

Conference on Integration

Monday, 21 May 2012
Ballroom 1 & 2, Orchard Hotel

Images of New Citizens and Permanent Residents in Singapore's Mainstream News Media: Prospects for Integration

Dr Selina Lim
SIM University

Overview

- Central role of news media in creating perceptions and encouraging social integration
- Discourse analysis of news articles published by Singapore's English language news organizations
- Period under consideration:
January 1, 2011 to May 6, 2011
- Findings
- Recommendations

Mass Media

- Bearer and gatekeeper of information
- Agent of socialization
- Mirror of society
- Arena for contesting, negotiating, and constructing shared meanings on social and national values and norms
- Platform for various parties to engage in public dialogue

METHODOLOGY

Database	Factiva
Retrieved on	November 6, 2011
Keywords used	“new citizens”; “permanent residents”; “Singapore”
News providers	<i>The Straits Times/The Sunday Times, Business Times, Today, MyPaper, The New Paper, ChannelNewsAsia</i>
Time frame under consideration	1 January 2011 – 6 May 2011
No. of news articles	66
Thematic clusters	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Social integration2) Regulation of immigrant flows and criteria for immigration and citizenship3) Maintaining a strong citizen core

Newspaper articles on new citizens and permanent residents in Singapore (published date: Jan 1, 2011 to May 6, 2011)

Publication*	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Total # of articles
<i>Business Times</i> (BT)	2	2	2	1	0	7
<i>ChannelNewsAsia</i> (CNA)	3	4	1	1	0	9
<i>My Paper</i>	1	2	0	0	0	3
<i>The Straits Times</i> / <i>The Sunday Times</i> (ST)	11	9	6	4	3	33
<i>The New Paper</i> (TNP)	0	1	0	0	1	2
<i>Today</i>	1	2	2	5	2	12
Grand Total	18	20	11	11	6	66

*Based on articles retrieved from Factiva on November 7, 2011

Array of voices in the 66 news articles

- 37 articles showcased comments and quotes from political leaders and politicians from the People's Action Party
- 4 articles showcased quotes from opposition politicians (Workers' Party and Singapore Democratic Alliance)
- Interspersing of comments from new citizens, hopeful PR applicants, spokespeople of national organizations and government agencies

Theme 1: Social Integration

(42 articles)

- Provided evidence of new citizens' and PRs' willingness to participate in national life
- Public institutions (e.g., SINDA, PA, RC) proposed as arenas for social integration
- Official exhortation for greater inclusivity and accommodating stance towards immigrants
- Social integration in the Indian community
 - 9 articles, published at the rate of one article per month (six in ST, one each in *Business Times*, *My Paper*, and *The New Paper*)

Theme 1:

Social Integration in the Indian Community

- Hint of local-versus-foreign divide
 - Language
 - Religion
- Recommendation
 - Encourage participation of foreign Indians in our national life and community activities

Theme 2: Regulation of immigration flows (24 articles)

- Three issues:
 1. What the government is doing to regulate immigration (18 articles)
 2. Qualifying criteria for citizenship (4 articles)
 3. Greater transparency with regard to Singapore's migration policy (3 articles)
- Featured mostly the views and reassuring authoritative voices of expert elite
- Launch of “The Singapore Citizenship Journey” in February 28, 2011

Theme 3: Maintaining a strong citizen core (17 articles)

- Require “strong citizen core”
- Evolving definition of “strong citizen core”
(Feb 2 to Feb 26, 2011)
- Context: rising public expectation that the General Elections will be called within the next few months
- Indicative of a more inclusive society?

Prospects for Integration?

- The Good
 - PRs and new citizens portrayed as acquiescent individuals eager to fit in and contribute to Singapore
 - Move towards a more inclusive society
 - Moderate voices of reason and restraint
- The Less-Than-Ideal
 - Tensions between local-born citizens and immigrants
 - Relatively low level of intercultural competency among local-born citizens
 - Fragmented understanding of underlying issues
 - Apathetic citizenry with shallow understanding of issues at hand

Recommendations

- Clearer communication of immigration policy
- Media practitioners to be more reflexive about the practice of their trade
- Expert elites to encourage and engage citizens in deliberating and contemplating best way forward for society
- Local citizens to make conscious effort to interact with immigrants at personal level