

Housing and Community Messages on a Korean-American Online Community: The Importance of Social Capital

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Abstract: This study attempts to examine the role and importance of an ethnic online network and resulting social capital (social resources and social support) in the research on housing and community. To that end, first of all, social capital is identified in this study as both housing and community-related information (social resources) channeled among members of the Korean-American women's online community, known as "MissyUSA" (missyusa.com). Second, this study also regards social capital as a support network among its online members on the basis of their commonly shared identity, mother tongue (Korean), culture, birth country (Korea), positions in the family (a housewife and/or mother) and life experiences in their new country (immigration status). Overall, this study shows that the "MissyUSA" community functions as both an information conduit and a support network needed to help tackle some of its online member's housing and community concerns regardless of their whereabouts in the United States.

Key words: Housing, local communities, social capital, social resources, social support, the "MissyUSA" community

INTRODUCTION

In a large body of research on migration, social networks in the forms of migrant and ethnic ties have been viewed as one of the key factors for international migration (Epstein, 2008; Hochschild, 2002; Haug, 2008; Massey, 2000) as well as for immigrant's migration and resettlement within the host countries after their initial arrival (Ellis and Goodwin-White, 2006; Gurak and Kritz *et al.*, 2011; Funkhouser, 2000; McConnell, 2008). However, little has been known about the influence of ethnic online communities as a new mode of their social networks, on migration plans, decisions or actions international and domestic. This topic received little attention even in the studies of ethnic online communities which put much emphasis on the formation, transformation and reconstruction of community or identity across ethnicity, gender, location or nation in their respective host country (Brouwer, 2006; Madianou, 2005; Panagakos, 2003).

This study attempts to show the important roles that ethnic online communities play in immigrant's domestic migration within their host country. More specifically, it focuses on a Korean-American women's online community, "MissyUSA" in order to investigate how its members utilize the community when they plan on

moving. The "MissyUSA" community is the largest Korean American online community in which full membership requires common backgrounds such as the status of a married woman, their births in South Korea, their use of Korean language and their residence in the United States or Canada. As of November 2002, the estimated total number was >13,000 (The Chosun Ilbo 23 July, 2003) and until now, there have been innumerable daily hits to this website. This study shows that the "MissyUSA" community is a great source of information and social support for prospective migrants in their choice of new housing (house rental or homeownership) and local community (school, safety, shopping, open space, commuting) and those who want to manage their existing or new houses (interiors, repairs, refinancing) or to seek advice about their current local communities.

Social capital, the core concept of this study is defined as "those expectations for action within a collectivity" (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). Social capital is further operationalized in this study as two forms: social resources and social support. According to Lin (1982, 2001), social resources are embedded in one social network, through which one can access various types of "personal" resources that other individuals possess. In that respect, the information inherent in social networks can be also regarded as an important element of

social capital (Coleman, 1994). In turn, this account of social capital emphasizes that social networks like the “MissyUSA” community are definitely a source of social resources for its participating members. For many married women, the relocation and resettlements in new destinations are often unavoidable due to the changes in employment, financial situations, family size and so forth (Clark and Huang, 2003; Horner, 2004; Kim *et al.*, 2005; Peter, 1955). Once a migration decision is made, their thoughts and preferences are critical for the selection of family houses, since, they tend to take the primary responsibilities for family and child care as well as home management or housework such as furnishings interiors, cleaning and cooking (Hareven, 1991; Madigan *et al.*, 1990). The selection of family houses is also influenced by their judgments on the surrounding environments which include schools, community safety, local convenience facilities, commuting and so on. From that point of view, this Korean-American women’s online community in the perspective of the inquirers (information seekers), functions as an important source of information needed to improve their knowledge or understanding about housing or community conditions in new locations for migration.

Social support is the other form of social capital that is accessible through the “MissyUSA” community. It is often argued that online networks provide their members with various types of social support, e.g., small services, large services, financial aid, emotional aid and companionship (Wellman and Wortley, 1990). Research shows that online communities often become the networks of social support (Rheingold, 2000; Wellman, 2001; Wellman *et al.*, 1996). In the case, of the “MissyUSA” community, its provision of social support gets apparent when some members respond to the postings requesting help by sharing their experience, knowledge and wisdom. Besides, emotional support is also another aspect of social support that the inquirers can receive from their respondents.

In short, the main argument of this study is that the “MissyUSA” community creates two forms of social capital-social resources and social support for its participating members. To that end.

This study examines any housing or community-related messages posted on the message board of “Life Q and A” on the “MissyUSA” website. We argue that online connections through the “MissyUSA” community will make it possible for Korean American women to obtain information about local communities before and after they make decisions to migrate.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Social capital and immigrant settlements in the united States

Housing: For immigrants-particularly, new immigrants, their ethnic networks with family, friends or acquaintances act as a buffer against the uncertainty in the host country because they pave the way for finding jobs, housing, children’s schools, ethnic institutions (churches) and so on. Much of past research on the link between immigrants and social capital has focused on their job searches or employment opportunity in ethnic enclaves through their ethnic networks and the resulting employment concentration in certain ethnic economic sectors (Light, 1972; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; Sanders *et al.*, 2002).

On the other hand, there has been less interest in exploring the linkage between social capital and housing. As for immigrant’s housing, so far, much attention has been paid to their relatively lower homeownership rate than natives (Alba and Logan, 1992; Borjas, 2002; Krivo, 1995; Painter *et al.*, 2001). In fact, they seem to prefer housing rents to homeownership as their housing tenure choice (Saiz, 2007; McConnell and Akresh, 2010; Myers and Liu, 2005). A popular explanation to this has been discrimination from the US lending and housing markets (Alba and Logan, 1992). Another explanation has to do with their non-citizenship or temporary immigrant status. Buying a house requires naturalized citizenship or legal permanent resident status as a proof of their identification in the process of mortgage lending or purchase of houses (McConnell and Akresh, 2008; Toussaint-Comeau and Rhine, 2004).

A related reason for the low homeownership rate among immigrants has to do with the degree of their assimilation into the newly settled country. For example, as immigrants stay longer in the United States and improve their financial conditions and proficiency in English, the probability of owning their homes tends to increase (Alba and Logan, 1992; Krivo, 1995; Painter *et al.*, 2001). This assimilation approach, however, emphasizes the effects that personal-level improvements in human capital, economic mobility and cultural incorporation have on homeownership (Alba and Nee, 1997) whereas it underestimates the roles that immigrant’s ethnic networks play.

Prior studies show that immigrant’s social capital has a positive impact on their homeownership at the levels of ethnic enclaves (Borjas, 2002), ethnic communities (Painter *et al.*, 2004), gateway metropolitan areas (Painter and Yu, 2008) and medium-sized metropolitan areas (Painter and Yu, 2010). According to Borjas (2002),

immigrant households have the potential to improve their homeownership rates from their residence in ethnic enclaves in which ethnic resources are abundant. In the analysis of 60 medium-sized (or non-gateway) metropolitan areas in 2000 and 2005, Painter and Yu (2010) find that immigrants have more opportunities to become homeowners in areas where co-ethnic immigrants concentrate. It becomes easier for ethnic immigrants to access their ethnic resources necessary to buy their homes when they cluster together. The resources include, among others, ethnic real estate agents who are familiar with their housing tastes and mortgage lending institutions.

While these recent studies have explored the significance of immigrant's social capital across different ecological units, some important questions still remain unanswered at the level of individual immigrants. In this study, the concept of social capital with regard to immigrant's housing is understood as housing-related information and support through their ethnic online networks in the host society. We argue that like many housing related issues, immigrant's housing choices in new locations are affected by opinions and suggestions from co-ethnic immigrants. For instance, prospective immigrant homebuyers are likely to share their housing tenure concerns, e.g., homeownership or house rental, its potential value, its physical structure and its direction or specific location with their co-ethnic immigrants. It is also possible that they look for ideas regarding home decoration and maintenance. Hereinafter, the critical questions raised in this study are: What do the "MissyUSA" members (the inquirers) think are the most important housing issues? and in what specific ways do other members (the respondent) help the inquirers?

Local communities: In addition to good-quality housing, migrant families also want to reside in more family-friendly communities with regard to school, safety, good neighboring, open space and local convenience facilities (Clark *et al.*, 2006). Thus, their housing plans in new destinations are inseparable from their community choices. The same is true of immigrant families that plan relocations after initial settlements in the United States. The recent resettlement pattern of immigrants in the United States reveals a distinct feature at the macro level, Geographical dispersion from traditionally established large metropolitan areas to suburbs, medium or small-sized metropolitan areas. This is also true among Korean Americans. The proportion of Korean Americans in the 10 large gateway cities has recently declined from 69% in 2000-58% in 2010 as many of them migrated to other non-gateway cities including small metropolitan areas

(Min, 2011). The spatial assimilation model partly explains the recent trend of immigrant's migration within the United States, the resettlement in the white suburban communities from their ethnic communities in large central cities is a consequence of economic and cultural adjustment (Alba and Logan, 1992; Alba and Nee, 1997; Massey, 1985). The spatial assimilation model further highlights that suburban communities are more family-friendly than central-city ethnic communities. However, it fails to explain whether and how ethnic immigrant networks and their social capital affect this new pattern of immigrant resettlement. It also fails to explain why some highly educated or economically successful immigrants continue to reside in the traditional ethnic communities (Ellis and Goodwin-White, 2006; Kritz *et al.*, 2011; Logan *et al.*, 2002). Social capital enhancing employment and housing opportunities as well as ethnic cultural acquaintance and services, appear to be some of the reasons behind their settlements in these areas.

A case study from a Korean-American online community:

The Korean population in the United States has substantially grown from almost 800,000 in 1990 to >1.4 million in 2010 (Min, 2012). As a reflection of population growth in the United States, Korean immigrants hold different types of immigration status that include family-sponsored preference immigration, employment-sponsored immigration and non-immigration or temporary residence, e.g., Korean international students, trainees, exchange scholars, temporary workers, visitors, undocumented immigrants and so on. Another noticeable phenomenon as mentioned above includes the recent geographical dispersion outside of their gateway cities or metropolitan areas (Min, 2011). By and large, geographical migration and settlement at both international and domestic levels require (im) migrants readjust to their new environments. As a matter of fact their better adjustment in new destinations depend upon their accessibility to a wide variety of information, i.e., employment or business, housing, community or children's schools.

"MissyUSA" (missyusa.com) has been selected in this study because it is known to be the largest Korean-American online community in North America (The Korea times 20 March, 2005). A distinctive feature of this community is that its full membership is permitted only to married Korean-American women and recently, married Korean-Canadian women. The homepage of the "MissyUSA" website offers a list of links such as talk lounge, health and beauty, home and food, motherhood, life information, commerce, missy writer and missy shopping. In each link, there are many daily postings by

Table 1: The key themes and topics posted on the message board of the life Q and A

Themes	Topics
Culture	Ethnic retention: learning or maintaining Korean cuisines, celebrating ethnic events (Lunar New Year's Day, Korean Thanksgiving Day), keeping Child rearing practices, watching Korean TV programs, associating with Koreans or attending Korean organizations (churches), teaching Koreans to children and so on Cultural assimilation: learning major American cuisines, watching American TV programs or dramas, keeping company with Americans, learning English or American customs and so on
Laws, regulations and welfare	Citizenship, green-card, visa, social security card, passport, drive license, tax (property, income), insurance, traffic violations, bankruptcy, medicaid, Medicare, 401K, social security, welfare (food stamp, unemployment benefits) and so on
House or home	Mortgages, refinancing, selling, buying or renting a house, housing costs (home insurance, utility), housing maintenance (roof, window glasses, cleaning), home temperature or interiors, home or kitchen appliances (vacuum, refrigerator, bowl), gardening and so on
Health or nutrition	Hospital or specialty recommendation, the dentist's oriental medicine, western medicine, sickness or illness treatments, allergy, diet, exercise or fitness, nutritional products (multivitamin), pregnancy, abortion, menstruation, menopause, health insurance and so on.
School or education	School district, homework, readings, textbooks, tutoring, music lessons, private lessons for subjects, participation in school sporting teams, school absence, school transfer, college tuition, scholarship, education loans, ESL and so on
Visit or relocation	Vacation, Korea or her certain places, certain locations in the US or the related issues (moving, travel, accommodations, restaurants, shopping, recreational centers, weather, neighborhood), realtors, travel agents, air trip, moving costs, mileage, bringing or sending consumer goods across borders and so on
Finance	Checking or savings accounts, credit cards, credit scores, wire transfer, online banking, tax report, e-Filing, tax return and so on
Technology	Wireless phone or iPhone, iPod, itouch, galaxy tap, internet or website search (Google), Facebook, Kakao talk, LinkedIn, Wi-Fi, TV, computer, online game, navigation and so on
Marital relationship	Complaints about husband, extramarital affairs, divorce or its accompanying issues (child care, property, anxiety about uncertain future), remarriage and so on
Work	Qualifications or credentials (education, training, experiences, transfer), job search, work schedule, job stability, earnings, benefits, the balance between work and family, layoff, work certificates and so on
Consumer products	Quality, price, trustworthiness, internet shopping, sales, purchasing places, fraud ads and so on
Beauty	Cosmetics, skin care, hair, nail, surgery (eye, nose), body size or weight and so on
Others	Translation, car (purchase, lease, insurance or inspection), gifts, pregnancy, birth certificate, funerals, pet, e-Book, fortunetelling or riddling one's dream, selling gold, dry cleaning, dining, guest's visit, helper wanted, remittance, religion, merchandise return, first-birthday party, day care, breast or powdered milk, jury duty, traffic ticket, nursing homes and so on

full members. This study selects and analyzes the messages posted on a board called “Life Q and A” within its talk lounge page where members channel various types of information. The board can be regarded as a storehouse of all kinds of information and likewise, a venue for requesting certain information to its other online members. Thus, it provides its members social resources. The response messages on the initial postings can be also viewed as its member’s social support to the information inquirers.

There have been too many daily postings on the “Life Q and A” message board. For example, from January 1st, 2011-July 20th, 2012, the total number of postings (inquiries only) on the “Life Q and A” message board was 222, 985 an average of 447/day. This study selects a manageable sample of only those postings with over 100 views between January 1st and January 15th, 2012 and between February 15th and February 29th, 2012. A total of 13,475 messages (inquiries only) were posted on it during these two half-month periods. Of them, 4,515 postings (roughly a third) were viewed more than 100 times and are thus included in this analysis. All of these 4,515 inquiries seeking information have been classified according to general issues (housing and community),

themes and specific topics. The general themes include: culture, laws, regulations and welfares, house, health or nutrition, school or education, visit or relocation, finance, technology, marital relationship, research, consumer products, beauty and others. Under each theme falls a set of more specific topics (Table 1).

We limit our attention in this study to the posts (the messages of inquiry) directly or indirectly related to housing and/or community-related issues. Of the 4, 515 postings, 210 (almost 4.6%) were related to these issues. We further classified the 210 messages, on the basis the most important argument or idea in each message into three sections: housing, local community and housing and local community. Almost all postings are written in Korean and the posts in English are very rare. All postings written in Korean were translated into English by an expert who is bilingual in Korean and English.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Housing: The information inquiries about housing are classified into two parts, housing tenure plan (house rental and homeownership) before moving and the maintenance of their current houses. Taken together,

Table 2: A list of inquiries for information about housing prior to moving

Themes/topics	Number
Rental information	12
House rental in new locations	5
The early termination of lease contracts	5
The contracting process of new rental housing	3
The names of websites for rentals	3
The payment of damage on a rented house before moving	2
The direction of new rental housing	2
The management cost for a new rental unit -apt or condo	1
A moving-out notification	1
A record of eviction and a new rental housing	1
A name change for utility bills	1
Renting two apartments	1
Foreclosed and should move out	1
Property information	6
The direction of new house	4
All regular costs after purchase	4
Mortgage loan (process, approval, monthly payment)	3
Contract (necessary info, termites, inspection)	3
Home insurance (cost, coverage)	2
Property value vs. the total loan	2
Downpayment	2
The price of house under income and downpay	2
Deal for a short sale house	2
Buying land to build a house	2
A single house vs. townhouse	1
Buying a house under construction	1
The period of process	1
FHA loan	1
Buying a house without a realtor	1
Mortgage bank	1
Homeselling website	1
Loan co-sign	1
Property tax	1
The price of house and family budget	1
Offered and waiting	1
The renovation of the old house	1
Total postings	80

three quarters (156) of the postings (210) were information inquiries about housing and related issues. Table 2 lists the two types of information inquiries, housing tenure plan and other housing issues (80 postings).

The first panel of Table 2 lists the topics of information inquires under the theme of rental information. Some of its popular topics are house rental in new locations (the recommendation or the cost of rental house), the early termination of lease contracts before the expiration and the contracting process of new rental housing (a credit check, security deposit or payment method). Here is one example showing that this Korean American women’s online community functions as both of social resources and social support. One member wrote on its “Life Q and A” message board: “I am currently living in Orange County, California. I appreciate any information about Tara Village [apartment] at Cypress” (February 27, 2012). This post is an illustration that the “MissyUSA” community becomes a source of social resources (information) to this inquirer. There were four replies to this inquiry and another post by the inquirer in response to one reply.

Respondent 1: “How much can you afford to pay in rent each month? That apartment is not expensive but very clean. Besides you should know that there is a lot of noise from the floor above.” Inquirer: “It is possible to pay \$1,300 for the monthly rent. Is it really very noisy between the floors?”

Respondent 2: “You should go there and put you on the waiting list. There is little difference between that place and other apartments in noise from the floor above. Nonetheless, it is a good idea to find a unit on the second floor. Moreover, many Koreans are there.”

Respondent 3: “I think that you can get into there with such monthly payment. It is true that noise between the floors is very serious. It is really hard to bear if children live in the floor above. Many Koreans are there and many kids always play outside.”

Respondent 4: “I have often visited that apartment because one of my friends currently lives there. The condition of that apartment is not bad at all in such monthly payment. Besides, that apartment has the learning center where its staffs help the kid’s homework sometimes. The cost of electricity there is also very low but nothing can be done about noise between the floors. Anyway, my friend has lived there for 5 years.”

These four respondents can also be considered a network of social supporters to the inquirers. As their ways to support the inquirer, they provided the requested information that includes some detailed description, observation, explanation or advice.

The second panel of Table 2, enlists the topics of information inquiries under the theme of property information. This includes homeownership in new locations and other topics related before moving. Some of the frequently asked questions are the direction of new house, other costs after purchase of a house and mortgage loan (process, approval or payment), followed by a contract between buyer and seller (necessary documents, home inspections or the precautions before a contract) and home insurance (company, cost or coverage). For the inquirers, the “MissyUSA” community is indeed one of their social sources useful for them to seek property information. For example, one post on the message board was “I am now looking for a house to buy. There is a substantial difference in home price between the houses facing South and Non-South. Is this the same in America? The direction of a house in Korea is determined by the location of its porch but i am not sure in America” (10 January 2012). There were six replies to this inquiry, the first four of which are introduced here.

Respondent 1: “When I searched my house, I saw many houses faced toward the North. I don’t believe such things. A good house is the one that you feel comfortable and secure.”

Respondent 2: “Here, most people don’t care about the direction of their houses and there is no difference in home price between the houses facing South and non-South. Actually, many people dislike the houses into which the Sun directly streams. But I think that Koreans here prefer their houses to the South. It seems that the family room and kitchen is the key to the direction of the house. When I lived in a house toward the South, I could save the electricity cost, enjoy warm winter Sunshine and cool summers.”

Respondent 3: “If the window of the living room in the house is directed to the South, that location is the South of your house. Personally, I like a house that lies in the South. For such a house is better to save the electricity cost and enjoy Sunlight.

Respondent 4: “We should know it accurately. The main entrance of your house determines the direction of your house. The houses facing the South are bright whereas the houses facing the North are generally dark. Then the houses directed to the west are also, bright but very hot at Summer Sunset.

Americans don’t pay much attention to the direction of their houses or their houses on the street. This is not true among Korean Americans who still prefer a house facing the South. So do I. If possible, don’t buy the house that lies in the North. For you may feel drained of the energy all the time. Moreover, if you plan to buy a house to either the east or the west, it is a good idea to choose one in which kitchen window lies in the South.”

In general, these messages of the respondents contain several types of information including information correction or confirmation, explanation or advice. Furthermore, one thing consistent among their responses is the fact that they try to help support the inquirer. Table 3 lists information inquiries about the maintenance of their current houses (76 postings). The list includes various topics such as house maintenance (utility costs, home temperature), house decoration (floor covering, advice on interiors), house cleaning (a certain part of the house, help wanted), the house repair, mortgage and home insurance, title search for the property and the property resale. One inquiry posted on it was that “The heating bill at home was over \$300 last month even as the indoor temperature was set to 70°. I am not certain what to do. The weather in my area is very cold” (5 January 2012).

Table 3: A list of inquiries for information about the current residential housing

Themes/topics	Number
House maintenance	
Utility (electricity, heating, water, gas, aircon) costs	6
Home temperature	4
House rat	2
Late payment	1
Repairs needed (new rent house) House decoration	1
Carpet vs. wood floor	3
Advices for interiors	2
Kid’s furniture, brand	2
Window blind vs. curtain	2
Sofa	1
Mary clothes and closets	1
Bathroom tiles (color?)	1
Sky window	1
Gas fireplace	1
A heated floor	1
Space	1
House cleaning	
Floor, room, bathroom	11
Helper (search and payment)	6
How to deal with unused	1
home furniture	
Carpet cleaning tips	1
Cleaning company (cost?)	1
House repair	
Saving the cost	1
Staying with workers	1
All day?	
Insurance	1
Paying for repairs by whom (tenant vs. owner)	1
The replacement of refrigerator in apt	1
Garage door	1
Go moldy	1
Plumbing	1
Home fire alarm control	1
Siding	1
Ventilation	1
Mortgage/insurance	
Interest rates, timing, reducing the pay period credit check	6
Mortgage escrow	1
Two properties or more (any difficulty)	1
Renewal cost (home insurance)	1
Property title	
Check methods, website	2
Property resale	
With home furniture	2
Tax payment	1
Short sale closing date	1
Total postings	76

There were seven replies to this inquiry and another post by the inquirer in response to some replies, the first six of which are introduced.

Respondent 1: “The heating system of my house is central. When my kids went out to schools, I set the air conditioner at a lower temperature and then raise it one hour before they come back home.”

Respondent 2: “If you have a big house, your electricity bill is not high, just mediocre. It could be more than

that.” Inquirer: “I didn’t know mine was just mediocre. It was less cold last month than this month. I am now very worried that the heating bill may reach \$400 or even \$500 this month.”

Respondent 3: “Your electricity bill is lower than the average. I am living in Washington State and the indoor temperature is always set to 63°.”

Respondent 4: “I pay \$800 on average.”

Respondent 5: “Your electricity bill is not bad at all. I paid \$450 last month and expect more this month even in my area of the mid-west region where winter is not so cold.”

The respondents all became social supporters for the inquirer seeking information about her heating bill. Thus, this Korean American women’s online community played a role in channeling its inquirer some specific types of information including explanation, evaluation, comparison or advice.

Local communities: For both Korean American migrants and settlers in the United States, community-related information is as important as housing-related information. The “Life Q and A” message board of “MissyUSA” becomes a venue to channel community information among its online members. Compared with information inquiries on housing, however, there were not many postings requesting community information 25 postings in total. Specifically, 19 out of 25 postings were the requests of community information from those who consider or plan on migrating to new locations. The posts contained several specific topics about new destinations for migration or current communities. The topics of the new or current communities include schools (school levels or districts), living environments (safety, the cost of living, the degree of discrimination, neighboring, cleanliness or tranquility), Korean community (marts, restaurants or churches), commuting or traffic, weather and so on. To the inquirers, the “MissyUSA” community is a source of information while it also becomes a network of social support. For example, one inquiry was that “Which towns in Westchester, NY are good for both of elementary school children and commuting to NYC? And how about discrimination against newcomers?” (24 February, 2012). There were six replies to this inquiry.

Respondent 1: “Westchester, NY is one of the richest counties in the US Many people there commute by train Amtrak. Some rich people, like company CEOs, commute with a chauffeured limousine.”

Respondent 2: “Metro-North to Grand Central on East Side.”

Respondent 3: “Commute by Metro-North, not by Amtrak. It is connected to Grand Central Terminal at 42 Street. A long time ago, Westchester is the region where Monica and Chandler, two main characters of friends, an American sitcom, moved in with their new baby.”

Respondent 4: “Check the map first. Also keep in mind that Westchester is very broad and large in size. Town schools are generally fine there but Ardsley, Scarsdale and Chappaqua are the best among them.”

Respondent 5: “As respondent 3 wrote, use Metro-North for commuting. Although I lived in one of these three towns before, I had never experienced discrimination.”

Respondent 6: “I am now living in Westchester. I agree with respondent 5 about schools and commuting. Discrimination does not exist here.”

These six respondents are a group of social supporter to the inquirer providing various types of information such as facts, explanation, correction, personal experiences or confirmation.

As another illustration, a posting of information request was that “Recently, my neighbors next door made a chicken house in front of the fence we built and started to raise chickens. The noises and cries of chicken bother us all day long and the problem is that the fence is on our property. Is it a good idea to contact HOA [The Homeowner’s Association] or talk directly to my neighbors next door? Offer your opinions on this matter, please” (23 February, 2012). There were six replies to this inquiry.

Respondent 1: “It is illegal to raise chickens in the yard. Such an issue must be notified to the police.”

Respondent 2: “It is not illegal. Someone told me that each family can raise chickens up to seven.”

Respondent 3: “Doesn’t that rule vary across States? You must be suffering from bad smells.”

Respondent 4: “The rules to raise chicken in the yard differ across cities. The city where I live prohibits it. Check your city ordinance and then decide to notify this to the city hall.”

Respondent 5: “Contact HOA.”

Respondent 6: “I think you need to talk to your next-door neighbors first. If that is not working, you should consider reporting this issue to the city hall.” In this case, the “MissUSA” community functions as a source of information to the inquirer. At the same time, the respondents play a role of supporting the inquirer by empathizing affectively with her concerns and sharing relevant information and advice.

Housing and local communities: Upon the “Life Q and A” message board, some members planning to move requested the information about both housing and local community in their new destinations 29 postings in total. About a half of them (15 postings) include the messages requesting information about rental housing (recommendations, monthly payments, utility costs, cleanliness or its physical structures), together with information about the local community surrounding new rental housing (schools, safety, living costs, commuting or traffic, shopping, the presence of Korean community or discrimination). The remaining 14 postings were information requests for homeownership in the new locations (recommendations, property value, housing conditions, the direction of new house or other costs after purchase of a house), its prospects for future investment and its surrounding environments (schools, safety, open space or amenity, Korean community or living costs). Here are two examples to show that this “MissyUSA” community functions as both social resources and social support. As an example, one message reads, “My family will move to the town of Fort Lee, NJ [a Korean community]. We have no choice but to rent a house there and my kids will attend its schools. I am very worried about its school environment” (24 February, 2012). There were three replies to this inquiry.

Respondent 1: “It is true that Fort Lee is not one of the best towns. But it is not as bad as you think.”

Respondent 2: “For your information, I know one Korean at the age of 20 now who came from Korea and attended the town’s elementary school. The level of his English fluency is just so-so. He attended its public schools where Korean students were too many, I guess.”

Respondent 3: “There are many Koreans in most towns of Northern NJ including those North of Fort Lee which are considered better. There is not much difference in school environment among the elementary schools but some difference may exist at the middle and high school levels. However, one Korean student at a Fort Lee high school received admission from Harvard this year. It all depends

on what they do. School environment is of secondary importance. Speaking Korean at schools is widespread in most towns of Northern NJ where Korean populations are concentrated.” All three respondents belong to a network of social support for the inquirer by posting such a sort of information as the description of a case, evaluation and advice.

As another example, one member wrote, “I am planning to buy a house whose price ranges from \$400,000-\$500,000. Now I am looking for the areas near my current location of residence-Fullerton, Brea in CA. My family came to America 4 years ago and has lived in this location, since. We feel comfortable, safe and satisfied with school environment here. A couple of years ago, my husband and I went to Chino Hills several times and thought that we could buy a house in this town. We need your general information or advice about Chino Hills. And how about schools?” (8 January, 2012). There were seven replies, the selected five of which are introduced below.

Respondent 1: “Sometimes it smells bad because of slaughterhouses at Corona. But its house prices are cheap and its schools are good.”

Respondent 2: “Chino Hills is different from Chino. I have often visited Chino Hills because my parents are currently living in Diamond Bar. The schools in the area are not so good. If they get better, house prices will rise for sure.”

Respondent 3: “For 5 years I am living in a neighborhood near Diamond Bar. The smell is bad in Chino Hills and really bad in Chino. But the elementary schools are good there. There are many Chinese people in that area.”

Respondent 4: “I used to live in Chino Hills. The smell was not serious at all but it was quite bad when it is foggy in winter.”

Respondent 5: “There are many good schools and many newly built houses in Chino Hills. Also, that location is very convenient when you go to the Korean markets at Rowland Heights.” As revealed in the inquiry and the accompanying five responses, the dual forms of social capital-social resources (information) and social support come to the forefront from this “MissyUSA” community.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to examine the importance of social capital (social resources and social support) on housing and community in the context of an online platform. Social capital in this study has been understood

as housing and community-related information and social support channeled among the members of “MissyUSA” (missyusa.com), a new mode of ethnic social networks. The inquiries and responses posted on its “Life Q and A” message board provided information not quite accessible within geographically bounded communities. Here, housing-related information has encompassed a wide variety of information about housing tenure plan (house rental or homeownership) in new locations, the maintenance and management of their current houses and other topics related to rental housing before moving. Moreover, community-related information involved schools, safety, neighboring or discrimination, living environments, the presence of Korean community, commuting and so on. While this study did not follow up the actual utilization of information that inquirers gained through the online community, the information and support probably made many of the inquirers feel relieved or more confident.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Moreover, this study has further emphasized that this “MissyUSA” community also becomes a support network for the information inquirers which was displayed in various forms including explanation, advice or the sharing of personal experiences. Even though members of the “MissyUSA” community remain anonymous to each other in their personal identity, their actions of posting the messages there as either inquirers or respondents, might be grounded on their shared sense of belonging. The outcome that ensues is that both information seekers and respondents feel comfortable or committed, even before they post the messages of inquires or responses. On the one hand, their sense of belonging might come from their “communal sharing of culture” in history, identity, experiences and rituals or from the same linguistic culture that contributes to the construction of a very similar mental world in ways to share their values, norms, emotions and behaviors. On the other hand, their sense of belonging can be also deeply rooted to their similar demographic status together with their commonly shared interests and life experiences in their new country. Taken together, this sense of belonging among its members is what makes the “MissyUSA” online community become a true community.

As shown before, this type of a new ethnic network has ultimately become a communicative community in which its anonymous members interact with each other by requesting certain information about or expressing their thoughts or support for, various housing or/and community concerns. Moreover, it is likely that this online

community can generally enable Korean American users resettled into white suburban communities to keep their old connections with those in the ethnic enclaves from which they departed. Therefore, it is further possible to argue that some Korean Americans living in predominantly white suburban communities might experience a decline in their personal ties with other Korean Americans but not a decline in their online ties with them.

Even for those Korean Americans living in their traditionally established ethnic communities or their newly emerging suburban communities, their online connection through “MissyUSA” can also play an important role when they seek the information that is unobtainable or inaccessible, from their in-person networks. Especially, personal networks through immigrant’s family members, friends or co-ethnic neighbors in ethnic enclaves can reach the limit in their attempts to search for information about new locations for migration including new housing conditions and community environments. By and large an ethnic online network like “MissyUSA” cannot be undervalued during the process of settlement or resettlement in the United States. Therefore, this study has regarded the “MissyUSA” community as both an information conduit and a support network needed to help tackle some of its member’s housing and community concerns in the United States.

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