

“They act like we are going to heaven”: pre-arrival information experiences, information crafting and settlement of immigrants in Canada

Information
crafting and
immigrants in
Canada

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Abstract

Purpose – Although there is a growing body of work on immigrants’ information behavior, little is known about the pre-arrival information experiences of immigrants who consult formal information sources such as immigration agents. Drawn from a larger study on the information behavior of immigrants, this paper mainly reports the semi-structured interview findings on the pre-arrival information experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants who used formal information sources with discussion on how that affected their post-arrival settlement into Canada.

Design/methodology/approach – The study used a mixed method approach with semi-structured interviews (n = 60) and surveys (n = 205) with participants who arrived in Canada between the years of 1971 and 2017. Data were collected from May 2017 to February 2018.

Findings – Although the overall scope of the original study is much larger, this paper features findings on the pre-arrival information experiences derived mainly from an analysis of interview data. This study provides insights into the pre-arrival information experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants consulting formal information sources such as immigration firms, individual immigration consultants and more formal government agencies. The author introduces a new concept of “information crafting” by exploring the negative consequences of selective information sharing by immigration consultants/agents in newcomers’ settlements in Canada, primarily positive information about life in Canada, sometimes with exaggeration and falsification. The interview participants shared story after the 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 after arrival. 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.

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Originality/value – The findings of this study have theoretical and practical implications for policy and research. This study provides insights into the complicated culturally situated pre-arrival information experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants. Moreover, the study findings encourage researchers in various disciplines, including psychology, migration studies and geography, to delve more deeply into newcomers' information experiences 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. The study challenges the general assumptions that formal information sources are always reputable, useful, and comprehensive, and it provides some future directions for research that seeks to understand the culturally situated information behavior of diverse immigrant groups.

Keywords Settlement information behaviour, Information experiences, Pre-arrival information seeking, Immigration agencies, Formal information sources, Government agencies

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Canada is one of the top three destinations for potential migrants worldwide (Pugliese and Ray, 2023). Every year, many people across the globe move to Canada as immigrants. Immigrants play a significant role in Canada in terms of population growth, economic growth, and innovation (Boyd and Cao, 2009; Conference Board of Canada, 2010; Dean and Wilson, 2009). Given the importance of immigration, the federal government of Canada aims to welcome about 1.5 million immigrants to Canada between 2023 and 2025. Although Canada is one of the most desired destinations for immigrants across the globe, several studies report a significant mismatch between immigrants' expectations about life in Canada and their actual experiences after arrival (e.g. Khan and Watson, 2005; Simich *et al.*, 2006; Shuva, 2020; Zaman, 2010). At times, this results in anxiety, frustration, and despair, which in turn affect settlement and integration (George and Tsang, 2000; Simich *et al.*, 2006).

Several studies (e.g. Caidi *et al.*, 2010; Caidi and Allard, 2005; Shuva, 2020) have shown that relevant, authoritative information encountered at the point of need can aid the settlement processes of newcomers, including refugees, which can, in turn, support social inclusion. On the other hand, the lack of critical information may lead to depression and social isolation (Shuva, 2015, 2020). Studies on newcomers and immigrants (e.g. Allard, 2022; Allard and Caidi, 2018; Caidi *et al.*, 2019; Esses *et al.*, 2013a, b; Fisher *et al.*, 2004; Khoir, 2016; Khoir *et al.*, 2015; Shuva, 2020, 2021a, b) report that immigrants and newcomers consult various formal and informal information sources, such as friends and family networks, settlement agencies, and public libraries, to meet their settlement information needs after arrival in the host country. Studies (e.g. Ahmad, 2005; Bauder, 2005; Shuva, 2021a) have reported negative information experiences when consulting informal information sources, such as co-ethnic community networks. Although newcomers use a variety of settlement information sources, it is evident that not all information sources are helpful (Shuva, 2021a).

There are several recent studies (e.g. Allard, 2022; Allard and Caidi, 2018; Caidi *et al.*, 2019; Esses *et al.*, 2013a, b; Khoir, 2016) in the context of immigrants' settlement in a new country that report the information sources immigrants use; however, we do not know much about the settlement information sources immigrants use in pre-arrival contexts. Despite some newspaper reporting (e.g. Lindsay, 2022; Ward, 2016) on the immigration frauds by Canadian immigration consultants, very little is known about the information newcomers receive about life in Canada before arrival from their immigration agents in developing countries like Bangladesh. Excerpted from a large-scale study on the information behavior of Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada, this paper presents the results of an exploratory, mixed-method study on the settlement information behavior of Bangladeshi immigrants to Canada. Using the Bangladeshi community as a case, the author describes findings related to the information some participants received from formal information sources such as immigration consultancy agencies in pre-arrival contexts and how that affected their post-arrival settlement in Canada.

Justification of the study

Canada welcomes immigrants with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds from across the globe, and the majority of recent newcomers are admitted under the economic category (Statistics Canada, 2022). Not surprisingly, employment has been the core settlement concern for newcomers and their families (Dean and Wilson, 2009; Esses *et al.*, 2013a, b; George and Chaze, 2009; Kaushik and Drolet, 2018; Murphy, 2010; Shuva, 2022). Research shows that employment status significantly affects life satisfaction, health, and well-being of newcomers (Aycan and Berry, 1996; Dean and Wilson, 2009; Simich *et al.*, 2006). Skilled immigrants to Canada are educated and bring global experience in diverse professions to their new host country. However, in the immigration discourse the employment-related challenges newcomers face in Canada are clear (e.g. Dean and Wilson, 2009; Picot and Sweetman, 2012; Reitz, 2007a, b, 2013; Zaman, 2010). Recent studies in Library and Information Science (LIS) in North American contexts (e.g. Allard, 2022; Caidi *et al.*, 2014; Mabi *et al.*, 2023; Rayes *et al.*, 2016; Shuva, 2020, 2022) also shed light on the importance of employment-related aspects in newcomers' settlement and on informational activities used to obtain work. Furthermore, immigrants' lack of awareness of employment challenges they might face after arriving in Canada results in a mismatch between life expectations and actual lived experiences after arriving in Canada (Shuva, 2020). Although there are studies (e.g. Allard, 2022; Allard and Caidi, 2018; Caidi *et al.*, 2019; Esses *et al.*, 2013a, b; Khoir, 2016; Shuva, 2020) that report on the wide range of information sources used by immigrants to meet their settlement information needs, this study takes a closer look at one such domain of formal information sources and channels used by Bangladeshi immigrants in pre-arrival contexts to Canada. As part of a larger study on the information behavior of immigrants in Canada (see Shuva, 2020), this study addresses the following research questions.

- RQ1. What are the pre- and post-arrival settlement information sources [1] of Bangladeshi immigrants to Canada?
- RQ2. What are the information experiences [2] of Bangladeshi immigrants when using formal information sources such as immigration consultants and government agencies in pre-arrival contexts?
- RQ3. How does the use of formal information sources help (or not help) immigrants make informed decisions about their move to a new country?

Literature review

It can be challenging to conduct research with immigrants (Caidi and Allard, 2005; Caidi and MacDonald, 2008; Fisher *et al.*, 2004), and there are relatively few studies of their information behavior (Caidi *et al.*, 2010; Caidi and Allard, 2005; Mason and Lamain, 2007), and even fewer focused on immigrants' pre-arrival information experiences. This review emphasizes research literature with a focus on Canada, although key findings from a wide array of studies conducted around the world on immigrants' information behavior are also included. The literature review begins with these studies, and concludes with a brief overview of studies on misinformation, disinformation, and immigrants [3].

Canada has long been an adopted home country for many people, some of whom land as willing migrants, while others have been forced to make new lives in a new nation. Research has begun to tell us more about the settlement information behavior of immigrants. Allard's (2022) empirical study of 14 Filipino immigrants who were part of the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP) found 8 settlement-information phases. The information seeking strategies of the participants included consulting various information sources such as informal information networks, using online resources such as Citizenship and Immigration

Canada (CIC), Google search, and Canadian job banks. Participants rarely reported consulting immigration consultants and firms. [Quirke \(2014\)](#) studied the post-arrival settlement experiences and information practices of Afghan youth in Toronto. In this study Facebook and online resources were used by Afghan youth and family/friends were primary information sources during settlement.

Another recent study in Canadian context by [Caidi et al. \(2019\)](#) examined the information behavior of 16 Chinese older adult (aged 60 and over) immigrants to Australia and Canada. Children were the main sources of information for learning about Australia and Canada. An earlier empirical study in Canada on the information needs and seeking behavior of 24 Southern Sudanese youth in London, Ontario, by [Silvio \(2006\)](#) reported academic information as a core information need along with a high dependence on personal networks comprising friends, colleagues, and neighbors.

Using semi-structured interviews with 25 African immigrants in Metro Vancouver, Canada, [Mabi et al. \(2023\)](#) explored their employment related information experiences. Participants encountered various difficulties in obtaining information related to employment, which negatively affected their ability to make timely and informed career decisions due to limited access to relevant information. [Raves et al. \(2016\)](#) explored the information behavior in highly educated newcomer groups comprising 10 American and 10 Canadian medical graduates. Again, one of the core information needs of this group was employment- and career-related information. They relied on professional friends, personal networks, and online sources in their quests to obtain professional positions.

A large-scale study by [Esses et al. \(2013a\)](#) described the results of a telephone survey conducted in Alberta regarding recent immigrants' experiences with settlement services in that province, their information needs, and their economic and social integration outcomes. Although the majority of the participants obtained settlement information from family and friends and government websites, approximately 10% of the participants reported gathering information from their immigration consultants. [Esses et al. \(2013b\)](#) built on the Alberta study to conduct surveys with nearly 3,000 immigrants in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan to learn more about their settlement, integration experiences, and outcomes. Similar to the Alberta survey, the participants of this study indicated high dependence on family and friends (61%) and government websites (59%). Some participants reported obtaining information from immigration lawyers and consultants.

[Khoir \(2016\)](#) used surveys, interviews, and photovoice to study Asian immigrants' settlement in urban South Australia. The Internet, family, and friends were the main sources of settlement information. [Komito and Bates \(2011\)](#) found that Polish and Filipino nationals in Ireland heavily relied on the Internet for information and communication with home countries. Before arriving in Ireland, participants mainly used friends and family for their information needs.

In a study in New Zealand, [Machet and Govender \(2012\)](#) examined the information behavior of new Chinese immigrants in Auckland. The information sources used by new Chinese immigrants include friends, radio, newspapers, television, and the Internet. Another study in New Zealand by [Mason and Lamain \(2007\)](#) explored the information-seeking behavior of 78 immigrants. Although the Internet was the most utilized settlement information source, books and other media, as well as family and friends, were important.

There have been some studies on the information behavior of immigrants in the USA. A recent study by [Suh and Hsieh \(2019\)](#) on 16 South Korean immigrants' information behavior and ICT usage reported that participants needed information related to housing, work, banking, transportation, law, school, health, and language. This study also reports the significant use of ICT-mediated resources to satisfy information needs in the new country context. [Lingel \(2011\)](#) examined the information practices of 12 migrants in New York to report various information sources utilized by the participants to meet their everyday life

information needs. Friends and the Internet were the most frequently reported. The usefulness of ethnic online information resources was evident in Lingel's study. Koo (2013) investigates how isolated Korean immigrant adolescents seek and use necessary information in everyday life contexts. High dependency on family members, particularly parents, to fulfill various everyday life information needs was evident among participants.

Contexts for the information behavior of refugees are fundamentally different from those of skilled immigrants, and the contexts of their migration may be characterized by an urgency born of state violence or natural disasters that affect their capacity to research and access either pre- or post-arrival information sources. However, some of the settlement information needs (such as employment and housing) and sources (e.g. personal networks) of refugees may be very similar to those of immigrants. In the following, the author presents some of the main findings of recent studies on refugees' information needs and seeking behavior conducted around the world with a particular focus on information sources.

In Australia, a study by Lloyd and Wilkinson (2019) reported young refugees (16–25 years of age) using various information sources such as community people, churches, libraries, and social networking tools, such as Facebook, to gather information about local society and culture, employment, career, maintaining transnational ties, and learning about home country affairs. A recent study by Mansour (2018) on Syrian refugees displaced to Egypt revealed Syrian refugees' heavy dependence and preferences for information sources such as friends and family. In the U.S., Hassan and Wolfram (2020) investigated the information needs and seeking behaviors of African refugees in the Midwest United States. The participants reported requiring information related to housing, health care, employment and education and relied heavily on their caseworkers employed as sources of information after their arrival in the United States.

Although informal information sources continued to be one of the top settlement information sources for immigrants across the globe, more recent studies on immigrants' information needs and seeking see a shift in preferred information sources among newcomers. Family and friends, newspapers, TV, and radio were the major sources of information before the widespread availability of the Internet. However, looking at the findings of the recent studies, especially those published after 2005 (e.g. Esses *et al.*, 2013a; Khoir, 2016; Komito and Bates, 2011; Lingel, 2011; Mason and Lamain, 2007; Shuva, 2021b), it appears that the Internet and its various resources, including websites, blogs, and online communities, are becoming increasingly important sources of information for immigrants including refugees.

Large-scale studies by Esses *et al.* (2013a, b) reported the significant use of Internet resources among newcomers in Canada. A study on Alberta settlement outcomes (Esses *et al.*, 2013a) showed a strong preference for obtaining information about government services via the Internet. The participants also reported the ease with which they located information on the Internet in both pre- and post-arrival contexts. These findings are similar to those of the Western settlement outcomes survey (Esses *et al.*, 2013b). Caidi *et al.* (2014) report foreign-trained health professionals utilizing various immigration-related online discussion forums (e.g. AllNurses) to meet their varied settlement-related information needs, including those related to employment. The use of the Internet to meet various settlement information needs (such as residency-related information) among international medical graduates in Canada and the US was also evident in Rayes *et al.* (2016). Studies on refugees, such as Kaufmann (2018) and Gough and Gough (2019), report the use of ICT-mediated information sources among refugees.

Despite the research findings that show how central government websites and immigration consultants are for settlement information, we still do not know how their information experiences are impacted by consulting those formal information sources. Shuva (2021a) reports on the consequences of solely depending on informal information networks, especially for employment-related information and guidance, no study has described the

information experiences of consulting formal information sources such as government websites, immigration consultants, and how that helps (or does not help) newcomers make informed decisions about their move to a new country.

There has been an increase in research in the areas of misinformation and disinformation (e.g. [Aimeur et al., 2023](#); [Guess and Lyons, 2020](#); [Rubin, 2019, 2022](#)). Much of this scholarship focuses on misinformation and disinformation in online environments. In general, misinformation is defined as “wrong or misleading information” ([Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.a](#)) and disinformation as “the dissemination of deliberately false information . . .” ([Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.b](#)). The concepts of misinformation and disinformation are complex. A recent study by [Ruokolainen and Widén \(2020\)](#) conceptualized misinformation in the context of asylum seekers by introducing the concepts of “perceived misinformation” and “normative misinformation,” emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of information in marginalized and vulnerable groups.

In migration research, there has been little research that this discusses misinformation and disinformation, or selective information sharing among formal information providing agencies in the context of newcomers’ settlement in a new country. In studies of asylum seekers and refugees, there is evidence of government agencies not providing needed information in a comprehensive and timely way thus creating distrust in government information sources. For example, [Carlson et al. \(2018\)](#) showed how frequent policy changes, limited communication, and ad-hoc policy implementation led to a lack of trust among asylum seekers for government officials and ethnic out-groups. As a result, refugees actively sought out smugglers and other informal (and more risky) sources for information, leading to situations where they acted on rumors. A recent study on repatriated migrants by [Shuva \(2021c\)](#) revealed that they often did not seek information regarding their irregular migration due to unrealistic perceptions about life in abroad, trust in smugglers, and misinformation. They reported not verifying the (mis)information they received from the human smugglers and their local agents and did not use any formal information sources such as local government agencies.

This study, one of the few studies on the information behavior of skilled immigrants and their dependents in Canada, examines misinformation and selective information sharing by immigration agencies in Bangladesh and government offices in Canada.

Research methods

This study uses a mixed method approach to comprehensively understand the information behavior of Bangladeshi immigrants in Ontario, Canada. After obtaining ethics approval from the Institutional Review Board of Western University, Canada, the larger study gathered data from semi-structured interviews and surveys. It is important to mention here that although a large-scale survey data was gathered on various aspects of the settlement information behavior of Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada, this paper mainly draws from the semi-structured interview findings on the pre-arrival information experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants and how that affected their settlement into Canada after arrival. Before presenting the findings of the pre-arrival information experiences, the study presents survey data on the list of pre- and post-arrival information sources consulted by the survey participants.

Using convenience and purposive sampling, the author conducted 60 interviews (21 face-to-face, 37 by telephone, and 2 via Skype) between May 2017 and February 2018. The continuing validity of the findings of a 2018 study on the selective sharing of information, often with misinformation and false promises by immigration agents in developing countries, is evident in recent reports and newspaper articles. For example, it has been reported that some immigration agents in international students’ home countries created forged letters

without the knowledge of the international students to secure Canadian study permits (see [Aulakh and Kelley, 2023](#); [Ballard, 2023](#); [Mundie, 2023](#)). Also, recent tweets by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) warned foreign nationals planning to come to Canada for work, study, or permanent residence to be cautious of fraudulent immigration consultants (see for examples, [Figures 1 and 2](#) below). In response to those tweets, many reported on similar immigration frauds. IRCC also created a webpage on protecting potential immigrants from immigration fraud at <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/protect-fraud.html>>. The findings of this study have potential to help



Source(s): IRCC(@CitImmCanada), (2023, June 18), available at <https://twitter.com/CitImmCanada/status/1670386094045552643>

Figure 1.
IRCC Tweet on June 18,
2023 warning potential
newcomers to Canada
about
immigration fraud



Source(s): IRCC(@CitImmCanada), (2023, August 15), available at <https://twitter.com/CitImmCanada/status/1559299206791266304>

Figure 2.
IRCC Tweet on August
15, 2023 warning
potential newcomers to
Canada about
immigration fraud

agencies like IRCC to critically review their information sharing practices to create an ethical information system that focuses on sharing comprehensive information about life in abroad rather selective sharing of information aiming at attracting global talents.

Although the interview participants had the option of being interviewed in Bengali or English, most of the participants (51 interviewees) preferred to be interviewed in Bengali, the mother tongue of the participants. After the initial analysis of the interview data, an online survey was developed to better understand the settlement information behavior of Bangladeshi immigrants living in Ontario at the time of the survey. The study received 205 survey responses.

Participants had to meet the following criteria to be eligible for interviews and surveys:

- (1) Had lived in Bangladesh for at least 12 years before moving to Canada;
- (2) Were at least 18 years of age;
- (3) Resided in Ontario at the time of interview/survey;
- (4) Were proficient in either Bengali or English; and
- (5) Were either citizens or permanent residents [4] of Canada.

The author, a Bangladeshi citizen and a fluent Bengali speaker, and an international student at a Canadian research university at the time of the study, held an insider position. The author used several recruitment strategies such as attending Bangladeshi community programs and events in various cities in Ontario, advertising in local Bengali newspapers published from Toronto, Ontario, and seeking help from Bangladeshi community leaders to recruit participants for this study. During the semi-structured interviews, the author was able to build rapport with interview participants quickly and gathered rich insights on the settlement experiences of the participants due to his insider status. Rapport building is an essential component of rich qualitative interviews (McGrath *et al.*, 2019; Sivell *et al.*, 2019) and gathering in-depth perspectives on the phenomenon being investigated. Also, gaining trust among participants is crucial to gain the complete picture of people's settlement experiences, including challenges they face settling in a new country. Because of author's lived experiences, his orientation to Bangladeshi systems, culture, and politics, he was privileged to understand respondents' answers to interview questions quite quickly and was able to ask relevant questions to get further insights into their challenges.

After the initial interview data analysis, an online survey questionnaire was developed using Qualtrics. Although most of the participants completed the online survey questionnaire, three preferred to participate in surveys via telephone.

Of the 60 interview participants, the majority were classified as skilled immigrants and principal applicants ($n = 38, 63\%$); see Table 1). More than half of the interview participants moved to Canada after 2011 ($n = 32, 53\%$). A vast majority of the participants were between the ages of 30 and 49 years ($n = 51, 85\%$), and over one-third of the interviewees identified as female ($n = 22, 37\%$), and two-thirds as male ($n = 38, 63\%$). Most of the participants reported being married at the time of the interview ($n = 54, 90\%$). Almost all of interview participants ($n = 58; 96\%$) were highly educated and had obtained university degrees before moving to Canada.

Of 205 survey respondents, a majority were skilled immigrants ($n = 125, 61\%$, see Table 2). About 43% ($n = 78$) of respondents moved to Canada during and after 2011, and a majority of survey respondents were between the ages of 30 and 49 ($n = 146, 71\%$). Similar to the interview participants, most of the survey participants ($n = 90\%$) obtained university degrees before moving to Canada; 61% of the survey participants were male and 27% were female (three participants did not report their gender). Most of the survey participants were married ($n = 189, 92\%$) and most had children ($n = 174, 85\%$).

Immigration status	Frequency (n = 60)	Percentages
Skilled worker or professional-principal applicant (including provincial nominee principal applicant)	38	63.3
Skilled worker or professional-dependent (including provincial nominee dependent)	19	31.7
Family class	3	5.0
Total	60	100.0
<i>Year of arrival</i>		
Before 2000	6	10.0
2000–2005	9	15.0
2006–2010	13	21.7
2011–2015	24	40.0
2016 onward	8	13.3
Total	60	100.0
<i>Age</i>		
30–34	11	18.3
35–39	15	25.0
40–44	16	26.7
45–49	9	15.0
50 and over	9	15.0
Total	60	100.0
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	38	63.3
Female	22	36.7
Total	60	100.0
<i>Marital status</i>		
Married	54	90.0
Single	3	5.0
Single mother	3	5.0
Total	60	100.0
<i>Education</i>		
Master's degree	41	68.3
Bachelor's degree	12	20.0
Earned doctorate	5	8.3
Secondary school diploma or below	2	3.4
Total	60	100.0

Source(s): Table by the author

Table 1.
Interview
demographics

Braun and Clarke's six-phase "thematic analysis" approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) guided the interview data coding and analysis for the larger study. The author used NVivo 12 to code the interview data. The interview data were transcribed by the author, a native Bengali speaker. Transcribed interviews were reread, and open coding was conducted, generating initial codes through NVivo12 Plus. The codes were then combined into potential themes, and their relevancy was checked with the coded extracts. The potential themes were revised and renamed multiple times. The final phase involved organizing the codes logically for analysis and presentation, and the author translated all quotes from Bengali to English while preserving the participants' voices, including grammatically incorrect words. The coding categories presented in the findings were in response to the research questions. SPSS software was used to analyze the survey data. Only descriptive statistics are used for this paper.

Immigration status	Frequency	Percentages
Skilled worker or professional-principal applicant (including provincial nominee principal applicant)	125	61.3
Skilled worker or professional-dependent (including provincial nominee dependent)	45	22.1
Family class	25	12.3
Other (including investor)	9	4.4
Total	204	100.0
<i>Year of arrival</i>		
Before 2000	20	10.9
2000–2005	28	15.3
2006–2010	57	31.1
2011–2015	56	30.6
2016 onwards	22	12.0
Total	183	100.0
<i>Age</i>		
18–29	11	5.4
30–39	71	34.6
40–49	75	36.6
50–59	37	18.0
60 and over	11	5.4
Total	205	100.0
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	126	61.5
Female	76	37.1
Other (please specify)	1	0.5
Prefer not to mention	2	1.0
Total	205	100.0
<i>Marital status</i>		
Common-law	1	0.5
Divorced	3	1.5
Married	189	92.2
Single	10	4.9
Separated	2	1.0
Total	205	100.0
<i>Children</i>		
Yes	174	84.9
No	31	15.1
Total	205	100.0
<i>Education</i>		
Master's degree	138	67.3
Bachelor's degree	41	20.0
Earned doctorate	14	6.8
Higher secondary school diploma or equivalent	4	2.0
Secondary school diploma or below	3	1.5
Other (please specify)	4	2.0
Total	204	100

Table 2.
Survey demographics

Source(s): Table by the author

One of the main limitations of this study is related to participant recruitment. The participants were selected using non-probability sampling techniques (e.g. convenience and snowball). As a result, the findings are not generalizable, and caution should be exercised when interpreting the results. Another limitation is that the study is that participants were recruited after settlement in Canada and were asked to recall or reflect their prior information behavior when in Bangladesh or other places of residence before coming to Canada. Except for a few very recent immigrants who move in 2016 onwards, a majority of participants had been in Canada for 5–10 years at the time of the interview and surveys. Therefore, the stories told about their pre- and post-arrival settlement experiences and their transitional information behavior may have been distorted by memory. However, because of the length of their stay in Canada, they were able to clearly articulate their information experiences with their personal networks (see [Shuva, 2020](#)) and formal information sources (e.g. immigration firms) and importantly, they were able to consider the effects of those informational interactions. Future longitudinal studies are warranted that investigate immigrants' information experiences in pre- and post-arrival contexts. Despite its limitations, this study is one of the few recent empirical studies on immigrants' settlement information behavior of immigrants. The findings of this study have the potential to improve information policies related to what information is shared with immigrants and offer directions for future research on immigrants' information behavior, in particular, research on pre-arrival information behavior.

Findings of the study

The findings of this study are divided into two categories: I. Pre-and post-arrival settlement information sources; and II. Pre-arrival information experiences using formal information sources and settlement of immigrants. The author first presents the interview data, followed by the survey data, when appropriate.

I. Pre- and post-arrival settlement information sources

Interview participants were asked to share the information sources they used to gather information about their settlement in Canada in pre-and post-arrival contexts. They reported using various information sources to meet their settlement information needs, including Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), now the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), friends and family networks, and immigration consultation agencies. Survey participants also reported using a variety of information sources in the pre- and post-arrival contexts (see [Figures 3 and 4](#)). A previous study (see [Shuva, 2021a](#)) has discussed findings related to the information experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants using informal information networks such as co-ethnic friends and family networks. Although participants of the larger study reported utilizing various social media, Internet tools and resources including co-ethnic social media Facebook forums (see [Shuva, 2021b](#)), it was beyond the scope of the larger study to comprehensively analyze the role of social media in the information experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants.

As shown in [Figure 3](#), the IRCC [5] was the topmost settlement information source. Although immigration consultants in Bangladesh were not among the top five pre-arrival information sources, approximately 13% of survey participants claimed to use immigration consultancy firms and lawyers for settlement information.

For post-arrival information sources, the IRCC ranked among the top-consulted post-arrival information sources (see [Figure 4](#)). Although not surprising, after arrival, few participants consulted immigration representatives.

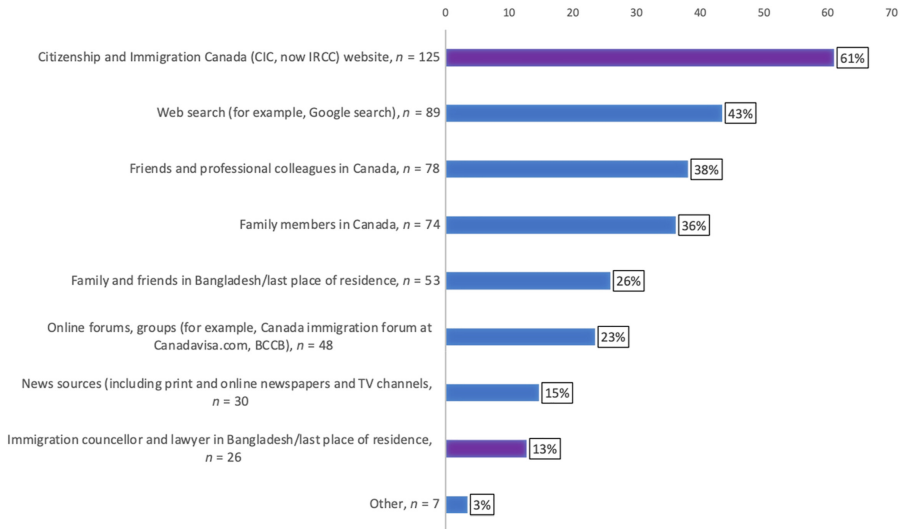


Figure 3.
Pre-arrival information sources

Source(s): Figure by author

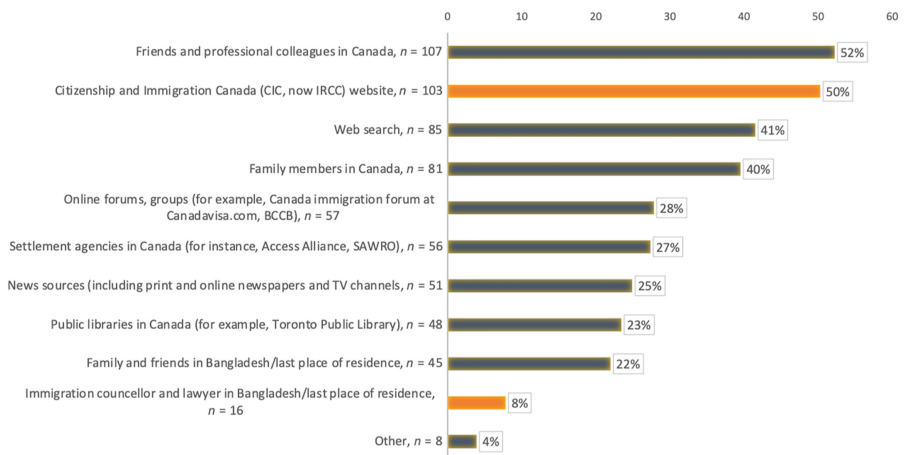


Figure 4.
Post-arrival information sources

Source(s): Figure by author

II. Pre-arrival information experiences using formal information sources and settlement of immigrants

Interview participants reported using immigration agencies in Bangladesh before emigrating to Canada. After reading the interview transcripts of the participants who used 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 might encounter after arrival. Immigration agencies 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.

Further, participants claimed that immigration agencies in Bangladesh deceived their clients by providing information on opportunities available to newcomers, often with

exaggerated 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 would obtain 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 that they did not need to worry about anything before arrival. 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 claim that getting services from them puts prospective immigrants one step ahead of their dreams of getting Canadian immigration and other visas. For example, Salam (Toronto, 2011 [6]), 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 exaggerating and false information about life in Canada. 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 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].

An agricultural professional from Bangladesh, Lopa (Toronto, 2011), expected to be able to work in an agricultural sector in Canada after arrival. She went through various employment-related challenges and was not even able to get a survival job initially. Lopa never anticipated that she would have to pursue post-secondary education in Canada on pharmaceutical technology, which is completely different from what she was trained for. Even though she was working as a full-time employee in a pharmaceutical company at the time of the interview, she emphasized her dissatisfaction with not being able to maintain her professional identity in Canada and the lack of information about the Canadian employment system before arrival.

If I knew before arriving, the [employment] situation in Canada is like this; I would not come. I would not even plan to move if [I knew] I had to [struggle] for the [professional] job. I thought I would get a related job. I moved here through a skilled migration.

Canada offers pre-arrival settlement services to help immigrants make informed decisions regarding their move to Canada, however, some interview participants, such as Iqbal (Brampton, 2017) and Salma (Toronto, 2016), reported that their friends and families who applied through immigration agencies in Bangladesh were unaware of the pre-arrival services offered by the pre-arrival settlement agencies funded by the Federal Government of Canada. Iqbal and Salma both applied for immigration on their own. Iqbal said that he heard from others who applied through agencies that they were not aware of the pre-arrival settlement services in Bangladesh and did not receive any communication from the IRCC. Salma's sister, who had moved to Canada two months before Salma, did not obtain information about the pre-arrival settlement service. While Salma applied by herself, her sister and their family applied through an immigration consultancy agency in Bangladesh that did not share the information about the pre-arrival settlement services which could have been useful for the family. A report published by [IRCC \(2018\)](#) confirms the low use of pre-arrival information services among diverse immigrant groups.

Misinformation or informational deception by immigration agencies in Bangladesh is also illustrated in Jahid's (Barrie, 2014) interview excerpt. Jahid told the author that he noticed misleading advertising by immigration firms in Bangladesh designed to attract people to immigrate to Canada to at least apply through immigration agencies.

Jahid: A few days back, I noticed [in an advertisement] that Canada will invite 300,000 Bangladeshi. I do not know how they [immigration agencies] get such information.

Nafiz: Where did you see that?

Jahid: In a newspaper, they [immigration lawyers] advertised in a Bangladeshi newspaper. Many immigration lawyers advertised that 300,000 Bangladesh will be able to come to [Canada] under the professional category [skilled immigrants]. Seeing this, a lot of people [in Bangladesh] are inspired to apply for immigration [as they think] if Canada takes 300,000, I may be one of them.

The experiences of immigrants using immigration agencies in Bangladesh, as reported by Salam, Iqbal, Salma, and others, suggest an “informational gap” of immigrants who use immigration agencies in Bangladesh and those who applied independently. People who apply through such agencies do not usually receive communication from the IRCC, and they may not obtain information related to various pre-arrival settlement services. It is worth noting that many immigration agencies and consultancy firms in Bangladesh do not work in the same manner as Canadian immigration agencies. In late 2021, to ensure that immigration consultants offer ethical and professional Canadian immigration services, the Government of Canada created the College of Citizenship and Citizenship Consultants (CICC) to regulate licensed immigration and citizenship consultants, and international student immigration advisors. The CICC replaced the Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council (ICCRC). Bangladeshi immigration agencies are not regulated. Although some agencies in Bangladesh claim to be authorized by the CICC, several work as unlicensed, commercial firms without any oversight.

The author of this paper is an active participant in various Bangladeshi social media forums for international students and permanent residents of Canada who noticed several social media posts reporting misinformation and deceptions by many so-called immigration consultants in Bangladesh. One of the most widely used online resources by international students, Prospective Bangladeshi Students in Canadian Universities (PBSCU), even created page sharing several stories of misinformation and immigration frauds by several paid agents (<https://www.pbscu.ca/resources/dalal>). The author also noticed immigration consultants sketching a smooth transition to life in Canada. They share a lot of misinformation that would appeal to many Bangladeshi people, although immigration consultants are aware that many applicants will not be successful in getting the immigration. For example, although there are criteria to get unemployment insurance and not everyone is eligible, some immigration consultants claim that immigrants receive employment insurance benefits if unemployed without mentioning eligibility criteria. Many immigration agencies in Bangladesh make positive claims about opportunities for newcomers and their children in Canada. They present the Canadian immigration process as hassle-free if done with their help and claim to be experts in Canadian immigration processing. The IRCC is aware of this phenomenon of selective information sharing, often rife with misinformation and now creates several resources to warn potential immigrants about immigration fraud and scams. However, unauthorized immigration agents continue to work in developing countries, such as Bangladesh and India, and continue to deceive people by offering false and exaggerated information about life abroad.

Selective information sharing and withholding of information may also be perceived as strategies used by government immigration agencies and other stakeholders to recruit new immigration applicants. Some interview participants in this study claimed that the federal government of Canada always highlights the positive aspects of life in Canada without giving much information about challenges newcomers encounter. Some participants questioned information shared by the Canadian government regarding employment prospects for newcomers. In story after story participants described settlement challenges and poignantly discussed how the expectations they built through the information received from immigration consultants and government agencies did not match with their lived realities.

Among those who used immigration consultants in Bangladesh, claimed that they would not have relocated to Canada if they had been aware of the challenges. Istiaq (Ajax, 2000), a mechanical engineer from Bangladesh, expected to be employed in his profession field after obtaining Canadian permanent residency, as he was told during his immigration interview. He also questioned employment-related information provided by the government agencies as again the information he received during the immigration interview did not match, and he ended up doing various odd jobs after arrival.

The main thing is information [for newcomers]. If government make it [information] available to every country, it would be better for newcomers. And what is shown or highlighted [to newcomers] about the job market [in Canada] is it real is questionable. Because when I did my [immigration] interview, the immigration officer told me you are a mechanical engineer, you will get a job immediately after arrival. So, my expectation was like that. However, after arrival where did I get my job? [Employers in Canada] they just ask for Canadian experience after arrival. How could one get Canadian experience not having a job here?

Like Istiaq, Kabita (Toronto, 2000) was also very confident about her life and career in Canada after the immigration interview in Singapore (conducted through the office of the Canadian High Commission) as she received very “positive information” about her prospects in Canada. However, after she moved to Canada, she realized that she did not get a complete picture of the settlement challenges newcomers faced in Canada and felt shattered by her settlement experiences. Kabita describes the importance of being mentally prepared by knowing about the reality of the settlement experience. In her words:

Final immigration interview was in Singapore. The person [Immigration officer] told me ‘You will do very good in Canada.’ The way he told I felt like, wow, I am a special person from Bangladesh moving to Canada, after arrival they will make me the Prime Minister. [Later] I felt very bad about it [not getting the real picture]. At that moment I was very much [confident]. I was very hopeful. I had self-confidence. [Thought] Everything is fine. However, after arrival it felt like I was thrown from top to bottom. I thought it would have been better to move here with some concept [information] so that people would understand the level of the shock before they get shocked after arrival.

Mahin (Toronto, 2015), a journalist from Bangladesh, claimed to have used the IRCC website along with consulting friends and family in Canada to learn about life in Canada before arrival. He termed his post-arrival experience as “unimaginable.” Mahin thought that it was only people with lower levels of education, lack of language proficiency, and formal skills who would face settlement challenges. He never expected educated immigrants like himself to face the challenges he experienced after moving to Canada.

Some participants thought that the Government of Canada should provide information about both opportunities and challenges faced by newcomers to Canada, not just positive information. For example, an economics graduate from Bangladesh, Liton (Toronto, 2001), thinks that the way Canada highlights the employment prospects for newcomers is totally misleading. Although he and his family used the services of immigration lawyers, Liton claimed that he rarely had any discussions about life in Canada with the lawyer and did not receive much information about life in Canada before arriving. Like Kabita, another participant, Chameli (Toronto, 2002; English), a social policy researcher in Canada, believes that the Canadian government should share information on the challenges newcomers face in order to mentally prepare newcomers to face initial settlement challenges after arrival.

There are a lot of struggles [for newcomers]. Nobody talks about struggles. Nobody talks about challenges. It should come from the horse’s mouth. I mean Canadian government should prepare potential immigrants that it’s not as easy as you are thinking. We welcome you but these are the challenges you have to go through. So, I think someone should step into that and create the stories and share the stories.

As evident in this study, although formal sources may seem more reliable and trustworthy for newcomers than informal information sources, in reality, formal information sources may not always offer information that is perceived to be helpful, or any information at all about the difficult realities of transitioning to life in Canada. In the discussion section below, the author presents the concept of “information crafting” drawn from the interview findings of the larger study.

Discussion: information crafting

As reported earlier, participants felt deceived by immigration consultants in Bangladesh who did not offer true and comprehensive information about life in Canada before arrival, instead presented exaggeratedly positive information that created unrealistic expectations about their future life in Canada, particularly related to getting professional jobs. As a result, some participants were not prepared for the many challenges they experienced after arrival. They were frustrated and disappointed. They described how immigration agents crafted information in such a way that it would attract clients and bring benefits to their business/purpose. Consultants shared information on positive aspects of Canadian life (e.g. free education, free healthcare, employment benefits) without mentioning the struggles many newcomers face settling into Canadian society. The author terms this phenomenon “information crafting” defined as selective information sharing, mainly positive information, sometimes with exaggeration and falsifications. In the context of immigration, information crafting is performed by information providers who deliberately select and share information to satisfy their business/purposes. Figure 5 presents the characteristics and elements of information crafting.

Information crafting (e.g. selective information sharing) may also be done by the government agencies such as the Federal Government of Canada to attract the global talents to Canada without mentioning much about the settlement challenges newcomers face. Some participants of this study who envisioned a better life in Canada based on the information they received from IRCC (previously CIC), questioned the information about employment

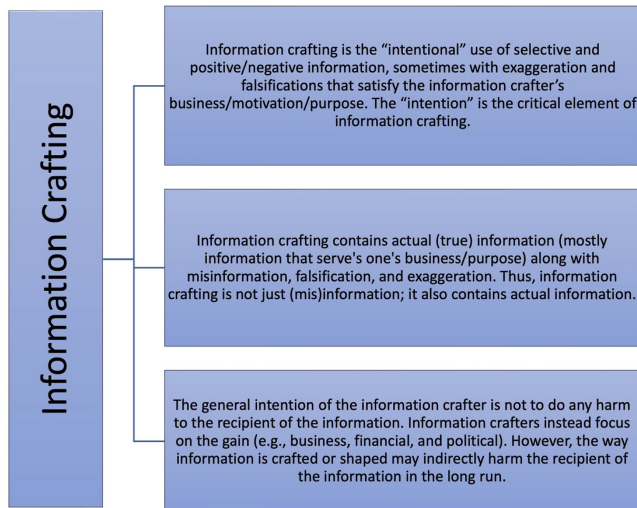


Figure 5.
The characteristics/
elements of
information crafting

Source(s): Figure by author

opportunities available for skilled immigrants as claimed by the Federal Government of Canada. Although their information experience consulting formal agencies like IRCC was positive (as they received mostly positive information), they faced several challenges in settling in a professional job after arrival. Thus, the information they received from IRCC was not very helpful in making informed decisions about their life in Canada and did not help them prepare for the settlement challenges, in particular employment-related challenges after arrival in Canada.

One of the primary concerns for new immigrants to Canada is employment, as it has a significant impact on their overall settlement and social integration following arrival (George and Chaze, 2009; Murphy, 2010; Rayes *et al.*, 2016; Shuva, 2022). Although there is research (e.g. Dean and Wilson, 2009; Subedi and Rosenberg, 2016) that shows skilled immigrants facing severe employment challenges in Canada such as lack of recognition of foreign credentials (e.g. George *et al.*, 2012; Guo, 2009) and discrimination (e.g. Creese and Wiebe, 2012; Dietz *et al.*, 2015), the information related to the settlement challenges newcomers may face is not usually highlighted or shared by the Canadian Government and other relevant agencies working with immigrants. While private immigration agents may craft the information in a way that may contain misinformation and false promises, government agencies such as IRCC may share selective positive information (i.e. highlighting the opportunities and benefits). Government agencies may omit information that may create negative portrayals of life for newcomers in a new country. Although previous studies (e.g. Carlson *et al.*, 2017, 2018) report a lack of trust among asylum seekers for government officials and ethnic out-groups, the current study participants did not explicitly indicate any distrust in resources shared by government agencies such as IRCC. This could be partly because of their immigration status. All participants moved to Canada as permanent residents and did not need to worry about getting their applications accepted for permanent residency. Because of the complexity and the nature of asylum applications, asylum seekers may often consult agents and smugglers over government sources.

It is important to mention here that the information crafting may be done by other individuals as well. For example, Shuva (2021a) found that some immigrants were selectively sharing positive information about the life in Canada with their friends and relatives because they feared losing connections with them if they were honest about the realities of difficult experiences in Canada. Although previous studies on immigrants' information behavior globally reported newcomers utilizing information from various informal and formal sources including government agencies (e.g. Allard, 2022; Allard and Caidi, 2018; Khoir, 2016; Machet and Govender, 2012; Rayes *et al.*, 2016; Silvio, 2006; Shuva, 2021b, c), this study highlights the need for future research to examine the information shared by various formal agencies, such as immigration ministries and agents, and emphasizes the value of exploring pre-arrival information behavior to understand newcomers' settlement experiences and the consequences of a lack of information about life in the host country in post-arrival contexts.

Theoretical and policy implications

The concept of information crafting has several theoretical and practical implications for policy and research. First, in the context of immigration, 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. "Information crafting" practices led some participants in this study to be unaware of the challenges newcomers faced with little knowledge of what do upon arrival to have a better settlement experience. Although the majority of the participants of the larger study visited the IRCC website, a significant number of survey and interview participants

also reported a mismatch between their expectations of their life in Canada and the reality after arrival (see Shuva, 2020). Considering the intentional provision of skewed information in “information crafting” many more questions are raised about the information sharing practices of formal immigration information providers. What information is shared with potential immigrants and how is it used in decision making? How does the information shared prepare them for their settlement in a new country? Do government agencies share both positive and negative aspects of immigration to the country? Addressing these questions using an information crafting framework can help to better understand the information crafting practices of various agencies, both official and authorized and unofficial and unauthorized.

Second, this research suggests that government-run immigration agencies in countries like Australia, the UK, and the USA that welcome significant number of immigrants across the globe can do more to provide comprehensive information about settlement life in Canada for newcomers. The findings in this study about the information experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants are relevant in the context of immigrations to Australia, the UK and the USA as many immigration agencies in developing countries simultaneously process applications for these countries and for many European countries too. Recent reports show many newcomers to Australia and the UK are deceived by immigration agents in their home countries. For example, in Australia, the ban on recruiting students from certain Indian states has been imposed by universities in Victoria and NSW amid visa fraud concerns by local agents (Lucas, 2023). In the UK an inquiry by Sky News reported that the system for skilled worker visas is being exploited by agents, with numerous individuals being falsely assured of employment opportunities in that do not exist (Sky News, 2023).

The concept of “information crafting” is important for immigration ministries actively recruiting immigrants from around the world as it suggests that information programs, documents, and services that are shared with newcomers required ongoing review and revision. The findings from this study also show the importance of understanding information sharing strategies from the perspectives of immigrants themselves.

Given the growth in immigration consultancy businesses globally along with the increase in the unlicensed and unmonitored immigration firms in developing countries, it would be difficult for government agencies such as IRCC to track the immigration frauds happening locally across the globe. Although the CICC regulates the practice of authorized Canadian immigration consultants and offers ethical and professional immigration consulting services, there are several cases where licensed immigration consultants played a role in immigration fraud, including offering false information (see for example the “Revocations, suspensions, and restrictions” page of CICC at <https://college-ic.ca/protecting-the-public/disciplinary-proceedings-and-tribunal/disciplinary-revocations>). While it would be very difficult to identify and track the activities of local unlicensed commercial immigration services in developing countries such as Bangladesh and India, the author believes that such work should be undertaken. For example, the High Commission of Canada in India, might work with the CICC and IRCC to identify the immigration frauds happening locally and act upon them. Furthermore, local high commissions could create meaningful partnerships with local organizations, including local public libraries, to create culturally appropriate print, electronic, and social media content in local languages that would inform people about the misconceptions about life abroad, show the process of applying for Canadian immigration, and connect potential immigrants to appropriate and sanctioned local resources to help them identify licensed immigration consultants, if needed, and to report immigration fraud. Government agencies such as IRCC should also commission research in local contexts to better understand the information potential newcomers including international students receive from various agents.

Conclusions

The foregoing discussion of information crafting shows the importance of a systematic review of information systems used with potential newcomers, and calls for the creation of an ethical information framework for various newcomer groups recognizing that membership in these groups may dictate different information needs. As immigrants may hold unrealistic expectations about life in their new countries, it is critical that information about challenges are also shared to allow people to prepare. Immigration consultants and agencies in various countries should be monitored to track those spreading misinformation and creating fake documents for immigration. The concept of information crafting undermines the assumption that formal information sources such as immigration consultants and government agencies are always reliable and comprehensive. The effects of information crafted to sell immigration to prospective immigrants can be devastating to their well-being and healthy integration into their new countries. Information crafting also has consequences for the information sharing economy among newcomers and immigrants where misinformation and disinformation undermine employment and education prospects. In short, as the Federal Government of Canada plans to welcome millions of immigrants in the coming years, it is imperative that comprehensive, accurate, and helpful information is provided to newcomers about the realities of settlement in a new country.

Notes

1. Pre- and post-arrival information sources are defined in this study by the author to mean the settlement information sources (e.g. friends and family networks, web search and social media) the participants used before and after arrival to Canada.
2. Pre-arrival information experiences are defined by the author to encompass both active and/or passive interactions with formal settlement information sources such as immigration consultants as well as the consequences of their informational interactions with these information sources on their settlement lives in Canada.
3. It is beyond the scope of this paper to define the concepts of misinformation and disinformation. Readers interested in the concepts of misinformation and disinformation in different context may consider reading Karlova and Fisher (2013), Rubin (2019), Ruokolainen and Widén (2020) and Stahl (2006).
4. “A permanent resident is someone who has been given permanent resident status by immigrating to Canada, but is not a Canadian citizen. Permanent residents are citizens of other countries.”, Government of Canada (2023), “Understand permanent resident status”, available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/new-immigrants/pr-card/understand-pr-status.html>
5. This study was approved by Western’s Non-Medical Human Research Ethics Board (semi-structured interviews were approved on 24 May 2017, and the surveys were approved on 13 December 2017).
6. In this research, pseudonyms were employed along with participants’ actual place of residence and year of arrival in Canada. For interviews conducted in English, the term “English” was placed in brackets next to the participants’ names.

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