

Connections and Disconnections: A Look at International Student Social Media Use in Australia and Singapore

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Social Media – What is it?

- * Basic definition:

Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking

Oxford Dictionary

Social media and (social and professional) connectivity

- * blogs, business networks, enterprise social networks, forums, microblogs, photo sharing, products/services review, social gaming, social networks, video sharing and virtual worlds (Aichner and Jacob 2015).



Popular social media platforms

- * **Blogs:** A platform for casual dialogue and discussions on a specific topic or opinion
- * **Facebook:** The world's largest social network, with more than 1.32 billion monthly active users (as of June 2014). Users create a personal profile, add other users as friends, and exchange messages, including status updates. Brands create pages and Facebook users can "like" brands' pages.
- * **Twitter:** A social networking/micro-blogging platform that allows groups and individuals to stay connected through the exchange of short status messages (140 character limit).
- * **YouTube and Vimeo:** Video hosting and watching websites.
- * **Flickr:** An image and video hosting website and online community. Photos can be shared on Facebook and Twitter and other social networking sites.
- * **Instagram:** A free photo and video sharing app that allows users to apply digital filters, frames and special effects to their photos and then share them on a variety of social networking sites.
- * **LinkedIn Groups:** A place where groups of professionals with similar areas of interest can share information and participate in a conversations.

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- * ordinary people able to communicate with people on a mass scale whom they have no interpersonal relationships
 - * masses have so much access to public figures.
 - * social media is a platform of choice for everyday communication with family, friends and acquaintances
 - * it also allows us to broadcast our thoughts, opinions, ideas and ideologies with audiences we don't have social relations with — across state and national lines.
 - * Sometimes these thoughts, opinions, ideas and ideologies go viral whether on purpose or accidentally which has led to political, social and cultural change.

* Numa Numa Guy, 700 million views



Social media and international students

- * Interviewed 121 international students in Australia and Singapore from 2013-2014
- * Undergrads and Postgrads
- * Australia and Singapore university setting
- * Largely from Asia but from beyond (from Latin America and less from Euro-America)
- * Identities, social networks (friends), notions of home, social media and communication use

What social media platforms do international students use?

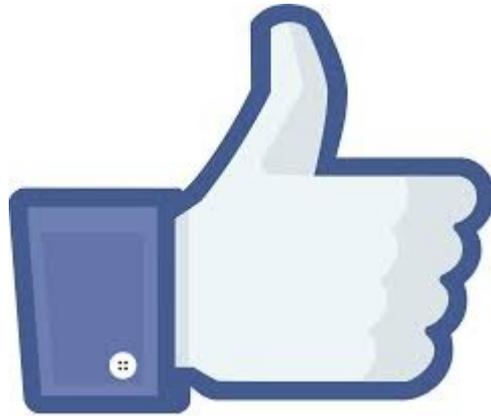
- * **Facebook**
- * LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter
- * Ren Ren, QQ, WeChat and Sina Weibo - Chinese
- * KakaoTalk – South Korean



What do international students do on social media?

Lurking

- * Posting
- * Commenting
- * Chatting
- * Liking
- * Linking
- * Lurking



Lurking

Lurking

Lurking

Chatting, Posting, Commenting

- * Communicate more with parents and grandparents on Skype and email
- * If on social media – Facebook - to let family and friends know what they are up to – PHOTOS!
- * Will only chat with close friends on FB.

Social media and passive connections to home – Lurking!

- * *Yeah, news feed or I search people, I just click and click and click and click (20 year old Singaporean ugrad in Australia)*
- * *I don't really comment a lot or like stuff...I just look through, to see what's going on (23 year old Singaporean ugrad in Australia)*
- * *They get to know what happens to friends and home nation instantly while not really engaging with them*

Local connections – passive info-seeking

- * Practical considerations: finding information on host nation from Facebook groups (e.g. Colombians in Australia)
- * Information from institution-based societies and courses



Collecting local friends?

- * May 'collect' locals as Facebook friends but no meaningful relationship with them
- * Multitaskers when it comes to social media platforms – maintain multiple social media sites and connect with co-nationals in transience through them. E.g. Mainland Chinese use QQ and Weibo while South Koreans use KakaoTalk

Social Media and Mainland Chinese students

- * Mainland Chinese students in Australia mainly use QQ and Weibo to connect with friends in China and with other diasporic Mainland Chinese (not other Chinese). Grew up with Chinese platforms.
- * Mainland Chinese students *however* have lived in Singapore much longer than those in Australia. *Reconnect* with China through Chinese platforms.

Social media and South Korean students

It's almost like routine to Facebook and KakaoTalk. If I don't then I feel like missing out

But when I see posts re political issues in Korea, I can relate to them much more than I can to Australian issues. I guess I'm still a bit torn whether I'd like to migrate here permanently. Also whether I would be able to cut ties completely with Korea—which by the way would be impossible.

(5th year South Korean medical student in Australia)

Social Networks (friends)

- * They don't directly engage with friends in home nation (even on social media!)
- * Generally - prefer fellow international students as friends and have face-to-face relationships with them.

Patterns of social networks



- * More international students in Australia have ‘international friends’ – fellow international students who are both co-nationals *and* IS from other countries
- * BUT international students in Singapore who have been there longer than counterparts in Australia are predominantly friends only with co-nationals. A way to keep in touch with home nation even though co-nationals are *also* ‘global citizens’ or IS like them.

What can we take away?

- * Ultimately, face-to-face relationships are still more important than relationships on social media
- * Social media assists with visual communication
- * Certain social media platforms are used for more personal communication – Facebook!

Acknowledgements and Thanks

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Starter Questions

- * What is your experience with social media? What platforms have you used? Have you incorporated social media into your work (e.g. communication, research etc.)? Does it work for you?
- * How important do you think friends are for students – local and international? How can you use friendship networks in your work with students?