Study of Asian Immigrants' Information Behaviour in South Australia: Preliminary Results

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Abstract

The study reported in this paper is part of an ongoing research project examining Asian immigrants' information behaviour in South Australia. Involving eight Asian participants, the pilot study was conducted from March to April 2013. The study used questionnaires, photovoice, and interviews to collect data relating to participants' information needs, information sources, and information grounds, attempting to capture both everyday and formal requirements for settling in South Australia. The preliminary results indicate that these immigrants have a diverse range of information needs, with various preferred information sources from multiple information grounds. Use of the Internet and strong virtual and real social networks are both important sources and grounds. The results indicate both the participants' competencies and the challenges they have faced. The photographic images provide a further dimension to the analysis.

1   Introduction

According to the 2011 census, in Australia, the number of people born overseas as of 2011 is 6,489,874, accounting for 30.2% of Australia's population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Twenty-three per cent of the immigrants are Asian, and the majority of them are from China, India, and Vietnam. In South Australia, the number of immigrants is represented by 26.7%, with 19.8% from Asian countries. An immigrant is defined as a person who was born overseas but either possesses an Australian permanent-resident visa or has become an Australian citizen. Making the adjustments required for settling into a new country, culture, and language requires many skills on the part of the immigrant and goodwill on the part of the country of destination. An inclusive multicultural society depends on respect for others' heritage, with equal opportunities and support for all within the country. Because Australia is a country with a substantial number of immigrants, this study is considered important, addressing a lack of evidence-based research on how immigrants in Australia deal with information needs and sources, and their information grounds and information sharing during their immigration process. In order to ensure that immigrants' settlement process is smoother, it is significant to understand their information behaviour (Caidi et al., 2010).

Information behaviour, including information needs and information seeking, reflects a person's needs to know certain things in a particular environment, as well as that person's capacity to obtain such information. It may be directed and purposeful or received without any intention (Case, 2007); it may be acted on or not acted on in a person's daily life (Pettigrew et al., 2001; Wilson, 2000). Information needs are often associated with or leading to the seeking of information. Everyday-life information seeking (ELIS) refers to the behaviour whereby people acquire information through their daily activities (such as watching

television, meeting a friend, and visiting a doctor), behaviour in which they may not be seeking particular information purposefully (Pettigrew et al., 2001; Wilson, 1994)

In understanding immigrants' information behaviour, it is also important to discover where they find their information. Pettigrew (1999, p. 811) defines an information ground as "an environment temporarily created by the behaviour of people who have come together to perform a given task, but from which emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information". Information grounds may include formal and informal settings, such as health community clinics (Pettigrew, 1999), public libraries (Fisher et al., 2004), and social-networking sites (Counts & Fisher, 2010), as well as the local supermarket, café, and cultural gatherings.

While some studies on immigrants' information behaviour have been conducted in Israel (Shoham & Strauss, 2008) and New York (Fisher et al., 2004), there is only limited research into this area (Fisher et al., 2004). In addition, some noted studies related to information behaviour in Australia have focused on refugees or immigrants in general (Kennan et al., 2011; Lloyd et al., 2010 and 2013). Those papers have mainly discussed information and its relation to social inclusion (Kennan et al., 2011) or else information poverty, literacy, and social exclusion (Lloyd et al., 2010 and 2013). To the best of our knowledge, there are no prior studies with deep analysis on Asian immigrants' information behaviour in Australia.

Incorporating ELIS into more formal information-seeking behaviour is still exploratory (McKenzie, 2003). The present study aims to identify Asian immigrants' information needs, their information sources, and their information grounds during their settlement process in South Australia. The findings will significantly provide empirical evidence to Australia, which may assist in the formulation of policies to facilitate the settlement and social inclusion of immigrants and to better support service planning and management. The study reported in this paper addresses the following research questions:

1. What kinds of information do Asian immigrants need?
2. How do Asian immigrants search for or collect information to satisfy their information needs?
3. What are Asian immigrants' information grounds?
4. Is there any aspect of their settlement, such as the challenges that they face and the strengths they have in a new country?

2   Research Design

2.1   Participants

The target group of participants in this study was immigrants from Asian countries who lived in South Australia. As Caidi et al. (2010, p. 495) have defined immigrants, "international migrants include anyone living outside their country of citizenship but the condition of permanence in the term immigrant excludes those living abroad temporarily, such as visitors, migrant workers, and international students," we set the following screening criteria for recruiting Asian participants in this study: those who were not born in Australia; hold permanent-resident visas or have become Australia citizens; are neither visitors nor international students; do not have an Australian partner; and currently live in metropolitan Adelaide, South Australia.

Potential participants were approached initially from the researcher's personal network and then the participants' networks via e-mails, telephones, and face-to-face invitations. Finally, eight Asian immigrants (3 males and 5 females) from various backgrounds participated in this pilot study. They were from China (n = 2), India (n = 1), Vietnam (n = 2), South Korea (n = 1), Indonesia (n = 1), and Singapore (n = 1). Their ages ranged between the ages of 25 and 35 inclusive. Most of the participants (n = 6) had been in Australia for less than five years and were thus considered newcomers (Caidi et al., 2010). Three of the participants were university students, while the rest were professionals working either in academic institutions or in the private sector. More than half of the participants had post-graduate degrees. Despite

the various languages spoken by Asian immigrants, this study was conducted in English, since all the participants involved in this study had good English competency. The researcher had no difficulties communicating with them in English. The data were collected from March to April 2013.

2.2   Data collection instruments and procedures

We employed a combination method of questionnaires, photovoice, and interviews to collect data on immigrants' information behaviour. With questionnaires we gathered demographic data on the participants, and gained a general understanding of their information behaviour with a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions. To enrich these data, we used photovoice, in the forms of photos and personal stories, to allow the participants to express themselves. Finally, we used interview sessions to discuss the photos taken by the study participants.

Photovoice is a relatively new technique in research methodology, "a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique" (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). The data, in the forms of photos, enabled the exposition of ideas that could not easily be expressed by words and thus enabled further exploration (Briden, 2007; Wang & Burris, 1997; Weber, 2008). Photovoice has been developed as a method that empowers the participants (Wang & Burris, 1997). One of the advantages of photovoice methods is that the participants feel more comfortable as they decide themselves what to capture (Julien et al., 2012). Photovoice was used in this study to explore the immigrants' lived experiences more deeply, from their own perspectives. Interviews were employed to clarify and discuss images captured by the photovoice method.

In the first phase, the researcher contacted all participants, setting an initial meeting time. Questionnaires were sent by e-mail or by mail to the participants as per their requests. During that meeting, the data-gathering process was explained. The researcher also provided a short training session regarding what photos to take, including the ethics considerations. For collecting the photo data, participants could use cameras provided by the researcher or their own equipment. The participants were given a week to capture eight to ten images that reflected aspects of their immigration process which indicated their information needs, their information sources, how they sought information, strengths and barriers in their information seeking, places where they met friends and shared information, and any interesting aspects related to their information behaviour. It turned out that all of the participants employed their own mobile phones to capture the photo data.

Following the photovoice, around one week later, the researcher contacted the participants again to organise a time with each participant for the interview session to discuss the photos captured. In terms of image copyright, the researcher gained permission to use the photos in the publication. The interviews were conducted in places convenient to the participants, such as university libraries, malls, or the participants' offices. Each interview was audio-recorded and ranged from 30 to 60 minutes in length.

2.3   Data analysis

Numeral statistics, presented in percentages, was used to analyse the questionnaires. The images from the photovoice method were analysed and classified using the participatory analysis, inclusive of the process of selecting, contextualizing, and codifying (Wang & Burris, 1997). Images were classified into themes according to the story behind the picture as discussed with the participants. The interview data, moreover, were transcribed and analysed by content analysis, grouped into certain categories with open coding (Weber, 1990). Then, for the analyses, the researcher combined the groups of themes resulting from the interview and photovoice results.

3   Preliminary results

3.1   Information needs of Asian immigrants

In a new country, addressing information needs is one of the challenges immigrants face (Caidi et al., 2012) and considered to be an ongoing process. In this study, the areas that the participants ranked as the most important information needs in relation to their settlement in a new country were categorised into three types: personal information needs (i.e. individual needs), general information needs (i.e. environmental-location needs), and formal information needs (i.e. institutional and legal needs) (Table 1). The more specifically information needs are satisfied, the smoother the settlement process is (Shoham & Strauss, 2008).

Asian immigrants' information needs		
Personal	**General**	**Formal**
Job/employment	Accommodation	Immigration
English literacy	Transportation	Education
Networking (friends/ family/community)	Local culture/ lifestyle	Tax assistance
Computer skills	City profile/ orientation	Legal aid
Health insurance	Road safety and driving	Banking

Table 1: Asian immigrants' information needs

Similar results on the personal and general information needs of US immigrants in Israel have been reported by Shoham and Strauss (2008). Formal information needs were identified as a distinguished kind of need in this study. While Shoham and Strauss have identified needs as personal and general, the inclusion of the formal category in this study enables more thorough analysis.

The information needs of one person may be different from those of others. In this study, all participants agreed that job/employment appeared as the biggest challenge. For example, information about job vacancies, job references, and how to apply for jobs was crucial, particularly when immigrants were not employed at their first arrival. As one participant said:

> Finding a job is the real challenge. I felt anxious every day about finding a job related to my field, as I did not know anybody here. I had to deal with online application and strategies to address the selection criteria. Any information regarding the vacancy was very useful [helpful]. I came to public libraries for job application advice. Finally, after I had tried several times, I got the job that I dreamt of (study participant 2).

3.2   Information seeking and information sources

With the availability of electronic substitutes for almost all manual information sources, the way people seek information is shifting. Amongst New Zealand immigrants, the Internet was the main source of information (55%) (Mason & Lamain, 2007). In a study in Ireland, family and friends (43%) and the Internet (35%) were identified as immigrants' two main information sources (Komito, 2011).

The participants in this study had their general and formal information needs met largely by the Internet (87.5%), while they sought their personal information mainly through families, friends, and colleagues in their broader social networks (62.5%). One third of the participants reported that they used social networks as an information source to find information on jobs and social activities. The participants used the Internet in their initial information searches, and then they took further action, such as telephoning the number provided by the websites for clarification or for requesting further information, especially when

dealing with formal organisations in Australia, such as Immigration Offices and the Australian Department of Human Services, which is responsible for a range of payments and other services for immigrants.

3.3   Information grounds and information sharing

According to Fisher et al. (2004, p. 756), "information ground can occur anywhere […] predicated on the presence of individuals". In this study, homes, cafés, malls, offices, campuses, and libraries were various information grounds identified by the participants. Immigrants substantially used new information and communication technologies to exchange and share information. Most of the participants (75%) had online social-network accounts (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter) to communicate, particularly with friends or family back in their home countries. Relying on Facebook, the participants said that they learnt from their friends' practical experiences during settlement. This sort of personal information could not be gained from formal organisational websites, and online social networks played a significant role in information ground and information sharing. These results confirm the findings reported by Bates and Komito (2012), who agree that there is a strong connection between immigrants and social-media networks. Before them, Counts and Fisher (2010, p. 104) have claimed that "online settings can serve as the information ground". Understanding the places (such as Facebook) where immigrants meet and share information allows services to be directed to appropriate sites.

3.4   Photovoice results

Using the photovoice technique to collect information behaviour data is an innovative dimension in this study. It also provides high relevancy in terms of study participants as target groups with their barriers in languages. In this study, photovoice was used to explore through images the immigrants' ideas and experience during their settlement. With the images, while the researcher exploring the stories behind the pictures, the participants expressed what they felt in a relaxed interview session. The participants found it easier to tell the stories represented by the pictures.

All participants chose to use their mobile phones to capture an aspect of their experience that would be developed into an extended narrative with the researcher. A total of 38 photos were received from the participating immigrants. For lack of space, four representative images have been selected and presented below (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Photovoice images of Asian immigrants' information behaviour in Australia

Figure 1 shows four selected photos (numbered clockwise from top left), illustrating immigrants' information needs, information seeking and sources, challenges met during the settlement process, and information grounds.

Photo 1: Information needs. This photo of housing billboards captured the information needs of understanding the process of finding accommodation and other issues such as the bond for house renting, legal contracts, and regular inspections.

Photo 2: Information sources. This image of a South Australia Government website illustrated the role that the Internet plays as an initial and preferred information source for finding out information on the immigration process.

Photo 3: Challenges. This image of an advertisement for English classes identified how important proficiency in English was perceived to be for adapting to life in Australia. It also depicted English as a challenge, particularly in the immigrants' first few months after arrival.

Photo 4: Information grounds and social networks. This photo illustrates a group of friends from various cultural backgrounds sharing a meal, reflected in one place for immigrants to meet, share, and mingle with other people.

Photovoice is a substantial way to explore more comprehensively the immigrants' information behaviour, because each picture may tell a story based on the immigrants' contexts. For example, one participant took the picture of the house billboard (Photo 1), and it represented other related issues, such as house bonds, legal matters, and inspection, that were completely new to that participant.

3.5   Aspects of settlement: challenges and strengths

Australia provides many services to its immigrants, many of them online. The Asians in this study were all computer-literate, and so using the Internet to find out information may not have been a challenge for them. While technology literacy ensured access to online information, competency in the English language and understanding of cultural differences were still found to be major challenges, even after several years of living in Australia. English and cultural differences as barriers and challenges are consistent with the findings reported by Fisher et al. (2004) on immigrants in the US.

Living in a multicultural society allows the immigrants to maintain their cultural identities. Our results indicate that immigrants' computer literacy allows them to become transnational citizens (Vertovec, 2004), hopefully adapting well to Australia and being able to maintain their connections with their countries of origin. While all participants assessed their reading skills as reasonable, coping with the spoken language and adjusting to the Australian accent were perceived as difficulties, particularly in the first few months after arrival. Some cultural differences also emerged as challenges when the immigrants first arrived, including the custom of addressing everyone casually by their first names; the man not being the one who always pays for a meal; visits to friends' homes having to be previously arranged; shops closing early; and there being less frequent public transportation on weekends and public holidays.

4   Conclusion and further research

Understanding the information behaviour of Asian immigrants is crucial to such countries as Australia, which have a large proportion of immigrants in their populations. It is significant to identify immigrants' information needs, information sources, and information grounds, as well as their strengths and challenges in the settlement process. All of this information will provide valuable empirical evidence, both for policy makers, who are involved in the immigration processes and seeking to provide better services, and for the immigrants themselves, who may then benefit from having services and pathways that fit their needs and reflect their patterns of behaviour.

With eight educated young-adult Asian immigrants as participants, some initial findings have been acknowledged. Although the study is preliminary, its findings can depict immigrants' information behaviour in Australia at a glance. Three categories of information needs (personal, general, and formal) have been identified, and may provide an initial framework of what Asian immigrants need in their settlement. The Internet has been found to be their initial and preferred information source, with family and friendship

networks not far behind. Computer literacy has become the study participants' strength in the settlement process, allowing them to adapt to their new surroundings. Social-networking sites are considered the most important information ground. In this rapidly changing information environment, the photos captured by study participants' mobile phones have been used to represent the participants' voices and strengthened the evidence gathered. The role played by technology has led to the development of social networks and allowed the immigrants to be transnational citizens.

While in this pilot study English was not a barrier between the researcher and the participants, in our future study we shall seek interpreters to assist the researcher to communicate with participants if they require. We are currently recruiting more immigrants (some 300 participants) to participate in the ongoing study, which considers demographic differences such as greater age and education differential. Stratified sampling (Fowler, 2009) will be used as a purposive sampling technique to ensure that the study reflects the total immigrant population. Future analysis may include reference to how age, level of education, period of stay, and gender influence the immigrants' information behaviour and identify their possible inter-relationships.

5   References

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