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Transnational Audiences and Homeland Public Service Media: A Study about Japanese International Students' Use of NHK Programs Oversea

By DOU Xue*

Introduction

Over recent decades, we have witnessed a significant advancement in technology that has changed our lives, in particular the way we consume information. This brought the public service media (PSM) many challenges, including the need to digitize their programs in order to meet the audiences' desires to access information from digital media. Recently, a great deal of discussion and debate has occurred regarding this issue, and the "audience" referred to in these debates is often by default domestic community members.

However, the demand for digitized public broadcasting service is growing internationally. One of the driving forces behind this phenomenon is the increasing population of temporary residents abroad, such as international students and expatriate employees. According to the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), the number of international students has been increasing constantly over the last decade, but most of them tend to return to their homeland after completing their academic programs (Sood, 2012). In the case of Japan, there were about 840,000 long-term temporary overseas residents¹ in 2012, and this number had doubled from that of 2002 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2013). Compared to traditional long-term stay individuals, such as immigrants, the temporary residents living abroad have different media consumption patterns. While immigrants are more likely to change their media use preferences to reflect their residence in the host country, temporary residents tend to continue to consume the media content from their home countries with regard to entertainment and information acquisition. Digitized media content is often the most preferred source for these audiences as such content is more readily accessible and financially available to them (Kim, Yun, & Yoon, 2009).

This study argues that the PSM may also need to consider these international

* Assistant Professor at Institute for Media and Communications Research, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan.
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audiences and take their views into account in the digitization debate. As an attempt to stimulate discussions on this matter, this study takes the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) as an example and aims to answer the question of how some Japanese residents who have experienced living in other countries temporarily consume Japanese media, especially NHK content, during their stay. The study will first introduce the history and current situation of NHK's international broadcasting services. This will be followed by a survey of the recent literature in relation to the media usage behaviors of immigrants and temporary residents. Finally, the paper summarizes the findings of interviews with several Japanese students who have temporarily resided in foreign countries. The results of this study will contribute to the debates regarding PSM digitization and further our understanding of the issues and opportunities that the PSM is facing with ever-growing transnational audiences.

NHK's International Broadcasting Services: Its History and Current Programs

NHK was originally founded in 1926 and later became Japan's national public broadcaster under the terms of the Broadcast Law in 1950. As of March 2013, NHK has 54 domestic broadcasting stations that deliver varieties of television and radio programs throughout Japan. Like other public service media, NHK also has its own international broadcasting services for global markets. The history of NHK's international service can be traced back to 1935. NHK used shortwave broadcasting bands to deliver daily radio programs to Hawaii and the west coast of North America. The length of the radio broadcasting was limited to one hour per day at that time, and both Japanese and English were used during the programs. The radio broadcasting was soon extended to other regions, including Europe, the east coast of North America, and South America in 1937. International television broadcasting services using satellite technology became available in 1995. The services was first introduced in North America and Europe, and eventually become available worldwide in 1998 (NHK, n.d.).

Both radio and satellite television services still remain important media outlets for NHK's international broadcasting. As of 2013, their radio programs (NHK World Radio Japan) can be accessed from 15 broadcasting areas in 18 different languages. There are a variety of programs, including up-to-date news, culture, sports, and music. In terms of satellite television, two channels are currently available. One is an English channel named "NHK World TV" that targets a non-Japanese audience. This channel contains a variety of programs that introduce Japanese sightseeing, Japanese culture, and the latest trends in Japan along with some news programs. NHK also has another Japanese channel called "NHK World Premium" that is designed for Japanese immigrants and Japanese residents who are temporarily living abroad. Viewers are able to access a variety of programs broadcasted in Japan, including

news, dramas, entertainment programs, and educational programs for kids (NHK, 2013).

According to NHK, its international broadcasting service has two missions. One is to promote Japan and Japanese culture to overseas audiences, and another is to provide necessary information and comfort to Japanese living abroad (NHK, 2011). However, the organization currently seems to put more emphasis on the former than later. For example, only 40% (20 hours) of the World Radio Japan's broadcasting hours are targeted toward Japanese people living abroad. Similarly, compared to the average broadcasting hours of NHK World TV (i.e., 23 hours and 37 minutes per day), the World Premium program only takes 4 hours and 47 minutes of the day. One of the reasons for the shortage of Japanese content could be the fact that NHK is highly dependent on its domestic programs as the basis for its international Japanese content. Since the use of its domestic programs is controlled by copyright law, NHK is unable to reuse many of its programs in its international services.

Recently, NHK is increasingly utilizing online media to deliver its programs, which could be the main media channel for Japanese living abroad to access NHK in the future. For example, NHK currently has an official website about its international broadcasting service (NHK World Online). The website allows viewers to read news and watch live streams of programs from NHK World TV and NHK World Radio Japan. At the same time, NHK is also strengthening online content distribution of its domestic shows. For example, NHK started online video on-demand service in 2008 that allowed users to purchase and watch some of its domestic television programs. Moreover, Japanese government decided to modify Japanese broadcasting law in early 2014 that had been regulating NHK to deliver its programs online. This modification is likely to accelerate NHK's online services delivery both in domestic and international (Asahi Shimbun, 2014). As Japanese living abroad could be an important audience group to access NHK's online programs, it is necessary for NHK to consider their media consumption habits and reflect their needs to its online service.

The Media Use of Individuals Living Abroad: The Role of Homeland Media

The media consumption habit of individuals living abroad has been a research agenda in many academic domains, including sociology and communication (e.g., Sun, 2006). Oftentimes, "ethnic media" have been the central subject in these studies. Ethnic media refer to media content that has been designed and produced for a particular ethnic group by the local ethnic community (Matsaganis, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2010). Taking Los Angeles (LA) as an example, as of 2011, there were at least five Japanese ethnic community papers that publish content in Japanese on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis (County of Los Angeles, 2011). The newspapers

consist of a variety of content, including the latest news from Japan, local news, and classifieds. Most of them also have an official website that can be accessed from outside of the Los Angeles area. The function of ethnic media is often compared to that of “mainstream media,” which refers to media content that is produced for mainstream society (Matsaganis et al., 2010). While mainstream media deliver domestic news, the content of ethnic media reflects the needs of particular ethnic groups. As illustrated in the example of Japanese newspapers in LA, ethnic media introduce immigrants to local resources and sometimes educate newcomers about the societal values of the host country. Therefore, researchers have asserted that ethnic media are important media outlets that influence immigrants’ cultural adoption and identity construction in the host country (Viswanath & Arora, 2000).

However, recently, some scholars have highlighted the need to also consider “online homeland media,” in order to better understand immigrants’ media usage. Online homeland media can be defined as media that are “produced in the home country without specifically targeting, yet [is] easily accessible to, overseas migrants” (Yin, 2013, p. 4). Previously, geographical distance often became a barrier to media content distribution overseas. Immigrants often need both time and money to obtain this media content, and such considerations prevent their consumption of homeland media. The development of information communication technology and the increase of online digital content have taken the geographic barrier away, and accessing homeland media has become easier than ever for immigrants. For example, in a study of 710 Chinese migrants² living in Singapore, Chen (2010) found that these individuals spent a longer amount of time accessing websites based in China (1 hour per day) than websites based in Singapore (0.7 hours per day). Such studies suggest that online homeland media are becoming a crucial media outlet for immigrants.

The reasons that immigrants use homeland media are different from their motivation to access ethnic media, even though both of them are provided in the immigrants’ native language. As noted above, ethnic media are often closely connected to an immigrant’s local community and help the immigrants adjust to life in the local community. On the other hand, homeland media seem to satisfy immigrants’ need to feel connected to their home country. For example, in a study of Chinese migrants in New Zealand and their habits in terms of accessing online Chinese media content, Yin (2013) found that accessing homeland media brought a sense of belonging to the migrants and reinforced their affiliation with their homeland country and the people living there. Some participants mentioned that homeland media better reflect their cultural preferences, and therefore provide them with more entertainment. Similar results were found in a study from Kama and Malka (2013) involving Jewish Israeli migrants living in the United States. The study noted that accessing Israeli media made these migrants feel as if they had never left their homeland country.

One of the notable findings from these studies was that the duration of time in the host country determined the amount of online homeland media usage. In Chen's (2010) study mentioned above, the shorter the stay in Singapore, the more amount of time was spent using websites based in China. Similar results were revealed in a study about the media usage of adolescent Korean immigrants in the US (Lee, 2011) and in another study about the Turkish diaspora in Belgium (Gezduci & d'Haenens, 2007). The reasons for such results could be that immigrants often have language barriers when they initially arrive in foreign countries, which makes them more dependent on homeland media. In addition, newcomers are also likely to face difficulties adjusting to the host country's culture; therefore using homeland media helps them cope with their stress.

The above-mentioned literature suggests that immigrants and individuals are increasingly gaining access to their homeland media while they are abroad. Needless to say, public service media are also one type of homeland media discussed in the studies. Unfortunately, previous studies have not differentiated PBS from other media, so it is unknown whether immigrants and temporary residents access the contents of homeland public service media differently from other homeland media. Therefore, this study conducted interviews with Japanese living overseas about their use of Japanese public service media (i.e., NHK).

Particularly, the current study chose to interview Japanese international students. There are three reasons for focusing this group. Firstly, most of the international students are in their twenties, and this is the age group that actively uses online media for gaining information. Second, according to the studies mentioned above, the amount of years living abroad negatively predicts the amount of homeland media use (e.g., Chen, 2010). As international students often stay at host countries for only a couple of years, it can be assumed that they are likely to have higher needs of accessing homeland media. Third, previous studies pointed out that international students tend to face a higher level of stress in the process of adjusting their life to the host country. Such stress can become a driving force for them to access homeland media (i.e., Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003). Therefore, international students can be an ideal population to examine temporary residents' need of accessing homeland media.

Research Method

In order to answer the questions raised above, this study interviewed eight Japanese who were either studying abroad at the time of interview or had stayed in other countries over the past year. Most of the participants were staying at the U.S., and one of the participants went to the United Kingdom. All of the participants was in their twenties. Table 1 provides detailed demographic information about the participants.

The interviews were carried out in June 2014. The author interviewed two participants in Japan, and other six participants were interviewed in the U.S. by an interviewee hired for this study. Each interview took about 20 minutes. Participants were asked a couple of questions about their usage of media in general and their usage of Japanese media, particularly NHK media, while they were abroad.

Table 1: Detailed Information about the Participants of this Study

Participants	Gender	Country of stay	Length of stay at the host country
A	Male	United Kingdom	1 year
B	Female	United State	1 year
C	Male	United State	2 years
D	Male	United State	1 year
E	Male	United State	5 years
F	Female	United State	3 months
G	Male	United State	5 years
H	Female	United State	1 year

Use of Japanese Media in General

All of our participants admitted they used Japanese media while staying abroad. As expected, their access to Japanese media was mainly via the Internet. When the research team asked the reasons for their media usage, many participants pointed out the utilitarian aspects. For example, participant E said, “Since Japanese is my native language, using a Japanese website is the most convenient if I need to search for information.” In addition, three participants mentioned their need to stay updated on Japanese news because of their plans for after their return to Japan. One participant A mentioned “I was planning to find a job soon after I go back to Japan. I heard that knowledge about current news is necessary to pass a job interview, and this motivated me to access Japanese media in the host country.”

On the other hand, some participants mentioned they intentionally avoided using Japanese media. Such tendencies were especially strong among participants who were in their host countries for one-year academic exchange programs. Participants such as B mentioned that they restricted their use of Japanese media because it may interfere with their purpose for going abroad: “I knew I would be in the US for only one year. I try not to access media content in Japanese so I can learn English better and blend into the host country quicker.”

Interestingly, on one hand, many participants mentioned their avoidance of using Japanese media and the Japanese language. But all of the participants said they

were actively using social networking sites (SNS) to communicate with their friends in Japan. When the research team asked the reasons for their SNS usage, some participants said they had used SNS in Japan, and they retained this habit in the host country as well. SNS also served as an information source for our participants. For example, participants C and D mentioned that they got the latest information about Japan from SNS by following the twitter accounts of opinion readers in Japan and by checking their friends' comments on SNS. Some participants also felt that SNS satisfied their need to feel included in their homeland community. When the research team asked whether he felt homesick during his stay in the US, one participant C said, "I did not feel homesick. I think one of the reasons is that I was able to know what was going on in Japan via SNS. Having access to these kinds of information made me feel included in the community there."

Use of NHK and Reasons for Using It

Among all of the participants in this study, four indicated they listened or watched NHK's programs during their stay abroad. Two participants indicated they regularly watched a particular NHK television program online, and one participant used NHK's podcast service. In terms of NHK's radio and satellite television services, only one participant had a chance to use them. When the research team asked about the reasons for not using NHK's radio and satellite television services, many of the participants pointed out the issues of purchasing equipment. One participant B noted: "Most international students do not have radio and television in their place. I don't either. But even if I had television in my home, I would hesitate to subscribe to NHK's satellite television programs because of the cost and the laborious process of setting up cable service. Besides, I don't think I will have a chance to watch programs on TV, since I seldom stay at home." The three participants who accessed NHK's online services mentioned the convenience of accessing programs online. For example, one participant A indicated that he used NHK's podcast service almost every day. He felt it was very handy because he could download the programs on his iPhone and listen on the way to school.

During the interview, participants constantly praised the quality of NHK's programs. One participant C said, "I regularly watched one television program (Professional Shigoto No Ryugi) here in the US. It was high quality and very interesting to watch." Coincidentally, another participant E was also a regular viewer of this television program. He found the show educational and useful for marketing students like himself. One participant H commented that she wished she could have access to her favorite NHK television show: "I was a regular viewer of NHK's make-up lesson show before I left Japan. The show was well organized and easy to follow. I would like to watch it if NHK makes the show available online."

Besides the quality, some participants also mentioned NHK's credibility. One

participant B had no opportunities to access NHK programs during her stay in the US, but she mentioned there were a couple of times when she felt the need to check NHK's news programs: "My friends sometimes make posts on their SNS about what is happening in Japan. Some of the information they posted looked bizarre, and I questioned the credibility of the information. It was on this kind of occasion that I wanted to access NHK's news program. After all, NHK is the most credible information source in Japan."

Expectations for NHK's International Programs in the Future

Three points were articulated during the interview about what participants expect for NHK's international broadcasting. The first one was about the channel delivering programs. Most participants mentioned they would like to access programs online. Particularly, some participants said their schedules weren't fixed, so they preferred on-demand services better than live streaming.

Another frequently mentioned point was the demand for a native Japanese television program. As pointed out in previous studies, immigrants and temporary residents abroad wanted to access their homeland media to feel connected to their homeland community. The participants in this study also mentioned they wanted to catch up on the latest news and trends in Japan, so they could understand what their friends were talking about on SNS. Accessing native Japanese programs could better serve their needs, since those programs are what their friends are watching in Japan.

Finally, some participants mentioned that they wanted NHK to consider providing information about their host countries. This is because they had problems using a host country's language to access information and needed to keep up with their daily chores, such as where to go when they got sick, how to find Japanese news, and how to open a bank account. One participant B mentioned that "I knew there were Japanese ethnic media that provide useful local information. But a small city like where I was staying doesn't have such ethnic media. If NHK can somehow provide important local information in Japanese, that would be really helpful."

Discussion

Through the interviews, this study illuminated the media usage habit of international Japanese students overseas. Unlike the findings of previous studies, the participants in this study did not use homeland media frequently. One of the reasons for this is their usage of SNS. During the interviews, many participants indicated that they faced a dilemma regarding the use of Japanese media. On one hand, they wanted to check information in Japan to help them to feel connected with the Japanese community. On the other hand, they wanted to avoid Japanese information in order to adapt themselves to the host country's environment smoothly. In order to

resolve this conflict, they chose to use SNS. SNS took over the role that was previously held by the homeland media. In addition, our participants felt NHK's programs to be high in quality and credibility. These characteristics drove them to access NHK's programs during their stay abroad. Particularly, they were interested in accessing NHK's domestic programs, as this makes them feel connected with their community in Japan. However, most of the domestic Japanese programs are only available via satellite television, and this prevents them from using NHK in the host country.

Based on these findings, NHK may want to consider following points when it designs its international broadcasting service. First, NHK need to make more domestic programs available online. This may mean that the organization needs to clear out issues of copyright and also charge users a fee of accessing on-demand programs. However, if the programs are high in quality, international users are willing to use the service. In fact, some participants even mentioned that they would like to pay for accessing NHK's on-demand service of watching domestic programs.

Second, NHK should advertise more about their international broadcasting services, particularly its multi language programs, to Japanese international students living abroad. As highlighted in the findings, international students have a tendency to avoid accessing information in Japanese. At the same time, they also want to know about what is happening in Japan in order to prepare them to get back to Japanese and feel connected with their friends. Multi language programs can be useful to satisfy both needs. One of the participants in this study was a regular listener of NHK's English podcast. He pointed out that listening to NHK's English podcast is like a killing two birds with one stone. However, not every participants in this study knew that they were able to access NHK's multi language programs online. NHK can promote their international programs to these potential audiences by highlighting programs' educational value.

Third, NHK may also want to consider using SNS or online community to reach its Japanese users oversea and promote dialogue among these users. The findings of this study signify that SNS become a hub for Japanese international students to get information about Japan. Therefore, the organization can utilize SNS to inform audiences about their programs and direct audience to their online contents. In addition, NHK can also help Japanese living abroad by running online community where users can share local information and discuss events occurring in Japan. This may sound unconventional for some readers. However, the purpose of PSM in a democratic society is not only to make the information available to citizens, but also to facilitate communication with each others (Moe, 2008). Therefore, considering ways to utilizing two-way interactive media should an important subject to consider for PSM as well.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the results of this study revealed some insights, the study also has several limitations that should be considered. Particularly, most of the participants in this study were studying at United States and only one student was from United Kingdom. These two countries have good Internet infrastructure that allow users to access the Internet with low cost. Such environment might influence the degree to which the participants used the Internet to access homeland media. If the study could include participants from other countries where the Internet access were inconvenient, the results might be different.

In addition, this study focused on young Japanese international students as an initial investigation to understand temporary residents' need of accessing homeland media. However, students may have different needs and habits of information access compared to others, such as full-time workers who took oversea job assignments. These full-time workers may be more likely to depend on public service media for gaining domestic information. Also, as these workers often go abroad with their family, public service media may also serve as an educational tool in order for their childrens to remember their domestic culture and language. Therefore, future studies should also consider individuals with different occupations and ages.

NOTES

1. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan defines long-term temporary overseas residents as those individuals of Japanese nationality who have stayed or are planning to stay abroad for more than three months. They do not have to have permanent residence status in a foreign country. In addition, even an individual who has permanent residence status in a foreign country can be counted if that person is planning to go back to Japan in the future; such people are included as long-term temporary overseas residents
2. Migrant in Chen (2010) includes Chinese people who have citizenship of Singapore, who have permanent residency of Singapore, and who are living in Singapore temporary.

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