

520

MELBOURNE



**520 MELBOURNE REPORT: SNAPSHOT
ENGAGING CHINESE-SPEAKING INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS IN MELBOURNE'S ARTS AND
CULTURAL SECTOR**

AUTHORS' NOTE

Why write the 520 Melbourne Report

The 520 Melbourne Report recognises the importance of Chinese-speaking international students, celebrates their affection for the city, and fosters deeper connections with Melbourne's arts and cultural scene.

Researched and written in Melbourne, the report has relevance for all those wishing to increase engagement with Chinese-speaking millennials.

The primary focus of the research is Chinese-speaking international tertiary students. The research approach included an online survey (633 respondents), in person focus groups (two three-hour conversations with ten participants each), an online focus group (one-hour WeChat conversation with more than 250 participants), consultation and interviews. 60% of survey respondents live in Melbourne CBD postcodes. All research was conducted between July - September 2019.

The 520 Melbourne Report is intended as a conversation starter.

We hope this report inspires institutions to make their own connections, involve more Chinese-speaking people in project teams, and talk to Chinese-speaking international students and Asian-Australian millennials about their cultural consumption preferences.

COVID-19 Context

520 Melbourne Report was written in 2019 and was due to be launched just as COVID-19 shut down Melbourne in March 2020. All data referred to in this document was gathered before the devastating impact of COVID-19 on both the cultural and international education sectors.

The importance of Chinese international students to Victoria's economic life has been starkly emphasised during COVID-19, as has the ongoing need for Victorian cultural institutions to remain relevant to diverse local audiences.

This cohort is a digital generation, which means they are even more relevant for cultural institutions that have made the 'digital pivot' during COVID.

Whilst the trajectory for both sectors is currently uncertain, we feel this report has increased relevance as Melbourne looks to recovery and growth in the future.

520 is Chinese online slang for 'I love you'.
To Melbourne and our student cohort... 520.

Kate Ben-Tovim, Wenona Lok and Tam Nguyen
November 2020

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CREATIVE VICTORIA

STUDY MELBOURNE



We acknowledge the First Peoples and traditional owners of the land we now call Melbourne. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and future, on whose unceded land we live and work and celebrate the history and contemporary creativity of the world's oldest continuous living culture.

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Designed by Iris Ng
Cover image: Christopher Hopkins, The Age

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Photo : Melvin Melvin

WHY SHOULD YOU GET TO KNOW THIS AUDIENCE?

International education has significantly shifted the demographics of Melbourne's central business district (CBD).

Pre COVID international students made up one in seven of the youth population of Victoria and one in five residents of the City of Melbourne. China is currently our largest source of international students, making up 31.5% of the student population in 2018.

Since 2016, Mandarin has exceeded English as the most commonly spoken language by residents of the City of Melbourne. Far more CBD residents identify themselves as Chinese (38%) than Australian (5%).

International education is big business for Victoria. It is the state's single largest service export, generating over \$12.6 billion and supporting 79,000 Victorian jobs in 2019.

Yet despite Melbourne's thriving music, arts and creative sectors, the sector's low level of engagement with this cohort shows us that cultural institutions are grappling with understanding this exciting new audience demographic.

International students – together with recent graduates who stay in Melbourne after their studies, Asian-Australian students, and visiting family and friends – are an influential cohort of millennials active in the life of our city.

Although current student numbers are in flux, engaging this group in the life of the city makes undeniable cultural, economic and political sense.

A QUESTION OF TASTE

The question of why audiences attend events (and what is most likely to appeal to them) is challenging to answer in absolute terms – a complex matrix of personal taste and peer preferences that audience members employ when making choices about their leisure time.

This is a cohort that likes to go out in Melbourne, that engage with arts and cultural activity in their home country, and that value events in Melbourne that enable them to meet new people.

Chinese-speaking partners or team members are invaluable in helping to navigate the nuance of cultural preferences and communications.



Photo : Gabrielle Henderson



These 520 Melbourne Report survey statistics are key to understanding how this cohort engage with information about activities in Melbourne

66% Do not engage with any Australian media - online or offline.

97% Engage with Chinese-language social media platform WeChat every day.

58% Are interested in attending more events but don't hear about them.

85% Find out about events online through social media platforms.

(58% specifically through Chinese-language platforms)

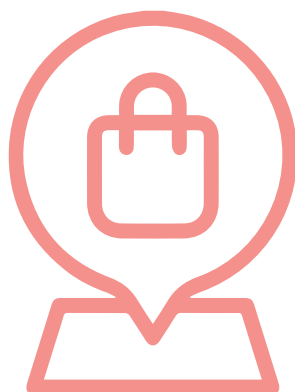


62%

Go shopping or hang out in retail malls more than once a week.

83%

Eat in restaurants more than once a week.



39%

Attend food festivals or events more than once a month.

36%

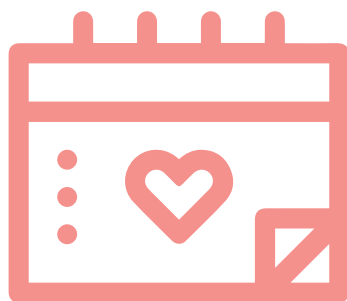
Attend exhibitions more than once a month.

29%

Attend pop events more than once a month.

LESS THAN 10%

Attend theatre, dance, comedy or classical music more than once a month.



The 520 Melbourne Report survey and focus groups consistently showed these factors as important influencers on their engagement with activities



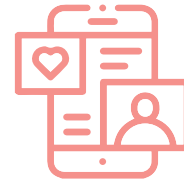
In the city

This cohort goes out frequently, with the vast majority engaging with restaurants and retail outlets more than once a week.



On trend

This audience is highly trend focussed and keen to be across the 'latest thing'.



Brand affiliation

Having a well-known commercial brand on board can help this audience trust an otherwise unknown cultural institution or event.



Content familiarity

Entertainment trends that are popular in their home countries such as, gaming and eSports, Asian pop and Hallyu / Korean pop culture are appealing, as are globally famous or known 'on trend' artists.



Convenient timing and location

The audience prefers to attend events that do not impede exam study periods or times when they would be in their home countries. Events at easily accessible places via public transport are more appealing.



Social network driven

Finding out about the event via Chinese social media platforms and seeing it discussed endorsed via trusted networks using the platforms this audience is familiar with.



Inclusivity

Being made to feel welcome by an event or institution. This is particularly important as many international students feel isolated from broader university and city life.



Connectivity

The opportunity to make friends in a new country and outside of their immediate circle.



Validation

A special offer or student discount acknowledges their student status - which can be just as, if not more, important than the cost of the event itself.



Food offerings

Food culture is an important aspect of this audience's cultural identity.



Shareable

The experience being easily 'shareable' via social media.



Keepsakes

Having limited edition merchandise available adds priceless value to the event experience.



IF IT'S NOT ON WECHAT, IT DOESN'T EXIST

Understanding WeChat is essential to understanding this cohort.

WeChat is a semi-private, peer-driven social media platform. It is integrated into almost all aspects of daily life in China, including news and information sharing, social interaction, payment and administrative systems.

The vast majority of Chinese-speaking students arrive in Melbourne already part of the WeChat ecosystem. It's how many of them 'plug into' Melbourne life.

Students use WeChat networks to navigate the logistics of life in their new city and remain in active dialogue with their home country networks.

97% of survey respondents use WeChat every day. 84% engage with WeChat Moments every day (a private 'friends circle' similar to a Facebook timeline). 78% engage with WeChat Groups every day. Focus Groups supported this high interaction with WeChat.

Put simply, if it's not on WeChat, it doesn't exist.

WeChat is vital to any broader engagement strategy with this audience. Visibility via trusted networks is key to WeChat marketing success, and influencers – typically referred to as Key Opinion Leaders (or KOLs) – are key to dissemination.

QR codes (Quick Response codes) are widely used with WeChat in China. Using QR codes on printed and online materials is highly valuable when engaging Chinese audiences, providing an easy gateway to information and services.

Photo : Flynn Edwards

UNDERSTANDING CHINESE SOCIAL MEDIA

WECHAT

WeChat is a semi-private, peer-driven social media platform that is integrated into almost all aspects of Chinese daily life.

Since its launch in 2011, over 1 billion people now use WeChat to send mobile payments, make video calls, play games, hail taxis, share their locations and more. WeChat uses QR codes for many of its in-app functions.

Marketing to this audience requires a multi-pronged approach. It's not as simple as paying for advertising space to push a product or event. The audience needs to know and trust a brand before they buy. As scams are quite common, brand awareness and recognition are essential and requires ongoing investment.

Visibility via trusted networks is key to WeChat marketing success. To achieve this, marketing campaigns often use the accounts of Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) who are influential in their own niche areas.

As WeChat is a semi-closed platform, interactions between KOLs and users are personal and targeted. WeChat users subscribe to content that they are interested in, so KOL accounts are a trusted source of knowledge and known to provide information and advice for their followers. Their audiences also tend to be more specific, which allows marketing campaigns to micro-target existing and potential audiences.

Many WeChat KOLs are considered experts in their fields. They produce informative and reliable reviews and comparisons so followers consider them trustworthy.

They influence and facilitate their followers' purchases, with reviews often being paired with giveaway campaigns or links to an online sales page.

There are four main types commonly-used of WeChat KOL marketing:

- WeChat KOL Articles
- WeChat groups
- WeChat KOL Banner Ads
- WeChat KOL Moments

WECHAT KOL ARTICLES

KOLs write articles in their usual style that include a focus on a particular product or event, using images of the product or event for illustration.

WECHAT KOL BANNER ADVERTISING

WeChat KOL banners are a visual call-to-action that generally consist of an image, heading and QR code.

WECHAT GROUPS

WeChat Groups are closed discussion forums that allow users to chat amongst friends or groups of interest. Ranging from of 3–500 users, group chats are commonly used by WeChat users.

WECHAT KOL MOMENTS

WeChat Moments, also known as 'Friends' Circle', is similar to a Facebook timeline.

WEIBO

Weibo provides microblogging services equivalent to Facebook and Twitter combined. Launched in 2009, it now has 430 million users visits every month (based on 2018 figures). It is often referred to as the 'Chinese Twitter'. While complementary to WeChat, users consume media within Weibo slightly differently. The interface is akin to microblogging, with posts limited by a number of characters at the first point of interaction, requiring users to click to read more.

As it is an open platform, KOLs' interaction with the audience is an indispensable part of marketing on Weibo. KOLs post regularly to keep a presence in their followers' feeds. Some post up to every hour or two, or three to five times each day. This continued high engagement ensures their brands are trusted as relevant and being 'in the know.'

Because of this fast-paced environment, information on Weibo changes frequently and spreads exponentially. Weibo is an important tool for brands that want to increase their exposure, build their brand image, and launch marketing campaigns with rapid and numerous updates.