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CAIS/ACSI 2022

"They act like we are going to heaven": Information crafting, misinformation, and settlement of Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada

Abstract or Résumé:

This paper reports on findings from a larger study on the settlement information behaviour of Bangladeshi immigrants to Canada. This study uses a mixed method approach, including semi-structured interviews (n=60) and surveys (n=205) with Bangladeshi immigrants who arrived in Canada between 1971 and 2017. The author discusses the new concept of information crafting by exploring the information immigrants received from immigration consultants in Bangladesh and the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The study reports negative consequences of selective information in newcomers' settlement in Canada, primarily positive information about life in Canada, sometimes with exaggeration and falsifications.

1. Introduction and Study Approach

Canada regularly welcomes immigrants and is one of the most desired destinations for migrants globally. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, Canada welcomed 401,000 immigrants in 2021, breaking the records for landed immigrants since 1867 (El-Assal & Thevenot 2021). However, a growing number of studies convey a mismatch between immigrants' expectations about life in Canada and their actual experiences (e.g., Khan & Watson 2005; Simich, Hamilton & Baya 2006; Shuva 2020a; Zaman 2010). At times, this results in anxiety, frustration, and despair, which in turn affect settlement and integration (George & Tsang 2000; Simich et al. 2006).

Several studies show that relevant, authoritative information encountered at the point of need can aid in settlement, which can, in turn, support social inclusion (Caidi et al., 2010; Caidi & Allard, 2005; Esses & Medianu 2012). On the other hand, the lack of critical information may lead to depression and social isolation (Shuva 2015, 2020a). Studies on newcomers and immigrants (e.g., Allard 2015; Allard & Caidi 2018; Caidi et al. 2019; Esses et al. 2013; Fisher et al. 2004; Khoir 2016; Shuva 2015; 2020a) report that immigrants and newcomers consult various formal and informal information sources such as friends and family networks, immigration consultancy agencies, settlement agencies, and public libraries to meet their settlement information needs. Although newcomers use a variety of settlement information sources, it is evident that not all information sources are helpful for their settlement in a new country; in many cases, they may harm settlement in the host country. Studies (e.g., Ahmad 2005; Bauder 2005; Shuva 2020b) have reported negative information experiences of consulting co-ethnic friends and family networks. Therefore, information sources newcomers consult may affect their settlement in a new country. In other words, not all settlement information sources may be helpful for newcomers' settlement in a new country.

The paper presents the results of an exploratory, mixed-method study on the settlement information behaviour of Bangladeshi immigrants to Canada. Using the Bangladeshi community as a case, the author describes the findings related to the information some Bangladeshi immigrants received from formal information sources such as immigration consultancy agencies in the pre-arrival context and how that affected their settlement in Canada. The findings are based on data collected from semi-structured interviews conducted from May 2017 to February 2018 with 60 participants (21 face-to-face; 37 by telephone; and two via Skype) and 205 survey responses from December 2017 to March 2018. Although the larger study was a mixed method study, in this paper, the author mainly presents findings based on semi-structured interviews (see Shuva 2020a for a detailed description of the research methods).

2. Information crafting and negative consequences on settlement of Bangladeshi immigrants

Bangladeshi immigrants were asked to share the information sources they used to gather information about their settlement in Canada in the pre-and post-arrival contexts. They reported using various information sources to meet their settlement information needs, including the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), now the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), friends and family networks, and immigration consultation agencies. A larger study (see Shuva 2020a) has already reported the information experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants using informal information networks such as co-ethnic friends and family networks. In this paper, the author presents data on the information that some interview participants received, mainly from their immigration consultancy firms in Bangladesh and IRCC, and how the information affected their settlement in Canadian society after arrival.

Some participants reported using immigration consultants in Bangladesh to migrate to Canada. After reading the interview transcripts of the participants who took the service of immigration consultants, it was clear that immigration agencies in Bangladesh did not provide actual information about the initial settlement challenges that newcomers faced after arrival. Immigration consultants in Bangladesh sketched life in Canada as heavenly as possible without giving Bangladeshi immigrants any information about the settlement challenges newcomers usually go through after arriving in Canada. The author calls the phenomenon of intentional sharing of selective information, mainly just positive information about life in Canada, sometimes with exaggeration and falsifications, "information crafting." Information providers (such as immigration firms) deliberately select and share information to satisfy their business purposes through information crafting.

Many immigration consultants, who are often unauthorized consultants, craft the information to serve their businesses as sharing the actual picture of life in Canada may discourage many potential newcomers from applying for immigration, resulting in harm to their businesses. These organizations craft the information they share with their clients to maximize their benefits. Instead of sharing the complete picture of life in Canada, immigration consultants, for example, would do the "information crafting" and will share only the positive aspects with some exaggeration (such as free education, free healthcare, employment benefits) of life in Canada without mentioning the struggles many newcomers go through initially.

Many participants claimed that immigration agencies in Bangladesh deceive their clients by providing information on opportunities available to newcomers, often with exaggeration and fabricated details. Interview participants who utilized services from immigration consultants in Bangladesh reported having the impression that the faster they landed in Canada, the faster they had a better life for themselves and their families. Some interview participants said that the information provided by their consultants was so positive that they felt they did not need to worry about anything before arrival as they believed that as soon as they arrived in Canada, things would be great. Immigration consultants in Bangladesh provide information about Canadian life in a manner that brings many interested clients. They present Canadian life full of opportunities for newcomers and their children. The agencies present themselves to their clients that getting services from them is one step ahead of their dream of getting Canadian immigration and other visas. For example, Salam (Toronto, 2011), who worked at a development agency in Bangladesh before moving to Canada, applied for Canadian immigration with the help of an immigration firm in Bangladesh. He reported receiving information about Canadian life with exaggeration and falsifications. He recounted that the information he received from the firm did not match with actual life in Canada. In his words:

> They [immigration consultancy agencies in Bangladesh] act like we are going to heaven. Move fast [to Canada]. I mean, they hide many things. They do not share [the complete information]. They do not say that you will be thrown into a sea. They hide those things. All firms do the same thing. If they say this, they won't be able to run their business. If they inform you that you will be in trouble after arrival, you will do odd jobs; you will struggle, I believe 50 percent of people won't think of applying for it [immigration].

Information crafting may also be performed by government immigration agencies and other stakeholders such as IRCC and provincial immigration ministries in order to attract the best immigrants from across the globe. Some interview participants in this study claimed that the federal government of Canada always highlights the positive aspects of life in Canada and does not usually offer any information about the challenges newcomers initially face. Some participants questioned the information shared by the Canadian government regarding employment prospects for newcomers. The interview participants described story after story of the settlement challenges they faced after arriving in Canada and how the expectations they built through the information received from immigration consultants and government agencies did not match. Some participants who used immigration consultants in Bangladesh claimed that they would not move to Canada if they were aware of the challenges they faced, including switching professions entirely after arriving in Canada.

Figure 1 presents the characteristics/elements of information crafting.

INFORMATION CRAFTING

1 Information crafting is the "intentional" use of selective and positive information, sometimes with exaggeration and falsifications that satisfy the information crafter's business/motivation/purpose. The "intention" is the critical element of information crafting.

2 Information crafting contains actual (true) information (mostly positive information) along with misinformation, falsification, and exaggeration. Thus, information crafting is not just misinformation; it also contains actual information.

3 The general intention of the information crafter is not to do any harm to the recipient of the information. Information crafters instead focus on the gain (e.g., business, financial, and economic). However, the way information is crafted or shaped may indirectly harm the recipient of the information in the long run.

Figure 1: The characteristics/elements of information crafting

This study emphasizes the importance of providing comprehensive information about life in Canada to potential newcomers so that they can make informed decisions even before they apply. As IRCC is one of the core sources of information for newcomers coming to Canada, the author believes that IRCC should offer both information about the opportunities available for newcomers and the challenges newcomers may face along with the things newcomers can do after arrival (such as pursuing education in Canada) to have a better settlement experience after arrival. Through the lens of information crafting, the author believes that it is possible to evaluate the information newcomers receive from various information agencies and whether the information offers a comprehensive picture of life in Canada for newcomers, including opportunities and challenges for newcomers to Canada.

3. Significance of the study in LIS and interdisciplinary contexts

The concept of information crafting has theoretical and practical implications for policy and research. First, it provides insights into the complicated culturally situated information experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants consulting immigration consultants who could not make informed decisions about their move to Canada. Because of consulting agencies' "information crafting" practices, some participants in this study were unaware of the challenges newcomers face and what they should do after arrival to have a better settlement experience. Because of the information crafted by their immigration consulting agencies, the study participants pictured their lives as full of opportunities and "heavenly", resulting in frustration, anger, and disappointment after arrival, primarily related to their employment in Canada. Second, the author urges the Federal Government of Canada to provide comprehensive information about settlement life in Canada for newcomers, including challenges newcomers may face initially and things they can do to mitigate those challenges. Third, the study findings encourage researchers in various disciplines, including psychology, migrational studies, and geography, to go deeper into newcomers' information experiences with their settlement information sources using an informational lens to examine the information newcomers receive from diverse sources and their effects on their post-arrival settlement in a new country. Finally, the concept of information crafting can be applied in other contexts. For example, the concept of information crafting may be helpful in exploring the information sharing practices of diverse industries such as food and pharmaceutical companies to investigate whether food and pharmaceutical industries only highlight the benefits of their products (positive information) over the side effects and long-term consequences of using their products.

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