

Examining How Newcomer Women to Canada Use Social Media for Social Support

Zulfia Zaher
Central Michigan University

ABSTRACT

Background *This study utilized an exploratory sequential mixed-method research design to examine how newcomer women in Canada use social media for support to enhance their mental well-being.*

Analysis *The qualitative findings revealed that social media helped these newcomer women both before and after their arrival in Canada. The quantitative results showed that newcomer women mostly use social media for receiving information, followed by esteem support, networking, and emotional support.*

Conclusion and implications *The effectiveness of social media was dependent on the participants' socioeconomic and migration status. Social media were evidently useful for resisting and coping with stress and contributed to online community connectedness. However, using social media was a source of concern for refugee women due to personal safety, immigration proceedings, and customs.*

Keywords *Social media; Social support; Newcomer women; Canada; Immigration; Mental health*

RÉSUMÉ

Contexte *Cette étude recourt à une conception séquentielle exploratoire fondée sur une méthode mixte de recherche afin d'examiner comment les nouvelles immigrantes au Canada utilisent les médias sociaux pour ménager leur santé mentale.*

Analyse *Les données qualitatives de cette étude montrent que les médias sociaux ont aidé ces femmes immigrantes pendant et après leur arrivée au Canada. Les données quantitatives montrent que les nouvelles immigrantes utilisent les médias sociaux d'abord pour recevoir de l'information et ensuite pour maintenir leur estime de soi, faire du réseautage et trouver des appuis émotionnels.*

Conclusion et implications *Selon l'étude, l'efficacité des médias sociaux dépend du statut socioéconomique et migratoire des participantes. Il est clair d'autre part que les médias sociaux sont utiles pour résister au stress ainsi que pour le gérer, et qu'ils contribuent à entretenir des rapports avec la communauté en ligne. En même temps, les médias sociaux peuvent être une source de soucis pour les réfugiées par rapport à leurs traditions, au processus d'immigration et au besoin de sécurité personnelle.*

Zulfia Zaher is Assistant Professor in the College of the Arts & Media at Central Michigan University. Email: zaherz@cmich.edu.

Mots clés *Médias sociaux; Appui social; Nouvelles immigrantes; Canada; Immigration; Santé mentale*

Introduction

Canada is one of the fastest-growing immigrant and refugee host countries. In 2016, nearly 300,000 newcomers reached Canada (Chavez, 2019). Women form more than half of this population. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada defines newcomers as immigrant subgroups (e.g., refugees, family class, and economic class) who have lived in Canada for a short time, usually less than three to five years. In the past couple of years, with a growing immigrant population in Canada including refugees from conflict regions like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yemen, immigrants reported physical and mental health conditions began to worsen (Kirmayer, Narasiah, Munoz, Rashid, Ryder, Guzder, Hassan, Rousseau, & Pottie, 2011). The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) revealed that 29 percent of immigrants reported having some emotional problems and 16 percent reported high levels of stress, with women consistently reporting a higher level of stress than men (Robert & Gilkinson, 2012).

The Canadian government has identified protecting the mental health of current and incoming immigrant subgroups as a significant public health concern. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a “state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his own community” (2007). Mental health is a vital component of any individual’s life and particularly in the lives of immigrant subgroups, who are considered more vulnerable due to displacement. The immigration and settlement processes, whether forced or voluntary, are inherently stressful. Mary Levitt, Jonathan Lane, and Jerome Levitt (2005) stated that immigration and settlement processes are a “profound non-normative life transition requiring extensive adaptation” (p. 160). The initial settlement process jeopardizes immigrant subgroups’ mental well-being, and this challenge can continue beyond the settlement period. Additionally, factors such as unemployment, separation from family, discrimination and prejudice, language barriers, and lack of social and emotional supports add to the mental health stressors.

Although many studies have focused on different aspects of immigrants’ well-being, there is a shortage of in-depth research on the strategies that immigrant subgroups use to enhance their social and mental well-being. The Canadian Mental Health Association (2010) suggested that mental health entails not only the absence of psychological problems, but also the use of various coping strategies, such as balance, resilience, and flexibility. This study examines how newcomer women to Canada use social media to enhance their mental well-being. In particular, it focuses on online social support as a factor for improving mental well-being. The social quality of social media platforms allowed the researcher to explore concepts of social support in-depth, owing to social media’s significant reach in terms of time and space and across geographical and temporal boundaries.

Social support in any form is crucial for improving the well-being and sanity of individuals. Cobb (1976) refers to social support as a moderator of life stress. Lack of social support contributes to the loneliness that can lead to isolation and eventually

to depression and other psychological issues. Therefore, people seek support from others to maintain a supportive relationship. Social support has long been explored in diaspora studies. Immigrants often build a shared identity to generate mutually supportive social ties. Raymond Scupin (2003) stated that “throughout the world individuals migrating to different areas often use ethnic ties as a means of social adjustment” (p. 78). In the recent Western European sociocultural context, immigrant subgroups have been subject to hate crimes and other forms of discrimination (Khandaker, 2017; Chazan, 2015). This environment has further increased the fear and anxiety of these immigrant subgroups. Studies have long established that the conditions in which people are born, raised, work, and live impact their well-being (Ng & Omariba, 2010). An understanding of social support will provide a crucial vantage point from which to examine the well-being of newcomer women in Canada.

In the past couple of years, the primary concerns of refugees and immigrants have no longer been the typical immigration problems (e.g., resettlement, language barriers, losing cultural identity, or other daily struggles), but rather intolerance and hate crimes. The growing intolerance against refugees in various Western countries has made them more vulnerable to hate crimes. In 2015, 1,005 crimes against refugees were reported in Western Europe, including 93 incidents in Germany that involved burning refugee camps (Underwood, 2016). Similarly, in 2015, over 400 crimes against Muslims, including assaults, harassment, and various criminal acts, were recorded in France (Chazan, 2015). Religious persecution of Muslim refugees was also reported in the United Kingdom, Finland, Sweden, and other European countries (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2016; Corke, 2015). Meanwhile, in Canada, 1,409 hate crimes targeting Arabs, South and West Asians, the Jewish population, and people based on their sexual orientation were reported to police in 2016, 47 more hate crimes than in 2015, which accounts for an increase of 3.5 percent (Khandaker, 2017).

At this time, when any discourse about immigrant subgroups is wrapped up in many countries’ political agendas, exploring the strategies new immigrant and refugee women use to maintain their mental well-being would be useful for a few reasons. First, it generates a new discourse by highlighting the use of social media in improving well-being. Second, the topic is timely because of increased immigration, and the results could be utilized by policymakers, social justice advocates, health communication experts, and migration scholars to explore the interconnections between social media use and well-being. Lastly, the results of this study may assist government policymakers, non-profit organizations, and Immigration and Citizenship offices in designing interventions that can help improve the lives of immigrants in Canada and beyond. The majority of these immigrant subgroups had come from Muslim-dominated nations to escape war and persecution. Therefore, their challenges are maximized.

Understanding the significance of this topic, this study examines how newcomer women in Canada use social support strategies on social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook, to enhance their mental well-being. This study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-method research design. In the first phase, the researcher conducted 17 semi-structured interviews with newcomer women. In the second phase, content analysis was conducted to examine a total of 1,347 social media posts (650 Facebook

posts and 697 Twitter messages) for the provision of social support in participants' posts on Facebook and Twitter.

Literature review

Social support and social media

As social beings, we have an inherent notion of social support (Fiske, 1992). Social support is not a new term, because, in the words of Rodrigues (2016), "Human beings are social creatures and often turn to each other for physical assistance and psychological sustenance" (p. 7). Previously, social support could only take place in face-to-face interactions. However, with the advent of online media, social media, in particular, have become increasingly significant for people to provide and seek social support. Xiaolin Lin, Dawei Zhang, and Yibai Li (2016) further argue that, compared to traditional social support (which operated offline), online social support has a greater reach in terms of time and space. It crosses geographical and temporal boundaries, has no time and space constraints. This motivates building connections through weak ties.

The social quality of social networking platforms enables researchers to explore the concept of social support on social media, particularly on Facebook and Twitter. Many studies have found that social support is correlated with physical and mental well-being and can also reduce the adverse effects of stress (e.g., Attai, Cowher, Al-Hamadani, Schoger, Staley, & Landercasper, 2015). Ting-Ping Liang, Yi-Ting Ho, Yu-Wen Li, and Efraim Turban (2011) pointed out that social media brings the value of users' social life to the forefront. Other studies compared the social connection of offline, face-to-face, and online, virtual, communication and found that Facebook continuously has proven to be the platform where users can build and maintain a social relationship (Chiang & Huang, 2016; Lin, Zhang, & Li, 2016). Evidently, these social relationships lower depression and increase satisfaction in individuals (Myrick, 2015).

Although social media have become an integral part of people's lives in this digital age, it is essential to understand their associated negative consequences. Social media are mostly well perceived because they allow users to maintain their pre-existing relationships and continue to be friends online, without offline encounters. However, these very same characteristics of social media may lead to negative consequences, such as social isolation, lack of interpersonal communication, and even trust issues. Social media skeptics argue that in the name of convenience and connectivity, social media have invaded people's privacy (Debatin, 2011). Users are under constant surveillance for corporate benefits and state-sponsored espionage (Andrejevic, 2012). Some studies have also expressed concern about maintaining a balance between "freedom of speech and the defense of human dignity" as social media create a space for hate speech that is harmful to a particular group of people (Silva, Mondal, Correa, Benevenuto, & Weber, 2016).

Social media provide connectivity between group members of a diaspora, where different platforms are used to transcend geographical, historical, political, and social boundaries (Harwood, 2015). They offer a new dimension of diaspora identity and migrant plurality by expanding the communicative horizons. The term *diaspora* is used to define many groups of people who leave their homelands and inhabit different countries. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (1996) explained that diaspora is related to the border

crossing (whether forced or chosen, necessary or desired). Furthermore, Harim Haiderali Karim (2003) claimed that not all diasporas have homeland myths at the centre of their consciousness. The concept of diaspora is not easy to understand because it comprises many religions, languages, traditions, et cetera. Although a diaspora is formed by people of similar backgrounds and origins, the reasons for immigration vary from one person to another. For example, the experience of an asylee could be completely different from a person who came to Canada through a spousal visa. These varied reasons for immigration may influence individuals' expectations in the host country.

Studies show that immigrants are early adopters of media and technology and use them to connect with the country of origin and build new connections in the country of settlement (Christiansen, 2004; Matsaganis, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2011). Various forms of media, such as ethnic, transnational media, and diaspora programs, have been used in diaspora for many decades (Karim, 2003). Diasporic media have often served relatively small but widely scattered communities. Media play an important role in the construction of diasporic and migrant identities. Myria Georgiou (2006) stated that media consumption and communication technologies' appropriation have become significant in the formation of shared identities. Although media have been an excellent tool in building shared identity and cultural ties for many people in the diaspora, they are linear, hierarchical, and expensive (Karim, 2003). However, online media have helped to overcome some of these challenges.

In the past two decades, researchers have increasingly focused on the use of online media for transnational communication in migration networks. Digital media and the internet serve as global technologies that provide social and information networks across geographical spaces. Scholars focus on the role social media play in connecting diaspora populations as well as influencing people to migrate in the first place. Some studies found that online media provide an infrastructure that extends the possibility and opportunity of network ties and information for prospective migrants (Burrell & Anderson, 2008; Dekker & Engbersen, 2014; Hiller & Franz, 2004; Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2014). Other scholars concentrate on how people in diaspora construct, negotiate, and deconstruct their personal and communal identities based on shared national and global ideologies using online media (Harwood, 2015; Plaza, 2010).

Social media provide useful tools to build close relationships and allow individuals to seek support and uphold relationships in a virtual community (Chiang & Huang, 2016). Virtual communities have been formed to enable people with a shared interest who feel a sense of connectedness to communicate and seek and share information (Khan, Zaher, & Gao, 2018). Community connectedness refers to a community setting or a real neighbourhood, where people reside (Strange, Fisher, Howat, & Wood, 2014). However, in situations where the community is geographically dispersed, online community connectedness can offer the same social ties, sense of community, and a safe zone in which to provide and seek support. Virtual communities play a pivotal role in the lives of marginalized populations, especially members of the diasporic community, as they are linked by more than just shared interests (Karim, 2003). They are linked by cultural markers, language, religion, need, and social connectedness. Such connectedness is significant for seeking and offering social support.

Although previous studies established that social media play a vital role in diaspora studies, there is insufficient research on how new immigrants and refugees in a country use social media strategically to enhance their well-being by seeking and providing social support. This study aimed to address this issue sought to understand the coping strategies of newcomer women in Canada through their use of social media as an accessible means of communication in the beginning of the settlement period when they may not have access to other resources and external support. Thus, this study examines the following questions:

RQ1: How do newcomer women use social media?

RQ2: How do newcomer women utilize social media to seek social support?

RQ3: What type(s) of social support do newcomer women use the most on Facebook and Twitter?

RQ4: Are there any statistical differences in the use of social support between Facebook and Twitter?

Research design

This study utilized an exploratory sequential mixed-method research design. The exploratory sequential design is a two-phase design that involves both qualitative and quantitative methods (Carpenter & Lertpratchya, 2016).

Qualitative methods

Conducting semi-structured interviews was the method chosen to gather data to understand social media usage and its relation to the well-being of newcomer women. This was the most appropriate approach for this study, since little research had been conducted using a qualitative method to thoroughly investigate this topic in the context of the minority population (Creswell, 2013).

This study employed snowball sampling, which is particularly useful when targeting a group of people who are geographically dispersed in a larger province like Ontario, Canada. Ontario is not only Canada's most populous province, but is also ethnically diverse with the highest number of immigrants as residents (Statistics Canada, 2018). Newcomer women living in Ontario were recruited between June and October 2017. The recruitment statement was disseminated widely to make sure that a wide range of perspectives from newcomer women could be captured. The recruitment flyer was first sent by email to the following organizations: the FCJ Refugee Centre (in York), Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA, in Scarborough), Newcomer Women's Services Toronto, Peel Newcomer Strategy Group, and Afghan Women's Organization (AWO, in North York and elsewhere). Second, the recruitment flyer was posted on public notice boards in libraries, adult schools, community centres, and other places in different parts of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), including Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, Pickering, Markham, Vaughan, Milton, Ajax, Burlington, and Newmarket. The researcher also utilized social media groups such as Muslim moms of Mississauga, Ontario new immigrants, Racial Health Equity Network, Beyond our Lineage, Newcomers Women's Services Toronto, Pakistani Muslim Moms in Canada, and others. Subsequently, 17 newcomer women from the GTA volunteered to take part in this study.

This study conducted 17 semi-structured interviews with newcomer women in Ontario, Canada. The average length of the interviews was 26 minutes. Interview participants identified themselves as newcomer women who had lived in Canada for less than four years. They were between the ages of 20 and 45. Research participants also identified themselves as originally from the following countries: Pakistan (5), Afghanistan (3), Syria (3), India (2), Iran (2), Jordan (1), and Saudi Arabia (1). Five out of 17 held a master's degree, one was a medical doctor, one identified herself as a doctoral candidate, six held a bachelor's degree, and four of them carried a high school diploma or professional certificates.

Furthermore, they entered Canada through various avenues: eight as refugee claimants, six through the Federal Skilled Worker Program (Express Entry), two through a spousal visa, and one as a temporary resident. Regarding their marital status, four identified themselves as single (never married before), one as divorced, and 12 as married. In regard to employment, five participants held a full-time job, five had a part-time job, three were students, and four were homemakers. Fifteen out of the 17 participants were from predominantly Muslim countries. Also, the participants were living in the Ontario communities of Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, Pickering, Markham, Vaughan, Milton, Ajax, Burlington, and Newmarket. In this study, every interviewee was given a pseudonym to protect their privacy. This way, they were assured of the confidentiality of the study.

The interview data (audio recording) were transcribed verbatim. This study used Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's (2006) guidelines on thematic analysis to analyze the interview transcripts, incorporating both theory- and data-driven analysis. After coding the interview transcriptions, the researcher identified 24 overlapping categories. After a careful study of those categories, five themes emerged. This study also employed member checking and peer debriefing to ensure the validity of the findings.

Quantitative methods

In the second phase, this study conducted content analysis to examine the provision of social support on Facebook and Twitter platforms used by newcomer women. Content analysis is systematic and was thus an appropriate approach for measuring a large set of unstructured communicative online data (Ramanadhan, Mendez, Rao, & Viswanath, 2013). This study examined and analyzed only the manifest content of the messages on the participants' Facebook and Twitter platforms.

To construct a sampling frame, this study conducted several rigorous online searches to find organizations and services that deal with newcomer women in Canada. This study also conducted a Google search using a combination of words such as *newcomer*, *women*, *Canada*, *Toronto*, *Ontario*, *GTA*, *immigrants*, *refugees*, and *non-profit*. Such informed procedure directed the researcher to several immigrant and refugee organizations.

After examining online resources, the researcher selected three organizations on social media that dealt with newcomer women. Newcomer Women's Services Toronto had 1,384 members on its Facebook page and 3,127 followers of its Twitter account. Similarly, Newcomer to Canada had 10,070 members on its Facebook page and 3,930 followers on Twitter. Also, the Newcomer Centre of Peel had 1,237 members on its Facebook page and 1,340 followers on Twitter. From a total of 12,691 members on

these three Facebook pages, only 267 members identified themselves as newcomer women to Ontario, Canada, and met all the criteria mentioned in the recruitment flyer. Also, from the 8,397 Twitter followers on these three newcomer Twitter pages, 76 Twitter users identified themselves as newcomer women to Ontario, Canada, and met all the criteria listed in the recruitment flyer. Out of the 267 newcomer women Facebook users, only 80 volunteered to be part of this study. The communication and consent process took place via Twitter and Facebook direct messages. The data was then collected for four weeks in October 2017 through the online social media analytics tool called Quintly. Through employing Quintly, this study collected a total of 1,347 social media posts (650 Facebook posts and 697 Twitter messages) from 156 newcomer women's Facebook and Twitter platforms. However, this study was not able to collect demographic data (e.g., country of origin, education) for social media users, as this data was not publicly available.

MEASUREMENT

The variables were all nominal, and each variable was measured for presence and absence through a scale (Yes = 1 and No = 0). The social support codebook was previously used to assess the occurrence of support-intended communication behaviours. All five categories were almost precisely adapted from Coulson, Buchanan, and Aubeeluck (2007), as follows: i) information support (e.g., advice, referrals to experts, situation appraisals, and teaching); ii) esteem support (e.g., compliments and anchorage); iii) network support (e.g., access, companionship, and express willingness); iv) emotional support (e.g., virtual affection, sympathy, validation, encouragement, prayer, and relief of blame); and v) tangible support (e.g., performing a direct or indirect task).

INTERCODER RELIABILITY

Three people with substantial media research experience conducted the intercoder reliability after participating in four rounds of training sessions. Detailed instructions and variable definitions were specified in the codebook, and it was ensured that the coders comprehensively understood them. On average, 130 Facebook messages and 139 Twitter messages were coded during each 90-minute training session, followed by test coding. When coders faced any disagreements, they reviewed, discussed, and updated item codes for maximum clarity. Once a high level of agreement was achieved, actual coding began. After completing multiple long training sessions, each coder separately coded a 20 percent sample of data to establish intercoder reliability (ICR). ICR was measured employing Krippendorff's alpha (α) (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). After comparing the coding of these messages, ICR was found to be 0.85 for nominal variables: information (0.85), esteem (0.80), network (0.80), emotional (0.95), and tangible (0.80). After achieving the average level of agreement expected by Krippendorff's alpha, the researcher then too on the coding. The data was then transferred to SPSS 24.0 software to run descriptive and chi-square (X^2) statistics analyses.

Results

Qualitative results

NEWCOMER WOMEN AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE

This part of the article addresses RQ1 for this study: How do newcomer women use

social media? On average, all the participants used at least three social media platforms. These platforms, when ordered by the frequency of their use (greatest to least), were Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Snapchat. All participants carried smartphones and also accessed social media through either a computer or an iPad. Although they occasionally used a laptop or an iPad, they primarily used smartphones for accessing social media platforms, since these devices were more accessible and convenient at work, at home, and while commuting.

Themes

As mentioned, after the researcher talked to the newcomer women about their social media use, five themes and seven subthemes emerged. These themes were i) pre-arrival, ii) resilience to stress, iii) self-protection, iv) online community connectedness, and v) fear. Each theme is discussed in more detail below.

Pre-arrival

Previous studies have mostly been concerned with newcomer settlement after newcomers have already entered the new country. However, there is a shortage of information on how pre-arrival is crucial and how it might help newcomers to prepare for the settlement process. This study came across two different types of opinions from participants who migrated to Canada seeking better career opportunities and those who were admitted to Canada in order to survive.

Immigrant women. Pre-arrival seemed to be more vital for the Federal Skilled Workers, who had a well-established career in their country of origin before moving to Canada for better opportunities and better lives. One crucial observation gained from talking to the skilled workers was how they distinguished themselves from refugees by taking pride in the fact that they had been admitted to Canada through a merit scale based on their education, work experience, proficiency in English or French, and other skills. Since they give up their jobs in their home countries, they tended to inquire more about their potential destination before departure. Many participants said that before they immigrated, they used all sorts of external supports, such as social media and any form of digital media, in general, to connect with different communities in Canada and ask questions about housing, employment opportunities, benefits, school systems, weather, et cetera.

Refugee women. Although the immigrant women placed emphasis on the importance of social media pre-arrival, the majority of the participants who were protected persons had different experiences concerning pre-arrival. They did not use social media, even intentionally tried to avoid using them entirely. Participants who feared persecution in a war zone country were afraid of surveillance. For example, participant Marwa said:

I avoided any communication, including social media, before leaving my home country. My family and I were in an awful situation. We avoided any means of communication with other family and friends, and we wanted to ... what you call it ... lay low until we get [sic] to Canada. We were in danger, and we did not want to announce this to the world that we are leaving the country or things like that.

The participants who were in a better situation in their country of origin used social media and other means to compare their options. However, women who left their countries to find a safe place to live did not care where they were going. Most of them said they left hurriedly and lived in a few countries before they reached Canada. These newcomer women relied mostly on internal support (e.g., beliefs, faith, destiny, etc.) to stay positive. This reliance was particularly important at the time when they did not have access to external support. Nilo replied when asked about the pre-arrival process, “No, I did not care how the new place looked like. I knew any place would be better than the place I was. I had faith.”

A few of the participants lived in refugee camps in a third country until they were admitted to Canada, so they did not have access to technological resources. Aaliyah said, “Internet was expensive, so I just checked my email once in a while until I get [sic] to Canada.”

Resilience to stress

Receiving social support, in any shape or form, and maintaining interpersonal relationships were essential for the newcomer women in developing resilience. Although these women, regardless of their immigration status, experience structural stressors (e.g., separation, unemployment, language barriers) and situational stressors (e.g., isolation, racism, discrimination), they greatly depended on many external and internal supports to develop methods to resist stress. Many mentioned their partners and children as sources of distraction from stress. However, for a few women, children were the source of stress, since the women did not have any family members in Canada to seek help from, whereas they had had many family members around to help them in their country of origin.

When asked about social media and its association with well-being, the majority of participants described social media as a positive tool by using the actual terms “stress buster,” “de-stressor,” and “positive distractor.” In general, the participants expressed that exchanging of opinions and sharing their feelings with others helped them to feel better. However, they waited until something triggered their emotions to voice their opinion. They were not the initiators. They also said they often expressed their feelings by commenting on others’ posts, not on their social media pages. Many participants introduced social media, particularly Facebook, as a platform on which to vent.

Venting. Social media provided a space for newcomer women to vent and express their frustration and disappointment in the forms of words, poems, and wisdom quotes. Husna said when she felt upset about some shocking events taking place in Afghanistan, she wrote on Facebook. A few participants said they also used social media to take a stand against the “extreme racism” they or their loved ones face. Saima, who left her executive job in search of a better life in Canada, expressed a zero-tolerance for racism. She said, “I give [sic] up everything in Pakistan, hoping to have a better life in Canada ... I am not here to be mocked by some bigots.” She expressed her frustration whenever she encountered such an experience.

Image management. Maintaining a positive online image was also perceived as a way to resist stress. Many of the participants pointed out that since they had entered Canada, their social media focus had changed compared to what they were posting in

their countries of origin. Marwa, whose parents are from Palestine, was born and raised in Jordan and is married to a Syrian. She said that since she arrived in Canada, she had entirely changed her social media usage. She used to be angry about the Arab Spring and used to create angry posts before coming to Canada. However, she started to display more of as what she called her “human side” by uploading her pictures, family pictures, and places she visited in Canada. She further said, “Our social media profile is important for people who look us up online. Some people may judge us.”

For some participants, positive portrayal came naturally. They expressed that their lives had been changed for the better in Canada and their social media posts had become more positive. They explored new places, cuisines, and activities, and thus took a lot of photos and shared them with their family and friends. A few participants said they wrote about their observations of the new culture, for example, what amazed them and why.

Relaxation and cheering. Some participants found social media a good distraction to cope with loneliness. Many of the participants started using social media more in Canada compared to their country of origin. Most of these women came from cultures where they used to live in big families. Thus, loneliness and isolation could trigger stress. They often referred to online sources to resist loneliness.

Some participants expressed their gratification for funny and joyful content on social media. Many participants followed particular Facebook pages that involved sarcasm, funny clips, jokes, and images. While previous studies, such as Young Min Baek, Young Bae, and Hyunmi Jang (2013) concluded that dependency on social media is associated with social isolation and loneliness among adult social media users, that study did not consider the opposite scenario, where social interaction is hard to maintain. For example, in the case of newcomer women, it takes time for them to build connections and trust in a new environment. Consequently, this type of social isolation too can cause dire physical, mental, and emotional stress. In the situation of extreme separation and social isolation, social media can facilitate that external support.

Self-protection

Based on the conversation I had with many women, I realized that they were aware of the impact of some content and even people on social media on their well-being. Fifteen out of the 17 participants said that they willingly avoided discussion of politics and religion on social media. They were cautious about getting involved in those topics for “self-protection,” as they called it.

Topics on gender inequalities and social injustice were the only topics that kept women engaged on social media. However, they only took a stand when they saw someone discriminate against women. They did not initiate these topics, but they joined the conversations on these topics. Their persistence, a few of them explained, was because the more discussion they generate about gender inequalities and discrimination, the more attention it gets. It reaches more people and gets harder to ignore. However, the participants picked and chose what topics they wanted to be vocal about. Self-censorship and self-restraint were widely reported to protect their well-being.

Previous studies such as Bernhard Debatin (2011) have highlighted privacy concerns on social networking sites. He mostly focused on privacy in the context of per-

sonal space, particularly in Western countries, which can discourage users from sharing and thus may lead to self-restraint. In contrast, the participants of this study were not concerned about personal space, but they feared humiliation, harassment, and surveillance. They avoided publicly discussing politics and religion in an effort to protect themselves and their well-being. They would rather save their time and energy and enjoy watching funny clips rather than arguing with people; a few participants described other social media users in their networks as “low-tolerant.” The participants described the low-tolerant social media users as neither educated nor rational.

Avoiding politics. Avoiding any discussion of politics was one of the significant sub-themes that emerged. Participants expressed different reasons for avoiding politics on social media (e.g., unfair judgment, fear of immigration and citizenship authorities, lack of expertise, lack of interest, and distrust of politics). By avoiding politics, the majority of the participants intended to save themselves from any unwelcoming remarks, trouble, and negativity in general. Some participants compared discussing politics on social media to “opening a can of worms.” They said once they started talking about politics, there was no going back. The people they interacted with were mainly from their country of origin. In this study, the participants already consumed such negative content via social media, but they intentionally avoided further engagement.

Some participants also expressed surveillance concerns when discussing politics on social media in Canada. A few participants, who identified themselves as Muslim, said that as Muslims, they were not sure if it was wise for them to talk about politics on social media, especially with the politicization of Islam. Sara shared her concern about social media while travelling and re-entering Canada:

I don't know how to explain, but ... you know that sometimes people say that if you live abroad, they [government] also check your Facebook messages [surveillance]. I used to laugh at that, saying that the government does not have that much time to go through everyone's Facebook. But this happened to my husband at the border when he visited the U.S. and came back. They took his phone and checked his Facebook page. So, in some cases, social media could also be dangerous. It's not all positive.

Avoiding religion. The majority of participants described religion as a highly sensitive topic that often provokes a strong reaction. Thus, they intentionally avoided getting involved in any debate about religion or any topic that led to religious discussions on social media. The participants shared a few reasons for avoiding religious topics. First, a number of participants said that religion is private, and they would not get involved in discussing any religious topic out of respect for others. Second, a few participants claimed religious messages are open to interpretation, so there is no end to those conversations. Third, some of them were concerned about their lack of expertise in religion, so they would not get involved in discussions to save themselves embarrassment.

At the same time, many women expressed that when they saw others attacking their religion, particularly Islam on social media, it hurt them. They said that social media also provided a space for xenophobia that could lead to dividing communities and end up harming some people. Husna said, “Social media also gives space to

Islamophobics to express their anger against us.” Sara stated, “I have good control over my emotions. I won’t say that I get depressed, but yes, some posts really upset me, especially those on religion and especially those targeting Muslims.”

Pew Research Center (2017a) data showed that social media helps to stifle discussion of important topics. Social media users who avoid certain topics on social media are less likely to discuss those topics in real life, due to fear of facing the same consequences in an in-person discussion as they would on social media. Although avoiding politics and religious discussions may help newcomers in the short term, it might have some negative repercussions on their confidence, self-esteem, and eventually their well-being in the long run. Further study is needed to explore this topic in-depth.

Online community connectedness

Social media, particularly closed groups on Facebook, allowed the newcomer women to seek support and maintain a social relationship with other women who shared the same language, religion, and national origin. Social media seemed to be used in a very organized way post-arrival. Newcomer women found social media to be beneficial in connecting them to different communities in Canada. Some participants found particular community groups useful. Shahida said, “Online mom groups are very powerful and active. Women are very supportive of each other on these Facebook pages. They talk about the racial problem and other issues that their children face in school.” For the newcomer women, it was not only important to receive the information they needed, but also to receive the information from people who had gone through the same experiences added a different level of trust. Aisha said, “Most of the women on these online pages are so clever and active that they speak [to] my heart. Some of them share tips on how to manage their time and live in a cosmopolitan environment.”

The participants found online groups safe and protected. According to a study from Pew Research Center (2017b), members of minority populations and women are most likely to face online harassment because of their race, cultural orientation, and political views. In recent years, the formation of online communities around a shared interest or cause has rapidly increased. Online communities can provide both quality and quantity in social connections to a person, group, or community. The most significant example of community connectedness given by participants was the “candle-light vigils” in different parts of Ontario. The participants also named advice on moving, shopping, assembling appliances, and legal issues as a few ways the online community and closed groups helped them as newcomers in Canada.

Fear

Most of the newcomer women preferred to maintain low visibility or no visibility at all on social media during the first few months after their arrival in Canada (for a few, this period was up to six months). Fear of immigration proceedings was the participants’ primary reason for laying low on social media, regardless of their immigration status. The participants explained that the first few months post-arrival were a crucial time, as their immigration cases were in process. Most of the participants believed that immigration and citizenship agencies in Canada checked their social media sites. Two

of the participants told me that they deactivated their social media pages during the first three months. They said they did not have anything to hide on their social media, but a lot of people scared them about having any communication with people in their country of origin. They made the decision to deactivate their accounts to be safe rather than sorry. Nilo said, "I came here as a refugee from Iran ... so people told me to not talk to anyone in Iran on social media when my case was in process."

Talking about fear on social media, a few participants expressed concern about social media privacy. Their concerns were about privacy in the context of personal safety. Generally, when people think about online security and privacy, their worries are more likely to be about identity theft and theft of financial information. However, for newcomer women, the privacy concerns were mostly about immigration proceedings, their status as permanent residents (not yet citizens), customs, et cetera. Some of the participants expressed concerns because of their identity as Muslims. Amina said, "It's hard for us to talk about certain topics on social media. It is like we represent the ... entire religion, so we have to be cautious with what we say." Two other participants raised the issue of immigration and customs investigations that could be different for Muslim populations.

A few participants were concerned about their status as a permanent resident. Sara said, "Permanent residency doesn't mean permanent. The smallest thing we share on social media can go against us in the citizenship process." Aisha said, "I heard people could get even deported on what they share on social media. I think I heard one student from the Middle East was deported back to his country from the USA [referring to Emadeldin Elsayed, 23, from Egypt]." Farida also said, "I saw on the news that the USA would make an actual law for checking immigrants' social media pages." Husna said, "It's like the entire world can talk about Trump, but God forbid ... if we talk about him, people look at us differently."

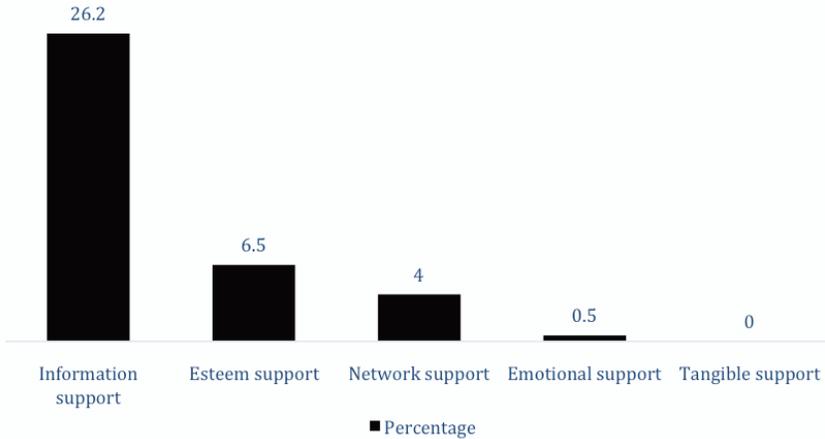
Exploring some other fears and concerns that could negatively affect women's well-being, a few participants said social media were not all positive. These participants found social media overwhelming, distracting, and disturbing. Some believed that the images and videos they consumed through social media not only had the potential to make them feel overwhelmed, but also such images and videos were insensitive and normalized violence.

Quantitative results

To address RQ3 and RQ4, this study examined social media posts ($N = 1,347$). More specifically, Facebook posts made up 48 percent ($n = 650$) of the data, while Twitter messages constituted 52 percent ($n = 697$). RQ3 investigated the types of social support newcomer women use on Facebook and Twitter. The data for content analysis was gathered over the period of four weeks in October 2017 from the social media of 156 newcomer women (80 from Facebook, 76 from Twitter). A descriptive analysis was conducted to explore the frequency of social support used by newcomer women on Facebook and Twitter. To examine the associations between various types of social support on Facebook and Twitter and to answer RQ4, this study conducted a series of chi-square tests.

RQ3 revealed that the types of social support, in order of frequency, were information, esteem, network, and emotional (see Figure 1). The results also showed that there was no sign of tangible support on Facebook and Twitter.

Figure 1: Types and frequency of social support used on Facebook and Twitter



The study revealed that information support was the most dominant type of social support on Facebook and Twitter (see Table 1). It comprised 26.2 percent ($n = 353$) of the social media messages, (171 Facebook and 182 Twitter posts). The most prominent type of information was situation appraisal, comprising 16.6 percent ($n = 223$) of the data. The second type of information was teaching, at 5.2 percent ($n = 70$), followed by advice, at 3.4 percent ($n = 46$), and referrals to experts, 1.0 percent ($n = 14$).

To address RQ4, a chi-square test of independence was calculated to compare the association between the use of information support on Facebook and Twitter. Information support was used 12.7 percent by participants on Facebook and 13.5 percent on Twitter. However, no significant association was found [$X^2(1) = .000, p = .9 (p > .05)$].

Table 1: Types and frequency of information support used on Facebook and Twitter

Types of information	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Situation appraisals	223	16.6
Teaching	70	5.2
Advice	46	3.4
Referrals to experts	14	1.0
Total	353	26.2

The results (see Table 2) showed that esteem support was the second type of social support on Facebook and Twitter. Esteem support included 6.5 percent ($n = 87$) of social media posts (11 on Facebook and 76 on Twitter). Within esteem support, compliments formed 6.4 percent ($n = 86$) and anchorage constituted 0.1 percent ($n = 1$) of the social media posts.

Table 2: Types and frequency of esteem support used on Facebook and Twitter

Types of esteem	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage
Compliments	86	6.4
Anchorage	1	0.1
Total	87	6.5

A chi-square test of independence was calculated to understand the association of esteem support between Facebook and Twitter (see Table 3). A significant relationship emerged [$X^2(1) = 46.2, p = .000$]. This suggests that there was a significant association in the use of esteem support between Twitter and Facebook platforms. The newcomer women utilized esteem support 0.8 percent on Facebook and 5.6 percent on Twitter.

Table 3: Chi-square test of esteem support on Facebook and Twitter

Chi-Square test	Value	Df	Asymp. sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	46.273 ^a	1	.000		
Continuity correction	44.769	1	.000		
Likelihood ratio	52.039	1	.000		
Fisher's exact test				.000	.000
Linear-by-linear association	46.239	1	.000		
N of valid cases	1,347				

Note: a Zero cells (.0%) have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 41.50.

The third type of social support used on the social media platforms of newcomer women was network support. It comprised 4 percent ($n = 55$) of the data (23 messages on Facebook and 32 messages on Twitter). The two different kinds of network support, in order of frequency, were accessed, at 3.9 percent ($n = 53$) and companionship, 0.1 percent ($n = 2$) (see Table 4).

Table 4: Types and frequency of network support used on Facebook and Twitter

Types of network	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage
Access	53	3.9
Companionship	2	0.1
Total	55	4.0

A chi-square test of independence was calculated to examine the association of network support between Facebook and Twitter. Network support was used 1.7 percent on Facebook and 2.4 percent on Twitter. However, no significant association was established between Facebook and Twitter [$X^2(1) = .952, p = .3 (p > .05)$].

The fourth type of social media support used by newcomer was emotional support, comprising 0.5 percent ($n = 8$) of the data (six messages posted by Facebook users and two posted by Twitter users). In order of frequency, the types of emotional support were: virtual affection, at 0.2 percent ($n = 3$), sympathy, at 0.1 percent ($n = 2$), validation/empathy, at 0.1 percent ($n = 2$), and encouragement, at 0.1 percent ($n = 2$).

A chi-square test of independence was also run to compare and establish an association in the use of emotional support on Facebook and Twitter by newcomer women (see Table 5). A significant relationship emerged [$X^2(1) = 4.96, p = .26$]. This indicated that there was a significant association in the use of emotional support between Twitter and Facebook platforms. The newcomer women utilized emotional support more on Facebook (0.4 percent) compared to Twitter (0.1 percent).

Table 5: Chi-square test of emotional support on Facebook and Twitter

Chi-Square test	Value	Df	Asymp. sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (2-sided)	Exact sig. (1-sided)
Pearson chi-square	4.964 ^a	1	.026		
Continuity correction	3.509	1	.061		
Likelihood ratio	5.520	1	.019		
Fisher's exact test				.033	.028
Linear-by-linear association	4.960	1	.026		
N of valid cases	1,347				

Note: a Two cells (50.0%) have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.86.

Discussion

As the first mixed-method research on this topic, this study offers insights on the ways newcomer women seek and provide support and attempt to improve their well-being through social media. This research contributes valuable insight to migration studies, as the research findings illuminate the interconnection between resettlement, social support, well-being, digital media, and the womanization of migration. These results provide a vantage point for health communication scholars from which to better understand the coping strategies of newcomer women. The findings can be helpful both for government policy-making and advocacy practices.

Although the qualitative approach was utilized as the primary method in this study, the quantitative approach worked well to build on qualitative findings. The qualitative and quantitative results revealed five aspects of social media use by newcomer women. First, they used social media to seek and provide support. Newcomer women explained that social media played crucial roles both before and after their arrival. Those migrant women who were admitted to Canada through the Federal Skilled Worker Program emphasized the usefulness of social media prior to their arrival in Canada. Social media greatly helped those women who connected with their communities before migration. It saved them a lot of time upon arrival because they came more prepared. This was reflected in the quantitative findings as information

support (26.20%) and was found to be the most prevalent type of support used by newcomer women. They primarily sought information that helped them with their day-to-day lives, such as information regarding moving, thrifty and economical shopping, appliance repair, and legal issues. Information support provided these women with significant information that could help them solve their problems or ease the decision-making process.

Previous studies such as Rianne Dekker and Godfried Engbersen (2014) found that social media facilitate migration, providing “a rich source of insider knowledge on migration that is discrete and unofficial” (p. 401). It provides a further opportunity to exchange “streetwise” knowledge with people who have gone through the same process. Although the findings are aligned in part with previous studies that acknowledge the significance of social media pre-arrival, these results do not apply to refugee women who left their countries overnight, hurried, and frightened. Such women not only lacked access to social media platforms due to instability and their unique circumstances. A study by Christine Walsh, Jill Hanley, Nicole Ives, and Shawn Hordyk (2016) that interviewed newcomer women about their housing situation in Canada found that women who left their countries in haste usually had no chance to collect their necessary documents. In most cases, the home country’s poor infrastructure did not allow the women to retrieve their proof of work and education. The lack of access could also discourage them from inquiring about the new country, as they already knew they would not be able to make preparations before departure.

Second, the newcomer women resisted and coped with stress through many strategies that involved esteem support, such as maintaining a positive image on social media. When asked how social media might impact their well-being, participants answered mostly in the positive. They found social media to be a “stress buster,” a “de-stressor,” and a “positive distractor.” This attitude is also reflected in the quantitative results, as esteem support was used significantly by newcomer women on social media. As mentioned earlier, these women are socially isolated during the settlement period. They found social media helped them feel less lonely at a time when other sources of external support were unavailable. The newcomer women further engaged in watching and reading funny videos, jokes, and sarcasm on these social media pages to relax, lift their mood, and overcome stress. This strategy had a positive impact on their mood and eventually impacted their well-being in a positive way.

The results of this study build on the broader social support theory and its relevance to improving individuals’ well-being. When studying social support, previous studies mostly focused on external support (e.g., neighbourhood, family members, friends, etc.). However, they did not consider the opposite scenario, where social interaction is hard to maintain, especially for immigrants new to a country. Participants in this study confirmed that social media platforms facilitated external support by connecting them to community members and entertaining them in the time of loneliness.

Third, to maintain a neutral mood and protect themselves and their well-being from any online harassment, women avoided discussing politics and religion on social media. People can be harassed online for their political views. For example, a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2017a) showed that both Democrats and

Republicans face online harassment due to their political orientations. However, the Democrats are more likely than Republicans to report online harassment as a problem (Pew Research Center, 2017a). This indicates that being involved in political activities or taking sides can make social media users vulnerable to online harassment. In this study, the newcomer women were already a minority, and addressing social media issues they considered controversial would identify them as a “minority of the minority.”

Although self-censorship and self-restraint were widely reported to protect their well-being, the participants of this study raised their voice against racism, gender norms, discrimination, sexism, and other inequalities and injustices they faced. The University of Toronto’s Dalla Lana School of Public Health recently published an article introducing racism as the missing social determinant of health (Mitchell, 2017). According to this article, racism was established as one of the components that could undermine people’s well-being. In the current study, speaking out against racism provided the newcomer women with some level of comfort and boosted their confidence. This result suggests that being vocal rather than being silent and venting about issues that bother women can positively impact their well-being.

Fourth, newcomer women mostly used closed Facebook community groups to network. Network support provided them with a sense of connection and belonging through shared language, religion, and national origin. Such support promoted social integration that enabled these women to fit in and to assimilate into a particular group. This type of networking was found to be reliable, as some of the women in the network had been through similar experiences. The participants found online groups to be safe and protected. According to a study by Pew Research Center (2017b), minorities and women were most likely to face online harassment because of race, cultural orientation, or political views. To protect themselves and their identities, these women preferred to network in closed community groups. The quantitative results in terms of network support echo this finding. Network support was used by only 4 percent of data on either Facebook or Twitter, showing that network support rarely occurred on public pages.

Fifth, social media were not positive for all participants. Some of them profoundly feared engaging and sharing their opinions due to immigration proceedings and the political environment in which some communities (mainly Muslim) are politicized. Whether real or perceived, the fear was considered a risk to personal safety and a threat to immigration status. They feared government surveillance and being tracked by other federal agencies. Some social media content was found to be overwhelming, distracting, and disturbing due to violence and explicit racism. Such content could be a threat to these women’s well-being.

Conclusion

The scope of this study was limited and did not allow an in-depth exploration of how gender and race affect the discussion of politics and religion on social media. Furthermore, this study was not able to collect demographic information for social media users. Such information would have made for a richer analysis of participants’ comments and a more in-depth exploration of social support. That said, this study contributes to the theory by using an exploratory sequential mixed- method research design to study social support. The mixed-methods provided this study with a greater

breadth and depth in order to better understand the results. The results of this study provide new insights for health communication scholars and professionals to understand the use of social media for overall well-being. Scholars who are interested in gender studies can also explore how gender and race affect a discussion of politics and religion on social media.

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