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and Fraudulent Schemes in a Digital Space:
The Case Study of Russians from Kazakhstan Living in Czechia**
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IMMIGRANTS' INTEGRATION STRUGGLES WITH MISINFORMATION AND FRAUDULENT SCHEMES IN A DIGITAL SPACE: THE CASE STUDY OF RUSSIANS FROM KAZAKHSTAN LIVING IN CZECHIA

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focuses on immigrants' experiences with misinformation and fraudulent schemes encountered online, and on the implications for integration into a host country. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 immigrants of Russian ethnicity from Kazakhstan living in Czechia. The findings show that while many participants have an awareness of online procedural misinformation and fraudulent schemes, ability to critically assess and manage these risks varies. This awareness is often based on personal experiences or incidents within their social networks. Immigrants facing language barriers often rely on information shared within online communities, where the reliability of sources may be questionable. Fraudulent schemes in areas such as visa applications and employment, take advantage of vulnerabilities of immigrants. The findings also highlight the need for targeted information literacy programmes and policies to improve immigrants' skills in evaluating the reliability of information, reduce their vulnerability to fraud schemes, and improve integration outcomes.

KEYWORDS

information literacy • immigrant integration • misinformation • fraudulent schemes • digital media • social media • qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

Information literacy (IL), is broadly defined as ability to identify, locate, evaluate and effectively use information (UNESCO, 2023). These skills are critical for getting involved with various aspects of daily life, such as understanding legal obligations, accessing healthcare and securing employment. It is challenging to pursue the bureaucratic system when facing language barriers unfamiliar norms and different legal systems. The ability to manage new and complex information sources is a basic need. With the increasing reliance on digital technologies and online platforms for information sharing, the need for IL increases. In the context of integration, immigrants should not only be able to access information but also critically assess its reliability and relevance, particularly online.

This study focuses on misinformation and fraudulent schemes, both pose significant risks to immigrants with limited language proficiency who are more prone to relying on unofficial or unreliable sources. Misinformation is defined as false or misleading information shared without the intent to deceive (Chen et al., 2023) and differs from the disinformation where the intent to deceive is present (Tackling Online Disinformation, 2025). Fraud involves intentional deception for personal gain (Riehle, 2024). This vulnerability can have serious consequences, potentially threatening immigrants' integration progress. Immigrants may fall victim to fraud schemes that take advantage of their vulnerable legal status or make ill-informed decisions that negatively affect their employment, housing or health. To develop strategies to support immigrants' integration, it would be helpful to understand:

- (RQ1) *To what extent are immigrants familiar with the concepts of misinformation and fraudulent schemes in the context of their integration?*
- (RQ2) *What experiences do immigrants have with misinformation and fraud, and how do these experiences shape their knowledge about the topic?*

Social media and online communities play a significant role in immigrants' lives and their information-seeking behaviour (Lášticová, 2014; Ihejirika & Krtalić, 2021; Perrenoud et al., 2023). Social media platforms also offer valuable resources, including support networks and information sharing, which can assist immigrants in many ways during their integration process. Online platforms also support a sense of community and belonging (Nessi & Bailey, 2019; Madianou, 2019), which is important for immigrants who may be isolated from traditional networks such as family and friends. Nevertheless, these same platforms are also places of misinformation and fraudulent schemes (Vidros et al., 2016; Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020; Pe-

droza, 2022), which can cause confusion, fear and unfortunate outcomes when immigrants rely on inaccurate information.

The existing literature on IL and immigration largely focuses on the integration of immigrants in relation to accommodation, legislation and employment (Caidi & Allard, 2005; Lloyd et al., 2013; Qayyum et al., 2014; Mansour, 2018; Yeon & Lee, 2021). Immigrants must manage a wide range of information-related tasks, such as understanding legal documents, completing forms, and making informed decisions about healthcare, housing and finances. The presence of unreliable information and online fraud further complicates these tasks, highlighting the relevant role of IL in the integration process.

The present study aims to contribute to the existing body of research by studying the IL practices of immigrants, with a specific focus on how immigrants are aware of and able to avoid misinformation and fraudulent schemes. By examining how immigrants get involved with these challenges while they seek information in their daily lives, this research aims to show the difficulties they encounter and the strategies they use to ease them.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Immigration and information literacy in the digital space

Immigration refers to the movement of individuals from one country to another, often motivated by the pursuit of better economic opportunities, education, or family reunion (IOM, 2019). Upon migrating, immigrants undergo the process of integration, which involves becoming part of the social, economic, cultural and political fabric of the host society (Ager & Strang, 2008). Successful integration involves mutual adaptation, where both immigrants and the host society adapt to one another (Berry, 1997). Key aspects of integration include language proficiency, securing employment, accommodation and accessing basic services such as healthcare and education (Ager & Strang, 2008). IL is connected to this process.

Numerous studies have focused on the relationship between immigration, integration and IL (Shoham & Strauss, 2008; Lloyd et al., 2013; Qayyum et al., 2014; Mansour, 2018). According to Lloyd et al. (2013), IL is one of the key skills required for immigrants to successfully integrate into society and minimise their vulnerability. The integration process often involves overcoming language barriers, learning new cultural norms to feel included, and understanding the complexities of the host society, many of which are shared and discussed on social media platforms (Riegel, 2019; Vorobeva et al., 2022). It can be said that in today's digital age, the ability to critically engage with digital technologies has become a central component

of IL, as most information pathways now lead through digital media.

Regardless of their backgrounds, immigrants increasingly turn to digital platforms, including social media, government websites and online communities, as primary sources of information (Lášticová, 2014; Timmermans, 2018; Shuva, 2021; Ihejirika & Krtalić, 2021; Perrenoud et al., 2023). Platforms such as Facebook, Telegram and WhatsApp enable immigrants to maintain connections with their home countries while building social networks in the host country (Williams Veazey, 2022). These platforms are used not only for getting information and meeting basic needs but also for building social understanding, sharing experiences, obtaining support, and creating a sense of community (Nessi & Bailey, 2019; Madianou, 2019; Zaher, 2020).

Nevertheless, the use of social media also exposes immigrants to challenges such as the spread of misinformation (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020), which can complicate the integration process and potentially have negative impacts on their well-being. Misinformation regarding immigration legislation or healthcare can lead to poor decision-making and even legal issues. Fraud also poses a significant threat in the digital space, as for vulnerable populations such as immigrants (Madden, 2017). Fraudsters often take advantage immigrants by offering deceptive employment opportunities (Vidros et al., 2016), housing or legal assistance, taking advantage of their unfamiliarity with local systems and their urgent need for reliable information and services (Pedroza, 2022). IL can be initial tool in helping immigrants recognise the warning signs of fraudulent schemes, such as unrealistic promises or demands for upfront payments. By developing IL skills, immigrants can critically evaluate the credibility of sources, cross-reference information, and avoid falling victim to these types of schemes. As in the case of migrants fleeing from Central America to the United States where experiences of misinformation, and fraudulent schemes (in addition with disinformation) on social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp were high. Many migrants fell victim to schemes and false information with blurry line of purposefully or not purposefully deceiving (TTP, 2022).

To conclude, IL is an important skill that can improve integration of immigrants into their host countries. Ability to effectively search for, critically evaluate and use information to their advantage can reduce their vulnerability. Distinguishing misinformation and fraudulent schemes can help immigrants avoid negative experiences that could complicate their long-term integration.

By analysing immigrants' awareness of misinformation and fraud in the context of Czechia, the study aims to identify potential knowledge gaps. Examining their personal experiences with misinformation and fraud will

provide insight into how these encounters affect their ability to recognise and respond to deceptive practices in the future.

1.2. Local systematic bureaucracy: The Czech case

Immigrants seeking to reside in Czechia must obtain government approval for their residence. This can be done by applying for a permit, which requires submitting the necessary documentation. Permits vary in purpose and duration. Preparing the documentation can be a complex process, as documents may need translation, multiple levels of verification, and other formalities.

The issuance of residence permits falls under the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) and its designated Department of Asylum and Migration Policy (DAMP, in Czech Oddělení azylové a migrační politiky) which operates The Information Portal for Foreigners (in Czech Informační portal pro cizince).¹ This portal is available in Czech, English and Ukrainian, providing information on visa, forms, required documents, legal obligations etc. The portal is funded by the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and MoI to improve the quality of information provided for immigrants from non-EU countries. While the multilingual translations help reduce barriers, language nuances, legal terminology and cultural differences can still create obstacles for the immigrants. In addition, immigrants with decreased information or digital literacy skills may face challenges using these platforms and understanding the legal terminology.

When facing the difficulties with obtaining permits or other required documentation, immigrants can approach various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Czechia that assist with integration. Key NGOs include the Integration Centre Prague (in Czech *Integrační centrum Praha*), which offers counselling, language courses, and cultural events, and the Counselling Centre for Integration (in Czech *Poradna pro Integraci*), which provides legal, psychological, and social support. Other notable NGOs include InBáze and the Centre for Integration of Foreigners (in Czech *Centrum pro integraci cizinců*), which offer counselling, language classes, and community programmes.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative approach to investigate the experiences and perceptions of 11 Russian-speaking immigrants in Czechia, regarding their encounters with misinformation, fraudulent schemes and challenges in accessing information. The primary criterion for participation in the

1 The Information Portal for Foreigners here <https://ipc.gov.cz/en/visa-and-residence-permit-types/>, accessed on March 28, 2025.

research interviews was that individuals be adult immigrants of Russian ethnicity, originally from Kazakhstan and currently residing in Czechia. Participants were approached through a combination of social media platforms, the researcher's personal contacts, and the snowball sampling method, specifically targeting Russian-speaking communities in Czechia. The author would like to acknowledge a possible bias, since she is also an immigrant. Even though during the interview, this fact helped to get the rapport with participants, it might have influenced the interpretation of the experiences. However, the author is not aware of anything in particular, that might have been unconsciously misinterpreted due to this bias. In addition, since she has been feeling integrated for decades, she does not have personal experiences with misinformation and fraud schemes regarding the integration process or is not aware of them.

Given the sensitive nature of the topics under investigation, i.e., integration, misinformation, and fraud, recruiting participants from this demographic posed a challenge with regard to ensuring anonymity. The confidentiality of participants was rigorously maintained through data anonymisation, which was emphasised during the recruitment process and repeated before each interview. Prior to conducting the interviews, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point were discussed. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns at any stage before or during the interview. Participants were also reminded throughout the interview that they were not obliged to answer specific questions and could terminate their participation at any time. After the interview, the researcher shared her contact information with the participants and reminded them to reach out if needed.

Interviews were conducted with 11 participants (4 males and 7 females, aged 26–43) residing in Prague, Central Bohemia region and Hradec Kralove Region (Table 1), economically saturated regions in Czechia. Most of whom held higher education qualifications and all the participants were employed. Almost a half of participants have moved to Czechia mostly for education purposes. After their studies were completed, they chose to stay and integrate to the local society. Others have moved due to better living conditions. A semi-structured interview guide, developed by the researcher, consisted of 10 core questions and explored participants' encounters with misinformation, strategies for verifying information, experiences with fraud, and overall access to information. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility, enabling participants to elaborate on their responses and providing the researcher the opportunity to ask additional questions if necessary (Puchta and Potter, 2004).

Table 1: The overview of details about participants. Source: Author

Code	Age	Gender	Education	Region	Length of stay
P1	29	Male	Higher	Central Bohemia	5 years
P2	28	Male	Higher	Hradec Kralove	11 years
P3	41	Female	unknown	Prague	15 years
P4	43	Female	Higher	Prague	3 years
P5	31	Male	Higher	Prague	13 years
P6	28	Female	Higher	Prague	9 years
P7	26	Female	Higher	Prague	10 years
P8	35	Female	Higher	Prague	16 years
P9	35	Female	Higher	Prague	5 years
P10	36	Male	Higher	Prague	10 years
P11	33	Female	Higher	Prague	5 years

Interviews were conducted from April to May 2023, most of them in person, with two interviews held online via the Zoom platform to suit participants' preferences. Interviews of 30 to 45 minutes long were recorded using either a dictaphone or a mobile phone, after which the recordings were transcribed and then deleted. To ensure anonymity, participants were assigned unique codes during the transcription and analysis phases of the study.

An inductive approach was applied to data analysis, enabling the researcher to capture and interpret participants' experiences and knowledge without imposing preconceived frameworks. During the data analysis process, the researcher reviewed the interview transcripts and assigned codes to the text. MAXQDA software was used for the coding and analysis, but without the use of AI features. Thematic analysis was employed to group codes that were similar in relation to specific facts, approaches or participant experiences. Themes were identified by analysing relationships between the codes and organising them into broader categories. These categories were then further refined into overarching themes that summarised the key findings of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3. FINDINGS

Table 2 presents the overview of categories with example quotes that were further used to identify themes, which follow in subchapters below.

Table 2: The overview of categories with example quotes leading to themes. Source: Author

Category	Example Quotes
What is misinformation/ disinformation	"Rumours or unreliable information" (P7); "Information that does not align with reality" (P8).

Types of frauds	"You've been rejected... and there's no way for you to verify it" (P9); "Send the deposit here... then the person disappeared" (P7).
Personal experiences with fraud or misinforming content	"I sent about 14,000 crowns, and then the person disappeared" (P7).
Noticing misinformation/fraud online	"Social media administrators... often issue warnings or ban content identified as misinformation" (P4).
Fact-checking	"I always try to fact-check and find the source" (P4); "You can access the official page... and see exactly what they have posted" (P4).
Spoken word	"Someone may ask a question about paperwork... others begin to offer advice based on their experiences" (P1).
How to avoid being scammed	"It's an issue I could never trust anyone else to handle" (P7).
Language limitations	"They won't explain anything to you in any language—often they don't even want to speak English with you" (P9).
Access to education/information	"There was no information at all on the Internet at the time" (P3); "What I mostly need is nuanced and minor, and such information isn't usually translated" (P1).
The willingness to share knowledge	"I started my own blog and began to publish a lot of things" (P3).
Information needed unavailable/unreachable	"Newcomers are more likely to use services that are fraudulent because of a lack of information" (P1).

3.1. Level of awareness and personal experiences

What is misinformation and how does it spread?

Based on the interviews, participants have a high level of awareness regarding misinformation, with many expressing familiarities with the distinction between misinformation and disinformation. While the participants' experiences and understanding of misinformation and fraudulent schemes varied, certain common themes emerged across the data.

Many participants provided their own definitions of misinformation and fraudulent schemes. For example, Participant 7 (P7) described misinformation as “rumours or unreliable information”, while P8 referred to it as “information that does not align with reality”. Despite their awareness, participants often expressed uncertainty about how to identify misinformation, reflecting a broader sense of ambiguity when receiving information: “I don't know how to recognise if they're doing it on purpose or if they really think that” (P11).

Two main forms of misinformation emerged from the analysis of participant responses. The first form was linked to cultural and national contexts, particularly among Russian-speaking immigrants from Russia or Kazakhstan who migrated to Czechia with preconceived views and information that they believed to be accurate, even when it was not. As P8 noted, in their home countries “the dissemination of accurate information can be

somewhat lacking. These individuals arrive in their new environments carrying the false information they've acquired".

The second form of misinformation involved individuals who, while attempting to help others, spread unverified or outdated information. P1 remarked: "that's not necessarily helpful because each case may be different; it's best to refer to the official website for accurate information. Misinformation like this is rampant". The risk of misinformation was further highlighted by those who offer advice based on personal experiences, which may inadvertently mislead others. P1 elaborated on this issue, explaining that "especially in chat groups or forums, someone may ask a question about a problem, maybe related to paperwork, and others begin to offer advice based on their experiences". A similar concern was raised by P7 in relation to visa issues, where shared information that is outdated could be harmful, even if unintentionally.

Participants emphasised the importance of fact-checking in dealing with critical information that lacked reliable sources: "I always try to fact-check and find the source. [...] Misinformation should not be propagated. Even if I come across information that I doubt, if there's a provided source, I will search for it in English or Czech and verify it" (P4).

Participants noted that people often refer to media outlets or claim that certain information is sourced from that outlet. P4 observed that "it's always easy to verify. We live in an amazing time where you can access the official page of any publisher and see exactly what they have posted". P4 also mentioned that the social media administrators in the groups she visits often issue warnings or ban content identified as misinformation.

Caution regarding fraudulent schemes

Participants demonstrated a high awareness of fraudulent schemes operating in Czechia, often through the negative experiences encountered either personally or the experiences of others. This awareness fostered a sense of caution in dealing with individuals or organisations offering services related to visas, accommodation, education, or other immigration-related matters. Several participants recounted direct encounters with such schemes. One type of fraudulent scheme occurs before migration, promising guaranteed admission to educational institutions or the assurance of a work visa, in exchange for an advance payment. P9 explained:

"In Kazakhstan, they create fraudulent websites that collect all your documents and apply for visas on your behalf, charging you an extra 2000 to 3000 euros, a significant amount, but they don't even send your documents. And then, for example, they would say, 'You've been rejected'. And there's no way for you to verify it".

In such cases, there is often a lack of proper documentation or contractual guarantees. Another fraudulent scheme involves false promises of guaranteed employment in the destination country, coupled with assurances of a work visa. Participants described how, upon arrival, they discovered that the alleged employer had no knowledge of their hiring, leaving them stranded without the promised job. P9 recounted: “You pay, and when you arrive at your position, they say, ‘No! We haven’t hired you.’ And you’re just left here, with no money, because you gave it all to someone, all your money. I mean, with the documents, but you just have to go back, and you’ve lost significant amounts of money. Because they gave you a Schengen visa, but not a proper work visa”.

Another commonly mentioned scheme involves fraudulent services offering guaranteed visa extensions, which, in reality, cannot be guaranteed; visa extension decisions are made solely by the Ministry of the Interior’s Department of Asylum and Migration Policy, so, any service claiming to guarantee such an extension is inherently deceptive.

Fraudsters also target potential clients through language schools and lure young people from Russian-speaking countries to enrol in language courses in Czechia before they start their studies at higher education institutions. These students are misled that Czech is an easy language to learn.

P5 shared his experience: “These schools, who told me that Czech is very easy, almost like Russian, just with the Latin alphabet. When I arrived here, I was shocked. That’s why I had a kind of... how should I say it, a kind of frustration for the first six months because I expected one thing and got another” (P5). This mismatch between expectations and reality can complicate the integration process by forcing students to face unexpected linguistic and cultural barriers.

Another fraudulent practice involves parents being promised guaranteed admission for their children into higher education institutions in exchange for (usually) large sums of money. P1 remarked on this practice: “It’s simply impossible to offer such a guarantee. I’ve even seen a medical appraisal offering a guarantee of passing the exam”.

Employers and accommodation fraud in Czechia have been a topic of concern among participants, for example in instances of unfair wages or financial deceit. In these cases, seeking accurate information proved to be a valuable tool for avoiding inadequate pay. P4 explained: “When they start claiming that everyone does it, I say no. I live here, I’m actively seeking employment, and I know exactly the average hourly wage and working conditions”. Another issue highlighted by participants is the practice of charging for services that should be free, such as changing employ-

ment. This can give the misleading impression that all basic procedures in Czechia require payment, which can be difficult to pay and discourages immigrants from integrating further into society. P1 noted that “the individual, misled, then believes that they need to pay a significant amount for these basic services. This could lead to a negative experience as they get the impression that everything costs quite a bit, even something as fundamental as changing jobs or place of residence”.

Being defrauded often serves as a harsh learning experience. One participant shared a negative encounter in which she lost money on a deposit for an apartment rental. Securing accommodation without meeting the owner or viewing the property can be risky and is a common type of fraud that affects not only newly arrived immigrants but also long-term residents. In this case, the participant believed her age played a role in her vulnerability. She recounted: “I found an apartment, and it was advertised as ‘Here I am abroad, and this is my daughter’s apartment, which I bought. She has already finished school, everything is fine, and I’m renting it out, but I can’t come. You can rent it remotely. Send the deposit here.’ Well, I was 18 years old, and I thought, ‘I can handle this on my own.’ And that’s how it ended up. I sent about 14,000 crowns, and then the person disappeared” (P7).

3.2. Access to information and avoidance strategies

Access to accurate information and the ability to critically evaluate it are of great importance for immigrants when managing a new environment. Nevertheless, they encounter a language barrier which often leads them to rely on information found online, mainly through social media and other immigrants’ personal experiences. This reliance can result in harmful situations such as dependency on unreliable sources or fall victim to fraudulent actors.

Information literacy and critical thinking

Participants recognised that a lack of IL and critical thinking skills can make individuals vulnerable to negative experiences such as dependency. P4 noted that “a person can find themselves in a dependent or unpleasant situation, and it’s because not everyone has access to proper education or critical thinking. Yes, individuals can end up in unpleasant situations where they lose their documents, money, or simply waste their time”.

Several participants viewed IL as an important asset. P10 stated: “One of the best qualities is to be able to distinguish good information from bad information. Because there’s a huge flow of information right now, and you just have to be able to filter it out”. Similarly, P5 reflected on the impor-

tance of critical thinking: “I’ve had enough critical thinking so far not to get caught up in certain things”.

Participants also discussed strategies for avoiding negative situations and fraudulent schemes. Participant 3, for example, shared a positive experience with InBáze, an organisation that supports immigrants. Initially cautious, she found that the organisation provided genuine assistance: “They certainly helped me, especially with qualification courses that they paid for, like marketing courses. But it was still necessary to find out if they really helped, if it wasn’t just words”. This cautious approach also helped P3 avoid fraudsters offering to renew her and her spouse’s visas. She also described the Internet and social media, despite being sources of misinformation, as useful tools for preventing fraudulent schemes since immigrant social media groups help users warn each other about suspicious offers. However, for sensitive matters such as visas, all the participants remained highly cautious. For example, P7 stated: “For me, the visa issue was always a top priority. If it was possible to apply for a visa in three months, I applied for it. I had all the necessary documents in order. [...] It’s an issue I could never trust anyone else to handle. But it paid off for me”. One participant also shared an example of a friend who was deported because of visa issues, and consequently, she handled her own visa-related documentation with care.

Despite the availability of information on social media, some participants expressed frustration with the repetition of questions in online groups, suggesting that many immigrants struggle to search for existing information. P1 observed: “They keep posting the same questions and receiving the same answers. I suppose this could be due to an inability to navigate and search for information”. He also emphasised the challenges faced by newcomers to the system, who, because of a lack of information, are more likely to use services that are fraudulent.

Interpersonal connectivity and language barriers

Information sharing between immigrants in social media groups fosters a sense of community, as many face difficulties accessing relevant information in their native language. Participants indicated that their proficiency in the local language is often insufficient to manage legal documents, leading them to seek advice from fellow immigrants online. P1 explained: “What I mostly need is often nuanced and minor, and such information isn’t usually translated”.

In response to these challenges, some immigrants take steps to fill the information gap. For example, P3 started a blog to provide guidance on topics such as maternity leave and financial aid: “I can tell you that when I moved,

there was no information at all on the Internet at the time. [...] I started my own blog and began to publish a lot of things. [...] I wrote about how they work, the system, social benefits and how to get them. I also wrote about living in Prague on a minimum budget". Her blog, written in her native language, has been well-received by other immigrants, as evidenced by the positive feedback she receives by email.

Many participants expressed frustration with the limited language support provided by state institutions. P9 noted: "They won't explain anything to you in any language—often they don't even want to speak English with you". This language barrier extends to work contracts, which are typically written in the local language, and immigrants lack the language proficiency to understand the terms. P4 emphasised the importance of not rushing into signing documents: "Whenever I'm asked to sign any document, I always say, 'There's no need to rush. Translate it into a language you understand'".

DISCUSSION

The findings from the study emphasise the importance of IL skills for immigrants when dealing with basic integration needs in the digital space. As mentioned in the Introduction, this study focuses on two research questions:

- (RQ1) *To what extent are immigrants familiar with the concepts of misinformation and fraudulent schemes in the context of their integration?*
- (RQ2) *What experiences do immigrants have with misinformation and fraud, and how do these experiences shape their knowledge about the topic?*

The participants showed a high level of familiarity with the concepts of misinformation and fraudulent schemes. They also experience challenges in recognising and avoiding them. However, it is important to note that the selection of participants was not geographically diverse. The majority were based in the capital city, with only two individuals coming from other regions.

Regarding their experiences, in some cases, participants fell victim to frauds when looking for accommodation or during the process to obtain visa; or they know about the cases of other victims. Those participants who fell victim were usually those of younger age or it happened when they were younger. These experiences and knowledge made them more cautious in the future when looking for the information. This agrees with the theoretical framework which suggests that IL is of a great importance for immigrants (Shoham & Strauss, 2008; Lloyd et al., 2013; Qayyum et al.,

2014; Mansour, 2018) when encountering information which is important yet often unreliable or unsuitable to their needs as shown in report of the TPP (2022) survey on the case of immigrants fleeing from Central America to the United States.

The study confirmed a present issue with the language barriers which is a common struggle in the case of immigrants (Watkins et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2019). Immigrants cannot rely on official sources because of language barriers, leading them to seek information from various, often unreliable, sources since language proficiency skills significantly affected the participants' abilities to access and critically evaluate information from official sources such as government websites. Many immigrants lack the necessary language skills to effectively know and use these official channels, which are often among the most reliable sources of information. As a result, immigrants frequently rely on information shared in their native languages within their online communities, which function as informal support systems (Williams Veazey, 2022). The reliance on other immigrants for information, while well-intentioned, can be problematic when the advice provided is outdated or incorrect, as in matters involving legal or bureaucratic processes. Incorrect information can lead to severe consequences, such as losing visa permissions. This highlights the social media as both a valuable resource and a potential source of misinformation (Ihejirika & Krtalić, 2021; Perrenoud et al., 2023; Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020; Pedroza, 2022). The participants' experiences emphasise the importance of IL in evaluating the quality and accuracy of information shared on these platforms, where distinguishing between reliable advice and misinformation can be difficult.

Fraudulent schemes were also identified as a significant issue affecting immigrants, in areas such as visa applications, employment and accommodation. The participants were aware of various types of fraud, both before and after their arrival in the host country, which often involved promises of guaranteed outcomes in exchange for money. These fraudulent schemes take advantage of immigrants' urgent need for reliable information and services, as well as their unfamiliarity with local systems. This vulnerability arises from immigrants' limited knowledge of the host country's processes, making them targets for fraudsters. These findings support the notion that vulnerable populations such as immigrants are often targeted by fraudsters in digital spaces (Madden, 2017). The findings are in consensus with the claim that immigrants with knowledge and skills to identify and avoid scams are more likely to avoid falling victim to fraud which otherwise can lead to significant setbacks in their integration, affecting basic needs such as visas, employment and housing.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that while participants were aware of misinformation and fraudulent schemes, many still found it difficult to recognise or avoid them, mostly during the early phases of their settlement. Experiences with fraud—such as in securing housing or applying for visas—were often mentioned as moments that led to greater caution and awareness over time. Language barriers were a frequent issue, making it harder to use official sources and encouraging reliance on advice shared within social media groups or informal networks. These sources, while often helpful, also carried the risk of spreading incorrect or misleading information, especially in situations where accurate understanding is necessary. Similar patterns have been observed elsewhere; for instance, a survey conducted by the Tech Transparency Project (TTP, 2022) among migrants from Central America to the United States found widespread use of platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp where respondents often encountered false claims and deceptive content in the process of migration, which brought difficulties to it.

This study has certain limitations in terms of sample size, cultural and social contexts and the generalisability of its findings to the broader immigrant population. Nevertheless, the results indicate that targeted policy interventions and practices could be beneficial to immigrants and their IL. For example, educational programmes and workshops designed to improve IL in immigrants concerning their interactions on digital platforms with misinformation and fraudulent schemes, could help prevent potential abuse by fraudsters and ease the negative impact on the integration process caused by misinformation. Some countries have begun addressing these issues through adding IL educational components to courses for immigrants. In Canada, the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has funded the *Digital and Media Literacy Training* organised by the COSTI Immigrant Services² (community-based multicultural agency). In Czechia, however, such initiatives remain limited. While there are basic orientation services and courses, such as the Adaptation and Integration Course, available to newcomers, structured IL education is not yet a consistent part of integration policy.

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2 More information available at https://www.costi.org/programs/program_details.php?sid=42&pid=9&id=242, accessed on March 29, 2025.

integration and media use, using mainly qualitative approaches with observation, in-depth interviews and focus groups for data collection.

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