



Mediatizing the network model of cultural capital: Network diversity, media use, and cultural knowledge along and across ethnic boundaries



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ABSTRACT

Existing studies have paid limited attention to how media use and network diversity are related to cultural capital along or across ethnic boundaries. Extending the network model to a mediated network model of cultural capital, this research examines cultural knowledge as a function of media use and network diversity and whether media use moderates or mediates the relationship between network diversity and cultural knowledge. Data were drawn from a random sample survey on Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Toronto. Results showed that media use was a stronger predictor of cultural knowledge than network diversity. It also moderated and mediated the relationship between network diversity and cultural knowledge along and across ethnic boundaries.

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1. Introduction

Cultural capital provides actors the toolkit for navigating the social world. A growing body of literature has examined the formation and function of cultural capital at the nexus of class and interpersonal networks (Bourdieu, 1986; Erickson, 1996). Yet, existing studies have paid limited attention to how media use is related to cultural capital along and across ethnic boundaries (Bennett and Silva, 2011). Expanding the network model of cultural capital which highlights interpersonal networks as an important source of cultural capital (Erickson, 1996; Lizardo, 2006) to a mediated network model of cultural capital, this research focuses on how co-ethnic and mainstream media use and network diversity are related to cultural knowledge, an important indicator of cultural capital. It further investigates whether media use moderates and/or mediates the relationship between network diversity and cultural knowledge along and across ethnic boundaries. It draws on a sample of Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Toronto, Canada, which provides a fertile ground to understand the interaction of media use, social networks, and cultural capital. With varying degrees, immigrant entrepreneurs use ethnic and mainstream media, interact with inter- and intra-ethnic network contacts, maintain ethnic cultural capital and accumulate mainstream cultural capital. Moreover, entrepreneurs have to tell stories to gain

credibility and recognition and such storytelling has to draw upon legitimate cultural script catered to the taste of different audience, which requires a variety of cultural capital and the knowledge of applying it to the right situation (Erickson, 1996; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001).

2. Theoretical framework

Taking into account media use into the conventional network model of cultural capital has theoretical importance. In a media saturated social world, “the media mediate, entering into and shaping the mundane but ubiquitous relations among individuals and between individuals and society” (Livingstone, 2009:7; Thompson, 2013). Drawing on terms such as medialization (Asp, 1990), mediatization (Hjarvard, 2008), or mediation (Livingstone, 2009), a growing literature has explored interactions between media and society, especially how media production and consumption shape the discourse and the “processes of skillful and purposeful activities of actors” such as institutions, organizations, or individuals when they engage with and adjust to media (Hjarvard, 2008:7; Strömbäck, 2010). If interpersonal networks of family, friends, workmates, or co-members of civic groups use to be the most important source of information, identity, and influence, few scholars would disagree that media “have to some extent taken over their role as providers of information and moral orientation” (Hjarvard, 2008:13). As media design and distribute cultural products that articulate and legitimate certain forms of cultural knowledge

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and practices, media serve as symbolic devices that structure individuals' acculturation and the ways in which they navigate diverse sociocultural spaces. That is, both media and interpersonal networks can act as sources and conduits of cultural capital, serving informational, signaling, and modeling function.

Yet, most research has focused on how political parties, social movement organizations, or life course has become mediated and few studies have empirically examined "the degree, nature and consequences of the mediatization of anything or everything – politics, education, family, religion, self" (Livingstone, 2009:7). In a similar vein, media use has been frequently mentioned or assumed but rarely theoretically and empirically examined in the network model of cultural capital. Indeed, there has been a strikingly lack of research on the relations, interactions, and mechanisms that link media use, interpersonal networks and cultural capital.

In what follows, I first discuss the importance of considering ethnicity as an important source of cultural capital (Hall, 1992; Kingston, 2001; Lamont and Fournier, 1992; Yosso, 2005), which would enrich the network model of cultural capital. As importantly, examining cultural capital in the aggregate may gloss over the complexities as it may be facilitated and constrained by social capital and media use along and across the ethnic boundaries. I then discuss how mainstream and ethnic media use would be related to cultural capital. Two sets of hypotheses and research questions are centered on the main effects of network diversity (H1a–H1c and RQ1) and media use (H2a–H2c and RQ2) on cultural capital, respectively. Moreover, I argue that media use may serve as moderator (H3) and mediator (H4) of the relationship between network diversity and cultural capital along and across the ethnic boundaries.

2.1. Cultural capital along and across ethnic boundaries

Bourdieu (1986) understood cultural capital as the extent to which an individual was socialized into the high culture or the culture of the dominant class in three forms: the embodied state in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body, the objectified state in the form of the ownership or consumption of cultural goods (e.g., books, art, and other cultural artifacts), and the institutionalized state in the form of educational qualifications. In empirical research, the concept has been operationalized as cultural taste, attendance, or consumption (Bennett and Silva, 2011; Lizardo, 2006) and as cultural knowledge indicated by a familiarity with various cultural genres (Erickson, 1996; Veenstra, 2005).

The classic work on cultural capital has emphasized the role of high culture in establishing class boundaries and reproducing inequalities (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986; DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985; Lamont and Molnar, 2002). While Bourdieu (1984, 1986) highlighted the implications of cultural capital for class distinction in a rigid, hierarchical French society, scholars in North America and elsewhere have argued that cultural capital can be used for spanning rather than demarcating class boundaries (Bryson, 1996; Lamont and Molnar, 2002; Peterson and Kern, 1996; Veenstra, 2005; Wang et al., 2006). For instance, social control in the workplace has been increasingly facilitated by coordination via diverse cultural knowledge rather than by distinction based on a mastery of high culture, as "those who have many cultural weapons can find one to suit the battle at hand, whether in the business company or in social company" (Erickson, 1996:219). Accordingly, high-status people have shifted from culture snobs specialized in high culture to culture omnivores with a wide range of cultural repertoire, while low-status people tend to be univorous with a limited cultural repertoire (Peterson and Kern, 1996). More recent studies further reveal that instead of one-size-fit-all, there are multiple manifestations of cultural omnivoresness (Bennett and Silva, 2011). However, both Bourdieu's theory on high and low culture and Peterson's theory on cultural omnivorism are primarily class-based, giving

short shrift to cultural capital along other important fault lines of inequalities such as race/ethnicity (Hall, 1992; Kingston, 2001; Veenstra, 2005).

Ethnicity is a profound source of cultural capital, which "does not always reduce to class cultural capital by any straightforward 'currency exchange'" (Hall, 1992:271). Yet, similar to class-based cultural capital, ethnicity-based cultural capital has critical implications for the maintenance of symbolic boundaries and the reproduction of inequalities in multiethnic societies (Lamont and Fournier, 1992; Yosso, 2005). Ethnic cultural capital refers to cultural knowledge and artifacts acquired by ethnic group members for in-group status attainment and out-group differentiation, which has a sometimes contentious, sometimes supplementary relationship with mainstream culture. For instance, upward mobile African Americans demonstrated "double-engagement" in the dominant Euro-American high culture and black art forms (DiMaggio and Ostrower, 1990). Thus, a better understanding of cultural capital along and across ethnic boundaries is "perhaps the most urgent priority in view of the increasing ethnic diversity of (most) Western societies" (Bennett and Silva, 2011:435).

2.2. The network model of cultural capital along and across ethnic boundaries

Bourdieu's seminal work (1984, 1986) reveals the exchange or "transubstantiation" between financial, cultural, and social capital. Theorized as individuals' investment in social relations for instrumental or expressive returns (Lin, 2001), social capital facilitates a wide range of information sources and faster information flow. People with diverse, resource-rich networks gain better access to information, influence, social credentials, and recognition via their network contacts as they gain timely access to fresh, high-quality, and fine-grained information faster and earlier than less connected people, which can further be translated into economic returns such as landing good jobs or having better ideas (Burt, 2004) as well as accumulating entrepreneurial resources (Chen and Tan, 2009). Besides class, social networks have been considered as an important source of cultural capital, dubbed by Lizardo (2006) as the "network model of cultural capital". Social interactions with diverse network contacts require and facilitate the accumulation of a diverse repertoire of cultural knowledge (DiMaggio, 1987). Network diversity – having network members of diverse social and economic backgrounds – is related to greater knowledge about a variety of cultural forms and a better understanding of their situational relevance (Erickson, 1996; Veenstra, 2005). For example, entrepreneurs "coordinate and motivate the efforts of all ranks in the company, and this calls for shared culture to smooth relationships across class boundaries" (Erickson, 1996:221).

Several mechanisms may link network diversity with cultural knowledge. First, both the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) and the social information processing theory (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978) suggest that the process of communicating, interpreting, and evaluating cultural knowledge unfolds in interpersonal networks. As pipes that carry information and prisms that amplify status (Podolny, 1993), interpersonal networks can serve as sources, conduits, and filters of cultural knowledge. Enabling informational and normative influence, a diverse network allows people greater access to cultural knowledge and more elaborated references to evaluate their cultural preference. Second, a diverse network increases cognitive flexibility and nurtures a cosmopolitan identity, allowing people to appreciate a wide range of cultural knowledge and practices (Erickson, 1996; Kane, 2004). Third, a diverse network gives people more opportunities to deploy their cultural knowledge for instrumental or symbolic gains.

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