Technology-mediated information and communication practices of refugees

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Motivation

- How ICT contributes to the social inclusion of refugees (Díaz Andrade & Doolin, 2016)
Research question

How do refugees exercise agency in enacting technology-mediated information and communication practices?

1. Information and communication practices
2. Human agency and technology enactment
Information and communication practices

• “The ways people seek, use, and share information in everyday contexts” (Savolainen, 2008, p. vi)

• “Communication is the sharing of meaning through the exchange of information” (Castells, 2009, p. 54)

1. Orienting practices (Savolainen, 2008)
   Monitoring information about everyday events or with which to orient oneself to a new or unfamiliar environment

2. Instrumental practices (Savolainen, 2008)
   Actively seeking and using information to make sense of a problematic situation, solve a problem or perform a task

3. Expressive practices (Caidi et al., 2010)
   Social and communicative dimensions of everyday information practices, particularly the sharing of information
Human agency and technology enactment

• As human actors, we assess how ICT affords possibilities for action that can help us address our needs and achieve our goals

• This process occurs within specific temporal, relational and historical conditions that we inhabit, and which enable and constrain human action

• Human agency has a temporal dimension – in acting, we can assume different simultaneous agentic orientations – to the past, the future, and the present (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998)

• Which of these forms the primary orientation depends on the emergent situation in which action is occurring
Three temporal agentic orientations

Capacity to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible actions in response to the contingencies of the present.

Imaginative generation of possible future trajectories of action in relation to hopes, fears and desires for the future.

Reactivation of past patterns of thought and action to give stability and order, and to help sustain identities and interactions over time.

(Emirbayer & Mische, 1998)
Data collection

Nelson
  11 Burmese
  10 Bhutanese

Hamilton
  2 Burmese
  1 Colombian

Auckland
  3 Burmese
  3 Congolese
  2 Eritreans
  2 Ethiopians
  1 Rwandan
  1 Iraqi

Palmerston North
  9 Burmese
  8 Bhutanese
Method

1. **Critical case** – refugees’ technology-mediated information and communication practices take place at the juncture between past experiences and future prospects, where they have to act upon presently evolving events.

2. Initial *thematic analysis* to identify emergent patterns technology-mediated information and communication practices – i.e., orienting, instrumental and expressive.

3. Reported practices were then *mapped* against their temporal agentic orientations – i.e., past, present and future.
Technology-mediated information and communication practices

Orienting Instrumental Expressive Temporal agentic orientations

Practical-evaluative Meaningful engagement with the context of settlement

Dealing with everyday problems in an unfamiliar environment

Developing social connections and support networks

Iterative Monitoring people and events in the country of origin

Actively seeking information to address a problem or task arising from the past

Maintaining ethno-cultural networks and transnational ties with family and friends; online consumption of cultural content

Projective Scanning for information potentially useful in the future

Developing capabilities now to enhance future life

Expressing cultural identity for future generations

"These Māori people... We are new to here, so it is hard for us... We go and search [on the Internet] to understand their culture"

Armand

"I go to Google Maps and look at the place where I was born... I can see a photo... My village has changed a lot. Someone cut the forest... I am very sad"

Maung

"My parents have got Internet... The website [supports video-chat, so] we can talk and we can chat... I am happy to see them on computer"

Thi

"I would like to write something about my family story... If I were good at computers, I could create a website... Maybe my son can do it... So in the future, my grandson or granddaughter can read about it"

Zaw

"When [a job] was advertised, I went [to] the Internet and prepared myself for the interview... There was no reason to look for a job, but I still go there because... if I become unemployed..."

Ganesh

"My parents have got Internet... The website [supports video-chat, so] we can talk and we can chat... I am happy to see them on computer"

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"I would like to write something about my family story... If I were good at computers, I could create a website... Maybe my son can do it... So in the future, my grandson or granddaughter can read about it"

Zaw

"We have a leader who organises the work we have to do for our village; like water, because in my country it is hard to get... We [send] the money to our country, so they buy the pipe"

Shwe

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Conclusion

We draw attention to how refugees as ICT users enact technology-mediated information and communication practices that enable them to:

• **Manage the present** → utilise ICT to address current dilemmas and contingencies, and minimise the uncertainties of the unfamiliar information environment that they have to navigate

• **Look to the past** → actions are focused on reinforcing past connections and reaffirming and upholding cultural identities

• **Envision the future** → engagement with ICT frames future expectations and aspirations, and is directed at preparing for anticipated events and situations
Implications

1. Interventions for the social inclusion of individuals based on ICT provision need to have a central concern with the agency of those to be included.

2. Social inclusion in an information society needs to encompass the ICT-enabled capabilities that such individuals value in constructing meaningful lives.

3. ICT facilitates the maintenance of transnational connections and identities that matter to individuals – refugees’ lives are not restricted to the local context of resettlement.

4. The social inclusion of displaced people such as refugees is more than an information problem – it involves communicative and expressive activities that repair disrupted social and cultural lives.
References


