INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE:
DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR STUDENTS GO TO FOR INFORMATION?

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ABSTRACT

With vast numbers of international students entering Australia, educational institutions and other international student service providers (including levels of government and community groups), often encounter challenges when disseminating relevant and timely information to these students. Often these challenges are compounded by many studies in the past that have focused on country of origin as a way to differentiate international students from each other. This research was born out of a need to find new, creative and effective ways of disseminating information to international students that go beyond traditional classifications. Therefore, this study argued that it is more useful to look at the sources of information from the perspective of different social network groupings than from the country of origin perspective. This is because international students are complex individuals with differing identities and information needs that are not solely located in the country/region they are born in. In order to uncover the different identities which students embrace, this research conducted focus groups to understand the social networks students belong to and to discern if there are patterns in the ways different social groups access information while in Australia. Students in the focus groups were drawn from postgraduate, undergraduate levels of study, as well as from TAFE and private colleges. The results indicate that classifying students according to the patterns of their social networks is more useful than grouping students to nationality when considering where students get information pre-arrival and during their time in Australia.

INTRODUCTION

Disseminating crucial information to international students pre-arrival and while they are in Australia has been a challenge since Australia receives large numbers of international students. Challenges range from providing relevant information in a timely manner, understanding sources of information that students rely on, and more recently, the use of social media in facilitating information exchange amongst international student communities (e.g. Yi 2007; Andrade 2006). At various levels, key service providers and governments have
tried to produce information portals specific to international students in the hope that they find these sites useful. Yet, there is very traffic or interest in these portals. Universities are also aware that it is a challenge to get students to keep in touch with them and to get students to seek out information even within University websites.

Engaging with future students by “Implementing an effective communication and media strategy” is a primary concern of the Australian government (Evans and Weddell 2010). Here the “development of communication tools for [the] Austrade network to facilitate consistent messaging” and to “work with the sector in Australia to develop relevant key messages, case studies and good news stories” are emphasised. This message has not been lost to international education providers (Young and McPharlin 2011) who are becoming aware of the impact current communication platforms such as social media has on student information access. Hence several initiatives have been undertaken to address the quality of the information agents provide to prospective international students. Initiatives by PIER, ISANA International Education Association and Victorian TAFE International (Dunstan, Hartridge and Chong 2011) reveal similar concerns and strategies to enhance the quality of information available through agents.

These challenges are compounded by the lack of understanding about how international students seek out information and how they use information. More importantly, some recent research shows that international students display different information seeking behaviour depending on the type of information they seek, where the students are from and the extent to which they might or might not integrate with Australian communities (Kashima and Loh 2006; Sakurai, McCall-Wolf and Kashima 2010). Social ties have been found to have a significant influence on information seeking behaviour (Steffes and Burgee 2009).

This information seeking behaviour may be based on international student social identities, and networks. International students may not have a singular national home-based identity or social networks exclusively connected to the home nation. Because of their transnational migration many international students have multiple identities and identity based social networks. These identities are based not solely on the place of their birth but on heritage connected to the broad categories of race, ethnic culture, national culture and religion, as well as to other categories such as gender and general interests such as hobbies. Moreover, because international students in Australia often have the intention of successfully converting their residential status to permanent, they have a vested interest in fostering stronger links to their adopted nation. Emerging studies (e.g., Sawir 2008, Kashima and Loh 2006) are showing that international students in Australia create identities and of course social networks that are tied to the adopted nation while studying and thus find the transition back to the homeland challenging.

This project therefore seeks to map out the social networks of international students as foundations to improving communication by asking the following questions:

1. What patterns might be discerned in the way international students access pre-arrival and academic information?
2. What impacts do social roles/networks have on how/where international students access this information?

BACKGROUND

The literature on international education is riddled with research on the difficulty of running effective orientation and transition programs for international students, in terms of providing information and social links effectively to assist students with their transition and adjustment to their new environment (Rhoden and Boin 2004). Yet, nearly all institutions that attract international students provide information on everyday living. However, this information is not well accessed by the students because of the lack of understanding on how international students search, access, use, rely on or share information. There has been much industry...
driven research into where international students get their information on institutions prior to coming to Australia, though much of this does not necessarily focus on online information (for eg., see Lawrence and Adams 2011). There has also been some research on the information needs of international students which is related to their academic needs, in particular, their use of library systems (e.g. Mehra and Bilal 2007; Y 2007; Liao, Finn, and Lu 2007; Safahieh and Singh 2006; Hughes 2005). However, there is no in depth research on how international students access information online, especially since they are not living in their home country. This raises questions around how international students use the Internet to gain the information they need.

Students are “global citizens” (Young and McPharlin 2011) and there are assumptions that the students generations who born 1980 onwards has been characterised as ‘digital natives’ (Bennett, Maton, and Kervin 2008) because of their familiarity with and reliance on modern social technologies, particularly that is transmitted over the internet and therefore they are more internet savvy (e.g. Pattingale and Silkstone 2011). As a result of their familiarity and experiences with technologies they are more likely to look for and readily find information online. However, there is literature that shows that internet savvy students are limited in their information seeking behaviour (e.g. Kennedy and Judd 2011; Judd and Kennedy 2011; Margaryan, Littlejohn and Vojt 2011) and have been shown to possess a diverse range of technology skills and preferences (Margaryan et al. 2011; Kennedy et al. 2010; Nagler and Ebner 2009; Kennedy et al. 2008) as well. For example, Margaryan et al. (2011) found that students use few established technologies and their use of collaborative knowledge creation tools, virtual worlds, and social networking sites was low. Kennedy et al. (2008) surveyed 2120 undergraduate students to examine what technologies tools were used by students and how frequently. They found that there is a lack of homogeneity in technology use, particularly when moving beyond established technologies such as mobile phones and email. Nagler and Ebner (2009) surveyed 821 first year undergraduate students and found that students use Wikipedia, YouTube and social networking sites more than social bookmarking, photo sharing and microblogging. Nagler and Ebner (2009) surveyed 821 first year undergraduate students and found that students use Wikipedia, YouTube and social networking sites more than social bookmarking, photo sharing and microblogging. Therefore, while the terms digital natives is used both in practice and in the literature, there are clear indications that this generation is not a homogeneous group in terms of both their use of digital resources and online social culture.

In addition, there are also various factors that affect the information behaviour of international students such as language (Onwuegbuzie and Jiao 1997; Liu and Redfern 1997; Bilal 1989), educational level (Y 2007), cultural background (Liao et al. 2007; Liu and Redfern 1997), and length of stay in the host country (Liu and Redfern 1997), which may influence the way international students access information online. Therefore, empirical research is needed to improve our understanding of the information seeking behaviour of international students particularly what social technologies they use and how they use them.

More recently, the call for integration of international students with the wider community has been intensified (Marginson 2010). The Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) strategy on International Education (2010) points to the need for better quality information to be provided to students. However, information needs to be communicated in ways that appeal to the needs of students and their social networks in a timely manner and using platforms that they can identify with. At the same time, there has been evidence that international students do not necessarily refer to host country sources of information or even belong to host country social networks, because of a range of social issues (Andrade 2006). Increasing work in the broader area of migrants and the media such as Hjorth and Arnold (2011) have shown that digital technology allows migrants to remain connected to their home cultures and societies by creating virtual networks and by providing direct communication with friends and family both residing in the homeland and elsewhere. Rising improvements in communication technologies that take the form of digital technologies (e.g. smart phones, skype, social
media and email) in other words, create a sense of belonging and connectivity in imagined spaces (Leong 2011; Evers and Goggin 2011).

On the other hand, individual and group identities, have become increasingly difficult and challenging to define, specify and even recognise because of globalisation through the circulation of people, ideas and cultures which are facilitated by the spread of communication and media technologies. Appadurai (1996) correctly notes that the global cultural flows and circulation of people, finances, technologies, media and ideas have created new collectives and thus identities. However, these new collectives are unique as they become what Anderson (1983) calls *imagined communities* which exist outside their geographical and national boundaries. However, while Anderson specifically looked at how communities maintained their national and cultural identities outside their homelands, his template allows us to build upon his theory of the imagined community in order to unpack the complex identities which are evolving as part of the globalisation process.

The work of Anderson (1983) and others such as Hall (1996), Jamerson (1991), Chow (1993), Bhabha (1994) and Ang (1985, 2001) on society and culture in many ways attempt to make sense of the subject of identity by investigating and unpacking collectives, their lifestyles and their products which include art, literature, architecture and the media. The media, in particular, has become an expanding cottage industry within the academy with branches examining different forms (entertainment, news and social media) and platforms which can be corporeal (eg. films screened in cinemas, television programs, dvds, memory sticks) and virtual. The unprecedented rise of direct user engagement with media such as comments on news and forum online sites, has provided consumers with broadcasting power that has never been seen before. These researchers and others like them have been attempting to make sense, for instance, of the social and cultural identities of different collectives that are defined by, become part of and have emerged from (trans)national boundaries. Such work thus provides valuable research that uncovers the role played by (shifting) identity(ies) in questions concerning individual and group determinants and identifiers of belonging, identification, (self) description and representation.

So while international students may be transient for now, their individual identities and social networks exist for future purpose and are possibly intrinsically linked to the adopted nation yet still connected to identities and social networks of past and ongoing experiences. Such a complex situation enables a multitude of bridges that connect the international student as transient migrant to adopted nation, homeland and possibly beyond in various ways (race, ethnic culture, national culture, religion, gender and general interests).

As a result, international students’ perceived self-identity and the social networks they belong to might have a direct impact on how and where they access information, how and where they share their information and how this might impact on their decision making. Therefore, this project extends these initial studies and will provide a clearer understanding of how self-perceived social networks and identities might have an impact on where students go to for information, how they might use the information and where and how they might share that information.

In sum, the interconnected concepts of the evolving identities of international students and the diversity of their online behaviours means that further research is important for understanding where international students are getting their information from, how they use and share that information and how it may impact on their decision making.

**METHODOLOGY**

This paper aims to explore how different groups of international students might access information. The paper also aims to study the relationship between international students’ self-perceived identity/social roles and social networks, in order to understand the patterns of communication of different groups of students.
Seven focus groups were conducted in total. An eighth focus group that was conducted by the City of Melbourne (CoM) researcher independently and the data was compared with that of the seven main groups. The details of the focus groups are indicated in Table 1. The duration of the focus groups ranged from 70 minutes to 120 minutes, depending on the size and willingness of respondents to go into more depth. As indicated in Table 1, the sample included students from a range of countries and across different educational levels (from vocational education and training (VET) to postgraduate studies (coursework and research higher degree). Notably, the main project did not manage to recruit any students from India for the focus group interviews while the CoM focus group did manage to recruit one Indian student only. In addition, there were more women who responded to the project than men.

**Table 1: Focus Group Participants' Background**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Discipline Areas</th>
<th>Countries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 1</td>
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<td>M (2)</td>
<td>Commerce (4)</td>
<td>China (2), South Korea (1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F (3)</td>
<td>English (1)</td>
<td>Vietnam (1), Hong Kong (1)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>M (2)</td>
<td>Commerce (1)</td>
<td>Iran (1)</td>
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<td>China (1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Architecture (1)</td>
<td>Singapore (1)</td>
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<td>Focus Group 3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Public Health (2)</td>
<td>Japan (1), USA (1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F (5)</td>
<td>Medicine (1)</td>
<td>Brazil (1)</td>
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<td>Sri Lanka (1)</td>
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<td>Art (1)</td>
<td>Bangladesh (1)</td>
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<td>Vietnam (1)</td>
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<td>Commerce (2)</td>
<td>Indonesia (2)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>F (4)</td>
<td>Engineering (2)</td>
<td>Hong Kong (2)</td>
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<td>Brunei (1)</td>
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<td>Chile (2), China (1)</td>
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<td>Turkey (1)</td>
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<td>Business (2)</td>
<td>Brazil (1), China (1)</td>
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<td>Turkey (2)</td>
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<td>(CoM) FG</td>
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<td>F (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>China (1)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>India (1)</td>
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**THE FINDINGS**

From the focus groups, it is evident that students could be classified into a number of broad groupings based on the demographic make up of their social networks. Four groups were clearly distinct from each other. These were:

**Students whose social networks are dominated by international students from their home country (SNHC)**

This group of students reported that they socialised, studied with and often lived with other international students from their home country. Pre-dominantly, they would speak their home language. This group included students from Vietnam, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, Chile and Colombia. Students in this group played different roles (e.g. leader, follower) in their different social circles. The role to be a leader or follower depends on the type of the group or the task/activity that needs to be done. For example, with study groups
they tend to be leaders [For me it depends on different group…in my club because of my position, so I'll be definitely a leader. But if like just hang out with friends… I'll just follow them; it's not really about organiser and a follower, If like I want to organise a big dinner that everybody want, will come, I'll organise it. But if other people organise it I'll just come, yeah (UG/China 1)].

Overall, this group of students mainly used sources from their home countries (e.g. Hoisinhvien-Vietnam, QQ [I use QQ more (UG/China 1)], and international sources (e.g. Google, Yahoo, Facebook) for information [I use as many search resources as I can like Google (UG/Vietnam)]. They do however used Australian sources to assist in navigating basic daily life out of necessity (e.g. transport timetable, weather, tourist attractions and travelling, jobs, eating and banking) [I like to search for jobs in Australia then I will use Gumtree (UG/Hong Kong 1)].

This group of students relied on international academic (e.g. journals, the Lancet) and university (e.g. library database) sources to seek information to complete their courses requirements and assignments [we have to go to a lot of websites to receive the article, like…the Lancet (PG/Vietnam)], [The academic part, I use Google (UG/Hong Kong 1)]. They would turn to their department (tutor, coordinator, lecturer, website) [I would talk to the coordinator (PG/Vietnam)] or student centre when they are confronted with issues such as failing courses for assistance [I would go to student centre… to check for it first, and then go to department to confirm that (UG/Hong Kong 2)].

This group of students depended on various sources to find pre-arrival information and apply to the universities such as agents [I rely on agent (UG/Indonesia 1)], family connections [I have a lot of family member who travel back and forth…so I got some information from them (UG/Vietnam)], websites for overseas studies in their home country and language [I search online. Search online via Baidu (UG/China 1)]. Institutional websites were primarily used after COEs were issued [I search for the information for Australia and Melbourne also, because it is the community that I need to stay for here (UG/Hong Kong 1)].

**Students whose social networks are dominated by international students from a variety of countries (SNIS)**

This group of students reported that they socialised with a range of other international students who are not necessarily from their home country. Sometimes, this might be due to a desire to interact across cultures while others reported that they might find it hard to connect with students from their own countries (either due to small numbers or social differences). These students communicated in a common language that their social network is familiar with. This group included students from Bangladesh, Singapore, Indonesia, Iran, Brunei Darussalam, Kuwait and South Korea. The social roles are clearly varied in this group [Learner, but then wanted, love to be organizer (PG/Iran)]. Many students in the group behaved as organizers or supporters in their social circles, few students behaved as a follower, problem solver, and extrovert or share ideas with friends [Sometimes a follower, sometimes an organiser, and sometimes, I share with them …it depends actually, it varies, time to time (PG/Bangladesh)]. Students played different roles in their different social circles. However, some students only played a single role.

Overall, this group of students mainly used international sources (e.g. Google, Facebook) and fewer sources from their home countries (e.g. Minihompy) [(I) use more of Facebook than the Korean equivalent (Minihompy) (UG/South Korea)]. They rarely relied on Australian sources except in some occasions if searching for a good place to eat in or train timetable [(I'll search more about like what times the train coming (UG/Brunei)].

This group of students used websites related to their course work and development such as urban design, disaster management [(I use) many websites: urban design, Facebook, disaster management (PG/Iran)]. Students will turn to their supervisor [(I'd first approach my
supervisor (PG/ Bangladesh), chief examiner, student centre [Go to student services and then contact a chief examiner (UG/ Brunei)] or GSA (Graduate School Association) Advocacy Service when they are confronted with issues such as failing courses for assistance.

Students in this group are mixed. Some of them sourced pre-arrival information directly from the institution's websites [Searched course website before coming to Australia (PG/ Iran)]. Others depended on their agent, family connections or their home community or embassy in Australia [Get information from parents, parents’ friends, Korean community, agents (UG/ Brunei)].

Students whose social networks are dominated by Australian domestic students (SNAS)

This group of students is smaller than the other three within our sample and reported that they actively sought to integrate and find local friends through study, work or general social clubs within their institutions or within the communities they live in. Some of the students might already have made Australian friends even before coming to Australia. This might have been through visiting Australia and overseas or through social networking sites. They speak English in their interactions. This group included students from countries around the world like Japan, China, Brazil and USA. They behaved as organizers and followers at the same time. So they play a double role. For example, they are followers among their Australian friends and they are organizers among their other friends. Therefore, they are clearly learning and gaining local knowledge and sharing this with their friends from overseas. [With my Aussie friends I’m the follower because they know more places than I do, and then I use those places to organise things for international students (PG/ Japan)].

Overall, this group of students mainly used Australian sources of information but in terms of news about their home countries (to know what is going on there) they relied on sources from their home countries [I use Japanese websites more (than Australian) now, because I don’t know what’s going on at home (PG/ Japan)].

Students in this group used websites related to their course such as politics and economics sources [I’m studying politics and so, and … politics and economics before, so I just follow like, I follow it a bit (PG/ USA)]. Students will turn to their tutor, coordinator, classmates, supervisor, administrative Staff, or university helpline when they are confronted with issues such as failing courses for assistance [I’d discuss with my tutor or my coordinator or my class (PG/ Japan)].

For pre-arrival information, students in this group depended on the university websites [I only checked out the Melbourne Uni website (PG/ Japan)] or relatives who work in universities to source this kind of information [I knew some people from Australia before. I mean, I had family here and so, one of my cousin’s husbands worked at Uni Melbourne (PG/ USA)].

Students whose social networks include a mix group of students, both Australian and international (SNMS)

This group of students reported that they almost seem to have two social networks that do not always mix with each other. They tend to be the middle person ‘moving and travelling’ between their social networks. They reported that they would speak different languages in their different networks. This group included students from Sri Lanka, China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Vietnam, Turkey, Chile, Colombia and Brazil. Many students behaved as followers or observers among their Australian friends and become leaders among their local and international friends. Some students behaved as the trusted person among their groups of friends or shared ideas with them [With Chinese friends: organiser. With others (Australians): observer. Get ideas and experience from Australians and then share with Chinese friends (PG/ China)].
Overall, this group of students mainly used Australian sources for most thing they do here in Australia (e.g. food, health, news, jobs, banks) and international sources [Generally, yeah (I use more) Australian websites (PG/ Sri Lanka)]. They rarely used sources from their home countries [I don't go to any Brazilian websites... If I want news or if I want to know about health... I follow on the news feed. Yeah, on Facebook (PG/ Brazil)].

This group of students relied on international and universities sources to seek information to complete their courses assignments (e.g. NY Times, universities' library database and online eBook) [NY Times in the morning because of my course (PG/ China), [I use the library, online eBook (UG/Hong Kong 3)]. Students will ask their tutors/coordinators or student centre first if they fail courses [(The student centre (PG/ Brazil), [(I go for a lecturer of course (UG/Hong Kong 3)].

Students depended on IDP [in Sri Lanka the way it worked to apply to universities in Australia is only via the so-called education consultants (PG/ Sri Lanka)], friends connections [When arrived, knew a friend of a friend, went through agent for visa (ADP) (PG/ China)], family decisions and agents [my parents make decision which university they go (UG/Hong Kong 3)] to find pre-arrival information. Students will also look at practical websites such as banking and immigration (visa).

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that students from all four social networks are similar in relying on information sources relating to activities such as academic development and progress. However, they are different in relying on information sources relating to their pre-arrival. Students whose social networks are more diverse are often presented with a wider range of information while students in the SNHC group rely on fewer sources and their friends within their social networks.

Students from all four social networks types also rely on Australian sources for most of the basic everyday things they do in Australia (e.g. food, health, local travel, weather, jobs, and banks). For other activities (e.g. news), students from SNHC and SNAS social networks use mainly sources from their home countries and/or international sources, whereas students from SNIS and SNMS social networks use only international sources. Notwithstanding, students from SNMS social networks rarely use sources from their home countries. Moreover, this study also found that focusing on country of origin could provide very misleading and incomplete information about international students. For example, students from China were represented in three of the four social network groupings above (namely, SNHC, SNAS, and SNMS). In terms of use and access to information, the Chinese students in each of the social network groupings displayed more commonalities with other students in the same social network groupings than with Chinese students who reported other social network groupings. Therefore, this study found that it was more useful to look at the sources of information from the perspective of different social network groupings than from the country of origin perspective. The importance of understanding social networks’ role in influencing the source of international students’ information is clearly highlighted by the experience of the students in all eight focus groups. Hence, international students rely on their social networks for information, which means that the more diverse the social network of the students, the greater the range of information the international student is likely to get.

Research into the classification of students in Australia has been either country (e.g. Yap and Watson 2011; Kemp, Webb and Shamsu 2011; Forbes-Mewett, Nyland and Shao 2010) or region specific with an almost exclusive focus on Asia. Such work includes studies on the recruitment of potential students (Ilieva and Goh 2011) and support of current students (Woodgate et al. 2011). On one level, these studies have not really addressed the increasing number of students arriving from South America who enrol in colleges and TAFE institutions (Baker, Chui, and Nelson 2011). On another level, these studies do not take into
consideration that students are not bound by their countries and regions once they start their courses in Australia, an issue this project is concerned about.

This paper argues that students do not solely socialise with others from their country of origin. Instead, they often socialise with students from their courses. Often, the students they socialise with tend to be fellow international students who hail from the region they come from and local students who are culturally similar to them. For example, Singaporeans might socialise with other Asian students from their courses such as international students from Malaysia, India and Vietnam and locals who are ethnically and culturally Chinese and Indian. While international students may be transient for now, their individual identities and social networks exist for future purpose and are possibly intrinsically linked to the adopted nation yet still connected to identities and social networks of past and ongoing experiences. These more diversified social networks mean that students receive informal information from sources which are not specific to their countries of origin and that they are much more likely to be interested in official information that are clustered round their institution and courses. Hence, these social networks have different impacts on where an international student might go to for information.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

There are several clear practical implications from this study in the way educational institutions, service providers and government communicate with students. The findings may influence the manner information is disseminated across broad areas of marketing and academic support.

Students from all four social networks types use international websites (e.g. Google, Journals, Wiki, Facebook) and universities sources (e.g. library, database) to help them complete their course work and assignments; and to develop skills and knowledge in their chosen discipline area. To find information pertinent to their chosen fields of study, students from all four social networks types use international websites (e.g. Google, Journals, Wiki, Facebook) and universities sources (e.g. library, database) to help them complete their course work and assignments; and to develop skills and knowledge in their chosen discipline area. This means that relevant information is not necessarily to be found by only depending on online sources but also on other more off-line avenues of information. This applies not only to a group of students but also to individual students because they may require relevant information from different sources and media. Educational institution websites thus need to take account of this wide range of information sources. This will facilitate better information provision which will hopefully translate to improved student satisfaction.

Students from all four social networks types turn to their department staff (e.g. tutor, coordinator, lecturer, supervisor, instructor, chief examiner) and/or student centre to solve their academic issues such as failing courses. Some students from SNAS social network type also rely on their classmates to learn from their knowledge and experience. Therefore, there is a need to enable and facilitate contact, communication and sharing relevant information between students and staff. Social media could provide new opportunities in this regard. Social media could be incorporated into university and college communication strategies for international students particularly given that Facebook operates on similar levels of trust as some off-line sources (e.g. word of mouth).

To find out about Australia, and Australian universities and colleges prior to their arrival, students from SNHC and SNMS social network types rely mainly on a number of sources such as agents, family connections, and websites for overseas studies in their home country while students from SNAS and SNIS social network types might use their institution websites but mainly rely on their relatives, agents and home country embassies. The practical implication of this finding is the need for continued training of and provision of good information to education agents. Also, there is a clear need for a social media strategy that can harness the word of mouth from existing students to engage with potential students.
CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The research reported in this paper is significant because few previous studies have identified the relationship between social roles and identities of international students and the way they access, use and share information. The project found that there is some initial evidence that social roles and networks do play a role in mitigating the way information is accessed and shared. The students were grouped according to the shapes of their social networks in order to address the impact social networks have on the how and the where international students access information.

What is clear from this study is that students do not subscribe to a ‘one size fits all’ model. This project is a snapshot of the complexity of social and information networks international students rely on.

In order to have a better understanding of the social networks international students keep and the sources of information they seek and rely on, we need to have a bigger sample size, which does not include just focus group discussions but also a nationally conducted survey. A survey that is released to international students throughout Australia will not only provide us with a clearer understanding of the ways in which international students form social networks and seek information for their basic, everyday and specific needs but it will also provide more data that allows us to inform international student service providers of better and effective ways of communicating with them.

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