Poster: Information Seeking, Sharing and Use on Religion among Afghan youth in Toronto

Abstract: This poster summarizes the findings of a qualitative, exploratory study on Afghan youth’s information seeking, sharing and use regarding religion. Data collection included interviews and participant observation. Findings included the key role of technology, the iKoran and social networking sites in particular, in facilitating information seeking and sharing on Islam.

Résumé: Cette affiche résume les résultats d’une étude qualitative exploratoire auprès des jeunes femmes afghanes sur leurs pratiques de recherche, de partage et d’utilisation de l’information concernant la religion. Les données recueillies proviennent d’entrevues et d’observation des participantes. Les résultats démontrent le rôle clé de la technologie, iKoran et les sites de réseautage social en particulier, et facilite la recherche et le partage d’information sur l’Islam.

This poster summarizes the findings of a qualitative, exploratory study of information seeking, sharing and use regarding religion by Afghan newcomer youth in Toronto. The field of information studies has not yet examined the information practices of Muslim newcomer youth with respect to religion; to date, little research has been done on this group (Caidi and MacDonald, 2008). My study, which explored the information practices of Afghan newcomer youth, begins to address this gap. The lack of prior research on the information behaviour of young Afghan newcomers meant that though many theoretical frameworks were reviewed for this study prior to data collection, none were selected as the guiding framework. Instead, an exploratory approach was adopted in which broad, open-ended questions were posed of participants. Religion was not an explicit part of the semi-structured interview guides, but instead emerged as a finding as participants described their time use, information-seeking and use of technology.

Data collection for this study included one-on-one interviews as well as participant observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven Afghan newcomer youth between the ages of 18 and 28. Each youth participant was interviewed twice over a period of a few weeks: though the interviews could have been combined, they were split into two sessions in order to allow enough time to gain in-depth information while not making each individual interview too long and onerous for participants. The questions in the first interview focused on participants’ settlement experiences and related information practices, while the second interview centred on leisure pursuits as well as informational aspects of these activities. Four participants were more recently arrived, having lived in Canada for less than one or two years, while three others had been in Canada for a longer period of time, between eight and ten years. The primary difference between the information behaviour of these two groups was that longer settled youth were more active users of technology and social networking applications, in particular with regard to information on religion. Though recently arrived youth
mentioned using the Internet, including Facebook and various e-mail programs, longer settled used these in addition to Twitter, iPhones and the iKoran application.

Interview data were supplemented by participant observation, which took place at events by and for Afghan youth in Toronto over a period of two years. Interview transcripts and fieldnotes, which consisted of detailed hand-written notes taken during and immediately following participant observation, were analyzed using a grounded-theory approach that involved inductive, line-by-line coding (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995).

Religion emerged in the information behaviour of participants, as they noted the ways in which they sought, used and shared information on Islam. The use of technology was key to participants’ information practices regarding religion, including the iKoran, while Facebook and other social networking tools were found to be popular methods by which participants shared information on religion with friends and others. Websites were not widely used by participants for information seeking on Islam due to perceived bias and uncertainty regarding the accuracy and quality of sources. As a result, youth often sought recommendations for online sources from trusted individuals such as teachers and friends before consulting online sources.

This study contributes to a better understanding of information practices in the personal lives of youth, and adds a study of non-professionals to the growing field of religious information behaviour (Michels, 2012; Lambert, 2010); with additional research in this area, a model of religious information seeking can be created in future. This study has a number of limitations, including the small sample size and heterogeneity of participants: though all participants were Afghan, they had diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and migration experiences. As religion was not an anticipated focus of this study, it was not a focus of questions in the interview guide; future research centering specifically on religious information seeking, sharing and use would therefore be advisable. Future studies could explore the link between the identity practices and religious information seeking of immigrant youth, in particular those belonging to a religious majority in their homeland who become a minority group in their country of settlement.

References


