

# **International students information seeking behaviour: Implications for International education**

**› Shanton Chang & Catherine Gomes**

# Profile of respondents from the survey



## Gender

**51% Female**

**49% Male**



## Study Sector

**38% Undergraduate degree**

**29% Postgrad by coursework**

**17% Postgrad by research**

**8% Vocational**

**4% EL/Pathway program**

**2% Secondary school**

**1% Other diploma / certificate**



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# Study background



- 3 Studies informing this Presentation

- 2012 Universities Australia report – ‘Mapping the Social Networks of International Student Foundations for Improving Communication’ (*with IDP and City of Melbourne*)



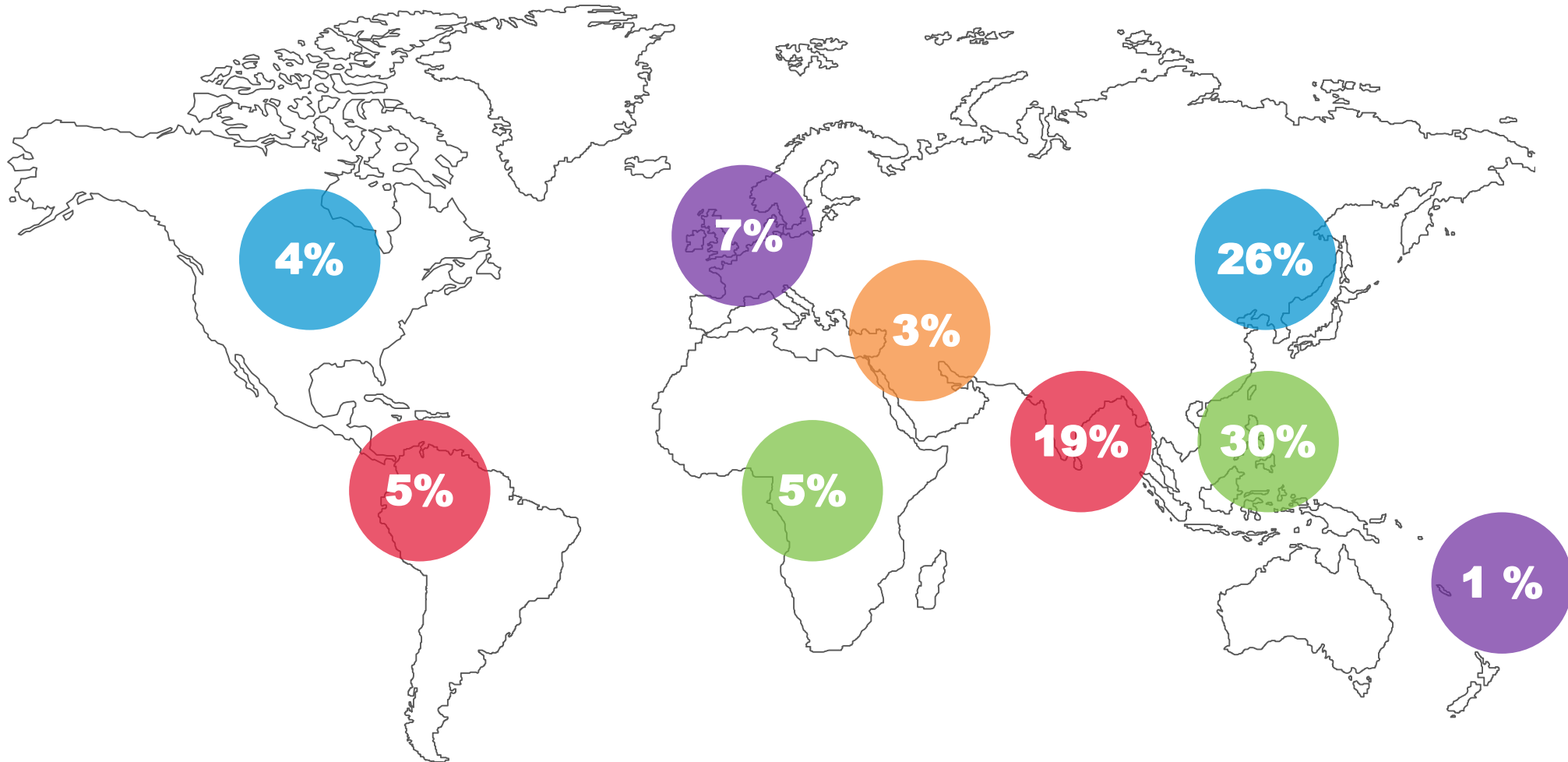
- 2013 – 2016, DECRA – Dr Catherine Gomes’ work on Transient Migrants: Media, Identity and Social Networks (with a focus on International Students and Workers)



- 2015, Online survey of over 6,699 international students studying in Australia on the Information Sources of International Students (*Joint study between RMIT, The University of Melbourne and IDP Education*)

# Respondents: Where are they from?

A broad spread of international students by citizenship



# Assumptions

- Digital natives
- Social media savvy
- Always logged on
- Information at their finger tips



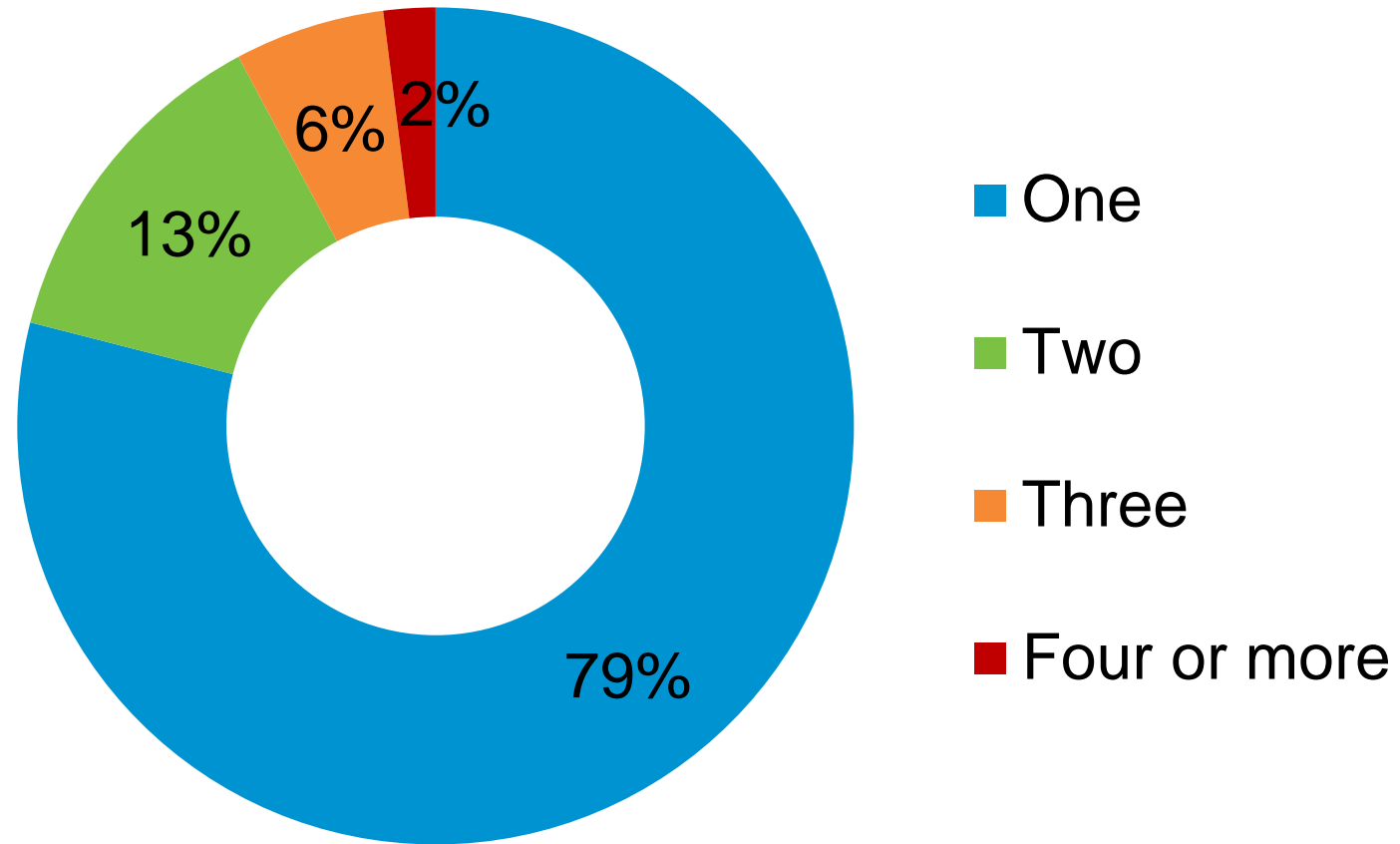
# From the Survey: Information sources

*Other than the institutional webpage, where else did you get information on studying and living in Australia, before you arrived in Australia'*



# Yet – single sources reign!

When self-directed and looking at institutional websites they look at a single site



# Focus Groups: Where do International Students get their information from?

- Chang et al (2012) found that;
  - amongst postgraduate students, institutions' websites are a good place for information
  - amongst undergraduate and college students, agents and networks of friends are still the most important source of information and sometimes. In some cases, students don't access institutional websites till after COE is issued in Australia.
  - the combination of social networks of family, friends and agents is still more important currently



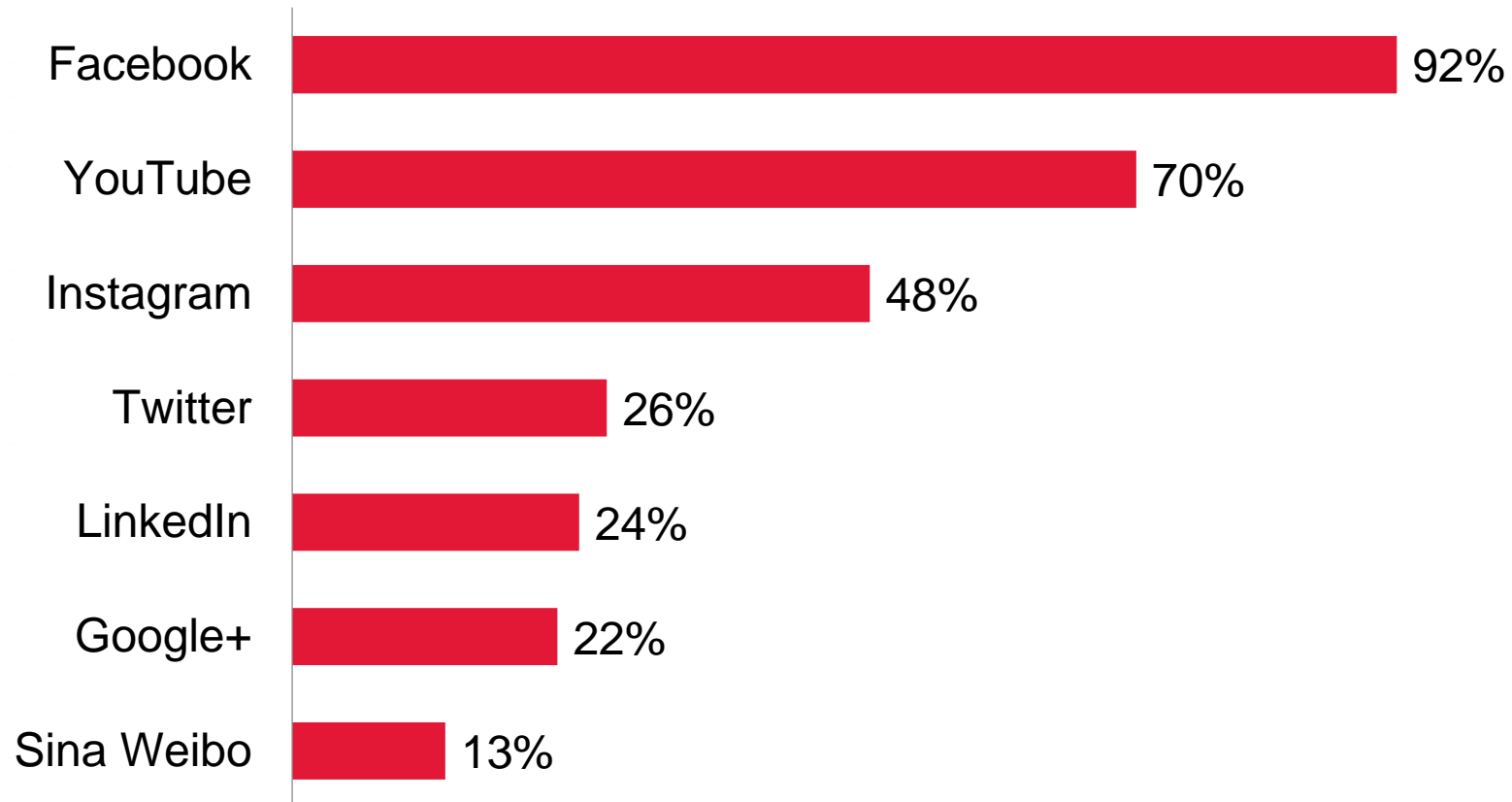
# What happens when they are in Australia?



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# Survey Responses: Social Media

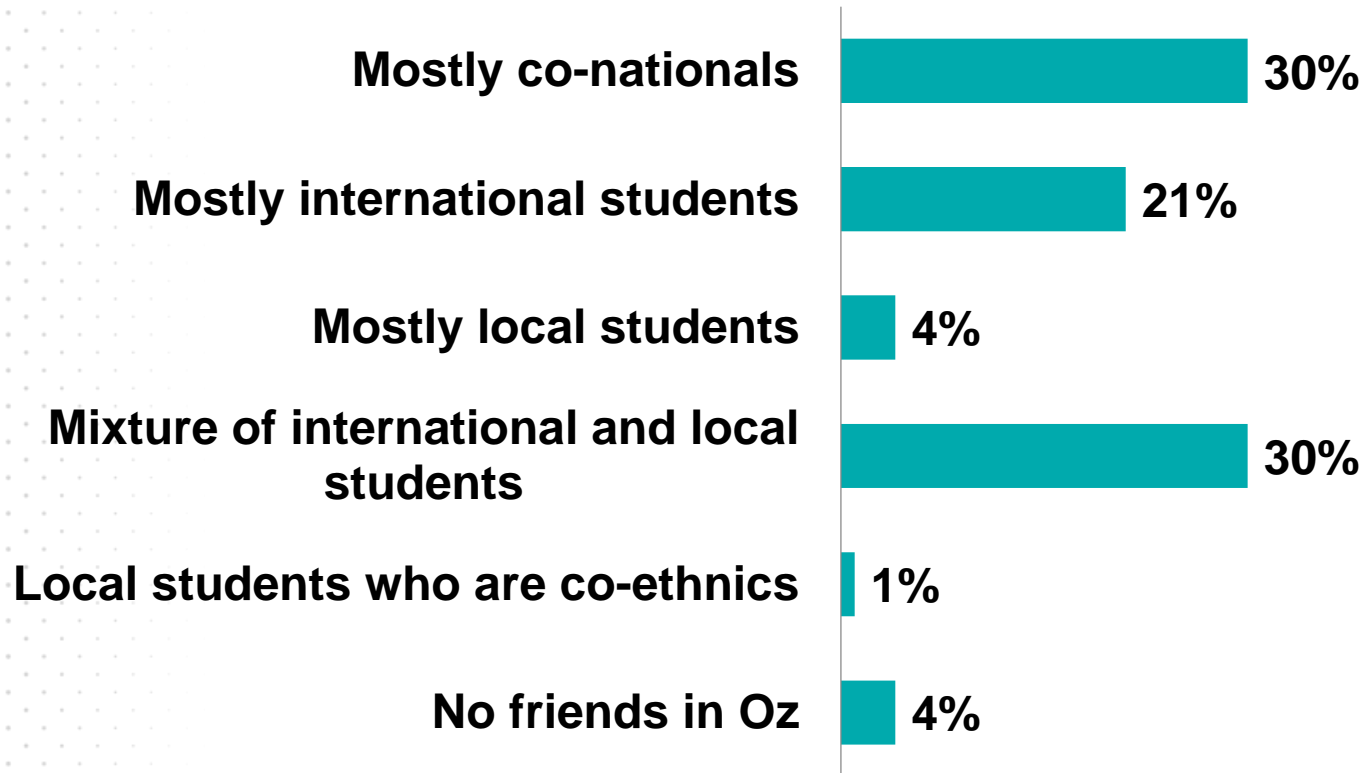
So what are the popular social media platforms used?



#1

# Friends

Relationship status: It's complicated



**Let's take the example of accommodation**  **RMIT**  
UNIVERSITY

Where to live??!!!?



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Which sources do you consult when looking for / information / on accommodation / and finding place to live?	Which of the following statement BEST describes your group of friends in Australia?						
	They are mostly international students from my home country	They are mostly international students from other countries	They are mostly local students	They are mostly local students who have similar ethnic backgrounds to me	They are a mix of international students and local students	I don't really have a group of friends in Australia	They are a mix of international students and local students who have similar ethnic backgrounds to me
General public domain websites	1278	861	176	31	1310	189	433
	29.9%	20.1%	4.1%	.7%	30.6%	4.4%	10.1%
Specialised real-estate sites	819	536	138	27	941	128	331
	28.0%	18.4%	4.7%	.9%	32.2%	4.4%	11.3%
Universities & Colleges accommodation websites	796	680	112	22	1023	120	348
	25.7%	21.9%	3.6%	.7%	33.0%	3.9%	11.2%
Google	580	472	85	19	708	104	244
	26.2%	21.3%	3.8%	.9%	32.0%	4.7%	11.0%
Friends	932	598	120	23	1078	96	340
	29.2%	18.8%	3.8%	.7%	33.8%	3.0%	10.7%
Overseas education agent websites	107	66	7	4	103	15	39
	31.4%	19.4%	2.1%	1.2%	30.2%	4.4%	11.4%
Weibo	154	19	2	4	30	7	27
	63.4%	7.8%	.8%	1.6%	12.3%	2.9%	11.1%

# Getting info on accommodation



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- Weibo and educational agents matter for students whose only friends are conational international students.
- Mixed international and local friends encourage them to go to university and college websites – local connections matter!

# So... did we find?

- They may be social media savvy and with information at their finger tips
  - BUT they *only* look at one source.
- They also turn to friends and family in Australia and in the home nations for advice on their study journey.
- Friends' international experience matters. Family can function as info source who research on students' behalf.
- A blended communication approach is needed to start students on their Australian journey.

# Social Network & Information Sources



- The more diverse the social network – the more diverse the sources of information
- Continued Reliance on trusted Information Sources from Home (especially digitally)



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# Social Network & Information Sources



- In relation to Accommodation information, commercial and social platforms rule BUT Weibo and educational agents matter for students whose only friends are conational international students.
- Mixed international and local friends encourage them to go to university and college websites – local connections matter!
  - In relation to News, home newspapers, BBC, CNN (what they used to watch back home rules)
  - In relation to Health, OSHC providers, family and friends



# Introducing “Digital Journeys”

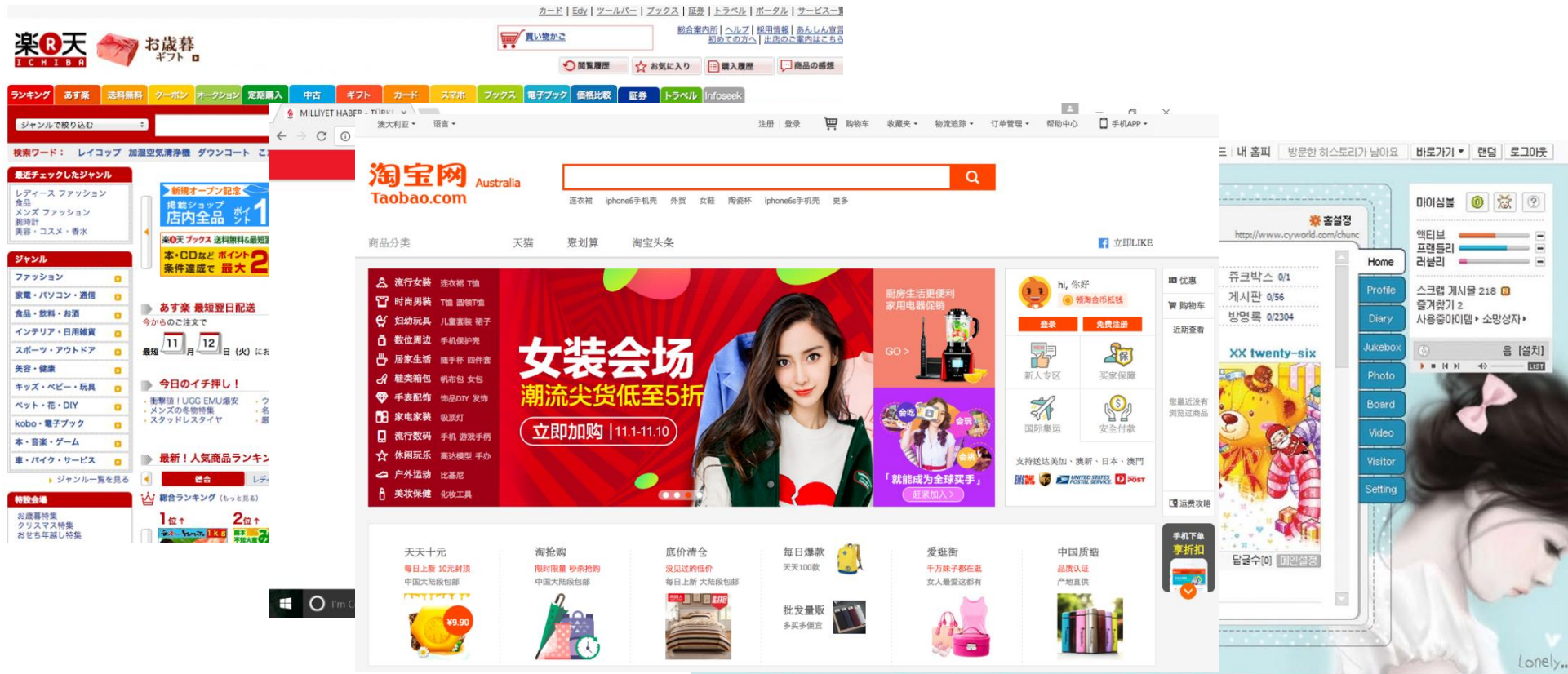


- Journey suggests the act of travelling from one place to another
- Digital Journeys therefore represent the act of moving between digital spaces, finding new spaces and new digital “homes”
- Key Concepts related to Digital Journeys;
  - Self-identity (Role, Tribe and Belonging)
  - Making the Journey (Convenience, Comfort Zone, Safety, Trust, Emotional Attachment, Devices and Platforms, Digital Skills)

# Current Focus on Physical Journeys

- Current best practice is based on decades of wisdom on what works and what does not in acculturating international students to their new environment.
- However, much of this excludes considerations of the realities of the Digital Age.
- Two Assumptions that need to be questioned are:
  - We need to only focus on the physical journeys of students when they move across countries
  - That the mythical “digital native” can find any information online and adapt on their own.

# Differences in Digital Environments between Home and Host Country



The image displays a screenshot of the Taobao.com Australia website. The main banner features a woman and the text "女装会场 潮流尖货低至5折 立即加购 | 11.1-11.10". The website layout includes a search bar, navigation menu, and various product categories. A browser window is overlaid on the right side, showing a user profile page with a name "마이심블", a profile picture, and a list of items including "스크랩 계산물 218", "즐거웠기 2", and "사용중아이템 + 소장상자". The browser window also shows a "Home" button and a "Setting" button. The overall design is colorful and user-friendly, typical of a major e-commerce platform.

A blue arrow pointing to the right, located on the left side of the slide.

## Check this out

The University of Tokyo

<http://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/en/index.html>

Now – go to the top right “Language” and click the first option (which is Japanese) – What do you get?

# So... Implications

- The role of Agents in Australian International Education continue to be pivotal – how do we audit their information? Should we be doing this given the extent of IS reliance on them?
- Institutions continue to put more services online without understanding user behaviour. Do we continue to rely on online sources as the primary means of communication with students? Can they continue to adopt the “Build it and they will come” attitude with online sources? E.g. there are increasingly now Orientation Services Online
- Is there really such a thing as Digital Natives?

# Implications for Practice

- How do you ensure that our sites are designed for the diversity of experiences and expectations?
- How do we transition students to new online environments and provide supportive online communities? Is that the role of Institutions when this is seen as a cost centre?
- What can we learn from this research for mitigating misinformation in the international student communities?

# What Can Student Services Do?

## Engage with alumni

- Tapping on recent international student alumni in the home countries can help international students with pointing to places where they can crucial information since they are considered a trusted source (been there, done that)
- Recent alumni who are former local and international students can be recruited during Orientation (IS make course-long friendships with people they first meet). They also want to make local friends!
- Gomes (2015 and 2017): International students have aspirations to live outside their home nation. Not just in the host country but elsewhere . They want to live and work in the financial capitals of the world (London, NY and maybe Asia). Engaging alumni as mentors with international students will help them in their plan for their future

# References



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- [Chang et al. 2012](#)
- Gomes, C. 2017. *Transient Mobility and Middle Class Identity: Media and Migration in Australia and Singapore*. Shanghai: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gomes, C. 2015. 'Footloose Transients: International Students in Australia and their Aspirations for Transnational Mobility after Graduation'. *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 41-57.