicated by higher levels of social interaction (Hye-Jin, P., Yoon, S., and Dhavan, S., 2005). Viswanath and Arora (2000) theorized that functions of the ethnic press, conceived of as a mass medium, are largely consistent with those of the community press in identifying external threats to spatially situated communities (p. 49). A separate study examined relationships between the use of the community press, local public affairs knowledge, and integration in territorially-defined communities (Viswanath, Kosicki, Fredin, and Park, 2006).

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More recently, there have been forays into territories inhabited by television, radio, and computer technology (Stamm, Emig, and Hesse, 1997). Viswanath, Finnegan, Rooney and Potter (1990), studied the influence of cable television on community ties in rural communities. Arnold and Schneider (2007), in a study of Turkish communities in Germany, found that ethnic media, including radio and television, provided a bond between Turks living in Germany and the culture of origin. The same investigation found that German mass media were used by the Turkish community for environmental surveillance and, presumptively, interaction with the larger society. While the two media types were found to be functionally different, no distinction was drawn between mass media and ethnic media as demassified, nor between ethnic and diasporic media.

Throughout the reported investigations, four principal flaws emerge. Among them are the failure to recognize the functional differences between demassified media and mass media, the distinction between mass and demassified audiences, and the arguable distinction between ethnic and diasporic media. Finally there is the anachronistic assumption that a necessary condition of community is stable occupancy of a defined space.

The imposition of spatial constraints as an unproblematic attribute of community can probably be traced to Hillery's review of the anthropological and sociological literature (1955). That review produced some 94 definitions of community, with territoriality or spatial determinants among prevailing attributes.

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More recent conceptualizations, generally ignored in investigations of media use and community integration, reject spatial contiguity as a necessary condition of community.   A sense of ethnocentricity among community members, interaction among community members such that they recognize one another as members of the same community, an accepted normative structure, and an awareness by community members of their community as separate and distinct from others has superceded a preoccupation with spatial determinants (Snedden, 1926; Gillette, 1926; Hiller, 1941; Warner, 1941; McIver and Page, 1949; Hill and Whiting, 1950; Hillery, 1955).

Rather than being defined by location, communities are typified by shared emotional connections (MacMillan and Chavis, 1986, p. 14). In contemporary society, relationships unrelated to geography are increasingly seen as the common denominator (MacMillan and Chavis, 1986, pp. 8, 14). Territorial environments of communities are increasingly evanescent (Chavis and Wandersman, 1990).

These communities without propinquity (Webber (1963, p. 29) are founded on common interests, social relationships, and intellectual pursuits that can be maintained across space and are in no way contingent upon shared geography. They are dynamic, social, psychological and semiotic constructions characterized more by transiency than permanence (Anderson and Meyer, 1988, p. 16; Cruz, 1987). Community members are seen as bound by a sense of identity, values, and interaction requiring a common language or symbol system.

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In large measure such a conceptual shift is driven by transportation and communication technologies that readily bridge discontinuities of time and space (Chavis and Wandersman, 1990, p. 61, 77; Altman and Wandersman, 1987, p. xvii; Lee, Oropesa, Metch and Guest, 1986; Guest Oropesa, 1986, p. 551; Chavis Hogge, McMillan and Wandersman, 1986, p. 26).

White (1991) suggests the emergence of new, more complex communal systems and meanings (pp. 266, 268), are consistent with the demassified society and demassified media described by Toffler (1970, 1980, pp. 155-167, 231-233). In contrast to masses of people receiving the same mass mediated messages, smaller, demassified groups exchange large amounts of their own imagery (p. 165).

Demassification suggests the coalescence of individuals and groups around ethnic, religious, professional, sexual, and cultural similarities (p. 232). Demassified media respond by permitting development and maintenance of community ties among spatially dispersed members of such communities. Relevant media include newspapers, limited circulation special interest magazines, electronic media, particularly radio and cable television, with its multiplicity of channels, and computer applications providing for communication among members of widely dispersed relatively discrete groups (pp. 155-167; Arnold and Schneider, 2007; Rheingold, 1994). These are community types in which the diasporic phenomenon can be located.

Populations are redistributed, often in relatively small groups, and, occasionally, as individuals within larger societies whose customs, rites, rituals, and beliefs may be

antithetical to those that have defined prior cultural realities. Resolution of the resulting dissonance is contingent upon the ability to maintain the communal associations that were previously products of some level of spatial contiguity, and to achieve some comfort in new social circumstances. Demassified media address the need to maintain at a distance the cultural bond, reinforcing a sense of communal solidarity. Conversely, mass media frequently project prejudices of the dominant culture, stereotyping and marginalizing people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds ((Mihalache, I., 2008; Schejter, A., Kittler, J., Lim, M., Douai, A., and Balaji, 2007; Husband, 1996). Despite the alienating impact of hostile narratives, however, acquisition of linguistic and other tools required to meet the imperatives of integration into adopted social circumstances requires mass media attendance.

The distinctions between mass and demassified media, and their use by diasporic communities (Figure 1), coupled with differences between mass and demassified audiences, and diasporic and ethnic media suggest three fundamental research questions and a number of hypotheses.

RQ1: Is there a substantive difference between ethnic and diasporic demassified media with regard to use, gratifications sought, and gratifications received by audiences?

RQ2: Are there differences in the integrative influence of print and electronic media, or among specific types of each?

RQ3: Are media used by diasporic populations with the explicit objective of meeting needs associated with environmental assimilation?

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Figure 1

Typology of Media Use by Diasporic Populations
                    Having Dual Community Memberships

Demassified Media Use	Heavy Use	Light Use
	Original Culture Maintenance	New Culture Adoption
Mass Media Use	New Culture Adoption	Original Culture Maintenance

H1: Diasporic populations will report higher scores on measures of demassified media use for maintenance of ties to the culture of origin.

H2: Diasporic populations will report higher scores on measures of mass media use for integration into adopted culture.

H3: Diasporic populations primarily concerned with maintenance of ties to the original culture will report statistically significant greater use of demassified media than mass media.

H4: Where mass media content is viewed by immigrant populations as consistently derogatory, there will be a statistically significant preference reported for demassified media use.

H5: Disasporic populations primarily concerned with new culture adoption will report statistically significant greater use of mass media than demassified media.

H6: Where maintenance of ties to original culture and new culture adoption are similarly valued, there will be no statistically significant difference

between scores on measures of demassified and mass media use.

Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

This paper argues for application of a new conceptual framework in investigating the relevance of the community integration hypothesis to disasporic communities. A distinction related to function is made between mass and demassified media, and their use in responding to demands of dual community memberships. It is noted that ethnic communities are not necessarily diasporic, and that functions served by both mass and demassified media may differ, when community type is taken into account.

The conceptual, theoretical, and empirical positions taken here have implications for public policy in curiously competitive ways. Evidence supporting hypothesized relationships could serve either liberal or conservative political interests, and with quite different outcomes. In a liberal political climate, policies directed at accommodation of differences, and improved cross-cultural relationships, perhaps through revised media structural relationships and content management, are justified. In more conservative political circumstances, support for hypotheses, in particular H3 and H5 can be leveraged to support exclusion. Where mass media use falls below some arbitrary standard, there is putative evidence of inadequate commitment to assimilation among diasporic populations, supporting demands for anti-immigrant policies.

Adequate theory and research need to account for multiple community memberships that may occur either sequentially or contemporaneously, recognizing that interests of diasporic populations span community boundaries. More and more intensive

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investigations need to be conducted involving media other than newspapers, which have been the principal focus of research testing the community integration hypothesis.

The integrative influence of multiple media also needs to be accommodated. Here, there are two concerns: the integrative impact of multiple media on the individual's membership in a single community and on the individual's membership in various communities. Use of different media may be prompted by different use motivations, and with different gratifications expectations. Moreover, integrative effects and differences may be transient. Finally, there is a need for comparative inquiry, examining the relative integrative effects of various media types on diasporic and spatially-situated communities.

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