

How media technologies and cultural backgrounds affect the pursuit of spiritual well-being among international students

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How can we provide better support services for international students in the area of spiritual well-being and growth? Answering that question is becoming an increasingly complex problem in today's highly-mobile, multicultural, and media-saturated environment. In this paper, I focus on the ways that global mobility and new media (such as social media, mobile phones and the internet) are changing the ways that international students are pursuing religious/spiritual well-being. This paper is part of a larger PhD thesis that examines international student well-being practices in the light of the rapid rise in mobility and new media technologies. As we explore these complexities, I pay special attention to the way in which specific religious traditions and cultural values place emphasis on particular ways of pursuing spiritual growth and well-being. Then I will show how the international student experience of mobility and global media complicate these practices.

Here, I present ethnographic work done among the tertiary-level international students in Melbourne, using a combination of interviews and picture diaries of more than 20 international students. Using the case studies of five students, I illustrate about how migration and media are changing international students' practice of religion / spirituality in two areas: how Muslims have to renegotiate their religious identities and lifestyles in an adverse environment, and how students of different faith traditions construct religious identities through the media. Finally, I make some recommendations about how student support services can help minister to the needs of international students seeking spiritual growth and wellness.