

Purchasing Diversity: A Media Ecology Analysis on the Recruitment of Newspaper Op-ed Columnists

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This study examines the dynamics of the overlap and shift of opinion-editorial (op-ed) guest columnists in a single news market. While previous studies have explored the diversity of op-ed columnists within an individual newspaper, we have investigated the dynamics through the ecological framework of market competition. The purpose of this article is to see how newspapers recruit op-ed columnists from the social pool, based on their position in the market. To explore this aspect efficiently, we have chosen the largely self-enclosed newspaper market of South Korea and analyzed longitudinal data on 7 national newspapers in that region. We expected that the market positions and political ideologies would delineate the movement and diversity of columnists. We found that the market leaders of the newspaper industry tended to achieve a diversity of op-ed columnists by actively recruiting them from other newspapers. However, the alignment of political ideology was still crucial in the recruitment.

Keywords: op-ed, guest columnist, newspaper ecology, diversity

Daniel Okrent, the first public editor of *The New York Times*, wrote in his column that the newspaper is strongly biased toward the liberal position. One of his key arguments addressed the opinion-editorial (op-ed) page, explaining, "You need an awfully heavy counterweight to balance a page that also bears the work of seven opinionated columnists, only two of whom could be classified as conservative" (Okrent, 2004, p. 2). This quote efficiently captures the expectation that the public puts on the op-ed page of reputable newspapers. It should strive to be a forum representing diverse public opinions in a balanced manner. Despite changes in the news environment that enable more customized news diets from multiple outlets with different political leanings, individual readers still decide on their

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preferred news outlets and put their expectations on them. One recent Reuters Institute survey found that on average 74% of news audiences across four different markets (United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Brazil) wanted news outlets to reflect diverse views and leave the decision up to them (Newman et al., 2021). At the same time, Okrent's statement vividly demonstrates that a perception exists that such expectations are not met, lacking balance and diversity. In this vein, several scholars have pointed out opinion diversity as the most important selection criteria of the columnists (see Golan, 2013; Mitman, Nikolaev, & Porpora, 2012; Sommer, & Maycroft, 2008). Moreover, the value of op-ed articles can go beyond normative goals because of their capacity for engagement and thus a more successful position in the market. Adam Piore (2020) claimed in a *Columbia Journalism Review* article that the opinion section of *The New York Times* accounted for "less than 10 percent of the Times' total output, yet represented 20 percent of all stories read by subscribers" (p. 97).

This observation necessitates an exploration into how balance and diversity have been pursued in actual practice. However, this question cannot be easily answered by looking at the operation of a single newspaper. Revealing larger patterns of how the pool of columnists is assembled requires more than simply reading the editorial policy for diversity. It needs to be understood as a complex dynamic between newspapers, including among other elements, the competition for relevance, public perception of diversity, and the reconciliation of such diversity with the overall leanings of the newspaper itself. It involves looking into how newspapers seek to recruit prestigious writers, debuting them or scouting them from one another. As such, we argue that this question needs to be analyzed through an ecological framework of the newspaper market as a whole.

To this end, this article analyzes the overlaps and movements of op-ed columnists between several major newspapers in a single newspaper market. Unlike most existing studies that examine the diversity of columnists within an individual newspaper, we investigate the dynamics of recruits and shifts in the larger news media ecology. The major contribution we seek to make is to propose this media ecology approach taking the competitive dynamics into account as an effective tool to understand current practices: how practical incentives of newspapers work for promoting diversity.

As the site of the analysis, the South Korean newspaper market was selected with seven major newspapers representing conservative, moderate, and liberal leanings. We believe the Korean newspaper media system is particularly well suited for a pilot case study to explore the workings of news media as a public forum with the potentials to be applied for other democratic societies as a comparative template. Besides being a market sizable enough to yield meaningful data, there are several unique reasons for this choice. First, the South Korean news media system has a relatively strong media-party parallelism, which refers to "the extent to which media reflects political divisions" (Hardy, 2008, p. 18). It arose in the rapid and most successful political democratization process of the modern Korean society (see Rhee, Cho, Song, & Jung, 2011). This will be beneficial in researching the effects of political leanings in the whole process. Second, the competition in the news market is very high (Lee, 2016), which can make its influence on the dynamics more visible. Third, it is a relatively self-contained market because of the language barrier, which makes it easier to explore within a narrower pool of prominent writers.

Most of all, the strong value of op-ed articles in the Korean news market has been well documented. Although op-ed accounts for approximately 10% of newspaper articles (Son, 2000), the section's readership ranks fifth or sixth among 12 section categories in the Korea Press Foundation's Audience Surveys (Korea Press Foundation, 2008, p. 76). Also, when asked for how people decide to subscribe to a newspaper, preference for columns was the second-most frequently cited reason, at 37.3% (Korea Press Foundation, 2010). One interesting aspect is that despite the parallelism, audiences cited balanced fairness as their third-most important reason for choosing their newspaper of preference (Korea Press Foundation, 2014). As was the case in the Reuters survey, the respondents were not expressing their desire for diversity in the entirety of the news ecology, but within individual news outlets. This is backed up by another fact that Korean voters tend to have a significant percentage of swing voters who make their decision in the last weeks (Ryu, 2014), providing incentives for newspapers to put on an image of balanced persuasion.

In the following sections, we will first review the theoretical background for studying op-ed pages as sites of dynamic competition. Then we will proceed to explain our data collection, our analysis, and the patterns found.

Literature Review

The Role of Op-Eds: Diversity for Influence

The op-ed section was designed to be one of the gateways that newspapers take the role of promoting deliberative democracy. As the mission statement in *The New York Times* (1970) states:

The objective is rather to afford greater opportunity for exploration of issues and presentation of new insights and new ideas by writers and thinkers who have no institutional connection with *The Times* and whose views will very frequently be completely divergent from our own. (p. 42)

It has become a standard for many newspapers to fulfill that normative function and to be commercially beneficial, making the section a so-called profitable public sphere (Socolow, 2010). Ideally, newspapers could use the op-ed section with a diverse range of views as a symbol for the "objectivity" norm in journalism and social responsibility toward better democracy (Ciafalo & Traverso, 1994; Day & Golan, 2005; Rosenfeld, 2000; Wahl-Jorgesen, 2004). Positioning as a political institution (Cook, 1998), newspapers have regarded that the op-ed also provided a grounding for institutional authority, which would help newspapers gain more readers and advertisers (Ciafalo & Traverso, 1994).

Despite this noble democratic purpose with expected financial benefits, previous studies have indicated that op-ed columns have been inconsistent in granting such diversity of views. For instance, in comparing *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, Day and Golan (2005) found that the views in op-ed columns are not consistently diverse across issues and newspapers. Likewise in South Korea, where the media-party parallelism is relatively stronger than in the United States, when the same issue was addressed in an in-house editorial and in columns by nonstaff serial columnists, they were consistently and

extremely—on average, 93.7%—similar (Lee, 2010). Even when there is a diversity, it can vary in terms of where such diversity comes from. In an international comparative study, Wahl-Jorgensen (2004) found that Danish newspapers brought ordinary citizens to opinion sections for the diversity, whereas elite figures of differing stances mostly drove the diversity in British newspapers.

These inconsistencies may imply that, in parallel to their normative claim, newspapers also look for opportunities to use the op-ed section to legitimize their own views. In this regard, it has been pointed out the selection of contributors in the op-ed section is not necessarily stemming from the role of “custodians and mediators of the broader popular culture and political culture alike” (Rosenfeld, 2000, p. 8). He argued that it can be influenced by newspapers being a carefully tended private property, emphasizing the pursuit of success in the market. If so, the consequence of such practice could be greater than a simple lack of diversity. The role of the public sphere is to filter and problematize issues, ultimately to deliver considered public opinion to the political system (Habermas, 1991). It rests on the circulation of reflexive feedback among informed and responsive citizens, which may get compromised by market incentives.

Op-ed columns in newspapers also serve as the entry door for policy influences and provide access to governments (Sommer & Maycroft, 2008). This implies that writers can expect to gain social influence by contributing to the op-ed columns. Meanwhile, for the newspapers, columns written by prestigious contributors confirm their market status or reputation, which helps them obtain financial benefits as well. In short, both the newspapers and the columnists seek to enrich their influences through such partnership. Backing this observation, a study by Woods (2015) found that prestigious newspapers tend to prefer writings from high-status scholars, instead of seeking out high-quality writing by lesser-known ones. The contribution gap between the low- and high-status holders has grown wider over the last decade. This provides another indication to theorize that the pursuit of diversity in the op-ed columns may be driven by market incentives rather than deliberative democratic purposes.

To explore this idea through empirical evidence, observation of an individual newspaper would be insufficient. Such an approach would be unable to evaluate any industry-wide pattern for diversity and openness because it would underestimate competition dynamics. For example, the diversity of potential writers may be limited by the pool of available high-status scholars in the market willing to become a regular contributor. In such a case, a newspaper may even attempt to recruit regular nonstaff columnists from competing newspapers instead of searching for a new qualified writer. Moreover, it could prefer people from other newspapers with similar issue stances. To find evidence for such hypotheticals, we would need to take the diversity of the entire pool of columnists into account for measuring the diversity of the op-ed sections. Unfortunately, previous studies have usually measured source diversity through the ratio between in-house columnists and guest columnists at the individual newspaper level (e.g., Day & Golan, 2005; Golan & Wanta, 2004). As such, we argue a holistic, ecological approach could fill the gap.

Ecological Approach to the Op-Ed: Organizational Competition for Resources

The ecological understanding of the newspaper market treats newspapers as agents competing for resources for survival, which are constrained by their environment. Just as the ecosystem concept in the

biological sciences refers to a bounded system of living where organisms interact with one another (Golley, 1998; Odum & Barrett, 2004), newspapers behave similarly for survival. The characteristics of such an ecology are based on the societal influence model (Meyer, 2009), where agents sell influence for readership and advertisement. Put differently, any increase in a newspaper's circulation means an increase in the newspaper's influence, increasing the subscription and advertisement revenue. Hence, newspapers naturally seek to increase their influence by drawing more attention from readers, including increasing the number of readers. In this respect, the diversity of news content has been suggested as one of the best ways to enhance such influence and revenue (Li & Thorson, 2015).

However, the diversity argument of newspapers often disregards the fact that newspapers are operating in an ecology of limited resources. For instance, one of the effects of the market environment is well explained by Carroll and Hannan (1989). They have revealed that the population density of newspapers influences the founding and mortality rates of newspapers. The ongoing crisis in the newspaper industry also shows a strong interaction between the market environment and newspapers. Newspapers with a substantial brand value, such as *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, have survived and flourished over the recent years after overcoming dire situations that could have broken lesser-known local newspapers. Meanwhile, midlevel local newspapers have been rapidly vanishing because of exogenous shocks such as the financial crisis and competition with new media (c.f. Grueskin, Seave, & Graves, 2011). Specialist newspapers in the newspaper ecosystem such as the *Financial Times* in the UK market were an exception to this trend, possibly because of their contents being less reproducible by other newspaper organizations.

The implication of this ecological approach to the diversity of op-ed columnists is that newspapers are dependent on their market positions and may diversify their strategies to recruit op-ed columnists from the available pool (c.f. Sarrina Li & Lee, 2010). Newspapers with uneven influences in the market compete for prestige op-ed columnists willing to be a regular contributor as a de facto limited resource. Particularly, in the op-ed section, where the diversity of contents is essentially linked to the diversity of views, the diversity of op-ed columnists may be directly linked to the competition between newspapers. Furthermore, the advantage of recruiting a regular op-ed columnist from another newspaper to one's results in obtaining diversity and claiming the influence of that columnist. Based on this, we can hypothesize that the market leaders will seek to recruit op-ed columnists from their near competitors rather than those whose market share is far lower. In other words, if the difference in market share between the market leaders and the market followers is smaller, the leaders will pursue active recruitment of op-ed columnists from other newspapers, and the market followers will take the brunt. Also, if we assume that influence is a key factor, market leaders will have a stronger pull than market followers. Based on the literature and our reasoning so far, we will examine the diversity of op-ed columnists as competition in the market ecology through two hypotheses.

- H1: *If the difference in the market share between newspaper market leaders and followers is smaller, sharing and recruiting op-ed columnists will be more frequent.*
- H2: *Market-leading newspapers will have more op-ed columnists joining them from other newspapers, compared with market followers.*

Context of Research: Korean Newspaper Marketplace of Op-Ed Columnists

To examine our topic at the ecological market level efficiently, some conditions were needed in selecting a model case. First, it needs to be a newspaper market with many players overlapping in its readers. If the market is largely segmented around geographical distance or consumer differentiation, it would be difficult to examine the ecology because they may not compete for the same resources. Second, the players in the newspaper market need to be stable enough to be observed for a long term. If the players are disappearing too fast, it would be another obstacle that prevents us from examining the long-term trend. Third, to assess whether our emphasis on the ecology level can yield meaningful new insights, we needed to narrow down our locus on a market that has been explored in previous studies on op-ed columnists.

Based on these conditions, we have selected the newspaper market in South Korea as our model case. Foremost, the mainstream players in the Korean newspaper market are remarkably stable. The top 10 national daily newspapers have been the same for more than two decades. Also, there are several studies on the op-ed columnists of that market. By examining the top 10 newspapers in 2006, Yang and Kang (2007) found strong homophily between newspapers with the same political orientations. Their main finding was that op-ed columnists often write columns to newspapers only within the boundary of newspapers with the same political orientations. Hence, they found three clusters of newspapers, which are conservative, liberal, and progressive newspapers.

Interestingly, there was an exception to this trend, in that the top-selling newspaper *Chosun Ilbo* seems to share columnists with seven other newspapers. Yang and Kang (2007) noted that this pattern arose because the op-ed columnists wanted to exploit the influence of that newspaper. Also, according to previous literature, political orientation is a strong indicator of the clustering in op-ed columnists; the expansion strategies of market leaders seemed to exploit this. Thus, it is reasonable that we may expect the following hypothesis.

H3: Market-leader newspapers will be inclined to recruit op-ed columnists from other newspapers with similar political orientations.

Data and Method

Data Collection

To examine op-ed columnists, we have selected seven newspapers in South Korea. Those newspapers were selected based on the three categories identified by the previous research of Yang and Kang (2007), who found out that the Korean op-ed columnist market is clustered around political orientations of newspapers. For modeling purposes, we evenly distributed the selection, with three dominant newspapers that have conservative leanings (*Chosun*, *Donga*, and *Joongang Ilbo*), two liberal newspapers (*Kukmin* and *Munhwa Ilbo*), and two progressive newspapers (*Kyunghang* and *Hankyoreh*). These seven newspapers share a combined 79.1% of all newspaper subscriptions in Korea, according to the 2015 Survey on the State of News Media (Korea Press Foundation, 2015). However, it should be

noted that across those newspapers, the readership is rather uneven. The sum of the three conservative newspapers takes a 66.8% share of the market, while the two progressive newspapers take 9% and the two liberal newspapers take 3.3%. Since the sum of all the other newspapers used in the previous study by Yang and Kang (2007) took less than 1%, we have not included them in our research. To perform longitudinal data analysis, we have selected three points in time in three-year intervals: 2008, 2011, and 2014. The reason for not extending the datapoint into 2017 is due to the impeachment of the conservative then-president Geun-Hye Park, which caused a massive political shift and media realignment during 2016–17. We concluded that it can act as an aberrant influence outside of the normal pattern of political discourse. This decision was made because this research aims to test a research approach rather than merely present a unique case study.

We have collected the list of every column written by regular nonstaff columnists in the op-ed section for each of those years, by means of Web scraping of the database MEDIAGAON (<http://www.kinds.or.kr>). This service is built and maintained by the Korea Press Foundation and is a newspaper query service running on the Korean Integrated Newspaper Database System. However, because the three conservative market-leader newspapers have not participated in this public database, we applied a Web-crawling technique for those entities. Namely, the data from those newspapers including title, author, and timestamp were collected directly from their official homepages using PHP and SQL codes. We collected the data between August and September 2015 and collected it again in March and April 2016 with reprogrammed crawling codes to proof check. Because of limited capabilities in collecting data beyond the outlets with databases or other online presence, we did not consider whether the columnists were working for news outlets outside of the ones included in the data set.

Table 1 shows the overall distribution of our data for each of the three time points. Note that some authors are counted multiple times in the table if those authors appeared in several newspapers. The total percentage of the number of authors for the three conservative newspapers during our examination is 60.0%. The total percentages for progressive newspapers and liberal newspapers are similar: 22.3% and 23.2%, respectively. Interestingly, the share of the two progressive newspapers is 2.7 times higher than that of the two liberal newspapers (9% vs. 3.3%).

Table 1. The Distribution of Op-Ed Columns by Newspapers and Years.

	2008		2011		2014		Total	
	Columnist	Article	Columnist	Article	Columnist	Article	Columnist	Article
<i>Chosun</i>	401 (19.33%)	1,091 (18.45%)	353 (17.09%)	971 (15.41%)	228 (15.67%)	783 (13.46%)	880 (16.64%)	2,845 (15.78%)
<i>Donga</i>	455 (21.93%)	1,113 (18.83%)	604 (29.25%)	1,126 (17.87%)	294 (20.21%)	855 (14.69%)	1,131 (21.38%)	3,094 (17.16%)
<i>Joongang</i>	248 (11.95%)	559 (9.46%)	206 (9.98%)	635 (10.08%)	253 (17.39%)	783 (13.46%)	1,161 (21.95%)	1,977 (10.96%)
<i>Munhwa</i>	285 (13.73%)	815 (13.79%)	249 (12.06%)	743 (11.79%)	152 (10.45%)	318 (5.46%)	538 (10.17%)	1,876 (10.40%)
<i>Kukmin</i>	338 (16.29%)	1,114 (18.84%)	139 (6.73%)	960 (15.24%)	136 (9.35%)	750 (12.89%)	525 (9.92%)	2,824 (15.66%)
<i>Kyunghang</i>	66 (3.18%)	422 (7.14%)	209 (10.12%)	887 (14.08%)	186 (12.85%)	1,251 (21.50%)	373 (7.05%)	2,560 (14.20%)
<i>Hankyoreh</i>	282 (13.59%)	798 (13.50%)	305 (14.77%)	979 (15.54%)	205 (14.09%)	1,079 (18.54%)	682 (12.89%)	2,856 (15.84%)
Total	2,075	5,912	2,065	6,301	1,454	5,819	5,290	18,032

Note: The numbers reflect overlaps of columnists appearing in multiple newspapers.

Method of Analysis

We have mainly used descriptive statistics to test hypotheses. The exception is the clustering diagram, based on structural equivalence scores derived from social network analysis. If the pattern of relations with other nodes between two nodes is the same, the structural equivalence score comes to zero, meaning they are connected to other nodes in the same ways. Therefore, it is an index indicating similarity between two nodes in terms of sharing op-ed columnists. The larger the score, the bigger the difference between the two nodes in their sharing of columnists.

Results

Overview of the Ecology

In general, our analysis shows that the marketplace ecology of the columnists was largely volatile and dynamic. The three years' average retention rate of op-ed columnists is on average 25.2% (26.4% and 24.0%, respectively). Put differently, about three-quarters of the guest columnists have exited from the columnists' marketplace after three years, and the open space was filled with new people. The six years' retention rate is 11.7%. Only 3.5% of the columnists in 2008 returned in 2014 after their absence in 2011. Meanwhile, 78.5% of the guest columnists only appear once during the three time points of our examination.

The retention rates by the newspapers seem to meet our expectations about the market competition for op-ed columnists. In general, the retention rate is measured higher when the market share is smaller. Though the number of cases is too small to validate statistical significance, the correlation between the ranked order of market share for newspapers and the retention rate showed values ranging from -0.15 (three years' retention, 2011) to -0.45 (six years' retention, 2014 and three years' retention, 2014). According to Table 2 and Table 3, the liberal newspaper cluster has the highest retention rate, and the conservative newspaper cluster has the lowest retention rate. There was a similarity between the progressive and liberal newspapers in the three years' retention in 2011. An exception is a similar rate between the progressive and liberal newspapers in the three years' retention in 2011. However, considering that the number of op-ed columnists for the progressive newspapers in 2011 has increased 147% compared with the number in 2008 (348 vs. 514), the retention rate of the progressive newspapers is understood as higher than the liberal newspapers (see Table 1). The total number of op-ed columnists for liberal newspapers in 2011 decreased 38% compared with the number in 2008 (623 vs. 388). From the retention rate statistics, we have found that newspapers seek to recruit a diversity of contributors from the external marketplace of columnists.

Table 2. Columnist Retention Rate in the Overall Ecology.

Starting Year	Total	Three Years' Retention	Six Years' Retention
2008	1,866 (100%)	493 (26.4%)	218 (11.7%)
2011	1,840 (100%)	441 (24.0%)	

Table 3. Retention Rate by Each Newspaper.

	Total	Three Years' Retention		Six Years' Retention		Total	Three Years' Retention	
	2008	2011		2014		2011	2014	
<i>Chosun</i>	401	55 (13.7%)		11 (2.7%)		353	38 (9.9%)	
<i>Donga</i>	455	119 (19.7%)		35 (7.7%)		604	67 (11.1%)	
<i>Joongang</i>	248	24 (9.7%)		5 (2.0%)		206	29 (14.1%)	
<i>Munhwa</i>	285	80 (2.7%)		26 (1.1%)		249	50 (20.1%)	
<i>Kukmin</i>	338	37 (10.9%)		27 (8.0%)		139	65 (30.2%)	
<i>Kyunghang</i>	66	20 (30.8%)		12 (18.5%)		209	42 (31.1%)	
<i>Hankyoreh</i>	282	46 (16.3%)		12 (4.3%)		305	40 (13.1%)	

Meanwhile, we have also found that the market position does matter for keeping the columnists within one's newspaper. Table 4 indicates the percentage of op-ed columnists who contributed only to a single newspaper, among columnists who have written multiple columns each year. According to those numbers, the conservative newspaper cluster has the highest percentage of people who contributed only to a single newspaper, followed by the liberal and progressive newspaper clusters. We suspect that this may be related to the recruiting strategy of the leading newspapers. For one, the leading newspapers recruited

columnists more from the progressive newspapers than from the liberal newspapers, which are closer to them in terms of market share.

Table 4. Proportion of Columnists Contributing to Single Outlet Only.

	2008			2011			2014		
	Unique	Total	Percentage	Unique	Total	Percentage	Unique	Total	Percentage
<i>Chosun</i>	31	46	67.4%	77	130	59.2%	90	131	68.7%
<i>Donga</i>	131	159	82.4%	62	80	77.5%	61	71	85.9%
<i>Joongang</i>	148	222	66.7%	147	238	61.8%	114	145	78.6%
<i>Munhwa</i>	95	164	57.9%	69	130	53.1%	54	83	65.1%
<i>Kukmin</i>	108	204	52.9%	72	161	44.7%	70	112	62.5%
<i>Kyunghang</i>	38	103	36.9%	37	92	40.2%	52	99	52.5%
<i>Hankyoreh</i>	74	107	69.2%	61	117	52.1%	86	122	70.5%

Overlaps and Shifts of Op-Ed Columnists

As the next step, we have looked into the overlaps in the appearance of op-ed columnists between the newspaper clusters. If our expectation that the market share difference between the market leaders and followers matter, the liberal newspapers may be more easily secure or hold their contributors in own newspapers. Table 5 aims to present the complex story about the recruitment of op-ed columnists. The overlap percentage of op-ed columnists between the conservative and liberal newspapers is consistently higher than the overlap between the conservative and progressive newspapers. Indeed, at least for the shared presence of columnists, this result provides some support to our third hypothesis that an alignment in political orientation matters. On first look, this result appears to contradict our first hypothesis since the market share difference between conservative newspapers and progressives is smaller than between conservative and liberal ones. However, this is where the longitudinal trend needs to be examined closer. In the longitudinal trend, the overlap between the conservative and progressive newspapers has increased since 2008, while the overlaps *within* conservative newspapers have decreased. One point to add is that the sharing between the progressive and liberal newspapers has been at its lowest, which is another indicator that the market is centered around the market leaders.

Table 5. Overlaps of Op-Ed Columnists.

2008			
Frequency	Conservative	Liberal	Progressive
Conservative	96 (51.75%)	101 (27.22%)	29 (7.82%)
Liberal		9 (4.85%)	7 (1.89%)
Progressive			12 (6.47%)
Total: 254			
2011			
Frequency	Conservative	Liberal	Progressive
Conservative	85 (44.74%)	81 (21.32%)	42 (11.05%)
Liberal		7 (3.68%)	5 (1.32%)
Progressive			34 (17.89%)
Total: 254			
2014			
Frequency	Conservative	Liberal	Progressive
Conservative	35 (35.35%)	44 (22.22%)	32 (16.16%)
Liberal		2 (2.02%)	2 (1.01%)
Progressive			23 (23.23%)
Total: 138			

Note. The numbers allow for multiple appearances across several newspapers.

Despite this complex interaction, it seems the conservative newspapers are also increasing their pool of op-ed columnists. It could indeed work in both ways. The increase in the shared pool of writers between the conservative and the progressive newspapers could be driven either by the conservative newspapers or by the progressive ones. To determine the origin of such an increase, we need to consider the time factor. For instance, if a columnist appeared in both conservative and progressive newspapers at a given point in time (T2) but appeared *only* in the progressive newspapers at an earlier point in time (T1), it can be concluded that the columnist has been recruited by the conservative newspapers sometime between T1 and T2. As a reference point, we have investigated 28 columnists appearing in both conservative and progressive newspapers in 2014. The number of columnists was originally 32, but we selected only writers with multiple appearances in several newspapers. We have tracked the contribution trajectory of these columnists to see whether the conservative newspapers drive that change. Among those 28 columnists with previous contribution history in 2008 and 2011, 16 columnists have written their columns mostly in the two progressive newspapers, but they started to appear in the conservative newspapers in 2014. Eight columnists first appeared in both conservative and progressive newspapers without a prior history. Four columnists have mostly appeared in the conservative newspapers and then started to appear in the progressive newspapers. This result, as presented in Table 6, indicates that the overlap was more actively driven by the conservative newspapers, which may confirm our second hypothesis about the role of market leaders.

Table 6. Original Alignment of Recruits.

No.	Direction of alignment change	2014		2011		2008	
		CONS	PROG	CONS	PROG	CONS	PROG
1	Conservative	51	25				11
2	Conservative	14	2				4
3	Conservative	7	7		1		
4	Conservative	4	1		2		10
5	Conservative	2	1		2		2
6	Conservative	1	16		17	1	
7	Conservative	1	10	1	11		
8	Conservative	1	6		6		6
9	Conservative	1	4		5		
10	Conservative	1	3		7		6
11	Conservative	1	3		7		
12	Conservative	1	1		16		1
13	Conservative	1	1		14		7
14	Conservative	1	1		3		1
15	Conservative	1	1		2		
16	Conservative	1	1				3
17	Progressive	1	1	11			
18	Progressive	1	2	7		1	1
19	Progressive	1	1	1			
20	Progressive	1	2	3		5	
21	No prior history	7	2				
22	No prior history	2	1				
23	No prior history	1	1				
24	No prior history	1	1				
25	No prior history	1	12				
26	No prior history	1	1				
27	No prior history	6	14				
28	No prior history	1	1				

However, we need further proof that it is not a temporary phenomenon. For instance, a columnist specializing in crime profiles who regularly appears in a newspaper may be invited to write an additional column from other newspapers when a homicide becomes a heated issue. Thus, we have conducted an additional investigation whether this pattern is robust enough over time. Because of the number of entries, it was impractical to perform individual content analysis. Instead, we have extracted the columnists who have appeared at two consecutive time points of our investigation. Among them, we selected the columnists who have only contributed to newspapers holding the same political orientation and observed how their affiliation changed at a later point in time. For instance, a columnist could have contributed only to

conservative newspapers in 2008 and have written a column in 2011. In such a case, we observed which newspaper the person wrote for to see if a possible shift in political alignment took place. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Changes in Contributing Newspapers.

Year 2011, Changes From 2008						
From	To	Conservative	Liberal	Progressive	Total	
Conservative		211	21	21	253	(53.2%)
Liberal		37	96	5	138	(29.0%)
Progressive		6	3	76	85	(17.9%)
Total		254	120	102	476	(100%)
		(53.4%)	(25.2%)	(21.4%)		

Year 2014, Changes From 2011						
From	To	Conservative	Liberal	Progressive	Total	
Conservative		153	32	14	199	(48.1%)
Liberal		16	66	2	84	(20.3%)
Progressive		24	3	104	131	(31.6%)
Total		193	101	120	414	(100%)
		(46.6%)	(24.4%)	(29.0%)		

Among all the movements that happened during this period, the movement of columnists *within* newspaper clusters of similar political views was the highest. However, from 2011 to 2014, the percentage of writers moving from progressive to conservative newspapers has risen, and the same holds for the movement from conservative to progressive newspapers. Such moves also confirmed the idea that market leaders attract columnists because of social influences. Since the sharing of columnists between the progressive and liberal newspapers was the lowest, the shift between them was the lowest.

Based on this observation, it is reasonable to assess that the conservative newspapers have put more effort into broadening the diversity of their columnists than progressive newspapers, which supports our second hypothesis. Both the sharing of the columnists and the historical shift of contributing outlets are strong indicators that the origin of the change was the conservative newspapers.

Pushing the Boundary

The next question is to estimate the effect of such recruitment, namely whether it benefited the diversity in the conservative newspapers. We have tracked the columnists who have changed their contributing newspapers in terms of their subject matter. The result of our inquiry is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Column Areas of New Columnists From Other Newspapers' Pools.

	2014				2011	
	From		From		From Liberal to	
	Progressive to	Conservative	Conservative to	Progressive	Conservative	
Occupation						
Professor	11	44.0%	10	71.4%	27	73.0%
Researcher	2	8.0%	0	0.0%	3	8.1%
Writers/Critics	6	24.0%	2	14.3%	3	8.1%
(Former) Minister/Politician	2	8.0%	0	0.0%	1	2.7%
Gov't Institution Head	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	5.4%
NGO Activists	1	4.0%	2	14.3%	0	0.0%
Priest	2	8.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Etc.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	2.7%
Contribution Area						
Foreign Policy (N. Korea/Int'l Relation)	5	20.8%	4	28.6%	11	29.7%
Politics/Current Affairs	3	12.5%	3	21.4%	7	18.9%
Economy	4	16.7%	1	7.1%	4	10.8%
Other Policy Expert Field	3	12.5%	2	14.3%	12	32.4%
Soft Essay	8	33.3%	4	28.6%	3	8.1%
Sports	1	4.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Total	24	100.0%	14	100.0%	37	100.0%

Table 8 displays the occupation of the columnists as they appeared in the columns and the subject areas that their columns wrote about. Because of the amounts of overlaps that can be more readily analyzed, we selected the year 2014 for the relation between the progressive and conservative newspapers. For that reason, 2011 was chosen for the relation between the liberal and conservative newspapers.

Table 8 indicates that the conservative newspapers tend to benefit themselves by bringing a relatively high proportion of soft essay columnists from the progressive newspapers. The contrast between them and columnists who exited conservative newspapers to enter progressive ones was prominent. The economy is also a topic area where conservative newspapers tend to bring more columnists from the progressive newspapers than vice versa. The difference in other areas was only marginal.

Another pattern found in Table 8 is that the conservative newspapers draw columnists from the pool of corresponding writers of *liberal* newspapers. In 2011, 73.0% of the columnists recruited from liberal newspapers were professors; areas related to foreign policy and other policy experts took 62.2% of the contributions. It may indicate that columnists from liberal newspapers are considered as adequate resources for showing off diverse views while being less controversial to their conservative readers than columnists

recruited from progressive newspapers. Based on these analyses, we argue that our third hypothesis on the significance of political alignment is largely validated.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has attempted to apply an ecological lens of newspaper competition to examine the diversity of op-ed columnists in a single market. This approach differs from previous research in several aspects. First, it analyzes the market-level dynamic between newspapers. Existing studies on the diversity of op-ed columns had been largely focusing on the individual newspaper, which was limited in understanding how other players in the same market affected such diversity. Second, our research takes the viewpoint of economic incentives for promoting diversity in the op-ed columns. While most previous studies have discussed the positive outcome of such diversity from a normative viewpoint, we attempt to understand it as a rich ecology with market competition for guest columnists. While we think that the role of newspaper journalism as a political institution to foster a functioning public sphere is important, we also believe that we can only help build it by understanding how op-ed diversity works in the given dynamics of the newspaper market. To that end, we provided a glimpse into how economic actions coming from the competition in the market can drive the pursuit of diversity. Previous literature had already pointed out that the op-ed's diversity in newspapers varied across different issues, contexts, and newspaper markets. We think that such variety may be grounded on the economic incentives for the op-ed columns and tried to explain it from the market competition perspective. Third, we traced a long-term trend rather than a cross-sectional examination to find out how the market status of newspapers influences their behaviors. Unlike previous studies, this study has analyzed the ecology of op-ed columnists in a single market with the longitudinal data set and explored three hypotheses.

Our analyses yielded mixed results. Our first hypothesis was only supported as a longitudinal trend but was not supported as a cross-sectional status. For a given year, the market-leading conservative newspapers tended to recruit op-ed columnists more from the liberal newspapers than from the progressive ones with a smaller difference in market share. On the other hand, we have observed that the share and shift of the columnists from the progressive to the conservative newspapers rose over a longer time span.

Our second hypothesis that market leaders are the drivers of the ecological dynamics was largely supported, which indicates that the economic approach can be a valuable tool to understand this dynamic. According to our longitudinal analysis, conservative newspapers recruited policy experts from liberal newspapers, whereas such recruitment from progressive newspapers was centered around columnists specializing in softer human-interest essays. This finding also partly supports our third hypothesis about ideological alignment even while pursuing diversity.

Taken together, our findings indicate that the leaders in the newspaper market actively pursued strategies of gaining diversity as a means of competition in that they aimed to maximize the competitive edge of diversity. From this, we can infer that the diversity of op-ed columns is a complex dynamic between newspapers for limited resources. Although this study is based on data from a single newspaper market, we believe our approach merits further testing in other markets as well.

Nonetheless, our research is not without limitations. First, we have extensively focused on the columnists rather than the actual content and number of columns they contributed. For this research, the assumption was made that serialized columnists tend to maintain a consistency of views, which made them sought-after in the first place. Although the authorship can be a good proxy for what gets written by them, follow-up research at the individual column level may provide better discussion and deeper insight into the dynamics, taking individual change and complexity of views into account. Second, the generalizability of our results should be cautiously assessed. One of the reasons that the South Korean case was an effective model to analyze was that the newspapers, which are the key agents in the market ecology, remained stable throughout the years analyzed. Future studies should consider adding the expectation of newspaper sustainability into the model, which may influence how the recruitment of op-ed columnists unfold. Third, our data included only the guest columnists and purposely excluded staff journalists having their columns to explore the recruitment dynamics. Future models could explore deeper into the dynamics by looking at the cross-recruitment of staff writers as well. Finally, our study does not include systematic evaluations of the columns' contents to look deeper into whether the views of the writers have changed or not. Future studies could benefit from the addition of qualitative approaches to complement the larger picture.

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