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Believing is Seeing: Korean Immigrants' Perception of the Former South Korean President Roh

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Abstract

This study explores how individual characteristics interact with news media choice and people's perception of mediated news events and public figures focusing on South Korean immigrants' perception of the former South Korean President Roh. Thirteen South Korean immigrants were interviewed, and the results demonstrate a three-way relationship between (a) interviewees' political orientation, (b) media choice, and (c) perception of Roh and the newspapers. The interviewees supporting Roh, who read online news on a regular basis but did not read conservative newspapers, recognized the political claim that the oligopoly of the conservative newspapers has influenced public opinion on Roh, while the readers of the conservative newspapers, who do not read on-line news, did not acknowledge the claim. Individuals' opinions on Roh and the newspapers were not directed by media framing, but interviewees selectively chose what they read and accept.

Keywords

South Korean President, New Media Use, Political Orientation, Political Perception

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Believing is Seeing: Korean Immigrants' Perception of the Former South Korean President Roh

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This study explores how individual characteristics interact with news media choice and people's perception of mediated news events and public figures focusing on South Korean immigrants' perception of the former South Korean President Roh. Thirteen South Korean immigrants were interviewed, and the results demonstrate a three-way relationship between (a) interviewees' political orientation, (b) media choice, and (c) perception of Roh and the newspapers. The interviewees supporting Roh, who read online news on a regular basis but did not read conservative newspapers, recognized the political claim that the oligopoly of the conservative newspapers has influenced public opinion on Roh, while the readers of the conservative newspapers, who do not read on-line news, did not acknowledge the claim. Individuals' opinions on Roh and the newspapers were not directed by media framing, but interviewees selectively chose what they read and accept. Keywords: South Korean President, New Media Use, Political Orientation, Political Perception

On March 12, 2004, South Korean parliament passed a motion for the impeachment of the President Roh Moo Hyun, which had never happened in Korean history. Although the Constitutional Court rejected the motion about two months later, the incident was a symbolic event representing Roh's unstable political status, which lasted for his whole term. There has been a view that the media is partly responsible for the poor evaluation of Roh. For example, Ju (2005) asserts using the perspective of framing and priming effect of media that the intensive media coverage of the President Roh negatively characterizing him as a politician affected the public attitude toward him, resulting in a poor approval rating. The supporters of Roh even argue that the major local conservative newspapers implicitly and explicitly attacked him to obstruct his presidential performance as they were in an extremely hostile relationship with the President. These views are based on the assumption that the media can "impose their own definitions of political events, actors and institutions on the public agenda" (Schröder & Phillips, 2007, p. 890).

However, it is not certain whether and how the media coverage actually influenced people's attitudes toward Roh even though it is true that the media highlighted the negative sides of him. A plethora of research has demonstrated diverse media effects on public opinion, but the research mainly looked at the public opinion as a whole, disregarding how individuals with various personal backgrounds and viewpoints differentially process the media content on a political event or figure. In Kurosawa's film, *Rashomon*, individuals have their own interpretation of an event, and Kurosawa describes the individuality as coming from self-interest. In the realm of political phenomena, the varied perspectives are not accounted for by only self-interest but also by the individuals' backgrounds, such as family, education, socio-economic status, and political orientation. Hence, the current study examines how these personal backgrounds and viewpoints function along with the media coverage when ordinary folks formulate their position or attitudes toward a political event or figure, of which information is not directly accessible to them without the media.

Literature Review

Former South Korean President Roh's Relationship with Conservative Local Media

Throughout his presidency (2003~2007), the former South Korean President Roh had continued the so-called “war on the press,” which consequently caused an adversarial relationship with the major local newspapers (Ju, 2005; Ryu, 2003; Symonds, 2004). Media reform was one of the President's policy priorities, and he had vowed to correct the “distorted newspaper market order” even before assuming the office (Ryu, 2003, p. 1). It had been generally known that Roh's media reform was targeting the three major Korean newspapers, known collectively as *Cho-Joong-Dong* [*Chosun Ilbo*, *JoongAng Ilbo*, and *Dong-A Ilbo*], which delivered to three-quarters of Korean newspaper subscribers and were allegedly having nexus with the conservative elites consisting of the anti-Roh group (Kim & Johnson, 2006; Chang, 2005). Roh criticized the three newspapers for their family ownership intervening in editorial affairs, a tradition of inaccuracy and lack of concern for individual rights, and unlimited competition among themselves to expand circulation (Ryu, 2003; Kim, 2004). The government brought their news reports to the Press Arbitration Commission as many as 17.6 cases per month, which is huge when compared to 0.5 cases during the former President Kim Young Sam's incumbency (‘Press policy reflected in the press arbitration’, 2004). In response, the newspapers condemned the president's media policies, and expanded their criticisms to economic policy, foreign policy, and North Korean policy (Kim, 2004). They argued the government was trying to tame the three newspaper companies that were critical of the new administration (Ryu, 2003).

Just after Roh's inauguration in 2003, the *Cho-Joong-Dong* intensively covered corruption scandals involving the President's relatives and aids. They even reported the possibility of the President's involvement in the scandals. The newspapers demonstrated excitement to find out the wrongdoings of the President even though there had been no solid proof that the President was actually involved in the corruption cases. At the intensive and hostile coverage of the scandals, the President expressed his anger toward the press, implicitly indicating that he felt threatened by the power of the major newspapers.

I have been subject to ceaseless and unreasonable attack...I doubt that that [he becomes a successful President] can come true under such a media environment...The media represent another kind of power. It does not have any check on it. Unchecked power is dangerous. This is even more so when a few media organizations dominate the market. (Address to National Assembly on April 2, 2003)

The three major newspapers' massive coverage of the President-related scandals was distinctively intensive when compared to the coverage of other presidential scandals in previous presidents' cases. Moreover, it was only the beginning of his presidency. Like the press in the United States, the Korean press traditionally has a “honeymoon period” during the early presidency, in which the press treatment of the administration is more likely to be favorable or sympathetic to the president (Domke, Graham, Coe, John, & Coopman, 2006, p. 292). Unlike previous presidents, however, Roh had to deal with the press attack as soon as he assumed office.

As Roh's relationship with the newspapers deteriorated, the public support for the President and his administration weakened. Ju (2005) asserts the newspapers' intensive coverage of the corruption scandals affected the public attitude toward the President and the low approval rating of his performance reflected this public mood. In the eight months

following his inauguration, the approval rating of the President's job performance recorded 30 percent, which was significantly low when compared to the former President Kim's 71 percent (Ju, 2005). This low approval rate induced the President's call for a national referendum over his administration, and five months later, congress passed the motion for his impeachment (Ju, 2005; 'Referendum', 2003; Symonds, 2004).

A president's relationship with the press is a crucial factor for the president's successful performance in that the press affects public opinion, which, in turn, influences the president's policies (Davis, 2007; Todd, 1997). For example, Franklin Roosevelt is well known for his use of the press, through which he influenced news coverage and persuaded public opinion (Johnson et al., 1995). Studies of presidential speeches (Corcoran, 1994; Johnson, Wanta, Byrd, & Lee, 1995; Hill, 1972; Kahl & Leff, 2006) and news media contents (Peake, 2007; Todd, 1997) have shown the significance of presidential press relations.

Media Influence on the Public's Perception of Political Events and Political Figure

The significance of the presidential press relations is based on the premise that media influence public opinion. Indeed, empirical evidence supports the impact of news coverage on public opinion. Simon and Jerit (2007) found in their study of the influence of media frames regarding the abortion debate in the U.S. that the consistent use of specific terms affected public opinion on the issue. Ju (2005) also found the priming effect of news frames on public opinion in his study of news content analysis and survey of public opinion in South Korean political context. Media framing is defined as "to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Zaller (1992) asserts framing largely influences people's responses to media contents, such as attitude changes, because ordinary people are not well-informed and do not think over social or political issues. Opinions on political events and figures, which are remote from everyday lives, are mostly based on mediated news. Under this circumstance, interpretations and judgments of political events or figures tend to be influenced by the frames imposed by news media because there are not many other sources that provide "evidence to counter" the claims made by the media (Edelman, 1993, p. 240). Hence, news media can be used to "place mass audiences in invented worlds" that justify particular groups or policies although they have played an important role for political subjects in gaining political knowledge (Edelman, 1993, p. 242).

However, the skepticism on audience's knowledge and competence that underlies the framing effect needs to be reconsidered because audiences do not just accept what they hear or read from news media, but they "decode" the meanings of the news based on their own perspectives and interests (McQuail, 1997, p. 101). Audiences tend to selectively receive messages which reinforce the hopes and wishes that they already have (Edelman, 1993). That is, frames exist not only in media messages but also in the audience: The selectivity and salience of framing is a product of the "interaction of texts and receivers" (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Manifestation of framing in texts, such as key terms used, images highlighted, and sources frequently used, interacts with the audience (receiver)'s perspective that has been built through individualistic and collectivistic experiences.

Although the myth that mass audience is passive, uninformed, and cognitively inactive, as assumed in the old magic bullet theory, has not fully disappeared, a consensus has been made to view audiences as "active meaning-makers" among audience research scholars (Schröder & Phillips, 2007, p. 893). In this perspective, audience is not a fixed or unified entity but individuals with subjectivities that are divided and constantly changed (Moores, 1993). As media contents are "complex and structural arrangement of signs rather than an

empty vehicle for the transmission of information or opinion” (Moores, 1993, p. 6), audiences’ subjectivities interact with the media contents resulting in varied interpretations and reactions based on individual knowledge and competences that have been acquired through individual experiences (Entman, 1993; Moores, 1993).

In addition, individuals use or do not use specific news media for reasons. Audience’s media choice is contingent on numerous factors including social and cultural background and personal attributes such as age, gender, family position, education, work, level of income, media-related needs, personal taste and preferences, and so on (McQuail, 1997, 2010). For example, newspaper choice is often characterized by political orientation. That is, readers “reveal their political identity by their choices of paper as well as finding reinforcement for their beliefs” (McQuail, 1997, p. 28).

Nonetheless, individuals are not equally active in terms of media choice, attention, and response. How active an individual would be varies by “degree of motivation, attention, involvement, critical or creative response, connection with the rest of life, and so forth” (McQuail, 1997, p. 22). The more active the audience is, the less receptive the audience would be. Mediated news affects audience perception and attitudes more easily when the audience is passive and less involved. An active audience would be more “resilient and resistant” to the influence.

In summary, audience research features the following characteristics:

- 1) media content is perceived and interpreted from the perspective of audience;
- 2) individual’s media use involves particular social, political, and/or cultural contexts; and
- 3) audiences are not equally experienced and involved. (Lindlof, 1991)

In the current study, this audience research perspective is employed in order to examine audience’s media choice and their perception of political events and a political figure in the context of South Korean politics.

Research Questions

As a South Korean doctoral student studying political communication, I was interested in President Roh’s relationship with the conservative local newspapers and wondered whether and how the news coverage influenced South Koreans’ perceptions of Roh and political events such as the impeachment of the President. Although previous research found the framing and priming effect of news on the approval ratings of the President (Ju, 2005), it was not certain how people actually thought of Roh and the political events involving the former President as well as how the media influenced the perceptions. Furthermore, people do not just learn external information but they “determine the extent of influence” through their own cognitive responses (Petty, Brinal, & Priester, 2009, p. 131). Then, what factors affect South Koreans’ decision on the extent of media influence? I wanted to find the answers to the questions through in-depth interviews with South Korean immigrants residing in the U.S. with limited sources of information on Korean politics. In sum, the research questions are as follows:

- RQ1: How do individual characteristics and backgrounds of South Korean immigrants affect their media use?
- RQ2: How do South Korean immigrants perceive the former President Roh and political events around him?

RQ3: What are the factors that affect South Korean immigrants' perception of the former President Roh and political events around him?

Methods

I employed Strauss and Corbin's (1990) approach to grounded theory because its principles and procedures are consistent with the intention of the current inquiry. In a ground theory study, the intent is "to move beyond description and to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a process, action, or interaction on a topic" (Creswell, 2007, p. 63). When a research question explores an area where a preexisting theory has not been developed to explain certain phenomena within specific contextual conditions, grounded theory is a particularly useful approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Participants

I conducted a total of thirteen interviews with four students from South Korea, one temporary resident in the U.S., and eight South Korean immigrants. Five were female in their 20s, 30s and 50s. Males were in their 30s to 50s. In order to recruit the participants, I initially employed snowball sampling, using the recommendations of the participants already in the study (Richards & Mores, 2007). The initial two participants were recruited through personal contacts. As the theory began to emerge, I used theoretical sampling to ensure the data was driven by the theoretical concepts and to provide an opportunity for identifying patterns and variations in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the beginning stage of data collection and analysis, South Koreans who had been staying in the U.S. for more than two years were recruited. However, as data collection and analysis progressed, those who had resided in the U.S. for longer years were increasingly recruited, which enabled the author to compare the younger and older generations. While students were very cooperative and willing to participate in the interviews, some non-student Korean immigrants who were comparatively older avoided talking about political issues, particularly regarding presidents. As they immigrated to the U.S. 20 to 30 years ago, when South Korea was still under the control of a military dictatorship, they might have been influenced by their memory of how it was dangerous to discuss political issues with a stranger. Especially when they were asked to sign an informed consent form, they suspected that it implied some legal responsibility and initially refused to sign the form. The author had to convince them that the interview was only for academic purposes and there would be no harm to the participants caused by participating in the interview before getting the form signed. Interview places were various depending on the participants' convenience.

Data Collection & Analysis

Data for this study were collected during the months of February and March of 2009 in a middle sized city in a mid-western state, where approximately five hundreds Korean immigrants and two hundreds Korean students reside. Following Institutional Review Board approval, the author contacted initial participants by email informing them of the purpose of the study and inviting them to participate in an interview. Those who agreed to participate in the study were contacted by the author by phone. All of the participants provided informed consent prior to the interview. The author conducted the interviews, which ranged in duration from 15 minutes to 1 hour, transcribed verbatim in Korean, and translated selected quotations from the interviews into English for presentation.

In order to establish methodological rigor, the author made efforts to maintain objectivity and recognize bias throughout the research process by following the research procedures associated with grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Weed, 2009). First, questions were based on the protocol developed by the author. As the protocol was intended to guide the conversation, some questions were added or eliminated depending on the interviewee's knowledge and experiences regarding the issue. The protocol was developed from the emerging data, and the ongoing analysis influenced the next interview questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). While it was impossible to transcribe and code each interview before the next interview, the author made notes about important concepts that emerged. After the interviews were completed, the author read each transcript to grasp the overall context of the data. Then open coding was conducted. Open coding involves identifying concepts within the text and developing categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The categories created in open coding were refined to form more precise concepts. Throughout data collection and analysis, the author wrote memos summarizing findings and interpretations, which guided selective coding and arranging categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Finally, I sought explanations of the relationships among the conceptual categories to derive a theory about the relationships among the interviewees' characteristics, news media use, and perception of Roh.

In addition, Miller, Wang, Sandel, and Cho (2002) contend that the meanings from the standpoint of the interviewees are understood through not only what the interviewees say but also "when and how they say it, what they convey nonverbally" (p. 216). Thus, the author paid attention to when and how the interviewees tell their stories as well as what they said and tried to understand what the behavioral or verbal expressions of interviewees mean in the context.

Findings

Korean News Consumption Pattern

Although all interviewees were keeping track of Korean news either on or off line, their news source showed a clear differentiation by generation. For those who were under or in their 30s, the main news source was the Internet. They read news on Korean portal sites, such as *Daum* or *Naver*, on a daily basis. Some interviewees were also using the links to on-line newspaper sites on the portal sites in order to get more news on the issues they are interested in. One Korean student explained the pattern: "I read news only on the Internet... While reading news on *Naver*, if I find one interesting item and want to know more about it then I click into the linked newspaper website." Another student favored one particular newspaper site: "I read news on *Daum*. When I move on to a newspaper website, I go to the website of *Pressian* [a progressive online newspaper]." This student showed pro-Roh inclination throughout the interview.

On the other hand, the main news source for those who were older was print newspapers or television. These interviewees had lived in the U.S. for 10 to 30 years. Among these interviewees, those who had moved from large cities, such as Los Angeles, complained about a lack of accessibility to main Korean news sources in the mid-western state where the interviews were held. As the mainstream Korean local newspapers, such as *Chosun-Ilbo* and *Joongang-Ilbo*, were available in the large cities in the U.S., they said they used to have more chance to be exposed to those conservative newspapers. However, in this mid-western state where the Korean population is comparatively small and the Korean newspapers are not available, it appeared that they could not keep their Korean news consumption pattern. Now the only practically available Korean news sources for them were mostly television and a

Korean news magazine, which hardly provides information on political issues. Although the interviewees said they were willing to spend their time in reading Korean news, the lack of availability of the newspapers of which form they are most familiar with kept them from following Korean news closely.

If they were highly motivated to obtain particular news items, such as the World Cup soccer game news or a scandal relating to a celebrity suicide, they would seek other news sources, such as the Internet. However, most interviewees were not highly interested in political issues. As Bird (2003) mentions, people are not interested in politicians or political issues as much as they are in sports and entertainment. One interview with a man in his 40s clearly demonstrates this pattern:

Interviewer: Do you read Korean newspapers?

Interviewee 8: Of course, I do. But, when I lived in Los Angeles, I read a whole lot more. They have all kinds of Korean newspapers, *Chosun Ilbo*, *Hankook Ilbo*, *Dong-A Ilbo*...They don't have those [print] newspapers here. Here, I only watch Korean TV sometimes...

Interviewer: Which sections of the newspapers do you usually read?

Interviewee 8: I am very interested in sports. Sports, entertainment...I follow World Cup news all the time. Sometimes, political or social sections...when there is something interesting. Because we don't have Korean newspapers here, I sometimes read the news on the Internet. I think it is Yahoo Korea...The World Cup is coming again! I am reading more news on the World Cup.

The reason why they read Korean news while they were living in the U. S. varied. For the sojourners, who were planning to go back, reading Korean news was one of their leisure activities. When they wanted to have some relaxing time, they navigated the Korean Internet portals and spent some time reading Korean news about sports, entertainment, social issues, and political issues. For immigrants, reading Korean news was out of necessity as well as out of interest. Because they hung around with other Korean immigrants, they needed to follow Korean news so that they could join the talks with other Korean friends or acquaintances. For example, when asked why he reads Korean news, interviewee 7, who was running a Korean restaurant, said, "I have to. I didn't know I had to before, but now I know I need to chat with other Koreans. It is kind of business related, too. Many of our regulars are Koreans. It is necessary to talk with them about shared interests." Another interviewee who had lived in the United States for 30 years also said he followed Korean news in order to participate in the chit-chat time after a soccer game with other Koreans. Those immigrants' cultural identity seemed to be absolutely Korean whether they were officially U.S. citizens or had not been to South Korea for more than fifteen years.

As the Internet portals in Korea provide links to the original source of the news, which are mostly web sites of print newspapers, when the interviewees had special interests in particular news, they would go to the web sites of the newspapers by clicking on the links. In this process, certain orientations toward the web sites of favorite newspapers were detected. For example, interviewee 7 usually used the links to *Hangyoreh*, which he subscribed to when he was in Korea. Considering *Hangyoreh* is one of the pro-Roh or pro-progressive newspapers, his political orientation toward Roh was assumed. Actually, it turned out he was originally from Junrabookdo, South Korea, where the residents are

generally known for their political inclination toward Roh, and he showed mild support for Roh. However, interviewee 4, a housewife whose family is extremely conservative, did not use the links to *Chosun Ilbo*, a conservative newspaper, even though her family used to subscribe to the newspaper when she was in Korea. She only read some Korean news on *Daum*, one of the Internet portals, occasionally. She never read progressive newspapers, such as *Hangyoreh* or *Oh-my-news*, on-line. She said she hated those online newspapers that criticize the current conservative President Lee and claimed the online newspapers were responsible for the economic downturn in South Korea. In summary, the selectivity in choosing and reading specific newspapers that fit the readers' preexisting views affected the pattern of using online news sources.

Perception of Roh and Cho-Joong-Dong

The interviewees' recollection on the relationship between Roh and the conservative newspapers varied by the extent of their interests in Korean politics, political orientation, and news consumption patterns, although most of them agreed that Roh did not have a positive relationship with the conservative newspapers. Those who had sympathy with Roh perceived that the newspapers had been hostile to him because of his political orientation. Two male graduate students in their thirties shared a very similar view. One of the students remarked, "Well, he (Roh) couldn't do many things because of the *Cho-Joong-Dong*. Whenever he tried to do something, the newspapers found fault with it." The other student categorized the general public by *Bosu* [conservative side], *Jinbo* [progressive side], and *Joongdo* [neutral] and then identified himself with *Jinbo*. He called the conservative side as "they" and the progressive side as "we." He barely read *Chosun Ilbo* or *Dong-A Ilbo*, which are conservative newspapers. He said that the conservative newspapers were unfavorable to Roh, and *Pressian*, one of the progressive on-line newspapers, was favorable to Roh, and then added, "Everybody knows that."

The *Bosu Sinmun* [conservative newspapers] lack fairness or neutrality, of course. The President Roh would say that several times in press conferences [when he was in his presidency]. I think *Hangyoreh* is rather fair and objective. The conservative newspapers are not fair at all. They are fully oriented toward *Hannara-dang* [the conservative ruling party]. They [the conservative newspapers and the conservative party] give and take... [Regarding the accuracy of news reports,] news articles are written by reporters, and it is natural that they have all different perspectives and inclinations... *Pressian* is favorable to Roh while *Chosun* always speaks ill of Roh.

This interviewee showed a strong political orientation toward the progressive and pro-Roh side, but the source from which he got information to build his belief was not clear. His belief that the conservative newspapers had such a strong political orientation against Roh seemed to be solely based on Roh's speech in the press conferences.

On the other hand, those who were unfavorable toward Roh did not appear to have the conception of the structure of anti-Roh versus pro-Roh newspapers. A housewife from a very conservative family, who showed an anti-Roh sentiment, recalled that the relationship between Roh and the press had been hostile, but she could not discern which specific newspapers showed hostility toward Roh. She said that *JoongAng Ilbo* was hostile to Roh, but she denied *Chosun Ilbo* was strongly against Roh. Considering other interviewees who viewed themselves as neutral or progressive were familiar with the structure of *Cho-Joong-*

Dong [conservative, anti-Roh newspapers] versus *Jinbo Sinmun* [progressive, pro-Roh newspapers], this finding that conservative newspaper readers were less likely to recognize the structure is notable. She and her family including her parents and in-laws were against Roh. They never read any other print newspapers than *Chosun Ilbo* or *JoongAng Ilbo*. They barely read on-line newspapers either. Thus, she could not compare the tone of *Chosun Ilbo* or *JoongAng Ilbo* with other newspapers and was not exposed to the discourse about the political inclination of *Cho-Joong-Dong*, which was often covered in the progressive media.

One interviewee recalled that *Chosun Ilbo* and other conservative major newspapers had overly criticized Roh, but after a few seconds of pause, she added that *Oh-my news*, an on-line newspaper with a strong left-wing tone, criticized the current President Lee, too. She said, “Just like *Oh-my-news* is against Lee, *Chosun* was against Roh.” Her personal story indicated that she had tried to balance her political view, while struggling to find her own political identity between her conservative family and progressive friends in South Korea. She admitted newspapers have their own perspectives, thus, was skeptical about objectivity or neutrality of newspapers in general.

Interviewees believed Roh himself was in part responsible for his antagonistic relationship with the press. However, there were some nuances in that view. The graduate student who showed a favorable attitude towards Roh said,

If Roh was friendly with the owners of the *Cho-Joong-Dong* drinking and hanging around with them, things would have been different. In the past when Korea was under the military dictatorship, like in the *Park Jung Hui* administration or *Jun Doo Hwan* administration, they [the dictators] overpowered the press. I think it should have been much easier for them to govern and control the press.

Perhaps he did not actually mean that the dictators were right in controlling the press but was being sarcastic about the way the dictators dealt with the press by saying “it should have been easier for them.” It seemed he believed the way Roh handled the press – not keeping an intimate relationship with the press for favorable coverage nor forcing the newspapers to write in favor of him – was democratic and right although it was not an “easy” way.

On the other hand, another interviewee with anti-Roh sentiment viewed that Roh provoked the press first. She said,

Roh was negative on the press from the first. Well, the press may have written badly about him. But, unlike previous presidents, he closed the press room. And when he had a press conference in the Blue House [the South Korean presidential office], he did not invite the journalists from some particular media [that were unfavorable to him].

She recalled the fact that Roh excluded the journalists of *Chosun Ilbo* from his lunch meeting with journalists, which was reported in *Chosun Ilbo*. According to her, because Roh was hostile toward the newspapers first, the newspapers were not favorable to him. It seemed she strongly believed that the primary responsibility of their conflicts was on Roh.

On Impeachment

Most interviewees had clearer memories of the impeachment incident than other policy issues on Roh. Whether they were favorable to Roh or not, all participants agreed the incident was “wrong.” They seemed to believe that t once a president is legitimately elected,

the person's presidency should not be threatened for political reasons. They did not accept the concept of impeachment whether the president's performance was successful or not. One Korean immigrant said, "It is wrong to dismiss a president even though he does not do a good job." This sentiment might have partly come from the influence of Confucianism, in which a king is considered to be a destined position and should be respected whatsoever, like a parent.

Although all interviewees demonstrated the negative view on the incident itself, they did not agree on who was mainly responsible for the incident. One interviewee clearly recalled the impeachment incident even though he could not explain its political background in detail. "I saw *Park Kwan Young* [the chairman of the congress at that time] strike the gavel on TV." While he evaluated the incident as the result of an absurd brawl that the congressmen of *Hannara-dang* [the anti-Roh conservative party] started, he was not sure about the direct influence of *Cho-Joong-Dong* on the event. Nonetheless, he appeared to believe there should have been "something" between the newspapers and the anti-Roh party, and this engagement between the newspapers and *Hannara-dang* was seen through the changes made in the current President Lee's media policy. He said, "if Roh were friendly with the owners of *Chosun*, he would not have had to go through all the turmoil." But when asked whether he would have kept a friendly relationship with the newspapers if he had been in Roh's position, he burst into laughter and said, "no, never!"

Other interviewees remembered less, but they seemed to believe the responsibility of the incident was on the opposition party, *Hannara-dang*. A lady in her fifties cautiously said,

I don't remember the details...I only remember it was the opposition party that tried to drag down Roh Moo Hyun...they [politicians] always do power struggles...But, people ignored him [Roh] most [among the Presidents]. He was not respected. That's why it happened...I think the opposition party [*Hannara-dang*] is responsible for that.

However, they did not recognize the influence of the newspapers on the incident. It is speculated that they did not think the newspapers have much power on political events nor malicious intention toward Roh. The housewife, who had an unfavorable view toward Roh, strongly denied the influence of the newspapers on the incident:

The newspaper influenced the impeachment? No, I don't think so. If they had that much power, the impeachment would have been passed. Of course, the reporters should have their own perspectives, so they criticized Roh Moo Hyun. But they would not do that to him on purpose to harm him. Why would they do that?

The political claim that the newspapers' negative coverage caused Roh's unstable political status never occurred to these interviewees who did not read progressive newspapers on and/or off line and had limited political discourses in their everyday lives. For them, the newspapers were not powerful political institutions but information sources produced by politically neutral journalists.

Discussion

This study developed a grounded theory of the relationships among the South Korean immigrants' characteristics, their media use, and perception of the former South Korean President based on the analysis of the data drawn from the interviews with the South Korean immigrants who reside in the U.S. The findings indicate the South Korean immigrants'

evaluation of the former South Korean President Roh was not uniform, as framed by the major conservative newspapers (*Cho-Joong-Dong*), but varied by their news media choice. Individuals' choice of news media and what people perceive through the mediated communication on political issues were related with individual characteristics, particularly their political orientation. This relationship and its implications are discussed in more detail.

First of all, the interviewees' attitudes toward Roh were related with their Korean news sources. Those who showed a mild or strong support for Roh mostly read or used to read *Hangyoreh* (progressive print newspaper) or on-line newspapers, such as *Oh-my-news* and *Pressian*, while those who opposed Roh read or used to read the conservative newspapers. That is, readers of the pro-Roh newspapers generally supported Roh, while readers of the anti-Roh newspapers evaluated negatively on Roh. However, it is less likely that the newspapers influenced the readers' attitudes toward Roh, but more likely that people chose the newspapers that fit their preexisting political orientation.

People categorize things, other people, or events in everyday lives. Categorization is "the necessary condition of abstract thought and of the utilization of symbols in reasoning and in expression" (Edelman, 1993, p. 232). One interviewee who was not an active political participant but followed Korean political news and supported specific progressive politicians categorized the general public and Korean newspapers into three groups – *Bosu* [conservative side], *Jinbo* [progressive side], and *Joongdo* [neutral] – by political orientation and placed himself as a member of *Jinbo*. He drew a clear line between the group to which he belonged and the other groups by calling the conservative group "they" while calling his in-group "we." From his point of view, *Cho-Joong-Dong* is "they," which connotes an inimical relationship. He had the prejudgment of *Cho-Joong-Dong* that the newspapers were hostile to Roh even though he never read the newspapers. This categorization of newspapers, not based on actual observation but driven by prejudice, was common among the interviewees. They chose to read the newspapers that are "we" newspapers. This pattern of selective exposure based on political orientation is consistent with previous research results (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2010, 2011; Tsfati, Stroud, & Chotiner, 2014). For example, Iyengar and Hahn (2009) found in their recent study that conservatives and Republicans preferred news reports from Fox News and avoided news from CNN and NPR, while Democrats and liberals avoided Fox News.

The findings of the current study also demonstrate that individuals' perception of a political phenomenon is largely dependent upon their political orientation. Turner (1986) points out that political position is one of the social structural characteristics that provide "clues" about what aspects of a social or political event are emphasized and how the event is interpreted (p. 40). As long as knowledge is "not a battle 'on behalf' of the truth, but a battle 'around' truth" (Ang, 1991, pp. 8-9), the institutionally-produced category of true and false knowledge cannot help but involve political position. Indeed, the interviewees interpreted the nature of the adversarial relationship between Roh and the conservative newspapers from various viewpoints largely depending on their predispositions as well as their news sources. Those who had sympathy with Roh and regularly read on-line news said they viewed that the news reports of *Cho-Joong-Dong* were hostile to Roh, and the newspapers intended to obstruct Roh's performance because they were in the politically opposite position to Roh. It seems they clearly recognized the structure of anti-Roh newspapers and pro-Roh newspapers. On the other hand, those who had unfavorable attitudes toward Roh and used to read and/or still read at least one of the three conservative newspapers did not even have the perception of anti-Roh newspapers. They accepted the criticism and unfavorable coverage of Roh by the conservative newspapers as they were conveyed and believed that Roh deserved all the criticisms and negative coverage. However, one of the interviewees who was not favorable to Roh but read online news regularly acknowledged the structure of anti-Roh and pro-Roh

newspapers and believed all of the newspapers were skewed in their coverage. These findings suggest audience's predisposition interacts with exposure to certain media on their perception of media content and formulation of their opinion.

When people believe a medium is biased, they formulate the prejudgment that its content is also biased (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994). As McLuhan asserts by his famous phrase "The medium is the message," medium influences how message is conveyed and perceived. Although Burke (1966) criticizes saying "the important thing is not what somebody says in a given medium, but what medium he uses, regardless of what he says" as oversimplification (p. 413), he also addresses how the medium affects people's perception of messages:

Incidentally, there is a news program that I regularly follow with some confidence; yet I can't help worrying about the fact that it is sponsored by the damndest batch of poisons and quack drugs, so I keep fearing that the show is somehow being built up for a sellout, come the strategic moment. In any case, whether you like it or not, we are here concerned with the contents of the programs and the ads... (p. 417)

If audiences judge a medium as biased by pressures from advertisers or owners, their perception of the messages from the medium should be affected by the negative judgment on the medium. The interviewees who supported Roh strongly criticized the conservative newspapers of skewed coverage against Roh because they believed the conservative newspapers were hostile to Roh. However, there was one interviewee who tried to balance her own view by reading both progressive and conservative newspapers because she believed that newspapers have their own perspectives. From her viewpoint, it is hard to expect objective or neutral coverage from newspapers. Thus, she was skeptical about the claim that the conservative major newspapers had over-criticized Roh, saying progressive newspapers, such as *Oh-my news*, an on-line newspaper with a strong left-wing tone, also attack the current President Lee, who is in the conservative side. In this sense, the claim made by the supporters of Roh that *Cho-Joong-Dong's* negative coverage of Roh was responsible for his low public evaluation loses its ground because audiences do not just accept what the media conveys but accept what they believe, whether the belief is from prejudice or not.

Nonetheless, it appears some interviewees believed the content of newspapers influences people's views on issues. For example, the interviewees who read on-line news or progressive newspapers perceived the impact of *Cho-Joong-Dong* on public opinion. A student who favored *Pressian* (a progressive on-line newspaper) stated that he would not be influenced by the newspapers but others would. He believed that because his belief about what is right or wrong is strong, he would never be influenced by the content of the newspapers. However, he perceived other people, those who do not have a strong political belief or much knowledge on political issues, would be influenced by the news coverage: "The journalists are really good at writing stories. They make the stories quite believable, and people would move toward their side." Davison (1983) contends that people perceive the greatest impact of communication not on "me" or "you" but on "them" – the third-persons (p. 3). That is, people who have preexisting values and beliefs perceive that a mediated message that is inconsistent with their own views would exert influence not on themselves but on others who are assumed to be more vulnerable to the media message. The interviewee exhibited this perception of media influence on others, but this perception was not observed among other interviewees who had less political involvement.

Finally, the association between newspaper readership, political position, and attitudes toward Roh was less distinct when it came to a critical threat to Roh's presidency. All

interviewees agreed that the incident was wrong, whether they were favorable to Roh or not, or whether they read conservative newspapers or progressive newspapers. As mentioned earlier, the influence of Confucianism is one possible explanation. Another possible explanation is that they might have thought the congress did not have the right to dethrone the President who was elected by the direct election. The interviewees basically agreed that the impeachment lacked legitimacy. This finding implies that when an issue is clear to people and there is no alternative opinion available, they are less influenced by mediated news because they can formulate their opinion without more information from other sources and deliberation.

A quantitative study of the priming effect of media frames of Roh found that the rationales people mentioned for their disapproval of the presidents were consistent with the pattern of *Chosun-Ilbo*'s news coverage (Ju, 2005). That is, media frame influenced people's evaluation of Roh. However, the current study questioned of the uniformed influence of the media and examined whether and how individual characteristics interact with the media influence. This study focused on people's perception of the former President Roh and the major conservative newspapers, based on the assumption that audiences would view and judge the media phenomena from their own perspectives. The results confirmed that it is not that individuals' opinion is directed by media framing, but rather that audiences selectively choose what they read and accept depending on their individual characteristics. For political issues, political orientation was the strongest factor that influenced people's media choice and interpretation of the mediated political phenomena.

Although all interviewees seemed to have retained their identity as Koreans and continued to follow Korean news, they were in a different social and media environment than those in Korea. Because they have limited access to the local South Korean media and interpersonal communication, their source of political news is comparatively simple, which made the data analysis clearer. Thus, it should be noted that the results of the current study should not be generalized to those who reside in Korea. Another limitation of the study is that political orientation was so closely related with other individual characteristics such as age or education that it was hard to partial out these other characteristics. For example, there seemed to be age differences in the perception of Roh since younger interviewees were more sympathetic toward Roh, but age was also related to political orientation and news media choice in Korea. Younger interviewees were more likely to be progressive and depend on on-line news sources, while older interviewees were more likely to be conservative and read print newspapers. Future research in other contexts might be more able to examine other individual characteristics influencing people's media use and perception.

Despite the limitations, this study demonstrates how individual characteristics interact with media choice on people's perception of mediated news events and a public figure in the context of South Korean political events. The results indicate a three-way relationship between political orientation, media choice, and perception of the former President Roh and the newspapers. The findings also suggest that the influence of media on individuals' opinion is minimized when their opinion is held strongly without the need for further information and/or deliberation.

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