The role of information in the migration experience of young Polish women in the UK

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Purpose: Since Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, migration from Poland to the UK has increased substantially. These migrants are generally young and highly educated, and are migrating for reasons of economic improvement and self-fulfilment. Many are women migrating independently, an emerging trend in migration in general. Information behaviour research around migration has tended to focus on populations such as refugees; less research has been done on the information behaviour of economic migrants. This paper therefore investigates the role of information in the migration experience of young Polish women in the UK.

Design/methodology/approach: This study takes an interpretivist, constructionist perspective, with a broadly ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis. An exploratory study was conducted, involving expert and pilot interviews and analysis of secondary data. In the main study, twenty-one participants were interviewed using a semi-structured technique. Data was analysed thematically.

Findings: The paper provides insights into the information behaviour and experience of this migrant group. They were found to be confident and successful information users, partly because their migration was planned, their language skills were high, and cultural differences from their host country were not substantial. Weak ties were an important source of information. The paper contextualises these findings against previous research on migration in information science, and presents a model of the underlying factors shaping the relationship between migration and information behaviour.

Originality/value: The paper examines the migration experience of a relatively under-studied group, drawing attention to a broader range of experience and demonstrating that a wider conceptualisation of migration is required in information behaviour. It presents a model of key factors shaping information behaviour around migration, which is relevant not only to the information field, but also to a wider range of areas. It also delivers practical recommendations for migrants and those working with them.

Introduction

In 2018, 244 million people, 3.3 per cent of the world's population, were international migrants (IOM, 2018); within the UK, the number of foreign-born residents increased to over 9.3 million, 13.9 per cent of the population and over double the 1993 figure (ONS, 2019). The migration experience and process of settlement varies greatly between groups, some of which have received more attention than others both in popular media and in various fields of academic literature. There is a significant global population of refugees and displaced migrants (UNHCR, 2018), and extensive coverage of this group, particularly in recent years, has shaped perceptions of what the migration experience is, the characteristics of a migrant, and wider issues surrounding migration. However, the refugee community is only one part of a larger migrational population. Many migrants choose to move internationally for economic improvement or to join family, and the experience of these groups is quite different from that of the refugee.

Since the accession of Poland to the European Union (EU) in 2004, the number of Poles moving to the UK has substantially increased, to almost one million by 2018 (ONS, 2019). While the Polish population in the UK is long established, particularly following the Second World War, the experience of the post-accession generation of Poles has been quite different (Bielewska, 2012). The demographic profile of post-accession migrants is generally young and highly educated, and they have migrated for largely economic reasons (Fihel and Kaczmarczyk, 2009), although their migration narratives are often complex, nuanced, and multifaceted and economic improvement is often not the sole motivation (Ryan, 2015, Toruńczyk-Ruiz, 2008, White, 2010).

Additionally, the increase in the number of Polish women migrating, often solo rather than in conjunction with a family, reflects wider global trends toward the feminisation of migration (Gabaccia, 2016) and the changing motivations, experiences and issues faced by women migrants. Potential reasons for female migration encompass a wide range of social, economic and political factors (Maldonado and Brock, 2017, Currie, 2009, Coyle, 2007, Donato and Gabaccia, 2015). Female migration from Poland is no new phenomenon, but there is evidence to suggest that the shift from communism to capitalism, coupled with a new wave of social conservativism in Poland, has influenced young Polish women to seek employment and personal fulfilment abroad (Aziz, 2015, Coyle, 2007).

Justification for the present study: a new focus on economic migrants

During the process of migration, migrants' knowledge bases and information behaviours often become disrupted and fragmented, and upon arrival, must be reconstructed through re-engagement with new sources and types of information. Migrants must establish the characteristics of their new information landscape, and learn how to navigate it; the ease of accomplishing this is influenced by many factors. There is also an array of information needs at different stages, from practical matters of accommodation and employment to less tangible needs such as feeling connected to new (and old) communities, dealing with status loss, and questions of identity (Caidi et al., 2010, Pumariega et al., 2005, Rayes et al., 2016, Borkert et al., 2018, Fisher et al., 2004a). Increased migration also places pressures on the host country. All of this makes it imperative to study the needs of migrants and how they might be met (Rutter and Latorre, 2009, Wilson, 2010). Previous research suggests that migrants may have distinct information behaviours, such as preferring interpersonal sources (Khoir et al., 2015, Caidi et al., 2010, Kennan et al., 2011, Ryan et al., 2008) or seeking out connections based on shared ethnicity, common interests or simply feeling oneself to be in a minority (Fisher et al., 2007). These information needs and behaviours have been examined intensively for refugees (Lamb, 2007, Melnyk, 2017, Nekesa Akullo and Odong, 2017, Shankar et al., 2016, Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2017, Lloyd, 2014, Lloyd et al., 2013, Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2016, Lloyd, 2016) but few studies have been undertaken regarding highly skilledeconomic migrants in general, and even fewer addressing the Eastern European population in the UK. With the UK's decision to leave the EU and the associated focus on migration rights and patterns, examination of this community's information behaviour around their migratory experience becomes even more timely. The population of young, often highly skilledof young economic migrants (who are often highly skilled) from Poland to the UK has been studied in depth in fields such as sociology and geography, but in the LIS field there has been no research into the experience of this group.

The information literature, while giving some attention to economic migrants, tends to foreground the experience of the refugee. Against the backdrop of a worldwide refugee crisis, it is clearly important to study this group's circumstances and how their situation manifests in their information behaviour. However, much can be learned from studying other groups of migrants, such as those in this study, and setting their experience against the refugee migrant's.

The aims of this study are therefore to provide insight into the information behaviour of young Polish women migrating to the UK; to contextualise this against the information behaviour of another group, namely refugees; and finally to present a model of the underlying factors shaping the relationship between migration and information behaviour. It contributes a broader understanding of the role of information behaviour in migration as a whole.

Literature review

A number of databases, both in LIS and wider migrational literature, were searched in order to gain understanding of the nature of migration and accompanying information behaviour. These databases were searched using terms such as 'migration', 'information', 'Poland', 'female', using wildcard operators to ensure all key terms were included. Once an initial amount of literature had been gathered, it was reviewed and further searches conducted on specific concepts or areas that merited more examination. Reference lists were used to locate and investigate further important literature, and as the project progressed regular searches were performed to ensure that newly published sources were included.

The Polish migratory experience in the UK

A highly mobile world will necessarily generate a large number of migrants, shifting between cities, countries and cultures with varying degrees of permanence (Joly, 2017). In Sheffield, the primary focus of this study, 11% of residents were born outside the UK; population growth is driven primarily by international migration (Migration Yorkshire, 2017). Migration from Poland to Sheffield has increased substantially since EU accession in 2004.

Polish migration to the UK, however, is far from novel; after the Second World War many displaced Poles settled in the UK. Further family joiners arrived throughout the 1960s, and more settlement occurred in the 1980s after martial law was imposed in Poland (Garapich, 2008). These post-war migrants have, it has been claimed, had "their identity… shaped by strong wartime nationalism" rooted in patriotism and religion (Bielewska, 2012). It has been further been suggested that this group regards later Polish economic migrants with suspicion or disdain, feeling that their pragmatic, individualistic motives depart from the romantic nationalistic narrative and that they are 'tainted' by their upbringing in communist Poland (Garapich, 2008). Additionally, this older generation increasingly chooses to live near other Poles and Polish institutions, possibly seeking to reproduce their Polish home in their new environment, both physically and in social structures and gender roles (Bielewska, 2012).

Following the collapse of communism, economic transition in Poland was not easy. The country had to adjust to a market economy and experienced high levels of unemployment (Drinkwater et al., 2009, Fihel and Kaczmarczyk, 2009), with approximately one million Poles annually seeking work outside Poland (Jordan and Düvell, 2002). Since EU accession many Poles, particularly the younger generation (Garapich, 2008), sought new experiences abroad, taking advantage of cheap transport

across Europe and new communications technology (Heath et al., 2015). In addition to economic

motivations, a common theme was a desire for greater independence (Toruńczyk-Ruiz, 2008, White,

2010) or "a bit of adventure" (Ryan, 2015). In many locations across the UK, Polish-run shops and

businesses emerged to support the growing Polish population; this entrepreneurship and job

creation, along with less formal kinds of self-employment such as homemade dinner delivery or

translation services, is not uncommon among post-accession Polish migrants (Aziz, 2015, Harris et

al., 2015).

In contrast to the Poles who came to the UK in the 1940s and 1950s, previous research suggests that

post-accession Polish migrants do not display such strong patriotism, often seeking to distance

themselves from other Poles and to replace such networks with links to their new society, through

social relationships and lifestyle choices reflecting cultural globalisation (Eade and Garapich, 2008,

Bielewska, 2012). In addition, the open borders of the EU, and the corresponding right to live and

work in EU countries, allow them to feel part of a larger global society; they "tend to construct

migration as an action which is easy to take, does not take long consideration, long-term

preparations nor involves a difficult crossing" (Galasińska and Kozłowska, 2009, p. 89). Migration is

thus "a low-risk experience" and they do not require the "safety net of ethnic solidarity" (Bielewska,

2012, p. 97). Massey's (1993) conception of space as open and networked applies more to this

generation of migrants, connected to both the UK and Poland, and who may move back and forth

between countries frequently or make daily calls to Poland (Fihel and Grabowska-Lusinska, 2014,

Ryan et al., 2009). For them, migration is fluid, motivated by a desire to improve employability and

experience life abroad; there is no need to reinvent Polish 'home' in the UK.

Co-ethnic relationships between post-accession Poles are often complex and changeable; the kinds

of connections and networks they initiate and foster may change during settlement, and they may

actively move away from the Polish community to experience UK culture, make new friendships and

improve their language skills (Ryan et al., 2009, Ryan et al., 2008). Even among those who retain

close contact with other Polish migrants, not only are these co-ethnic networks looser, but

individuals may exhibit distrust and rivalry amongst themselves; for example, in competition for

jobs. This conflicts with their need to rely upon fellow Poles for information and support, and can

produce an interesting dynamic where those in a close network with the migrant are seen as

supportive and trustworthy even as the Polish migrant population in general is seen as unhelpful,

untrustworthy and as competition (Düvell, 2004, Ryan et al., 2008).

Turning to the issue of gender, a dominant view of femininity in Poland is constructed around

notions of gender relations wherein women are "valued highly and treated in a gentlemanly fashion,

but at the same time subordinated and assigned to the private, female sphere" (Aziz, 2015, p. 4). The construct of *Matka Polka*, or Mother Poland, originated in the early nineteenth century and became a means of maintaining Polish identity, presenting women as self-sacrificingly limited to the spheres of domesticity and procreation (Aziz, 2015, Tieszen, 2007). The conservative values historically promoted by Polish government and organised religion, coupled with a recent upsurge in social conservativism, promotes this narrative and produces a climate that is less welcoming for women who find themselves outside this traditional presentation. Moving across Europe may therefore offer Polish women an opportunity to resist and escape such restrictions in both economic and social spheres.

Despite the large body of research on Polish migration touched upon here, and existing research on migration in the LIS field, there remains a gap in our understanding of information behaviour regarding this group. The increased migration of Polish women to the UK in the years since EU expansion produces a timely opportunity to study their information behaviour, particularly within the context of gender and the feminisation of migration. There is scope to discover the factors influencing the experience and information behaviour of young Polish women during migration and settlement, and to situate these findings within wider theorisations of migration.

Information behaviour of migrational individuals

Information is vital for migrational individuals to facilitate their inclusion in society and enable them to make informed decisions and settle successfully in their new environment (Caidi et al., 2010, Caidi and Allard, 2005, Lloyd et al., 2013). The role of information in migration can be understood by examining information needs and behaviour at different stages. Once the decision to move has been made or forced upon the migrant, planning begins. At this stage, migrants typically seek and find information from online sources and personal networks, but information is sometimes unreliable, scarce, or difficult to find. Migrants may thus form imaginaries of their new environments that are not fulfilled upon arrival, resulting in an information disjuncture, knowledge gaps, and anxiety (Allard, 2016, Benson-Rea and Rawlinson, 2003, Shoham and Strauss, 2008).

Upon migrants' arrival, one model observes three stages of acclimatisation and settlement (Mwarigha, 2002). Initially, practical needs are most pressing, including accommodation, language learning and basic orientation. Engagement with local systems and institutions follows, primarily centred on finding employment but also including health and education services. The final stage involves migrants aiming to become "equal participants in the country's economic, cultural, social

and political life" (Mwarigha, 2002, p. 9). These stages present a range of practical hurdles to overcome but may also pose less tangible difficulties, including questions of identity, cultural conflict, mental health, and social or economic status loss (Pumariega et al., 2005, Berry, 1997, Crooks et al., 2011, Lubbers and Gijsberts, 2016).

Migrants have distinct learning styles and ways of interacting with knowledge; research shows that they prefer to seek interpersonal sources or use gatekeepers for reasons of convenience, familiarity, language, and ease of access (Fisher et al., 2004b, Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2016, Kennan et al., 2011). Shared bonds such as ethnicity, commonalities of interest or the sense of being a minority strengthen connections and promote information sharing (Fisher et al., 2007, Rayes et al., 2016). However, migrants have differing abilities to connect with support and information sources, through differences in personality, social and cultural capital, and language skills (Ryan et al., 2008).

Migrants' varied needs often result in them utilising a range of information sources: for example, information about registering with health or educational services may be sought via local contacts who have both formal and informal knowledge of these services, whether these are close friends or casual acquaintances. Furthermore, such support networks are likely to change and adapt throughout settlement; migrants may develop contacts and networks over time that differ from those available to them upon immediate arrival (Ryan et al., 2008, Morgan, 1990). Seeking emotional support many make more use of transnational connections than local ones; Ryan et al. (2008) found that, owing to the prevalence of affordable transport and communications technology, recent Polish migrants in London maintained close links with their family and friends in Poland and primarily used these contacts for emotional support, rather than any in their local vicinity. As migrants settle, they take on additional roles within their networks of contacts, transitioning "from information users to information producers", producing and disseminating information to personal and professional contacts, particularly within co-ethnic networks (Rayes et al., 2016, p. 5).

While the refugee experience has been studied intensively in the LIS field, less research has been conducted into the information behaviour of other migrant groups, with some notable exceptions (Rayes et al., 2016, Allard, 2016, Caidi et al., 2010, Lingel, 2015, Komito, 2011, Audunson et al., 2011, Shoham and Strauss, 2008, Srinivasan and Pyati, 2007, Fisher et al., 2004a, Benson-Rea and Rawlinson, 2003). The emerging type of migration embodied ~~by young, highly skilled~~by young economic EU migrants has not been studied in depth within the information context. This study explores the factors shaping the experience and information behaviour of young Polish women during migration and settlement, and contributes to the wider theorisation of information use during migration.

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Methodology

This qualitative study took an interpretivist, constructionist perspective. ~~It was informed by feminist principles, including recognising the importance of women's lived experience and viewpoints; seeking to make women's voices heard; and reducing the potential for exploitation by co-constructing knowledge and aiming to give something back to participants, in this case the opportunity to be heard and involved in a study that ultimately aimed to improve understanding of their situation (Hesse-Biber, 2012). A broadly ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis was taken; participants' lives were studied in everyday, naturalistic contexts, attempting to encourage authenticity in the data collected. Following Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) principles, the research evolved iteratively as the fieldwork progressed, in both methods and analysis. Ethnographic methods also provide an opportunity to hear potentially marginalised voices, such as those of migrants and women, with a focus on lived experience and rich context (Stacey, 1988, Reinharz, 1992).~~ An exploratory study was undertaken to contextualise the research and refine the methodology, involving expert and pilot interviews and analysis of secondary data from a previous study of recent Polish migration to the UK (Eade and Garapich, 2008). The collection and analysis of data using a range of sources and techniques, as well as member checks and researcher reflexivity, contributed to the quality and credibility of the research.

In the main study, twenty-one participants were interviewed using a semi-structured technique. Purposive sampling was used, aiming to recruit a sample of Polish women aged 18 to 45, who had migrated to the UK since 2004, that was as diverse as possible in occupation and educational background to reflect a broad cross-section of economic migration. Participant recruitment began via a university email list, yielding an initial cohort of nine. In order to diversify the study population, the decision was then taken to extend the study boundaries to two nearby towns, Doncaster and Rotherham. The study aimed to capture a range of migrants from different educational and occupational backgrounds, such as those in a major city as well as those in smaller towns. Based on anecdotal evidence from earlier participants, these two towns were known to have significant Polish populations and it was felt that by extending the study to towns without universities, it would be easier to recruit participants from more diverse backgrounds, with a wider range of experiences. This population would be fairly typical of migrational experiences in ~~a large amount of the country, outside London, or more rural areas, where conditions might be expected to be different~~provincial towns and cities.

Access to the Polish population in these towns was gained by several routes; some participants were suggested by the researchers' personal or professional contacts, and others were recruited via a training centre offering language teaching and citizenship preparation, with a high uptake by young Polish women. The first author attended sessions and succeeded in recruiting several participants directly, and more via snowball sampling, again using a purposive approach and applying identical criteria to the initial recruitment drive. This second wave also included several participants in Sheffield who were not connected with the universities and thereby contributed to a more diverse sample, with a broader range of educational backgrounds and occupations better reflecting the diversity of the UK's Polish population. The final sample ranged in age from 25 to 43, with an approximately even balance of highly educated (undergraduate or higher) participants versus those with a high school level education, and with occupations including lecturers, engineers, students, warehouse and factory workers, retail staff, and small business owners. It was thus considered to reflect something of the diversity of this population of migrants.

Participants were asked questions covering a range of topics spanning the life course: their life in Poland; their move to the UK, including their experience of arriving in, and discovering, the area; their daily lives, including employment and family; places or sources where they visited regularly or found helpful in finding or using information; their Polish identity and the local Polish community; their experience of being a woman in the UK and Poland; and their future plans, particularly in the context of the UK leaving the EU. Within these questions, follow-up questions were asked to draw out more about participants' information behaviour. For example, when participants narrated their employment history, they were asked what sources they had used or encountered to find particular jobs, and whether the sources they had used were useful and reliable. A copy of the interview schedule is included in the Appendix.

Interview data was analysed thematically, following the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interviews were transcribed and re-read individually, producing increased knowledge of the data and awareness of potential themes. Initial descriptive codes (Wolcott, 1994) were generated and collated into broad themes, then reviewed and refined. Some codes were broken down further and others consolidated, and some data was re-coded or assigned additional codes. For example, the codes of 'feminism', 'Polish men', 'women – expectations', 'women – experiences' and 'women – opportunities' were collected under the category of 'gender'. The category 'work' was created to include 'career progression', 'self-employment', and 'work via friends'. Once re-reviewed, these larger themes and sub-themes were arranged into a larger thematic map. Following this, themes were further refined and re-defined, and finally organised in a logical order for presentation of the findings.

Findings

The following findings represent the main themes arising from the interviews, identified by thematic analysis. Each section focuses on relevant aspects of information behaviour related to that theme, in order to begin to offer an interpretation that will be further examined in the discussion section.

Migration: choices and motives

Push factors from Poland were mostly economic in nature, reflecting the poor economic situation. However other, often intertwined, motivations included career progression, language learning, and a desire for adventure or self-fulfilment. A common narrative was that of intending to move to the UK for a short period, but then prolonging the stay.

Participants' information behaviour around migration was varied at all stages, from planning and researching the move through to considering longer term plans. This variety reflected the range of circumstances and narratives. Some planned their move months or even years in advance and made heavy use of a wide range of sources, including formal sources such as government websites or employment agencies as well as less formal sources such as personal contacts or social networking sites. Those who had lived abroad previously often utilised sources they had used before, such as websites to find jobs or evaluate cost of living, as well as drawing more generally on their experience of migration and the awareness afforded of potential issues:

> *"You need to understand if you would like to live in this country, so from the environment, the weather, to the opportunities, to which type of job you are going to do, and how you will feel there… doing a lot of research is really important and talking to other people." (Izabela)*

Others made their move on much less notice, sometimes only days or weeks, and had comparatively little time to plan, instead exhibiting flexibility and a willingness to approach the experience on an 'ad hoc' basis, with little long-term planning and a more spontaneous approach to finding information only as and when required:

> *"We have friend here… one day they just called and told us, maybe you want to come to England? We have flat for you, we have a job for you… we have only two weeks." (Kamila)*

Most participants displayed assurance in their ability to find and use relevant information, as well as familiarity with available sources and routes to information. They were able to evaluate sources for trustworthiness and were confident in dealing with formal sources. Information behaviour was

proactive and they were inclined to seek information rather than having it pushed to them. Key

information needs at the planning and immediate arrival stages for all participants included finding

accommodation, employment or study, and financial issues such as cost of living. However,

regardless of the level of pre-arrival planning and research, most participants did not have long-term

plans in mind when moving, and many were uncertain about what the future held.

Imaginaries of the host country (Taylor, 2004) played an important role in participants' experience;

most spoke about their pre-arrival notions of life in the UK and how the reality differed. These

imaginaries were often acquired from conversations with friends or contacts who had lived in the

UK, forums or social networking sites, or even from books, film, or television. Often, the imaginaries

that participants had constructed became fragmented upon arrival due to information disjuncture

between expectations and reality, whether positive or negative, and then needed to be

reconstructed over time. However, this disjuncture did not seem to pose lasting problems and was

generally relatively easily overcome:

> *"I felt a bit disappointed… I think of books they represent it a bit differently; when you come here*
> *it's a bit different!" (Julia)*

Polish identity and community

Participants differed in the degrees to which they identified with, and engaged with, the local Polish

community. Some were demonstrably proud of their nationality and made strong efforts to maintain

aspects of their lives that they felt important to their Polish identity, such as observing Polish

holidays and traditions, eating Polish food regularly, or buying Polish-made products:

> *"I'm staying in touch with Polish culture by Polish shop… I'm more far away from home right*
> *now [and] I feel more [need] to pay attention to Polish aspects… If I found something to eat*
> *and you can find where it was produced that's in Poland, I feel better about it." (Oliwia)*

Those with children often felt that maintaining their Polish identity and passing on their Polish

heritage were important. These behaviours were greatly facilitated by digital information;

participants used social networking sites and communications technologies to maintain contact with

family, friends, and the wider Polish diaspora. Keeping up with current events in Poland was

important to many, and again this was largely done via the internet:

> *"I read Polish news, because I want to know what is happening in my country, because of course*
> *this is always the country which is at the first place for me" (Izabela)*

However, there was some evidence of information avoidance and information overload around these topics; for example, wanting to avoid potentially upsetting political news from Poland or feeling that they spent too much time reading about Polish events:

"I do get quite emotional about some political debates… it probably would be easier if I didn't have all that information and waste my time on it" (Klara)

An interesting paradox arose in examining engagement with the local co-ethnic community. Nearly all had Polish friends or contacts in the UK; for some these were very important for socialising and information exchange. Many made heavy use of the local Polish community early on, often for practical needs such as accommodation and employment, but also for social contact and adjustment to their new environment. Participants were aware of the sizeable UK Polish population, with accompanying infrastructure and support network for their information needs if required:

"I do have Polish neighbours… it was in the beginning very helpful. I could ask them a lot of questions like where to go and buy this, how to handle this situation… they have a lot of experience and knowledge, it was easy for me" (Oliwia)

However, a surprising number expressed a desire to avoid fellow Poles, either through mistrust, a sense of competition, negative view of Polish mindset and behaviour, or simply wanting to cultivate a more diverse social and professional network:

"Polish community is not that cool together, I try to avoid them… they not stick together, they more jealous than friendly, they kind of use you and leave you" (Nikola)

"First of May 2004 came, and when you heard the Polish language you pretended you didn't understand. Because the crowd coming in, it was shocking, the majority of people that came I just didn't want to associate with at all." (Anastazja)

The role of information in everyday life

Discussing participants' everyday lives provided insight into their information behaviour. Proficiency in English was seen as vital at all stages; it was important to be able to communicate in the short term, but it was also seen as advantageous in the long term no matter where they chose to settle. Participants expressed the need for strong English language skills for accessing and understanding both everyday and compliance information, and it was a priority information need either before migrating or upon arrival. Language skills and usage permeated every aspect of participants' everyday lives and affected their ability to find appropriate employment, make friends, engage with

institutions such as schools and healthcare, and interact with people in their new environment. A good level of English was also important to facilitate independent information behaviour; those who spoke little English initially were compelled to rely upon others to translate or interact on their behalf. Several participants made conscious efforts to interact with native English speakers or sought out English information sources or media to improve language skills. English language classes were also a way for participants to gain everyday information:

> *"Learn English. Because it's not only about communicating, it's about independence, it's about dealing with matters yourself." (Ana)*

Online sources, including social media, were also important for information seeking and encountering; this could lead to further social connections and the establishment of interpersonal networks for everyday information:

> *"I started going to all the mums' groups and toddler groups… [you can get] advice [about] what was happening or what to do if a child is ill… through that network you build other networks of friends… now I know if I need something there's Facebook, toddler groups… other mother friends." (Klara)*

Food was culturally important for many participants and was often discussed in terms of maintaining Polish identity and tradition, as well as facilitating social contact with people of other nationalities. Participants navigated food shopping and preparation with relative ease in terms of available information, particularly those who had previously travelled elsewhere in Europe. This illustrates a certain similarity of information landscape between the UK and Poland.

Religion was not seen as a major information need by most participants, but attending church was seen as a useful way to make contacts, particularly with other Poles, and to gain information about, for example, schools for children:

> *"There is a Catholic church in our area… And this school is… affiliated with this church, it's where we found out about the school. Plus… there are a lot of Polish people around, and a lot of them send their children to [this school]." (Ana)*

The influence of gender on information behaviour

Some participants felt that expectations of women were generally more relaxed in the UK; they felt that a wider range of options in terms of life choices and balance were available to women, with less pressure to fulfil traditional gender roles. They often exhibited an independent, self-sufficient

attitude, enabling them to pursue these options and feel less restricted by the Matka Polka role that might have been expected in Poland:

"We have this kind of Polish mother stereotype where… you just give everything… Which I don't feel is the case here… I feel there are different expectations towards women in Poland and here." (Natalia)

"[In the UK] even if you're a woman and someone [tells you] you shouldn't do something… eventually if they see you can do it, they look at you in different ways… you can improve yourself… In my country it's very stupid" (Monika)

Education can be a gendered issue for migrants. In some cultures women are not routinely educated to the same level as men, which influences their information behaviour; it can mean that they are forced to rely upon male family members to navigate their new information landscape. Women in Poland, though, are entitled to the same educational opportunities as men, and participants in the present study were well educated; all had attended school to the age of 18, many had completed an undergraduate degree, and several had completed postgraduate degrees. This endowed them with the abilities to seek, locate, evaluate, and use information with relatively little difficulty; they exhibited independent information behaviour, with no reliance on male family members. The information landscape of the UK also supported these behaviours for them, as participants generally felt that gender-based barriers were fewer than in Poland.

Discussion

Motivations for migration were multifaceted and levels of planning varied, reflecting contemporary patterns of economic migration as opposed to the displacement of the post-war generation. Many participants desired to stay in the UK, expressing that they felt settled and had strong ties to the country in a range of areas. Feelings regarding the Polish community, and participants' own Polish identity, were complex and sometimes conflicting. In some cases participants' behaviour reflected the paradigm described earlier (Bielewska, 2012, Garapich, 2008), in which they attempted to distance themselves from the Polish community and develop stronger links in their new home society. However, many frequently used the Polish community for support and practical help, and expressed their sense of Polish identity in everyday life.

The issue of gender was an area where expectations and experiences appeared different between Poland and the UK, with the UK exhibiting a more relaxed attitude to gender roles and greater

flexibility in terms of life choices, according to several participants. Migration also presents the opportunity to renegotiate gender roles and expectations; while the women in this study had not experienced entrenched traditional gender roles to any significant degree, migration had afforded them greater independence and self-sufficiency. Their attitude enabled them to pursue the broader range of options available and they often expressed that they felt less constrained by expectations of the *Matka Polka* role (Aziz, 2015) that they experienced in Poland.

In terms of information behaviour, participants demonstrated extensive use of online sources and social media, both for finding information and for maintaining social connections. Interpersonal contacts, including weak ties, were a key source of information and support. In contrast to other studies, information grounds and everyday spaces were not as significant as might have been expected; participants with children made most use of these, such as at schools or parent-child groups. Use of everyday spaces leaned more towards information encountering, such as spotting job advertisements in shop windows. The library also did not emerge as a key space for information seeking, encountering, and sharing.

From the preceding findings, combined with previous literature, it is possible to use the experiences of this group to propose a model of factors shaping information behaviour around migration, and to contrast economic migrants with the refugee experience. An initial factor shaping information behaviour during migration is the motive(s) for migration and degree of autonomy. The major motive of migrants in this study was economic improvement, but language learning, a desire to travel, and self-fulfilment also featured. Their autonomy enabled them to choose their destination, and to have more access to informal sources; by choosing to go where employment opportunities or friends were, they took advantage of information that was present through these sites and connections. Groups such as refugees, who have little choice in the decision to migrate or the destination, can experience difficulties through lack of ability to plan. This disadvantages them as they are forced to accept help and information from immediately available sources, regardless of safety or reliability. Upon arrival they may feel disoriented or overwhelmed and lack information skills to navigate their new landscape (Lloyd et al., 2013, Hicks and Lloyd, 2016, Kennan et al., 2011). Planning is therefore another key factor shaping migration experience; those able to plan have a 'head start', while those displaced by outside forces have little opportunity to plan. The level of autonomy available to migrants shapes their experience greatly; this autonomy is inextricably tied to the motive for migration, forced or chosen. These factors shape migrants' location and the resources available.

Knowledge bases and information behaviours become disrupted and fragmented during migration and settlement. Upon arrival, migrants must re-engage with information, establish the characteristics of their new information landscape, and learn how to navigate it. Cultural similarities and differences influence this process. Although the reality of life in the UK did not always match Polish migrants' expectations, in this study this information disjuncture was temporary, and they adapted to it with relative ease. Cultural differences were nuanced, in contrast to the large differences illustrated in the literature regarding refugees moving to Western countries (Lloyd et al., 2010, Hicks and Lloyd, 2016, Kennan et al., 2011). The information landscape of the UK was generally experienced as familiar and easily negotiable. Participants in the study were able to use the same information practices and strategies as in Poland, with relative confidence that information would be accessible, transparent, and trustworthy, and made use of a wide range of social contacts and weak ties. Most migrants arrive with reduced levels of social capital, but some build it more quickly. For migrants, such as refugees, moving to a country culturally quite different from their home country, the experience is often more difficult. These groups tend to rely on co-ethnics and find information in everyday spaces (Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2016, Allard, 2016, Fisher et al., 2004a). It is clear that similarities and differences in cultures and information landscapes shape information behaviour around migration.

A migrant's new information landscape is also shaped by the networks and sources of information available to them. Institutional sources, such as agencies, employers, or official websites, play a part in most migrants' experience, but the level varies. Participants in the present study used these sources, without relying heavily upon them as refugees in work by Kennan et al. (2011) did. In common with most migrants, including refugees, they made strong use of interpersonal connections, whether strong ties such as friends, family, or work colleagues, or weak ties in the outer reaches of their social networks. These connections were important in assisting with everyday information, and directing participants to sources of compliance information. Participants also displayed a high degree of autonomy in their information behaviours, in contrast to refugees, who rely more heavily on information being pushed to them. Some participants appeared cautious of engaging with the Polish community, although many had made use of it for practical support and friendship. This measured level of engagement with co-ethnics perhaps indicates a level of comfort with their new environment, in which the social milieu seems to operate in a similar way to the previous one; migrants who experience large cultural and social differences, as refugees do, appear to rely more heavily on co-ethnics for information and support. These factors reflect again the significance of the migrant's ability to make social connections and leverage weak ties, which is in turn influenced by cultural similarities between countries, linguistic competence, and access to the
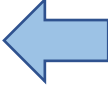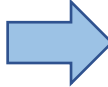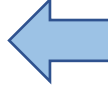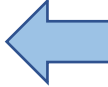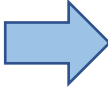
broader range of sources and contacts afforded by autonomous migration. The kinds of sources and networks that migrants use, and their level of co-ethnic engagement, play a large part in successful settlement and integration.

Compared to other migrant groups, participants in this study were offered little formal help. Support was available to them, but not pushed; they had to find it themselves. This involved more work in seeking information and evaluating sources, but also afforded control over their information gathering and processing. Other migrant groups, such as refugees, are recognised as being in need of assistance, and information and support is pushed to them, largely through formal sources. This is useful, but can result in information overload or over-reliance on these sources (Lloyd et al., 2013, Hancock, 2009, Lloyd et al., 2010, Kennan et al., 2011). These factors are also linked to motive and type of migration; economic, autonomous migrants are more able to shape their own information landscape, whereas displaced migrants are less able.

Levels of language skill and educational background also influence migrants' settlement. For the Polish economic migrants in this study, their education and qualifications largely translated satisfactorily into the UK system. Their language skills were generally good, although some acknowledged that upon arrival they had struggled with confidence or ability. This particularly influenced the employment opportunities open to them; critically, whether they were able to find jobs similar to those they would have found in Poland. Those learning English before arrival, or prioritising this upon arrival, adapted quicker. Migrants who arrive with less ability in the host society's language, as refugees often do, face substantial barriers. Language competency affects everything from employment to social life and ability to engage with healthcare and education systems. It also shapes autonomy and ability to plan. Lack of language skill may lead to over-reliance on gatekeepers, reduced employment opportunities, social isolation, and status loss. Many characteristic aspects of refugee information behaviour seem to arise from the language barrier; for example, reliance on visual information or on co-ethnic gatekeepers (Hou and Beiser, 2006, Watkins et al., 2012, Kennan et al., 2011). The young Polish migrants had good information literacy skills, which assisted them in negotiating their new environment. Overall they also had a much wider potential range of sources, whereas refugees could be reasonably characterised as "information poor". Technology is also an important factor in migrants' information behaviour; many use it frequently for seeking information and maintaining social contacts. However, financial pressures, a lack of technological training, and unfamiliarity with digital sources contribute to some lacking access or skills. Usage varies according to migrants' information needs and their technological competence.

Model of factors shaping the migratory experience

Migration is a diverse process that plays out in different ways for different groups. In order to understand the complexity and variety of the migrant experience, it is necessary to examine the factors that affect this diversity and shape the information behaviour of any group of migrants. Having first identified the omissions in previous approaches, via a literature review, and then having conducted an examination of the migrational experience of young Polish women to the UK, we are now in a better position to identify the factors affecting the different stages of migration. This enables a deeper understanding of the factors affecting the information behaviour of different migrant groups, thereby building on previous research which would have tended to focus only on the refugee experience. These factors are illustrated in the model below.

Economic migrant		Factor		Refugee
Pre-arrival				
Primarily economic		Motive for migration		Forced migration
Relatively high; move often well planned	←	Degree of autonomy	→	Low; move usually at short notice; little planning
Upon arrival				
Largely independent behaviour		Help pushed or sought independently?		Help pushed by official/ government agencies
Wide range available; strong use of interpersonal connections; some use of official sources	←	Sources and networks available	→	Often fewer sources available; rely heavily on official/ institutional sources; less social capital
Settling-in period				
Frequently similar		Cultural similarities and differences between home/ host countries		Often fundamentally different in terms of, e.g. religion, cultural norms
Measured; some engagement but some suspicion	←	Level of co-ethnic engagement	→	High; strong reliance on co-ethnics
Longer-term				
Often high		Language skill		Often low

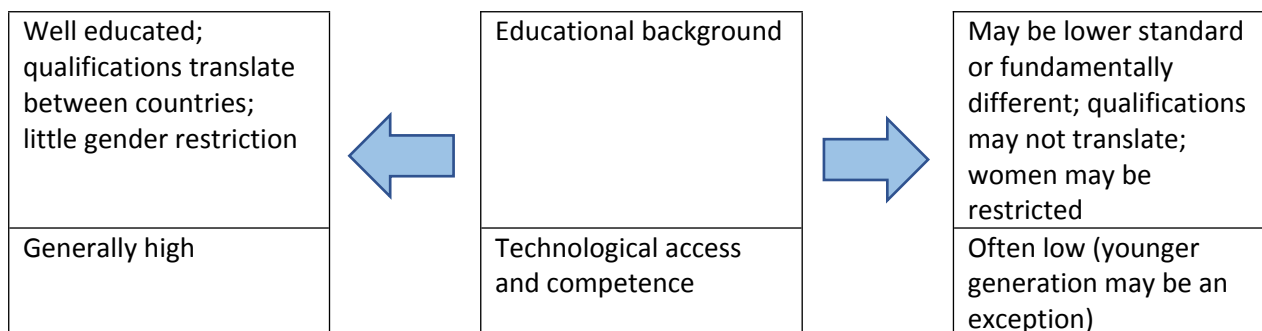| Well educated; qualifications translate between countries; little gender restriction | Educational background | May be lower standard or fundamentally different; qualifications may not translate; women may be restricted |
| Generally high | Technological access and competence | Often low (younger generation may be an exception) |

Figure 1. Factors shaping the migrational experience, with reference to the economic migrant and refugee.

While this model illustrates how these factors apply, broadly speaking, to the experience of the economic migrant and the refugee, the temptation to create or infer a binary contrast should be resisted; there are common elements among migratory experiences of all kinds, such as the use of interpersonal contacts and engagement with a co-ethnic community, and most experiences are somewhere on a scale. There does, however, seem to emerge a contrast. The refugee experience is characterised by a reliance on official sources, frequent information disjunctures, use of gatekeepers or mediators, and a limited use of digital information. The economic migrant is able to capably navigate an information landscape that is often similar to that of their home country, demonstrating independent information behaviour with strong information literacy skills and heavy use of digital information. The inter-related underlying factors shape this contrast; the more the migrant experiences the conditions in the 'refugee' column, the more likely they are to have a more extreme challenge of adjustment.

Conclusion

Contribution of the study

One of the main contributions of this work is to provide an examination of the migrant experience of a relatively under-studied group, drawing attention to a broader range of experience and thereby demonstrating that a wider conceptualisation of migration is required in information behaviour. Much literature and coverage of migration focuses on refugees and asylum seekers, who are subject to extremely difficult conditions and experience many challenges during migration. They are therefore an important group to study, and research across a range of disciplines has addressed their situation. Within the LIS field, literature on migrants has tended to focus on groups that may be

seen as marginalised or disadvantaged, challenges and barriers faced by migrants, and recommendations for support and assistance of these populations.

This study, however, has uncovered a different, more complex narrative of the migration experience. Young Polish female migrants have emerged as capable, competent, resourceful, and confident. They follow Harzig's (2001) portrayal of modern female migrants as "well-informed global players… decisive agents pursuing their own agenda" (p. 25). Their experience has, admittedly, been easier than that of the refugee population, due to cultural similarities between Poland and the UK and the relatively autonomous circumstances of their move. Like all migrants, they were naturally in need of some assistance during migration and settlement, and their migration was not without challenges. However, they were obliged to be independent in their information behaviour and displayed highly developed information skills. It should be noted that refugees and other disadvantaged groups of migrants are often also well-educated and information literate, even if their skills and competencies are not always apparent or do not correspond to Western perceptions (Khoir et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the literature has tended to focus on barriers faced, or the ways in which they are 'lacking' or need help. The present study has demonstrated the positive qualities and self-directed information behaviours of a different group of migrants, moving towards presenting an expanded view of the migration process. The experience of the displaced refugee, and that of the highly skilled migrant moving between culturally similar countries, sit alongside many other potential forms of migration to produce a more nuanced account of migration and the role of information in it. Through highlighting factors to consider when studying migrant groups, this study shows that a wider conceptualisation of migration is needed, both in LIS and in migration studies in general.

Much literature regarding the information behaviour of migrants addresses details such as their preferred sources, barriers experienced, and day-to-day behaviour, taking a practitioner-based approach to deliver recommendations for service providers. This study takes a broader perspective, stepping back from the details of other studies, viewing participants' information behaviour over the course of many years and emphasising the role of information in the life course. Literature on refugees in particular emphasises the period of arrival and immediate settlement, with less material on pre-arrival practices and longer-term settlement. This study provides more insight into all stages of migration, examining participants' lives before migration, the decision to migrate, pre-migration planning, the journey, arrival, immediate settlement, and longer-term settlement.

Finally, and most significantly, this study has presented the beginnings of a model of key factors shaping information behaviour across all migrational experiences. By considering the factors shaping migration, this model suggests a different way of looking at the experience as a whole, indicating

how these factors might impact and influence all migrants, despite the variety and complexity
exhibited by different groups. This is meaningful when considering the migration experience from
the perspective of information behaviour, but also has applicability in a wider range of areas,
including the migration field and beyond.

Future research and recommendations

There is scope for future research by extending the parameters of the current study; for example,
studying the Polish population in more rural areas; studying Polish men in the UK; and studying
those who have returned to Poland, or who live a more transnational existence than participants in
the current study. The experiences of these groups will differ from those in the present study.
Finally, although the current study addressed the life course of migrants, it was still limited to a
relatively brief period of engagement. A more longitudinal study could follow, observing migrants
from the moment of deciding to move, through the process, and monitoring their experience over
several years.

The findings of this work have implications for various groups involved in the migration process.
Most participants had had little contact with migration-related organisations, Polish institutions or
formal networks; these organisations could make an effort to reach out to EU migrants to keep them
informed and make information accessible and transparent. This becomes particularly important
given the context of uncertainty and insecurity surrounding residency and employment status during
and after the Brexit process. By broadening their perspective, there are lessons to be learned from
those groups of migrants who have been relatively successful in their transition, such as those in the
current study. Polish institutions should make efforts to reach this younger generation and
demonstrate their relevance, and there is scope for networks to be developed to help at the pre-
migration stage with informal advice and support.

This study took place over a significant moment in recent UK history: the beginnings of the Brexit
process. When the research ~~began~~was initially conceived in 2013, Brexit was not a factor, but as the
research progressed, it became increasingly important and influential, and was discussed
substantially in interviews. Participants expressed a range of emotions regarding Brexit, and even
over the few months of data collection, the consensus of feeling and thoughts of future plans
fluctuated. Participants previously feeling themselves to be welcome and well-integrated in the UK
had this world view disturbed by the referendum outcome and were forced to reconsider their
position. Several participants expressed that the Brexit vote, rather than encouraging them to leave

the UK, had in fact made them more determined to acquire citizenship and stay in the UK where

they had settled and built their lives. Whether this is indicative of a broader trend, and whether this

intent translates into a large number of young Poles remaining in the UK, is a question worth

investigating. More research on the range of experience throughout the process would contribute to

the emerging model of the variety of migrational experience.

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Appendix: Interview Schedule

Interview questions – participants

Explain purpose of project and grouping of questions before starting

Yourself

1. Name, age, marital status, children
2. Could you tell me about where were you born and brought up?

Your move to the UK, accommodation and employment

3. How did it come about that you came to live in the UK?
4. What did you need to find out before you came? How did you do this? (then follow-up questions as applicable re: info sources mentioned, as in list below)
5. Was there anything that you couldn't find out about, or were not prepared for?
6. Can you describe your first few days in the UK?
7. When you came to the UK, how did you find a place to live?
8. Have you been working since coming to the UK? How did you get your first job here? How did you find out about jobs? Have you changed jobs?
9. (If applicable – questions about children – do they go to school/ other groups? If so, how did you find out about these?)

Polish identity and contacts

10. Do you have many Polish contacts in the UK? Friends/ workmates/ acquaintances?
11. How do you stay in contact with your home country and the people there?
12. Do you keep in touch with Polish events, culture, etc.? e.g. watch Polish TV, read Polish websites?
13. Do you feel a need to maintain or keep in touch with a Polish identity? e.g. do you engage with Polish institutions in the UK?

How you find information

14. Were you a library user in Poland? (what do they use it for, why/ why not?)
15. Have you used the public library since being in the UK? (what for, why, etc.)
16. Sometimes people go to a place for a particular reason such as to eat, get a haircut, to worship, for child care, get something repaired, see a health provider or get exercise, but end up sharing information just because other people are there and you start talking. Does such a place come to mind for you? What is it? What makes this a good place for obtaining information, either accidentally or on purpose? What are some examples of information that you might pick up there?

Being a woman in Poland/ the UK

17. Do you think there is a difference in the opportunities available to women in Poland/ the UK? If so, why?
18. Are expectations of women different in the UK compared to Poland? Have you noticed any examples?

19. Do you think Polish men who move to the UK have a different experience to Polish women?

General/ conclusion

20. What are your plans for the future?
21. Has Brexit changed your feelings or plans?
22. What advice would you give to other Polish women wanting to migrate to the UK?

Prompts to use with questions about finding information

-    Where did you find that out?
-    What's that place like?
-    Did you get information there easily?
-    Did people give you information freely?
-    Did you/ do you share information with others in that place?