

Digital Natives on the Move: Electronic Connectivity and International Student Experience in Australia

A majority of international students currently studying in Australia are 'digital natives,' having grown up in an era when electronic communication and digital media systems form a taken-for-granted aspect of everyday experience. Recent research across media studies, cultural geography, migration studies, sociology, cultural anthropology and architecture has shown that people's relationships with place are increasingly produced by their interactions with electronic entertainment and communications media. Such research points to the capacity of new social media to foster new ways of experiencing locality, culture and belonging: for habitual users of these media, every local place is always also an internationalized one.

This paper draws on qualitative research to explore how international higher education students from China currently studying in Melbourne use both local and transnational media to experience, thus produce, Melbourne as a place. While these students' engagement with new social media provide them with a heightened sense of connection with 'home', it also contributes to the constitution of the local place of Melbourne within a wider geographic and experiential transnational space. These students' senses of both 'back home' and 'out here' are fragmented, deterritorialized and syncretic, woven in and through each other, as the Australian localities that they inhabit are shaped by the fluctuating co-presence of home as a result of electronic media connections.

Insights into this generation's mediated experiences of mobility and place have implications for how the Australian international education sector communicates with and provides information to these students. Understanding that such students bring a transnational frame of reference to learning not just by virtue of their histories of international travel, but also due to the transnational electronic connectedness of their everyday life experience in Australia, also has significant implications for how we approach teaching these students.