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CALRG presentation: full paper

Minoritised populations' informal learning behaviours in response to the challenges of accessing online services

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Protecting Minority Ethnic Communities Online (PRIME) project is a UKRI-funded transdisciplinary, cross-sectoral, and cross-institutional project. It involves Cranfield University, Universities of Glasgow and York, The Open University and four community organisations, led by Heriot-Watt University. Launched in 2022, the 36-month project has sought to understand the minority ethnic (ME) communities' experiences of online services in health, energy and social housing and how online harm can be mitigated for these communities.

Part of what we at the OU wanted to find out was the informal learning taking place when people attempt to access the online services. Early on in the project were a series of interviews carried out with 100 ME participants from several ethnic backgrounds including Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Black Caribbean and Black African. From analysis of the interviews, seven different practices were apparent:

1. Learning through trial and error
2. Learning by accessing online information/advice
3. Learning through conversation
4. Online informal learning
5. Supporting others' learning/information-seeking
6. Generational differences in learning
7. Learning from family members and others

These behaviours are clearly shown in the dialogic analysis of the interviews. Practice 1, for example, tells of a woman who operates her phone and WhatsApp, but then goes to her son if she experiences any problems (practices 5-7). Practice 2 tells of people seeking advice through Facebook, Uswitch, the NHS website and the Google translation website.

Practice 3 tells of individuals who find it quicker to talk to service representatives, rather than filling in a long online form. Practice 4 tells of persons accessing the Internet to learn more about speaking English, and for other activities such as to learn more about Buddhism and join in an antenatal class. Practices 5-7 show the value of having others, particularly family, to help with the problem at hand.

What is clear is that a number of educational methods are used by ME people to deal with online access challenges in energy, health and social housing. Following extensive analysis, we hope to write a journal paper from these experiences.