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# Transnational Misinformation Experiences Amongst Migrants

## Research-in-progress

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## Abstract

Migrants are undergoing a transition when they migrate to a new place. Across different migration stages, migrants have different information needs and part of their transition entails establishing new information strategies. Barriers to information access (i.e., language, bureaucratic, etc.) may push migrants to rely on familiar digital sources. They may consult their digital social networks that transcend geographic boundaries, or they may consult digital media from their home countries. The use of transnational sources may make migrants more susceptible to misinformation due to bias. Conversely, literature has shown that the power of comparison across these digital ecologies may mitigate against the impacts of misinformation. This research-in-progress article will examine the literature on migrants' information experiences and use of transnational sources. It will then identify gaps in our knowledge about the impact of the use of transnational sources on misinformation experiences. Finally, it will lay out agenda for future research.

**Keywords** Migrants, Information Experiences, Misinformation, Digital Ecologies, Transnationality

## 1 Introduction

During the COVID-19 epidemic, the spread of misinformation within migrant communities in Australia impacted the delivery of vital health information (Grey 2020). If the misinformation is coming from someone the individual trusts, such as someone within their community, they are more inclined to believe it (Talwar et al. 2019). In 2021, 27.6% of the Australian population was born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022). Thus, it is important to investigate the experiences of migrant communities with misinformation because they make up such a significant part of the population and because exposure to misinformation may impact their quality of life in the new country (Bahl et al. 2021).

Migrants are undergoing a transition when they migrate to a new place. That is, they are undergoing a substantive change featuring movement between 'states'. This change is not just a static process but rather complex and experienced over a period of time and space. Consequently, information needs of individuals undergoing transitions, like migrants, are not static but evolve across their settlement processes (Willson 2019).

Migrants require information to help them adapt and settle into their new nations. Soon after a migrant arrives in the new nation, there may be significant barriers to accessing critical information as new patterns to finding information have not yet been established (Caidi et al. 2010). Additional barriers present at all stages of settlement include information overload, issues finding credible information, emotional stress, financial stress, limited social support, language barriers, and bureaucratic barriers (Caidi et al. 2010).

In the face of inadequate information in new countries, migrants may turn to their 'transnational networks' for information (Caidi et al. 2010). Research has shown that migrants will use transnational sources to keep up to date not just with home-country news but also with new-country news (Bahl et al. 2022; Zhang 2018). How local news might be framed in a non-local source differs from how it might be reported in local sources (Porshnev et al. 2021; Zhang 2018). The difference in framing may make migrants more vulnerable to misinformation. In addition, migrants may rely on misinformation if it is coming from a source they trust or if it aligns with their cultural values (Bahl et al. 2022).

Existing literature examines migrants' use of transnational sources for information (Dekker and Engbersen 2014; Komito and Bates 2011; Lam 2009). However, there is limited research on the impact of transnational sources on migrants' experiences with misinformation. Research has shown that in the instance of international students who rely on transnational sources for information, the use of those sources actually offers a protective effect against misinformation (Bahl et al. 2022). However, there is a need to further examine the impact of inhabiting multiple digital ecologies on information and misinformation behaviors. Thus, our research will be driven by the following question:

*How do migrants who draw on transnational online sources of information experience misinformation?*

To investigate this question, we conducted an extensive literature review. We made use of Google Scholar. Search words included: information behavior, information needs, information literacy, misinformation, social media, online communities, migrants, and migration. Sometimes words were searched in conjunction with one another, for example: migrants and information behavior, to find specific results. Other times they were searched individually to obtain more general results. Through this process, we were able to form an understanding of human experiences with information, misinformation, as well as migrant experiences with information by analyzing more than 30 different articles.

In this paper, we will begin by defining migrants and digital ecologies. We will then analyze the literature on different migrant communities' information experiences by looking at their needs, information seeking processes, and information evaluation processes. From this analysis, we highlight potential gaps in the literature, and use these gaps to establish our propositions. Finally, we will set up our research agenda and discuss the impact of our work.

## 2 Definitions

The literature-based definitions we give here are the definitions we use throughout the paper.

### 2.1 Migrants

When used in general public discussion, ‘migration’ implies a voluntary choice to leave one’s country, in search of economic opportunities, education, medical reasons, or family reunions (UNHCR 2018). The literature distinguishes between two broad categories of migrants: those who may be permanently settled in their new countries (Schiller et al. 1995) and those whose migration is of a transient nature (Gomes 2021). That is, they may migrate temporarily for work or study and eventually either return to their countries of origin or migrate elsewhere (Gomes 2021). Generally, the literature distinguishes between those categories based on the migrant’s claimed intentions within a country rather than a timeframe (Bauer and Sinning 2011; Dustmann and Mestres 2010).

### 2.2 Digital Ecologies

In this paper, we use the term digital ecologies to refer to virtual spaces that host information communities/ecologies (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Carr and Hayes 2015). A key aspect of these ecologies is that they are driven by interactions between the users of those spaces and the content found in the ecologies (García-Marco 2011; Marwick 2018).

## 3 Migrant Information Experiences Across Settlement Stages

We use the term information to refer to the general concept of information, and consider misinformation to be a kind of information (Ruokolainen and Widén 2020). To conceptualize migrants’ misinformation experiences, we need to first understand their information experiences. In this section we explore how information experiences for migrants vary across settlement stages.

Information is a key aspect of settling into any nation and the information experiences of migrant groups may be influenced by demographic factors such as age, gender, sex, country of origin, socio-economic status, and education. Social factors, such as whether they have ties in the new nation, and whether they have other family members migrating with them, may also affect their information experiences. They may also be influenced by personal factors such as: “optimism, hardiness, locus of control” (Scott and Scott 1989). In addition, some migrants may not have significant pre-existing knowledge of the new-country information systems prior to migrating (Caidi et al. 2010; Komito and Bates 2011). Importantly, migrants are transitioning into both new physical and digital spaces as they navigate developing new information strategies (Caidi et al. 2010; Chang and Gomes 2017).

Caidi et al. (2010) describe four stages of migration: the pre-migration stage (occurring before the move to a new country), the immediate stage (immediately following arrival), the intermediate stage (as the migrant begins to settle in), and the integrative stage (once the migrant has adapted to living in their new nation).

### 3.1 Information Needs Across Settlement Stages

For migrants, the transition period will be kickstarted when they decide to move to a new country. As that situation evolves and the move takes place, migrants might find that their information needs evolve along different stages of the transition. Additionally, because migrants are diverse groups with diverse experiences, individual information needs may vary alongside demographic, social, and personal factors (Caidi et al. 2010).

Generally, however, newly arrived migrants may be looking for information regarding employment, language, social connections, housing, health, transportation, banking, and education. In contrast, more settled migrants will be looking for information that may help them participate in the political, economic, and cultural spheres of their new country (Beretta et al. 2018; Caidi et al. 2010; Khoir et al. 2015).

### **3.2 Information Seeking Across Settlement Stages**

The literature defines two key categories of information seeking – active and passive (McKenzie 2003; Wilson 1999). As part of their everyday lives, information seekers may actively seek out information to address a present need or they may “discover” information as they “monitor the context” to stay up to date with what is happening in the lives of their friends and family, and the world at large (McKenzie 2003).

Different migrant groups will have access to different resources so they may seek information differently. International students, for example, might have access to resources through their educational institutes. Migrants who are being sponsored by a workplace might have access to resources through their workplaces.

Migrant groups across settlement stages may both use informal and formal sources of information (Beretta et al. 2018; Khoir et al. 2015; Komito and Bates 2011; Rodriguez-Mori 2009). Broadly, however, newer migrants who are still developing information strategies may rely more on social networks for information (Beretta et al. 2018; Khoir et al. 2015; Rodriguez-Mori 2009). Trust often dictates how migrants access information (Caidi et al. 2010) and some migrant groups may be more inclined to rely on and prefer social networks (Caidi et al. 2010). Moreover, more formal sources of information may be riddled with language and bureaucratic barriers, making them more inaccessible (Caidi et al. 2010).

Migrants can now use digital communication platforms to gather information from contacts dispersed across different geographic locations (Dekker and Engbersen 2014). Indeed, information gathered from these sources is occasionally preferable as it offers access to “streetwise knowledge of migration” which institutional sources may lack (Dekker and Engbersen 2014). Moreover, migrants may rely on media from home countries and ethnic media as a way of gathering information about what is happening in their new country (Caidi et al. 2010; Porshnev et al. 2021; Zhang 2018).

Part of the migrant’s settlement process involves understanding digital information sources and how to seek out information digitally in the new nation. It is when a migrant transitions to using those new-country-based digital information sources, “a digital journey” takes place (Chang and Gomes 2017). A study showed that Canadian Muslims, post 9/11, lacked confidence in reporting on Muslims, and consumed both ‘ethnic’ and local media, which exposed them to a variety of perspectives (Caidi and MacDonald 2008). Another study showed that over time, while some migrants stopped monitoring affairs in their origin countries, they still passively monitored what was happening with their family and friends there (Komito and Bates 2011).

### **3.3 Information Evaluation Across Settlement Stages**

Migrants’ experiences finding and evaluating information may be influenced by factors such as their adjustment to their new ecologies, willingness to seek out information, tolerance for new information, and their information literacy (Beretta et al. 2018; Caidi et al. 2010; Chang and Gomes 2017).

Information literacy refers to skills that allow for interrogating, evaluating, and analyzing both the source of information as well as the information itself (Jones-Jang et al. 2019; Lloyd et al. 2010). Information evaluation entails assessing information that has been encountered, to determine whether it is of value to the individual evaluating (Makri et al. 2017; McKenzie 2003). The way the information is evaluated can be influenced by existing life experiences and cultural values (Bahl et al. 2021; Beretta et al. 2018; Ruokolainen and Widén 2020).

What information an individual finds trustworthy within non-dominant communities is often culturally influenced (Ruokolainen and Widén 2020). In the context of migrants that maintain transnational ties, it is vital to be mindful of how they may choose to trust information. To elaborate, a migrant is bringing cultural values developed in a different environment to the localized digital ecologies in their new home country. This may impact how they evaluate information across digital ecologies. Thus, we propose the following:

**Proposition 1: Differing cultural context will impact what information migrants find trustworthy.**

Lack of cross-cultural understanding of different digital ecologies may prove particularly harmful when it comes to misinformation. Migrants may find themselves more vulnerable to the impacts of misinformation if they possess inadequate information literacy and understanding of new-country digital ecologies. They may rely on misinformation if it is coming from a source they trust or if it aligns with their cultural values. Moreover, if a migrant is relying on sources from multiple digital ecologies, they may have an increased risk through increased exposure to misinformation (Bahl et al. 2021). However, as a migrant progresses along stages of the settlement process, they may become more familiar with new country sources of information. Accordingly, the impact of misinformation may differ. Thus, we propose the following:

**Proposition 2: The impact of misinformation on migrants is dependent on what stage of the settlement process a migrant is in.**

People who experience transitions tend to compare information by “isolating aspects of experience and identifying what is different and labelling what is new, then weighing those differences and similarities to better understand their current situation” (Willson 2019). International students, a sub-migrant group that may similarly experience transitions across settlement stages, were similarly found to compare information. They did this by comparing information found in home-country information sources with the information found in new-country information sources. Ultimately comparison allowed those international students to definitively identify misinformation (Bahl et al. 2022). Thus, we propose the following:

**Proposition 3: Migrants’ use of a wide variety of transnational sources may help to support evaluation of online misinformation.**

## 4 Agenda for Future Research

In this paper, we examine the varying information needs and seeking processes of migrants across different settlement stages. Existing research has examined the information experiences of migrants across settlement stages (Beretta et al. 2018; Caidi et al. 2010; Khoir et al. 2015). Existing literature also examines their use of transnational sources (Komito and Bates 2011; Lam 2009). However, literature does not examine how the use of those transnational sources impacts information evaluation and subsequently, misinformation experiences of migrants across settlement stages. More research is thus needed to examine this gap in the literature.

To address the propositions raised in the paper, we intend on using a mixed-methods approach. For the first study, we verify migrants’ behaviors, by administering a survey where participants will be asked to self-evaluate their information evaluation behaviors on a likert-like scale using instruments specified in the literature (Jones-Jang et al. 2019). The evaluation will include a verification of those behaviors by asking individuals to classify pre-selected posts that contain misinformation. The results of this study will be used to inform questions asked in our second study. The second study will entail several focus groups with migrants across different settlement stages to get more data-dense information about evaluation behaviors and misinformation experiences. For both studies, we will run a pre-participation questionnaire where we ask participants questions about their use of transnational sources and exclude individuals who do not draw on transnational sources.

## 5 Conclusion

It is apparent from the literature that exposure to misinformation may limit migrants' ability to access and engage with vital information in their new countries. Surprisingly, then, migrants' experiences with misinformation are understudied. The proposed research will allow us to better understand the role of transnational sources in migrants’ lives and the subsequent impact of their use on misinformation experiences. Further, it will support people tasked with communicating vital information to migrants, to ensure that the information is being designed

and communicated to migrants in a manner that aligns with their information seeking processes. This understanding will ensure that vital information is more accessible to migrant groups as it will be integrated more intuitively and better communicated. Finally, results of this study can be used to design digital information literacy strategies that focus on comparison as an evaluation mechanism. Our research will contribute to not only the literature on information experiences of migrants but also to the literature on misinformation.

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