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Social media in the information seeking behavior of married Korean immigrant men

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ABSTRACT
In the past, understanding the culture of the USA was very hard for Koreans because they had a language barrier and a lack of information source due to strong ethnic ties (Jeong, 2004). However, technology allowed people to share information via the Internet, especially social media (Haight, 2014). Although some researchers have studied on information seeking behavior of Korean women and youth, very few studies focused on married Korean men. Therefore, this study focuses on married Korean immigrant men (MKIM) and their information seeking behavior with social media usage. The questions are: What is the role of social media in terms of advantages and obstacles of MKIM’s information seeking process and absorption in the USA? Is there any difference in the role of social media and usage between married Korean men and women? To answer the research questions, a mixed method approach is used in the exploratory study.

Keywords (Required)
Information Seeking Behavior, Immigrant, Social Media, Korean married men

INTRODUCTION
Although living in the foreign country is hard and filled with uncertainty, one of the hardest things would be finding the right information. As immigrants come to another country, they encounter the new environments that they have never faced before (Jeong, 2004; Shoham, 2008; Sin, 2013). However, technology developments provide more convenience tools for solving information needs for immigrants than the past (Fogt, 2008; Haight, 2014). Immigrants can find information about the United States immediately through the Internet, and also they can ask and receive fast feedbacks via E-mails or social media (Sin, 2013; Haight, 2014). Therefore, solving information needs and adoption process in the United States are seemed to be easier than the past so that many researchers have studied about immigrants’ information resource and needs (Fisher, 2004; Jeong, 2004; Yi, 2007; Cho Kim, 2012; Kim, 2012; Elligsen, 2013; Sin, 2013). However, the main subjects of those studies were students (Jeong, 2004; Yi, 2007; Sin, 2013) or married women (Cho Kim, 2012; Kim, 2012). A few studies have focused on whole immigrants including males (Fisher, 2004; Elligsen, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to investigate how immigrants use those new channels of information resources, especially social media, and how a specific demographic group of immigrants like MKIM use it in their life for solving information needs and adopting in the new country.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Information Seeking Behaviors and Korean Immigrants
When a user is in a problematic situation, it is very hard to represent what the user want to find because users can not specify their needs (Belkin, 1980). The gap between situation and solution is increased by uncertainty, and people have needs and attempts to reduce the gap (Case, 2012). For the immigrant, the gap and uncertainty could be bigger than local people due to a language barrier and cultural differences so that their information seeking behavior could be rougher and have smaller boundaries than local people (Fisher, 2004). Individual aspects could be universal, but there are existing cultural differences by ethnic groups or different group identities (Markus, 1991). Some researcher focused on this problem and researched the social aspect of information seeking behaviors (Chatman, 2000; Caidi & Allard, 2005; Silvio, 2006; Machet, 2012). According to Chatman’s small world (2000), information-seeking behavior has a boundary made by the small world, which defines and creates the limitations and viewpoint of users, from the surrounding environment of users. They are surrounded
by many accessible information resources as local people, but their information seeking behavior tends to stay in the group that had similar identity.

According to studies about Korean immigrants (Min, 1991; Kwon, 1997; Jeong, 2004), Korean immigrants have been tied strongly to their ethnic group due to the language barrier and cultural shock from the lack of education and occupational skills of the United States. Among Koreans, women and students have been especially studied because the population contained more women than men (46.2%, U.S. Census Bureau, 2014) and students are treated as a minority and are easy to access for study (Kim Cho, 2012; Kim, 2012; Sin, 2013; Oh, 2014). On the contrary, Korean male immigrants have been less studied because they assumed that they are the majority of immigrant society even though they are a statistical minority (46.2%) in the population of Korean immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Surrounding environments and information sources are totally different from South Korea so that their information searching behavior could have more obstacles than what they did in their home country, so then it is necessary to focus on what information seeking behavior they have.

Information Ground and Social Media

The information ground is not only physical places such as libraries but also an environment temporarily created when people come together for sharing information (Pettigrew, 1999; Fisher, 2004). In the past, Korean churches have been main information ground places of creating and sharing information because it was the only and fastest way to share information and their lives (Jeong, 2004). However, technology development allowed people to share information via the Internet, especially social media (Haight, 2014). Social media helps users to keep in touch with their friends or make new virtual social friends (Muscanel, 2012). For immigrants, social media becomes one of the useful information resources for people, and it is considered to have a positive impact on adjustment in the new country (Sin, 2013). According to the research about social media users, females use social media more than males (Madden, 2011; Moore, 2012), social media also helps the international students’ relocation in aboard country (Zhang, 2011; Sin, 2013), and social media is acquisition of useful information such as health information (Kim Cho, 2012; Oh, 2013; Oh, 2015). Unfortunately, however, there are a little research concerned or mentioned about immigrant males’ information seeking and information needs (Oh, 2013; Oh, 2014). Moreover, social media is considered a positive tool for cross-culture adjustment, but it is hard to say whether this social media could be helpful to MKIM or not due to the lack of previous studies.

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTION

Because of the lack of focuses from researchers, there is insufficient research about information needs and seeking behavior of MKIM, and also their social media usage. Therefore, the main object of this study is to explore the value or role of social media to married Korean immigrant men and investigate the difference between men and women in the Korean immigrant society. The following is the research questions of this study.

1. What is the role of social media in terms of advantages and obstacles of married Korean immigrant men’s information seeking process and absorption into American culture?
2. Is there any difference in Social media usage and role between married Korean men and women?

METHODOLOGY

Data collection

The research design of this study is a mixed-method research. Qualitative and quantitative research methods are used in sequence. A two-phase study is designed for gaining an in-depth understanding of the information seeking behavior of MIKM.

In the first phase, the qualitative research method is used for finding the roles and usage patterns of social media in information seeking behavior of MIKM. Six participants from Korean immigrants in the Milwaukee area are involved. Interviews are used in the first stage and consist of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The main categories of questions are: (1) the reason and experience of immigration; (2) current life problems and information needs; (3) information sources and channels; (4) evaluation of used information sources and channels; (5) the meaning of social media and frequency of usage; (6) the reason and experience of social media.

In the second phase, the web survey is used and distributed to Korean immigrants in the United States via the Internet. The questionnaire is constructed after the analysis of the data collected through the interview in the first phase. Through the
interview, questions are made and categorized. Questions consist of closed-ended questions and ratings that use 5-point Likert scale. The main categories of questions are: (1) information sources and channels; (2) evaluation of used information sources and channels; (3) frequency and satisfaction of social media for solving information needs (Cool, 2000; Fisher, 2006).

Data Analysis

After interviews, open coding of the data from the interviewee is used for identifying significant and distinct units of information. The object of the analysis is to identify the role and usage patterns of social media in MKIM. Coded data is categorized by the keywords from absorption and satisfaction models (Shoham, 2008), and Information Ground (Fisher, 2006). After finishing the analysis of the first stage, items and questions are generated for web survey, and then web questionnaires are distributed for the second phase. After receiving questionnaires, all data are stored in SPSS 22 that is used to generate descriptive statistics as well as measures of validity and reliability. Frequency and satisfaction data by Likert scale are compared using descriptive statistics and ANOVA results.

LIMITATION AND EXPECTATION

As this study is exploratory in nature, the findings are descriptive and have several limitations. First, the main limitation of this study is the sample size in the second stage. Besides this, this study is simply compared with married men and women so that there would be a possibility to overlook other factors that can manipulate the information seeking behavior, such as demographic difference, length of stay, education level, and family size. Nevertheless, this study will provide the evidences on how the social media act as an information ground, and also unveil factors to the information seeking behavior of married Korean immigrant men for future research. The finding will provide useful data for supporting information literacy in the libraries or community centers that need to support minorities’ society especially Koreans in the United States. In addition, this study will expand the scope of subjects in the research of immigrants’ information seeking behavior related to new technologies.

REFERENCES


