



A Community-Based Participatory Mixed-Methods Approach to Multicultural Media Research

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Abstract

This chapter critically reviews and discusses the methodological approach adopted by the Ottawa Multicultural Media Initiative (OMMI), a team-based, multidisciplinary, and multi-sectoral partnership project, examining the role of Multicultural Media (MCM) in fostering the settlement, integration, and well-being of four immigrant and ethnocultural communities in Ottawa,

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Canada – Chinese, Spanish-speaking Latin American, Somali, and South Asian. The project was carried out in accordance with key principles of community-based participatory research in the hopes to influence policy and standards and create a community action project for promoting newcomer well-being and inclusion, as these concepts are understood within specific ethnocultural and immigrant communities. To this end, a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, focus groups, media content analysis, and semi-structured interviews, was adopted, and all research instruments were developed in collaboration with multiple local community and municipal stakeholders. While navigating the challenges of participatory research (e.g., time constraints, competing expectations, and reiterative process), significant opportunities emerged to produce grounded and relevant research and policy outcomes that encompass the diverse needs and practices of the communities under study and are embedded within the local multicultural context. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the key insights gained from the OMMI experience that will help to advance more “holistic” approaches to the study of MCM in a variety of contexts for development and social change.

Keywords

Community-based participatory research · Ethnocultural · Knowledge mobilization · Immigrant communities · Mixed methods · Multicultural media · Partnership

Introduction

The Ottawa Multicultural Media Initiative (OMMI) is a team-based, multidisciplinary, and multi-sectoral partnership project, examining the role of Multicultural Media (MCM) in fostering the settlement, integration, and well-being of four immigrant and ethnocultural communities (i.e., Chinese, Spanish-speaking Latin American, Somali, and South Asian) in Ottawa, Canada. OMMI’s three main interrelated objectives were (1) to build long-term research capacity and expertise on the intersections between MCM, immigrant integration, and economic prosperity; (2) to forge strong partnerships with the municipal government (the City of Ottawa), targeted communities, and local stakeholders (e.g., settlement agencies, immigrant associations, community groups) through a broad and dynamic network of collaboration; and (3) to cocreate, mobilize, and disseminate knowledge about MCM and their potential to address issues related to Ottawa’s economic prosperity and immigrant inclusion and integration. With the aim to co-construct knowledge, the project was carried out in accordance with key principles of community-based participatory research (Israel et al. 1998) in the hopes to influence policy and standards and create a community action project for promoting newcomer well-being and inclusion, as these concepts are understood within specific ethnocultural and immigrant communities (EICs). To this end, the research team adopted a mixed-methods approach (including surveys, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and media content analysis) and developed all research instruments in collaboration with

multiple local community and municipal stakeholders. While navigating the challenges of participatory research (e.g., time constraints, competing expectations, and reiterative process), significant opportunities emerged to produce grounded and relevant research and policy outcomes that encompass the diverse needs and practices of four different EICs and are embedded within the local multicultural context. This chapter focuses on the conceptual, empirical, and methodological contributions of OMMI's approach. The chapter is divided into six sections, with section two describing the OMMI partnership development. In section three, the conceptual framework and methodological approaches that OMMI adopted are described, while section four outlines the project governance structure. Section five describes the participatory design of the project, and section six provides a discussion of the key insights gained from the OMMI experience that will help to advance more "holistic" approaches to the study of MCM in a variety of contexts for development and social change.

Conceptual Framework and Methodological Approaches

Community-based participatory research – oftentimes equated with action research, participatory research, and participatory action research, among other terms (MacDonald 2012) – is “a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings” (WK Kellogg Foundation 2013, para 1). The OMMI project was carried out in accordance with seven key principles of community-based participatory research (Israel et al. 1998) that advocate for fruitful research partnerships (WK Kellogg Foundation 2013). These principles include (1) recognizing “community as a unit of identity,” (2) building “on strengths and resources within the community,” (3) facilitating “collaborative partnership in all phases of the research,” (4) integrating “knowledge and action for mutual benefit of all partners,” (5) promoting “a co-learning and empowering process that attends to social inequalities,” (6) involving “a cyclical and iterative process,” and (7) disseminating “findings and knowledge gained to all partners” (Israel et al. 1998, pp. 179–180). These principles are in line with the intended outcome of influencing policy and standards (Brown et al. 2002) and creating a community action project with a view to promote newcomer well-being and inclusion as these concepts are understood within specific EICs. The intention was to engage local stakeholders through the collaborative network and the broader community through focus groups and interviews (Anyaeibunam et al. 2010) in order to benefit from their resources and knowledge in such a way as to produce grounded as well as relevant research, practice, and policy outcomes (Graybill et al. 2010; Mays et al. 2013).

Located within a community-based participatory research framework, the OMMI project incorporated a two-pronged approach that combined corresponding quantitative and qualitative methods. The first approach focused on a Uses and Gratifications approach (Blumer and Katz 1974; Elliott 1974) involving surveys in order to examine MCM consumption behavior of members of EICs (why and how members of EICs consume specific MCM to meet their information needs). The second approach focused on a social capital approach (Bourdieu 1986; Putnam 1993a, b)

involving focus groups and interviews in order to examine the potential of MCM for building both community bonding and intercommunity bridging social capital. Together, these two approaches and their respective methods were adopted and adapted to help identify both opportunities and challenges associated with MCM and, more specifically, to determine the role of MCM in facilitating settlement, integration, and well-being of EICs in Ottawa.

It is also important to note that the OMMI project structure reflected the goal to develop social capital by building and bridging links between the different groups: researchers, the producers and consumers of MCM, and community partners, thus helping to create a rich partnership model that can form the basis for future partnerships and networks of collaboration.

Description of the Partnership and Its Development Process

According to the 2011 census data, 22.6% of Ottawa's population were foreign-born, representing a slightly higher percentage than the national average of 20.6% (Statistics Canada 2013). Through a partnership with key local stakeholders such as service providers, the City of Ottawa launched the Ottawa Immigration Strategy (OIS) (OLIP n.d.) in 2011, a community action plan and strategy to address settlement and integration needs of immigrants at the local level.

The growing ethnocultural diversity of the City of Ottawa has been accompanied by the increasing appeal for MCM. Such demands are linking EICs to diverse media sources, creating an opportunity to foster MCM growth. However, little is known of what challenges and opportunities exist in Ottawa's MCM landscape. Against this backdrop, the OMMI engaged in an important partnership development endeavor to undertake a study of Ottawa's MCM landscape with an in-depth focus on the Chinese, Spanish-speaking Latin American, Somali, and South Asian communities to examine strategies for improving the social inclusion, well-being, and labor market integration of EICs.

The four EICs were selected based on three primary considerations. First, these communities constitute Ottawa's largest visible minority groups and are fast growing. Second, the communities represent a fertile combination of characteristics in terms of population size, group cohesion and diversity (e.g., language, immigrant status, period of settlement, and so on), geographical/national dispersion, and media production/consumption, thus likely leading to rich and nuanced research. Third, the communities were complementary to the research team's expertise and language competencies, thus facilitating fruitful collaborative and participatory engagement.

Governance Structure of the Partnership

The OMMI partnership utilized its governance structure (see Fig. 1) to engage the different actors involved in the project. Specifically, it was able to link the University of Ottawa and the City of Ottawa to a network of MCM producers; leading MCM



Fig. 1 Ottawa Multicultural Media Initiative collaborative structure

scholars and practitioners; representatives of the local Chinese, Spanish-speaking Latin American, Somali, and South Asian communities; and other stakeholders (e.g., settlement organizations, schools, and community centers).

The governance structure consisted of four main core pillars that created an opportunity for OMMI to develop meaningful network and partnership building. Moreover, it enabled the integration of collaborative expertise in four ways. First, OMMI assembled a strong team of multi- and interdisciplinary researchers specialized in communication, geography, and political science with a unique focus on issues of MCM, immigrant inclusion and integration, diversity, and community building and integration. The project also brought together a group of experienced collaborators comprising academics and practitioners who had a twofold mandate: a) to ensure a rigorous and inclusive methodology and b) to facilitate the goal of cocreating, mobilizing, and disseminating knowledge and understanding about MCM and its potential for addressing the complex, pressing, and interconnected issues of prosperity and newcomer integration. Second, the City of Ottawa, the main partner, involved four municipal departments – Corporate Communications, Community and Social Services, Organizational Development and Performance, and Human Resources – thus bringing expert knowledge about their existing policies,

in-kind support, and a willingness to participate in the research to develop improved communications and newcomer integration policy. Third, the project formed an Advisory Board composed of leading scholars from across Canada and practitioners representing a broad spectrum of views on MCM and community integration and representatives of municipal and local agencies and the core ethnocultural communities. The Advisory Board met annually, in conjunction with core team meetings and on a consulting basis, to oversee the direction of the project, monitor progress, and offer advice and guidance as needed. Fourth, the research team developed a collaborative network among the university, local agencies, MCM producers, and the EICs under study. The role of this collaborative network was to bring grounded knowledge of as well as contacts in the four communities in order to recruit study participants, secure access to data sites, and aid in communicating research findings.

Collaborative Participation in the Intellectual Leadership

Through their collaboration with the research team, representatives from the City of Ottawa, research collaborators, Advisory Board, and the collaborative network were afforded opportunities to provide input on every aspect of the OMMI project. The research team created a small working group comprised of these representatives in order to ensure more detailed and substantive input on the actual design and direction of the research. For example, in accordance with their needs, policy mandate, and priorities, members of this small working group (1) attended team meetings and workshops; (2) had an opportunity to review and to suggest modifications to the survey questionnaire, focus group materials, and interview guide; and (3) commented on research output drafts as they became available. This process helped to ensure that the research materials reflect the different concerns and needs of the multiple actors involved in the project.

Participatory Research Design

In participatory action research, various methods of data collection, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, are applied (Pain and Francis 2003; Small and Uttal 2005). This flexibility in data collection is believed to lead to best practices for bringing about social change (McTaggart 1991; Reason 1994; Reason and Bradbury 2001). To meet its objectives, the OMMI project employed a mixed-methods approach in three sequential phases (Creswell 2014) over 3 years (see Fig. 2). At the core of this design was the goal to elicit participatory input from all actors involved in the project (e.g., the research team, the partner, the collaborative network, and the Advisory Board) in order to complement the research findings and offer richer insights (Olson and Jason 2015).

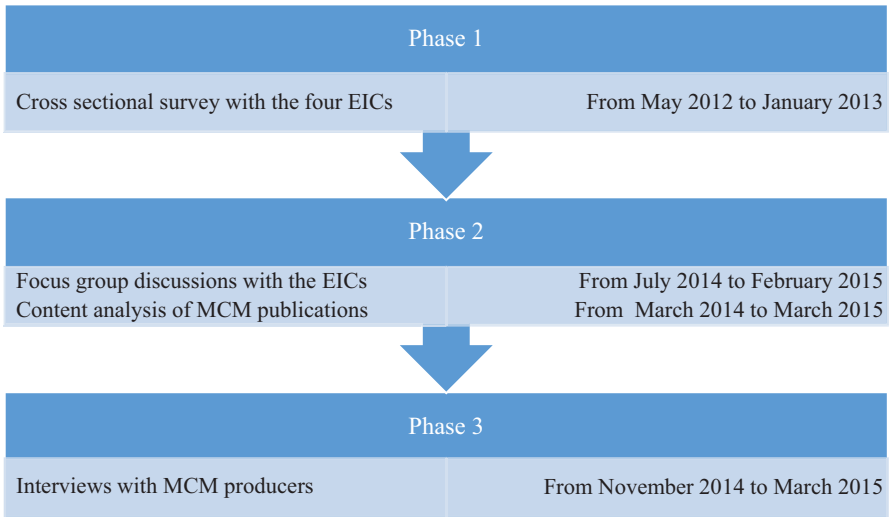


Fig. 2 Ottawa Multicultural Media Initiative

Design of Research Instruments

The OMMI adopted four main data collection techniques to meet its research objectives: (1) survey questionnaires with MCM users (i.e., members of the four participating EICs), (2) focus group discussions with MCM users, (3) content analysis of MCM publications (press), and (4) semi-structured personal interviews with MCM producers. During the development stage of the main research instruments – the survey questionnaire, focus group guide, and interview protocol – OMMI followed an iterative process, a major principle of participatory action research (Kim 2016; Lewin 1946). As such, a series of consultation meetings were held with the Advisory Board, partners, and community representatives for each phase to collaboratively develop the instruments. In particular, special care was taken to solicit input from the community representatives of each EIC. While this iterative process was time-consuming and involved numerous discussions among various participating actors, it was essential to ensure that the data collection tools reflected the needs and interests of each group.

Data Collection

In accordance with the community-based participatory research approach, the collaborative effort of the OMMI research team, community representatives, collaborative network, and local community organizations was leveraged in order to recruit survey, focus group, and interview participants and improve response rates. For example, to recruit survey participants, community partners sent out email messages

and letters of invitation to potential survey participants on behalf of the OMMI research team; OMMI researchers attended community events and workshops; with the help of representatives from the collaborative network, language training classes, on and off the university campus, were targeted, where students were provided with information on OMMI research and invited to participate in the survey.

Data Analysis

The mixed-methods approach employed by the OMMI project was consistent with a major principle of participatory action research, including flexible research methods, and allowed triangulation of data in consultation with various actors by building on the findings of each stage. Thus survey results were discussed and verified during focus groups; survey and focus groups findings were discussed and verified during interviews with producers; and so on. This process facilitated the amassing of different types of data (quantitative, qualitative) as well as from different types of sources (e.g., media users, media producers, media content). This multiphase, mixed-methods approach led to diverse and complementary perspectives on the use and role of MCM among EICs (i.e., a better picture of the issue from different angles) by engaging researchers, community partners, and collaborators in the analysis.

Participatory Knowledge Mobilization

The knowledge mobilization plan of the OMMI was based on the goal to engage its partners in continued dialogue, cocreation and dissemination of knowledge, and exchange of ideas concerning MCM and community integration. An additional goal was to build bridges among citizens, community leaders, policy makers, and academics. To this end, the research team organized knowledge mobilization activities according to collaborative learning and participatory research principles reflecting the values, expertise, and experience of the team and the nature of the partnership targeted at three broader audiences – academic, policy, and public. In addition to a summary in Table 1, OMMI's collaborative strategies for participatory knowledge production and dissemination are described below.

Knowledge Production/Creation

Academic

A disciplinary and interdisciplinary research partnership approach was employed within the core research team. Comprising five scholars from three different disciplines, the team composition allowed for nuanced, multi-perspective research capable of making a significant contribution to advancing the growing research on MCM in Canada. Students were involved in all aspects of the research process, which allowed the team members and initiative to benefit from the interest, energy, capacity, and knowledge that students brought to the project.

Table 1 OMMI collaborative strategies for participatory knowledge production and dissemination

Audience	Academic	Policy	Public
Knowledge production/creation	Disciplinary and interdisciplinary research partnership approach Student training	Multi-sectoral team meetings and workshops Participation in research design Participation in preliminary analysis	Broader audience knowledge mobilization strategies Community workshops and feedback sessions Community capacity building
Dissemination activities	Conferences Peer-reviewed publication (OA) Project website, online presence, social media	Reports, press releases, policy presentations Project website research data base Participation of partners and collaborators in conferences and professional meetings	Open access website with resources and data bases Interviews in local media Social media

Policy

The OMMI engaged all its contributors in policy production – i) the City of Ottawa as the main partner; ii) the collaborative network composed of local stakeholders, media producers, and the core ethnocultural communities (Chinese, Spanish-speaking Latin American, Somali, and South Asian); and iii) the Advisory Board composed of leading scholars and practitioners representing a broad spectrum of views on MCM and community integration and the representatives of municipal and local agencies and the four core EICs. Their participation played an important role in knowledge mobilization because of their involvement in every step of the project (some even attended our team meetings while at the proposal stage). In accordance with their needs, policy mandate, and priorities, the Advisory Board members (1) attended team meetings and workshops, (2) offered input in research design (e.g., selection of and access to research sites and groups/issues for study), and (3) commented on research output drafts as they became available.

Community

The partner, collaborative network, and Advisory Board were actively involved in developing specific knowledge mobilization strategies suitable to community groups for increasing access to and utilization of materials intended for a wider audience. Dissemination workshops were conducted in each of the four core EICs to provide opportunities for community members to offer feedback on the research and the implications of the findings for specific groups. Drawing on the project findings, capacity building activities were created for community members to take part in (e.g., writing and photo contests for students belonging to each of the four EICs).

Dissemination

Academic Dissemination

The OMMI research was presented at regional, national, and international professional meetings (both disciplinary specific and interdisciplinary) to showcase the project's findings while also hosting seminars and organizing conference panels in conjunction with the project. Peer-reviewed articles were published in interdisciplinary and disciplinary journals, including online journals to make project findings available via open access. A project website was created that served as a key forum for the team, partnership, and research-related communications transcending the academic/policy/public divides, including through the use of social media.

Policy Dissemination

In collaboration with the partner and collaborative network, (1) the research team developed and implemented dissemination strategies such as writing, publishing research reports and press releases, and delivering presentations at policy roundtables; (2) the main partner, the City of Ottawa, and the collaborative network had access to the project website research database; and (3) representatives from the partner and collaborative network were invited to present project findings at conferences and regional and national professional meetings.

Public Dissemination

For public dissemination of research findings, OMMI adopted three strategies: (1) an open access website was created to archive and document the project findings in publicly accessible databases; (2) the research team engaged in interviews with local mainstream and MCM; and (3) social media fora, such as Facebook and Twitter, were created in order to reach a broader audience.

Key Learnings and Insights

The key learnings and insights gained from the OMMI experience are discussed in light of the challenges that were encountered in applying a community-based participatory research. Overall, the aim is to help advance more “holistic” approaches to the study of MCM in a variety of contexts that can support positive development and social change.

Although the OMMI collaborative effort was successful in closely adhering to and implementing a community-based participatory approach, a few limitations and challenges need to be noted. The main issue was the time and effort invested in the process over a sustained period for all parties involved. Maintaining momentum throughout the project was another significant challenge, even more so due to changes to and turnover among staff and representatives of participating stakeholders. In some cases, there were also changes in the interests and priorities of collaborating actors, which meant that their level of participation, engagement, and involvement fluctuated over time (Gillis and Jackson 2002; MacDonald 2012).

The OMMI was able to creatively adapt and find ways to address these challenges, but this required additional efforts, resources, and committed management strategies to ensure progress and completion of the project. Thus, community-based participatory research generally implicates “more than the sum of its parts” both in terms of the process and the outcomes.

Notwithstanding the challenges, the OMMI partnership offered an ideal opportunity for all interested parties, the research team, the City of Ottawa, the collaborative network, and the Advisory Board, to join their efforts in order to pursue relevant research on the pressing questions of well-being and prosperity of the City of Ottawa and its immigrant population. By collaboratively working together, the OMMI research team and all its partners managed to achieve much more than independently. In particular, the project led to the generation of robust and comparable set of empirical data that will advance understanding of the use, role, and potential of MCM in facilitating and promoting newcomer and immigrant integration, inclusion, and participation in Ottawa and in Canadian society more broadly (Ahmed and Veronis 2017; Veronis and Ahmed 2015). More specifically, the research findings have been made available to various local stakeholders (e.g., City of Ottawa, community groups, settlement organizations, etc.) who can apply them to address the complex and interconnected issues of social and economic health of Ottawa’s diverse communities.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Community Media for Social Change in South India](#)
- ▶ [Theorising Participation as Communicative Action for Development and Social Change](#)
- ▶ [Youth Voices from the Frontlines: Facilitating Meaningful Youth Voice Participation on Climate, Disasters and Environment in Indonesia Plush](#)

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