

**Managing and imagining  
migration: The role of Facebook groups  
in the lives of “new” Italian migrants in  
Australia**

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the requirements for the Degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Declaration**

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the intellectual content presented in this thesis is original and my own work.

I therefore certify that this thesis has not been submitted for any degree, at this or any other institution, or for other purposes. Any help that I have received in the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all sources have been referenced in the thesis.

### **Signature**

C V Davis

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### **Date**

29 August 2017

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I acknowledge that parts of Chapter Five of this thesis, including the data and analysis, have been used in the following publication:

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the role that Facebook groups play in the lives of the so called “new” wave of Italian migrants in Australia both pre- and post-migration. Over the last decade, especially since the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, large numbers of young Italians have been arriving in Australia, however little is known about their migratory experiences. Similarly, while scholars in the field of technology and migration have shown that online communication can facilitate the process of migration, it is still unclear whether it can also influence migrants’ expectations before they have even left their home countries.

Therefore, in order to elucidate whether – and how – Facebook groups shape pre-migration expectations and subsequent post-migration experiences, two data sources have been employed: a thematic analysis of the wallposts made to three public, user-created Facebook groups dedicated to “new” Italians in Australia, and in-depth interviews with members of these groups.

Findings show that these Facebook groups are online communities where “new” Italian migrants come together at various stages of the migration process in order to prepare for, manage and imagine the experience of migrating to Australia. By joining Facebook groups prior to migrating, “new” Italian migrants can gain access to social support, relevant, practical information, and insider knowledge about how to prepare for everyday life in Australia and what to expect upon arrival. Likewise, belonging to Facebook groups can help “new” Italian migrants manage their post-migration experiences by providing them with opportunities for employment and socialisation, and for regaining social capital. Overall, the first-hand migration stories and images posted by those already in Australia construct a *hyper-reality*, that is, a space or window for pre-migrants to imagine what it is like to be an Italian migrant in Australia today and, in turn, shape realistic expectations.

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## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CMC	Computer Mediated Communication
COASIT	Committee of Assistance to Italians
CORMS	Characteristics of Recent Migrants Survey
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection
DIMA	Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students
GIA	Giovanni Italiani Australia
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
LSIA	Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia
NOM	Net Overseas Migration
NOMIT	Melbourne Italian Network
NSW	New South Wales
OSHC	Overseas Student Health Cover
RSA	Responsible Service of Alcohol
SoNA	Settlement Outcomes of New Arrivals
SNS	Social Networking Site
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
UGC	User Generated Content
WH	Working Holiday
TFN	Tax File Number

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2012, while living in Sydney, I increasingly began to hear the melodic and musical sounds of the Italian language everywhere: at bus stops, in cafes, at beaches and in supermarkets. It then became clear to me that Italians – and young Italians in particular – were coming to Sydney in greater numbers than in previous years. As a self-proclaimed Italophile, I watched excitedly as a proliferation of newspaper and magazine articles, radio and television broadcasts, and websites all confirmed that a large number of predominantly young Italians were leaving Italy in order to chase the Australian dream. During this time, a friend and I set up a small business dedicated to providing personalised English lessons to newly arrived Italian migrants, as well as translations, advice and information. Within days of launching our website, we quickly found ourselves inundated with emails and phone calls from Italians desperate to learn English. In just one year, we had taught English to over sixty Italian migrants aged between 18 and 35. During the lessons, my students would often recount their experiences of migrating to Australia today, including the challenges of securing a well paid job in their field. Some of my students had un-met expectations about Australia, especially following the realisation that they could only find low paid work as waiters and dishwashers in Italian restaurants.

As I listened to their varied migration stories, I began to ponder the notion of expectation versus reality. I wondered how these newly arrived young Italians had formed their expectations prior to arriving in Australia and decided that I wanted to find out more. This thesis was therefore born out of both a longstanding love for Italy

and the profound conversations I had with my Italian students.

The students that I taught are part of a so called “new wave” (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016; Baldassar & Pyke, 2014; Dalla Bernardina, Grigoletti, & Pianelli, 2013) of young Italian migrants to Australia who, propelled in part by the devastating effects of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, have been leaving Italy in order to escape financial austerity and precariousness. The majority of these “new”<sup>1</sup> Italian migrants arrive in Australia on temporary visas, primarily the Working Holiday visa (see section 2.2.4), in order to gain better job opportunities and new life experiences (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016).

One of the most unique, and I would argue significant, aspects of contemporary migration from Italy to Australia is the role that online communication<sup>2</sup> plays throughout the process. In particular, on Facebook there are a large number of groups about life in Australia which are specifically created for and used by “new” Italian migrants. Before having left Italy, “new” Italian migrants can access these Facebook groups in order to gather insider information and advice about migrating to Australia from those who are already there. Once arrived, these groups can provide much needed social support as well as frequent opportunities for socialisation with other Italians.

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<sup>1</sup> Within both academic (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016; Baldassar & Pyke, 2014; Dipalma, 2015) and non-academic literature (Dalla Bernardina, Grigoletti, & Pianelli, 2013; Grigoletti & Pianelli, 2014; Moritsch, 2012), the phenomenon of contemporary Italian migration to Australia is generally referred to as “new” in order to differentiate new migrants from the previous waves of migration from Italy to Australia. In this thesis, therefore, I use the term “new” to refer specifically to those Italians who migrated to Australia after 2000.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, online communication refers to the various technologies that people use to communicate with one another on the internet, such as social media, email, forums, online games, blogs, and skype.

Despite the considerable presence of “new” Italian migrants interacting on Facebook groups, it has been argued that a large number of these Italians arrive in Australia ill-informed, unprepared and with unrealistic expectations (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016, pp. 117-118; Moritsch, 2012, p. 3). Yet, as we will see in the analysis of my data (Chapters Five and Six), these groups are more than just virtual information hubs about Australia. They are dynamic online communities which bind the cohort of “new” Italian migrants together and profoundly shape, indeed influence, their pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences.

While previous studies (see Chapter Two) have thoroughly investigated those Italians who migrated to Australia during the mass migration periods of the 1950s and 1960s, academic research on the experiences of these “new” Italian migrants to Australia is only just beginning to emerge (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016; Baldassar & Pyke, 2014; Dipalma, 2015). My study is therefore one of the first to contribute to our understanding of the new wave of Italian migration to Australia by focusing on the role that online communication, more specifically Facebook groups, plays in shaping the pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences of these young Italians.

### **1.1 Relevance of study and research questions**

Once seen by some as inhabiting a *double absence* (Sayad, 2004) – neither here, nor there – contemporary migrants have developed new ways of being present – from both there and here – within a ubiquitous routine of *virtual co-presence* (Komito & Bates, 2009) engendered by the technological developments of the twenty-first century. In a world transformed by globalisation, the realities of migrants’ everyday

life now extend across a number of different places or *geographical spaces* (Pries, 1999, p. 3) so that migration is now “a mode of being in the world” rather than “an awkward interval between fixed points of departure” (Carter, 1992, p. 101). Further, the burgeoning use of online communication, intensified by the advent of social media applications, like Facebook, and their swift integration into our smart-phones, has fostered an ever-increasing drive towards constant connection (Turkle, 2012). One is now *always on* (Baron, 2008), that is, always able to communicate with others who are not physically present.

Such practices have given rise to the *connected migrant* (Diminescu, 2008), one who is both physically and digitally mobile, and who has a sense of belonging to and being in two or more places simultaneously. Indeed, within transnationalism literature it is generally agreed that technology influences migrants by uniting the temporal-spatial disjuncture that once marred the experience of migrating to a new country (Collin, 2014; Glick Schiller et al., 1995; Panagakos & Horst, 2006; Portes, 2006).

As Chapter Three will show, numerous migration studies have found that online communication is having a profound effect on the lives of new migrants by making it more accessible and affordable for them to maintain close, continuous communication with their home country post-migration in a way that was never possible before (Burrell & Anderson, 2008; D’Haenens et al., 2007; Diminescu, 2008; Komito, 2011; Portes, 2006; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998; Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2014). For new migrants to Australia, a country often perceived as being geographically isolated from

the Americas or European countries such as Italy, online communication presents enormous possibilities for facilitating the migration process.

Indeed, before the growth of new technologies and affordable transport, return visits to one's home country were often too expensive, and daily contact with family members was taxing due to the time constraints of predominantly asynchronous communication such as letters. The communication revolution changed this by creating "[n]ewer, cheaper, and more efficient modes of communication and transportation [that] allow migrants to maintain transnationally – effectively both 'here' and 'there' – their originally home-based relationships and interests" (Vertovec, 2001, p. 575), paving the way for what has been described as the "annihilation of space" and "the death of distance" (Cairncross, 2001). Travel to and from host countries such as Australia is now common and affordable. Moreover, constant, synchronous communication with family and friends is possible on a daily basis via new technologies. One's home country is, in essence, "no longer just a memory supported by occasional contact, but can be an intimate aspect of daily living" (Hiller & Franz, 2004, p. 735).

While these advancements in technology and communication have certainly made it easier to manage migration, it is still unclear whether they can also influence migrants' expectations before they leave their home countries. As this study focuses on both pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences, it is worth asking when migration begins and how technology can be utilised throughout the process. In this study, I position migration as a process that begins *before* the arrival in the host



country: it begins when an individual has started to reflect upon and consider migrating to a new place. Indeed, while still deciding whether to migrate, technologies can be used for planning (Collin, Karsenti, & Calonne, 2015).

Yet, research that specifically addresses the use of online communication during the pre-departure period is scant. While studies have shown that online communication enables migrants to join online communities of fellow migrants in a new country (Komito, 2011; Oiarzabal, 2012; Tabor & Milfont, 2013), make new contacts, gather information on a particular destination, and plan how to migrate there (Caidi et al., 2010; Dekker et al., 2015; González Martínez, 2008; Hiller & Franz, 2004; Moon et al., 2010), research on the role that online communication plays in shaping pre-migration aspirations and decisions has received little attention (Burrell & Anderson, 2008; Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2014, 2015). In order to address these gaps in the literature, this study sits in the interdisciplinary field of technology and migration, and will answer the following questions:

- 1) Does being a member of Facebook groups influence the pre-migration expectations of prospective Italian migrants to Australia?
- 2) *How* do these Facebook groups shape the expectations and post-migration experiences of new Italian migrants in Australia?

As mentioned, this study is concerned with the influence of one social media platform – Facebook groups – on the young Italian migrants who have come to Australia in the new wave of migration as a case study for examining these questions. More specifically, I conducted a thematic analysis of 3000 posts made to the walls of three

specific Facebook groups that have been created for and are used by the “new” Italian migrants to Australia. I followed this up with in-depth face-to-face interviews with 15 members of the aforementioned Facebook groups.

The remainder of this chapter will define the key terms that are used throughout this thesis. It will then provide an outline of the organisation of the chapters.

## **1.2 Definitions of key terms**

For clarity of understanding, the following terms have been defined:

### **Social media**

In this thesis social media are defined as an umbrella term which describes the various types of popular World Wide Web (WWW) applications, such as blogs, microblogs like Twitter; social networking sites (hence force SNSs), or video/image/file sharing platforms or wikis (Fuchs, 2014). One particular characteristic of social media platforms is that they are reliant upon the content that is produced and shared by the users themselves, that is, user generated content (henceforth UGC). UGC describes the mélange of multimodal resources that social media users can employ, such as photographs, video and text, in the communication and presentation of their experiences, or in this case, in the presentation of the experience of migration. As we will see throughout the thesis, UGC helps create an environment of trust within the Facebook groups. It is for this reason that I adopt the definition by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) who position social media as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p. 61).

## **Social networking sites**

The most widespread social media platform is SNSs which have all been designed to cater to different networking needs. For example, there are SNSs that focus specifically on connecting with friends and family (Facebook) or business networking (LinkedIn), while there are others that aim to develop users' specific hobbies or passions such as photo sharing (Instagram), video sharing (YouTube) or music (LastFm).

SNSs are defined by Murray & Waller (2007) as “virtual communities for people interested in a particular subject or just to ‘hang out’ together” (p. 56). While this definition is certainly apt for a study of Facebook groups for new migrants, a more comprehensive definition was put forward by boyd (sic)<sup>3</sup> & Ellison (2007) who define SNSs as web-based services that allow individuals to maintain social interaction on the internet and have three main characteristics which distinguish them as a SNS. SNSs allow their users (1) to construct a public or semi-public profile on the site; (2) to access the other people using the site, with whom they share a connection; and (3) to look at and explore their list of connections (p. 211). Other common features of SNSs that are important to note are: the ability to create a list of friends, update a status, make posts, comment on other users' statuses and posts, indicate that they “like” another user's post, and send private messages (Pew Internet, 2011).

One point of contention, however, is that boyd & Ellison (2007) prefer to use the term “social network site” rather than “social networking site”, arguing that the latter

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<sup>3</sup> The scholar Danah Boyd has legally changed her name to be written in lowercase.

signifies the beginning of a relationship, usually between strangers. While this is certainly true, in this study, it is precisely the “beginning of a relationship” that emerges most notably when considering the use of Facebook groups by Italian migrants. As my findings will demonstrate in Chapters Five and Six, Italians on Facebook groups initiate relations with other Italians, who are ultimately strangers, but with whom they share a common cultural identity and country of origin. For this reason, it can be argued that the term social “networking” is a more valid and pertinent term than “network” to describe websites that make such online connections possible. Hence I adopt this terminology for the purpose of this thesis.

## **Facebook**

The platform analysed in this study is Facebook groups, one of many features within Facebook. Facebook is the most popular SNS and a habitual feature of everyday lives for around 1.49 billion people all over the world (Facebook, 2015). As described on its website (Facebook.com), Facebook is a SNS that gives its users the ability to set up a profile in order to “to stay connected with friends and family, discover what’s going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to [them].” Other features which enable individuals to connect with extended social networks on Facebook are Facebook Photos, Events, Videos, Groups, and Pages.

## **Facebook groups**

A Facebook group gives users access to a message board on which to share common interests and express opinions about a central topic. As Facebook.com puts it, the Facebook group feature allows for users “to come together around a common cause,

issue or activity to organise, express objectives, discuss issues, post photos and share related content.” For example, in the case of this study, the Facebook groups analysed were created in order to discuss the topic of Australia, and more specifically, the topic of Italians migrating to or living in Australia. Once a Facebook group is created, the creators of that group have the ability to decide the privacy level of the group. The privacy level can be “public”, where anyone is able to join and view posts, or “private”, where users must accept an invitation from the group’s members to join to view wallposts and contribute to conversations. Such wallposts are pieces of text written by members within a Facebook group and are used to query or communicate with all members of the group. They are often topic-based threads initiated by one member of the group. Other members may then respond by posting comments to an original post or subsequent comments in that discussion thread.

### **1.3 Organisation of the thesis**

This thesis is organised into seven chapters.

This introductory chapter has outlined the thesis topic, highlighted the relevance of the study, posed the research questions and defined specific terms.

Chapter Two contextualises the current study. It begins with a presentation of contemporary migration to Australia and then focuses specifically on the history of migration from Italy to Australia. Finally, it presents the current phenomenon of new Italian migrants to Australia and addresses the role that the Italian Australian

community<sup>4</sup> plays in their lives, as well as the various new services and initiatives that are available to them.

Chapter Three reviews the essential literature within the field of technology and migration. The first part focuses on those studies that analyse how transnationalism and technology are changing the reality of migration for contemporary migrants. It also discusses how migration is a process that involves different stages with designated uses of online communication technologies. The second part of the chapter addresses social media and online community, revealing the implications of technology in everyday life. I particularly highlight those studies that explore how social media have changed the way in which we build rapport with one another and how SNSs can function as communities and social support networks which, in turn, facilitate the process of migration. The theoretical framework used to analyse the findings from both data sources is then delineated.

Chapter Four presents the research methodology that has been chosen for this study. The chapter begins with a discussion of qualitative research design followed by the rationale for choosing a case study. The data sources – the Facebook groups and in-depth interviews – are then described, as well as some of the ethical considerations surrounding the use of social media in academic research. Finally, the tools involved in the analysis of data are presented and justified.

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<sup>4</sup> In this thesis, the Italian Australian community refers to the historical community of Italians who migrated to Australia over the last fifty years and their descendants. However, this community is not intended to be taken as a homogeneous or closed-knit group. Those who identify as being part of the Italian Australian community differ significantly depending on their regional background, as well as their gender, class, age, and generation.

Chapters Five and Six present the analysis of the two data sets. The analysis of Chapter Five focuses on the data collected from wallposts made to three Facebook groups. Chapter Six then explores the analysis of the data collected through the in-depth interviews. It begins by introducing the interview participants and then examines the main findings from the analysis. Further, the chapter supports many of the findings from the thematic analysis of wallposts.

Finally, Chapter Seven brings together and further discusses the major findings in order to answer the research questions posed by this study. It then highlights the contributions made by the current study, as well acknowledging some of its limitations. It then proposes suggestions for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO CONTEXT**

This chapter provides an account of the context of the current study by presenting a general overview of migration to Australia with a particular focus on the new wave of migration from Italy to Australia. While the first section outlines the different types of migrants in Australia today, the second briefly discusses the history of migration from Italy to Australia, highlighting information and statistics about the number and characteristics of migrants who have arrived over the last two decades. It then details the types of visas available to temporary Italian migrants today and their primary motivations for coming to Australia. Finally, the role that the Italian Australian community plays in the lives of the “new” Italian migrants – as well as the various new services, initiatives and online resources that are available to them – are discussed.<sup>5</sup>

### **2.1 Types of migrants in Australia today**

Australia is a country characterised by diversity. With a long history of immigration, it has arguably become one of the most cosmopolitan populations in the world. In particular, the mass immigration program post World War II, which was designed to meet Australian labour and defence needs, brought significant change to what was previously a predominantly Anglo-Celtic population.

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<sup>5</sup> From this point on, I will no longer employ the use of inverted commas when referring to new Italian migrants or new Italian migration to Australia.



In the early post-war years, this program consisted of granting entry to what Australia deemed as “desirable types” of immigrants: it gave preference to the British, followed by Northern Europeans, Eastern Europeans, and lastly Southern Europeans (Castles, 1992). Non-Europeans, in particular Asians, were to be entirely excluded from immigrating under the much maligned White Australia Policy (see section 2.2.1).

However, despite a great resistance to Southern Europeans entering the country – based on the belief that they were less educated than Northern Europeans – it was Southern Europe that went on to become the primary source of migrants in the 1950s (Castles, 1992, p. 39). Further, with the repeal of the White Australia Policy in the 1970s, large inflows of Asian immigrants became the norm, with people arriving from South-East Asia, predominantly Vietnam, and subsequently other Asian countries. After 1970, Australia experienced a dramatic shift from, as Smolicz (1997) put it, a “migrant country” to a “multicultural nation” based on a new policy of multiculturalism. This policy, unlike the rigid assimilation policy of the early post-war years, encouraged new migrants to Australia to maintain their distinct cultures while simultaneously acculturating into Australian society.

Since 2005, net overseas migration (NOM) has been the main contributor of population growth in Australia, exceeding natural increase (i.e. the number of births less the number of deaths) (DIBP, 2014). Moreover, according to the latest Australian Census conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (henceforth ABS) in 2016, nearly half (49%) of Australians were either born overseas or one or both parents were born overseas (ABS, 2016d). Nevertheless, although migration has played a

fundamental role in the growth of Australia's population and in the creation of a multicultural society, government policy has always closely controlled the movement of people into the country, that is, under which conditions new migrants can enter and from which countries of origin.

In the decades between World War II and the 1970s, Australia's migration policy focused primarily on permanent settlement based on the need to increase population and economic growth. Indeed, up until December 2016, migrants to Australia have been able to gain permanent residency under one of the following streams: (1) the Skilled Stream which allows for the migration of people with skills and abilities which will contribute to the economy, including Employer Sponsored, Business Skills, General Skilled Migration, and Distinguished Talent; (2) the Family Stream which allows for the permanent entry of people with close family ties in Australia comprising partners, dependent children, parents or other family members; (3) Special Eligibility which allows for the resettlement of former Australian residents; and (4) a Humanitarian Stream which forms a separate Humanitarian Programme. In 1996, new legislation was passed which allowed for large numbers of migrants to enter Australia on a non-permanent basis. This, in turn, sparked a "paradigmatic shift" from permanent to temporary migration (Hugo, 1999). A range of temporary visas were thus introduced, enabling migrants to temporarily live, work or study in Australia. Unlike permanent migration, there are no caps on temporary visas. Therefore, in recent years, temporary migration has completely redefined the nature of immigration to Australia (Mares, 2016). Table 2.1 shows the most common types of visa categories for temporary migrants to Australia.

**Table 2.1 Categories of Temporary Resident Visas**

<b>Visa Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
Working Holiday Maker	Allows people aged 18-30 to spend an extended holiday in Australia with short-term work and study rights. <sup>6</sup>
International Students	For people studying full-time in registered courses in Australia on a Student visa valid for the length of their course.
Skilled temporary residents	Allows people, mostly recruited by Australian companies, to enter as temporary skilled migrants for up to four years under the Temporary Business (Long Stay) (subclass 457) <sup>7</sup> visa.
Other temporary residence	Includes a range of temporary residence visas allowing people to come to Australia for social, cultural, international relations and training purposes.

Adapted from DIBP, 2014

Arguably, one of the most significant innovations in this temporary Australian visa system was the introduction of the Working Holiday (henceforth WH) visa which has become a popular choice among new Italian migrants to Australia (see section 2.2.4). First introduced in 1975 and made only available to British and Canadian citizens, its popularity dramatically increased after 2000 when it allowed seventeen other countries to be included in the scheme, including Italy in 2004 (Tan, Lester, Richardson, Bai, & Sun, 2009). The WH visa allows individuals to gain legal employment in Australia for up to twelve months; work for up to six months with each employer; study for up to four months; and leave and re-enter Australia any number of times for the duration of the visa. The option to obtain a second WH visa

<sup>6</sup> The term Working Holiday Maker actually refers to two separate visa subclasses: the Working Holiday (Subclass 417) and the Work and Holiday (Subclass 462). While the purposes of and requirements for both visas are almost identical, the Work and Holiday visa is offered to partner countries which have broader visa compliance issues for their nationals (Tan et al., 2009, p. 1), for example, the People's Republic of China, Vietnam and Hungary.

<sup>7</sup> However, on 18 April 2017, the Australian Government announced that "the Temporary Work (Skilled) visa (subclass 457 visa) will be abolished and replaced with a new Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) visa which will support businesses in addressing genuine skill shortages" (DIBP, 2017a).

(for another year) is available to those who have completed three months of specified work, commonly referred to as farm work (e.g. in plant and animal, cultivation, fishing and pearling, tree farming and felling, and mining construction) in regional Australia while on their first WH visa.

According to the DIBP website, the purpose of the WH visa program is to “encourage cultural exchange and closer ties between arrangement countries by allowing young people to have an extended holiday supplemented by short-term employment” (DIBP, 2017d). WH visas are restricted to people aged between 18 and 30 who are from selected (mostly European) countries with which Australia has a reciprocal arrangement. These countries include, but are not limited to, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Republic of Ireland, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea and the UK. WH visas are a popular choice for young people with data from the Working Holiday Maker Visa Report, issued in June 2016, showing that 159,409 first WH visas were granted in the 2015-16 financial year (DIBP, 2016c, p. 7).

Another popular choice among new migrants to Australia, including recent Italian migrants (see section 2.2.4), is the Student visa which allows individuals to stay in Australia for the duration of a full-time course and permits multiple entries to Australia. One’s dependent family members may also come to stay in Australia for the duration of the course, yet students and their families must have Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) for the full period of their visa. The main Student visas granted to Italians include, but are not limited to: the Independent ELICOS Sector visa (subclass 570) which allows one to stay in Australia to study a full-time English

Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students (ELICOS); the Vocational Education and Training Sector visa (subclass 572) which allows one to stay in Australia to study a full-time vocational education and training course; and the Higher Education Sector visa (subclass 573) which allows one to stay in Australia to study a full-time higher education course (DIBP, 2017b).

While the DIBP data provide us with information about the current intake of new migrants to Australia, other studies conducted at regular intervals, such as the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA), the Continuous Survey of Australia's Migrants conducted by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA)<sup>8</sup>, and the Characteristics of Recent Migrants Survey (CORMS) conducted by ABS, provide insights into the circumstances and characteristics of recent migrants to Australia in terms of labour force status, occupation, education attainment, spoken English proficiency, earnings and other demographic characteristics.

The latest CORMS from 2016, for example, showed that of the recent migrants who have come to Australia in the past ten years, the majority (81%) were aged 20-44 years on arrival. Further, the data revealed that around 65% of recent migrants already had a tertiary qualification before arriving in Australia. Of these, 76% had a Bachelor Degree or higher, 14% had an Advanced Diploma or Diploma and 8.7% had a Certificate level qualification (ABS, 2016b).

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<sup>8</sup> From late 2013 DIMIA was renamed the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP).

The Labour Force participation rate for recent migrants and temporary residents was 70% in 2016, while the total participation rate for Australia was 66% (ABS, 2016b). Upon arrival in Australia, however, about one third (31%) of recent migrants reported experiencing some difficulty finding their first job. Of the migrants who experienced difficulty: 65% reported a lack of Australian work experience or references; 31% reported a lack of local contacts or networks; and 25% experienced language difficulties (ABS, 2016b).

As a result of the large number of non-English speaking immigrants to Australia over the years, a key feature in Australian society is a diversity of languages. Although English is the main language spoken in Australia, there are more than 300 different languages spoken in Australian households, including indigenous languages (ABS, 2016c). According to the 2016 Census, 21% of Australians speak a language other than English at home. Besides English, the next most common languages spoken at home are Mandarin (2.5%), Arabic (1.4%), Cantonese (1.2%), Vietnamese (1.2%), and Italian (1.2%) (ABS, 2016a).

Interestingly, of the recent migrants who arrived in Australia after 2006, only 33.5% speak exclusively English at home and another 54.1% speak another language and English either very well or well (ABS, 2012). The Settlement Outcomes of New Arrivals (SoNA) from 2011<sup>9</sup> showed that employment, English language proficiency and social networks are some of the key factors in understanding how well migrants adjust in Australia. In particular, social networks are important as they connect people

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<sup>9</sup> To the best of my knowledge, the most recent SoNA report from the 2016 Census was not yet available at the time of writing this thesis.

together with family, friends and the larger community based on shared interests, values and living circumstances, which in turn foster feelings of trust, social connectedness and a sense of belonging (ABS, 2014). According to the SoNA Report, a well-connected migrant will, for example, actively participate and interact with family and friends in Australia as well as with other ethnic or religious groups (DIAC, 2011b, pp. 62-63).

Overall, migrants have made – and continue to make – a considerable contribution to Australia and Australian society. In particular, they comprise a significant proportion of Australia’s population growth (ABS, 2015) and have provided much needed skills that drive economic development (DIAC, 2011a). Further, they have created a rich society of people who have a variety of cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds. Italians have also contributed significantly to Australian society, as well as to Australia’s population growth over the years. The following sections will provide a specific overview of the patterns of migration from Italy to Australia from the nineteenth century to the present day.

## **2.2 Migration from Italy to Australia: an overview**

Between 1876 and 1965, some 25 million Italians had emigrated (Castles, 1992, p. 36), primarily to certain parts of the US or Western Europe. Mass emigration from Italy came to a standstill in the 1970s when the country experienced improved economic, political and social conditions. In Australia, while Italians have been present since the late nineteenth century, large scale migration from Italy to Australia did not begin until the mass migration period after World War II. The following

sections will provide a historical overview of the patterns of Italian migration to Australia during the last century and outline the characteristics of and motivations for the various migration waves by drawing on Australian Census data and reports from the DIBP. I have chosen to divide the migration patterns into four phases: phase one, pre-World War II migration; phase two, World War II and post-war mass migration; phase three, the 1970s and the years of standstill; and phase four, post-2000: the new Italian migrants.

### **2.2.1 Pre-World War II migration**

Italians have been present in Australia since the late nineteenth century when fishermen from Sicily and Puglia settled in Western Australia (Alcorso, 1992, pp. 9-10). However, it was only in the 1850s, 60s and 70s, when rich gold deposits were discovered in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, that a more significant wave of migration occurred from Italy. Indeed, according to Alcorso (1992), the first numerically significant group of Italian migrants arrived at this time when 2000 Swiss-Italians from Canton Ticino settled in Victoria (p. 5).

By the 1901 Census, the first after Australian Federation, 5678 Italians were recorded as living in Australia. However, according to Cresciani (2003) a more accurate figure would be 7000, as many Italians were scattered across the countryside, unaware of, or unable to register for, the Census (p. 54). These Italians arrived in Australia during the turbulent climate created by the White Australia Policy which comprised a number of acts aimed to exclude all non-Europeans from immigrating to Australia. Under this policy, a further discrimination was made whereby Italians, like other Southern



Europeans, were perceived as “non-white” and deemed less desirable and less likely to assimilate than their Northern European counterparts (Baldassar, Pyke, & Ben-Moshe, 2012, p. 35). Nonetheless, with the Pacific Islands Labourers Act of 1901, which deported thousands of Pacific Islanders (*kanakas*) working on cane fields in Queensland and Northern New South Wales, Italians were recruited to replace them in the labour force (Cresciani, 2003, p. 45).

From the 1920s, although the Americas had previously been the preferred choice for many Italian migrants (Jupp, 1998, p. 60), the limits on immigration imposed by the American Government’s Emergency Quota Act in 1921 and the Immigration Restriction Act, also in the early 1920s, imposed heavy restrictions on Italian immigration caused an increase in the flow towards Australia. In fact, the 1921 Census recorded 8153 Italians living in Australia, with a more accurate estimate of 15,000 (Cresciani, 2003, p. 54).

In the years that followed, migration from Italy to Australia continued to escalate as many Italians felt compelled to escape Italy’s economic problems and increasing political unrest, and were drawn by the promise of Australia’s decent wages and working conditions. Indeed, according to Cresciani (2003), Australian immigration offices were opened across Europe and “people were given a most favourable, albeit utopian, account of Australia and of the economic possibilities open to them, and wooed to apply for a visa” (p. 125). By the time of the 1933 Australian Census, the Italian population in Australia had increased three-fold to 26,756 (ABS, 1933). Initially, young single Italian males left their villages individually. Often aged

between 20 and 40 when they left Italy, they had limited formal education, were usually impoverished and had come to Australia to make money in order to pay off their debts back home (Alcorso, 1992; Castles, 1992). Usually, they would go on to establish themselves in Australia within semi-skilled or unskilled sectors of industry such as building and construction (Castles, 1992).

These young Italian males would then encourage fellow *paesani* (people from the same region) to migrate to Australia, creating small enclaves of Italian communities and supportive networks across the country. At a later stage, their wives and extended families would join them. These community networks engendered strong feelings of in-group solidarity and formed a pattern of chain migration that would go on to characterise much of the post-war migration of Italians to Australia (Alcorso, 1992, p. 9).

### **2.2.2 World War II and post-war mass migration**

During World War II, Italians living in Australia were officially classified as “enemy aliens” and were subject to a number of restrictions. Indeed, under orders from the National Security Act of 1939-1940, the Federal Government could imprison and intern anyone who was suspected of being disloyal. Thousands of Italians were also deported to Australia as Prisoners of War and subsequently employed as labourers in order to compensate for the shortage of workers, especially on farms.

The years immediately after World War II, however, marked the beginnings of a mass migration of Italians to Australia. Between 1947 and 1950, 33,280 Italians had used

their own chain migration networks to come to Australia (Baldassar et al., 2012, p. 23). This number further increased, partly because of the introduction in 1951 of a series of bilateral Assisted Migration agreements between Italy and Australia, which allowed for the entrance of large numbers of Italians and their families. Thus, for the first time in the context of the White Australia Policy, Australia allowed the entry of significant numbers (20,000 migrants per year for five years) of what were still considered “less-desirable” immigrants from Southern Europe (Castles, 1992, p. 40).

The large majority of the post-war arrivals were from small towns and villages in rural areas of Southern Italian regions – Sicily, Calabria, Abruzzo and Campania – but also from Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia in the North. They were largely labourers with limited formal education who sent remittances to support their family and friends back home (Alcorso & Alcorso, 1992). While Italy often saw Australia’s immigration policies as racist, and many Italians intended to return to Italy permanently, numerous others stayed in the hopes that they could provide a better life for their children (Baldassar et al., 2012).

Due to chain migration and a lack of settlement services and jobs elsewhere in Australia, the majority of these post-war Italian migrants went on to settle in the metropolitan areas of Melbourne (Victoria) and of Sydney (New South Wales). Even today, Melbourne and Sydney still have the highest number of Italian-born people in Australia. The 2016 Australian Census revealed that Victoria had the largest number of Italians (70,530), followed by New South Wales (49,474), Western Australia (19,204), and South Australia (18,537) (ABS, 2016f).

Mass migration from Italy to Australia continued until the end of the 1960s, reaching its peak in the period from 1951 to 1960 with approximately 17,000 new migrants arriving in Australia each year (Castles, 1992, p. 42). Of the 4.3 million migrants that arrived in Australia between 1945 and the 1980s, the Italians formed the largest group of non-English speakers (Collins & Castillo, 1998, p. 29).

### **2.2.3 The 1970s and the years of standstill**

Between 1966 and 1975, the number of Italians migrating to Australia began to decline when the economic situation and standard of living in Italy improved considerably. It was also during this period that the Australian Government repealed the White Australia Policy and began focusing on recruiting migrants from other European and Middle Eastern nations (Castles, 1992) which further contributed to the decline in Italian migration to Australia. Those Italians who did emigrate in this period were primarily motivated by career, lifestyle and/or love (Baldassar et al., 2012). Unlike the agricultural workers of earlier migration waves, many of these Italians were professionals from the middle classes, and were generally not part of the chain migration networks which previously connected Italians to Italian Australian communities.

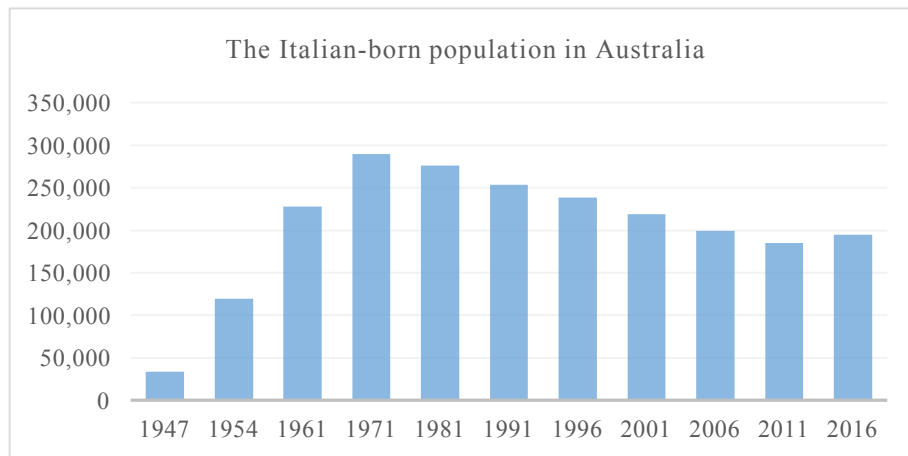
The generation that arrived as young adults in the 1950s and 1960s, during mass migration, reached retirement age in the 1990s. At the same time, international travel also became much more affordable for those who wished to return to Italy for extended visits or to permanently resettle. Data provided by DIMIA (2005) show that between 1990 and 1999 the number of permanent migrants from Italy was at its

lowest with only a few hundred arrivals per year (ranging from 336 in 1994-95 to 168 in 1999-2000).

Throughout the late 1990s, then, as a result of the decline of permanent migrants from Italy and the deaths occurring in the ageing population of the Italian Australian community, the number of second-generation Italians (people born in Australia with at least one parent born in Italy) has exceeded the number of Italian-born by almost 30%, according to the Census in 1996 (McDonald, 1999, p. 5). Indeed, as the graph below (Figure 2.1) demonstrates, the Italian-born population in Australia has been steadily declining. The number of Italian-born in Australia declined from 289,476 in 1971 (11.2% of the overseas-born population) (Castles, 1992, p. 43) to 238,216 in 1996, and furthermore, by 2011 it had fallen to 185,402 (3.5% of the overseas-born population) (ABS, 2012).

The latest Australian Census in 2016 revealed that there were 194,900 Italian-born people in Australia (0.8% of the overseas-born population in Australia) (ABS, 2016a). Of the Italian-born in Australia, the median age in 2016 was 70-years-old, with a total of 66% being 65-years-old and over (ABS, 2016c). This is in stark contrast to the median age of Australia's general overseas-born population (44-years-old) and those born in Australia (34-years-old) (ABS, 2016d).

**Figure 2.1 Italian-born people in Australia at the time of the Australia Census between 1947 and 2016**



Source: ABS, 2007, 2011, 2016a; Castles, 1992; McDonald, 1999)

Despite this massive decline in the Italian-born population, the growth in second and third generation Italians in Australia indicates that the Italian Australian community still has a visible presence. Indeed, in 1996, the second generation Italians totalled 334,036, almost 100,000 more than first generation Italians (Hugo, 1999, p. 94). Moreover, in 2001, the number of second generation Italians had risen to 355,200, representing 44.4% of the total Italian Australian population and over 136,000 more people than the first generation. Further, according to the 2011 census, 185,400 Italian-born Australian residents and a further 916,000 residents have claimed Italian ancestry, making it the fifth most identified ancestry in Australia behind English, Australian, Irish and Scottish, and the highest number among all non-English speaking migrant communities (ABS, 2012).

Due to these increasing numbers, the Italian Australian community still has a clear influence in Australian society today which, facilitated by Australian multicultural

policies, has seen the continued preservation of Italian culture and identity. Indeed, over the years, Italians have significantly changed the nature of Australian cultural tastes, especially in terms of food, wine and fashion, making it increasingly popular to be Italian for the majority of second and subsequent generations of Italian Australians (Baldassar et al., 2012). In particular, from the 1980s, engendered by the “Made in Italy” phenomenon, Italian became a much sought-after language and Italy became a much desired place to visit. During that time, the concept “Made in Italy” referred exclusively to Italian economic production. However, it represented much more than just consumer goods produced in Italy: it was associated with distinct Italian characteristics, such as luxury, quality, style and uniqueness (Petrilli, 2014).

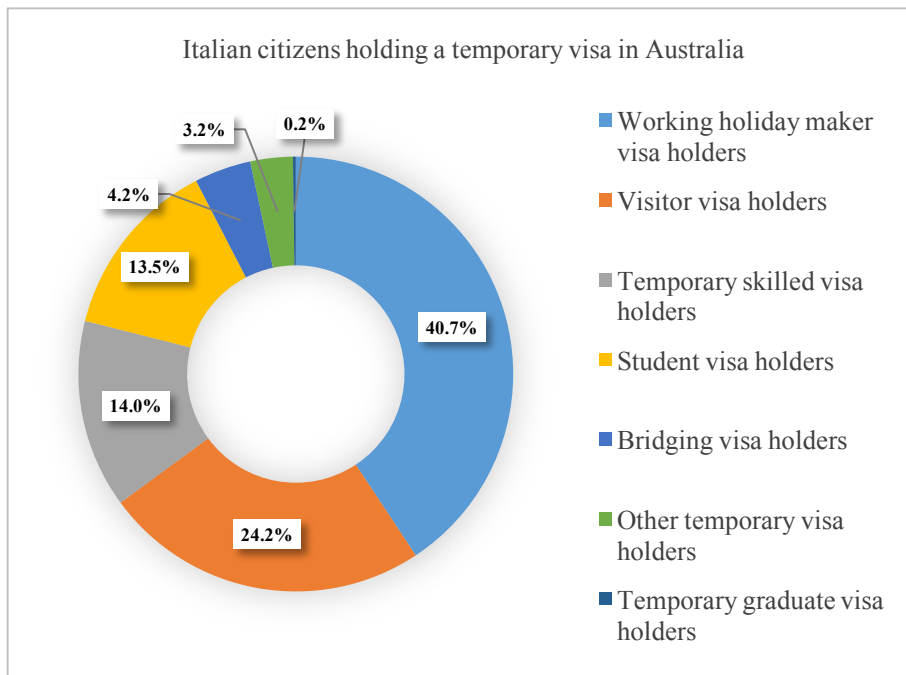
In fact, Baldassar et al. (2012) have found that second (and later) generations of Italian Australians are eager to learn Italian, visit Italy and participate in online Italian social networks and media that keep them up to date with life in Italy. In this sense, the large presence of second and subsequent generation Italians in Australia, as well as the increasing number of Australians claiming Italian ancestry, signifies that the Italian cultural (and to a lesser extent linguistic) identity is still very much a part of Australian society.

#### **2.2.4 Post-2000: the new Italian migrants**

As discussed in section 2.2.3, migration from Italy to Australia was at its lowest in the 1990s. However, over the last decade, particularly since the introduction of the WH visa arrangement between Australia and Italy in 2004, and further intensified by the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the number of Italian arrivals in Australia increased

significantly, reaching its peak in 2013. Data from DIBP show that the new Italian migrants come to Australia, at least initially, on temporary visas. The graph below (Figure 2.2) shows that of the 126,233 Italian temporary visa holders between 2004 and 2015, the majority (40.7%) used the WH visa to migrate to Australia. This section of temporary visa holders was followed by Visitor visa holders making up a further 24.3% of the total. Other major groups were represented by Temporary skilled (457) and Student visa holders making up 14.0% and 13.5% respectively.

**Figure 2.2 Italian citizens holding a temporary visa in Australia 2004-2015**



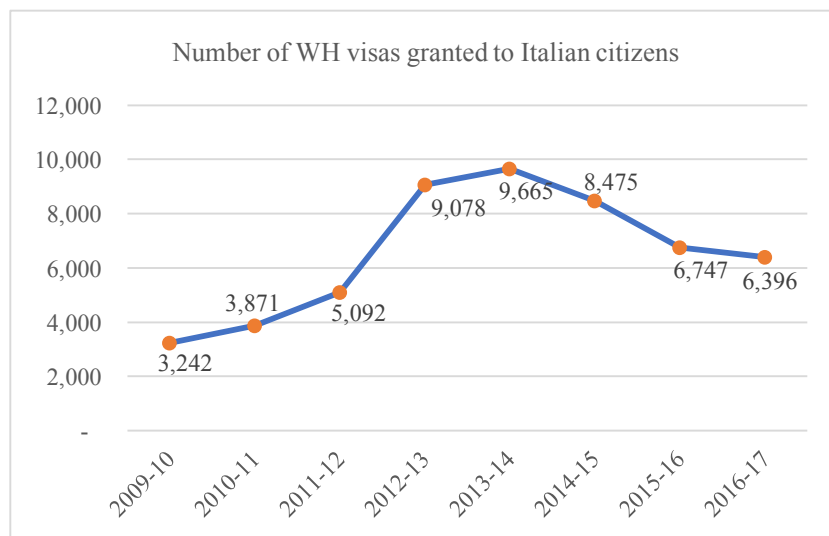
Adapted from Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016, p. 79

In particular, on 2 January 2004, Italy entered into a Working Holiday agreement with Australia and since then more than 50,000 Italian youths have been granted WH visas to enter Australia. The graph below (Figure 2.3) shows the total number of WH visas granted to Italian citizens between the financial years 2009-10 and 2016-2017 (until



December 31 2016). It clearly demonstrates that there was a steady increase in WH visas granted to Italians in the period between 2009-10 and 2013-14. Specifically, the first clear sign of the large increase in the number of Italians arriving on the WH visa was during the years between 2011-12 and 2013-14, when there was an increase of 89% of Italian WHs in Australia.

**Figure 2.3 Total number of WH visas granted to Italian citizens from 2009-10 to 2016-17 (to 31 December 2016)**



Adapted from DIBP, 2013, p. 19, 2016b, p. 21

Indeed, as Table 2.2 shows, at its peak in 2013-14, Italy was the fourth largest European source country of first WH visas granted, following the UK (23,927), Germany (15,941) and France (14,988), and the sixth largest source country globally.

**Table 2.2 Top ten source countries of WH visa applications granted by citizenship country from 2009-10 to 2016-17 (to 31 December 2016)**

<b>Citizenship country</b>	<b>2009-10</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
United Kingdom	19,788	19,866	20,818	24,134	23,927	23,924	22,501	21,800
Germany	11,499	10,995	12,149	14,719	15,941	15,217	15,141	15,694
Taiwan	4,618	6,007	9,112	17,968	15,704	12,960	11,089	9,947
France	10,518	10,566	11,092	13,815	14,988	13,338	12,255	12,308
Korea, South	17,461	14,002	15,201	16,844	14,908	12,160	11,139	10,968
Italy	3,242	3,871	5,092	9,078	9,665	8,475	6,747	6,396
Ireland, Rep. of	6,945	8,923	11,928	10,239	6,660	1,074	3,380	3,897
Hong Kong	1,676	1,760	2,824	4,666	5,837	4,681	3,158	2,120
Japan	3,944	3,342	3,966	4,732	4,860	4,938	5,633	5,097
Canada	4,844	4,571	4,550	4,385	4,173	4,232	4,333	4,084

Adapted from DIBP, 2013, p. 19, 2016b, p. 21

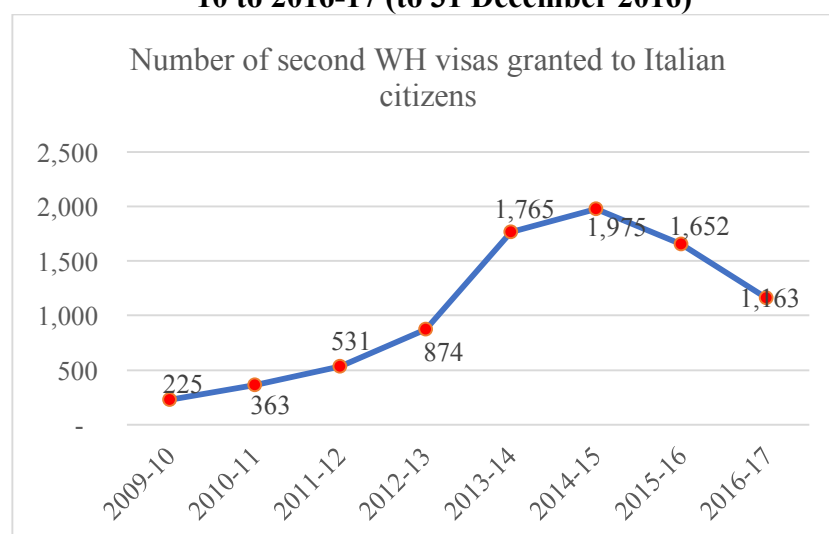
Even more noteworthy, however, is the large number of second WH visas granted to Italians during the same period, as shown in Table 2.3 and Figure 2.4. Indeed, in 2013-14, Italy was the third largest European source country of second WH visas granted, and the fifth largest source country globally. Further, Figure 2.4 highlights that the number of second WH visas granted to Italians more than doubled between 2012-13 and 2013-14, an increase of 101.9%. As others have noted (Dalla Bernardina et al., 2013; Dipalma, 2015), requesting a second WH visa is often an indication that a person wishes to prolong their stay in Australia. Therefore, the large increase in second WH visa grants points to a growth in the number of Italians wanting to prolong their stay in Australia.

**Table 2.3 Top ten source countries of second WH visa applications granted by citizenship country from 2009-10 to 2016-17 (to 31 December 2016)**

Citizenship country	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Taiwan	1,136	924	1,838	3,047	5,510	4,767	3,611	3,680
United Kingdom	2,727	2,392	3,057	3,749	4,523	4,685	4,482	3,979
Ireland, Rep. of	3,032	1,606	2,794	3,735	3,076	1,490	880	849
Korea, South	3,321	2,389	2,523	2,663	2,991	2,600	2,033	1,919
Italy	225	363	531	874	1,765	1,975	1,652	1,163
France	746	787	951	1,204	1,623	1,735	1,733	1,507
Hong Kong	143	246	478	791	1,400	1,364	1,015	729
Japan	858	619	667	838	1,004	985	1,107	1,067
Germany	670	635	787	882	932	999	1,027	918
Estonia	230	236	281	380	503	442	351	320

Adapted from DIBP, 2013, p. 20, 2016b, p. 22

**Figure 2.4 Number of second WH visas granted to Italian citizens from 2009-10 to 2016-17 (to 31 December 2016)**

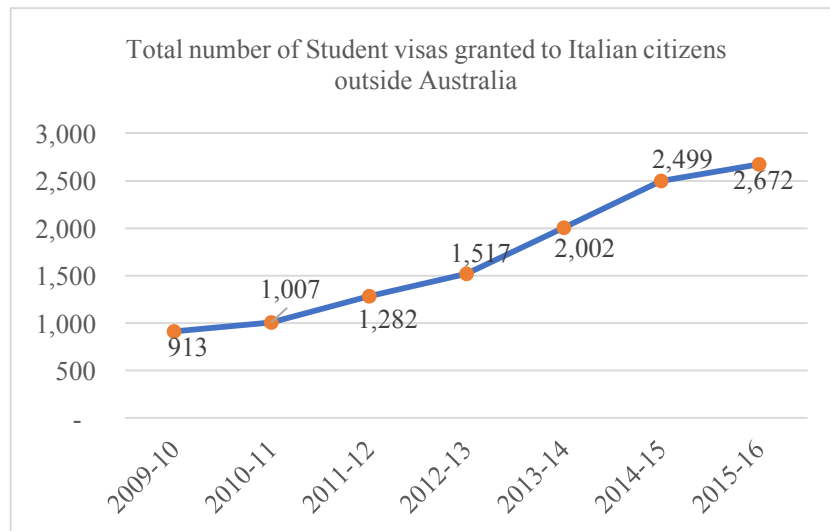


Adapted from DIBP, 2013, p. 20, 2016b, p. 22

Moreover, as illustrated in the graph below (Figure 2.5), data released by the DIBP reveals there was also a steady increase in the total number of Student visas issued to Italians outside Australia between 2009-10 (913 visas) and 2015-16 (2672 visas).

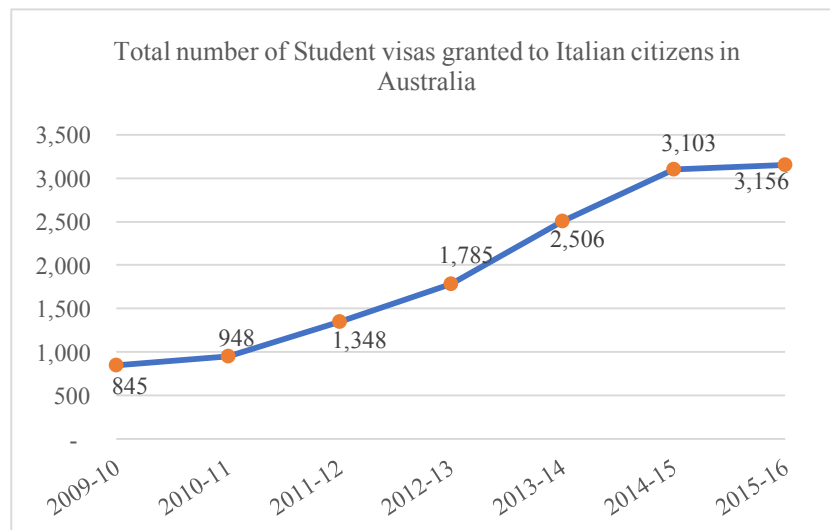
Again, particularly significant is the number of those Student visas which have been granted to Italians already in Australia (Figure 2.6), highlighting the applicant's intention to prolong their stay in Australia.

**Figure 2.5 Total number of Student visas granted to Italian citizens outside Australia from 2009-10 to 2015-16**



Adapted from DIBP, 2016a, p. 21

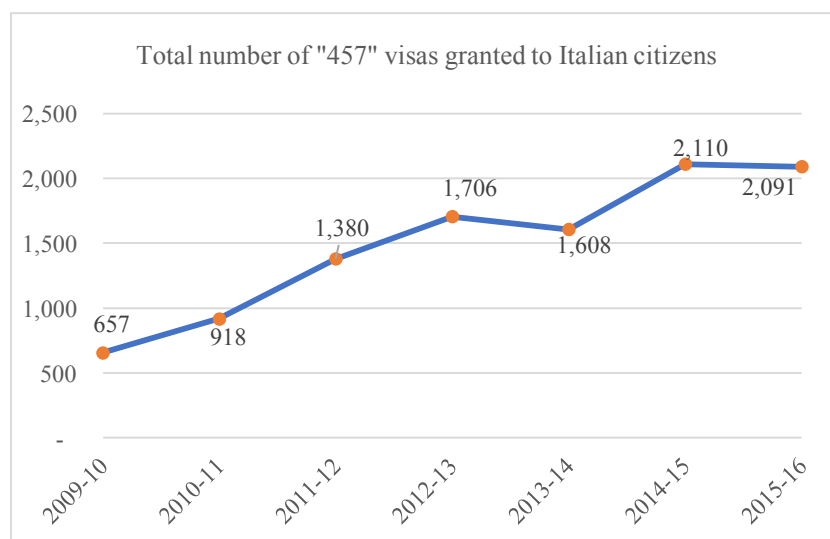
**Figure 2.6 Total Number of Student visas granted to Italian citizens in Australia from 2009-10 to 2015-16**



Adapted from DIBP 2016a, p. 22

Among temporary Italian entrants, the number who holds a Temporary Work (457) visa also increased during the period between 2009-10 and 2015-16. This visa, which until April 2017 allowed the holder to work for the sponsoring employer for a maximum of four years, represented a direct path towards Permanent Residency: after two years on a “457” visa the holder was able to apply for a permanent visa.

**Figure 2.7 Total number of Temporary Work (“457”) visas granted to Italian citizens from 2009-10 to 2015-16**



Adapted from DIBP, 2017c

Overall, Figures 2.3 to 2.7 show the continuous increase in the number of new Italian temporary entrants, especially those who came on WH, Temporary Work (457) and Student visas in the financial years between 2009-10 and 2013-14. It also indicates that Italians have a desire to prolong their experience in Australia. In particular, Figure 2.3 shows the popularity of the WH visa among young Italians, with numbers gradually increasing from 2009-10 and reaching their peak in 2013-14.

Interestingly, however, the figures above also show that in the last few financial years (between 2013-14 and 2015-16), there has been a slight decrease in the number of both WH (-33.8%) and second WH visas (-41.1%) granted to Italians. While the reasons for this decline are still unclear, it is possible that negative publicity in Italy about the widespread labour exploitation on farms<sup>10</sup> in Australia has been a contributing factor. Indeed, as findings from my in-depth interviews will illustrate (Chapter Six) my participants were well informed about the exploitation of new migrants to Australia and were increasingly concerned about having to carry out three months of farm work if they wanted to obtain a second working holiday visa. These, and other concerns and challenges for new Italian migrants to Australia, will be discussed below in section 2.3.1.

It is worth noting that the increase in the number of new Italian migrants to Australia, especially in the years between 2009 and 2013, marked for some scholars (Dalla Bernardina et al., 2013; Grigoletti & Pianelli, 2014, 2016) the beginnings of a new mass migration wave, comparable to that of the 1950s and 1960s. For example, Dalla Bernardina et al. (2013) released a report indicating that there had been a boom in the number of young Italians in Australia. The report indicated that by 30 September 2013 there were a total of 18,610 Italian citizens in Australia on temporary resident visas which was an increase of 116% in comparison to 30 September 2011 (Dalla Bernardina et al., 2013; Grigoletti & Pianelli, 2014). In addition, Grigoletti and Pianelli (2014) reported that by 30 June 2014 there were 20,920 Italian citizens in Australia on temporary visas (primarily WH, 457 and Student visas), an increase of

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<sup>10</sup> Throughout this thesis, “the farms” or “farm work” refer to the three months of specified work in regional Australia that Working Holiday Visa holders must complete in order to obtain a second WH visa (see section 2.1).

163% from 30 June 2011. In 2016, another study by Grigoletti and Pianelli appeared which focused on the increasing numbers of Italians coming to Australia across most visa categories.

However, according to Armillei and Mascitelli (2016), the claims made in the studies and reports by Dalla Bernardina et al. (2013) and Grigoletti and Pianelli (2014) about a new wave of mass migration from Italy to Australia are exaggerated because “the contribution of the Italian cohort of migration to the national permanent population in Australia is rather low” (p. 20). Indeed, I would also argue that although many Italians who arrive in Australia on a WH or Student visa may wish to prolong their stay in Australia, there is no clear indication that they want to settle in the country permanently. The large majority of Italians, in fact, are merely coming to Australia in order to have new experiences (see Chapter One). Therefore, as others have argued (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016; Dipalma, 2015), not only are the conclusions made by Dalla Bernardina et al. (2013) and Grigoletti and Pianelli (2014) misleading, they also represent a different phenomenon to that of the post-war Italian migrants. Although many post-war migrants may have intended to return to Italy, of the estimated 360,000 Italians who migrated to Australia between 1947 and 1976, approximately 25% repatriated (Castles, 1992, pp. 41-42). The majority therefore settled in Australia permanently.

Armillei and Mascitelli also extensively researched the phenomenon of new Italian migrants to Australia and produced a report in July 2016. However, unlike the data analysed in the studies by Dalla Bernardina et al. (2013) and Grigoletti and Pianelli

(2014), which are derived from DIBP statistics, Armillei and Mascitelli's (2016) research is based on two data sources: a statistical analysis of the data produced by various Australian authorities and an analysis and interpretation of data they collected between January and May 2016 from more than 600 online surveys with Italians who had arrived in Australia after 2004. Further, they also conducted focus groups with new Italian migrants and Italian migration agents in order to probe deeper into the results of the online survey responses. Their study is the *only* study, to my knowledge, that provides an accurate and comprehensive portrait of the phenomenon of new Italian migrants to Australia today, based on both quantitative and qualitative data. Therefore, the information about the new Italian migrants presented in the next sections will be largely based on the findings from Armillei and Mascitelli's (2016) survey and focus groups.

### **2.3 Who are the new Italian migrants?**

This section will present some of the common characteristics of new Italian migrants. In Armillei and Mascitelli's (2016) sample, between 2004 and 2015, 65.1% of new Italian migrant arrivals were aged between 15 and 44, with the large majority (51.4%) in the 25-44 age group category (p. 71). In terms of the geographical distribution of Italians, the majority arrived in New South Wales (41.1%), followed by Victoria (26.3%). Western Australia and Queensland follow with 13.7% and 11.5% respectively (p. 22). Further, Armillei and Mascitelli (2016) demonstrated that unlike the Italian mass migration wave of the 1950s and 1960s, who primarily came from the South of Italy (but also from Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia in the North) (see section 2.2.2), the majority of new Italian migrants are coming from Northern Italian



regions (45%), mainly Lombardia, Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia or from central Italy, chiefly Lazio and Toscana (26%) (p. 88). In contrast to the post-war arrivals (see section 2.2.2), the new Italian migrants are highly educated (60%), some holding a Bachelor Degree (21%), a Master's Degree (32%), or even a PhD (9%) (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016, p. 23). Further, 60% of Armillei and Mascitelli's (2016) sample indicated that they had at least a "good level" of English, as many Italians now study it from primary school (p. 24).

### **2.3.1 Concerns and challenges for new Italian migrants looking to prolong their stay in Australia**

Armillei and Mascitelli's (2016) survey results point to the considerable number (114 or 58%) of their respondents wishing to prolong their experience in Australia by taking advantage of other visas (p. 103). While most of them arrived in Australia on a WH visa, once it was about to expire they applied for other visas, such as the Student visa, or they sought sponsorship by an employer. Those who intended to stay in Australia permanently were primarily motivated by the "High standard of living" (71%) (e.g. healthcare, educational system, economy, public transport) and "more job opportunities" (71%) (p. 103). However, a more permanent status in Australia is challenging and can only be obtained through one of the Migration Program Streams, as mentioned in section 2.1.

Indeed, Armillei and Mascitelli (2016) found that the path to permanent residency was challenging for new Italian migrants to Australia, with many describing the process as confusing and ambiguous. For example, a large number of their

participants (37%) could not have their tertiary qualifications recognised in Australia, thus presenting a major problem for those who were looking to prolong their stay. In addition, a large number of their survey participants (48%) stated that the visa system was too costly (p. 24).

Another problem that temporary Italian migrants face, as mentioned above (section 2.2.4), is being exploited in the workforce because of their “vulnerable and uncertain visa status” (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016, p. 26). This primarily occurred in the hospitality and farm sectors. The data from Armillei and Mascitelli’s (2016) focus groups indicated that there was a general consensus among participants that a large presence of Italians or Italian Australians are taking advantage of the newly arrived Italian migrants. Their participants cited instances in which they were underpaid, forced to work overtime without remuneration, and were not entitled to sick leave. In fact, issues surrounding work exploitation among temporary workers in Australia came to a head in 2015 when an Australian current affairs documentary program, *Four Corners*, broadcast an investigation which uncovered instances of extreme exploitation of Working Holiday visa holders on vegetable and fruit farms, and in chicken factories (Meldrum-Hanna & Russell, 2015). More recently, the Australian Senate released a report entitled “A National Disgrace: The Exploitation of Temporary Work Visa Holders” (Parliament of Australia, 2016). The instances of exploitation of Italians in Australia is particularly disquieting as the data from this study will also show (Chapter Six). My interview participants often turned to Facebook groups to search for valuable information about which businesses and farms

underpay or exploit their staff, in order to help them prepare for migrating to Australia.

Nonetheless, despite these challenges, various other services have been created for new Italian migrants which can, and do, help them prepare for and manage their lives in Australia. The next section will discuss some of the initiatives that new Italian migrants have access to pre- and post-migration to Australia. It will also analyse the role that online communication plays in providing new Italian migrants with connections to their family and friends back home, as well as insider information about Australia.

### **2.3.2 Communities and connections for new Italian migrants to Australia**

One of the most notable differences between recently arrived Italian migrants and those who migrated to Australia from Italy in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s is their level of connectedness to family and friends back home. While in the post-war era, airmail, media and word of mouth were the primary sources of news and information about Italy (Castles, 1992), communication with family and friends back home in Italy was primarily via letters as the telephone was only used in emergencies due to its high costs. Today, however, connectedness to family and friends is possible every day via new technologies.

Indeed, in their survey of four Italian Australian cohorts – (1) “Elite” professional migrants from post 1970s wave; (2) “New” migrants “elite” professional migrants

from post 2000 wave; (3) Post-war second generation migrants; and (4) Migrants from Post-1970s cohort – Baldassar et al. (2012) reported that the “elite” professional migrants from the post 2000 wave remain strongly connected with Italy through instant, regular and more accessible communication technologies. Their respondents reported frequent communication with family and friends, that is, monthly or several times a year, and the primary means of communication is by phone, email or Facebook (Baldassar et al., 2012, p. 11). Online communication can therefore act as a channel of cultural maintenance and identity (Hugo, 2014; Baldassar et al., 2012). Similarly, Rubino’s (2009) study of multilingualism and language maintenance among Italians who migrated to Australia between 1993 and 1997 found that of the 12 women interviewed, all maintained very strong connections to Italy. Indeed, they too reported frequent use of email, phone calls and Skype to communicate with relatives and friends back in Italy; they listened to and watched Italian programs on the radio and television quite regularly; and read Italian magazines and books. Some even housed visitors from Italy and also travelled to Italy on a regular basis. Indeed, connectedness to Italy is now readily available post-migration thanks to access to Italian newspapers, online commercial Italian radio programs and podcasts, and daily television broadcasts from Italy on SBS, Australia’s free-to-air multicultural, multilingual television and radio network.

In Australia, the presence of a large Italian Australian community who speak the Italian language is another important consideration when studying new Italian migrants to Australia. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, a pre-established ethnic community can aid in the migration process by providing new migrants with feelings

of well-being through a sense of connectedness to like-minded others. For example, studies from as early as the 1980s have shown that in the initial stages of post-migration, ethnic-based social networks are invaluable to newly arrived migrants, especially those with linguistic ties, as they ease the stress and loneliness commonly felt during intercultural adaptation, and provide various forms of social support (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

Baldassar et al. (2012) also established that the new Italian migrants to Australia seek support from these post-war, second and third generations of Italian migrant communities already established in Australia. Baldassar and Pyke (2014) defined this as a type of “intra-diaspora knowledge transfer” whereby new migrants seek out “pre-trip”, “settlement” and “future goals” information from older Italian migrants (p. 137). Baldassar and Pyke (2014) found that before migrating, new Italian migrants “use on-line mediums to research potential professional contacts in Australia of Italian birth or heritage in their chosen occupation and ‘cold call’ in the hope of assistance including advice about migration pathways and employment prospects” (p. 138). They therefore argue that the post-war Italian community in Australia “represent an important source of knowledge and support for new arrivals” (p. 138). Conversely, my data show (Chapters Five and Six) that the “knowledge transfer” between the post-war Italian Australian community and the new Italian migrants is becoming less significant because the proliferation of online communities of Italian migrants on Facebook can provide a more personalised, up-to-date medium through which to gain information and support pre- (and post-) migration to Australia. In this regard, while the studies carried out by Baldassar et al. (2012) and Baldassar and Pyke (2014) have analysed

the new Italian migrants to Australia, including the way in which prospective Italian migrants use online communication to research professional contacts, they do not explore the influence of online communities, such as those created for Italians within Facebook groups, on pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences.

Besides Italian migrant communities on Facebook, the increase in the number of Italians migrating to Australia over the last decade has led to the creation of a plethora of informative websites (e.g. [IloveAustralia.it](http://IloveAustralia.it), [vieniinaustralia.it](http://vieniinaustralia.it), [DoitAustralia](http://DoitAustralia.com), [PortaleAustralia.com](http://PortaleAustralia.com), [Australiandreaming.com](http://Australiandreaming.com), [SydneyxItaliani](http://SydneyxItaliani.com)), blogs (e.g. [italiani-in-australia.blogspot.com](http://italiani-in-australia.blogspot.com), [italiansinfuga.com](http://italiansinfuga.com), [ilfaro.org](http://ilfaro.org), [australiaitalia.it](http://australiaitalia.it), [sognandoaustralia.com](http://sognandoaustralia.com)) and forums (e.g. [australianboardcommunity.com](http://australianboardcommunity.com), [tripaustralia.com](http://tripaustralia.com)). Recently, a new migrant association called GIA (Giovani Italiani Australia), set up an online portal for young migrants – [www.puntoinformativo.it](http://www.puntoinformativo.it) – aimed at the new WH visa holders. Further, in 2017, “Famiglia Australia Online” ([itaufamily.com](http://itaufamily.com)) was set up as a bridge for potential Italian migrants to Australia to connect to the already established Italian Australian community. All of these online platforms provide new Italian migrants with information and support both pre- and post-migration to Australia, and help them to build social networks with other Italians who are already in Australia.

Further, the phenomenon of new Italian migration to Australia has also sparked an increase in face-to-face services available to Italians. Once arrived in Sydney, for example, newly arrived Italians often go to the main Italian organisation in Sydney, Co.As.It (Comitato Assistenza Italiani/Committee for the Support of Italians), to

obtain information and support. The organisation was founded in 1968 under the auspices of the Italian Government with the objective of promoting and preserving the Italian culture in Australia and providing immigrants with help and advice through a coordinated system of facilities for inclusion in Australian society (Co.As.It., 2015). In 2013, to cope with the growing phenomenon of new Italian migrants to Sydney, Co.As.It established a new service called “Welcome to Australia” which provides assistance to this new group of migrants. These services are offered by email, one-on-one meetings and via free informative group seminars held at Co.As.It’s office in Leichardt, Sydney. The seminars, conducted in Italian, provide information on topics of interest to recently arrived migrants, such as opening a bank account, requesting a tax-file-number and advice about finding a job or accommodation and learning the English language. Co.As.It’s internet website has several sections which also publicise information on the topics of health insurance, bureaucratic aspects of the WH visa, study, work, social life, housing, and tax returns.

In Melbourne, the non-government organisation NOMIT (Melbourne Italian Network) also provides assistance to incoming Italian migrants. NOMIT is located inside the Italian Consulate and provides an informal point of call for prospective Italian migrants, as well as for other Italians who have just arrived in Australia. However, this organisation is only sustained by a group of young Italians who volunteer their time. Nonetheless, with the support of and in conjunction with the Italian Consulate in Melbourne, NOMIT assists many Italians with useful information, including matters related to work rights, such that it has been identified

as a major contributor of support for newly arrived Italians in Melbourne (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016, p. 30).

The increased number of new Italian migrants to Australia has also led to the provision of other initiatives. In September 2013 the Italian Australian Newspaper *La Fiamma* in Sydney (and its equivalent *Il Globo* in Melbourne) launched “Pagina Giovane”, a page dedicated to young Italian migrants in Australia and their experiences.

While the support and information provided by the various online platforms and face-to-face organisations, discussed above, respond to many of the needs of the new Italian migrants to Australia, such needs are varied and multifaceted. Indeed, migrating to a new country can often be extremely challenging, with individuals experiencing stress, depression, loneliness, and other negative emotions (Bhugra, 2004; Chen & Choi, 2011; Croucher, 2008). Whether a migrant adjusts in a new country depends on whether, and to what extent, these needs for support are met. Migrants’ needs will be discussed in the following chapter, Chapter Three, in relation to social support, connectedness and sense of community.

The increasing number of services being set up for new Italian migrants to Australia may also be an indication of their lack of preparedness pre-migration, and their need for more information and support. Indeed, Armillei and Mascitelli’s (2016) survey showed that 40% of their respondents felt that they did not have enough information about Australia before leaving Italy (p. 24). Further, according to the Italian migration



agents in Armillei and Mascitelli's (2016) focus groups, many Italians arrive in Australia unprepared and with unrealistic expectations because they gather information from unofficial, informal sources such as social media (pp. 117-118). Unrealistic expectations about Australia have also been noted by the administrators of various websites, blogs, forums and Facebook groups for Italian migrants in Australia (Freri & Fossati, 2013).

The Italian media may also contribute to raising the expectations of these young Italians, with its tendency to exaggerate the stereotypical and primarily positive characteristics of Australia and Australian society, creating an idealised vision of Australia in the Italian imagination. Indeed, in one of the few academic works on this subject, Lorenzato (1995) argues that historically Australia has been imagined by Italians as either Myth or Utopia. He describes the common Italian vision of Australia as “a series of perceptions”, often circulated by the Italian media, which are based on Australia's geographical position and the length of time it took for it to be “discovered” by Europeans. As he writes:

*[questi dettagli] hanno contribuito poi a darle quel tanto di fittizio o di immaginario e a trasformarla in una terra misteriosa, in una imprevista meta di viaggi avventurosi e simbolici o, addirittura, nella mitica sponda del paradiso terrestre ritrovato (Lorenzato, 1995, p. 3).*

([these details] have contributed to giving it that touch of the unreal or the imaginary and to transform it into a mysterious land, into an unexpected destination of adventurous and symbolic journeys or, even, into the midst of the mythical shore of the re-discovered terrestrial paradise).<sup>11</sup>

In her article on knowledge transfer through literary translation, Wilson (2014) maintains that this perception of Australia as the “exotic other” is also what drives

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<sup>11</sup> Throughout this thesis, all translations from Italian into English are my own.

Australian literature in Italy. In her article, knowledge transfer is exemplified in the way in which Australia is filtered by journalists and by editors in Italy. In particular, she shows that journalists and commentators create a perception of a “land of opportunity” that is always in stark opposition to the dire economic situation in Italy. She also reveals that Italian editors meticulously choose which Australian literature to translate and publish in Italy and that these choices exacerbate that perception.

Similarly, in his article on new Italian migrants to NSW, Moritsch (2012) also inferred that the Italian media often juxtapose the context of an Italy in widespread crisis with an image of Australia as “a country rich in resources, constantly developing, and characterised by a high level of social equity, that is, able to give anyone a chance (the so-called ‘fair go’)” (p. 3). Indeed, over the last decade the proliferation of Italian newspaper articles has demonstrated a marked interest in the multitude of new Italian migrants to Australia and their experiences. Since the Global Financial crisis in 2008, there have been continuous Italian news reports in at least the following newspapers – *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, *L’Espresso*, *L’Avvenire*, *La Stampa*, *Cambia Mondo* – heralding a sort of “exodus” of Italians to Australia, as well as various news broadcasts. For example, in 2012, SBS Radio Italian journalists Magica Fossati and Marina Freri shed particular light on the increased number of new Italian migrants in their radio documentary “Bye-Bye Italy: from Austerity to Australia” (Freri & Fossati, 2013). The interviews carried out with new migrants, migration experts, key members of the Italian Australian community, and politicians in both Australia and Italy highlighted the motivations behind this phenomenon and revealed how Australia is a dream destination for many young people; a myth which is being perpetuated by the Italian media. The reality, however, can be quite different. Further,

being able to stay in Australia indefinitely is challenging and cannot be guaranteed. Indeed, despite the large number of online and offline initiatives that have been set up for new Italian migrants to Australia, as discussed above, concerns have been raised about the number of Italians who are still arriving unprepared and with unrealistic expectations (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016, pp. 117-118; Moritsch, 2012, p. 3).

## **2.4 Concluding remarks**

This chapter has presented information related to the context of the study of Italian migrants in Australia. As this project involves a case study of new Italian migrants, details about the history of Italian migration to Australia based on Australian immigration data, current trends of Italian migration, and the common characteristics of recently arrived Italian migrants, were also provided. More notably, the discussion above points to concerns about the large number of new Italian migrants arriving in Australia ill-informed, unprepared and with unrealistic expectations. It is also for this reason that this study aims to shed more light on whether, and how, the pre-migration expectations of new Italian migrants to Australia (as well as their post-migration experiences) are shaped by the use of online communication, or more specifically, by Facebook groups. Indeed, if online communication is transforming the interaction norms in our daily lives, arguably access to social media has also redefined the way in which Italian migrants form expectations of Australia and how they experience the migration process. As mentioned above, this is the aim of this study. The next chapter, Chapter Three, will review the literature surrounding migration and online communication, highlighting the specific gaps.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **ONLINE COMMUNICATION AND MIGRATION**

Online communication has burgeoned over the last decade, dramatically transforming the ways in which individuals can communicate and interact with one another across time and space. This revolution coincided with the advent of media rich social networking services with UGC (see Chapter One), otherwise known as Web 2.0 technologies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In recent years, the integration of these new technologies into everyday life through smartphone capabilities has enabled a *virtual co-presence* (Komito & Bates, 2009) through which individuals may have constant, uninterrupted access to each other's lives.

Such heightened connection is particularly significant for groups of individuals who are experiencing a stressful life experience, such as migrating to a new country. Indeed, given the challenges that often present themselves during the process of migration, migrants can find solace in having affordable, ubiquitous and instantaneous communication with other migrants already in the host country and with their friends and family back home.

As outlined in the Introduction, recent studies have demonstrated that online communication is having a profound effect on the daily lives of migrants and on the process of migration in several ways. First, online communication enables prospective migrants to join online communities of fellow migrants (Komito, 2011; Oiarzabal, 2012; Tabor & Milfont, 2013), make contacts, gather information on a particular

destination, and plan how to migrate there (Burrell & Anderson, 2008; Caidi et al., 2010; Dekker et al., 2015; González Martínez, 2008; Hiller & Franz, 2004; Komito, 2011; Moon et al., 2010; Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2014, 2015). Second, online communication has made it more accessible and affordable for migrants to maintain close, continuous communication with their home country post-migration in a way that was never possible before (Burrell & Anderson, 2008; D'Haenens et al., 2007; Diminescu, 2008; Komito, 2011; Portes, 2006; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998; Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2014).

However, while these new technological developments have certainly made it easier to manage migration, it is still unclear how the use of online communication, and, in particular, participation in online communities, can influence migrants even before they leave their home countries. Indeed, migration is a process that begins long before the arrival in the host country. Yet, whether and how technology shapes pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences is an under-researched area (see Chapter One).

As argued above, this study aims to contribute to a growing body of scholarship addressing the impact of online communication on migration. The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of the literature surrounding the three central areas involved in this investigation: 1) technology and transnationalism; (2) social media and migration; and 3) online communities. The first area paints an overall picture of the context of migration today by outlining how transnationalism and technology have changed the nature of migration and made it a more dynamic, interconnected process

that begins long before the arrival in the host country. The next areas – social media and migration, and online communities – reveal the implications of technology in everyday life. More specifically, I review those studies which show how social media have changed the way in which we build rapport with one another and how SNSs function as online communities and social support networks which facilitate the process of migration. This chapter then concludes by presenting the theoretical framework for this study, drawing from a variety of theories and perspectives, in order to discuss the three key analytical concepts employed in the interpretation of the data, namely online community, imagination, and cultural identity.

### **3.1 Technology and Transnationalism**

#### **3.1.1 Transnational migration**

Among the defining features of the 21<sup>st</sup> century migrant are mobility and connectivity, acting as a trajectory that ensures continuity in migrants' lives and in the relationships they have with their environments at home, in the host country or in between (Diminescu, 2008). The concept of transnationalism and specific transnational practices – including sending remittances, sustained communication with home countries, and media consumption – have developed as a result of increasing globalisation over the last three decades.

Transnationalism is a key component within the discourse of migration and is now commonplace in the literature of migration (Glick Schiller & Levitt, 2004; Vertovec, 2004). The broad conceptualisation of transnationalism refers to “the cultural, economic, and political linking of people and institutions [which] de-emphasises the

role of geography in the formation of identity and collectivity, and creates possibilities for new membership across boundaries” (Levitt, 2001, p. 202).

Transnational migration theory is thus concerned with simultaneity, that is, it positions migrants within two or more social spaces at the same time. Transnational migrants are no longer faced with the burden of being trapped “between two cultures” (Watson, 1977), conversely, they are able to bridge these cultures, and in doing so, “forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Glick Schiller et al., 1995, p. 7). For this reason, transnational migrants can have *dual*, *multiple* or *hybrid* identities. Indeed, Glick Schiller et al. (1995) argue that *all* migrants today are transmigrants because they are embedded in their host country while maintaining multiple linkages to their home country (p. 48).

The transnational perspective on migration came about in the late 1980s as a research framework developed by Glick Schiller et al. (1992) and was defined as:

the processes by which immigrants build social fields [or spaces] that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement... transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously (pp. 1-2).

Glick Schiller and Levitt (2004) view transnational social spaces as transnational social fields, or, “sets of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organised, and transformed” (p. 1010). A transnational migrant’s position within a given social field is not fixed, rather, it is marked by a dual presence which allows for the personal activation of various social resources depending on the context (Glick Schiller & Levitt, 2004).

In this sense, *home* no longer needs to be viewed as something that is left behind, rather, it can be something that is uprooted and, when necessary, re-grounded (Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier, & Sheller, 2003) via new technologies. Brah's (1996) concept of a *homing desire* is concerned with this desire for home and belonging, "not so much about the connection with a country as it is about the creation of a sense of place, which is often uttered in terms of 'home'" (Fortier, 2000). *Homing desire* highlights the multi-dimensionality of home for contemporary migrants, which involves the reclamation of certain foods and household objects, encounters with familiar people and languages, or habits that reconnect lives *here* (in the host country) with lives *there* (at home). *Home* is thus a space which is both constructed and experienced through the commodities, practices and habits that encompass the experience of being and belonging both *here* and *there*.

Scholars have also researched the complexities surrounding migrant identity formation in transnational social spaces (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998) and the difference between *ways of being* and *ways of belonging*. The actual social relations and practices that transnational migrants engage in, as opposed to the identities associated with their actions, are *ways of being* in a transnational social field (Glick Schiller & Levitt, 2004, p. 1010). Conversely, *ways of belonging* refer to "practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group" (Glick Schiller & Levitt, 2004, p. 534). These practices are not merely symbolic, rather, they are tangible and visible actions that provide clear markers of belonging such as wearing a t-shirt with a flag on it, or choosing a



particular cuisine to eat. *Ways of belonging* therefore combine both an action and an awareness of what that action implies.

Communication is also a fundamental aspect of transnational practices or habits because “the vitality of transnational links relies on the strength and intensity of social contacts across national borders” (Hosnedlová and Stanek, 2012, p. 64). The use of online communication to connect with other co-nationals – both in the host country and in the home country – is therefore another, more recent, practice or habit that facilitates the daily reconnection of migrants’ lives *here* and *there* during contemporary international migration. As indicated above, the influx of online communication has created new digital spaces via the internet, e-mail, SNSs like Facebook, and smartphones. In many ways, these spaces can be interpreted as social fields and can facilitate the process of migrant transnationalism by allowing users to be engaged simultaneously with two or more physical spaces (Ros, 2010). Social media may, in this sense, be conceptualised as another social field in which migrants now operate (Dekker and Siegel, 2013). As Nedelcu (2012) explains, online communication and other technologies:

allow migrants to form multiple belongings, to capture cosmopolitan values, to develop deterritorialised identities and biographies and to act at a distance in real time; on the other hand, while accelerating integration and incorporation paths in host societies, ICTs [internet and communication technologies] also enable migrants to defend particularistic values and to claim a particular belonging while living as global citizens (pp. 1340-1341).

Indeed, a study carried out by Metykova (2010) examined the transnational practices of migrants from eight European countries living in the UK, in particular those everyday transnational practices which involve the use of a variety of media. It is

argued that migrants bring with them their everyday routines from their countries of origin and adapt these to the new spaces in which they negotiate their lives in the UK; this applies to new media routines as well, such as checking Facebook or reading newspapers in their native tongue. This is also demonstrated by a study of Brazilian migrants in Belgium who use the SNS Orkut (Schrooten, 2012).<sup>12</sup> Schrooten (2012) argues that for pre-migrants and recent migrants to Belgium, these Orkut communities function as bridges between Brazil and Belgium and his data revealed that migrants' use of digital technologies is deeply rooted in their *transnational lifestyle* (p. 1798).

Online communication may also motivate transnational migrants to form communities online which allow for provision of solidarity, material resources, negotiation of identity, and, ultimately, the facilitation of migration. Migrants online mobilise for “purposive objectives” (Brinkerhoff, 2009, p. 44), such as for finding employment or accommodation in the host country. It is for this reason that online migrants are often seen as actively participating in the (re)construction of their own identity, negotiating its boundaries and learning to be both from *here* and *there* (Brinkerhoff, 2009).

Regular use of online communication helps migrants to adapt to new social codes as well as maintaining traditional ones from their home country. In particular, the interactive components of new technologies are efficient, easy-access platforms for storytelling and sharing, enabling migrants to make sense of their experiences and feelings in the encounter between cultures and identities (Brinkerhoff, 2009, p. 50).

Arguably, new technologies are the *social glue* that create a sense of *collectivity* between geographically dispersed people (Vertovec, 2004, p. 220).

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<sup>12</sup> Orkut was a SNS created by Google. Like Facebook, the platform was designed to help users find new and old friends, and maintain pre-existing relationships. It was shut down in 2014.

### **3.1.2 The use of technology to prepare for, manage and imagine the migration process**

Research into the use of new technology during the pre-migration period is still scarce as few studies (Burrell & Anderson, 2008; Caidi et al., 2010; Collin et al., 2015; Hiller & Franz, 2004; Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2014, 2015) have taken into account *how* individuals use various online communication technologies for pre-migration preparation, and even fewer have examined whether online communication can shape expectations. Below I discuss those studies which *do* take into account the different uses of technology during the various stages of the migration process.

The empirical study conducted by Hiller and Franz (2004) is one of the few studies, to my knowledge, to consider online communication use from the position of the pre-migrant. In their study of Newfoundlanders' use of forums in Canada, Hiller and Franz (2004) identified three phases in the migration cycle (pre-migrant; post-migrant and settled-migrant) which show completely different uses of technology. Based on 350 interviews with migrants and an analysis of the websites that they were using, the two scholars identified that four types of online communication – search tools, email, chat, and a bulletin board – were used by migrants for different purposes at different stages of migration. In terms of the pre-migrant, he/she “is essentially information-seeking and finds the computer enormously useful in obtaining information, making contacts and obtaining assistance and advice about the possible move” (Hiller and Franz, 2004, p. 738). In this phase, technology plays an instrumental role in generating pre-migration excitement. The exchange of information and advice is of paramount importance during this phase, as is discussing feelings and sharing

observations with other migrants. The post-migrant, on the other hand, uses technology as both a means of integrating into the host country (that is, *looking forward*) but also as a way of *looking backward* and staying in touch with his/her country of origin. This “backward gaze of the computer facilitates the maintenance of old ties” (Hiller and Franz, 2004, p. 740) and is thus a pivotal element in this migration phase. The strong desire for virtual contact with home derives from a longing to return to one’s home country, feelings of homesickness or the need to simply stay connected. Lastly, the settled-migrant is usually well-adapted to the host country and thus “Keeping in contact with family and friends from the region of origin helps to perpetuate a sense of belonging, regardless of whether return is contemplated” (Hiller and Franz, 2004, p. 743). The settled migrant’s *backward gaze* is fuelled by nostalgia and a desire to rediscover and maintain contact to home. While new connections are often instrumental and help the pre-migrant to find accommodation or employment, post-migrants develop new ties with both host nationals and co-nationals in order to become integrated into the new community. The settled-migrant seeks out new ties with people who share their ethnic culture and old ties become expressive and affective, creating emotional connections, reminiscence and occasionally family and childhood history.

Caidi et al. (2010) also reported changes in the ways that migrants find information online during the process of migration. In the pre-migration stage, migrants who have not yet migrated tend to gather general information about the host country from formal sources such as government websites, as well as from informal sources such as friends, family and blogs. Yet, in the immediate stage of post-migration, they search

for more practical information that they could use for survival, such as accommodation or language classes. Finally, during the later, intermediate stage of post-migration, migrants search for information necessary to find certain institutions, such as health or employment services.

Nonetheless, besides providing migrants with practical information and assistance to prepare for and manage the migration experience, online communication can also play an important role in the pre-migration phase by producing *images* of new opportunities, new lifestyles and new places that encourage aspirations, desires and even decisions to move elsewhere (Burrell & Anderson, 2008; Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2014, 2015). For example, Thulin and Vilhelmson (2014; 2015) argue that the internet influences migration plans and decisions by encouraging people to migrate. In their study of young adults in Sweden, Thulin and Vilhelmson (2014) reported that internet-based information practices had influenced and facilitated the decision to move and the choice of destination for a large number of their participants. They distinguish four roles played by the internet in migration decision-making: inspiration, screening and sorting, operational and emotional preparation, and post-processing. In a subsequent study of young adults in Sweden, Thulin and Vilhelmson (2015) showed that the internet plays a crucial role in influencing early considerations and desires to migrate to other countries by constantly providing images of the opportunities available in other locations, therefore exacerbating the desire to move. Further, their study indicated that individuals specifically use the internet in the early phase of migration in order to collect first-hand experiences and insider information because of a shared perception that like-minded others on social media provide a more reliable,

relatable, and authentic image of living in a new place than would have been possible in the past.

Similarly, Burrell and Anderson (2008) researched how the personal aspirations and social landscapes of Ghanaians living in London shaped their use of communication technologies such as camcorders, digital cameras, the internet and mobile phones.

Their interview data showed that the use of the internet was useful in providing a space for exploring possible futures, realising aspirations, and indulging certain fantasies about migration (p. 217). Indeed, as will be discussed below (section 3.4) *images* and the *imagination* are significant considerations for this study as Facebook groups, via the variety of images engendered through wallposts, enable Italian migrants to imagine their lives in Australia before they have even left Italy.

Based on the above literature, it is clear that today the pre-migrant is often well informed about the host country long before actually migrating there. Moreover, positive post-migration experiences can be derived from gathering practical information in the immediate post-migration stage, and/or being in contact with other migrants who can help make the migration experience more manageable. As I will show in the analysis of my data, Chapters Five and Six, new Italian migrants use Facebook groups in order to gather as much information as possible prior to migrating and, in turn, they are much more prepared for their arrival in Australia.

The above studies are certainly useful to understand how information gathering changes throughout the process of migration, and how ideas, images and aspirations can be shaped by online communication. However, the current study will fill a

significant gap in the literature by examining whether the expectations and experiences of new migrants to Australia are also influenced by the use of online communication, or more specifically, by online communities of Italian migrants on Facebook groups.

## **3.2 Social Media and Migration**

### **3.2.1 What we do on social media and why**

To understand whether – and how – Facebook groups shape the pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences of new Italian migrants to Australia, we must also understand how, in a broader sense, social media influence their users. It is also important to ask what the implications of social media platforms are on the lives of migrants and on the process of migration, and why Facebook, in particular, is so popular among young people today. This section begins by discussing what Facebook is and why it is now the most popular SNS in the world. It also elucidates how Facebook is a community-forming platform where users meet and interact, thereby creating social networks and virtual communities (Oiarzabal, 2012). It then goes on to discuss the overarching uses of social media today, more specifically, what we share and why we share on social media.

Although Facebook was developed in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg as an online community solely for college students at Harvard University, membership has since extended to anyone with an e-mail address (over the age of 13). Once a member, users can connect to anyone else with a Facebook account. Facebook is composed of core site functions such as a person's home page and profile. The home page includes a

news feed, that is, a constant stream of news, or diffusion of information. Facebook (2015) describes the News Feed as:

the constantly updating list of stories in the middle of your home page. News Feed includes status updates, photos, videos, links, app activity and likes from people, pages and groups that you follow on Facebook. The order of stories in your News Feed is influenced by who posted the story, the number of comments and likes it received, and what kind of story it is (for example, a photo, video, status update). This helps you to see the most interesting stories from the friends you interact with the most.

A large portion of communication on Facebook is, in this sense, created through online communities of personal friends, common interest groups or fan pages, political activists and so on (Fuchs, 2014). Yet online communities did not emerge with or because of social media; they had existed since the 1980s in bulletin board systems such as the WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link), a San Francisco-based conference site. Arguably, Facebook can also be conceptualised as a tool for communication and for the maintenance and formation of communities (Fuchs, 2014).

Indicating its popularity, compared with other SNSs, Facebook users have been found to be the most engaged (52% visit Facebook daily in comparison to other popular SNSs such as Twitter (33%) and LinkedIn (6%)) (Hampton, Sessions Goulet, Lee, & Purcell, 2011, p. 13). Further, Facebook users are more trusting than users of other SNSs. Indeed, a Facebook user is 43% more likely than other internet users to feel that most people can be trusted (Hampton et al., 2011, p. 4).

Within the Australian context, some 79% of Australians use social media (Sensis, 2017) and Facebook continues to dominate with 16,000,000 registered Facebook



users (Social Media News, 2017). According to Sensis, 94% of Australians use Facebook and the typical user spends almost ten hours a week on the site (Sensis, 2017, p. 4). Overall, for Australians social media are fundamental online spaces for socialising, with 89% of the sample claiming that they use these platforms to “catch up with family and friends” (Sensis, 2017, p. 4). Interestingly for this study, among Italians in Italy, the use of Facebook is also prevalent, with 30 million active Facebook users per month. Further, the average user in Italy spends just under two and a half hours a day on Facebook (WeAreSocial, 2017).

Nonetheless, the success of Facebook, and its popularity, derive from the affordances that it provides its users. As Fox and Moreland (2015) explain, not only can users connect with their offline networks on Facebook, they can also make *new* connections. Moreover, via the posting and sharing functions, information is easily disseminated and users can provide feedback to this information through comments and “likes.” Facebook also enables users to join groups (or pages) in order to connect with like-minded others, as well as to use private communication channels, such as private messenger. The proliferation of smartphones has facilitated access to Facebook and made it even more frequent (Sensis, 2017, p. 3). Indeed, Facebook’s mobile application (app) allows users to access the site at any time and from anywhere. Overall, these affordances account for the particular success and prevalence of Facebook on a global scale.

In other words, Facebook, like social media generally, offers a diversity of content-rich, interactive, and collaborative platforms – more commonly known as Web 2.0

(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) – that provide users with an immensely different communication and interaction experience from that of the early internet era. Social media have thus redefined what it means to be *present*.

As explained in the Introduction, the integration of social media into our everyday life, via smartphones, has produced an insatiable desire to be constantly connected to others, such that we now talk of *pervasive awareness* (Chen, 2013), as well as *ambient* (Komito, 2011) or *connected presence* (Schroeder, 2006). We are *always on* (Turkle, 2012), in essence, always communicating with others who are not physically present.

Because social media also enable individuals to create and distribute content, gather and share information, and communicate with others across time and space, users have now turned into *producers* (sic) (Bruns, 2008). In other words, individuals have now taken on a “hybrid user/producer role which inextricably interweaves both forms of participation” (Bruns, 2008, p. 21). The key implication of this is that social media have created unparalleled opportunities for anyone, anywhere, to create and disseminate content.

Indeed, the most significant and distinguishable feature of social media is that the content is produced or created through UGC. In fact, studies have demonstrated that UGC is accepted as a more trusted and reliable information source for travel planning or in this case, for migration planning, than other more official tourism or immigration websites, because of the perceived impartiality of the individuals posting

(see discussion below in section 3.3.3).

Social media were designed “to help people spread information whether by explicitly or implicitly encouraging the sharing of links, providing reblogging or favouriting tools that report images or texts, or by making it easy to copy and paste content from one place to another” (boyd, 2014, p. 12). They are thus about being social. We spend most of our time on social media *sharing* and we are enabled, indeed encouraged, to share in various ways:

countless websites have some kind of ‘Share’ button that enables the surfer to bring the page to the attention of others...on Facebook, where we are encouraged to ‘connect and share with the people in your life’, the act of posting a status update is also called ‘sharing’; and so on. In brief, the word that describes our participation in Web 2.0 is sharing (John, 2013, pp. 167-168).

In his recent book “#Tell Everyone: Why We Share and Why It Matters”, Hermida (2014) analyses the implications of this social media obsession and, in particular, what drives us to relentlessly share online. Hermida (2014) argues that social media bring to the forefront patterns of sharing that have always existed in society but with one difference: they now take place more publicly, that is, on large online social networks. The majority of the information shared on social media, however, is “all about me” (Hermida, 2014, p. 39) with people spending hours documenting their life stories and sharing their personal experiences, opinions and information with others. Research by Harvard scientists Tamir and Mitchell (2012) has shown that individuals like sharing themselves with others so much that over 80% of social media posts to sites like Facebook are about one’s own immediate experiences (p. 8038). By performing functional MRI scans on 212 subjects while asking them to talk

alternately about their own opinions and personality traits, and about other people's, Tamir & Mitchell (2012) evidenced that self-disclosure, defined as verbal and non-verbal communication which reveals information about an individual (Trepte & Reinecke, 2013, p. 1102), is enabled and encouraged by social media. More specifically, they found that self-disclosure activates the reward systems in the brain, producing a hit of dopamine.<sup>13</sup> They established that sharing could be so intrinsically rewarding that individuals were willing to forgo money merely to communicate thoughts about themselves to others. Their findings also suggested that self-disclosure is exacerbated by the promise of gaining feedback from other people. Self-disclosure will be discussed in greater detail below in section 3.3.3.

Further, researchers have discovered that we are increasingly addicted to using social media because the chemical dopamine is released in our bodies whenever we receive positive feedback from somebody else (Greenfield, 2015). In other words, whenever we receive a "like", comment or other positive reinforcement on social media about ourselves, dopamine is released, causing us to feel pleasure. This feeling can ultimately lead to addiction, making us even more inclined to return to social media and to continue to share.

Indeed, a clear motivator for sharing on social media is that it becomes, as Hermida (2014) puts it, "a way of gifting something with the expectation of gaining something in return" (p. 34). As the analysis of my interview data shows (Chapter Six), within community forming spaces like Facebook groups, this is certainly the case, as the

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<sup>13</sup> Dopamine is a neurotransmitter which is triggered when a rewarding action is perceived by the brain.

sharing of personal information or asking a personal question about migrating to Australia is inextricably linked to the individually motivated desire for gaining a response from the other group members.

Based on the evidence above, it can be argued that sharing on social media is simply another expression of the traditional exchange of goods and information that creates and sustains social capital, the glue that forms new ties, shared understandings, that forges (online) communities and engenders trust (Hermida, 2014, pp. 34-35). As will be outlined below (section 3.2.2), in the context of migration, the recreation of migrants' social capital in the host country via weak ties within online communities improves well-being, thus facilitating the migration process. The next section will begin by introducing the concept of social capital and it will then elucidate how weak ties on social media platforms can serve to influence the experience of migration.

### **3.2.2 The strength and influence of weak ties on social media**

The concept of social capital derives from the work of Bourdieu (1992) and Coleman (1988), and has been advanced by Putnam (1995, 2000) and Lin (1999) amongst others. It can be defined as: “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 119). Thus, unlike other forms of capital, social capital manifests itself in those resources obtainable from the relationships and interactions between and among people (Coleman, 1988) within their social networks. Social capital can be either bonding or bridging (Putnam, 1995, 2000). *Bridging social capital* is exchanged

between weak ties, people who do not know each other and who have different backgrounds or views. *Bonding social capital*, on the other hand, is the benefits and support gained from strong ties, those exchanges that take place between people who are in close relationships such as family or friends.

Online networks revolve primarily around weak ties, much like they do in the real world (Hermida, 2014). In his influential thesis entitled “The Strength of Weak Ties”, Granovetter (1973) argued that in order to gather new information and resources (a crucial exercise for migrants prior to migrating), weak ties are often more valuable than strong ties. In tight knit communities, where everybody knows each other, the same information is shared and perpetuated. Casual acquaintances, on the other hand, move in different social networks and have access to new and unique information. In other words, weak ties in a social network are more likely to have information not previously held by the individual or by the individual’s strong ties (Granovetter, 1973), such as job opportunities for new migrants. Weak ties, online and offline, thus serve as bridges between different communities, allowing information to be shared between and among a larger range of social circles, and to spread by word of mouth. In this sense, if one of the key motivators for participating online is “the desire to be heard” (Hermida, 2014, p. 37), social media provide the platform for continuous and unparalleled opportunities for reaching a larger audience of weak and strong ties.

Researchers have investigated how social capital is created by and through SNSs. The use of these sites has been associated with greater levels of social capital (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010; Coleman, 1988), including the benefits that derive from

*bridging social capital* and *bonding social capital*. Research in this area has focused on how people connect with one another on Facebook to gain social capital and thereby improved well-being and life satisfaction (Barker, 2009; Burke et al., 2010; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009; Zywicki & Danowski, 2008). For example, Ellison et al. (2007) determined that there is a strong relationship between Facebook use intensity and bridging social capital. However, they also found that Facebook intensity predicted increased levels of what they call *maintained social capital*, that is, one's ability to maintain contact with strong ties. In terms of migrants, Láštiová's (2014) study of the use of new media by Slovak migrants to build social capital in the UK, revealed that certain platforms, especially Facebook and Skype, contribute to *maintained social capital* through contact with pre-existing strong ties in their home country of Slovakia. Drawing from a pilot study with 36 Slovaks living in the UK, and on a content analysis of the main Facebook page for Czechs and Slovaks in the UK, Láštiová (2014) demonstrated that Facebook is primarily used for sharing emotions about life in the UK with strong ties.

In addition, in a study of more than 1000 English-speaking adult Facebook users, Burke et al. (2010) investigated the correlation between Facebook communication (wallposts, comments, "likes", status updates, photos, friends' conversations) and social capital, and concluded that communication on Facebook is inextricably linked to feelings of bonding social capital which, in turn, reduces feelings of loneliness. Moreover, in a random web survey of college students across Texas, Valenzuela et al. (2009) identified positive relationships between intensity of Facebook use and

students' life satisfaction and social trust.

Researchers in the field of migration studies have also explored the correlation between social media and migration through the analysis of how the creation of weak ties between individuals on social media facilitates the experience of migration (Dekker & Engbersen, 2013a; Komito, 2011; Komito & Bates, 2009). For new migrants, the loss of social capital is demonstrable. Migrants often leave their family and friends behind in order to move to a new country where they may not have any affiliation with any other groups. Belonging to migrant social networks online, however, is a significant means for regaining social capital within the host country. As we will see (Chapters Five and Six), this is why when new Italian migrants join online networks, such as online communities on Facebook groups, they reaffirm their group membership and identity, activating a sense of *being* and *belonging*.

In their qualitative study of 90 in-depth interviews with Brazilian, Ukrainian and Moroccan migrants in the Dutch cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, Dekker and Engbersen (2013a) revealed that social capital within migrant networks could help lessen the risks and challenges associated with migration. In particular, they showed that weak ties in host countries sometimes function as “pioneers” (p. 408), providing tangible assistance (or support) to new migrants – for example, to find accommodation or employment. Social media can thus strengthen the capital of migrants as well as their access to information about the host country. This may serve to lower the threshold (Dekker & Engbersen, 2013a) for aspiring migrants to migrate by creating an *information infrastructure* (pp. 405-406) which allows for the



exchange of *unofficial insider knowledge* on migration (p. 406). This, in turn, makes migrants more *streetwise* about migrating and about the host country (p. 9). Social capital is, in other words, not only facilitated and increased by social media, but also the formation of weak ties within online networks may even develop into strong ties.

Further, engaging with other migrants on social media in order to become *streetwise* before migrating to a host country may also serve as an essential means of shaping more realistic expectations. This was demonstrated in a study carried out by Horst (2006), which examined the transnational communication between Jamaicans in Jamaica and their friends and family abroad. Horst (2006) highlighted the fact that virtual interaction, especially transnational communication via mobile phones, often provided “more realistic expectations of the migration experiences and opportunities associated with living abroad” (p. 155).

In this respect, social media can be conceptualised as “critical hubs of information distribution” (Oiarzabal, 2012, p. 1470) which enable migrants to come together to share their experiences of living, studying or working in a new country, as well as to express challenges that arise during the process of migration. Indeed, in studying how Basque diasporas use Facebook groups, Oiarzabal (2012) found that Basque social capital may be increased through Facebook use because it promotes sharing information and interacting with other group members. Facebook groups, he argues, can expand offline activities because Facebook makes it easier for people to interact with other migrants offline (pp. 205-211).

As mentioned above, the dissemination of large volumes of information is a common characteristic of any social media site. As boyd (2014) notes, "...the ease with which people can share and spread information on social media is unrivalled, which can be both powerful and dangerous" (p. 12). For prospective migrants, this access to information can indeed be powerful as it allows for the spreading of a large amount of useful and practical information about how to prepare for migration to a new country and what to expect post-migration. However, it can also be dangerous because the information given by other migrants could be falsified or unrealistic, which can potentially "manipulate migrants by offering jobs or partners that turn out to not be there, or to be very different than expected" (Dekker and Engbersen, 2012, p. 404).

Nonetheless, in their study of the impact of SNSs on migration strategies and integration, Komito and Bates (2009) found that potential Polish migrants to Dublin have access to information about the host country and contacts with Polish people in Dublin before migrating; in fact, many of their participants joined an online community before even leaving Poland, acquiring emotional and other support. In a subsequent study of social media uses among Polish and Filipino ethnic minority groups in Ireland, Komito (2010) showed that social media enable migrants to both extend their personal networks (i.e. to build bridging capital with other migrants) and to maintain participation in and feelings of membership to their country of origin (bonding capital). Social media use for migrants can therefore facilitate migration through the maintenance of both strong and weak ties between individuals and groups.

In another example, Collin's study (2014) of newly arrived, so called fourth-wave Chilean migrants to Australia showed that not only do certain online communication technologies, such as Facebook, facilitate new forms of ties between Chilean migrants, but also connections between Chileans and non-Chileans in Australia, thus engendering feelings of both *being* and *belonging* for migrants. Collin suggests that a *hyper-digital transnationalism* has emerged which complicates the experience of migration by bringing together distant geographical places – of future residency or traditional home – into everyday life, and that this blurs the journey between departure from the home country and arrival in the host country. Indeed, some of Collin's interviewees cited feelings of being *in-between* countries because their use of online communication to connect to other Chileans in Australia, as well as their ability to be in constant contact with their friends and family back home, seemed to preclude or prolong the idea of having actually left Chile.

Relatedly, as demonstrated in Sawyer and Chen's (2012) research on social media's influence on migration among international students in the U.S, social media can create a sense of "interconnectedness" through the online interactions and conversations that people have with their family and friends back home. Social media thus facilitate the migration process by helping individuals cope with the challenges of adjusting to a new country, especially during the initial stages of the migration process when "... they experienced culture shock, and communicating with people who they were familiar with provided them with a sense of comfort" (p. 165).

Further, as discussed in Chapter Two, the use of social media to gain social capital is exemplified by a recent case study of Italian cohorts in Australia carried out by Baldassar and Pyke (2014). They found that the cohort of newly arrived Italian migrants (post-2000) remains strongly connected to Italy through regular expressions of intimacy online with their family and friends back home. They also reported that before migrating, this cohort utilises a variety of online communication to seek out weak ties, that is, professional Italian contacts already in Australia from whom they can get advice about employment opportunities. Nonetheless, as discussed in Chapter Two, their study does not consider the role that Facebook plays in the lives of these new Italian migrants. As I have argued, Facebook is now a much more utilised medium through which new migrants gain relevant, insider information and support.

### **3.3. Online Communities**

#### **3.3.1 Online communities as real communities**

In order to analyse the use of Facebook groups by migrants, we must firstly understand *how* online communities develop within SNSs, *what* online communities are and *why* people join them. Secondly, it is worth exploring what occurs within online communities that enables members to be influenced by one other. To this end, the notions of self-disclosure and social capital, introduced above, will also be discussed in greater detail.

One clear identifier of community is a sense of belonging. Wellman (2001) defines community as “networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, sense of belonging, and social identity” (p. 37). In this way, a sense of

belonging to a community can provide individuals with resources while simultaneously shaping identity, values, attitudes, and experiences. Similarly, groups of individuals interact within online spaces, in the form of online communities, in order to connect with like-minded individuals who are also influenced by their members.

The literature offers various definitions of the terms online community and virtual community, and the two are normally used interchangeably (Preece, Maloney-Krichmar, & Abras, 2003). Rheingold (1993) was the first to conceptualise an online grouping as a “virtual community” in his study about the WELL, as introduced above. Rheingold (1993) defined virtual communities as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (p. 5). In this sense, individuals who belong to online communities often cross geographical and political borders in order to connect with others who share a common purpose of achieving certain goals, engaging in discussions and sharing information and knowledge (Rheingold, 1993). Therefore, “People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but [they] leave [their] bodies behind” (Rheingold, 2000, p. xvii).

Based on Rheingold’s work, Castells (2001) went on to describe virtual communities as “self-defined electronic networks of interactive communication organised around a shared interest or purpose, although communication sometimes becomes the goal itself” (p. 352). A similar definition considers online communities as “a set of users

who communicate using computer-mediated communication, and have common interests, shared goals, and shared resources” (Lazar & Preece, 2002, p. 128). In other words, online communities have similar characteristics to offline communities and according to Baym (2015), these characteristics include a shared sense of space, shared practices, shared resources and support, shared identities, and interpersonal support.

Thus far, few studies (Marino, 2015; Oiarzabal, 2012; Tabor & Milfont, 2011, 2013) have examined the emergence of online communities of migrants on SNSs and how they influence the process of migration. For example, Marino (2015) and Oiarzabal (2012) focus on how diasporas create online communities on SNSs in order to maintain a connection to their ethnic identity and, in turn, a sense of belonging. In the above-mentioned study of the Basque diaspora on Facebook groups, Oiarzabal (2012) found that Facebook was not only used to stay in contact with one another and to get information, but also to collaboratively reaffirm and maintain their identity, with a clear awareness and intention of community-building. Further, Marino’s (2015) ethnographic study of seven online communities and related SNSs for the Italian diaspora in London established that shared identity – being Italian and being a migrant – enabled members to more quickly establish feelings of belonging and a sense of community which, in turn, facilitated the process of migration.

Similarly, in their study of how migration forums function as communities to facilitate the transition to New Zealand, Tabor and Milfont (2013) observed that participation in an online community created a shared experience of migration and

made the process much easier for members. Moreover, belonging to an online community pre-migration provided them with information, advice, support and encouragement during the uncertainties and stresses of migration. However, while these studies uncovered that being part of an online community can facilitate the process of migration by making it much less challenging and stressful (Tabor & Milfont, 2013), not enough attention has been given to the way in which online communities may also shape pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences.

A related point to consider is that it is not only having something in common with others that creates feelings of belonging to a community, it is also the act of *sharing* oneself with others. As Blanchard (2006) maintains, people who are part of virtual communities “identify with and have developed feelings of belonging and attachment to each other” (p. 55). McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined sense of community as: “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). Some of the most comprehensive research into the notion of “sense of community” within ethnic groups has been carried out by Sonn and his colleagues (Fisher & Sonn, 1999; Sonn, 2002; Sonn & Fisher, 1996). These studies reveal the importance of participation and togetherness in the creation of both a sense of community and a sense of identity among migrants. For example, Sonn and Fisher (1996) explored the meaning of sense of community offline within “coloured” South African immigrants to Australia by investigating how support systems help transfer a *sense of community* from one cultural context to another. Sonn

and Fisher (1996) established that by sharing stories and “reminiscing” with fellow South Africans about their lives in both South Africa and Australia, their participants created feelings of connectedness derived from the implicit familiarity of their shared origin.

The same sense of community can also be felt in online environments. *Sense of virtual community*, as defined by Koh & Kim (2003), is created through three distinct factors: *membership, influence and immersion*. While *membership* involves experiencing feelings of belonging to a virtual community, also relevant is the degree of *influence* that members feel they can have in the community. *Immersion*, on the other hand, is based on the concept of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)<sup>14</sup>, that is, the extent to which members feel immersed in that online community.

Koh and Kim’s (2003) research – which involved the analysis of questionnaires with members of the 44 most popular virtual communities in Korea – also highlighted the importance of offline activities between members in fostering a strong *sense of community*. Indeed, online communities do not exist in isolation. They are also part of the “real world.” In other words, relationships between online community members are not always confined to the virtual sphere, rather, members often have pre-existing offline affiliations with one another, or conversely, form offline relationships after “meeting” online. Studies have indicated that the occurrence of relationships transferring from online to offline is common (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Tabor & Milfont, 2013; Xie, 2008), suggesting that there is an avid interest in making

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<sup>14</sup> Csikszentmihalyi defined flow as “a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (1990, p. 4).



meaningful connections that may turn weak online ties into strong offline ties. For example, from 33 semi-structured open-ended interviews in China conducted with members of a senior-oriented Chinese internet community, Xie (2008) found that when both online interactions and offline interactions exist together, the overall relationships are stronger, closer and more intimate and thus more likely to encourage certain types of social support. In fact, research suggests that one of the primary motives for joining a virtual community is to exchange social support (Wasko and Faraj, 2000; Ridings & Gefen, 2006) with like-minded others. The next section will review those studies which show how social support exchanged within online communities can help individuals manage certain stressful life events, such as migrating to a new country, and in turn, further cement feelings of belonging and increased social capital.

### **3.3.2 Social support within online communities**

Social support is “verbal and nonverbal communication between recipients and providers that reduces uncertainty about the situation, the self, the other, or the relationship, and functions to enhance a perception of personal control in one’s experiences” (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987, p. 19). Social support has multiple dimensions, and diverse types have been identified by scholars. For instance, Schaefer, Coyne, and Lazarus (1981) and Goldsmith (2008) distinguish between three predominant types of support: emotional support (showing care/concern for others and being able to confide in and rely on others for intimacy); informational support (getting information and advice to solve an issue and gaining feedback); and tangible support (providing actual help e.g. with services, chores, lending money). Other

classifications have been used by scholars including: esteem support (actions or statements that provide people with evidence of their own worth); social companionship support (providing a sense of belonging through real shared activities); and motivational support (providing encouragement to achieve a certain goal) (Wills, 1985).

Social support has long been found to have primarily positive effects on an individual's well-being (see review by Taylor, 2011). These include a reduction of psychological distress such as depression or anxiety during a stressful life event, and the promotion of psychological adjustment to various diseases or mental health conditions. Certainly, in terms of migration, strong social support systems will also be beneficial as they provide the context for the experience of belonging and identification as well as opportunities for socialisation post-migration (Sonn, 2002). With developments in online communication, social support has expanded from traditional face-to-face communication to online contexts. In fact, some online communities are specifically created as social support groups (Baym, 2015). For example, there are countless forums, blogs, websites, and more recently, increasing numbers of Facebook groups and pages, that have been created for those who have severe medical conditions, traumas, addictions, mental illnesses, as well as for people experiencing stressful life events, like migration. Unsurprisingly, then, the majority of the research in the area of online communities has focused on health-related support groups. Indeed, research has been conducted on online support groups of individuals who have been diagnosed with cancer (Namkoong et al., 2013), adults suffering from depression (Lazzari, Egan, & Rees, 2011), individuals trying to lose weight (Leggatt-

Cook & Chamberlain, 2012), and for women suffering from infertility (Knoll & Bronstein, 2015). The findings from these studies showed that participants reported a significant decrease in the negative feelings associated with their particular life stressor.

Yet, even when online communities are not explicitly designed to be social support groups, members often end up exchanging social support anyway (Wellman & Giulia, 1999). For example, many Usenet messageboards in the mid-1990s were developed to discuss television series, like soap operas. However, within these communities, members not only exchanged updates and opinions about the shows but they also talked about their lives, shared information and exchanged social support (Baym, 1999).

More recently, Pfister (2014) conducted a study of “Hogwarts at Ravelry”, an online community devoted to people interested in both Harry Potter and fibre crafting. Part of a larger SNS, Ravelry.com, for lovers of knitting, crocheting, spinning, and weaving, the Hogwarts at Ravelry community mirrors the magical wizarding school of Hogwarts in J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter book series. Members become students of a fantasy fibre crafting Hogwarts and participate in activities inspired by the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The community uses a messageboard design to host classes, events and other activities, while simultaneously supporting and encouraging members’ fibre crafting skills. However, as Pfister (2014) explains, “the community and support also extend far beyond the formal boundaries of the

group. [It] offers a safe space for sharing resources and encouragement as members apply for jobs [...] welcome a new baby [...] or grieve the loss of a husband” (p. 15).

The fact that online communities can provide these benefits (in particular, various forms of social support) to individuals during important life experiences is particularly pertinent to a study of new migrants. Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter Two, migrating to a new country can be a challenging life event, sometimes involving the severing of community ties and the loss of social networks, which may engender negative emotions such as feelings of stress, depression or loneliness. As it will become clear from the analysis of my data (Chapters Five and Six), Italian migrants on Facebook groups also provide each other with social support, especially pre-migration to Australia when they experience stress and anxiety about migrating. In this sense, the exchange of social support within online communities can be seen to play an instrumental role in influencing pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences by helping migrants prepare for and manage their journey. In what is known as the *direct-effects hypothesis* of social support, individuals with high levels of social support will see an increase in their well-being and reduction of stress, regardless of the stressor, in comparison to those who have low social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Thus, because online communities can be entered into every day, and at any time, it is possible that overcoming challenging life experiences (in this case, migrating to another country) is influenced by this direct-effects model. The accessibility of online communities, like those on Facebook groups, enhanced by their integration into smartphones, allows for individuals to benefit from the support of even larger networks of people who can help them maintain *daily* well-being and

overcome feelings of stress, loneliness and nostalgia. In fact, as Ryan et al. (2008) found in their study of recent Polish migrants in London, for many newly arrived migrants, migrant networks may be the only means of network support for finding employment, tangible support such as translations, and even companionship. Indeed, in the aforementioned study by Tabor and Milfont (2013), the members of the three online communities analysed provided each other with emotional support and encouragement during the stresses associated with migration, and this facilitated the experience.

As discussed above, when individuals connect online and share social support, they also contribute to each other's accumulated social capital (Baym, 2015, pp. 91-92). According to Putnam (2007), "Norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness" are prerequisites of social networking (p. 137). In other words, "a group whose members manifest trustworthiness... will be able to accomplish much more than a comparable group lacking that trust" (Coleman, 1990, p. 304). In this regard, the amount of investment one has in their social networks can allow him/her to form the trust and intimacy necessary for successful involvement in certain in-group activities (e.g. participation in community groups) and to access information (e.g. job opportunities). Trust is thus a key concept for the current study because, as I will show in the analysis of my data (Chapters Five and Six), it plays a crucial role in determining if – and how – online communities, such as Facebook groups, influence their users. The concept of trust will therefore be discussed in greater detail below (section 3.3.3).

### **3.3.3 Trust and self-disclosure and anti-social behaviour within online communities**

In “Trust in Modern Societies”, Misztal (1996) defines trust as the belief that the “results of somebody’s intended action will be appropriate from our point of view” (pp. 9-10). Due to fewer auditory and visual social cues online compared with face-to-face communication, people are unsure of who they can trust (Baym, 2015). In addition to *sense of virtual community*, as discussed above, in an online environment trust is a key factor increasing the propensity for knowledge sharing and participation (Andrews, Preece, & Turoff, 2002; Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006; Ridings, Gefen, & Arinze, 2002). Indeed, trust has been found to be a key predictor of members’ desire to exchange information, and in particular, to seek information online (Ridings et al., 2002).

From their survey of members of 36 different virtual communities, Ridings and colleagues (2002) established that trust is higher when personal information is given. In short, members will trust each other more if they know something personal about them. Similarly, on social media platforms, those comments that are generated by unofficial sources, that is the users themselves (or UGC), are commonly perceived as more impartial, trustworthy, and unbiased than information provided by other more official sources. For example, this was found in the area of Facebook and tourism, where there was more trust in peer comments than in information controlled by companies (Wilson et al., 2012), like tourism or immigration websites. Indeed, UGC on SNSs is considered to be a more influential source of information because of the perceived impartiality of the person posting (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). In this

respect, the source has to be someone who is like-minded or someone like me, not a third party. Trust and trustworthiness thus play a crucial role in whether online communities, such as Facebook groups, can influence pre-migration expectations.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that while internet users can maintain their anonymity when asking questions on search engines, on Facebook groups the user's identity is known to the other group members because one's full name and photograph, associated with their personal Facebook profile, is displayed for anyone to see. Access to personal identity information, such as one's profile, has been reported to support relationship-formation (Ellison et al., 2011), because personal information can help people engage in *people sensemaking*, the process of understanding "who someone is and to determine how and why that user should interact with someone" (DiMicco & Millen, 2008, p. 1, cit. in Lampe et al., 2011, p. 5). As we will see in Chapters Five and Six, this accounts for why, when using Facebook groups to ask questions to acquaintances or strangers (weak ties), new Italian migrants may feel an even stronger sense of belonging to the online community, and may be more trusting of the other Italians within it.

Self-disclosure is thus a significant means of forming trust on SNSs as the giving of personal information contributes to creating close relationships. For example, in defining self-disclosure, Jourard (1959) put forward a theory that states:

The amount of personal information that one person is willing to disclose to another appears to be an index of the "closeness" of the relationship, and of the affection, love, or trust that prevails between the two people (p. 428).

Self-disclosure online takes place “when self-information is divulged to a single or multiple others” on any internet platform (Attrill, 2015, p. 62) and previous research (Henderson & Gilding, 2004) has shown that there is a reciprocal relationship between trust and self-disclosure in online communication. In particular, the disclosure of information can create a sense of trustworthiness which often results in reciprocal personal disclosure between individuals (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009). Joinson (2001) carried out a series of studies examining the frequency and potential causes of self-disclosure during computer mediated communication (CMC) among 42 undergraduate students in the US. For the first study, the amount of self-disclosure during CMC and face-to-face discussions was compared, for the second study visual anonymity was manipulated during CMC-based discussions, and for the third study, private and public self-focus were manipulated during CMC, and the impact on self-disclosure was measured. The studies showed that self-disclosure is higher in CMC than in face-to-face communication.

In their study of the types of questions individuals ask each other on SNSs in general, Morris, Teevan, and Panovich (2010) observed that trust significantly influences users’ decisions to ask each other questions. The motivations for responding to other people’s questions were primarily based on altruism (that is, wanting to be helpful), as well as on (perceived) expertise and knowledge of the topic. Interestingly, some of their participants were also motivated by social capital, the feeling that if they responded to someone’s question, they would be more likely to receive a response when they themselves had a question to ask. It is possible, then, that self-disclosure



within online spaces is a key factor in creating trust and maintaining relationships with others, and may also be particularly instrumental in the re-creation of migrants' social capital in the host country.

However, it is worth mentioning that belonging to any community, including online communities on SNSs, has both positive and negative implications. While the studies above illustrate that connecting and sharing with others within online communities can provide social support, increased social capital and therefore improved well-being, other researchers have uncovered several dangers related to using SNSs. For example, scholars have identified that SNSs, especially Facebook, can be used to bully, threaten, stalk or harass other people (Fox & Moreland, 2015; Kwan & Skoric, 2013). This anti-social behaviour online belongs to the phenomenon of flaming (O'Sullivan & Flanagan, 2003), generally defined as “the anti-normative hostile communication of emotions that includes the use of profanity, insults, and other offensive or hurtful statements” (Johnson, Cooper, & Chin, 2009, p. 419), and may also develop within online migrant communities on Facebook groups. The presence of anti-social behaviour online is said to be exacerbated by *the online disinhibition effect*, that is, the fact that people feel more disinhibited in online interactions (Suler, 2004), and because of the absence of social cues. On the one hand this disinhibition can be positive (*benign disinhibition*) – it can encourage individuals to disclose more personal things about themselves or show unusual acts of kindness and generosity, sometimes going out of their way to help complete strangers – as in the case of my study where Italians using Facebook groups give each other advice and assistance with finding work or accommodation in Australia. Yet, on the other hand, this

disinhibition makes individuals feel free to use rude language, harsh criticisms, anger, sarcasm, and even threats (*toxic disinhibition*) (Suler, 2004). Anti-social behaviour has been widely investigated in relation to online communities and it is said to negatively influence members and harm the community (Cheng, Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, & Leskovec, 2015). However, anti-social behaviour has not been identified, to my knowledge, within studies of online communities of migrants. This will be discussed in greater detail in my analysis chapters (Five and Six) which show that instances of anti-social behaviour are indeed present within online communities of Italian migrants on Facebook.

### **3.3.4 Shared identities within online communities**

Trust in others within an online community may also derive from having a shared identity. The concept of identity is an important consideration for the current study because a shared identity, in this case being Italian, may create feelings of belonging that need not be derived from any prior face-to-face contact.

According to Baym (2015), within online communities, shared identities include a sense of who “we” are that may or may not exist prior to the formation of the online community or may develop because of it (p. 96). In fact, some people join communities specifically because they already share a social identity, that is, those qualities of ourselves that define us as members of a group. While some of these are involuntary – such as sexual orientation or ethnicity – others are memberships or affiliations of choice (Baym, 2015, p. 118). This is also the case for Italian migrants who become members of Facebook groups specifically for Italians in Australia.

Indeed, many online communities have been created for people who already share a specific social identity, such as Blackplanet for African-Americans, Cafemom for mothers and mothers-to-be, and Elftown for fantasy and science fiction artists and writers.

During her decades of research, Baym (2015) found that within these already established communities built on shared social identities, many regular frequenters take on specific roles by “enacting consistent and systematic behaviours that serve a particular function” (p. 86). In turn, they establish and maintain a sense of group identity. For example, based on their research on social roles in online forums, Wesler et al. (2007) were able to identify several common roles within online communities including local experts, answer people, conversationalists, fans, discussion artists, flame warriors, and trolls (p. 3).

Drawing on poststructuralist notions of multiple, fragmented and discursively produced identities in a globalised world, Hall (1996) conceptualised the post-modern subject as having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity (p. 598). People can, and will, present themselves in different ways depending on the particular contextual circumstances or when interacting with others (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). In this sense, shared identities are always social: they are created, presented and reshaped by interaction (Baym, 2015).

In face-to-face interaction, individuals can employ a large number of cues to construct these various identities. For example, our clothes, bodies, and gestures signal

messages about status, power, and group membership. In online interaction, however, these signs are absent. Therefore, as Hermida (2014) points out, what we share or “like” online serve as the “digital clothing of identity” (p. 39). The sharing of personal news, information, photographs, pictures, opinions and advice on social media are all declarations of our identity, or, *identity claims* (Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, & Morris, 2002). We are selective about what and when we share because we are attempting to influence the way in which others perceive us: we therefore project an (often idealised) image of ourselves (Hermida, 2014).

In a similar way, migrants join online communities, and in doing so, make declarations about their identities as “migrants” by exchanging personal news, information, photographs, pictures, opinions and advice relating to the experience of migration. However, besides manifesting their migrant identities, they can also re-establish, reinforce and maintain their shared cultural identity by joining specific online communities. Hall (1992) defines cultural identity as an identity which arises from our “belonging” to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious and above all national cultures (p. 274).

Hiller and Franz (2004) showed that certain types of shared affiliations online – like shared cultural identity – engender a kind of communal bonding that needs not be based on any previous interaction. Their study demonstrated that community emerges “from a generalised sense of belonging (as slippery a methodological slope as it may be) based on a group identity and a territorial homeland [that is maintained] through online interaction” (p. 746). Indeed, as discussed above (section 3.2.2), other scholars

have also shown how migrants can maintain their cultural identity in a host country by joining an online community of co-nationals, which in turn, engenders trust and facilitates the process of migration. Relatedly, online communities can create feelings of exclusivity which are also based on shared cultural identity. For example, in his study of Indian migrants online, Mitra (2006) describes how online communities provide a space for identity narrative construction. From his findings, he argues that Indian migrants use certain websites to create a “cybernetic safe space” where they can give a voice to their Indian (immigrant) identity, which they are unable to express freely in the host country.

A shared cultural identity can therefore bind migrant groups tightly together and help them create a common, exclusive space which is accessible only to those who have the specific social and cultural skills, such as shared language and history (Mitra, 1997; Parker & Song, 2006). Similarly, studying Chinese migrants in London, Kang (2009) concluded that migrants use the variety of internet technologies available as a means of mirroring their home country and cultural practices, or to “re-territorialise” their homeland. In this way, Chinese migrants’ experiences of place, territory, and landscape in the host country are transformed through the recreation of visual, audio, physical, and social contexts of their homeland in both personal spaces (e.g. into migrants’ homes through listening to the radio or sharing online pictures or videos) and public spaces (e.g. Chinatowns). In this sense, Kang (2009) argues that Chinese migrants can “safely” reproduce and practice their cultural identity in new public spaces or online communities.

Relatedly, Buzzi and Megele (2011) propose that for migrants, being able to join and return to a stable web address (whether it be a webpage, a blog, a SNS like Facebook, or others) is more than a mere communication channel, it is an anchoring point of identity: “the familiarity of the migrant’s web address can provide that ordinariness and routine embodiment that evokes feelings of familiarity, connection with family and community, a sense of friendship and belonging, a sense of “home...” (p. 41). Once in the host country, the use of a permanent “web address”, in this case Facebook groups for Italians in Australia, is particularly useful as it can offer respite from potential feelings of loneliness or stress. It can, in essence, provide a *virtual home* – a grounding or point of reference in *virtuality* and *hyper-reality* in the host country (Buzzi and Megele, 2011, p. 41). For example, transnational migrants can actively participate in the (re)construction of their own identity, negotiating its boundaries and learning to be transnational, that is, “from here and there” (Brinkerhoof, 2009, p. 50).

Megele and Buzzi (2011) also argue that online communities offer an important source of identity experimentation as they allow for members to interpret and create various realities. According to Schumann (2012), this permanent, ongoing negotiation of belonging characterises the dichotomy between preservation of the ethnic and adoption of the host culture, and it is this phenomenon that creates the in-between space of hybrid identities: “The crucial characteristics, defining people with hybrid identities is the fact, that “home” is neither represented by their country of origin, nor by their host country. The migrant rather feels affiliated to both places with both cultures...Hybrid identities float between” (p. 5).

Indeed, Skop and Adams (2009) investigated how Indian immigrants in America use the internet to construct a sense of identity and community in virtual spaces. They argue that online communities “can provide a sense of togetherness, engagement in cultural traditions, and exchange of in-group information—in short, a sense of place” (p. 132). Their study showed that online communities are particularly useful for new migrants because the “creation and inhabitation” of virtual places can help them overcome separation from their home country and, in turn, allow them to negotiate new conceptions of (shared) identity.

However, although online communities can help migrants overcome feelings of separation from their home country, they can, conversely, separate migrants from the host country. The next section will examine the role that the imagination plays in binding groups of co-nationals together within online communities and whether this can lead to the creation of enclaves.

### **3.3.5 Online ethnic communities or enclaves?**

According to Mitra (1997), the imagination that tightly binds members together within an online community of co-nationals is their common memory of their shared place of origin. He explains:

The sense of community is based on an original home where everyone belonged, as well as a sense of a new space where the question of belonging is always problematized. Since the original home is now inaccessible, the internet space is co-opted to find the same companionship that was available in that original place of residence (p. 70).

Komaromi and Erickson (2011) also maintain that in a general sense, “community represents a group of people who have something in common with one another that

differentiates them from other groups. It is the boundaries that ultimately define the community and the boundaries are created symbolically in the minds of the community members” (p. 1). Anderson (1991) described these groups of people as *imagined communities* because even though most members may never personally know one another, “in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). Their connection is therefore an imagined one. This is also the case for Italian migrants on Facebook groups. Although many of the Italians do not know each other face-to-face, they feel a connection to the problems or concerns voiced by others members in the group and a stronger sense of cultural identity and in-group solidarity. Arguably, one’s relationship to an online community is a constructed one.

The concept of *imagined community* is furthered by Fox (2004) who maintains:

Applying the idea of imagined community to virtual community allows for an understanding of the concept as more than just people interacting online... For individual members to truly belong, they arguably must be able to both imagine the community and in turn perceive themselves as a part of the community (p. 54).

The notion of *imagined community* is important as it illustrates the centrality of the “image” in forming a *sense of community*. Indeed, sometimes the comparison of online communities to face-to-face communities can reveal more of an ideal of a community than an actual lived one, as online groups are often more isolated<sup>15</sup> than “real-life” groups (Smith & Kollock, 1999, p. 16). In other words, although the formation of strong social networks and social support within (online) communities

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<sup>15</sup> Some scholars have argued that the internet causes individuals to become socially isolated from real social relationships, as they are alone at their computers communicating predominantly with strangers (e.g. Turkle, 2012).



can help decrease the stresses associated with migrating, the prolonged exposure to and reliance on monocultural, monolingual social networks may actually create an enclave whereby the migrant becomes dependent on that group for their every need. Church (1982) was one of the first scholars to argue that in order to cope with the challenges of migrating to a new country, many migrants “form enclaves of fellow nationals that largely determine the living arrangements, friendship patterns, and organisational affiliations of the sojourners involved” (p. 551). It is worth considering that while these “enclaves” function as a point of reference for migrants, enabling them to analyse the new culture together, Simon and Schild (1961, cited in Church, 1982) warn that on occasion, initial (inaccurate) perceptions, or attitudes and high expectations, risk being determined, and perpetuated by co-national interactions and discourses surrounding the host culture.

This is demonstrated in the aforementioned study of recent Polish migrants to London conducted by Ryan et al. (2008). Their research highlighted the positive as well as negative aspects of ethnic-specific social support by examining some of the factors, skills and opportunities that may limit interaction with the host country and instead contain migrants within co-ethnic networks. The scholars demonstrated that while (face-to-face) networks of co-ethnics were a source of support which could provide resources for information, housing and employment, “...such networks may lock migrants into specific ethnic niches... exacerbating competition, rivalry and exploitation” (p. 686). Their findings also suggested that some groups of Poles became so dependent on each other for communication and information that they developed high levels of distrust and competition towards other groups of Poles, as

well as unrealistic expectations.

In an online context, the late sociologist Zigmunt Bauman suggested in an interview in 2016 that “most people use social media not to open their horizons wider, but to lock themselves in a comfort zone” (cited in De Querol, 2016). He argued that social media are, in this sense, a trap because they create closed networks of people who share the same ideas and beliefs or backgrounds, “where the only sounds they hear are the echoes of their own voice.” Relatedly, using data from qualitative research with Australian transnational professionals working in Asia, Butcher (2009) maintained that the motivation for individuals to form or maintain relationships online often derive from the need to manage relocation in a new cultural context and the need to re-create spaces of familiarity or comfort (p. 1359). Yet, the potentially isolating experience of migrants who spend most of their time within an online community of co-nationals instead of with host country nationals is under researched. Exceptions are the studies by Komito (2011) and Komito and Bates (2009) of Polish and Filipino non-nationals in Ireland which showed that SNSs act as an *emotional buffer*, decreasing motives for integration as there is less need to make new friends with natives in a host country if one is in constant contact with co-nationals via online communities. Similar results were found by Brekke (2008) in her study of young refugees in Norway who concluded that “by using the internet they are not so dependent upon finding friends and developing social networks in their geographic proximity, and regard online friends as being just as adequate as the people they meet face-to-face” (p. 111). In this sense, online communities also have “the potential to virtually segregate migrants from the wider society in which they live” (McGregor &

Siegel, 2013, p. 9).

Although these enclaves may lead to separation from the wider society, according to Sonn (2002) such settings enable an adaptation to a new *social ecology* and thus form new spaces for social engagement. He writes that, “the settings provide the contexts in which cultural identities, histories, and other social identities can be affirmed, but they do not necessarily mean separation from the broader social system” (p. 19). In other words, these “enclave” settings (including those within online communities) not only provide migrants with certain social and cultural needs such as “cultural rehearsal and maintenance” (Furnham and Bochner, 1986); they will also help them gain other needs in the broader community, such as social support and, in turn, social capital. This idea is manifested in Schrooten’s study (2012) of Brazilian migrants in Belgium which demonstrated that online togetherness was an integral part of most of their lives and that this reflects the “offline” aspects of their social lives. The use of social media was simply a way to “reaffirm themselves as Brazilians and construct a shared imagination” (Schrooten, 2012, p. 1801). The references they made to Brazil, their online discussions pertaining to nostalgia for Brazil, and the rehearsal of “being Brazilian”, revealed that interactions online were instrumental in the recreation of collective identity or social connectedness.

Overall, I would argue that despite the potential for ethnic “enclave” formation, online communities are, nonetheless, invaluable for new migrants to recreate their social capital and cultural identity in the host country and, in turn, increase their well-being. Indeed, as the analysis of my data will show (Chapters Five and Six), new Italian

migrants can use the online communities within Facebook groups in order to recreate their *italianità* (Italianness) in Australia and a *virtual home away from home*, which facilitate their experience of migration.

The above studies have demonstrated the complexity of online communities and the way in which feelings of belonging, or *sense of virtual community*, can influence the members in a variety of both positive and negative ways. Drawing on the wealth of these studies, then, the next section will elucidate the broad theoretical framework that I have adopted for the current study. More specifically, I refer to the key concepts that will be involved in the analysis and interpretation of my data.

### **3.4 Theoretical Framework**

As an overall approach, my study is broadly informed by social constructivism because it sees social connections (or networks) as being at the forefront of our sense of individual identity. As discussed above, one's sense of self is viewed as a product of social interaction (see for example Littlejohn and Foss, 2005; Krippendorff, 1993) with individuals in a constant process of constructing and reconstructing their identities. Social constructivism developed from the seminal work of Berger and Luckmann (1991) which recognises the influence of the social environment, culture and religion on *how* people construct their realities about their world. The two scholars see people as creating meanings for their activities together, that is, people “socially” construct their reality (Williamson, 2000, p. 20). Individuals are therefore perceived as being able to shape one another's attitudes, expectations, practices, beliefs and experiences, and in turn create a shared sense of identity.

In a similar way, online communities can also exert influence on individuals. As shown in the studies above, the growth of social media has, in recent years, created new spaces for community formation and the negotiation of identity. Within the context of the rapidly changing field of technology and migration, the advent of SNSs, like Facebook, has contributed to the various mediated spaces available to migrants throughout the process of migration. The Facebook groups analysed in this study are therefore conceptualised as spaces in which online communities of Italian migrants are constructed. Drawing on the studies by Ryan et al. (2008) and Dekker and Engbersen (2013a), online migrant networks (and communities such as the Facebook groups I selected for this study) – through the co-construction of a shared “migrant identity” – are taken to be vital sources of social capital for migrants, enabling them to access social support and insider information about the host country, thus facilitating the process of migration.

As discussed in the Introduction, the premise of this research is that the phenomenon of new Italian migrants to Australia is under-researched. In addition, the influence of online communication on the expectations and experiences of new migrants needs further examination, particularly because few studies within the field of technology and migration have taken into account the pre-migration period (section 3.1.2). On the contrary, in this thesis, migration is conceptualised as a process that begins *before* the arrival in the host country.

The three phases of the migration cycle identified by Hiller and Franz (2004) (see section 3.1.2) – pre-migrant, post-migrant and settled-migrant – revealed three

completely different categories of computer usage. My thesis draws on these stages and phases as they help to illuminate the changes in the way that migrants use technology throughout the migration process.

Unlike Hiller and Franz (2004), however, in addition to a pre-migrant's use of the computer to gain information, make contacts and get advice about potentially migrating, in my analysis of Facebook groups I also consider how migrants are influenced by the way in which the host country is imagined collectively in the minds of the community members (section 3.1.2). For the purposes of the current study, then, the concept of imagination is a key construct that will be used to address the research questions posed. The concept of *imagination* extends Hiller and Franz's (2004) definition of the pre-migration period as it refers to the way in which online communities may also influence initial expectations by providing a kind of *armchair travel/migration* (Buzzi & Megele, 2011, p. 39). In other words, online communities are understood as providing a *hyper-reality* (Buzzi & Megele, 2011, p. 39) in which potential-migrants can obtain a window into their potential lives in a host country through the photographs, stories and information shared on social media by those who are already there.

The imagination can be used as a meaning-making device and is the foundation of many travels, whether in the context of tourism (Salazar, 2011) or migration (Appadurai, 1996). While motivations to migrate are usually varied, they are inextricably linked to the ability of individuals and their social networks to imagine other places and lives (Salazar, 2011).

In particular, Appadurai (1996) offers a useful framework for examining the role of social media and imagination during the migration process. Appadurai conceptualises modernity as the practice of imagining where you would like to be. He proposes that based on technological advancements of the twenty-first century, the imagination has become part of everyday life for ordinary people, instead of being confined to the privileged and powerful. He writes, “Because of the sheer multiplicity of the forms in which they appear (cinema, television, computers, and telephones) and because of the rapid way in which they move through daily life routines, electronic media provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project” (p. 4).

In this sense, the average person can frequently imagine him/herself in different situations and different places due to those technologies which disseminate images of other lifestyles and other places. He highlights that these lifestyles and places are not fantasised, but are genuinely imagined because in our technology-dominated world, everything appears as possibility and nothing is out of reach: “More people than ever before seem to imagine routinely the possibility that they... will live and work in [or migrate to] places other than where they were born...” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 6).

Although Appadurai’s theory is based on mass media, such as television, film and radio, it can also apply to online communication technologies like social media. As Burrell and Anderson (2008) point out, “Internet users have an unprecedented level of control over what images, people and information they are exposed to that television watchers never have.” (p. 216). Indeed, differently to television, film and radio, social media platforms, such as Facebook, promote UGC which has been found to be

a more influential and trustworthy source of information because of the perceived impartiality of the person posting (see review by Litvin et al., 2008). In my study, Italian migrants' UGC on Facebook groups provided my participants with, in their words, relevant, personalised feedback, and reliable information about life in Australia that they could not get from official government websites.

Two other concepts that are significant in this study are community and identity. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, I take the position that the concepts of community and identity are socially constructed phenomena within an interactive, dynamic process of negotiation (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Krippendorff, 1993; Littlejohn & Foss, 2005). However, communities and identities are of course not constructed in isolation. Thus, as discussed above, this study defines community by drawing on Baym's (2015) and Wellman's (1999) previously outlined identifiers of community, that is, belonging to a community involves networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, sense of belonging, and social identity. Indeed, as will become clear in the following chapters, the majority of Italian migrants using Facebook groups show feelings of belonging to the groups and being part of a close-knit Italian community.

Drawing on Komito's (2011) research of Polish and Filipino non-nationals in Ireland, the use of social media is able to provide migrants with a common experience of migration that supports a shared commitment and common identity, all of which can be considered characteristics of a *real community*. Additionally, as Baym (2015) explains, online and offline communities share five main commonalities: a shared



sense of space, shared practices, shared resources and support, shared identities, and interpersonal support. These characteristics also help to form my conceptualisation of Facebook groups for Italians as online communities, that is, they have a shared sense of space (Facebook groups for Italians in Australia) and shared cultural identity (being an Italian migrant). The feelings that derive from being part of this shared sense of place are defined as a *sense of virtual community* (see Koh and Kim, 2003 in section 3.3.1) which is useful for examining how groups of individuals can influence each other online.

The notions of social support and social capital are two other key concepts for understanding how these Facebook groups function as online communities which influence their members. Both *bridging social capital* and *bonding social capital* are concepts that are often examined in reference to the notion that technology facilitates migration (see section 3.2.2). During the pre-migration period, Putman's (2000) notion of *bridging social capital* is particularly useful for understanding why migrants who interact online are more likely to gain information not previously held by the individual or by the individual's strong ties (Granovetter, 1978). Similarly, *bonding social capital* is also influential as it helps maintain ties with family and friends, particularly those back home. In this study, I will draw in particular on the notion of *bridging social capital* in order to elucidate why pre-migrants (and post-migrants) use their online community as a resource for finding insider information and knowledge from other members about the host country.

Since online communities are often viewed as spaces for exchanging information and social support, and for regaining social capital, as shown by the majority of studies presented above, they have often been analysed with the assumption that there is little conflict within them (section 3.3.3). Yet, by conceiving online communities as *real* communities, I take a more nuanced view of online communities and thus acknowledge that although these communities encourage information sharing and social support, certain negative or anti-social behaviours such as hostility and aggression may *also* develop in online communities, just as they do in face-to-face communities.

The concept of identity is also crucial when analysing online migrant communities such as those created within Facebook groups for Italians in Australia. Since this thesis is concerned with the influence of online communities on the expectations and experiences of a group of Italian migrants, it is useful to focus particularly on the aspect of cultural identity (Hall, 1997). Hall argues that our identities are formed and transformed within and in relation to representation. In other words, one knows what it is to be “Italian” because of the way *italianità* has come to be represented, as a set of meanings, by Italian national culture. Hall writes, “In part we give things meaning by how we represent them...meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we “belong”” (Hall, 1997, p. 3).

Furthermore, from this perspective, people are not merely passive users of representation, they are also simultaneously their producers. As thoughts, ideas and feelings are represented in language and culture (Hall, 1997), so do meanings and

identities rely on representation, both linguistic and cultural; thus identities are always negotiated in a transnational context (Georgiou, 2006, p. 28). Taking this view accepts the poststructuralist perspective that identities are not unified but fragmented and fractured; they are in a constant process of change and transformation, that is, they are “...constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (Hall, 1996, p. 4). In terms of migrants who interact within online communities, their sense of identity is situated on a continuum of potential-migrant, pre-migrant and post-migrant. Their migrant identity, for example, is in the process of *becoming* rather than *being*. Hall (1996) writes, “identities are about... not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we might have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves” (p. 4).

In the case of migrants, SNSs, like Facebook, more than any other medium, also help to “develop, maintain, and re-create” identities (Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010, p. ix). The influences of both home and host country, and strong and weak ties, can also interconnect to form a transnational identity which is in a constant state of production and reproduction. As explained above, contemporary Italian migrants in Australia are viewed in this inquiry as transnational migrants, operating within a transnational lifestyle (Schrooten, 2012). The homeland (Italy) acts as an emotional and relational glue which gives rise to new ties (often sustained through technology) with other migrants (Italians) living in the same host country, sharing the same culture (Hiller and Franz, 2004). Therefore, in exploring the construction of identities in the analysis of my data (Chapters Five and Six), priority is given to the construction of cultural

and transnational identities, that is, how new Italian migrants reconstruct, reaffirm and maintain their identity as Italians in Australia by using Facebook groups.

### **3.5 Concluding remarks**

This chapter has reviewed the relevant literature on migration, social media and online communities, and provided a theoretical framework for the current study. The literature reviewed points to the potential of online communities within SNSs to facilitate migration. It has been acknowledged that the recreation of social capital in the host country via social media improves the well-being of migrants and thus their ability to cope with any difficulties during the migration process. A migrant's sense of trust is also largely informed by the degree to which his/her online network aligns with his/her personal values, such as family and local community.

It is expected, then, that being part of an online community, such as those in Facebook groups created for Italians in Australia, will increase social connectedness, trust, sense of community, and in turn, influence both the pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences of Italian migrants in Australia. However, it is also possible that being part of an online community can engender ethnic enclaves of mutually dependent weak ties. Heavy reliance on co-nationals within online settings is bound to have some consequences on how expectations are shaped pre-migration and the types of culturally specific experiences that will occur in the host country post-migration.

The next chapter, Chapter Four, will elucidate the research methodology chosen for this study, including an overview of the data sources as well as the motivations for

choosing them. The chapter will then detail the sample and recruitment process for finding participants as well as the tools that were used to analyse the data.

## **CHAPTER FOUR METHODOLOGY**

The previous chapter reviewed the literature on migration and online communication with a focus on how social media, and in particular SNSs like Facebook, can facilitate the process of migration through the creation of online social support, social connectedness, *virtual sense of community* and social capital. This chapter presents the research design that has been used in this study. More specifically, I provide an explanation of the foundations for the study and the rationale for applying a qualitative methodology. The method is then outlined, including the context of the study, the position of the researcher and the case study. The data sources are presented, as well as some of the ethical considerations surrounding the use of social media as a data source in online research. The sample to be used for the in-depth interviews is also explained. The final section details the tools used for data analysis.

### **4.1 A qualitative approach**

Studies in the social sciences can be categorised into two distinct research epistemologies: positivist and interpretive. Positivists maintain that the truth is objective and manifested in measurable properties that are independent of the observer (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). They primarily conduct quantitative research. Interpretive studies, on the other hand, believe that individuals create and interpret their own subjective and inter-subjective reality as they interact with the world around them. Interpretive researchers thus attempt to understand phenomena by accessing the meanings that enable them to understand the foundation of social reality (Burrell and

Morgan, 1979); interpretivists primarily conduct qualitative research. Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) conceive studies as interpretive when the aim of the research is to increase the understanding of the phenomenon of interest within cultural and contextual situations, where said phenomenon is examined in its natural setting and from the perspective of the participants, and where researchers do not impose their objective understanding on the situation (p. 7).<sup>16</sup> This study has aimed for an interpretive, qualitative analysis because it sought to answer a how and a why question (see Chapter One):

- 1) Does being a member of Facebook groups influence the pre-migration expectations of prospective Italian migrants to Australia?
- 2) *How* do these Facebook groups shape the expectations and post-migration experiences of new Italian migrants in Australia?

In order to answer these questions, it was necessary to analyse the ways in which being a member of Facebook groups may influence the process of migration by attempting to understand, in the participants' own words, "... how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). In addition, a qualitative research design enabled me to develop an understanding of the meaning or nature (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) of the diverse expectations and experiences of migrants, and it allowed for the data to be examined via multiple methods of inquiry. Hence, the design that was chosen is an information-rich case study of the phenomenon of new Italian migrants in Australia through an analysis of the wallposts made to three Facebook groups and in-depth interviews with members of these groups.

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<sup>16</sup> Research designs also often combine quantitative and qualitative data in a single study which is commonly referred to as a mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2007).

Stake (2000) posits that there are three major differences between quantitative and qualitative research: (1) the distinction between explanation and understanding as the purpose of inquiry; (2) the distinction between a personal and impersonal role for the researcher; and (3) a distinction between knowledge discovered and knowledge constructed (pp. 19-20). Indeed, qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality and the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied. They seek answers to questions that emphasise *how* social experience is shaped and given meaning (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Because qualitative research attempts to make sense of experiences in terms of the meanings that people bring to them, it is particularly useful for a study of migrants and their experiences during the process of migration. More specifically, qualitative research provide valuable data for understanding how new Italian migrants in Australia themselves see the phenomenon of migration and how they conceptualise themselves within new online spaces, like Facebook groups, pre- and post-migration.

As discussed in the Introduction, the phenomenon of new Italian migrants in Australia is, at this juncture, under researched, and the expectations and experiences of this group pre- and post- migration to Australia have not yet been analysed by taking into account the influence of online communities. Following the definitions of qualitative research offered by Stake (2010), the characteristics of qualitative research that I applied in this study are the following: (1) it is interpretive, that is, it interprets the phenomenon of new Italian migrants through the influence of Facebook groups on their expectations and experiences; (2) it is experiential, that is, it relies heavily on investigating the personal experiences of the people (new Italian migrants) being



studied; (3) it is situational, that is, it is situated within the context of contemporary Australia; and (4) it is personalistic, that is, it emphasises diversity and the individual perceptions of these new Italian migrants (p. 15).

Despite its interpretive, experiential emphasis, there are several disadvantages to qualitative research. Qualitative research has been criticised for being subjective and time consuming, and for posing many risks (Stake, 2000). Common risks may include the reliability of the researcher's observations and the validity of the study (Babbie, 1995). As subjective observations can never be entirely certain, it was important for me to remain aware of and continually monitor my own biases while conducting the study. Further, in order to minimise the potential for subjective observation, in this study, codes and descriptions that are analysed from the data sources derived from the participants' own words.

As discussed in Chapter Three, several studies have employed qualitative methods to explore some of the influences of the use of social media by migrant communities (e.g. Komito and Bates, 2009; Komito, 2011; Ryan et al., 2008; Sawyer and Chen, 2012; Thulin and Vilhelmson, 2014). These studies emphasise the importance and significance of understanding individuals' diverse experiences of using social media during migration, and how a qualitative methodology provides the researcher with in-depth findings about migrants' interactions online. For example, Sawyer and Chen's (2012) use of the qualitative method of in-depth interviewing provided them with detailed responses about their participants' (international students at a US university) thoughts and perspectives on the impact of social media on intercultural adaptation. In

particular, this method enabled the researchers to conclude that seeking connections on social media sites impacts upon post-migration adaptation. Similarly, Dekker and Engbersen's (2013a) use of in-depth interviews with 90 Brazilian, Ukrainian and Moroccan migrants in the Dutch cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam enabled them to determine how migrants obtain information and resources about what to expect once they have arrived in a host country by using online migrant networks. Lastly, in-depth interviews with urban young adults living in Sweden who were planning to move enabled Thulin and Vilhelmson (2014) to uncover how, among other things, young people themselves think that internet use encourages interest in migrating.

Creswell (2007) identified five traditions where qualitative research is likely to be positioned for data collection: Biography, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, and Case Study. The next subsection explains the rationale for the choice of Case Study which is adopted in this study. It begins by outlining the context of this study, my position as researcher, and the various types of case studies that can be utilised. It then details the motivations for choosing a case study method, and how it will be used to inform this particular research. Lastly, it briefly explains some of the problems associated with case study research and how to overcome them.

## **4.2 Method**

### **4.2.1 Case Study**

According to Yin (2014), a case study should be considered when the objective of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions, and when the focus is on an in-depth investigation of an actual case, describing the activities of a particular group within a

bounded system (i.e. a setting or a context) (Creswell, 2002). A case study is appropriate for the topic of this thesis so as to understand a case of migration bounded in time and place: a group of Italians who arrived in Australia on temporary visas as part of the so-called new Italian migrants in Australia.

Patton (1990) maintains that case studies are an invaluable means of forming an in-depth, comprehensive understanding of particular people, problems or situations. The methodological flexibility of the case study means that data selection, data collection and data analysis can be qualitative or quantitative in methodology, with varying methods of analysis to be carried out within diverse time frames. However, there are some discrepancies surrounding how case studies should be defined. Some scholars maintain that a case study is an item to be researched (Stake, 2000), while others define a case study as a process of investigation (Creswell, 2002).

A case study, as Stake (1994) strongly maintains, is used to: "...draw the researcher toward understanding of what is important about that case within its own world, not so much the world of researchers and theorists, but developing its issues, contexts and interpretations" (p. 99). Creswell (2002), on the other hand, conceptualises a case study as "an in-depth exploration of a bounded system...based on extensive data collection" (p. 485) and recommends that a case study should be chosen as a methodology if the objective is to understand "an event, activity, process, of one or more individuals" (p. 496).

Types of case studies can be distinguished by three variations of intent: the single

instrumental case study, the collective or multiple case studies, and the intrinsic case study. According to Stake (1995), a single instrumental case study focuses on an issue or concern and selects one bounded case to exemplify the issue. In a collective case study or multiple case studies, an issue or concern is chosen but multiple cases are used to highlight the issue, often to show numerous perspectives. The intrinsic case study focuses on the case itself because of its unique or uncommon situation (Creswell, 2002) and the study is carried out because of an intrinsic interest in a particular group, person or event.

The instrumental case study, based on the definition posed by Stake (1995), was considered most appropriate for this study as it (1) focuses on an issue or concern, that is, the influence of Facebook groups, and (2) selects one bounded case to exemplify the issue, that is, the bounded case of new Italian migrants in Australia.

Nonetheless, there are several issues surrounding the case study method. A fundamental limitation is that case studies provide very little scope for scientific generalisation since they use a small number of subjects, some conducted with only one. A common contention is how one can make generalisations from a single case (Yin, 2014). However, it is worth mentioning that a small sample is typical in case studies since “the real business of case study is particularisation, not generalisation” (Stake, 1995, p. 8), with researchers looking for what is *unique* about the case not what is generic. Thus, this study sought to understand the particular pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences of a group of new Italian migrants in Australia, an understanding of a single case which may later be transferred and

applied to other similar contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), for example, other new migrants in Australia using Facebook groups. Another issue is the methodological flexibility of a case study method. This flexibility has been criticised for its lack of rigor and structure. Indeed, Yin (2014) notes that, “too many times, the case study investigator has been sloppy, and has allowed equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions” (p. 14). To avoid bias, Hancock & Algozzine (2006) suggest that the researcher constantly remind himself/herself of the main research questions and examine the data in relation to these questions. Further, despite these criticisms, Flyvbjerg (2006) maintains that a case study, more often than not, ends up challenging the researcher’s “preconceived views, assumptions, concepts, and hypotheses” (p. 235) because of the rich data that is obtained.

In the next sections, where I outline the research design for this study, the following will be addressed: the context of the study; the types of data that will be collected to conduct the analysis; and the processes involved in coding.

## **4.2.2 Data Sources**

### **4.2.2.1 Facebook groups**

As explained in Chapter Three, several applications were added to Facebook in order to encourage further sharing among users. One of these was Facebook groups. Once registered on Facebook, anyone can create a group and invite others to join. These groups can be secret, closed (not public) or open (public) (Chapter One). Group members are then encouraged to share UGC – videos, links, photos and discussion

topics – of their choice (see Figure 4.1). In Australia, there is a plethora of popular groups on Facebook aimed at various migrant groups. These include *Brazilians in Australia*, *French in Australia*, *Japanese in Australia*, and so on. Despite their names, these groups may not be specifically used by migrants who are physically *in* Australia. Members may be prospective migrants to Australia who are still in their home country or they may be migrants who have previously visited Australia but have now returned to their home countries or elsewhere.

As discussed in Chapter One, three Facebook groups for Italians in Australia were chosen for analysis because a large number of new Italian migrants use them to prepare for and manage migration. The posts made to the walls of these three Facebook groups thus formed one of the data sources for this study. It is worth noting, however, that the use of Facebook groups is not only an Australian or Italian migrant specific phenomenon. In many other countries where migrants live, work and study, online communities of migrants are being created everyday on Facebook. If one searches for online communities on Facebook groups with the keywords “*Italiani in...*” (“Italians in”), the Facebook search engine lists more than a thousand communities all over the world. For example, Italians in Japan, Sweden and Cambodia.

#### **4.2.2.2 In-depth interviews**

The analysis of the wallposts was complemented by a series of in-depth interviews with members of these groups. In-depth interviews were conducted to create what Lofland and Lofland (1995) call a “guided conversation” (p. 85), enabling participants

to speak about the experiences that they believe to be most significant. In-depth interviews provided information about Italian migrants' own opinions and insights into whether Facebook groups shaped their pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences, and in what ways. As a "conversation with a purpose" (Webb & Webb, 1932, p. 232), in-depth interviews focus on several set topics or themes with an aim of "understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words" (p. 88).

While in-depth interviews are flexible and dynamic (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), the interviewer must have a sense of the themes he/she wishes to explore beforehand so as to ensure that key issues are established and covered during the interview. In light of this, the interview process was in no fixed order, it was negotiated through topics. In line with the research questions, the two main topics that were explored through the interviews were: the influence of Facebook groups for forming expectations pre-migration, and how Facebook groups shape pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences.

To further ensure that all interviews were focused, an interview guide approach was chosen. This involved a list of the general questions or issues to be explored during the interview (see Appendix A). While the interviewer is still free to explore, probe and ask questions considered significant for the study, this type of interview approach is useful for eliciting information about specific topics. It thus provides "a framework within which the interviewer would develop questions, sequence those questions, and make decisions about which information to peruse in greater depth" (Patton, 1987, p.

112), and to ensure that the data from each separate interview remains comprehensive, consistent and systematic. According to Boyce and Neale (2006), there should be no more than fifteen main questions to guide the interview, and probes should be included when necessary.

For this study, I needed to ask truly open ended questions (Patton, 1987) and descriptive questions. Open-ended questions ensure that the respondent could answer in his/her own words. A truly open ended question “does not presuppose which dimensions of feeling, analysis, or thought will be salient for the interviewee” (Patton, 1987, p. 123), and could include such questions as, “How do you feel about ...?”; “What is your opinion of...?”; “What do you think about...?” (Kvale, 1996, pp. 122-123). Conversely, descriptive questions allow the researcher to find out the details that are of significance to the participants. An example is “Can you tell me about...” (Kvale, 1996, p. 133). Further, in order to ensure that questions were fully comprehended by interviewees, they were short and devoid of academic jargon (Kvale, 1996). According to Patton (1987), asking the experience/behaviour questions first is also useful as it establishes a context that interviewees can later use to express feelings and opinions. For example, I asked, “What questions did you post on the walls of the Facebook groups” before “If you received responses to your questions, how did you feel?”

Another component of a successful interview is knowing when and how to probe (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). Probes were used when I wanted “to deepen the response to a question, to increase the richness of the data being obtained, and to give cues to



the interviewee about the level of response that is desired” (Patton, 1987, p. 125). Examples of probes include: “How did you feel then” and “What happened after that?” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 124). Lastly, throughout the interview, to avoid misinterpreting information, I always asked for clarification from participants. Indeed, Kvale (1996) proposes that researchers use such questions as “You then mean that...?” (p. 135) to confirm that interpretations made by researchers are correct or not.

The method of in-depth interviewing was chosen because it is an invaluable tool for gaining large amounts of data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989) and “no other method can provide the depth of understanding that comes from directly observing people and listening to what they have to say” (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, p. 104). Thus, I was able to investigate issues raised by participants, rather than adhering rigidly to set questions, as occurs in structured interviews (Minichiello, 1990). In fact, during the interviews, participants raised a number of interesting issues, such as their experiences with anti-social behaviour on Facebook groups, that were then incorporated into the interview schedule and asked in subsequent interviews.

One weakness of in-depth interviews is the issue of the reliability and honesty of the participants. A way I resolved this was by ensuring that I established a comfortable environment where the interviewees felt that they could talk freely (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Indeed, Minichiello et al. (1990) stress the importance of the interviewer’s role in “establishing rapport” and creating a “productive interpersonal climate” (p. 79) when carrying out in-depth interviews. Further, Hitchcock (1989) maintains that

“central to the interview is the issue of asking questions and this is often achieved in qualitative research through conversational encounters” (p. 79).

Marshall and Rossman (1989) highlighted some of the other key weaknesses of in-depth interviewing which include: the misinterpretation of results because of subjective differences between interviewee and interviewer; the reliance on an often small sample of interview participants, which may not allow for unusual responses; the difficulties surrounding the replication of the interview; and the dependency on the researcher to be resourceful, systematic, and honest while monitoring him/herself for bias (p. 104). In order to resolve the issues of reliability, subjectivity and bias, Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Denzin (1978) suggest the process of triangulation which involves the use of one or more methods to collect data (Yin, 2014). Thus, in-depth interviewing was complemented and enhanced by having previously conducted a thematic analysis of the posts made to the walls of the Facebook groups. By triangulating these two data sources, I decreased the propensity to subjectivity or bias by ensuring that I addressed a broad range of common themes from a multi-dimensional perspective.

In order to capture the data, the in-depth interviews were recorded using a voice recorder so as to “provide an accurate, verbatim record of the interview, capturing the language used by the participant including their hesitations and tone” (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003, p. 166). The stages of the interview process followed those described by Legard, Keegan, and Ward (2003), to include the following:

1. Stage One (Arrival) involved establishing rapport with the interviewee by engaging in informal conversation;
2. Stage Two (Introducing the Research) involved reminding the interviewee of the nature and purpose of the research, ensuring confidentiality, and reminding them that they have given their permission to record the interview (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984);
3. Stage Three (Beginning the Interview) allowed me to ask opening questions to collect important contextual information about such issues as age, education, occupation and residence (Patton, 1987);
4. Stage Four (During the Interview) involved me guiding the interviewee through the main themes with a series of questions, probes and follow-up questions;
5. Stage Five (Ending the Interview) is where I signalled the end of the interview using such phrases as “the final topic...”; and
6. Stage Six (After the Interview) is when the voice recorder was switched off and I thanked the participant.

#### **4.2.3 The researcher’s role**

The interpretation and analysis of data depend on, and may be complicated by, the researcher’s perceptions, experiences and knowledge. As Creswell (2002) states, the researcher should maintain reflexivity, a characteristic of qualitative research in which the “researcher systematically reflects on who he/she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study” (p. 182). While quantitative approaches attempt to minimise subjective bias, qualitative approaches

seek to acknowledge and account for biases, values or interests (reflexivity). In this sense, “the personal-self thus becomes inseparable from the researcher-self” (Creswell, 2002, p. 182) and the researcher, as the primary data collection instrument, must divulge his/her personal values, assumptions and biases at the outset of the study. Similarly, Meyrick (2006) maintains that in order to ensure rigour and to produce quality interpretive research, objectivity can be sourced by defining the researcher’s proximity through reflexivity. For example, it should be acknowledged that a researcher might focus on aspects of a topic that resonate with his or her own experience, thereby shaping his or her findings (p. 804). Therefore, in order to establish qualitative quality and rigour, as required by Meyrick (2006), a brief account of my background and experience in relation to the case study of new Italian migrants in Australia is given.

Although I am of not of Italian background, I am a highly proficient Italian speaker who has been studying Italian for over ten years. I have lived in Italy, including the cities of Rome, Vicenza and Florence, at various stages of my life for extended periods of time. I am therefore very familiar with Italian society and culture. I also maintain extensive contacts with Italians in both my professional and personal life, in both Italy and Australia. In the past, I have used Facebook groups for Italians in Australia in order to practice my Italian and to help prospective Italian migrants. At present, I have a network of Italian friends who are also undertaking postgraduate research degrees at my university.

My profound interest in the Italian language, society and culture, my strong

connections with Italians in Sydney, and my familiarity with and use of some of the Facebook groups created for Italians in Australia, all contribute to a rich background understanding of the current study. However, it may be argued that such familiarity with the topic could lead to research bias and, in turn, threaten the validity of the data. According to Glesne (1999), however, acknowledging and considering my pre-disposition to bias throughout the study helped me to become a “curious student who comes to learn from and with research participants” (p. 41). Indeed, approaching the study from the position of “researcher as learner” (Glesne, 1999) forced me to be open to new ways of seeing and understanding the data. Thus, in terms of my study, I followed the advice of Glesne (1999) who recommends that the researcher carefully monitors his/her subjectivity and preconceptions in order to ensure that the data is interpreted in meaningful, verifiable ways. In this way, as Meyrick (2006) maintains, once the researcher has defined his/her proximity to the study through self-reflection, he/she will become more objective.

### **4.3 Fieldwork**

#### **4.3.1 Preliminary Phase**

##### **4.3.1.1 Facebook groups for Italians in Australia**

The selection of the three Facebook groups for Italians in Australia were identified using Facebook’s basic search function. By typing in “Italiani in...” I was able to find a large number of Facebook groups for Italians in Australia, as well as more specific ones for Italians in various cities across Australia. To be included in the Facebook group samples, I set up the following criteria. Firstly, the group had to be a public group, therefore allowing anyone with a Facebook account, including myself, to join it and view the posts. Secondly, as of 1 April 2015 the group had to have at least 50

wallposts, indicating that the group is active, and at least 1000 group members, indicating that the group is popular.

Because the study involved the analysis of wallposts made to online Facebook groups, issues associated with the recruitment of participants or informed consent were somewhat complex. For this study, the content of the Facebook groups was analysed *without* gaining consent from the group members. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that, as boyd and Marwick (2011) argue, “In an era of social media where information is often easily accessible, it’s all too easy to conflate accessibility with publicity” (p. 6). In other words, although it is impossible to gain consent from every user who posts online, it is inappropriate for researchers to view their research as ethical merely because of the accessibility of the data (boyd and Crawford, 2011). Therefore, issues surrounding privacy and confidentiality were carefully taken into account, as discussed in greater detail in the next section.

#### **4.3.1.2 Ethical Considerations of Online Research**

The most significant rule of social research is that “it must bring no harm to the research subjects” (Babbie, 1995, p. 27). One way to ensure this is to carry out the research in a way that the research subjects are made aware of the study and have thus provided the researcher with informed consent. However, with the advent of internet research, the line between public and private information has been blurred. Social media research is still an emerging field and researchers are thus faced with many ethical dilemmas when carrying out studies of social media sites. The British Sociological Association’s Statement of Ethical Practice (BSA, 2002) confirms,

“Eliciting informed consent, negotiating access agreements, assessing the boundaries between the public and the private, and ensuring the security of data transmissions are all problematic in internet research” (p. 14). Indeed, although user information may be publicly available to anyone on the internet, this does not necessarily indicate that the user intended it to be public and later used as research data. Further, because seeking the consent of every user on a particular social media platform is challenging, if not impossible, maintaining participant confidentiality has never been more necessary. Wimmer and Dominick (2000) offer several useful guidelines for the online researcher who wishes to maintain confidentiality: “Do not name the group. Paraphrase long quotes. Disguise some information, such as institutional or organisational names. Omit details that may be harmful to individual participants” (p. 82).

The Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) have provided ethical guidelines that highlight the issues of negotiating online research (Ess, 2002) and agreed on a recommendation that collecting research data without informed consent would only be acceptable under certain circumstances: (1) if the environment is public and (2) if the material was not sensitive. More specifically, in terms of public community groups online, like Facebook groups, AoIR state: “If...subjects may be understood as authors intending for their work to be public (e.g., e-mail postings to large listserves and Usenet groups; public webpages such as homepages, Web logs, etc.; chat exchanges in publicly accessible chatrooms, etc.) – then fewer obligations to protect autonomy, privacy, confidentiality, etc., will likely follow” (Ess, 2002, p. 7).

Despite this, Elm (2009) argues that it is problematic to use the terms public/private spaces and sensitive/not sensitive material to describe online research, as “the concepts of private/public cannot be seen as a dichotomy but must be conceived of as a continuum” (p. 85). She maintains that the researcher must first consider whether the places he/she wishes to study online are in fact private or public, and second, he/she must decide whether the content of the communication includes private or public content. She asks, “What kind of consent is considered public enough to be studied without informed consent?” (p. 80). Elm (2009) classifies public content under “societal matters” and private content as individual private lives. For this study, a societal matter could include such topics and questions surrounding “the Australian culture”; “finding work in Australia”; and “how to obtain a Medicare card.” Private content would include particular references to specific employers, personal experiences and dealings with named individuals or organisations, and any other form of personal or incriminating information.

To avoid transgressing these ethical issues, the following steps were taken. Firstly, this study employed the strategies outlined by Elm (2009) and Wimmer and Dominick (2000) to ensure the privacy of the subjects studied. Although all the selected Facebook groups were publicly available for anyone to read, instead of the exact names of the Facebook groups, only the generic term “Facebook group or groups” are used in this thesis. To de-identify the names appearing in the Facebook posts, names were omitted completely, making the posts untraceable and unrecognisable. Based on these premises, approval for the study was obtained through the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the University of Sydney on 30 March 2015. Fieldwork



was conducted between April and November 2015. The procedures for recruitment, data collection, analysis and management were at all times consistent with the ethical guidelines that govern both online research and in-depth interviewing.

The interview participants were given a HREC approved written Participant Information Statement about the research and a Participant Consent Form which they had to sign. The Participant Information Statement and Consent Form contain the following statement: “I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.” Thus, in the event that a participant no longer wanted to participate in the research, he/she was able to withdraw from the study at any time. During the interviews, participants were again informed that in any research publications, their identity would be protected through the use of an assigned participant ID code and pseudonym. Further, all identifying information has been replaced in the transcripts. This includes names, organisations, states, cities, countries, and so on, which have all been replaced with pseudonyms.

During the fieldwork, all confidential data was securely stored on my own computer. Access to this computer was protected by a password. Further, the backup hard drive was accessible with a password. Once the fieldwork was completed, the data was stored in my Supervisor’s computer in her office, and it was only accessible to my Supervisor and I.

#### **4.3.1.3 In-depth interviews**

The in-depth interviews were conducted in Sydney and the sample was selected with

purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is often used in qualitative research as it involves selecting participants based on the needs of the study (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), in that researchers choose participants who give a richness of information that is suitable for detailed research (Patton, 2002). For this study, participants had to:

1. be of Italian nationality;
2. be aged between 18 and 30 years so as to ensure consistency;
3. be members of the selected (and other) Facebook groups for Italians in Sydney and/or Australia;
4. use the selected (and other) Facebook groups for Italians in Sydney and/or Australia on at least a fortnightly basis, indicating that they are active users of these groups; and
5. have been in Australia no longer than 12 months so as to ensure that they were able to recall their initial expectations.

Participants were recruited from the Facebook groups themselves via a post written in Italian asking for participants. This post was made to the walls of ten different Facebook groups for Italians in Australia in May 2015. Prior to each interview, a Participant Information Statement approved by the University of Sydney's Human Ethics committee (see Appendix B) was sent to anyone who expressed interest, informing them about the nature of the study, what it involved, and to help them decide if they wanted to take part. Once a potential participant had decided to be involved, a time and place were arranged, and, at the interview, they were given a Participant Consent Form (see Appendix C) to sign. Both of these were translated into Italian.

Overall, the process of recruiting participants and scheduling the interviews was challenging, mainly due to time and place constraints. Via the wallposts asking for participants on Facebook, many people showed interest and wrote to me via Facebook messenger. However, many of these potential interviews fell through because the person's work shift changed at the last minute. Similarly, people agreed to participate but could not find any time to meet with me.

Ultimately, for this study a sample size of 15 participants was considered adequate to uncover whether Italian migrants think that Facebook groups helped shape their expectations and experiences of migration. According to Kvale (1996), there is no set or recommended number of participants for in-depth interviews and the researcher should conduct as many interviews as needed "until a point of saturation, where further interviews yield little new knowledge" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 113).

The interviews were carried out between May and December 2015 in locations where the participants felt most comfortable, such as public libraries and university spaces. Participants were asked whether they preferred to do the interview in English or in Italian. However, given that all participants were Italian, only two opted to use English. All participants consented to the interview being audio recorded.

To begin the interview, I asked each participant to tell me about themselves and why they had come to Australia. In this way I set the scene for the interview. After this brief introduction, participants were asked to reflect on their use of online communication before arriving in Australia. The discussion revolved around the

following themes during the pre-migration period: uses of social media, especially Facebook groups; expectations about Australia (especially those created by Facebook groups); motivations for using Facebook groups; and preparedness for coming to Australia (see interview guide in Appendix A).

As part of the conversation, in the second part of the interview, participants were asked to explain *why* and *how* they used online communication post-migration to Australia, namely Facebook group use: uses of Facebook groups post-migration; expectations derived from Facebook groups; influence of Facebook groups on overall experiences in Australia; and impressions of Facebook groups for Italians, including in-group interactions. Each interview lasted between 35 and 70 minutes.

Consistent with Kvale (1996), each interview situation varied and, at times I had to effectively “think on my feet” (p. 311) in order to elicit information to be used in the analysis. Some participants spontaneously volunteered information, while at other times I needed to probe. Some participants were not very forthcoming with information about their use of the Facebook groups and even expressed frustrations with the groups, responding with one word answers. Nonetheless, even in the shortest interviews, the responses given were consistent with what other participants had said in longer interviews about the way in which their expectations and experiences in Australia were shaped by using the groups. Thus, after completing 15 interviews, I felt that I had reached data “saturation” in that the participants continued to discuss the same themes and no new topics seemed to emerge (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

#### 4.4 Data Analysis

Both data sets – the 3000 Facebook group wallposts and the 15 interview transcripts – were explored using thematic analysis, an approach which is used throughout a diversity of disciplines and is well outlined by Crabtree and Miller (1999). The framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) served as the foundation for my process of thematic analysis, a method used for “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data” (p. 79). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set and captures the crucial aspects of the data related to the research questions. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility: it allows the researcher to identify themes within a data set in an inductive or “data-driven” way, or a deductive (theoretical) way. The themes I identified were a result of both inductive and deductive analysis based on the recognition that “researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Therefore, a “thematic approach can produce an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 97), especially when triangulating two sets of data.

Thematic analysis examines patterns that occur within a particular text that illustrate the range of the meanings of the phenomenon rather than the statistical significance of the occurrence of particular texts or concepts (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). This method allowed me to identify meanings, themes and patterns that were manifest, for example at a semantic level, or latent, that is, alluded to in the wallposts and in the stories provided by the in-depth interview participants.

The objective of any type of qualitative analysis is “to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314), and in doing so, the researcher does not “intrude on what is being studied and thus does not affect the outcome of the research” (Berger, 2000, p. 181). Certainly, the great strength of thematic analysis is that it is an unobtrusive, non-reactive method (Marshall and Rossman, 1989) that portrays, in this particular study, whether and how Facebook groups influence pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences.

The guide developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) describes a series of steps for carrying out thematic analysis which were adapted to suit this study. Thus, to begin each separate analysis, I read through all the Facebook group wallposts and interview transcripts several times in order to *familiarise myself with the data*. I then began to *generate initial codes* from the wallposts and the interview transcripts using the method of “coding.” Coding is the organisation of raw data into thematic categories. Braun and Clarke (2013) describe coding as a “process of identifying aspects of the data that relate to your research question” (p. 206). More specifically, based on Saldaña’s (2012) coding manual for qualitative researchers, a code is conceived as a word or short phrase that “symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). A theme, on the other hand, is “an outcome of coding, categorisation, and analysis, not something that is, in itself, coded” (Saldaña, 2012, p. 13). In other words, a code is a word or phrase describing a part of data that is explicit, while a theme is a phrase or sentence describing it more implicitly (Rossman & Rallis, 2002 cited in

Saldaña, 2012). After coding, I then *searched for common emergent themes*, organising all codes into potential themes. Themes were organised hierarchically, with primary thematic categories and subcategories. Finally, I *reviewed the data* once more, adding, refining, or discarding categories in order to form final clusters of common themes which were subsequently *renamed and properly defined* (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

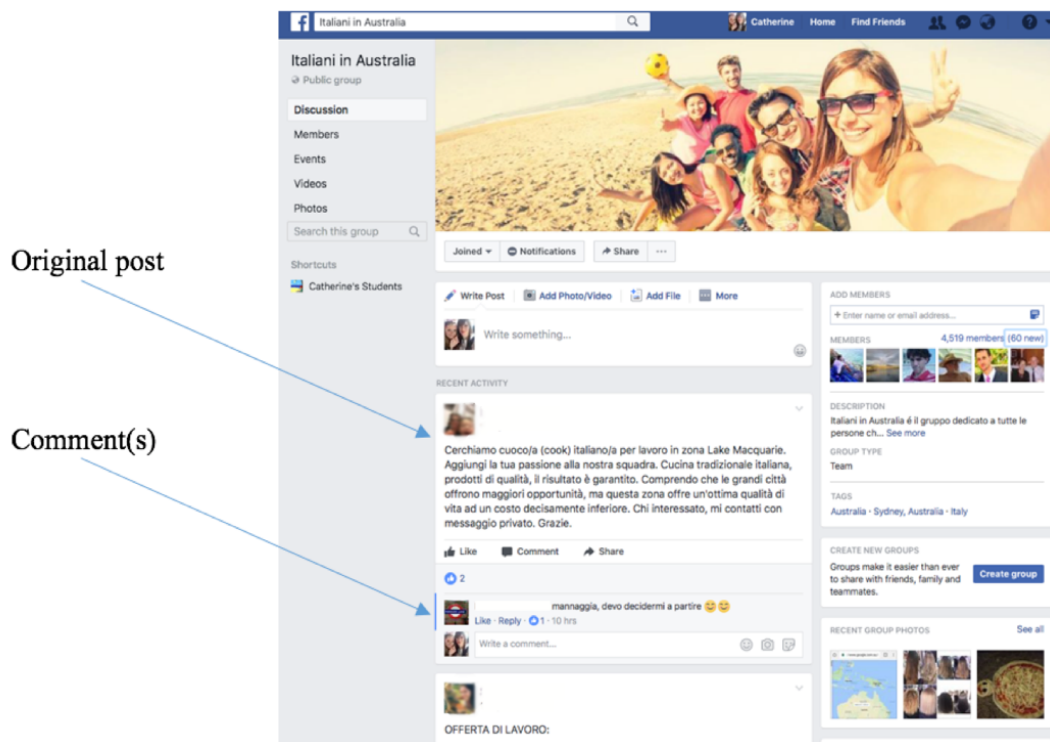
In terms of the Facebook groups, this type of analysis allowed themes to be extrapolated from the members' wallposts by observing the meanings created through words as well as pictures. The data were captured using Google Chrome NCapture and consisted of extracting the first 1000 posts from the wall sections of three Facebook groups for Italians in Australia in May 2015, a total of 3000 posts. These extracted postings were then uploaded onto NVivo 10, a specialised qualitative analysis software. This device enables qualitative coding throughout large quantities of text, audio and visual data. It was chosen for its rapidity, reliability and efficiency in searching text-based materials for word presence to supplement line-by-line analysis. NVivo 10 allowed me to digitally highlight phrases, words or entire paragraphs, right click on them, and assign them to a node (a code).

As mentioned above, at the core of thematic analysis is finding common themes that emerge in the data, and *not* to produce the statistical significance (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). However, in order to show the prominence of certain themes, I do provide a brief count of each category that emerged from the analysis (see Table 5.1). For the analysis of the wallposts, both original posts and comments were coded. If the

post was the first post in a thread, it was coded as an original post (see Figure 4.1). If there was only a single post and no responding posts to build a thread, it was also coded as an original post. If the post coded was not the first in a thread, it was coded as a comment post (or comment) (see Table 4.1 for definitions of terms).

Original posts and comments were included in the study if they were written in English or Italian, and contained at least one word or short phrase so as to ensure that they could in fact be coded. Picture posts, even without any text, were also coded as they are part of the richness of digital data. Individual users were identified by their Facebook ID so that multiple occurrences of a topic in an original post by the same participant was only coded once.

**Figure 4.1 Snapshot of a public Facebook group for Italians in Australia**





**Table 4.1 A summary of Facebook group practices and terminology**

Facebook term	Description
Wall	The area on the Facebook group where members can post thoughts, views, pictures and links for the other group members to see.
Original post	The first post in a thread in the form of written text, image and/or link.
Comment	A post in reply to an original post in the form of written text, image, and/or link.
Like	A clickable response device located under a post signalling acknowledgement of and appreciation for the post or comment.
Tag	When a group member mentions the name of someone else in a comment or post and it provides a link to their profile. The individual will also receive a notification.
Thread	A grouping of posts which acts as a conversation among members.

To illustrate the difference between codes and thematic categories in the analysis of the Facebook group wallposts, an example of an original post is used:

*CIAO a tutti, vivo a Roma e lavoro nella ristorazione. Sono esperto di ristoranti, pizzerie e gelaterie. Il mio sogno e quello di trasferirmi in Australia da quando ero piccolo. Sono disposto a valutare qualsiasi idea.<sup>17</sup>*

(HI everyone, I live in Rome and work in hospitality. I've had a lot of work experience in restaurants, pizzerias and gelaterias. It has been my dream to come to Australia since I was little. I'm open to any ideas).

**Codes:** dreams, potential-migrant, expectations, information seeking, employment

**Primary category and subcategory:** Images of Australia → Praise of and aspirations for Australia

**Primary category and subcategory:** Information Exchange → Employment

For the analysis of the in-depth interviews, after each interview was conducted, research notes and participant profiles were written. Writing the participant profiles and interview notes helped me to form initial impressions about coding and to begin

<sup>17</sup> Posts are presented exactly as they appeared on the Facebook groups walls, including any typographical errors, spelling mistakes, arbitrary sets of dots, and/or grammatical errors. Square brackets are used to add any explanatory information to improve clarity.

interpreting the interview material. The audio files of all 15 in-depth interviews were then uploaded on NVivo which also offers the opportunity to transcribe and code interview data simultaneously. By playing and transcribing the audio recordings in “transcribe mode”, I could play, pause or rewind, and when the stop button was pressed, NVivo created a new transcript row and timestamp where I could transcribe the salient parts of the interviews. Again, NVivo allowed me to capture recurring themes and patterns of repetitive word use by first coding sections of interview data into nodes (codes).

Coding interviews is described as a “process of determining categories and classification systems used by informants to get a sense of how their minds work, how they make sense of the world. [It is] “an attempt by researchers to see if any common themes and topics inform the interview transcripts; these common themes would help researchers see what is important to informants and what is secondary” (Berger, 2000, pp. 121-122). As mentioned, one of the most significant strengths of a thematic analysis is that it can be carried out unobtrusively (Berg, 2004).

A typical problem with qualitative data analysis, however, is that it is time consuming (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000). Furthermore, the researcher may subjectively analyse the data which, in turn, may decrease the accuracy of the results (Kracauer, 1952).

Weber (1990) notes: “To make valid inferences from the text, it is important that the classification procedure be reliable in the sense of being consistent” (p. 12). Weber (1990) goes on to argue that “reliability problems usually grow out of the ambiguity of word meanings, category definitions, or other coding rules” (p. 15). Thus, to ensure

objectivity, Marshall and Rossman (1989) maintain that much thought and care should be taken when analysing meaning from data. In this study, to address the issue of subjectivity, the method of triangulation ensured a greater understanding of the similarities and differences between what I observed myself from the Facebook group wallposts and what members of the groups perceive in terms of their own experiences on such groups. Overall, triangulation proved extremely useful for forming a rich interpretation of the findings.

#### **4.5 Concluding remarks**

This chapter has outlined the methodology and research design for this study. It has highlighted how the method of case study can be used to understand the phenomenon of a group of young Italians in Australia bounded by language, culture, expectations, and shared experiences. This chapter has also revealed the usefulness of triangulating two different data sets – Facebook group wallposts and in-depth interviews – through thematic analysis in order to provide a richness of data. The challenges involved in data collection and data analysis were also discussed, including participant recruitment, researcher reliability, and the various ethical issues around internet-based research. The next two chapters will present the main findings of the analysis, that is, the main themes that emerged from the separate data sets.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FINDINGS: FACEBOOK GROUPS**

In order to understand *if* and *how* Facebook groups influence Italian migrants pre- and post-migration to Australia, in this chapter I present the analysis of the posts ( $n = 3000$ ) which I extracted from the wall section of the three selected Facebook groups during the month of May 2015. As explained in Chapter Four, I identified key themes emerging from the posts in order to uncover the common patterns that emerged in data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Although the analysis is predominantly qualitative, as mentioned above, I do give the frequency of post categories as part of the analysis below in order to illustrate the magnitude of certain recurring themes.

Chapter Three revealed that few studies within the field of technology and migration take into account the pre-migration period. Such an approach can be considered limiting since it views the use of online communication from the perspective of newly arrived migrants without taking into account its influence on potential- or pre-migrants, especially on their expectations. In this study, exploring the role of Facebook groups throughout the entire migration process, that is, even before the decision to migrate has been finalised, provides a more holistic perspective.

The analysis of data employed two key concepts, *online community* and *imagination*, as they emerged from the exploration of the Facebook groups. As I explained in Chapter Four, the notion of online community (Lazar & Preece, 2002) is one of the foundations of the theoretical framework of this study, accounting for the way in which Facebook group members *can* influence each other's pre-migration

expectations and post-migration experiences. In order to understand *how* Facebook groups influence their members pre- and post-migration, it is also helpful to examine how online communities, like face-to-face communities, have a shared sense of space, shared practices, shared resources and support, shared identities, and interpersonal support (Baym, 2015).

The second notion, imagination, elucidates the process whereby new Italian migrants on Facebook groups collectively construct multi-faceted and complex images of Australia by gathering other members' photographs, stories, information and personal experiences. The ability of these groups to provide a space for imagining or re-imagining migration to Australia is made possible by UGC, that is, the way in which social media allow their members to easily produce and post a diversity of content in the forms of text, photos, videos, audio and so on (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). UGC has been found to be a more objective, reliable, and trustworthy information source in travel planning than tourism or immigration websites, and a significant information source in forming an image of a particular destination (see section 3.2.1).

Further, the imagination and images are often the foundation of many travels, whether in the context of tourism or migration, and while motivations to migrate are complex and diverse, they are inevitably connected to the ability of individuals and their social networks to use their imagination (see section 3.4). As will be shown in this analysis, Facebook groups, via the variety of images engendered by wallposts, enable Italian migrants to imagine their lives in Australia before they have even left Italy.

## 5.1 Facebook groups

At the time of data extraction, as per the sample criteria outlined in the Methodology Chapter, all three groups had more than 1000 members and more than 50 posts. The three groups were very similar: they all served as hubs for Italians who were planning to migrate to, had migrated to, or were simply interested in, Australia. Each group encouraged its members to exchange knowledge, information, advice and photographs that represent the experience of migrating to Australia. They were all public groups with an administrator who moderated the postings. In addition, the three groups had similar formats of posts: text, hyperlinks and images.

Overall, data extracted from the three groups consisted of 578 original posts and 2422 comments. Excluding the comments, 353 unique individuals posted original posts to the groups, of which 61% were male and 34% were female. The gender of 16 members was unidentifiable. The data showed that, for both gender groups, more than half tended to make original posts multiple times throughout the sample. Within the three groups, the members appeared to be predominantly, but not exclusively, of Italian background, based on the fact that postings were all in the Italian language and references were made to Italy as “home.”

The pattern of posting was similar across the three groups. First, a group member made an original post on the wall in the form of text, image or hyperlink, then other members would comment on or “like” the original post (see definitions of terms in Table 4.1). It is important to note that posting on the walls of Facebook groups takes the form of asynchronous communication and members reply to original posts and/or

comments whenever they log on to Facebook from their diverse locations. However, in my sample, on those occasions when two or more members were on Facebook at the same time, their participation in a thread occurred rather quickly and appeared as a synchronous, real-time conversation. Members posted various types of original posts and comments in the three Facebook groups, and Table 5.1 below shows the most common thematic categories.

**Table 5.1 Total number of posts by thematic category**

<b>Primary Category</b>	<b>Subcategory</b>	<b>Frequency (n = 3000)</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Information Exchange</b>	Bureaucracy, immigration and courses	362	12.1%
	Employment	360	12.0%
	Travel	219	7.3%
	Accommodation	112	3.7%
	Events and Entertainment	64	2.1%
	Australian history, culture and society	30	1.0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1147</b>	<b>38.2%</b>
<b>Community</b>	Encouragement, Support and Advice	374	12.5%
	Greetings and Thanks	220	7.3%
	Buying or selling goods and services	166	5.5%
	Companionship	96	3.2%
	Tag	76	2.5%
	Private Message Request or Offer	14	0.5%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>946</b>	<b>31.5%</b>
<b>Imagining Australia</b>	Challenges, delusion and voices of reason	233	7.8%
	Praise for Australia and aspirations	182	6.1%
	Photographs of Australia	138	4.6%
	Nostalgia about Australia	67	2.2%
	Comparing Italy to Australia	51	1.7%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>671</b>	<b>22.4%</b>
<b>Anti-social Behaviour</b>	Flaming	130	4.3%
	Responses to Flaming	6	0.2%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>4.5%</b>
<b>Other</b>		248	8.3%

Open coding produced 24 thematic categories. These were then refined to make five primary categories with 19 subcategories. The primary thematic categories are: *Information Exchange*, *Community*, *Imagining Australia*, *Anti-social Behaviour*, and *Other*. Because all UGC, that is, images, photographs, links and text based posts, were included as posts and were coded, they were often coded into more than one theme (see section 4.4 for an example). Thus, the total number of frequencies may not align with the total number ( $n = 3000$ ) of posts analysed.

Posts coded under *Information Exchange* represented 38.2% ( $n = 1147$ ) of the sample and included six separate subcategories of information. Posts coded under *Community* represented 31.5% ( $n = 946$ ) of the sample and included posts that showed six elements of community building. Posts coded under *Imagining Australia* represented 22.4% ( $n = 671$ ) of the sample and included five separate images. A small, albeit noteworthy, number of posts (4.5%;  $n = 136$ ) were coded under *Anti-social Behaviour* as they represented posts that were antagonistic or aggressive. Lastly, several posts (8.3%;  $n = 248$ ) were coded as *Other* because they were miscellaneous items or spam (e.g. “Grande musica oggi [www.radioitaliainternational.com](http://www.radioitaliainternational.com). Il meglio della musica italiana di ieri e di oggi.” “Great music today [www.radioitaliainternational.com](http://www.radioitaliainternational.com). The best Italian music from the past and present”). The subcategories subsumed within primary thematic categories are explored in more detail in the analysis below.

Overall, a conversation occurred through the comments made to original posts (see Figure 4.1 in Chapter Four), often with the same few members posting multiple times. Comments usually appeared in the form of responses to the questions, statements or



images from original posts made by other group members. While the comments made in my sample were usually polite, that is, they provided thoughtful responses to questions or statements, others were inflammatory. Inflammatory posts, or what is more commonly referred to online as *flaming* (see section 3.3.3), were coded as *Anti-social Behaviour*. This will be explained in greater detail below in section 5.2.5.

As mentioned above, Facebook relies on UGC and is thus a highly textual and visual space, enabling its members to present themselves through their wallposts. According to Lee (2014), the technological affordances of social media provide opportunities for users to employ a large range of multimodal resources in the expression of their identities (p. 93). Indeed, not only can Facebook users present themselves through the written word but also through images, links, videos, and their personal Facebook profile page which is accessible by clicking on their hyperlinked full name or photograph. In this way, when someone posts on the wall of a Facebook group, members of that group can click on and navigate to their Facebook profile page which, depending on personal privacy settings, displays a large number of personal photograph albums, their education background, interests, Facebook friends, other group or page memberships, and other information.

This access to Facebook profiles is a significant consideration because the ability to see other members' full names and profile pictures, and to navigate to their profile page, may help to create a more intimate environment thanks to the complementary relationship between self-disclosure and trust that exists online (see section 3.3.3).

Social media are also concerned with the act of sharing oneself with other people (see section 3.2.1). High levels of self-disclosure and information exchange, as we will

see, account for why the Facebook group members in this study display a strong sense of belonging to the communities, and can become trusting of and influenced by the people within that group.

I will begin by briefly describing the types of migrants who appear to be using the Facebook groups at different stages of the migration process. I will then outline the findings which illustrate that Facebook groups *do* influence pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences, and *how*.

### **5.1.1 Types of Italian migrants on Facebook groups**

Although it is not always possible to ascertain whether a member was physically in Australia, Italy, or even in another country, at the time of posting, I was able to identify at least four typologies of members who were using the groups: (1) the potential-migrant, (2) the pre-migrant, (3) the post-migrant, and (4) the return-migrant. These are reported in Table 5.2 and can be summarised as follows.

The potential-migrant is considering migration to Australia and asks questions about migrating. Posts or comments from potential-migrants usually begin with a personal introduction and then a question. It is at this point that he/she will begin to use the information received to make a decision about migrating. Pre-migrants, on the other hand, are already in the process of migrating to Australia and they are preparing their journey. They have usually booked their plane ticket and know the date of their arrival. In other words, they use the groups to make arrangements for their arrival in

Australia. However, at this time they also begin to imagine what their life will be like in Australia and form expectations.

The post-migrant has already migrated to Australia. These migrants usually seek information about renewing their visas, finding a course, buying certain products, and so on. They are also the ones who most frequently share information, advice and relay personal experiences to potential- and pre-migrants. They help potential- and pre-migrants form an image of and expectations about Australia. Finally, return-migrants have migrated to or visited Australia in the past but have since returned to Italy or elsewhere. They typically reminisce about their time in Australia and indicate that they wish to come back to Australia in the future. They too help other Italians in the group form an image of and expectations about Australia.

**Table 5.2 Migrant Categories found to be using Facebook groups**

Migrant Category	Definition (within the context of this sample)	Example(s)
(1) The Potential-Migrant	The potential-migrant is considering migration to Australia.	<i>Ciao a tutti sono [nome] ho 25 anni e lavoro in Italia come preparatore Atletico. Un amico di ritorno da un viaggio in Australia mi ha vivamente consigliato di provare a trovare lavoro lì. Se qualcuno riuscisse ad aiutarmi in qualsiasi modo, ne sarei infinitamente grato!!!!</i> (Hi everyone...I'm [name] I'm 25 years old and I work in Italy as a trainer...A friend of mine who just came back from Australia told me to try to find work there....If anyone can help me in any way, I'd be forever grateful!!!!).
(2) The Pre-Migrant	The pre-migrant is already in the process of migrating to Australia. He/she is preparing their journey to Australia.	<i>Io arrivo a Sydney a metà febbraio. Dopo aver fatto medicare ecc vorrei cercare lavoro nelle farm. Avete indicazione utile per come muoversi ?</i> (I'm arriving in Sydney in mid-February. After getting my medicare card <sup>18</sup> etc I would like to look for work on a farm. Do you have any advice about how to proceed?)  <i>Ciao ragazzi io arrivo il 14 gennaio a Melbourne e non parlo inglese. sto cercando qualcuno che mi faccia lezioni private.</i> (Hi guys, I arrive in Melbourne on January 14 and I don't speak English. I'm looking for someone who could give me private lessons).
(3) The Post-Migrant	The post-migrant has already migrated to Australia.	<i>Ciao a tutti!! Qualcuno sarà di sicuro più informato di me....sono qui con un working holiday...finiti i 2 anni posso attaccarci uno student visa per rimanere più a lungo??? Sperando sempre che qualcuno mi faccia da sponsor!!! Io ora ho 27 anni.</i> (Hi everyone!! Someone will know more than me... I'm here on a working holiday visa... after finishing the 2 years can I get a student visa to stay even longer??? Hoping that someone will sponsor me!! Now I'm 27 years old).  <i>Ciao [nome] condivido appieno il tuo punto di vista, per quanto riguarda la domanda sul studiare qua o in italia non saprei dirti, prova a contattare [nome], mi è stato utile nei miei primi giorni in australia, magari può indicarti la strada maestra da percorrere.</i> (Hi [name] I totally agree with you, about studying here or in Italy I wouldn't know, try to contact [name], he was helpful during my first few days in Australia, maybe he can show you the best way to proceed).
(4) The Return-Migrant	The return-migrant has been to/lived in Australia in the past but has since returned to Italy or elsewhere.	<i>Sono stata [in Australia] due anni e adesso che sono tornata a casa non vedo l'ora di ritornarci...</i> (I was in Australia for two years and now that I'm home I can't wait to go back...).

<sup>18</sup> A Medicare card is a plastic card that is issued to individuals or families who are eligible to receive a rebate of medical expenses under the Australian Medicare system. Italians are eligible for a Medicare card as the Australian Government has signed a Reciprocal Health Care Agreement with Italy.

Identifying the types of migrants that use these Facebook groups at different migration phases are key considerations as few researchers of online migrant communities have taken into account the pre-migrant, let alone the potential-migrant. For my research, this is particularly significant as I focus on migration as a process that is inclusive of the pre-migration phase and the post-migration phase (Chapter Three).

Nonetheless, my classification of migrant categories does bear some resemblance to the three categories of migrants – pre-, post- and settled-migrant – as outlined by Hiller and Franz (2004) (see section 3.1.2), especially that of the pre-migrant who uses the internet to gain information, make contacts and get advice before migrating. It is worth mentioning, however, that it is not always possible to assign a wallpost to a specific type of migrant. Therefore, the terms potential-, pre-, post-, and return-migrant will only be used when it *is* clear which category of migrant a post was written by. Otherwise, the more general term (Facebook group) member will be used.

## **5.2 Online communities on Facebook groups: A space for preparing for and managing migration**

Facebook groups are more than just virtual information channels, they are online communities where new Italian migrants to Australia share their desires, frustrations, dreams, expectations and concerns prior to migrating. Drawing on Baym's (2015) and Wellman's (1999) previously outlined identifiers of community (see section 3.3.1), online community posits around networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, sense of belonging, and identity. When Italian pre-

migrants join Facebook groups, then, they connect to a community of other Italians who also want to migrate or who have already migrated to Australia, and together they construct a shared space for preparing for, managing and imagining migration.

Below I have detailed those themes which reflect how being part of an online community influences the expectations of both potential- and pre-migrant Italians, and their post-migration experiences. In the first part I focus on the sub-themes of (1) the provision of *social support and encouragement*, (2) *companionship and friendship building*, and (3) the display of high levels of self-disclosure, trust and therefore reliance on other Italians in the group for *exchanging information*. I then discuss how the groups ultimately provide *a virtual home away from home*, that is, a space for re-creating *italianità* in Australia through shared cultural identity. Finally, I discuss how the groups can engender frustration and confusion among new Italian migrants due to the presence of *anti-social behaviour* and the dissemination of conflicting information. The following sections will summarise the primary, recurring findings that emerged, with typical examples of original posts and/or comments to illustrate the theme of online communities.

### **5.2.1 *L'importante è provare... buttati!!!!* (The important thing is to try... give it a go!): social support and encouragement**

The Facebook groups analysed in my study provide a platform for the enactment of solidarity and of bonding, especially among the potential- and pre-migrant Italians who intend to leave Italy for Australia. In my corpus, when potential- and pre-migrants to Australia made posts which expressed concerns, fears or frustrations

about migrating, comments generally responded with encouragement or support. For example, potential-migrants seeking advice about whether or not to migrate to Australia were met with comments from post-migrants encouraging them to come: “*venire in Australia, per qualsiasi motivo finale, secondo me, deve essere comunque un’esperienza che ti arricchisce*” (“Coming to Australia, for whatever final reason, must be, I think, an experience that enriches you”). Other responses focused on the importance of giving it a go. Comments such as “keep trying” provided encouragement to potential-migrants who were still uncertain about migrating, as shown in the following thread<sup>19</sup>:

1. *Io ne sono innamorato [dell’Australia] da ben 35 anni e volevo andarci a vivere purtroppo venivo deriso da parenti e amici, tutti i giorni vado su google earth e volo con i miei pensieri positivi. Grazie*
2. *a volte la vita si ricorda di premiare i migliori... keep tryin’!*
3. *Fattela tu una grossa risata compra un biglietto e ridi di gusto quando atterri nella terra dei canguri alla faccia di chi rideva di te*

- (1. I’ve been in love with it [Australia] for a good 35 years and I wanted to live there unfortunately I was laughed at by relatives and friends. Every day I go on Google Earth and I’m transported by my positive thoughts. Thanks
2. sometimes life remembers to reward the best of us... keep tryin’!
3. You’ll have the last laugh. Buy yourself a ticket and laugh in the face of all those who laughed at you when you land in the land of kangaroos)

Others were also encouraged to try their luck in Australia, and to take the plunge regardless of the perceived risks involved: “*buttati... non complicarti la vita, parti!*” (“give it a go... don’t make your life so difficult, leave!”) and “*l’importante è provare... buttati!!!!*” (“the important thing is to try... give it a go!”). In another

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<sup>19</sup> As the identities of all Facebook groups members have been withheld to protect their privacy and minimise the risk of repercussions, the numbers (1., 2., etc.) are used instead of their names within threads.

example, a potential-migrant who was seeking information about the likelihood of finding a job in his industry received the following candid response: *“Fai il biglietto e parti sono solo cazzate...”* (“Buy a plane ticket and leave; it’s only bullshit...”).

In the above examples, post-migrants provide examples of strong encouragement and attempt to minimise the fears of potential- and pre-migrants by using certain colloquial expressions (such as the word “cazzata”, a vulgar Italian expression meaning “something stupid” and “buttati”, an imperative form of the verb “buttarsi” meaning “to throw yourself (wholeheartedly) into something”) which assert that going to Australia is not overly dangerous.

Post-migrants also shared their positive experiences in Australia in order to encourage potential-migrants to follow their dreams:

*credici sempre.... i sogni si avverano, come è successo a me... 6 anni fa  
precisamente mi trovo in australia, che dire semplicemente STUPENDA!!!  
CREDICI CHE PRIMA O POI CI ANDRAI!*

(keep believing... dreams can come true, like they did for me... exactly 6 years ago I was in Australia, what can I say, simply AMAZING!!! BELIEVE IT: SOONER OR LATER YOU’LL GO!)

Further, members of the groups posted “good lucks” to provide support to pre-migrants who were about to leave Italy and “congratulations” to post-migrants who had just arrived in Australia. Several wallposts ( $n = 219$ ) were messages of thanks to other group members for having added them to the group as well as sharing general greetings and wishes aimed at all members: *“Grazie per essere con voi. Australia: il sogno della mia vita”* (“Thanks for being here with you. Australia: my lifetime dream”) and *“Ciaooooo A TUTTI”* (“Hiiiiiii EVERYONE”). Members also tagged (see definition in Table 4.1) the names of other people in the group or in their larger



Facebook network to include them in a particular thread.

Relatedly, group members received support when they encountered particular uncertainties both pre- and post-migration to Australia. For example, a pre-migrant expressed her anxiety about coming to Australia without sufficient knowledge of English and received an encouraging response:

1. *ho tantissime domande, sto valutando di lasciare l' italia ma ho tanti dubbi e tante incertezze, tra cui la lingua*
2. *Beh guarda per quanto riguarda la lingua anche io sono un po ignorante... dopo due mesi che sono qua parlo ancora poco faccio fatica ma non ti preoccupare che bene o male riesci a farti capire...*
1. *Bene, risposta rassicurante!Thanks (sic)*

- (1. I have a lot of questions, I'm considering leaving Italy but I have a lot of doubts and insecurities, among them is the language
2. Well look, with the language, I'm a bit ignorant too... after two months of being here I still have problems but don't worry, for better or worse you'll be able to express yourself...
1. Good, reassuring reply!Thanks).

In another instance, a post-migrant who posted about not being able to find a job in Australia received the following support: “*Non demordere prima o poi la chiamata arriverà*” (“Don't give up, sooner or later you'll get a call”).

Group members showed sympathy when potential-migrants or return-migrants expressed their longing to come/return to Australia. For example, “*Grazie per averci accettata x seguirvi a sognare l australia...ho realizzato il sogno di vederla per 21gg ma il desiderio di trasferimento aumenta sempre di più...*” (“Thanks for allowing me to follow your Australian dream... I realised my dream of seeing it for 21 days but the desire to move there gets greater and greater”). Phrases such as “I know what you mean” and “I feel the same way” appeared as comments to these types of posts.

Further, Italians empathised with one another by using more inclusive language, such as “we” or “let’s”, and indicated that they too had the same concern or fear about coming to Australia, as exemplified in the following thread:

- 1. Ragazzi, sto incominciando ad avere una paura ladra pre-partenza (il 13 ottobre) e non so se addirittura fare un passo indietro. sono troppe e troppo onerose le incognite. a parte il costo del biglietto che ho già preso e me lo inculerei se avessi un po più di certezze....*
- 2. Anch'io parto il 10 ed ho una paura mattaaaaa !!!! Ma ormai siamo in ballo e balliamo !! Lo abbiamo voluto noi.. e se ci tirassimo indietro potremmo pentircene !! Io ho tantissima paura ma meglio un rimorso che un rimpianto ;j Quindi... Partiamooooo !!*
- 3. Non aver paura io sono arrivata 3 giorni fa e avevo paura e ora giorno dopo giorno mi ambiente sempre Di piu . Se Hai bisogno Di aiuto puoi contattarmi*

- (1. Guys, I’m starting to have a serious pre-departure freak out (October 13) and I don’t know if I should take a step back. There are too many unfamiliar things, too many onerous ones. Apart from the cost of the ticket that I’ve already bought and I wouldn’t give a shit if I was more sure...
2. I also leave on the 13th and I’m freaking out!!! But I’ve made my bed and I have to lie in it!! We wanted this.. and if we pull back we could regret it !! I am really scared but life’s better without regrets!! So...Let’s leave !!”
3. Don’t be scared I arrived 3 days ago and I was scared and now each day I settle in more and more. If you need help you can contact me).

As in Hiller and Franz (2004, see section 3.3.4), my data also show that certain types of shared attachments online – like shared cultural identity – generate a common bond that is not necessarily based on any previous face-to-face interaction. A shared emotional connection, as in the example above, is thus a key factor in creating a *sense of community* (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), especially for new Italian migrants who join these Facebook groups in order to manage the process of migration. Indeed, by encouraging each other to overcome their fears about migrating to Australia and the possible challenges or supposed risks that may arise post-migration, new Italian migrants using these groups start forming a sense of belonging. It is this feeling of being connected to a group of fellow Italians and sharing the experience of migration

that contributes to *preparing* them for migrating to Australia. *Sense of virtual community* (Koh & Kim, 2003), then, accounts for why the Italian migrants using these groups become sources of social support for each other.

The displays of empathy and support within these groups were also confirmed by the data from my in-depth interviews (see Chapter Six). Participants stated that in the preparatory stage, receiving social support and encouragement from other Italians in the groups helped them feel less anxious about migrating to Australia because they could prepare for any challenges that they might face. In this sense, the social support that my participants received online helped reduce their uncertainty about the migration process and enhance a perception of personal control in the experience (Albrecht and Adelman, 1987, p. 19). Further, the frequent encouragement and support during the fears and concerns associated with the migration process make it a much more manageable experience and, in turn, fostered a *normalisation of risk*, that is, a belief among members that migrating is overall a non-threatening and very common thing to do (Tabor & Milfont, 2013).

### **5.2.2 *Se qualcuno volesse joinarmi, mi farebbe piacere* (If someone joined me, it'd make me happy): Companionship and friendship building**

Building friendships with weak ties and requesting companionship for certain outings or events are two other means of managing migration which, in turn, also produce a *sense of belonging* that may lead to lowered stress (see section 3.3.2), especially in the immediate post-migration stages. Suggesting that there is perceived value in making meaningful connections with like-minded others, in this case fellow Italian migrants,

my analysis found that both pre- and post-migration to Australia, new Italian migrants were specifically seeking the company of other Italians and used the groups to find someone willing to meet them offline in order to manage their lives in Australia.

These types of posts began with the phrase “*C’e’ qualcuno che...?*” (“Is there anyone who...?”), and were aimed at anyone in the group.

Pre-migrants attempted to establish contacts before having left Italy or companionship for international flights from their home town to Australia: “*Ciao a tutti, c’è per caso qualcuno di Firenze che sta per partire o parte entro un mesetto? Scrivetemi in pvt please, grazie*” (“Hi everyone, is there by chance anyone from Florence that’s about to leave or is leaving in a month? Write to me in private please, thanks”) and “*c’è qualcuno che parte per Sidney da Roma il 3 aprile con Emirates?*” (“is there anyone who leaves for Sydney from Rome on April 3 with Emirates?”). Moreover, they appeared to be using these groups to gain contacts and to network, as the following comment shows:

*Ciao [xxx], raggiungerò Brisbane questo weekend, posso contattarti nel caso avessi bisogno di info?alloggio/contatti/farm nei dintorni,ecc?! Grazie:)”*  
(Hi [xxx], I arrive in Brisbane this weekend, can I contact you if I need info. Accommodation/contacts/nearby farms, etc?! Thanks :)).

Italian companionship post-migration, on the other hand, was sought and offered for travelling to the farms:

*Ehi Mate! (sic) Ciao, siamo due ragazzi italiani di 27 (Giovanni) e 23 (Paolo) anni: abbiamo comprato una macchina (Toyota Corolla Wagon 4x4) e deciso di di (sic) dirigerci nell'Outback australiano, sino ad Alice Springs. Cerchiamo 2 persone con cui condividere il viaggio e dividere le spese.*  
(Hey Mate! Hi, we’re two Italian guys 27 (Giovanni) and 23 (Paolo) years old: we bought a car (Toyota Corolla Wagon 4x4) and decided to to (sic) head to the Australian outback, to Alice Springs. We are looking for 2 people to share the journey with us and split the cost).

Post-migrants also sought and offered companionship for various social activities, including dining out, entertainment, travel, and sport. For example, one member posted: “*C’è qualcuno/a zona darling harbour che vuole farsi na birretta al volo?*” (“Is there anyone in the darling harbour area who wants to get a quick beer?”), and another, who usually found himself alone, asked for company to watch an Italian football match:

*Domenica notte alle due gioca l ITALIA contro la francia, x il 6 nazioni di rugby. Io andro' a vederla allo starr casino di pyrmon, e come ogni volta saro' solo io e gli avversari. Se qualcuno volesse joinarmi (sic) m (sic) farebbe piacere. Cheers.*

(Sunday night at two ITALY is playing France, for the 6 nations rugby. I’m going to see it at star casino in pyrmon, and as usual it’ll be just me and the opponents. If someone joined me, it’d make me happy. Cheers.)

Here it is opportune to note that the use of the English word “cheers” at the end of the above post is an example of code-switching between Italian and English. Code-switching, generally defined as the “juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems” (Gumperz, 1982, p. 59), is used intermittently by new Italian migrants seeking companionship on these Facebook groups, as in another example: “*Hey guys (sic). .io saro presente ... alla tattoo expo domani ... mi fa anche solo piacere se passate a scambiare Un saluto da buon italiano. ..cheers guys..see u there...(sic)*” (“Hey guys. . I’ll be at the tattoo expo tomorrow I’d be happy if just you stopped by to say hi like a good Italian... cheers guys..see you there...”).

The word “thanks”, instead of the Italian equivalent “grazie”, is another common example of code-switching that appears both in comments to original posts or in

anticipation of a response to a question. For example, “*se qualcuno è qui a Melbourne possiamo anche incontrarci... Thanks (sic) :)*” (“if anyone is here in Melbourne we could meet up... Thanks:)).

Here it is worth mentioning that the informal register (i.e. “ciao a tuttiiiiiiii” (hey everyoneeeee); the use of abbreviations and text language (i.e. “x” instead of “per” (for)); emoticons<sup>20</sup>; and informal terms of address in Italian (i.e. “ragazzi” (guys)) can be taken as evidence of group members’ desire to share their migration stories on a personal level, and belong to the “in-group” given that these are all linguistic features that occur in online communication with friends in an Italian context (see for example Niola, 2014; Pistolesi, 2004).

Further, besides the word “cheers” in the example above, other Australian colloquialisms were used by members, including “guys” and “cool”, as well as Australian slang, words and greetings such as “mate” (friend), “g’day” (hello), “no worries” (no problem), and the borrowing of English verbs to make new Italian ones (eg. “joinarmi”). For example, responding to an information request asking what Melbourne is like, a member replied: “*Melbourne e' vero pezzo d'europa multiculturale, molto cool (sic), ossessionata col cibo, ristoranti ecc.*” (“Melbourne is a true example of multicultural Europe, really cool, obsessed with food, restaurants etc.”), and in the previously discussed examples, “*Ehi Mate! Ciao, siamo due ragazzi italiani di 27 (Giovanni) e 23 (Paolo) anni ...*” (Hey Mate! Hi, we’re two Italian guys

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<sup>20</sup> An emoticon is a pictorial rendition of a facial expression using punctuation marks, letters and numbers on a keyboard.

27 (Giovanni) and 23 (Paolo) years old”) and “*Se qualcuno volesse joinarmi (sic) m farebbe piacere. Cheers*” (If someone joined me, it’d make me happy).

In other examples which illustrate that Facebook groups are used for friendship building, some offline meet-up requests were more specific, and sought out people from particular regions in Italy. For instance, some Italians exclusively sought fellow Romans or fellow Venetians, as in the following post: “*Dai dai organizziamo qualche bar [a Sydney], briscolata con annesse bestemmie in Veneto!*” (“Come on come on let’s organise a good old game of briscola [in Sydney] with some Venetian profanity on the side”).<sup>21</sup>

The findings discussed above show that *sense of virtual community* also pivots around re-gaining the same friendships that were available in one’s home-country and the shared systems of culture (eg. the card game or the football match) and language (eg. Italian or a regional Italian dialect) that are spread across distances (Mitra, 1997). As will be discussed in the following chapter, the use of the groups to form friendships with other Italians was also found to be a key motive by my interviewees. In fact, the majority of participants indicated that they used the groups to find opportunities to socialise post-migration and that making friends with other Italian migrants in Australia was a positive outcome of the Facebook groups.

In reference to the examples of code-switching, it would appear that in the absence of social cues online, the new Italian migrants who use these Facebook groups must

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<sup>21</sup> “Briscola” is a traditional card game in Italy.

make certain language choices in order to establish their identities (see discussion in section 3.3.4). Indeed, the above examples show that members of these Facebook groups may be employing code-switching in order to position themselves as a certain type of Italian migrant, that is, one who appears to be more knowledgeable of Australia and the Australian vernacular than other Italians in the groups. Therefore, these online communities on Facebook also provide a space in which new Italian migrants can construct an identity for themselves as “expert migrants” who are part of a more “knowledgeable in-group.” This is also evidenced in section 5.2.5.2 below, where Italian migrants make inflammatory posts on the walls of the Facebook groups in order to take on an identity of “experienced Italian migrant” in Australia.

***5.2.3 L’Australia, come meta per ricominciare da capo. Che ne pensate? (Australia, as a place to start over. What do you think?): self-disclosure, trust and reliance on fellow Italians for information and advice***

Online communities of migrants primarily function as a space for the seeking and dissemination of information (Komito & Bates, 2009; Oiarzabal, 2012; Tabor & Milfont, 2013). In my study, the largest thematic category of posts was information exchange (see Table 5.1 above) indicating that the desire to find and disseminate information and knowledge are, indeed, two key motivators for using virtual communities (Wasko & Faraj, 2000). Yet, for this information and knowledge exchange to occur, community members must trust each other. As previously mentioned, trust has been identified as a key factor influencing the level of participation or knowledge sharing in virtual communities (section 3.3.3).



In my corpus, the type of information and advice sought and the responses given indicated a high level of self-disclosure and trust of the other members, which again suggests a strong community influence within these groups. As will be outlined below, various types of information were exchanged, including those of a more personal nature. An information exchange was communicated through a piece of text, an image or photograph, or a link to another web page. However, opinions, advice, and personal experiences were also communicated. Interestingly, comments in response to information sought appeared to come from Italian migrants who were further along in the migration process (such as post-migrants or return-migrants) and this was made apparent by phrases such as “I’ve been in Australia for....” or “when I was in Australia.”

As Table 5.1 shows above, 1147 posts were categorised as information exchange and were made up of different subcategories, including: employment; travel; bureaucracy, immigration and courses; accommodation; events and entertainment; and Australian history, society and culture. Each of these subcategories in Table 5.1 show the number of posts that were sought and shared by Information Type in order of frequency.

Information about *employment* opportunities such as job vacancies and posts asking for practical information about finding employment in Australia within a certain field, and *bureaucratic* matters, such as how to organise one’s visa, Medicare cards, Tax Returns and Tax File Numbers,<sup>22</sup> were the most frequently sought and shared types of information in all three groups. *Travel* information, including questions about tourist attractions in Australia, when to travel to Australia and which airline company to fly

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<sup>22</sup> A tax file number (TFN) is a unique number issued by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) to each taxpaying individual, company, superannuation fund, partnership, or trust.

with, was also a commonly exchanged type of information, whereas information about *Australian history, culture and society* was exchanged least.

Of particular interest in my analysis, however, was the highly specific nature of the information sought within the subcategories and the high level of self-disclosure.

Indeed, the Italians using these groups had very particular, at times extensive, information requests which they used to form an idea of Australia in relation to their *own* circumstances.

For example, a potential-migrant seeking information about employment in relation to his field posted:

*Ciao Ragazzi....sono un dentista e mi piacerebbe venire a fare un'esperienza in Australia e lavorare come dentista....vi chiedo delle cose pratiche....mastico un po' d'inglese...ma so lavorare bene e ho tanta esperienza.... vi chiedo questo....Primo. il mio mestiere fa parte degli " skill "o devo necessariamente avere un inglese certificato IELTS per fare questo?...o posso dimostrare in atto pratico che so fare questo e quindi la lingua passa in secondo piano? Secondo: avendo 32 anni che genere di visto posso fare per stare un minimo di sei mesi in tranquillità....? terzo..c'è qualcuno qui nel gruppo del ramo dentista? Sicuro di una vostra risposta vi ringrazio anticipatamente....:)*

(Hello Guys .... I'm a dentist and I'd like to have an experience in Australia and work as a dentist .... I'd like to ask you some practical things .... I only know a bit of English ... but I know my job well and I have a lot of experience ....I want to know ... : Firstly is my job part of the " skills list" or do I have to have an English IELTS certificate to do my job ? ... or can I simply show them that I can do my job and therefore the language is less important? Secondly, as I'm 32 years old what kind of visa can I get to stay a minimum of six months without being hassled .... ? thirdly.. is there someone in this group who is in the dentistry field?? Certain of your responses I thank you in advance .... :))

In another example, a member wanting information about specific courses asked:

*Ciao a tutti... volevo farvi una domanda... io in Italia ho il diploma di ragioneria che ovviamente non è servito a niente... in Australia vorrei fare qualche corso da estetista ma con il working holiday posso studiare massimo 3 mesi... la mia domanda è... esistono corsi che ti lasciano un attestato*

*almeno x iniziare a lavorare come estetista? Qualsiasi consiglio é ben accetto grazie :)*

(Hi everyoneee ... let me ask you a question ... in Italy I have a diploma in accountancy which was obviously useless ... in Australia I would like to do a beauty course but on the working holiday I can only study for up to three months ... my question is ... are there any courses that provide you with a certificate so that you can at least start working as a beautician? Any advice is welcome, thanks :)).

Unsurprisingly, much of the information shared within these groups, then, is “all about me” with members showing a strong desire to share personal information about their lives (section 3.2.1). These lengthy posts appeared to be made by potential- and pre-migrants who hoped to gather as much information and advice as possible in preparation for coming to Australia. Interestingly, the information requested in the above posts could have been obtained from official government sources, however, these migrants opted to use Facebook groups. Therefore, such posts suggest that new Italian migrants want very specific information about what to expect once arrived in Australia in relation to their own personal circumstances, and show they are heavily reliant on UGC.

While many information seeking posts were practical, such as “How do I get a tax file number?”, “Where can I get a Medicare Card?” or “What should I pack in my suitcase?”, other posts wanted advice for decision-making. These ranged from being highly impersonal – such as advice about which Australian city to choose or which English school to frequent – to the profoundly personal, including whether or not to leave Italy indefinitely.

Indeed, after a series of negative experiences in Italy, one potential-migrant posted to the group: *“sinceramente mi consigliate di andarmene per un periodo non definito a lavorare?”* (“honestly, do you think I should leave Italy indefinitely in order to work?”). In a similar example, another potential-migrant candidly asks: *“L’Australia, come meta per ricominciare da capo. Che ne pensate?”* (“Australia, as a place to start over. What do you think?”). Other potential-migrants saw the decision to migrate to Australia as particularly risky and believed they would be gambling with their lives. In one case, a member explained that given his and his partner’s age (30-years-old), they would only be able to come to Australia for one year on a WH visa, and in that time hope to secure a work sponsor in order to stay in Australia long term. He asks the group: *“[questa] soluzione è parecchio rischiosa, e chiedo a voi, cosa fareste se foste nei nostri panni?”* (“[this] option is very risky, and I ask you all, what would you do if you were in our shoes?”).

The above posts show that new Italian migrants on Facebook groups rely heavily on each other. In particular, the act of asking the group for advice about whether to make the important life decision of migrating to Australia indicates that potential-migrants have a high level of trust in the other members, and again suggests a strong community influence within these groups. This finding also emerged from the data reported in Chapter Six where several interviewees confirmed the influence of Facebook groups on important decisions they made before leaving Italy.

In this sense, new Italian migrants on Facebook groups also become highly dependent upon the *sense of virtual community* (Koh & Kim, 2003) that has been created and the commitment and unwavering participation of other Italian speakers to respond to

questions or requests in their mother tongue. At the same time, the online communities created within these groups provide a much needed safe and stable space for new Italian migrants to connect with one another and express themselves without being judged by other migrant ethnicities or Australian nationals (Mitra, 2006). In this way, as found in other research (Hiller & Franz, 2004; Marino, 2015) being Italian appears as a sufficient condition to establish trust and *sense of community* as it is much easier to trust the information, advice and knowledge shared by those who have the same cultural identity.

Reliance on other Italians for information and advice pre-migration can, therefore, impact on the migration process, including in some cases, even the decision to leave Italy. The expectations that Italians have regarding Australia, then, can be heavily influenced, but also limited by, the opinions, advice and stories described by the other Italians in the groups (see discussion in section 5.2.3). Nonetheless, the information exchanged between new Italian migrants in Australia appear to be valuable forms of currency (Ridings and Gefen, 2006) within these online communities on Facebook groups, as it increases preparedness and awareness about migrating to Australia, making the experience more manageable.

#### **5.2.4 A virtual home away from home: maintaining *italianità* in Australia**

As we have seen above, the groups have the ability to strengthen the social capital of migrants through the provision of social support (section 5.2.1) and practical, personalised information about what to expect in Australia (section 5.2.3). Another recurrent theme emerging in my data relates to the potential of Facebook groups for

bridging social capital (Putman, 2000), that is, fostering weak-tie social networks among Italian migrants through the sharing of *culturally specific information* (Chen & Choi, 2011; Dekker & Engbersen, 2013b; Komito, 2011).

Networks of trust, values and reciprocity are significant to the function and maintenance of community relationships (Putnam, 2000). Indeed, the Facebook groups analysed in this study provide a space where cultural values can be rehearsed and maintained (Furnham & Bochner, 1986), and in turn, create an anchoring point of identity (see discussion in section 3.3.4). First and foremost, in my sample the new Italian migrants on Facebook groups primarily used the Italian language (although interspersed with dialect terms or English words). Furthermore, they actively sought out opportunities to be with other Italians, including Italian flatmates, employment vacancies in Italian restaurants, companies or institutions. For example, “*Ciao a tutti vorrei sapere se qualcuno sa se ce bisogno di un aiuto cuoco a Sydney con solo la base di inglese, quindi ristorante italiano, grazie!*” (“Hi everyone, I was wondering if anyone knows of a place looking for a kitchen hand in Sydney with basic English, so an Italian restaurant, thanks!”).

Moreover, they looked to use Italian-specific *goods and services*, including Italian electricians, hairdressers or dentists, Italian food, books, household goods and beauty products. For instance, “*Ragazzi qualcuno conosce un dentista italiano in city?*” (“Guys does anyone know a good Italian dentist in the city?”), “*Ciao a tutti! Dove si mangia la pizza migliore a Sydney?*” (“Hi everyone! Where can I get the best pizza in

Sydney?") and "*Qualcuno conosce un posto dove posso comprare dei romanzi in italiano*" ("Does anyone know where I can buy novels in Italian?").

These posts show that shared identity – being Italian – appears to be sufficient for establishing trust (see section 5.2.1). For example, Italians using these Facebook groups may be actively seeking out an Italian health professional or an Italian employer because they will be able to trust them more readily than Australian ones and because it would be easier for them to explain their health problems in the Italian language. Further, the above findings provide examples of how a permanent web address (in this case the Facebook groups for Italians in Australia) can provide a *virtual home*– a psychological anchor and point of reference in the host country (Buzzi and Megele, 2011, p. 41). By using these groups to find Italian companionship for friendship building (section 5.2.2) as well as for Italian goods and services, members reinforce a sense of belonging to the Facebook group community. Several areas of everyday life thus emerge as key factors in the representation and maintenance of cultural identity (Hall, 1997) within these groups: being able to use the Italian language, living with, establishing ties with and gaining support from other Italians already in Australia, discussing the best Italian food in a particular Australian city, and so on.

In this way, for new Italian migrants on Facebook groups, sense of connectedness is a key factor influencing the experience of migration as it enables them to negotiate and reproduce their *italianità* online and thus reaffirm themselves as Italians in Australia. This is similar to Schrooten's (2012) findings of Brazilian migrants in Belgium who

use the SNS “Orkut” to “reaffirm themselves as Brazilians and construct a shared imagination” (p. 1801) and Oiarzabal’s (2012) research which demonstrated that Basque migrants and their descendants use Facebook to collaboratively reaffirm and maintain their identity, with a clear sense of community-building.

The above findings, then, show that within these Facebook groups, members’ shared identity is an essential element in the formation and development of an online community. In turn, shared cultural identity elucidates how pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences are so readily influenced by other Italians within the groups.

### **5.2.5 Tensions and disharmony**

As shown above, the three Facebook groups are online communities where new Italian migrants can gain social support, encouragement, information and advice in order to prepare for and manage the migration process. Nonetheless, comments within threads also showed several instances (130 posts or 4.5%) of flaming, thus highlighting the dark side to interaction on SNSs which includes cyberbullying, stalking, and online harassment (Fox & Moreland, 2015). Further, there were tensions between members who gave conflicting opinions or advice. It is worth noting that the actual percentage of posts categorised as flaming is likely to be much higher, as many of the posts may have been deleted by the groups’ moderators before they could be coded. Indeed, if the groups were being moderated hourly, some of the more hostile or aggressive posts will have been removed by the administrator before I extracted the data. In the following sections I will analyse some of the examples of comments



which were contradictory as well as those that appeared hostile in tone, including insulting, mocking or sarcastic comments.

### 5.2.5.1 Conflicting Information

The fact that original posts could receive an infinite number of unique comment responses meant that the information provided could engender contradictions, as in the following:

1. *Ciao a tutti ragazzi:) fra qualche mese saró a Sydney, volevo chiedere voi quando siete partiti avete fatto il biglietto di sola andata o andata e ritorno? Ho sentito che possono far delle storie se fai sola andata*
2. *... Non serve un biglietto di ritorno*
3. *Fai andata e ritorno ti conviene poi fai quello che ti pare*
4. *Ma non fare il ritorno un anno prima ma siete fuori.....sai quante cose cambiano in un anno magari fai progetti differenti e a casa ci torni prima o dopo..*
5. *io dico di prendere il ritorno perché se per qualsiasi motivo devi tornare indietro, con una tantum di 100€ parti il giorno stesso perché L hai già acquistato...*

- (1. Hello everyone:) in a few months I'll be in Sydney, I wanted to ask you when you left, did you get a one-way ticket or a return? I heard that they can make a fuss if you get just a one-way ticket
2. ... You don't need a return ticket
3. Get a return ticket and then do whatever you want
4. No do not get a return ticket a year in advance, are you guys crazy .... do you know how many things can change in a year, maybe you'll change your plans and you'll go home earlier or later
5. I think you should get a return ticket because if for any reason you have to go back, with a one-off €100 you can leave the same day because you have already bought the ticket).

The thread above shows four contradictory pieces of advice in response to an original post and is a typical example of how confusion and conflict can arise within these groups. First, the member is told that he *does not* need to buy a return ticket, then he is advised that he *does*, then he is told that he definitely *should not* buy one, and

finally he is told he definitely *should* buy one just in case. The tension is heightened by the expression “*ma siete fuori?*” which derives from the expression “*essere fuori di testa*” (“to be out of your head/mind”). It serves, in this example, to ridicule the members who had previously commented by insinuating that they are ignorant about Australian immigration.

Other instances of conflicting information and advice created further tensions between group members and even issues of distrust, as the following thread elucidates:

1. *Ciao a tutti! Probabilmente la domanda è stata posta mille volte ma non riesco a ritrovarla... A gennaio verranno i miei a trovarmi: possono portare con loro del cibo (tipo salame, affettati, parmigiano o altro) o delle bevande (vino)? in che quantità? Grazie mille ragazzi!!!*
2. *niente di tutto quello (non sono sicuro del vino pero')*
3. *si possono... devono essere sottovuoto e confezionati con etichetta industriale*
4. *Scusa ma voi non capite niente. Pensate che qui non ci [sono] salami, vino etc? Perche' non vi informate al vostro paese?*
3. *[nome di 4] impara a leggere.. lui [1] ha detto che e' sua mamma che viene.. le mamme quando vengono in visita vogliono sempre portare regali.. Se la tua no, non prendertela con lui...*

- (1. Hello everyone! I'm sure the question has been asked a thousand times but I can't find it ... In January, my parents will come visit me: can they bring food with them (like salami, ham, cheese etc) or drinks (wine)? in what quantity? Thank you so much guys!!!
2. none of them (not sure about the wine though)
3. yes they can ...but they have to be vacuum-packed and packed with an industrial label ...
4. I'm sorry but you don't understand anything. Do you know that you can find salami, wine etc here? Why don't you get better informed in your village?
3. [name of 4] learn to read, he said that his mum is coming .. when mothers are visiting they always want to bring you presents .. If yours doesn't, don't blame him ...

This exchange continued in this aggressive manner until the member who wrote the original post had to ask his question again. At this point, he also realised that he was unsure of whose information to trust, as he explicitly acknowledges: “*detto questo, di*

*chi mi dovrei fidare?*” (“that said, who should I trust?”).

Thus, we can see from the above thread that conflicting information can cause members to become frustrated and make inflammatory posts about other members’ ostensible ineptitude (eg. “but don’t you understand anything”). Further, the comments “get better informed in your village” and “learn to read” insinuate that the other members who posted are village peasants who are ignorant or illiterate. While this is a generic reference to being a “village peasant”, other examples below will more specifically point to the regional divide which still exists between the prosperous, industrialised North of Italy and the poorer, more rural South.

For potential- and pre- migrants, then, on the one hand these online communities are extremely useful because they allow for the spreading of a plethora of practical information and advice about how to prepare for migration to a new country and what to expect once arrived. Yet, on the other hand, as boyd (2014) argues, the ease with which people can share and spread information on social media can also be dangerous (p. 12). As we have seen from the excerpts above, when a large volume of information is disseminated by hundreds of individuals, confusion and tensions can arise within the groups. This may also be exacerbated by the fact that within these Facebook groups, members come from different regional backgrounds in Italy and will presumably have had different life-experiences.

In the following chapter, we will see that this finding was also confirmed by some of my interview participants who became frustrated, confused and, at times, anxious, because of the large amount of conflicting information and advice circulating within

the groups. In the following section, more examples of in-group tension will be discussed, especially those comments that explicitly insult or harass other members.

### 5.2.5.2 Insults and Sarcasm

In my corpus, instances of flaming were also apparent in comments which did not provide information or advice in response to the question posed, rather they simply ridiculed the member who posted for asking a seemingly obvious question. Others ridiculed members because of their regional background. Indeed, as mentioned above, a pervasive North-South regional divide still exists in Italy. Southern Italians, for instance, are often stigmatised as being less educated and therefore inferior to Northern Italians. In addition, there are still negative attitudes towards certain Italian dialects<sup>23</sup>, primarily Southern Italian dialects, which are perceived as languages of lower status and prestige (Rubino, 2014). These issues are illustrated in the following threads:

1. *Ciao ragazzi, una domanda.. ma il curriculum deve essere necessariamente in formato australiano o no?*
2. *Ma no mica sei in Australia....*
3. *Puoi anche lasciarlo nel dialetto della tua regione.. Nn per forza in inglese*
4. *Ahahahhhahahahahaha*
5. *Ma che cazzo xó! Dai.... sei in australia, mica in canada..*
6. *Ma tu buona sei?*

- (1. Hey guys, a question.. do résumés necessarily have to be written in the Australian format or not
2. But no of course not it's not like you are in Australia ....
3. You can also write it in the dialect of your region .. Not necessarily in English
4. Ahahahhhahahahahaha
5. What the fuck! Come on .... you are in Australia, not in Canada...
6. Are you alright in the head? )

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<sup>23</sup> In the Italian context, dialects are not so much variations of Italian but are distinct languages which are unintelligible to those who do not belong to a particular area.

The thread above shows several types of hostile comments: sarcasm (“But no of course not it’s not like you are in Australia .....” and “You can also write it in the dialect of your region .. Not necessarily in English”); profanity (“What the fuck!”); and finally an insult about the member’s intellect (“Are you alright in the head?”). Here we also see linguistic discrimination based on the treatment of a group member as a “provincial” person because of regional dialect differences (“You can also write it in the dialect of your region”).

In another example, a female member of one of the groups wrote an original post in which she indicated that she is from the city of Milan and could not find a job there. She stated that she hoped to come to Australia to look for work. Her post was met with derogatory comments about her background. One member writes, “*Milanese?!! Torna a casa!!! O almeno se proprio vieni levati la puzza sotto al naso.*” (“Milanese?!! Go back home!!! Or if you do come, at least act less snobby”).

After a series of antagonistic exchanges, the group administrator intervened and told the group that comments which insult other members will not be tolerated. The Milanese woman eventually responds by saying “*a quanto pare qui perdo solo tempo*” (“it appears that here I’m just wasting my time”). The above comments again highlight Italy’s regional divide. Indeed, reflecting the widely spread stereotypes of Northern Italians, the Milanese woman is treated (probably by Southern Italians) as snobbish and not in need of a job. Other original posts asking questions that appeared “obvious” to other members were met with comments of laughter (“hahahahaaha”), blasphemy or swearing, and, on one occasion, sexism. For example, commenting on a

female member's original post asking where to have her passport photo taken, a male member replies: "*Stupidità femminile infinita :)*" ("Infinite female stupidity :)").

The instances of flaming that I observed on the Facebook groups may actually be interpreted as a negative consequence of the heightened self-disclosure and *sense of community* that keep these groups going. As discussed, flaming can be attributed to what is known as *the online disinhibition effect* (see Suler's notions of *benign disinhibition* and *toxic disinhibition* in section 3.3.3). Moreover, although Facebook is *not* an anonymous site, one is still behind a screen, which can remove those inhibitions that would normally be present in face-to-face interactions (Turkle, 2012).

According to Hopkinson (2013),

One of the defining aspects of online interaction, compared to F2F [face-to-face] interaction, is the physical remoteness of communication. Participants are not in physical proximity; they do not see each other during the interaction. This factor plays an important role in conditioning the tenor of the discourse. The physical distance between participants may potentially have a dehumanizing effect... This in turn may lead to a heightened intensity of antagonism, as some participants feel licensed to behave towards [others] with a degree of aggression that they would generally avoid in face-to-face interaction (p. 6).

In my corpus, it would appear that the instances of aggression (or the *toxic disinhibition effect*) predominantly surface through posts made by those Italians who believe they are more experienced migrants, that is, they believe they are more knowledgeable about Australia because they have been there longer, such as post- or even return-migrants. This is also confirmed in the data from the in-depth interviews as some of my participants indicated that those Italians who are already in Australia or have visited Australia in the past, construct an identity for themselves as "expert migrants" and position themselves as superior to the potential- and pre-migrant

members within the groups. In other cases, the instances of aggression derive from larger issues within Italian society, such as Italy's unique regional divide.

The above findings are troubling because the tensions between group members and the conflicting information within threads may adversely affect those Italians who are seeking information, advice and support, and impact on the types of expectations they form pre-migration and the experiences they have post-migration. In this sense, although these groups can produce a *sense of virtual community* (Koh & Kim, 2003), certain negative or anti-social behaviours, such as flaming, can *also* develop in this context and present a paradox to Mitra's (2006) notion that online communities provide a safe space where migrants will not be judged. This finding is confirmed by data from the in-depth interviews, discussed in Chapter Six, where the majority of my participants expressed feelings of ambivalence towards the groups because of the presence of anti-social behaviour. As the analysis of the interviews will reveal, this particular issue created disharmony and tension within the groups, with participants characterising other group members as aggressive or rude, and, at times, unsupportive.

### **5.2.6 Concluding remarks**

The findings presented in this section have demonstrated that being a member of Facebook groups for new Italian migrants in Australia *can* influence pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences by providing a (generally) supportive space for preparing for and managing migration. The *sense of virtual community* (Koh & Kim, 2003) derived from elements such as the provision of social support, encouragement, and friendship building help to create feelings of belonging and, in

turn, trust in other group members' information, advice and opinions. This trust makes the members more inclined to be influenced by one another, enabling them to use these pieces of information and advice, or opinions, to prepare for what to expect in Australia, decide whether or not to migrate, and to manage their lives there once arrived. Italian migrants in the current study also use these groups, as discussed above, as an anchoring point of reference post-migration, that is, *a virtual home away from home* whereby various aspects of their culture and life in Italy can be expressed and rehearsed.

Yet, the environment of trust created within Facebook groups for new Italian migrants may be simultaneously complicated by the instances of anti-social behaviour and conflicting information. The oppositions of in-group harmony versus in-group disharmony and information versus misinformation are indicative of an underlying complex relationship that the new Italian migrants have with these Facebook groups. This will be elucidated in the following chapter where the majority of my interview participants were, to varying degrees, ambivalent about using Facebook groups because of the presence of in-group tensions.

The next sections will highlight how pre-migrant expectations and post-migration experiences are also influenced by the way in which Australia is imagined collectively within the Facebook groups.



### **5.3 Images of Australia: imagining and re-imagining Australia through the eyes of other Italians**

As previously highlighted (see section 3.1.2), online communication can play an important role during the pre-migration period by producing images of new opportunities, new lifestyles and new places that encourage aspirations and desires to move elsewhere. Relatedly, another finding which illustrates *how* pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences are shaped, broadly relates to the way in which Australia is imagined collectively within the groups. In my corpus, new Italian migrants construct various images of Australia that are multifaceted and complex. More specifically, their collective imagining of Australia revealed four common images. Firstly, Australia was envisioned by potential- and pre-migrants as a dream destination, imagined as a place to build a new life. Secondly, it was idealised by return-migrants who felt nostalgic about their time in Australia and encouraged others to see “paradise” for themselves. Thirdly, it was envisaged by potential- and pre-migrants in comparison to Italy, that is, as a better place to live. Lastly, a less positive image of life as an Italian migrant in Australia was constructed through post- and return-migrants’ voices of reason about the challenges or delusions, as well as the general perils of leaving Italy with high expectations.

#### **5.3.1 *Australia: il sogno della mia vita* (Australia: my lifetime dream): Australia as a dream destination**

One of the most powerful images of Australia circulating within the groups was the notion that it is a place where dreams can be realised. Potential- and pre-migrants communicated on the walls of the groups that it had been their dream to come to

Australia since they were children and that they were seeking information and advice from other Italians about how to realise that dream. For example, *“Il mio sogno e (sic) quello di trasferirmi in Australia da quando ero piccolo. Sono disposto a valutare qualsiasi idea”* (“My dream has been to move to Australia since I was small. I’m open to any ideas”) and *“sto provando a trovare contatti in Australia. E cerco gente che possa aiutarmi in qualsiasi modo a realizzare questo sogno”* (“I’m trying to find contacts in Australia. And I’m looking for people who can help me realise my dream in any way”).

Having bought their plane ticket to Australia, pre-migrants heralded their excitement about their departure and their aspirations about starting a new life: *“Tutto pronto!!! Non vedo l’ora!!! L’8 aprile sono a Sydney!!! Nuova vita sto arrivando!!!”* (“Everything’s ready! I can’t wait!!! On April 8 I’ll be in Sydney!!! New life I’m coming!!!”).

After successfully migrating to Australia, post-migrants indicated that they had finally realised their dream: *“L’Australia è un sogno che può diventare realtà.”* (“Australia is a dream that can become reality”). This particular post caused one potential-migrant to express jealousy for those already in Australia but then he changed his mind: *“Bhe (sic) si invidia un po per chi è già in Australia... anzi non invidia, stima! Fortunati voi ;)”* (“Well, you feel a bit envious of those already in Australia... actually not envy, respect! Lucky you ;)”).

Words like “sogno” (dream) and “paradiso” (paradise) were recurrently used by group members to describe Australia. The use of these two words reveals that expectations of a better life in Australia are held by the Italians within these groups. Yet, it is worth reiterating that the Italian media may play a role in raising the expectations of new Italian migrants with its tendency to exaggerate the stereotypical and primarily positive characteristics of Australia and Australian society, creating an idealised vision of Australia as “paradise” (see Chapter Two).

In my corpus, photographs of Australia posted by other members further contributed to the image of Australia as a *dream destination*. The photographs conjured up both imagined and recalled images of Australia in the minds of other group members. Photographs were taken of various locations in Australia, most of which depicted scenes of quintessential Australian panoramas, such as beaches and the desert, as well as images of Australian native wildlife and animals such as kangaroos and koalas. There were also images of famous city landmarks such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Group members also posted pictures of their Australian-themed tattoos, for example an image of a kangaroo or a phrase about Australia being a “forbidden dream”, as below (Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1 A wallpost showing an Australian themed tattoo**



The use of these photographs, and the comments they generate, point to a collective admiration of Australia. At the same time, however, they may also increase expectations of the “sogno/paradiso” ideal. Indeed, comments posted by group members in response to these images were full of praise of Australia’s natural beauty. For example, responding to a photo of the iconic Bondi Beach, a potential-migrant still in Italy commented, “*Bondi Beach è un sogno...che paradiso!*” (“Bondi Beach is a dream... what paradise!”), and another, pre-migrant, responded, “*tra qualche giorno parto x l Australia in cerca di un futuro migliore*” (“In a few days I’m leaving for Australia in search of a better future”).

The idealisation of the host country as a dream destination is extremely common throughout the histories and stories of migration. It is also common in migration

studies literature. For example, similar findings were found in Tabor and Milfont's (2011) analysis of New Zealand migrant forums which showed that potential-migrants frequently discussed their "dream" of moving to New Zealand and their heightened expectations of a better life. Further, Hiller and Franz (2004) found that in the pre-migration period, both narrative discussions and pictures about everyday life in the destination country, such as weather, tourist attractions, job postings and so on, actually create pre-migration excitement. However, I would go further to argue that this pre-migration phase also creates and influences pre-migration expectations and imaginings of the host-country, as evidenced in the posts above.

### **5.3.2 ...*che ricordi, che malinconia* (...what memories, how sad): Memories and nostalgia about migration to Australia**

Return-migrants continued to use Facebook groups, back home in Italy, to offer personal advice and support to other members, as well as to express a profound sense of nostalgia for Australia. In fact, the word "nostalgia" and references to feeling nostalgic appeared repeatedly in relation to return-migration (67 posts). From Italy one member posted: "*tornerei [in Australia] domani e non tornerei più qui... :(*" ("I would return [to Australia] tomorrow and I wouldn't come back here ever again... :("). Another posted, "*Questo paese mi si è incastrato nel cuore e non se ne va più. Sicuramente uno dei paesi più belli del mondo. La nostalgia è enorme..*" ("This country is eternally embedded in my heart and it won't go away. It's certainly one of the most beautiful countries in the world. The nostalgia is enormous"). One member even posted regrettably about not having been able to realise her dream of coming to Australia: "*sono arrivata alla triste conclusione che ormai a 39 anni sono troppo*

*vecchia per realizzare il mio sogno di trasferirmi*” (“I’ve come to the sad realisation that at 39, I’m too old to realise my dream...”).

As discussed above, the postings of photographs on Facebook groups can be seen to function as a tool for imagining and disseminating “the Australian dream.” Indeed, online, photographs play a critical role in “perpetuating memories for a group, calling up moments for reflection and reminiscence. They are visual myths, capturing the best moments to be told and retold” (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011, p. 256). In my data, these photographs also triggered memories of Australia in the minds of return-migrants. Comments were written in response to the pictures which had allowed them to travel back in time to remember certain experiences in Australia. For example, “*Se non la vedi non puoi capire: straordinaria e bellissima. Rimane dentro*” (“If you don’t see it you can’t understand: extraordinary and very beautiful. It stays with you”). Return-migrants wanted desperately to go back to Australia as soon as possible. For example, commenting on a post of a picture of the Great Ocean Road, members wrote such things as, “*Bellissime foto e bellissimi ricordi di oramai 7 anni fa.. Anche io vorrei tornarci ... Magariiiiiii*” (“Very beautiful photos and very beautiful memories of 7 years ago now... I’d like to go back too... I wishhhh”) and “*che bello... che ricordi, che malinconia non essere li*” (“how beautiful... such memories, how sad not to be there”).

Other members expressed their longing for Australia, as shown in the following thread:

1. *il mio grande sogno era vedere l'australia ci sono stata 3 volte e ognivolta è un'emozione diversa*

2. *Io ci sono stata 2 volte. ...non vedo l'ora di tornare.*
3. *io una sola, ma anch'io ci tornerei domani...*

- (1. My great dream was to see Australia, I've been there 3 times and every time is a different emotion
2. I have been there 2 times. ...I can't wait to go back.
3. I only went once, but I would go back tomorrow too ...)

These excerpts illustrate return-migrants' positive experiences of migrating (albeit only temporarily) to Australia and, in particular, their desire to return. As we can see from the above examples, certain language choices, such as superlatives (e.g. "very beautiful") and metaphors ("This country is eternally embedded in my heart") can contribute to an idealised image of Australia. In turn, potential- or pre-migrants reading these positive experiences may form an unrealistic image of Australia and thus high expectations.

Interestingly, the nostalgia, memories and longing for Australia found in my data sample are in contrast to findings from other studies regarding (online and face-to-face) migrant communities, in which nostalgia, memory and longing is communicated about the *home country* not the *host country* (Ryan et al., 2008; Schrooten, 2012). Indeed, in my corpus, any sense of nostalgia towards Italy is expressed in feelings of sorrow about the dire employment prospects and uncertain future rather than about a longing to return home. Paradoxically, the sense of nostalgia toward Australia by return-migrants is shown, in my sample, in their desire to go back to Australia as soon as possible. This will be discussed below in section 5.3.3.

### 5.3.3 *Non ci voglio tornare (I don't want to go back there): comparing Italy to Australia*

While original posts and comments about Australia reflected idealised images about a better future, those about Italy painted a bleak and cynical picture about career and quality of life prospects. Despite displaying their emotional attachment, members spoke of Italy as a place that they, regretfully, hoped never to return to. For example, “*Mi dispiace, ma non ci voglio tornare in italia, anche se la amo*” (“I’m sorry but I don’t want to go back to Italy, even though I love it”). One member wrote “*...in Italia non c’è futuro almeno andando all’estero si ha un lavoro dignitoso*” (“...in Italy you don’t have a future, at least by going overseas you can find a decent job”) and another wrote “*se resto [in Italia] non ricavo nulla*” (“if I stay [in Italy] I won’t earn anything”). This sentiment was echoed by other members too, some of whom thought the situation was worsening, “*tanto [in Italia] non cambia niente, anzi ogni giorno peggio*” (“after all [in Italy] nothing changes, rather every day it gets worse”).

The disillusion with Italy was also apparent in the urgency expressed in posts about the need to go to Australia, “*Io sto cercando in tutti i modi di venire in Australia*” (“I’m trying in all possible ways to come to Australia”), and also in members’ comments urging others to *flee* Italy as soon as possible. One person, responding to a member’s query about how to come to Australia with her boyfriend powerfully replied: “*Scappate il più presto possibile, auguri*” (“Run away as soon as you can, good luck.”).



Members also compared Australia to Italy (51 posts). One member expressed his sadness about Italy and Italians, again the word “sogno” appears in relation to Australia:

*L'Australia noi italiani possiamo solo sognarla...magari riuscissimo ad arrivare ad essere civili in toto come loro...a noi resta solo l'invidia e la gelosia che nonostante abbiamo una meravigliosa penisola stiamo contribuendo con la nostra inciviltà ad affondarla nella melma<sup>24</sup> ...!*

(Us Italians can only dream of Australia... if only we could become civil about everything as they are... we're just left with envy and jealousy because despite our wonderful country, we're contributing to its decline with our incivility...!)

For pre-, post- and return- Italian migrants within these groups, then, there appears to be an inner-conflict between love and attachment to Italy versus an idealised image of Australia as a place where dreams are fulfilled. According to Schumann (2011), this permanent, ongoing inner-conflict of belonging characterises the opposition between connection to the home country, in this case emotional investment, versus the adoption of the host culture.

On the other hand, the juxtaposition of an Italy in widespread crisis with an image of Australia as a dream destination, exacerbated by images produced by the Italian media (see section 2.3.2), can serve to perpetuate and influence expectations of a better life in Australia and, in turn, may encourage potential-migrants to leave Italy. This is confirmed in the following chapter where some of my interviewees discuss how other Italians' posts about their experiences in Australia, as well as the advice and information they received pre-migration, did in fact encourage them to go to Australia.

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<sup>24</sup> “Affonderla nella melma” literally translates to “sink it in the mud.”

#### **5.3.4 *L’Australia ... può essere anche molto dura* (Australia ... can also be really hard): voices of reason about potential challenges in Australia post-migration**

As discussed above in section 5.2.3, a strong reliance on the *sense of virtual community* (Koh & Kim, 2003) created by these Facebook groups is seen in the ability of members to influence others’ decisions and expectations pre-migration, as well as to provide practical advice and encouragement post-migration. However, the information and knowledge disseminated not only constructed an idealised image of Australia as a dream destination. In fact, to a large extent (233 posts), members also posted about the challenges that could arise post-migration and any disappointments they had experienced in Australia. For example, comments responding to questions in original posts offered realistic albeit cautionary advice, informing potential- and pre-migrants about the difficulties of migrating to Australia and the perils of having expectations that are too high, especially in terms of money, employment and language.

For example, one member wrote, “*lascia perdere il paradiso... l’Australia può dare tanto ma può essere anche molto dura*” (“forget about paradise... Australia can give you a lot but it can also be really hard”) and “*...trasferirsi in Australia è tanto, tanto difficile e costoso*” (“...moving to Australia is very, very difficult and expensive”).

Post-migrants advised potential- and pre-migrants to come prepared and well-informed and one member went so far as to say that “*Arrivare in Australia impreparati è l’errore più grande che si possa fare!*” (to come to Australia unprepared is the biggest mistake one can make”).

As mentioned above in section 5.2.1, potential-migrants who were considering whether to leave Italy for Australia were encouraged by some group members to simply “take the plunge.” Annoyed by what he conceived as bad advice, one person stressed, through the use of capital letters, the sense of responsibility that other group members should have when providing pre-migrants with advice, especially for such a significant life decision, and warned:

*“Buttati!!!” -> brutto!!errore!*

*“Organizzati, documentati, vieni preparato, sappi questo, questo e quest'altro ancora!!” -> bene, buonconsiglio.*

*Capito, ora? Non direi mai a nessuno di non provarci, se se la sente, ma si DEVE sapere a cosa si va incontro e si DEVE avere un piano.*

(“Take the plunge !!!” -> Bad!!mistake!

“Get organised, get your documents, come prepared, know this, that and this again !!” -> Good, good advice

Understand now? I would never tell anyone not to try if they feel like it, but you MUST know what to expect and you MUST have a plan.)

Similarly, another member told the group:

*Chiunque abbia un minimo di affetto per il proprio paese incoraggerebbe la gente a venire qui preparata, con un minimo di consapevolezza in più.*

(Anyone with a bit of affection for his/her country would encourage people to come here prepared, with a bit more awareness.)

Other members went even further and cautioned Italians not to come to Australia at all if high expectations were held: *“se vieni con l'intenzione che l'Australia possa cambiarti la vita rimarresti deluso”* (“If you come here thinking that Australia can change your life, you will be disappointed”).

The examples above elucidate that another way that these Facebook groups can influence their members' expectations is that they allow them to become *streetwise* (Dekker & Engbersen, 2013a, p. 406) prior to migrating. In other words, the creation

of a realistic image of Australia manifests itself in the dissemination of *unofficial insider knowledge* (Dekker and Engbersen, 2013a, p. 406). For example, post-migrants would reply to pre-migrant queries with posts about the challenges surrounding (1) finding and maintaining employment in certain Australian cities, (2) the need for a decent level of English, (3) obtaining a visa, and (4) bringing enough funds.

In terms of finding and maintaining employment, it is acknowledged by post-migrants that finding a job in Australia is challenging, especially in one's field, as the following thread reveals:

- 1.... *LA MIA DOMANDA: c'e' qualcuno che lavora per tour operators o agenzie di viaggi o compagnie aeree che sa darmi il polso della situazione? si trova lavoro in questi 3 campi?*
2. *In generale ti direi di essere preparato inizialmente a non lavorare solo nel tuo settore, ma essere aperto anche ad altri settori...piu' flessibile sei e piu' facile e' trovare la propria strada...*
3. *La tua esperienza di sicuro ti aiuterà ma non aspettarti porte aperte altrimenti potresti rimanere deluso.*

- (1. ... MY QUESTION IS: is there anyone who works for tour operators or travel agencies or airlines who can give me the gist of the situation? Are there jobs in these three fields?
2. In general I would say be prepared initially to not work in your field, but also to be open to other sectors ... the more flexible you are, the easier it will be to find your path
3. Your experience will help you for sure but don't expect open arms otherwise you may be disappointed.)

One post-migrant, who was particularly disillusioned with his job as a waiter in Australia because of the long hours and poor pay, posted: "*Lavoriamo duramente, ognuno a modo suo da il massimo a stare qui... Sarà meglio finirmi sto visto e cambiare piani*" ("We all work hard, everyone in their own way does their best to try to stay here... I should just finish my visa and change my plans"). Some post-

migrants revealed that finding a job was “...piu' difficile del previsto” (“more difficult than expected”), while others posted that although it was difficult to find a job, it wasn't impossible.

Members also posted about the need to know English, especially in order to find a “good” job: “È molto difficile che tu possa trovare lavoro (anche con la tua esperienza) senza un minimo di inglese...” (“It's very unlikely that you'll find a job (even with your experience) without a minimal knowledge of English”). Further, when one potential-migrant asked the group how he could find a job in his field from Italy, a post-migrant responded that most Italians who come to Australia without English can only work as waiters: “Chi arriva senza lingua va a fare il cameriere se è fortunato.” (“Those who arrive without knowing the language go on to be waiters if they're lucky”).

Italians who wanted to enrol in certain courses were also informed about the need to know English, as illustrated in the following exchange:

1. *esistono corsi che ti lasciano un attestato almeno x iniziare a lavorare come estetista? Qualsiasi consiglio é ben accetto grazie :)*
2. *Come stai ad inglese? Niente Buon inglese niente corso di aggiornamento*  
(1. are there courses that give you a certificate at least so you can start working as a beautician? Any advice will be happily accepted thanks :)  
2. How's your English? No good English, no certificated course).

In addition, in the example below, a post-migrant vented his disappointment with the Student visa and how tiring it was to be trapped in a vicious cycle of going to work on a construction site, going to school and then going to bed. What follows is a series of images depicting the realities of studying in Australia, especially the pressure that

comes with trying to reconcile working long hours – usually illegally – in order to work more shifts, with studying full time:

1. *Student Visa... peggio errore della mia vita*
2. *Non puoi far grandi progetti eeee*
3. *Perche*
4. *Construction school bed.. Again construction school bed.. Again construction school bed*
5. *Dai no zio porco perche'? io l'ho fatto oggi. Vi odio rega*
6. *perche lo student non ti permette di lavorare piu di 20ore settimanali... e devi andare a scuola... roba da 10000 dollari l anno... cose assurde...*
7. *il problema e' l'obligo di frequenza*

- (1.Student Visa... biggest mistake I've ever made
2. You can't make big plans eh
3. Why
4. Construction school bed.. Again construction school bed.. Again construction school bed
5. Come on, for Christ's sake, seriously?? I got it today. I hate you guys
6. because the student visa doesn't let you work more than 20hours a week... and you have to go to school... 10000 dollars a year... crazy...
7. the problem is the compulsory attendance)

Like the comments made in the thread above, criticisms of visas were also found in Armillei and Mascitelli's (2016) study of new Italian migrants to Australia. A sizeable number of their focus group participants expressed concerns about the harsh restrictions and unrealistic demands set by the DIBP on holders of certain visas, such as said compulsory attendance requirements for Student visa holders. As discussed in Chapter Two, Armillei and Mascitelli's (2016) focus groups showed that there are growing fears among new Italian migrants about work exploitation in Australia and about the large presence of Italians or Italian Australians who take advantage of newly arrived Italians.

Similarly, findings from my in-depth interviews (Chapter Six) confirm that many new Italian migrants are concerned about the exploitation of migrants in Australia and are

thus wary about having to work on a farm in order to obtain the second WH visa. Indeed, my participants often used the Facebook groups to find information about which farms and businesses take advantage of their workers in order to protect themselves. For example, the following post made to one of the Facebook groups shows a typical example of one of these “warnings” that circulate within the groups. Having found a fake advertisement for farm work on Gumtree<sup>25</sup>, a member alerts the whole group by posting a link to it:

*Ragazzi questo annuncio è un fake. E' un truffatore. Vi chiede soldi per il secondo visa e non vi trova nessun lavoro. Vi farà stare nella sua accomodation e vi terrà lì illudendovi di trovarvi un lavoro al più presto soltanto per farvi pagare l'affitto. Vi chiederà di fare l'intervista a Palm Beach. SEGNALATELO!! <http://www.gumtree.com.au/xxx>*

(Guys this ad is fake. He's a crook. He asks for money to get you the second visa and doesn't find you a job. He will make you stay at his house and will keep you there misleading you that he'll find you a job as soon as possible just to make you pay the rent. He'll ask you to do the interview at Palm Beach. MAKE A NOTE OF IT!! <http://www.gumtree.com.au/xxx>).

In terms of other visas, those who had high expectations about working in Australia were told that it may be too late. For example, a 31-year-old man wanting to come to Australia on a WH received the following piece of advice:

*Il WHV<sup>26</sup> è solo per persone sotto il 31esimo anno d'età, purtroppo tu non lo puoi applicare (sic). Alla tua età è molto difficile e complicato venire in AU e trovare lavoro nel campo che cerchi. Forse l'unica sarebbe uno STUDENT VISA dove devi pagarti un corso d'inglese con la possibilità di lavorare al massimo 20 ore alla settimana. Mi spiace.*

(The WHV is only for people under 31 years old, unfortunately you can't apply. At your age it is very difficult and complicated to come to AUS and find work in the field you are looking for. Perhaps the only way would be to get a STUDENT VISA where you have to pay for an English course and you can only work 20 hours per week. I'm sorry.)

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<sup>25</sup> Gumtree is a free online classifieds website used by people all over Australia. Gumtree also has separate websites for people in the UK and South Africa, as well as in other European countries.

<sup>26</sup> Here WHV refers to Working Holiday Visa.

As for funds, post-migrants reminded pre-migrants about how much money they would need to spend on flights, visas and courses. In one example, a father wanting to bring his two children to Australia received this frank response: “*Avete almeno 20000 dollari, da spendere tra volo, visti student (sic) e visti per i bambini? ...purtroppo la realtà da considerare è questa*” (“Do you have at least 20000 dollars to spend on flights, student visas, and visas for your kids?...unfortunately this is the reality you have to consider”).

Overall, while other studies have found that heavy reliance on co-ethnics for employment, accommodation, and information can engender *unrealistic* expectations (Ryan et al., 2008), my analysis shows that although a strong reliance on other Italians on Facebook groups could create tension and hostility, for the most part, the information communicated reflected the genuine lived experiences of new Italian migrants in Australia, and thus has the potential to engender realistic expectations. As we have seen from the examples above, even the more idealised images of Australia circulating within the groups were ultimately tempered by the potential challenges and problems manifested in the migration stories told by those members who had been living in Australia for a longer period of time.

These findings correspond to those that emerged from the in-depth interviews which I discuss in Chapter Six. My participants indicated that using Facebook groups shaped their expectations before coming to Australia by providing them with a more realistic image of Australia today. By collecting as many experiences, stories, information and



advice as they could from other group members, they felt more prepared for what to expect in Australia.

### **5.3.5 Concluding remarks**

The Facebook groups analysed in the current study are online communities where Italian migrants at different stages of the migration process interact, different expectations are constructed and where various images of Australia – at times contradictory – are formed. Based on the posts made by potential-, pre-, post- and even return-migrants, Australia was imagined (or re-imagined) as a paradise, a place to build a better life. Yet, a less positive image of life as an Italian migrant in Australia was also created through post-migrants' posts about the challenges of living and working in Australia, as well as the general perils of leaving Italy with high expectations. Further, as we have seen, conflicting emotions regarding home (Italy) and host country (Australia) pervade the groups, that is, a dichotomy between feelings of attachment to Italy versus the sense of urgency to leave, indeed flee, Italy because of its bleak situation.

Finally, this section has demonstrated that the members of these Facebook groups can form a fairly realistic image of Australia today that increases the likelihood for greater preparation and realistic expectations pre-migration and more positive post-migration experiences. In the next chapter, I examine in-depth interview findings, providing a comprehensive analysis of the themes that emerged, alongside comparisons with the Facebook group findings discussed in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **FINDINGS: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS**

In this chapter I analyse the data gathered from in-depth interviews ( $n = 15$ ) conducted between May and November 2015. As discussed previously, data collected from the interviews aimed to supplement the analysis of the wallposts. By exploring the personal accounts and stories of Italian migrants who use Facebook groups, I was able to better understand their perceptions concerning the influence of such groups on pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences in Australia.

As outlined in Chapter Four, data was analysed using line-by-line thematic analysis facilitated by the NVivo software program and based on the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The wording of all interview quotes has been transcribed verbatim to retain the authenticity, originality, and spontaneity of the text. Direct quotes are in the Italian language with a translation in English beneath it, unless the interviewee chose to use English during the interview. Names of participants were changed in order to protect their identity. In the following section, a brief description of the interviewees is provided after which the primary, recurring themes that emerged from the interviews are discussed.

#### **6.1 The Interviews**

As mentioned in Chapter Four, interview participants were recruited from the Facebook groups themselves via a post made on the walls of five different Facebook groups for Italians in Australia in May 2015. Although I conducted a total of 16

interviews, data from one respondent was excluded because he did not use Facebook groups prior to coming to Australia. Of the 15 participants included in the data, 8 were male and 7 were female (see Table 6.1 for details of the participants).

As reported in Table 6.1, this section presents the participants' profile in terms of regions of origin, age, gender and level of educational achievement. Finally, the duration of their stay in Australia at the time of the interview, the type of visa held and their profession in Australia are also captured.

**Table 6.1 Participants' profile in chronological order of interview**

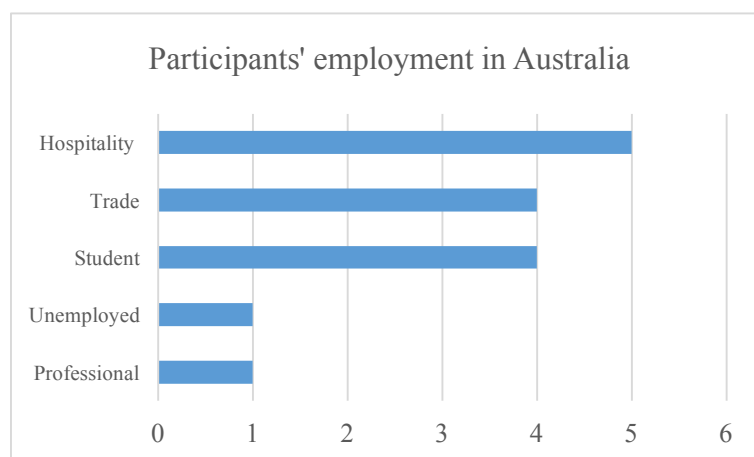
Name	Age	Gender	Months in Australia	Region	Profession in Australia	Education Level	Visa
Alessio	27	Male	7	Lombardy	IT Consultant	Postgraduate	457
Manuel	22	Male	3.5	Lombardy	Waiter/Bartender	Undergraduate	Working Holiday
Aurelia	30	Female	1.5	Puglia	Unemployed	Undergraduate	Working Holiday
Ilaria	27	Female	8	Lombardy	Student	Postgraduate	Student
Jack	28	Male	9	Puglia	Construction Worker	High School	Working Holiday
Francesco	23	Male	0.25	Basilicata	Student	Undergraduate	Working Holiday
Elena	24	Female	11	Lombardy	Waitress	Undergraduate	Working Holiday
Federica	25	Female	0.75	Lombardy	Hotel Receptionist	Undergraduate	Working Holiday
Mirko	23	Male	8	Sardinia	Student	Postgraduate	Student
Antonio	27	Male	0.75	Lombardy	Student	Undergraduate	Working Holiday
Pierluigi	29	Male	12	Sicily	Hairdresser	Undergraduate	Working Holiday
Carla	30	Female	10	Marche	Fishmonger	High School	Working Holiday
Lucia	18	Female	1	Veneto	Waitress/Bartender	High School	Working Holiday
Giuseppe	30	Male	3	Sardinia	Labourer	High School	Working Holiday
Marzia	24	Female	10	Lombardy	Babysitter	Undergraduate	Working Holiday

At the time of the interviews, all participants were between the ages of 18 and 30, with an average age of over 25 (see Table 6.1). They came from the following regions in Italy: Lombardy, Veneto, Marche, Basilicata, Sardinia, Puglia, and Sicily. Seven came from the Lombardy region in the North of Italy. This is not so surprising as a large proportion of new Italian migrants have been coming to Australia from the industrialised Northern part of Italy, not a traditional source of Italian immigrants in

the post-war years (Chapter Two). Further, while the post-war migrants were primarily labourers with limited formal education (Alcorso & Alcorso, 1992), as found in other studies of recently arrived Italian migrants to Australia (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016; Baldassar & Pyke, 2014; Baldassar et al., 2012), the majority of my participants also had tertiary qualifications, indicating that my sample is highly skilled. These qualifications came from a wide range of disciplines, including tourism, social sciences, engineering, law, humanities and health sciences.

At the time of the interviews, all of the participants were employed in Australia except for one (see Figure 6.1). More than half were employed in the hospitality industry or in trades, or in Italian run businesses, consistent with Baldassar and Pyke's (2014) finding that new Italian migrants rely heavily on their cultural identity and language as a means to secure employment in Australia, at least in the initial stages of post-migration.

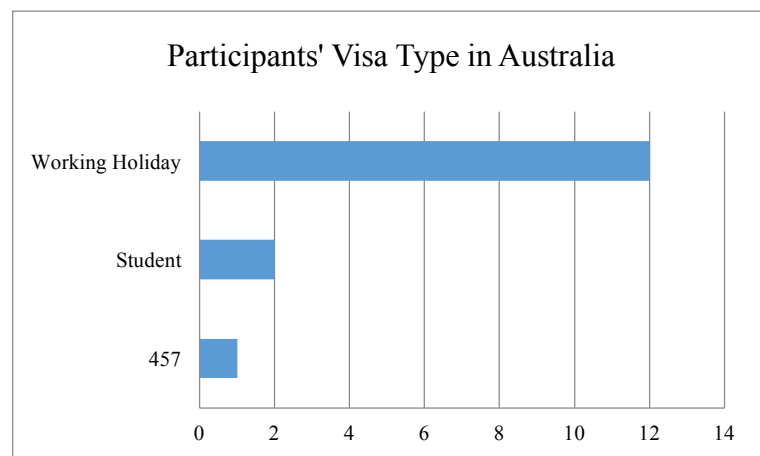
**Figure 6.1 Participants' type of employment in Australia at the time of interview**



As explained in the Methodology chapter, participants were selected with purposeful sampling, that is, I chose participants who would give a richness of information that would be suitable for research on newly arrived young Italian migrants (Patton, 2002). As per my criteria, the amount of time that the participants had been in Australia at the time of the interview ranged from just one week to twelve months, with more than half of them having been in Australia for more than six months. This was to ensure that they would be able to recall their initial expectations prior to coming to Australia.

The large majority of my participants were on a WH visa at the time of the interview (see Figure 6.2). This is in line with the data published by Armillei & Mascitelli (2016) which showed that the new Italian migrants predominantly arrive in Australia on temporary visas, namely the WH visa (see Figure 2.2), with hopes of prolonging their stay.

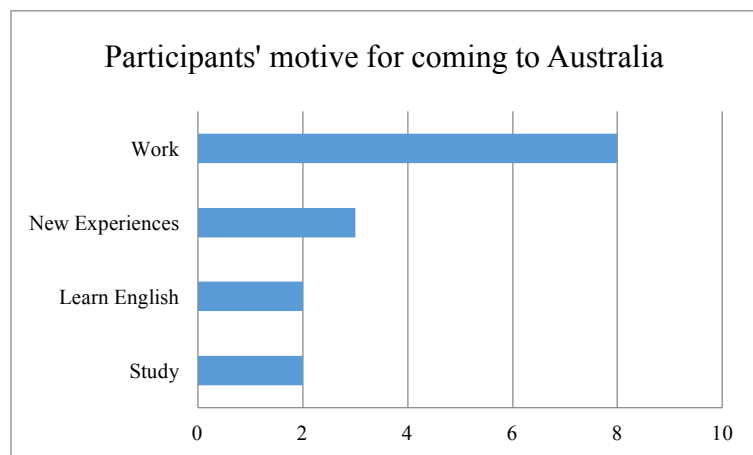
**Figure 6.2 Participants' visa type in Australia at the time of interview**



At the beginning of the interview, I asked my participants to explain why they had come to Australia. Most of them explained that they had come to Australia to find, in

their words, “a good job.” In fact, finding a job in the early stages of post-migration was one of their main concerns. Many participants had expected that it would be easy to find employment; however, as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, these high expectations often decreased after reading other Italians’ accounts of working in Australia that were posted on the walls of the Facebook groups. The graph below (Figure 6.3) shows other reasons my participants came to Australia other than to work (8 people), were to have new experiences (3 people), study (2 people) and to learn English (2 people).

**Figure 6.3 Participants’ motive for coming to Australia**



Nevertheless, some participants also stated that they had wanted to come to Australia because of what they had heard via word of mouth. They explained that their friends, friends of friends, acquaintances or relatives, had told them stories about their positive experiences in Australia and how easy it was to find a job. Relatedly, some participants alluded to the economic crisis in Europe, commenting that being unemployed or the prospect of becoming unemployed in Italy frightened them and propelled them to come to Australia.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked how they had informed themselves about Australia pre-migration. All of my participants specified that various Facebook groups were their main source for information gathering pre-migration to Australia as well as during the early stages of post-migration. They also indicated that they used Facebook groups every day which, in fact, corresponds with the figures on general internet use by Italians who are said to spend over two and a half hours each day on social media (WeAreSocial, 2017). Although Facebook groups were their primary source for gathering information about Australia, other sources were also mentioned, including YouTube, forums, blogs, websites, guidebooks, films and word of mouth.

### **6.1.1 The Interview Process**

Before beginning the interview, participants were reminded about the nature of the study and the various topics that would be covered. At this stage, they were also given the option of speaking in Italian or English. Seeing as all participants were new Italian migrants, most of the interviews were conducted in Italian. Nonetheless, I was intrigued that two female participants chose to speak in English, possibly as an opportunity to practise the language (section 4.3.1.3).

As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter (section 4.3.1.3), the interviews took place in a mutually agreed location convenient to both parties. Each interview varied in length, ranging from 35 to 70 minutes. While most of my participants spontaneously volunteered information, at times I needed to elicit more information from them through the use of probing or prompts. For instance, because some participants had

had negative encounters with the Facebook groups, they appeared frustrated when giving opinions, and the responses that they gave were at times vague or monosyllabic. Therefore, consistent with Patton (1987, p. 125), I used probes in order to give cues to the interviewee about the level of response that I needed. For example, I used probes such as “How did you feel then?” and “What happened after that?” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 124). One participant (Pierluigi) even expressed anger when talking about the groups, responding curtly at times. He repeatedly told me “never take what people say on the groups literally”, as though he had been previously misled by some of the other group members. Further, unsurprisingly, those who had been in Australia for a shorter period of time had more articulate responses about their pre-migration expectations and were more aware of the impact that the groups had had or were having on their experience of migration.

While it was initially difficult to recruit participants for my in-depth interviews, as discussed in Chapter Four, some of those who were able to volunteer their time expressed feelings of loneliness in Australia and seemed eager to converse with someone. During the interview, several participants asked me off topic questions, namely, advice about English language courses, where to buy certain items, where to find an Italian speaking psychologist, and how to travel to certain suburbs in Sydney. Further, after the interview, some participants even asked if I was free to go for a coffee or to get a drink with them at that moment or at some point in the future.

Overall, the data obtained during the interviews revealed many common themes. Despite the few interviewees who did not divulge much information about their use of



the Facebook groups, and the occasional interview that was short in duration, as will be demonstrated below, detailed and rich data were successfully extracted from the interviews.

### **6.1.2 The role of Facebook groups during the migration process**

To begin, I asked the participants about their motivations to join Facebook groups and *how* they used them *before* they came to Australia. I also asked them whether they thought that these groups had influenced their expectations before coming to Australia. I then turned to the topic of post-migration and asked how the participants had used the groups once they had arrived in Australia, and if the groups had influenced any of their experiences. As I will show in the analysis below, overall most interviewees agreed that using Facebook groups had had an influence on their pre-migration expectations on a practical level. They also stated that, once in Australia, these groups had influenced some of their more significant experiences, making the migration process much more manageable. At the same time however, the majority of participants were also ambivalent about the groups. They identified a number of concerns and problems regarding the use of Facebook groups, including in-group tensions, distrust and misinformation. It became clear that their relationship to the Facebook groups was much more complex than I had initially anticipated.

After presenting each of the participants, I examine the findings in more detail in the following sections, commencing with participants' motives for joining and using Facebook groups pre-migration, and the influences that the groups had on expectations.

### **6.1.3 Participant Profiles**

In order to provide a better understanding of the 15 young Italians who participated in my in-depth interviews, a brief snapshot is given of their lives. I begin by detailing their personal, educational, and professional backgrounds, as well as their reasons for coming to Australia. I then outline the circumstances of their lives in Italy pre-migration as well as their lives in Australia post-migration. Finally, I provide some information about their initial expectations of and experiences in Australia, and their use of Facebook groups pre- and post-migration. However, Facebook group use and influences will be discussed in greater detail in the actual analysis, in subsequent sections.

These profiles will enable the reader to become familiar with each of the interviewees. Any personal information, such as names of employers or places of employment, were omitted in order to avoid identifying information. Further, all names used below are pseudonyms chosen by myself. The profiles are presented here in chronological order of interview.

#### **Alessio**

Alessio is a Milanese man in his late twenties. He came to Australia with his girlfriend, Ilaria, and I interviewed them separately. At the time of the interview Alessio had been in Australia for seven months. He and Ilaria had come to Australia because they had grown tired of Milan's "chic culture" and stressful lifestyle. They believed Australia would offer them a better standard of living. When Ilaria was accepted into a prestigious Masters course in Sydney, Alessio jumped at the

opportunity to come to Australia with her. Alessio described his level of English as proficient. In fact, almost as soon as he arrived in Australia, he was able to find a job in his field, Information Technology, and shortly after, was granted a Business 457 sponsorship visa. Through his use of various forms of social media, including blogs, YouTube, forums and Facebook groups, Alessio said that he felt well-prepared for coming to Australia. He also had Italian friends who were already in Australia who gave him advice about living here. Alessio had not travelled very much in his life and therefore had high pre-migration expectations. However, he revealed that using Facebook groups every day had helped him form a clearer picture of Australia and in turn more realistic expectations. Post-migration to Australia, he used the groups to buy or sell items, or to find information about courses or events.

### **Manuel**

Manuel is a waiter/bartender in his early twenties who had been in Australia for three and a half months at the time of our interview. He had come to Sydney to find a job in the hospitality industry which would allow him to gain new skills and learn about various cuisines. He described his English as intermediate and found that he did not have trouble communicating with Australians. Pre-migration, he had low expectations of finding a job quickly because he had read on the Facebook groups that it was very competitive in Sydney. However, he managed to find a job the day after he arrived thanks to one of the Facebook groups for Italians in Sydney. He explained that, post-migration, he used Facebook groups regularly to look for parties or events in clubs and bars around Sydney and that he had met most of his friends through connecting

with other Italians on these groups. Manuel planned to travel around Australia after he had saved up enough money.

### **Aurelia**

Aurelia is a thirty-year-old woman from the South of Italy who had only been in Australia for one and a half months at the time of the interview. Aurelia decided to do the interview in English, even though she was not fluent. After completing her bachelor's degree in Italy, she worked in various fields for various Italian companies. She decided to come to Australia on a working holiday visa while she was still eligible for it. She had expected to find a job quite quickly; however, after being in Sydney several weeks, she was still unemployed. At the time of the interview, she had just come from yet another trial at an Italian restaurant and spoke disappointedly of her work experiences thus far. She cited several occasions in which Italian restaurant managers exploited her. For example, she did a seven-hour "trial" without any remuneration. Before arriving in Australia, she used Facebook groups in order to gather as much information as possible about what to expect in Australia. This, she explained, had helped her prepare for migrating. Post-migration to Australia she used the Facebook groups to look for jobs, although most of the supposed job opportunities that she did find fell through.

### **Ilaria**

Ilaria is a 27-year-old woman from Milan who had come to Australia seven months before the interview because she was accepted into a Masters course at a university in Sydney. Like her boyfriend, Alessio, Ilaria spoke of wanting to live somewhere more

relaxed and organised, that is, somewhere like Australia. At the time of the interview, Ilaria was very busy with exams but appeared very happy with her course and her life in Australia. As Ilaria had already travelled to the US and New Zealand in the past, she described her level of English as high. She also revealed that because of her extensive overseas travel, she had quite realistic expectations of Australia and did not feel that Facebook groups had influenced her expectations pre-migration. However, once arrived in Australia, she was able to find a job as a babysitter by using the groups and therefore believed that they could be a useful source of information if used cautiously.

### **Jack**

Jack is in his late twenties and from the South of Italy. He had come to Australia nine months to make money in order to support his family back home. He showed that while he loved Italy he did not see a future for himself there. He had low expectations about coming to Australia and thought it would be challenging to find a job because of his lack of English. Nonetheless, because of what other Italians had posted to the walls of the Facebook groups he knew what to expect in terms of finding employment in Australia. Indeed, after just one week in Sydney he managed to secure two jobs. Post-migration to Australia, he still regularly used the Facebook groups in order to check for updates about visas or other immigration affairs.

### **Francesco**

Francesco, a 23-year-old man from the South of Italy, had only been in Sydney for six days at the time of the interview. He had come to Australia on a WH visa with the

expectation of improving his English. At the time of the interview, he was enrolled in an English course and was looking for a job in an Italian restaurant. He used GoStudy<sup>27</sup> to plan his entire trip to Australia, including his accommodation, which was with an Italian Australian host family. Like many of the other participants, he also used the Facebook groups before leaving Italy in order to find out what life was really like in Australia. He had read on one of the Facebook groups that in order to find a job in Australia, a basic level of English was required. He thus enrolled in an English course in Australia before leaving Italy. Post-migration he was continuing to use the groups in order to meet new people and to get information about upcoming parties or events.

### **Elena**

Elena is a 24-year-old woman from the North of Italy who had been in Australia for 11 months at the time of the interview. She had studied languages at university and it had always been her dream to travel the world. She also wanted to get some work experience and practice her English. When she first arrived in Australia, she lived in a different state of Australia and stayed with relatives. While there she worked at one of the local universities for several weeks. She then came to Sydney where she worked as a waitress. At the time of the interview she was planning a holiday around Australia before returning to Italy for Christmas. She was happy to have come to Australia and had had many positive experiences. Pre-migration, she had had high expectations about Australia, all of which were met. Many of her expectations were

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<sup>27</sup> GoStudy is a consulting agency that offers free advice and student counselling to students from all parts of the world via Australian and international offices. Their services include academic course selection, visa processing, help finding jobs, migration services, accommodation and general welfare. (From <http://www.gostudy.com.au/>)

influenced by the various posts and comments made by other Italians on Facebook groups, namely about how easy it was to find a job. Because of the groups she was also very realistic about the difficulties of finding secure employment on a working holiday visa and thus was not disappointed when she had to work as a waitress in an Italian restaurant. She primarily used the groups post-migration to find employment opportunities.

### **Federica**

Federica is a Milanese woman in her mid-twenties who had been in Australia for two weeks at the time of the interview. She was in a long distance relationship with her boyfriend overseas. Before coming to Australia, she had lived in another European country for several years. She studied tourism at university and, because of her high level of English, had been able to work for several prestigious hotels in her career. Having heard how easy it was to obtain a WH visa, she decided to apply for one herself in the hope of gaining new work experiences. Federica was very prepared before coming to Australia because of her use of Facebook groups. In fact, based on posts she had read on the groups, and stories her friends had told her, she expected to work as a waitress or dishwasher in Sydney. Thus, before leaving for Australia, she sent her résumé to some hotel chains in Sydney and managed to successfully secure a job at a hotel before she had even left home. She described herself as an active user of Facebook groups for Italians and regularly comments on posts made by other Italians looking for help. At the time of the interview, she primarily used the groups to find information about upcoming social events in order to make connections with other Italians in Sydney and to make new friends.

### **Mirko**

Mirko is a 23-year-old man from the South of Italy who, having just graduated from an undergraduate degree in Engineering, came to Australia to do a Masters course at a university in Sydney. He was a proficient speaker of English as he had to pass the IELTS exam in order to be accepted into an Australian university. At the time of the interview, he had been in Australia for eight months. Mirko wanted to feel as prepared as possible before coming to Australia and thus relied heavily on posts made on Facebook groups and other social media. Having read both positive and negative accounts about life in Australia, Mirko explained that he knew what to expect during his first few months in Sydney and did not encounter any difficulties settling into his new life in Australia. At the time of the interview he was primarily using Facebook groups to compare his own experiences in Australia to those of other Italians but he also found them useful to look for accommodation.

### **Arturo**

Arturo, a 27-year-old man from the North of Italy, had only been in Australia for three weeks at the time of our interview and had left Italy shortly after graduating from his Law degree. He had wanted to come to Australia in order to learn English and hoped to eventually find a job to support himself and his travels. He spoke of wanting to have a new adventure. At the time of the interview he had found a job as a kitchen hand but because of personal reasons, he was unable to start the trial period. Before coming to Australia, Arturo used the Facebook groups to form a general idea of what to expect in Australia. Based on what he read, he realised that he would need to improve his English in order to find a job and he was studying English for that



reason. At the time of the interview, he was still actively using the groups whenever he needed advice or help; for example, when he hurt his knee, he used the groups to find a local physiotherapist.

### **Pierluigi**

Pierluigi is a hairdresser from the South of Italy in his late twenties. He had been in Australia for exactly one year at the time of the interview. He had come to Australia because he was tired of living in Italy and wanted a change. He decided to come to Australia before he turned thirty in order to learn English and to have an adventure. When he first arrived in Australia he lived in Melbourne. Having arrived with a very basic level of English, he spoke of finding the first few weeks in Australia very challenging. He was unable to find work in Melbourne so decided to travel to Queensland and Tasmania to find farm work. This way, he thought, he would ultimately be able to do a second year of the WH visa. After working on the farms, he came to Sydney and immediately found a job at a hair salon. Pierluigi was very disillusioned with his experiences with the Facebook groups for Italians in Australia. Although these groups had helped him to make friends in Sydney and provided him with advice about farm work post-migration, he disliked using them and he rarely trusted the other group members. He did not feel that the groups had made him more prepared for migrating to Australia.

### **Carla**

Carla, a 30-year-old woman from Central Italy, had come to Australia to gain some independence. She described feeling smothered by her family and, despite all their

generosity and support, had never felt free in her life in Italy. She had become tired of always working in her family's shop and decided to leave. She came to Australia with no English. However, before leaving Italy she secured a job as an au pair for an Italian family for the first few months in Australia by responding to a post on one of the Facebook groups. As an au pair she did not get much free time to explore Sydney and was never able to learn English. She then got a job at a market and, at the time of the interview, was looking for English courses. She expressed ambivalence towards the Facebook groups. While she felt they were useful for gaining information, she disliked the way in which some members replied to posts in an aggressive manner. Overall, post-migration to Australia, she used the groups every day, mostly to buy and sell items and to look for job opportunities.

### **Lucia**

Lucia is an 18-year-old woman from the Veneto region who had been in Australia for one month. At the time of the interview she had just finished high school and decided to come to Australia after the Italian summer holidays were over. It had always been her dream to come to Australia to have new experiences. Although her level of English was proficient, when she booked her trip through an agency, English lessons were included in the price. At the time of the interview, she was studying English in the afternoons and working in a café in the mornings. Having read posts on Facebook groups about how easy it was to find a job and an apartment in Sydney, she had expected to find them quickly. However, she struggled to find both and this greatly frustrated her. She felt very ambivalent about the groups and did not feel that they

were very supportive. Post-migration to Australia she used the groups to find events around Sydney and various opportunities to socialise with other Italians.

### **Giuseppe**

Giuseppe is a 30-year-old man from the South of Italy who had been in Australia for three months at the time of our interview. After being unemployed in Italy for several months and having to live with his parents, he decided to come to Australia. He described his English as being basic. Before leaving Italy, he used the Facebook groups to try to understand what life would be like in Australia. Through the groups he made many connections with other Italians when he first arrived and was able to find a job as a labourer through a wallpost. Now that he is in Australia, he spends much of his free time helping other members of the groups by responding to any questions or concerns that they have about life in Australia. He enjoys using the groups because they make him feel like he is still in Italy.

### **Marzia**

Marzia is a 24-year-old woman from Northern Italy and had been in Australia for ten months at the time of our interview. She had left Italy because she believed that she would not be able to find a good job there. She had never been away from home for longer than two weeks and surprised her family when she told them she was leaving for Australia. She came to Australia with no English and expected that she would only be able to find menial work despite having a degree in Political Sciences. In fact, during her time here, she has worked as a babysitter, a waitress, a sandwich hand, a cleaner, a car washer and so on. After a bad experience on the farms, she decided not

to try to obtain a second WH visa and focus on applying for a Student visa. Given her lack of English, she found the Facebook groups extremely useful for finding information about visa and money concerns before she left Italy. She now uses the groups to look for work, make friends and to help others in need.

#### **6.1.4 Summary**

It is interesting to note the demographic homogeneity of the participants – in terms of age, region of origin, and education background – as well as significant commonalities in their life experiences, knowledge of the English language, and their pre-migration expectations of Australia. Many of the demographic commonalities can be attributed to the eligibility criteria of my study which required participants to be between 18-30 years of age and to have been in Australia for no longer than twelve months. Nonetheless, my participants fall into the 18-40 age bracket that forms the largest group of recent new migrants in Australia (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016). My sample is highly representative of the new Italian migrants in Australia who, as found in other studies (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016; Baldassar & Pyke, 2014) are generally well-educated and technologically literate. Most of them have already travelled overseas, at least to other countries in Europe, and look to Australia for a better life and new experiences.

They are resourceful and connected individuals who employ their knowledge of new technologies in order to prepare themselves for migration to Australia. Their knowledge and everyday use of new technologies is typical of my participants' generation. Indeed, due to their ages, my participants are part of the so-called

Generation Y, generally defined as those born between 1981 and 1999 (Bolton et al., 2013, p. 246). A key characteristic of this generation is early and recurrent exposure to and heavy reliance on technology for communication, entertainment, and even emotional well-being (Bolton et al., 2013). The use of Facebook groups for Italians pre-and post-migration to Australia has the potential to further bind this cohort together, creating a shared space for preparing for, managing and imagining migration.

## **6.2 The influence of Facebook groups on pre-migration expectations**

Compared with other SNSs, Facebook users are the most engaged (section 3.2.1) and all of the participants in this study used Facebook, including Facebook groups for Italians in Australia, daily. Indeed, for new migrants, Facebook groups can provide instant updates about the host country and feedback to their questions in the form of information tailored to their personal needs. My participants indicated that the ability to receive instantaneous, relevant information on Facebook groups made them their preferred online source pre-migration to Australia.

All of the participants in this study began using Facebook groups for Italians long before they decided to migrate to Australia. Therefore, they were all exposed to other Italians' migration experiences in Australia before they had even left Italy. The information, photographs, advice and stories shared by other Italians on the walls of the Facebook groups were described as having a significant influence on my participants' decision to migrate and their pre-migration expectations about life in Australia. The majority of my participants reported that being a member of these

Facebook groups helped them to feel more prepared for migrating to Australia and, as will be demonstrated below, most of them acknowledged that the presence of online communities within Facebook groups had made the migration process much more manageable.

Three main themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews which show how the use of Facebook groups pre-migration to Australia influences pre-migration expectations. Firstly, Facebook groups enabled participants to gather practical information about how to prepare for migrating to Australia and what to expect upon arrival. Secondly, being a member of the groups enabled them to co-construct a more authentic image of Australia today and imagine what it would be like to be an Italian migrant there. Thirdly, the UGC from fellow Italian migrants in the groups provided them with, in their words, relevant, personalised feedback and *unofficial insider knowledge* (Dekker and Engbersen, 2013a, p. 406) about life in Australia that they could not get from other sources. These three themes are discussed separately below.

### **6.2.1 Collectively constructing realistic expectations through information-gathering**

A key theme that emerged during the interviews was that my respondents were very prepared for coming to Australia. Indeed, by using Facebook groups they were able to look for practical information, like jobs or an apartment (section 3.1.2). Nonetheless, while the majority of my participants expressed to a varying degree that they felt that the Facebook groups *had* helped them to feel more prepared for migrating, two did not. As will be discussed below, trust in other group members, or lack thereof,

affected participants' use of the groups and, in turn, whether or not their expectations were influenced by other group members.

Even before they had made the decision to migrate, my participants began to meticulously gather information about what to expect in Australia. Overall, this process of migration preparation and planning took a long time. Participants spent weeks and months collecting stories, experiences and snippets of information that they read on the walls of the Facebook groups in preparation for migrating. Some participants even spent years preparing for their departure, as illustrated by the comment below:

*Mirko: ...questa partenza l'ho preparata in parecchio tempo. Non è una cosa che ho scelto all'ultimo momento ma l'ho ben studiata, anche prima della laurea. Ho avuto tempo per documentarmi anche perché devi essere sicuro di quello che fai.*<sup>28</sup>

(Mirko: ...I had planned this departure for a long time. It's not something that I chose to do at the last minute but something I'd studied well, even before my degree. I gave myself time to prepare because you have to be sure about what you're doing).

During the interviews, participants indicated that their expectations had been shaped by the stories, experiences and information that they had gathered from the Facebook groups, highlighting that what they read on the groups had helped them to *prepare for everyday life* in Australia. In particular, they focused on the areas of employment, knowledge of English, accommodation and cost of living.

With regard to employment, participants acknowledged that they were often only able to find a job in their field in Australia because of the Facebook groups. In this sense,

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<sup>28</sup> Ellipsis indicates that part of the quotation has been omitted, square brackets are used to add any explanatory information to improve clarity.

the groups are able to inform potential-migrants about the various requirements needed to find work and therefore what to expect, as in the following example about finding a job as a labourer:

*Jack: Mi hanno aiutato [i gruppi] ad essere più preparato a quello che mi aspettava... [per esempio] per trovare lavoro devi sapere bene l'inglese, non è facile se non hai una qualifica o se non hai una specializzazione o se non fai dei corsi per prendere un white card<sup>29</sup> o se non fai un RSA<sup>30</sup>. Non è facile trovare un lavoro, non te l'aspettare...perché se non hai quello che richiedono loro, non trovi lavoro facilmente...*

(Jack: [The groups] helped me to be more prepared for what to expect... [for example] to find work you have to know English well, it's not easy if you don't have a qualification or if you're not specialised or if you don't do a course to get a white card or if you don't get an RSA. It's not easy to find work, don't expect to find a job...because if you don't have what they want, you won't find a job easily...)

His final sentence about not assuming that you will find a job easily (“if you don't have what they want, you won't find a job easily...”) was a common expectation among participants, which demonstrates that the new Italian migrants are well-informed about the potential challenges of migrating to Australia. They also realised the importance of gathering information from unofficial sources in order to adequately prepare for migration, as shown in the following comment:

*Mirko: [sui gruppi leggi] cose molto quotidiane, cose molto serie. Comunque, ti servono perché quando ti stai documentando su una città, sul modo in cui vivono in una città, ti serve ogni aspetto, non ti serve solo “è bella l'Opera House”; ti servono anche le cose più piccole.*

(Mirko: [on the groups you read] very habitual things, very serious things. However, you need them because when you're informing yourself about a city, the way in which one lives in a city, you need every aspect, you don't just need “the Opera House is beautiful”; you also need the snippets).

The need to know English before arriving in Australia was another expectation that

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<sup>29</sup> A White Card is evidence that one has completed a General Construction Induction course/White Card course. This course is mandatory for anyone who works or wants to work in the construction industry within Australia.

<sup>30</sup> RSA, or Responsible Service of Alcohol, is a training course that must be completed in order to work in a job serving or selling alcohol within Australia.



my participants formed by using Facebook groups. For instance, having been told by another group member that it would be difficult to find a job without a decent level of English, Federico decided to enrol in an English course in Australia before he had even left Italy. Relatedly, as is clear from the following excerpt from Carla, she was prepared for the possibility that it may not be easy to remain in Australia for a prolonged period of time, especially without a proficient level of English:

*Sapevo che non sarebbe stato facile perché il mio inglese è molto basilico e ti descrivono l'Australia come "bello tutto bello, il paese delle meraviglie." È bello [però] c'è da lavorare perché non ti regala niente nessuno, perché anche per stare qua: o fai le farm, ma sono dure, o ti prendi lo student, ma è costoso. La vita è qua è costosa– devi lavorare.*

(I knew that it wouldn't be easy because my English is really basic and they describe Australia as "beautiful, everything's beautiful, it's a wonderland." It is beautiful [but] you need to work hard because no one gives you anything for free, because even to be able to stay here: either you do farm work, but it's hard, or you get a student visa, but it's expensive. Here life is expensive– you have to work).

Regarding accommodation, others used the groups to find out about where to live in Sydney before leaving Italy, they wanted to be prepared because, *"arrivando dall'estero è molto difficile capire i quartieri dove andare a vivere... per capire quale fosse il prezzo medio qui"* (Ilaria) ("coming from overseas it's very difficult to understand which suburb to live in...to understand what the average cost [of rent] is here").

Further, Federica was prepared for the high cost of living in Sydney because of what she read on the groups. She explained: *"il caso dei soldi mi ha spaventato quindi sono venuta con il più possibile dei miei risparmi"* ("the money thing really scared me so I came with as much of my measly savings as possible").

The above comments elucidate that armed with the practical information they received from fellow Italian migrants using the Facebook groups, my participants were able to form realistic expectations pre-migration. Even for those who may have had high expectations of Australia prior to migration, joining one of these groups for Italians in Australia helped shape realistic expectations. Alessio articulated this process most effectively:

*Tipicamente appena nasce l'idea di trasferirsi in Australia, le aspettative sono altissime perché le informazioni raccolte più facilmente sono spesso quelle turistiche, quindi le aspettative sono enormi. Raccogliendo più informazioni pratiche sui gruppi di Facebook – quindi da persone che sono già andate, gli italiani che sono già andati lì – spesso le aspettative si abbassano e si assestano un po' sulla realtà oppure addirittura si abbassano rispetto alla realtà. Quindi le aspettative diminuiscono rispetto a quello che poi sono veramente le esperienze qui... Quando arriviamo qui [in Australia] si alzano un pochettino poi si stabilizzano con le esperienze. Quindi, diciamo che è una curva che parte altissima, scende, poi si assesta, risalendo un pochettino.*

(Normally, as soon as you start thinking about moving to Australia, your expectations are really high because the information gathered more easily is often touristy, so the expectations are enormous. Gathering more practical information on Facebook groups – therefore from people who are already there, Italians who have already been there – your expectations often decrease and become more realistic, or even decrease compared to reality. So your expectations decrease in relation to what your actual lived experiences here are... When we arrive [in Australia], they increase a bit then they stabilise with experience. Therefore, let's say that it's a curve that starts off really high, decreases a bit, then stabilises, increasing a little).

Here we can see how a possible cycle of migration expectations – high expectations followed by low expectations and then realistic expectations – is inextricably linked to the influence of social media platforms like Facebook groups. It is the process of experience gathering, that is, of other Italians' personal migration experiences in Australia, both positive and negative, that shapes their expectations. For the most part, then, my participants came to Australia with realistic expectations, and in some cases, they came with low expectations: “*Non mi sono fatte grandi aspettative perché*

*sempre un immigrato sono e all'inizio non è facile da nessuna parte. Quindi, volare basso...se cadi non ti sei fatto tanto male*” (Pierluigi) (“I didn’t come with high expectations because I’m just an immigrant and it’s not easy anywhere. Therefore, fly low... if you fall, you won’t hurt yourself too much”).

Some even went so far as to say that they did not come with any expectations at all:

*Giuseppe: In realtà, sono venuto senza aspettative. Non volevo avere nessun’aspettativa perché se si hanno delle aspettative, poi rimani deluso. Quindi è meglio venire così, alla giornata diciamo.*

(Giuseppe: Actually, I came without expectations. I didn’t want to have any expectations because if you have expectations, then you’ll be disappointed. So it’s better to come here like this, living one day to the next.)

*Aurelia: I didn't put expectations...in this experience because I didn't want to be disappointed...if I couldn't find anything [jobs] it's because it's hard.*<sup>31</sup>

Similar findings were drawn by Armillei and Mascitelli (2016) who reported that some Italians in their focus groups had no real expectations but came to Australia to “see how things go” (p. 108).

Nonetheless, as mentioned above, my participants were simultaneously sceptical of the groups and did not *always* trust the other group members. They identified a number of concerns and problems regarding the use of Facebook groups, including harassment or aggression from other group members, the distrust derived from the dissemination of misinformation, and the problems that could arise from relying on other Italians’ subjective, personal opinions and experiences. For the majority of participants, in fact, these Facebook groups played, to varying degrees, an ambivalent role in their lives throughout the entire migration process. This will be discussed in

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<sup>31</sup> Aurelia chose to use English during our interview.

greater detail below, in section 6.3.3.

In particular, two participants, Pierluigi and Ilaria, did *not* think that reading other peoples' experiences on the walls of the Facebook groups was a reliable, useful source for preparing for life in Australia or what to expect. From the moment we began the interview, Pierluigi expressed, in no uncertain terms, his complete disdain for the Facebook groups. He appeared frustrated and irritated when talking about the groups and did not trust the other group members. He explained that he did not take many of the posts seriously because they were so subjective, that is, "*ognuno racconta la propria opinione in base al proprio vissuto e non è mai da prendere alla lettera quello che gli altri dicono*" ("everyone gives you their own opinion based on their own personal experiences and what they say should never be taken literally"). He also alluded to the fact that some posts did not reflect life in Australia at all because in online contexts people often embellish. In his words: "*C'è gente che spesso ingrandisce le situazioni personali [qui] sia in senso positivo che in negativo*" ("There are people who often exaggerate their own situations [here] both the negative and the positive"). Alessio's comment further illustrates how some group members tend to exaggerate their experiences, especially focusing on the negative:

*spesso quello che succede in questi gruppi è si tende un po' ad enfatizzare le problematiche rispetto ai vantaggi...sono gruppi a cui tipicamente ci si rivolge quando si ha un problema da risolvere, quindi quello che si crea... è enfatizzare l'aspetto problematico della faccenda*

(often what happens in these groups is that people tend to focus on problems rather than on positives... they're groups that people use when they have a problem to resolve, so what the group creates is... it emphasises the problematic aspects of an experience).

Like Pierluigi, Ilaria was also unconvinced about using Facebook groups to prepare

for migrating to Australia, explaining that the large volume of conflicting information, advice and opinions left her feeling frustrated, confused and less trusting of the groups:

*[i gruppi] non mi hanno aiutato ad essere molto preparata a venire qui perché quando inizi a vedere che alla stessa domanda ci sono venticinque persone che rispondono in venticinque modi diversi dici, sai che c'è, magari vado all'ufficio [d'immigrazione] e vado a chiedere...perché non ti fidi neanche più di cosa ti viene detto perché non capisci cosa ha senso o no. A me è capitato effettivamente di ricevere risposte poi andare nell'ufficio specifico... chiedi e ti viene risposto molto semplicemente e basta. Faccio prima.*

([the groups] didn't help me to be more prepared for coming here because when you start to see that the same question receives twenty-five different responses from twenty-five different people, you say to yourself, you know what, maybe I'll just go to the [immigration] office to ask...because you don't even trust what you're being told anymore because you don't understand if it makes sense or not. It happened to me that after receiving a lot of responses, I went to the specific office, I asked them a question and they gave me a simple answer. It's quicker).

The above excerpt points to one of the downsides of the dynamics of interactivity inherent within Facebook groups, and other social media platforms in general. As in the data analysed in the previous chapter, section 5.2.5.1, while group members can rely on each other to find practical information pre-migration, such as information about accommodation, the question posted may receive hundreds of replies in a thread, some of which can be contradictory to what others have said previously. It thus becomes very difficult to determine who to trust (“you don't even trust what you're being told anymore”). Similar conclusions were drawn from Armillei and Mascitelli's (2016) interviews with Italian migration agents in Australia who suggested that the information shared on social media, such as Facebook groups for Italians in Australia, were often inconsistent or incorrect.

Interestingly, confirming that my sample is ambivalent about the groups, later in

Ilaria's interview when asked whether she thought the groups were useful in general, she revealed that they *were*, if used mindfully:

*Secondo me, se i gruppi sono usati facendo "cherry picking" sono utili. Nel senso, bisogna solo scremare un po' le cose inutili, quindi quando vedi una cosa inutile lascia perdere. Però ci sono cose utili, non sono da buttare via. [I gruppi] mi hanno influenzato in senso positivo perché facendo "cherry picking", ho usato le cose che mi potevano servire in senso positivo tipo quello del lavoro di babysitter.*

(In my opinion, if the groups are used by "cherry picking", they are useful. I mean, you just skim through the useless things and then, when you see something useless, you can just discard it. But there are useful things, it's not all to be discarded. [The groups] have influenced me in a positive way because by "cherry picking", I only used what was useful, like the babysitting job).

Other participants also demonstrated mindfulness about the misunderstandings inherent within the groups and they understood that they would need to wade through a multitude of conflicting information, some of which would turn out to be completely incorrect. Overall, then, they employed a decision-making process which involved choosing which information was useful and which was not, who to trust and who not to trust, as is evident in the following comment:

*Arturo: [I gruppi] danno delle idee che se uno non ha la capacità di autovalutazione, rischia di lasciarsi influenzare troppo forse... Creano una panoramica e poi decidi tu a chi dare ascolto.*

(Arturo: [The groups] provide some ideas that if someone weren't able to self-evaluate, they would risk becoming too influenced perhaps... They create a general picture and then you need to decide who to listen to).

Moreover, my participants revealed that they were unsurprised by members' contradictory advice as it reflected the nature of subjective experience present in all facets of life. They were aware that some of the information disseminated within the groups was unreliable. This idea is articulated in the following comments:

*Manuel: Vengono scritte [i post] da esperienze personali...[quindi] tante volte vengono scritte "quanto bisogna aspettare per ricevere il visto?" Non lo so,*

*uno ha aspettato tre giorni, io ho aspettato dodici ore, uno ha aspettato tre mesi. Sono comunque cose soggettive e non per forza attendibili.*

(Manuel: [The posts] are written from personal experiences... [so] often someone writes, “how long do I have to wait to get my visa?” I don’t know, some people waited three days, I waited twelve hours, another waited three months. They’re subjective responses and not necessarily reliable).

*Marzia: Quello che dicono dipende dalla persona, dalle esperienze, dal carattere*

(Marzia: What they say depends on the person, on their experiences, on their personality).

Alessio took this idea further and highlighted that although the information is often subjective and conflicting, because it comes from people with a shared cultural background, ultimately it is easier to decide which information to retain and which information to discard:

*[Le informazioni] sono conflittuali chiaramente. Essendo una conversazione tra persone diverse, di italiani diversi, con opinioni diverse, con un livello culturale diverso, background diversi. Quindi ovviamente c'è quello però proprio perché siamo italiani, riusciamo a capire la persona che sta scrivendo, che background [è] e quindi come interpretare il suo messaggio. Mentre in un gruppo probabilmente internazionale, faremmo più fatica perché non riusciamo così velocemente a capire la persona e quindi a inquadrare anche il suo messaggio in uno schema– che poi so che è un fatto di pregiudizi – però sicuramente bisogna giudicare velocemente se questa persona è affidabile, se questo messaggio è affidabile. Riusciamo a farlo meglio con un gruppo di italiani...*

([The information] is conflicting of course. As it is a conversation between different people, different Italians, with different opinions, with a different cultural level, different backgrounds. So obviously there’s that but because we are Italian, we can understand the person who is writing, what background [they are] and therefore how to interpret their message. Whereas in an international group, we’d probably find it more difficult because we wouldn’t be able to quickly understand the person or contextualise their message within a framework – and I know that it’s prejudice – but surely we need to be able to quickly judge whether the other person is reliable, if the message is reliable. We find it easier to do this with a group of Italians...).

The above comment illustrates that shared cultural identity is a key factor indicating *how* these groups influence pre-migration expectations despite the subjective or conflicting responses: it is easier to place one's trust in like-minded individuals, people who share *the same* culture. Shared cultural identity can make it quicker ("quickly judge if the person is reliable") and easier ("we find it easier to do this with a group of Italians") to determine whether or not another person's information can be trusted, and in this sense, whether or not that person will influence others' pre-migration expectations. As discussed in the previous chapter (section 5.2.1), shared cultural identity can be a sufficient bridge to establish trust and *sense of community*. The notion of shared cultural identity and trust will be discussed in greater detail in section 6.2.3 in relation to how feedback gained from like-minded individuals is often the most trusted and preferred source of information gathering pre-migration.

### **6.2.2 *Farsi un'idea dell'Australia* (To get an idea of Australia): creating an image of Australia**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the groups have the ability to provide a space for imagining life in Australia. The analysis of the wallposts showed that Italian migrants can use the groups to collectively construct various images of Australia that are multifaceted and complex, both unrealistic and realistic. Interestingly, this was also a key finding concerning the influence of Facebook groups on pre-migration expectations that emerged from the interview data.

The comments below will elucidate how online migrant communities, like those within Facebook groups for Italians in Australia, provide a kind of *armchair*



*travel/migration*, that is, a *hyper-reality* (section 3.3.4) in which pre-migrants can get a window into their potential lives in a host country by reading the experiences and suggestions of those who are already there. This *hyper-reality* can, in a sense, enable Italians who have not yet migrated to “try on” the migrant persona and create a new identity for themselves through the other Italians to whom they are digitally connected within these online Facebook group communities. Online communities, then, offer an important source of cultural identity experimentation as they allow for members to interpret and create various realities and identities (section 3.3.4). Indeed, the data from my interviews illustrate that when using the Facebook groups, many of my participants were heavily influenced by other Italians who had already migrated to Australia; in short the groups enabled them to imagine and construct a new identity as an Italian migrant. This will be discussed below.

Among my interview participants, the most cited reason for joining and using Facebook groups pre-migration was to, in their words, “*farsi un'idea*” (“to get an idea”) of Australia. The phrase “*farsi un'idea*” appears to denote the beginning of this process of imagining whereby new Italian migrants develop an image of Australia based on what they read or see on social media, in this case, on Facebook groups.

For example, when asked why they had initially joined the groups, my participants explained that they wanted to collect as many different personal experiences and accounts of Australia from other Italians as possible, believing it would be a more realistic means of forming an image of Australia pre-migration, as exemplified in the following comment:

*Alessandro: io penso che sia il mezzo più realistico per farsi un'idea da distanza. Se vai su un sito o su un'agenzia, vieni guidata perché ognuno lo fa in base al proprio interesse. Invece [i gruppi sono] senza scopi di lucro, senza nessuno che ci lavora dentro, ma semplicemente [de]le persone che stanno vivendo le esperienze, che hanno la voglia di perdere un attimo di tempo per dare un'opinione. Secondo me è il metodo più realistico per avere un'idea.*

(Alessandro: I think that it's the most realistic means to get an idea from afar. If you go on a website or an agency, you're guided because they do it on the basis of self-interest. Instead [the groups are] non-profit, no one is working from the inside, they're simply people who are living experiences, who are happy to spare a moment of their time to give an opinion. I think it's the most realistic way to get an idea).

As discussed, online communication plays an important role during the pre-migration phase by creating images of new opportunities, new lives and new places that can create aspirations and desires to move to another place (see section 3.1.2). In a similar way, the above comment shows that for my participants, the groups are perceived as the most “realistic means to get an idea” of Australia because they are based on the images put forward by Italians who are already “living experiences” in Australia. Some of my participants also used this *hyper-reality* to help them make their final decision about whether or not to come to Australia, as reflected in the following:

*Arturo: Ho aggiunto i gruppi quando ho iniziato a pensare di venire in Australia per vedere le persone che dicevano, per farsi un'idea: le cose più positive, le cose negative. Per essere più tranquillo, se la decisione era giusta o meno.*

(Arturo: I added these groups when I started thinking about coming to Australia because I wanted to see what people were saying, to get an idea, the most positive things, the negative things. To be more certain, whether it was the right decision or not).

*Aurelia: [I wanted] to be sure that people are ok [in Australia], to read stories in real life. To see that they are fine, they find jobs everyday... It makes me feel better, like a little bit calmer... You just want to be sure that there are people who are doing okay.*

Participants also expected that by reading other Italians' experiences of life in

Australia, they would not make the same mistakes that others had made and thus have more positive experiences in Australia. The essence of this sentiment is captured in the following excerpt:

*Arturo: M'interessava leggere le esperienze perché, ripeto, qualche volta venivano pubblicate delle interviste, impressioni, oppure "ragazzi io penso che il sistema di trasporto qui sia così", e magari c'era un dibattito di commenti eccetera. E quindi cercavo queste cose: dei dibattiti; delle discussioni; delle testimonianze. Penso che le testimonianze, brevi o meno, comunque aiutano perché a volte nelle testimonianze vengono fuori degli errori fatti, mentre possono aiutare chi le legge a non ripeterli.*

(Arturo: I was interested in reading other people's experiences because, as I said, sometimes things were posted such as interviews, impressions, or "guys I think that the transport system here is like this", and maybe there was a debate through comments etcetera. So I searched for these things: debates; discussions; testimonies. I think the testimonies, short or not, help anyway because sometimes mistakes made are written in the testimonies and they can help those who read them not to repeat the same ones).

By "getting an idea" of the mistakes that other Italians had made, my participants could get a glimpse of the realities of living and working in Australia. In this sense they could "try on" the identity of "new Italian migrant" in Australia and, in turn, avoid potential problems once arrived. For farm work, this was especially useful as participants also discussed their knowledge of the myriad problems associated with that type of work, such as exploitation, as the following comments illustrate:

*Lucia: [Certe cose che ho letto sui gruppi] mi hanno messo un po' in guardia...perché ci sono tante persone che vengono sfruttate principalmente nelle farm.*

(Lucia: [Certain things I read on the groups] put me on guard...because there are so many people who get exploited, mostly on the farms).

*Federica: Poi un'altra cosa che dicono (sui gruppi) è che molti datori di lavoro italiani non sono da fidare (sic) perché molti abusano e sono quelli che pagano di meno... fanno i furbi.*

(Federica: Another thing that they say [on the groups] is that you can't trust many Italian employers because many take advantage and they're the ones

that pay less... they try to outsmart you).

One participant even decided not to obtain a second WH visa because of a disconcerting exchange that she had with a potential farm employer:

*Marzia: L'unica cosa negativa di cui parlavano nei gruppi...era la questione farm. Gente che sfruttava, gente che ti chiedeva di fare favori sessuali in cambio di [qualcosa]. [Per esempio,] Mi hanno consigliato di telefonare a un farm per sapere se c'era disponibilita' per andare a lavorare. Telefono e dico "Guarda siamo due persone, siamo interessate a lavorare in farm" e mi dice "Due persone? E il tuo ragazzo? No, non c'è lavoro." E gli faccio "No, due persone: io e una mia amica." Mi fa, "Vabbe' se siete due ragazze, allora si." Allora a quel punto dici vabbè grazie ho cambiato idea. No, piuttosto mi pago lo student ma non sono disposta a fare queste cose.*

(Marzia: The only bad thing that they were talking about in the groups...was farm work. People who exploited, people who were asking you to do sexual favours in exchange for [something]. [For example,] I was advised to call a farm to see if there was availability to work. I phone and say, "Look, there are two of us interested in working on the farm" and he says, "Two people? Is the other person your boyfriend? No, there's no work." And I say, "No, two people: myself and my girl friend." He goes, "oh okay, if you two are girls, then yes." Then at that point you say to yourself, thank you I've changed my mind. No, I'd rather pay for a student visa but I am not willing to do these things).

Fortunately, however, by using the groups, the large majority of my participants were able to find invaluable information about avoiding these types of farms, as the following comment exemplifies: *"Il buono [dei gruppi] è che alcune persone dicono tipo "attenta posto x." Mettono all'erta altre persone che potevano fare lo stesso errore. Questo è un vantaggio [dei gruppi]"* (Pierluigi). ("The good thing about [the groups] is that some people say like "be careful of place X." They create an alert for other people who could have made the same mistake. This is an advantage of [the groups]").

Thus, because the groups allowed them to imagine all of the potential positive as well

as negative experiences that could arise in Australia, and because they had already travelled in their imagination, my participants arrived in Australia with the expectation that they already knew what their lives would be like. They arrived with clearly defined images and ideas which were produced by what they had read on the walls of the Facebook groups, as evidenced in the following comments:

*Federica: Da casa ho proiettato molto quello che sarebbe stata la mia vita qui secondo quello che vedevo nei gruppi. Nel bene e nel male.*

(Federica: From home I projected much of what my life here would be like based on what I saw in the groups. For better or for worse).

*Alessio: [Dai gruppi] abbiamo imparato anche a capire come le relazioni si svolgono qui in Australia. Quindi, un po' le usanze, i barbecue, la spiaggia...sono cose che scopri quando arrivi ma prima di arrivare, chiaramente hai una visione da quello che viene raccontato; e spesso gli unici racconti che hai sono quelli sul web o sui gruppi di Facebook.*

(Alessio: [From the groups] we also learned to understand how relationships take place here in Australia. So a bit about customs, barbecues, the beach...they're things that you discover when you get here but before arriving, of course you have an image based on what you've read; and most of the time, the only stories you have are those from the internet or from Facebook groups).

As mentioned above, the concept of *hyper-reality* accounts for *how* potential- or pre-migrants' expectations are influenced by Facebook groups, namely because of the first-hand stories and experiences shared by Italian post-migrants already in Australia. In this way, new Italian migrants tend to have more realistic expectations of Australia than migrants would have in the past when social media with rich UGC was not readily accessible. Indeed, through a lengthy period of collecting the stories, experiences and testimonies of others, my participants were able to form, in their words, a "more realistic" image of Australia.

Similar conclusions were drawn in the research conducted by Thulin and Vilhelmson

(2015) whose study of young adults in Sweden showed that the internet plays a crucial role in influencing early considerations and desires to migrate to other countries, by constantly providing images of the opportunities available in other locations, therefore exacerbating the desire to move. Moreover, their interviewees stated that they too specifically used social media in the early phase of migration in order to collect first-hand experiences because they believed that they would provide a more reliable, relatable, and authentic image of living in a new place.

### **6.2.3 The desire for feedback: trusting in like-minded others**

For new Italian migrants on Facebook groups, trust plays a significant role in information uptake and use. Indeed, as I will show in this section, while my participants used the groups to “get an idea” of Australia, they also used the groups to gain immediate, unbiased feedback in the form of specific information tailored to their own personal circumstances. They wanted a conversation with like-minded others (fellow Italian migrants) who could provide them with what they largely perceived as relevant, trustworthy information. In this sense, there is generally more trust in comments made by weak ties than in information controlled by government or corporate agencies, such as tourism or immigration websites (see discussion in section 3.3.3). This section will show that feedback gained from people who have a shared cultural identity is often the most trusted and preferred source of specific information gathering pre-migration and how this shapes their expectations.

During the interviews, all of the 15 participants agreed that they often used Facebook groups when they had a specific *problem to resolve* which required personalised

feedback. One person even acknowledged that she would turn to the groups if she had a really serious problem, indicating a high level of trust in the other members. The following insightful comment illustrates the common motivation for using Facebook groups to search for *specific* information and advice with feedback:

*Alessio:...se voglio recuperare un'informazione ufficiale o comunque obiettiva, la cerco sul web. Se voglio dei pareri su alcune problematiche particolari, chiedo alle persone sui gruppi di Facebook; e quindi è inevitabile che sul gruppo si concentrino richieste relative a problemi da risolvere...*

(Alessio:...If I want to get official information or anyway objective information, I search the web. If I want opinions on more specific issues, I ask people on the Facebook groups; and so it's inevitable that the focus of the group is on problems to be solved...)

In this sense, many participants were using the groups to obtain personalised and immediate responses from Italians already in Australia, as Federica's comment reveals: "*Stavo cercando informazione e un feedback di una persona che stava in situ*" ("I was looking for information and feedback from someone who was in situ").

The desire for feedback within online communities was also found in a study carried out by Wasko and Faraj (2000). Results from their survey examining why people participate and share knowledge in three electronic communities of practice led to the conclusion that:

...people participate in these [online] communities because they want to participate in a 'community', and engage in the exchange of ideas and solutions. Members are not simply interested in a forum for questions and answers, but appreciate the on-line dialog, debate and discussion around topics of interest. People feel that the community provides access to knowledge rather than just information, and becomes a valuable forum to receive feedback on ideas and solutions (p. 169).

The above quote stresses that the desire for feedback and knowledge is a key factor which motivates people to participate in an online community. In turn, the feelings of

belonging derived from engaging in an online community can, as demonstrated above, create an environment of trust, familiarity and support; in essence, a space “*per sentirsi un po’ più in italia*” (“to feel a bit more like you’re in Italy”) (Giuseppe).

In terms of my study, secure in the knowledge that there was an already established (online) community of Italian migrants in Australia, who were all in the same situation, participants felt more encouraged to migrate, as shown in the following comment:

*Marzia: [Sui gruppi] sai che ci sono tante persone nella tua stessa situazione, tante persone che sono venute da sole che ce la stanno facendo o ce l'hanno fatta, e questo ti spinge a dire: “Ok ce l'hanno fatta loro, perché io non dovrei farcela?” Quindi ti dà coraggio. Sai che comunque c'è una parte, fra virgolette, di casa, anche dall'altra parte del mondo. Quindi per qualsiasi cosa c'è qualcuno che ti può aiutare e questo secondo me ti fa diventare un po’ più forte.*

(Marzia: [On the groups] you know there are lots of people in the same situation as you, many people who came alone that are coping or have made it, and you think: “Ok, if they succeeded, why wouldn’t I succeed?” So it gives you courage. You know that in any case there’s a part of “home” on the other side of the world. So for whatever you need, there will be someone who can help and I think that this makes you a bit stronger).

*Manuel: Facebook è un po’... riesci, fra virgolette, a rapportarti un po’ meglio con le persone. È un po’ più veloce... poi vedi la faccia della persona con cui parli quindi è anche un attimino più credibile, un po’ più sicuro. Poi siccome sono all’inizio, voglio stare con italiani... anche per la lingua... anche per assorbire un po’ la sua esperienza... prendere il meglio della sua esperienza dall’italiano e crescere la mia esperienza.*

(Manuel: Facebook is a bit... you can “build a better rapport” with people. It’s a bit faster... and you can see the face of the person you’re talking to so it’s a bit more credible, a bit safer. Also, since I’m at the beginning, I want to be with Italians... even for the language... even to absorb some of their experience... to get the best from their experience as an Italian and improve on my experience).



From the above quotes we also see that there is a process of identification with the other Italians on these groups. My participants indicated that they particularly relied on the stories of other Italians who had realised their dream of creating a better life for themselves in Australia, because they believed “if they succeeded, why wouldn’t I?” In this sense, before even leaving Italy, they already identified with and trusted the other Italians on the groups so as to “get the best from” their experiences and “improve on” their own. This, in turn, gave them courage, therefore influencing, in some cases, the decision to migrate (“it gives you courage. You know that in any case there’s a part of “home” on the other side of the world”, Marzia).

This *sense of virtual community* and need for feedback from like-minded others, also account for why many of my interviewees preferred to use Facebook groups when they wanted to get personal advice and *unofficial insider knowledge* (Dekker and Engbersen, 2013a, p. 406) about life in Australia that they could not get from tourism or immigration websites. Further, sometimes it was simply easier and less time consuming to directly ask other people the question rather than to search for the information elsewhere: “*Cercare informazioni porta via tempo e ci vuole impegno per andare a cercarle per i fatti tuoi. E’ più facile scrivere a qualcuno che ti risponderà*” (Ilaria) (“Looking for information takes time and it requires effort to find it by yourself. It’s easier to write to someone who will reply to you”).

The desire for feedback also reveals why Facebook groups were the preferred choice for many of my interviewees over other social media platforms, for example blogs. Indeed, it can be difficult to rely on blogs for updated, current information because, as

Mirko explained, “*alcuni sono vecchi, alcuni non erano aggiornati*” (“some are old, some weren’t updated”), whereas a Facebook group is “*molto frequentato e [l’informazione] è aggiornata più costantemente, si tiene più al passo*” (“much more popular and [the information] is more frequently updated, it is kept up to date more”).

Further, some interviewees mentioned the benefits of UGC and the interactive and dialogical features of Facebook. For example, Giuseppe discussed his preference for Facebook groups over blogs because, as he put it, “*...un blog è un solo parere: uno scrive il proprio parere e si ferma lì. Invece in un gruppo ci sono più pareri quindi puoi vedere un po’ cosa dice un po’ la gente*” (“... a blog is only one opinion: one writes one’s opinion and it stops there. However, on a group there are more opinions therefore you can see what other people are saying”). Similarly, the groups are influential because the ability to comment on a thread creates a dialogue, as illustrated in Pieriluigi’s comment: “*...soprattutto [sui gruppi] c’era un discorso, non si fermava solo a notizie singole: si parlava...*” (“... above all [on the groups] there was a conversation, it didn’t stop at individual news: people spoke to one other”).

Participants also compared the Facebook groups to forums, which are another source of information for new Italian migrants (see section 2.3.2). Many suggested that not only are the Facebook groups superior because of the immediacy and accessibility of the communication, but also the ability to see other group members’ Facebook profile and obtain all of their personal information makes one feel more secure, perhaps more trusting of the other group members:

*Marzia:...con Facebook c’è la risposta diretta e soprattutto se tu rispondi in un forum piuttosto che [sui gruppi di Facebook] sì hai una risposta ma non*

*puoi avere tanta informazione su quella persona a meno che non gliela chiedi. Tramite Facebook tu puoi andare a vedere il profilo, le foto– puoi avere una immagine più chiara della persona, chi è, puoi contattarla immediatamente.*

(Marzia:...with Facebook there's an immediate response and above all if you get a reply in a forum instead of [on Facebook groups], yes you have a reply but you can't get much information about that person, unless you ask him/her directly. Through Facebook you can see the other people's profiles, their photos– you can have a clearer picture of the person, who he/she is, you can contact them immediately).

Marzia's comment is particularly significant as it draws parallels to findings from Ridings and colleagues' (2002) study which showed that trust within virtual communities is higher when personal information is given. In this sense, members will trust each other more if they know something personal about them. Their study also found that perceived responsiveness also builds trust, that is, when individuals reply quickly and often to messages, the members of that virtual community will have higher levels of trust.

Overall, then, the above examples demonstrate the preference for using social media in order to get *unofficial insider knowledge* (Dekker and Engbersen, 2013a, p. 406) before migrating, and this is a common trend among young people. Thulin and Vilhelmson (2015) also found that the majority of the young Swedes that they interviewed were sceptical of official information and photographs, regarding them as a type of marketing tool. Similarly, their study demonstrated that social media are viewed by young people as a popular alternative platform for exchanging first hand experiences, images and information about a place, especially because they simplify information seeking, making it more specific and relevant to each individual. In addition, the findings here reflect the data analysed in Chapter Five, which showed

that the most common category of posts were *Information Exchange*, indicating a strong reliance on other Italians for information.

It is worth noting that the feedback that is exchanged between migrants online has the potential to both encourage and discourage migration (Dekker et al., 2015, p. 79). In the case of my participants, however, it appeared to have encouraged migration because of their shared cultural identity. Indeed, my participants agreed that they used the Facebook groups to seek out information from fellow Italian migrants because they could relate to them more easily, as in the following:

*Alessio: fondamentalmente [cercavo] esperienze in prima persona, di persone che avessero già fatto le esperienze quindi conoscevano direttamente la tematica. [Cercavo anche] altre informazioni relative al lavoro, quindi alla possibilità, alla facilità di trovare lavoro..., avere il parere di persone già sul posto...con una base culturale simile... [perché] se dicono che è facile o difficile [in Australia] più o meno so di cosa stanno parlando perché chiaramente il metro di giudizio dev'essere simile per poi comprendere questi dati che sono qualitativi.*

(Alessio: fundamentally [I was looking for] first-hand experiences from people who had already had experiences so they personally understood the issue. [I also looked for] other information about jobs, so the likelihood of finding a job and how easy it would be to find one..., to get opinions from people who were already there...with a similar cultural background...[because] if they say it's easy or it's difficult [in Australia], I'll know more or less what they're talking about because of course you have to have a similar measurement criterion in order to understand such qualitative information).

Other participants' comments also reflected this idea. They returned to the idea that it was simply “easier” to rely on other Italians on Facebook groups than on an immigration website:

*Marzia: Il sito ufficiale [dell'immigrazione australiana], vedere tutta quella cosa scritta in inglese, mi mandava in panico quindi la cosa di affidarsi ad un altro italiano, era più facile – la via più facile, la via per non spaventarti ancora di più. E poi ovviamente non chiedi solamente ad una persona ma tre o quattro. Se tutti e tre o quattro ti rispondono la stessa cosa, si presuppone che sia la cosa giusta.*

(Marzia: The official site [for Australian immigration], seeing all of those things written in English, sent me into panic mode so being able to rely on another Italian was easier – the easiest way, the way not to frighten yourself even more. And then of course, you're not just asking one person but three or four. If all three or four reply to you saying the same thing, you can presume that it's right).

The above examples point to the way in which shared cultural identity can create feelings of comfort, safety and familiarity, especially for those who have limited English or are particularly stressed about migrating (“seeing all of those things written in English sent me into panic mode” and “being able to rely on another Italian...it's the easiest way, the way not to frighten yourself even more”). Shared cultural identity therefore also appeared to motivate Facebook group use.

Overall, the examples above reveal that many pre-migrants, especially those who are particularly stressed about migrating, will find themselves relying heavily on culturally-specific Facebook groups for information, advice and support. The motivation for individuals to form or maintain relationships online often derives from the need to manage relocation in a new cultural context and the need to re-create spaces of familiarity or comfort (see section 3.3.5). For new migrants then, Facebook groups, such as those created for Italians in Australia, create online communities because they are specifically aimed at bringing together a group of people who have common interests, shared goals, and shared resources (section 3.3.1). Indeed, when asked about the in-group interactions within Facebook groups, my participants acknowledged that the groups provided them with a support network because they gave them the feeling of shared cultural identity, as exemplified in the following:

*Alessio: le interazioni con altri italiani ti fanno immaginare di avere comunque una rete di appoggio... che naturalmente condividendo una nazionalità si crea un legame, anche se la persona non la conosci*

*direttamente, per cui si tende ad aiutarsi più facilmente.*

(Alessio: the interactions with other Italians make you imagine that you have a support network... and of course sharing the same nationality creates a connection, even if you don't know the person in real life, so you tend to help each other more willingly).

As in my analysis of wallposts (Chapter Five) and as in the study by Hiller and Franz (2004), the above excerpt shows that certain types of shared affiliations online – like shared cultural identity – can engender a kind of communal bonding that need not be based on any previous face-to-face interaction (“the same nationality creates a connection even if you don't know the person in real life, you tend to help each other more willingly”). Again, shared cultural identity helps to elucidate *how* Facebook groups influence the expectations and experiences of Italian migrants on Facebook groups.

#### **6.2.4 Concluding remarks**

The findings presented in this section have provided examples of how pre-migrants use Facebook groups to prepare for life in Australia and, in turn, form more realistic expectations. Three main themes have been discussed. Firstly, the groups were used practically for migration preparation, from how to find employment to the importance of knowing the English language before leaving Italy. According to my participants, what they read on the groups had enabled them to obtain practical information about how to prepare for everyday life in Australia and what to expect upon arrival.

Secondly, the groups provided participants with a *hyper-reality* (Megele and Buzzi, 2011), that is, a space or window for forming a more authentic image of Australia

today and imagining what their lives would be like as migrants in Australia. Lastly, by using the groups to search for specific information and by obtaining prompt feedback from people of their same cultural identity, the interviewees were more aware of which information could be trusted and more confident that it would be relevant to their personal circumstance. These feelings of trust and familiarity, or *sense of virtual community*, in turn made the experience of migration more manageable.

This section has also shown that that my participants are technologically literate (Baldassar & Pyke, 2014) Italians, that is, they are aware of how to use online communication to their advantage in order to adequately prepare for migration and form more realistic expectations. Indeed, my participants are able to differentiate between the various online platforms available to them – including websites, blogs and forums – in order to determine which will be more efficient and useful for their particular needs. Ultimately, they choose to use Facebook groups so that they can get up-to-date, immediate and relevant feedback. My participants also well-informed of the potential pitfalls of gathering information from a large number of different people in an online setting. They have learnt how to pick and choose what they need from the groups, which in turn enable them to be influenced by a multitude of different people, with different experiences, ideas, advice and information.

### 6.3 Facebook groups and their influence on post-migration experiences

After migrating to Australia, my participants' use of Facebook groups changed considerably. While pre-migration the groups were used to find information that would prepare them for what to expect in Australia and to imagine their lives there, post-migration the groups were used like a notice board in order to find practical opportunities in Australia as well as for socialisation. The change in the use of Facebook groups post-migration to Australia is clearly articulated in following comment:

*Alessio: [In Australia] l'utilizzo [dei gruppi] è cambiato totalmente. Adesso diventa più un utilizzo che serve a entrare in contatto con opportunità lavorative o opportunità di socializzazione qui sul posto. Quindi non è più "ho un problema come lo risolvo?" ma "devo vendere una libreria" o "c'è una persona che sta vendendo una televisione?" Per esempio, la mia ragazza ha trovato un lavoro di babysitter in questo modo. Io mi sono iscritto in un corso di balli tipici italiani. Quindi è più un utilizzo tipo classica bacheca annunci.*

(Alessio: [In Australia] the use [of the groups] changed completely. Now it has become more something you use when you want to find work opportunities or opportunities for socialising here. So it's no longer a matter of "I have a problem how can I fix it?" rather "I have to sell a bookshelf" or "Is anyone selling a television?" For example, my girlfriend found a babysitting job this way and I enrolled in a course of typical Italian dances. So it's more a classic bulletin board type use).

All of the participants in this study indicated that they had continued using Facebook groups even after they had arrived in Australia. Many stated that they predominantly used the groups during their first few weeks in Australia in order to orientate themselves. Several reasons for continuing to use the groups post-migration emerged as central themes surrounding the influence of Facebook groups on their experiences in Australia. These include using the groups to *find practical opportunities and needs*, such as for employment, accommodation and information that they may need at some



point in the near future. They also used these groups to *find friendship* with other Italians in Australia and *to give support* to other potential- or pre-migrants still in Italy. They wanted to ensure that other Italians also came to Australia well-prepared, with realistic expectations.

Nonetheless, as mentioned in the sections above, another finding that emerged during each interview was the participants' ambivalence towards the groups. While they did maintain that the groups had positive aspects, such as the giving and receiving of information and support, they were simultaneously frustrated with the *hostility* so often displayed by some group members. All of these themes are discussed in turn below with reference to their influence on post-migration experiences in Australia.

### **6.3.1 Practical opportunities and needs**

During the interviews, participants were asked to share their ideas (if any) about the role that Facebook groups had played in influencing their experiences in Australia post-migration. All of the participants indicated that the groups *had* influenced their experiences in Australia in various ways. They described how other group members had helped them in their everyday lives in Australia in terms of finding employment, accommodation, friendship, social outings, English lessons, items or products they needed to buy, and so on. What emerged from their responses was that they primarily used the Facebook groups post-migration to find *practical opportunities* which would meet their *specific needs* for creating their new life in Australia now and in the future. As Carla put it, “*io lo uso per quello che mi serve: se voglio sapere qualcosa inerente al lavoro o inerente a come le cose funzionano qua*” (“I use it for what I need: if I

want to know something about jobs or about how things work here”).

The two most commonly cited reasons for using the groups upon arrival in Australia however, were to search for employment opportunities, including farm work, and for accommodation. All of my participants used the groups post-migration for this purpose. Some participants were so desperate to find a job or accommodation in the early stages of post-migration that they used the groups daily, as in the following extract:

*Lucia: [Usavo i gruppi] quando sono arrivata qua in particolare per il lavoro e per la casa... perché lì sono le offerte che mettono e quindi li guardavo ogni giorno per vedere per le case in particolare.*

(Lucia: [I used the groups] when I first arrived here, particularly to find work and a house... because they post offers and so I looked [at the groups] every day, to look for houses in particular).

Others went further and showed that using the groups simply makes it easier to find a job because everyone in the group is Italian:

*Alessio: c'è un legame da un punto di vista professionale che può aiutare. Per esempio, come dicevo, come la mia ragazza che ha trovato di babysitter in questo modo perché una ragazza italiana doveva partire ha detto: “c'è questa opportunità: io facevo la babysitter in questa casa.” E' chiaro che se già una ragazza italiana ha avuto quell'opportunità lavorativa e si sta liberando, è più probabile che un'altra ragazza italiana ci possa essere piuttosto che ricercare su un gruppo non targettizzato in cui è più probabile che ci siano difficoltà.*

(Alessio: there's a connection from a professional point of view that can help. For example, as I said before, my girlfriend found a babysitting job like this because an Italian girl who had to leave [Australia] said: “there's this job opportunity, I was a babysitter in a house...” It's clear that if an Italian girl has already had that job opportunity and that opportunity is now available, they're more likely to choose another Italian girl rather than look for [information] on a non-targeted Italian group where it's more likely that there would be problems).

In the above comment, the notion that one could find a job by simply replacing another Italian once he/she had left Australia again demonstrates the influence of shared cultural identity on these new Italian migrants. However, it also reflects Putnam's (2000) concept of bridging social capital, namely how support can be gained from weak ties (eg. acquaintances). Bridging social capital is particularly beneficial and influential for migrants who interact online as they are more likely to have information not previously held by the individual or by the individual's strong ties, such as their family members or close friends (see section 3.4).

Participants also looked for job offers on the groups while simultaneously keeping an eye out for other information or advice that they did not need at that particular moment but that would help them at some point in the future, as the following excerpts show:

*Marzia: Ora uso i gruppi per le offerte di lavoro e ce ne sono tante e quindi provi, scrivi. Magari solo per avere informazioni più utili. Per esempio, che ne so, voglio andare a Morisette Park: Qualcuno c'è stato? Vale la pena? Non vale? Cosa consigliate?" O se ho il giorno off, [scrivo] "cosa consigliate di andare a fare?" Io li uso soprattutto per questo, il lavoro e per avere informazioni di questo tipo. Poi, gente che magari scrive "ho bisogno di un dentista perché mi si è rotto il dente." Poi a quel punto leggi i commenti, vedi quello che consigliano, fai uno screenshot, lo salvi e dici: non sai mai, se un domani dovessi avere bisogno.*

(Marzia: Now I use the groups [to look for] job offers and there are so many of them so you give it a go and contact them. Maybe [I also use the groups] even just to get more useful information. For example, let me think, say I want to go to Morisette Park: "Has anyone been there? Is it worth it? What do you suggest?" Or if I have the day off, "Where should I go?" I mostly use them for these reasons, for work and to get this kind of information. Also, maybe some people write things like "I need a dentist because I have a broken tooth." Then at that point you read the comments, you see what they suggest, you take a screenshot, you save it and you say to yourself: you never know, one day it may come in handy).

*Aurelia: I'm always watching, even if I'm not so active in the group, I'm always reading to see if there are some people asking things that could help me, even if not now, in the future...*

However, other participants also used the groups post-migration in order to meet much more specific needs or when they had specific issues to resolve. For instance, Mirko wanted to find the cheapest supermarket in Sydney, “[*ho cercato*] i posti dove fare la spesa, per esempio, “*Sapete qual è il supermercato più economico, più conveniente?*” (“[I looked for] where to go shopping for groceries, for example, “Do you know where the cheapest, more convenient supermarket is?”). Jack wanted to know how to join a gym in Sydney. Further, when Arturo injured himself shortly after arriving in Australia, he used the groups to find a physiotherapist.

### **6.3.2 Social support**

Italian migrants can obtain social support, information and resources about what to expect once arrived in Australia and how to organise their lives post-migration by accessing the social capital that the Facebook groups offer (see section 5.2.4). This, in turn, does serve to make their lives in Australia much more manageable. People often connect on Facebook with the specific purpose of gaining social capital and thereby improve well-being and life satisfaction (section 3.2.2). Indeed, another common motive for using Facebook groups post-migration was to make friends and to gain contacts in Australia. Interestingly, in Armillei and Mascitelli’s (2016) survey of more than 600 new Italian migrants in Australia, a large number of respondents (53%) stated that their closest friends in Australia are mostly Italians. Further, the majority of my participants indicated that they used the groups to find opportunities to

socialise, namely by looking for parties or meet ups that were being organised by other Italians. In fact, making friends with other Italians in Australia was described as a positive outcome of the Facebook groups.

For example, Federica met an Italian man from one of the Facebook groups and they provided each other with support, as her comment demonstrates:

*Ci siamo mandati dei messaggi perché cercava per esempio lui casa e quindi gli ho mandato il numero di telefono... poi ci siamo visti... ma è stato forte. Mi ha fatto vedere molti posti di Bondi.<sup>32</sup>*

(We sent each other messages because he was looking for a house for example and so I sent him my phone number... then we met up... but it was great. He showed me so many places in Bondi).

Pierluigi used the groups to find people to go out with when he was lonely: “*con persone che non avevano nessuno con cui uscire un fine settimana e io ero nella stessa condizione, ho risposto all’annuncio e ci siamo incontrati*” (“with people who didn’t have anyone to go out with one weekend and I was in the same boat”). Jack had met ten other Italians through the Facebook groups because they had all been looking for construction work and he had a large number of contacts. He told me that they regularly socialised altogether.

Marzia accounted for why friendships occur so readily on Facebook groups. Again she pointed to the subject of trust, stating that people are more trusting on Facebook and more inclined to meet people in real life because it is not an anonymous medium: you can click on a person’s name and see who they are by navigating to their

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<sup>32</sup> Bondi or Bondi Beach is a popular tourist beach and the name of the surrounding suburb in Sydney.

Facebook profile. Unlike forums or blogs, you can essentially “stalk”<sup>33</sup> a person before you decide to meet up with them. As she put it,

*... per le persone che scrivono sui gruppi: “Chi vuole venire a bere un caffè?” o “Chi vuole andare a mangiare la pizza?” Prima di andare, dici, controllo e vedo...puoi parlare in privato, al telefono con messenger, qualsiasi cosa puoi fare subito quindi secondo me è il mezzo più facile.*

(...for people who write on the groups: “Who wants to grab a coffee?” or “Who wants to get a pizza?” Before going, you think, let me just check [who they are]...you can chat to the person or talk on the telephone via messenger, whatever you want to do, you can do it quickly, it’s the easiest medium).

Here Marzia highlights another example of how these new Italian migrants are technologically literate. They use the tools inherent within social media platforms, like Facebook, to form new friends once in Australia but follow a process that allows them to be cautious, namely by “stalking” the person’s profile, then privately messaging them. In other words, profile information can help people engage in *people sensemaking* (DiMicco & Millen, 2008, p. 1, cit. in Lampe et al., 2011, p. 5): the process of understanding who someone is and whether to interact with them (see section 3.3.3).

As it is common for relationships to transfer from online to offline (see section 3.3.1) there may be an avid interest in making meaningful connections within online communities that may turn weak ties into strong ties. In other words, the ability to make friends with other Italians on Facebook groups, which can then be taken offline, can influence more positive experiences post-migration, especially by providing social support.

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<sup>33</sup> Facebook stalking is a term used to describe the use of Facebook in order to “follow the online actions of another Facebook user. Facebook stalking may include excessive viewing of a particular user’s profile and pictures, as well as repeatedly messaging or posting comments to another Facebook user.” (From <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/27873/facebook-stalking>)

For new migrants on Facebook groups, social support can help them overcome feelings of stress, loneliness and nostalgia, in essence, they have positive effects on an individual's well-being (see section 3.3.2). My participants acknowledged that the groups had influenced their experiences in Australia and highlighted some of the advantages of being part of an online community. These include: to garner social support and to feel a sense of connectedness and solidarity, as the following comments illustrate through phrases such as “feeling connected” and “receiving support”:

*Francesco: è positivo fare parte di un gruppo perché ti fa sentire sempre in compagnia, sempre legato a qualcosa.*

(Francesco: it's a positive thing to be part of a group because it makes you feel like you always have company, you're always connected to something).

*Marzia: ...c'è gente che ti scrive anche in privato dicendoti: “Se hai bisogno, non ti preoccupare. Guarda che a me è successo, si risolve tutto” ...Quindi anche il fatto di avere un appoggio, morale più che altro, aiuta.*

(Marzia: ...there are people who write to you, even in private, saying: “If you need anything, don't worry. Look, the same thing happened to me, everything will work out”...So even receiving support, moral support more than anything, helps).

Relatedly, as discussed in Chapter Three, in their study of an online migrant community forum, Tabor and Milfont (2013) found that helping behaviours, or altruistic behaviours, were very common among users, including the desire to help others avoid bad decisions. Indeed, some of my participants also showed these altruistic behaviours when they stated that one of the reasons that they continued to use the groups post-migration to Australia was because they wanted to help other Italians who were still in Italy, namely potential- and pre-migrants. They hoped that they could influence other Italians before they came to Australia in order to ensure

that they too came prepared and formed realistic expectations, as reflected in the following:

*Giuseppe: Li utilizzo [i gruppi] spesso per poter dare un aiuto, tramite la mia esperienza personale, a chi arriva qui ed è impreparato ed è venuto aspettando di trovare el dorado qui.*

(Giuseppe: I often use [the groups] to give help, based on my personal experience, to those who have arrived here unprepared and who had come expecting to find el dorado here).

Some participants helped other group members because they felt empathy for them as they too had experienced the same initial challenges and confusion upon arrival in Australia, as Jack's comment shows:

*Vado a vedere se ci sono ragazzi che hanno bisogno di qualcosa perché, comunque sia, io qui ho dato una mano ad altri cinque sei ragazzi italiani per trovare un lavoro...[Li aiuto] perché comunque so quello che ho passato io in quella situazione quindi a questo punto dico: se ti serve una mano, te la dò tranquillamente.*

(I check to see if there are other guys who need something because, in any case, here I've helped five, six other Italians find a job...[I help them] because I know how I felt when I was in that situation and so, at this point I say: if you need a hand, I'll happily give you one).

The examples above point to the cyclical, reciprocal nature of much supportive behaviour in online communities (Baym, 2015) whereby members feel inclined to give back to others in the community in case they should need more assistance in the future. However, they also reflect the nature of sharing social media in general which demonstrates that when we share something on social media, we do it because we expect to gain something in return (Hermida, 2014).



### 6.3.3 In-group tensions and disharmony

From the findings presented above, we could simply conclude that Facebook groups are online communities which allow their members to provide support, encouragement and companionship during the early stages of post-migration. However, during the interviews, my participants also expressed a range of problems associated with using the Facebook groups as mentioned above. In fact, the vast majority of participants were, to varying degrees, ambivalent about using the groups. Some talked about problems such as feeling frustrated with the trivial arguments that arose between group members about whose opinion was correct. Some felt anxious about posting for fear of being ridiculed by others, and others were becoming increasingly distrustful of the groups because of the large amount of conflicting information. These findings tell a different story to the ostensible *sense of virtual community* found in other studies of online migrant communities, for example the study by Tabor and Milfont (2013). After hearing my participants' negative feelings about the groups, it became clear that despite the fact that there is certainly a strong reliance on these groups for information and advice, as discussed in section 5.2.3, and there are feelings of solidarity among group members, the majority were also profoundly sceptical about the trustworthiness of other members. Both of these findings will be discussed below.

As in Chapter Five, which showed that there was a significant number of wallposts ( $n = 130$ ) displaying anti-social behaviour within the groups, a prevalent theme inherent in almost all the interviews was a feeling of ambivalence about the groups because of the presence of anti-social behaviour. During the interviews, most of my participants

expressed their opinions of in-group interactions, characterising some of the other group members, and/or their comments, as aggressive or rude, as Francesco's comment demonstrates:

*[Sui gruppi] ci sono persone che veramente ti aiutano, se fai una domanda ti rispondono subito, oppure ci sono altre persone "rude", cioè se fai una domanda in modo un po' sbagliato, ti vengono contro, ti attaccano. Senza motivo. Vanno fuori di testa.*

([On the groups] there are people who really help you, if you ask a question they answer immediately. Or there are other "rude" people who, if you ask a question in a slightly wrong way, they are against you, they attack you. For no reason. They go crazy).

Relatedly, over time participants had become frustrated with the aggression displayed by other members on the Facebook groups, as Manuel's comment illustrates: "*i membri sono una cosa negativa [dei gruppi]. Ci sono vari modi per dare una risposta senza usare certe parole. Ti danno una brutta immagine di questi gruppi. È un elemento negativo*" ("the members are a negative aspect [of the groups]. There are many ways to give a response without using certain words. They give you an ugly image of these groups. It's a negative aspect"). Elena also voiced a similar frustration with group members, stating that their hostility made her less active in the groups:

*Interactions on these groups are sometimes hideous because someone writes something and [someone else will] reply, "You're an arsehole, why don't you know what to do?", and you think, come on, maybe this person has doubts... One of the reasons I tried to interact [less] with [these groups] was because of this, because sometimes [the other members are] just so aggressive, they say: "What are you doing [in Australia], just go back home, stop complaining."*<sup>34</sup>

Carla also described feeling ambivalent towards the groups and provided an example of how in-group tensions, such as flaming, would often unfold:

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<sup>34</sup> Elena chose to use English during our interview.

*posso parlarne [dei gruppi] cinquanta bene cinquanta male. C'è sempre qualcuno [che] ti risponde in maniera molto esaustiva però, dall'altro lato, c'è sempre chi fa dei commenti idiotici...Ad esempio, quando sono andata via [dal lavoro come ragazza alla pari] e ho voluto aiutare [la famiglia] a trovare un'altra ragazza alla pari, ho scritto "C'è una famiglia che cerca...", e c'era chi mi ha risposto con commenti "col cazzo che lo farei" o "vaffanculo."*

(I can talk about them [the groups] fifty percent good fifty percent bad. There's always someone [who] will respond in a very comprehensive way but, on the other hand, there are always those who make idiotic comments...For example, when I left [my job as an au pair] and I wanted to help [the family] find another girl to take my job, I wrote: "There's a family trying...", and there were people who responded to me with comments like "my arse I'd do that job" or "fuck you").

Similarly, for Lucia the groups were not "serious enough" because although some members genuinely wanted to help others, many clearly did not since they responded with ridicule and censure, as her comment reveals:

*[I gruppi] non sono presi molto con serietà secondo me... Dipende dalle situazioni. Perché alcuni fai la domanda e ti rispondono anche, cioè, dipende dalla persona come sempre. Alcuni ti spiegano anche per la cazzata... anche per la classica domanda, "Dov'è che posso mangiare una buona pizza in Australia?" C'è chi ti mette giù cinquanta ristoranti con i prezzi e le pizze che fanno e la via e tutto, e il nome dello chef. Gli altri che ti dicono "Potevi stare in Italia a mangiarti la pizza." Dipende sempre un po' da chi trovi.*

([The] groups are not taken very seriously in my opinion...It depends on the situation. Because some really do respond to your question; it depends on the person as always. Some will even reply to something stupid...like even for the classic question, "Where can I get a good pizza in Australia?" There are those who will list fifty restaurants with the prices and the types of pizzas they make and the street and everything, and the name of the chef. Others simply reply: "You could have just stayed in Italy to eat pizza." It always depends a bit on who you find.

When I then asked Lucia how this type of exchange made her feel, she looked disappointed and replied, "*Secondo me, ti fa sentire meno a casa, tra virgolette, se è un gruppo per italiani dove dobbiamo darci forza e darci aiuto*" ("I think it makes you feel less "at home" if it's [supposed to be] a group for Italians where we should give each other encouragement and help one another").

Indeed, one participant also revealed that she did not always feel like there was a *sense of virtual community* within the groups and was not trusting of them, as Ilaria's comment shows: "*crea un po' di una comunità di barriere, chiusa. Leggendo i commenti che ci sono non mi stimola a frequentare italiani qua [in Australia]...*" ("it creates a community of barriers, a closed community. Reading the comments on the groups makes me not want to hang out with Italians here [in Australia]...").

Some participants also spoke about feeling discouraged to participate in the groups or even fearful of posting because they did not want to be ridiculed:

*Lucia: Mi faccio problemi a fare certe domande tipo "come si fa il TFN?"<sup>35</sup> perché magari gli altri pensano questa è stupida. È talmente facile che mi faccio io problemi a chiederlo.*

(Lucia: I become worried about asking questions like "how can I get a TFN?" because maybe other people will think that it's a stupid question. It's so easy that I feel worried about asking it).

Others had become so frustrated with the rudeness displayed by certain group members that they wanted to leave the group altogether, as shown in Manuel's comment:

*C'è stato un momento, seriamente, che vedevo che rispondevano male alle persone quindi ho detto: no, basta, mi tolgo...perché non mi piace questo atteggiamento perché siamo comunque tutti, chi prima chi dopo, sulla stessa barca. Comunque siamo arrivati tutti qua da un paese dove non c'è lavoro quindi dobbiamo tutti un po' aiutarci e non andare in contrasto tra di noi.*

(There was a moment, seriously, when I saw how badly other people were replying to each other that I thought: no, that's enough, I'm getting off...because I don't like that behaviour because we are all, some earlier and some later, in the same boat. Anyway, we all came here from a country where there's no work so we all have to help each other and not get into arguments).

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<sup>35</sup> As mentioned, a tax file number (TFN) is a unique number issued by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) to each taxpaying individual, company, superannuation fund, partnership, or trust.

As outlined in Chapter Five, a possible reason for the aggressive responses or conflicting comments could be that some members who have been in Australia for a long period of time, construct (or project) an identity of themselves as “expert migrants”, that is, more informed and knowledgeable about Australia than other Italians, especially the potential- or pre- migrants in the group. This idea was also expressed by my participants, as shown in the following excerpts:

*Ilaria: [I gruppi] possono creare confusioni enormi...perché la gente comunica delle cose sbagliate in maniera estremamente convinta... quasi in maniera aggressiva dicendoti: “ho controllato ed è così!” e tu dici, “No, non è così!”*

(Ilaria: [The groups] can create enormous confusion...because people communicate incorrect things with great certainty... almost aggressively telling you: “I checked this and I’m right!” and you say, “No, it’s not right!”).

*Aurelia: ...maybe there are people who are in that group for years and they have listened to the same question many times so they are a bit aggressive... sometimes [they say]: “why are you coming here, there are no jobs, there is a crisis here, there are so many of us... stay in your country.” They kind of feel like they're already from here.*

*Ilaria: secondo me quando stai [in Australia] per un po'... quando diventi un po' più esperto di qualcosa, tendi a dimenticarti com'era prima e quindi tendi a dimenticarti che anche tu ad un certo punto delle cose non le sapevi e magari hai fatto delle domande che adesso ti sembrano stupide...secondo me tendiamo un po' a rimuovere il passato.*

(Ilaria: I think that when you’ve been [in Australia] for a while... when you become a little more informed about something, you tend to forget how you were before and therefore you tend to forget that you didn’t know certain things and maybe you had to ask questions that now, seem stupid...I think we all tend to remove the past a bit).

Here Aurelia and Ilaria point to the idea of migrant identity reconstruction, that is, how some migrants begin to consider themselves as Australia “experts” because they have been in Australia for longer than others. However, besides trying to establish their “Australia expertise”, some migrants may become hostile because they fear having to compete for jobs, accommodation or other needs. In fact, in their study of

Polish nationals in London, Ryan et al. (2008) found that because “informal networks of co-ethnics may be their only route to employment, accommodation, practical assistance such as translation and even companionship...this reliance has to be reconciled with wariness, competition and distrustfulness” (p. 680). Other research (Dekker & Engbersen, 2013b) has shown that some settled migrants actually act as *gate keepers* and *gate closers* towards prospective migrants in order to discourage future migration movements to a particular destination.

However, despite the negative exchanges between members, most participants agreed that Facebook groups are still able to form a unified collectivity. The following account expresses this sentiment vividly:

*Marzia: È una comunità assolutamente perché nonostante ci siano episodi spiacevoli, comunque ci si aiuta: si vede l'unità degli italiani. Poi io ho visto altri gruppi [di Facebook], perché comunque avendo amici francesi, tedeschi... e comunque tutti gli altri gruppi hanno gli stessi problemi. Non credo che sia un problema degli italiani ma un problema delle persone, del mezzo. Poi il fatto di essere dietro un computer, è una cosa che spinge magari a dire certe cose che magari di persona, non le direbbero mai.*

(Marzia: It is absolutely a community because although there are unpleasant occurrences, people do help each other: you can see the unity of the Italians. Anyway, I've seen other [Facebook] groups, because I have French friends, German friends...and, in any case, all the other groups have the same problems. I don't think it's an Italian problem but a people problem, a problem of the medium. Also, the fact that you're behind a computer perhaps pushes some people to say things that they would never say in person).

Marzia's comment is insightful as it suggests that the instances of flaming apparent in these Facebook groups may not be unique to Italian migrants, rather they are simply symptomatic of the medium of Facebook itself. Indeed, the issue of online harassment is also not just limited to Facebook groups; it reflects a larger problem of online communication. Over the last decade, awareness of online harassment, or flaming, has

increased rapidly and according to Baym (2015), flaming is exactly the kind of behaviour one would expect to find on online spaces because of reduced social cues (p. 64). As discussed (see section 3.3.3), scholars have found that flaming can be attributed to *the online disinhibition effect* (Suler, 2004) which makes individuals feel free to offend or even threaten others.

From the examples above, my participants have shown that they are well aware that flaming and online bullying are common aspects of online interaction today. Yet their awareness is not surprising: it is typical of their generation, which as mentioned above, relies heavily on technology (see section 6.1.4). In this sense, because technology is so ingrained in their everyday lives, they are well-informed about the potential risks and challenges involved in using SNSs (such as misinformation as mentioned in section 5.2.5.1, or flaming). However, this awareness or knowledge of the problems that can occur on social media does not change their ambivalence towards the groups. Nor can it change their feelings of frustration, confusion and anger towards other group members.

#### **6.3.4 Concluding remarks**

The findings in this section show that Facebook groups continue to play a role in migrants' lives post-migration by providing them with practical opportunities which help them manage their new life in Australia. From the provision of jobs and accommodation to the creation of friendships that shift offline, these groups have had a strong impact on their new lives in Australia, giving them more social capital and social support. At the same time however, this section has also revealed that being a

member of these groups can be challenging. The presence of in-group conflict and tension, as well as conflicting information, was so frustrating and disappointing for the majority of my participants that it created an ambivalent relationship to the groups, at times making them question whether or not they even wanted to continue to be part of them.

The main insights derived from the analysis of both data sets – the Facebook group wallposts and the in-depth interviews – will be discussed and summarised in greater detail in the following chapter, Chapter Seven. Such insights will also shape the final considerations in relation to my research questions and to this study's key implications and future research directions.



## CHAPTER SEVEN CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this study was to deepen our understanding of the so called “new wave” of young Italian migrants who have been coming to Australia in the last decade, and in particular, following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and its aftermath (see Chapter Two). Further, I aimed to contribute to a growing body of scholarship addressing the impact of online communication on migrants by investigating the role that Facebook groups play in shaping pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences. To this end, I conducted a thematic analysis of the wallposts ( $n = 3000$ ) made to three Facebook groups specifically created for Italians in Australia, and in-depth interviews with 15 members of these groups.

In this concluding chapter I discuss the main findings of the current study. More specifically, in the first part of the chapter I answer my two research questions by presenting the most prominent results that emerged from the analysis. In the second part, I discuss the contributions, as well as the limitations, of the present study, and outline avenues for future research.

### 7.1 Addressing the research questions

My thesis aimed to answer two research questions:

- 1) Does being a member of Facebook groups influence the pre-migration expectations of prospective Italian migrants to Australia?
- 2) *How* do these Facebook groups shape the expectations and post-migration experiences of new Italian migrants in Australia?

The results from this study show that the Facebook groups analysed are online communities where potential-, pre-, post- and return- Italian migrants come together to share the experience of migrating to Australia. As outlined in Chapter Three, my study positions migration as a process that begins long before arrival in the host country. It begins with the intention to migrate. Indeed, migrants can now use online communication pre-migration in order to find information about the host country, as well as to exchange support, and goods and services, as identified in previous research (Burrell & Anderson, 2008; Caidi et al., 2010; Dekker et al., 2015; González Martínez, 2008; Hiller & Franz, 2004; Komito, 2011; Tabor & Milfont, 2013; Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2014, 2015).

In contrast to previous research, this study reveals that within the Facebook groups analysed, much more than resources are being exchanged before leaving the home country. As a *sense of virtual community* (Koh & Kim, 2003) forms, the Italian migrants using these groups also begin to influence, among other things, each other's migration decisions, images, expectations and experiences. In this sense, these groups are spaces for collectively preparing for, managing and imagining life as an Italian migrant in Australia.

In relation to my first research question – *Does being a member of Facebook groups influence the pre-migration expectations of prospective Italian migrants to Australia?* – a clear finding is that Facebook groups *do* influence Italian migrants' pre-migration expectations and this is realised in three ways.

First, the groups enable Italian migrants to collect numerous and diverse pieces of practical information about how to prepare for everyday life in Australia and what to expect upon arrival. As the data from my analysis of 3000 Facebook wallposts show, information exchange is the most prominent thematic category of posts with employment and bureaucratic matters emerging as the most frequently sought and shared types of information in all three groups. By exchanging practical information during the pre-migration period, expectations about the host country are also shaped. Findings from the in-depth interviews confirm that new Italian migrants specifically use these Facebook groups pre-migration to Australia in order to gather practical information about finding a job or an apartment, as well as to gain support and companionship for managing migration. In doing so, new Italian migrants are often well prepared for migration and, in turn, develop well-defined expectations about Australia.

The second finding, which is closely related to the first, is that the medium of Facebook, with its emphasis on UGC, enables new Italian migrants on Facebook groups to ask for specific, personalised information or advice. In turn, they receive relevant responses from like-minded others (fellow Italian migrants) so that they know what to expect in Australia in relation to their *own* circumstances. Thus, UGC provide new Italian migrants with *unofficial insider knowledge* (Dekker and Engbersen, 2013a, p. 406) about life in Australia that they cannot obtain from other, more official, sources. As found in previous studies, UGC is perceived by my participants as an objective, reliable, and trustworthy information source prior to migrating (Litvin et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2012). My interviewees confirmed that

they use the Facebook groups in order to gather quick, relatable, and trusted “feedback” which is tailored to their needs. Trust thus plays a crucial role in establishing that these Facebook groups influence pre-migration expectations.

Third, the Facebook groups analysed in the current study generate a space (or window) for Italian pre-migrants to form images of today’s Australia. As findings from the analysis of the wallposts show, various images of Australia are collectively formed within the groups. On the one hand, Australia is imagined and idealised as a dream destination, a place to build a better life. On the other hand, a more realistic image of life as an Italian migrant in Australia is constructed through the stories shared by post-migrants about the challenges of living and working in Australia, as well as the pitfalls of leaving Italy with high or unrealistic expectations. Similarly, findings from the in-depth interviews confirm that even before they make the decision to migrate, Italian migrants can use the groups in order to meticulously gather first-hand migration stories and experiences on the walls of the Facebook groups, believing that “*farsi un’idea dell’Australia*” (“to get an idea of Australia”) prior to leaving Italy will provide them with a more realistic image of and better expectations about Australia today. By “getting an idea” of some of the main difficulties that other Italian migrants are facing, for example workplace exploitation within the hospitality sector and on the farms, my interview participants were able to avoid some negative experiences in Australia.

The second research question posed was: *How do these Facebook groups shape the expectations and post-migration experiences of new Italian migrants in Australia?*

The current study identifies community, shared cultural identity, and imagination as the three dimensions which elucidate the way in which Facebook group members influence each other's expectations and experiences.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, the Facebook groups analysed are more than just online information channels. Rather, they are dynamic online communities which have the potential to bind the new Italian migrants together through their shared desires, frustrations, dreams, expectations and concerns about migrating to Australia. Indeed, by accessing these communities, new Italian migrants not only obtain knowledge about what to expect once arrived in Australia and how to manage the experience, they also obtain practical opportunities post-migration, such as employment and socialisation with other Italians.

The shared sense of space (Facebook groups for Italians in Australia), shared cultural identity (being an Italian migrant), shared resources (such as insider knowledge and information about opportunities in Australia) as well as the provision of social support and encouragement are all elements that clearly contribute to creating and sustaining these online communities (Baym, 2015). Further, the *sense of virtual community* (Koh & Kim, 2003) makes the entire migration process more manageable and creates a stronger reliance on and trust in other Italians' information, advice and opinions. In turn, this trust makes these Italians more susceptible to being influenced by one another.

Findings from this study also point to the way in which being part of an online community of migrants can influence post-migration experiences by helping users regain social capital and reconstruct their cultural identity. Identities are in the process of *becoming* rather than *being*: they are constructed and transformed within and in relation to representation (Hall, 1996). Indeed, when Italians join Italian-specific networks, such as those on Facebook groups, they can construct an identity of “new Italian migrant”, activating connections with weak ties in order to garner social support or *bridging social capital* in Australia (see section 3.4). These online communities are therefore anchoring points of identity (Buzzi & Megele, 2011) which provide familiarity and connection, as well as an even stronger sense of belonging to and trust in the other members. They become a *virtual home away from home* where Italian cultural norms and values, such as using the Italian language or eating Italian cuisine, can be articulated and reproduced in Australia (see section 5.2.4).

Yet, the environment of trust, the feelings of shared identity and the sense of community within these Facebook groups are simultaneously complicated by the instances of anti-social behaviour and conflicting information that appear within the groups. Further, although the analysis of the Facebook groups cannot verify whether these types of posts have a negative impact on the other group members, the in-depth interview data explicitly show that my participants are acutely aware of and adversely affected by the presence of this anti-social behaviour. Indeed, the majority of my interview participants also have concerns about in-group interactions, characterising other group members’ comments as aggressive, antagonistic or rude. Some

participants felt anxious about posting for fear of being ridiculed by others, others wanted to leave the groups altogether.

It can be argued, then, that the instances of flaming that I observed on the Facebook groups are a negative consequence of the heightened self-disclosure and *sense of virtual community* that serve to maintain these groups. As I have explained, *the online disinhibition effect* (Suler, 2004) on the one hand makes individuals more inclined to disclose personal information as well as show unusual acts of kindness and generosity (*benign disinhibition*), on the other, it makes them feel at liberty to use rude language (*toxic disinhibition*). Again, results from the in-depth interviews confirm that my participants equate the instances of anti-social behaviour on the groups to the nature of online communication itself, in particular, the fact that one is behind a screen. Overall, the presence of anti-social behaviour and in-group tension points to the ambivalent relationship that new Italian migrants can have with these Facebook groups.

In terms of imagination, pre-migration expectations are also influenced by the way in which Australia is imagined (i.e. through photographs, stories and information) by other Italian migrants on the Facebook groups or how it is remembered or re-imagined in the minds of return-migrants. The *hyper-reality* created by these groups (section 3.3.4) enables those who have not yet migrated to “try on” the identity of “new migrant” in Australia (Banerjee & German, 2010). In this way, migrants today can form realistic expectations of the host country. In fact, findings from the in-depth interviews confirm that my participants drew on the “testimonials” of fellow Italian

migrants, their insights and experiences, in order to construct vivid images of life in Australia and imagine what it would be like to be an Italian migrant there. New Italian migrants, then, arrive in Australia with a wealth of images which are primarily generated from what they have read on the Facebook group walls. In fact, the majority of interview participants claimed that they already knew exactly what their lives would be like post-migration because they had participated in the Facebook groups. In this sense, having already migrated in their imagination, they arrive with very clear expectations about their lives in Australia.

## **7.2 Contributions and limitations of the study**

To the best of my knowledge, my study is one of the first to contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon of contemporary Italian migration to Australia (see Chapter Two). Importantly, it also fills a notable gap in scholarly research on the role that online communication plays in shaping expectations during the pre-migration period, an area which has received little attention (see section 3.1.2). The data analysed in the current study offer some of the first insights into the experiences of new Italian migrants in Australia today and more specifically their use of Facebook groups to prepare for, manage, and imagine the experience of migration.

Before the advent of social media and applications with smartphone capabilities, Italian migrants may have been less certain about what life would be like in Australia, mainly because insider knowledge and unofficial information from other Italians were not so easily accessible. However, I have shown that joining one or more online communities for Italian migrants on Facebook groups plays a crucial role in shaping



vivid, genuine images of and realistic expectations about life in Australia today. This therefore disproves other studies which have found that heavy reliance on co-ethnics for employment, accommodation, and information can engender unrealistic expectations (Ryan et al., 2008). It also – to an extent – addresses the concerns raised about the large number of new Italian migrants who are seemingly arriving in Australia ill-informed, unprepared and with unrealistic expectations (Armillei & Mascitelli, 2016, pp. 117-118; Moritsch, 2012, p. 3).

Online communication has become a popular source of information, advice and support for migrants throughout the migration process (see section 3.1.2). Hence, this thesis also contributes more broadly to our knowledge of the role that technology plays in the lives of contemporary migrants by further exploring the implications of using online communication in the early stages of migration. Yet few studies (Burrell & Anderson, 2008; Caidi et al., 2010; González Martínez, 2008; Hiller & Franz, 2004; Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2014, 2015) consider the various ways migrants use technologies pre-departure or how they may also shape expectations. The current study, then, makes a noteworthy contribution towards reconciling these specific gaps in the literature.

As discussed above, instances of anti-social behaviour, including aggressive comments, sarcasm and flaming, appeared to compromise the online communities within Facebook groups. In this sense, my research also contributes more broadly to our understanding of the negative aspects of belonging to online communities. Because online communities can be viewed as spaces for exchanging information and

social support, and for regaining social capital, a positive relationship between virtual communities and the influence they have on their members have often been taken for granted. While considerable research (see overview by Ellison et al., 2007), including the current study, has shown the benefits of using SNSs, such as increased social capital, few scholars have examined the so called “dark side” (Fox & Moreland, 2015) to interaction on SNSs. More specifically, no instances of anti-social behaviour have been found or analysed, to my knowledge, within studies of SNSs and migration or within online *migrant* communities. Yet, both my analysis of the Facebook groups and my in-depth interview findings point to the presence of anti-social behaviour.

This particular finding shows a different side to the ostensibly supportive environment found in my study as well as in other studies of online migrant communities, such as Tabor & Milfont (2013), and suggests that in addition to the consequences that these anti-social posts have at a personal level, they can have other negative influences on in-group dynamics and harm the community (see Cheng et al., 2015). It is important to be aware of this “dark side” of online interaction because, as discussed previously (see Chapter Two), the process of migrating is a challenging life event, with migrants often experiencing stress, depression, loneliness, and other negative emotions.

Overall, anti-social behaviour within the Facebook groups highlights the multifaceted nature of online communities and the importance of exploring this phenomenon further.

On this note, another contribution of this study is that it confirms that young people’s knowledge of new technology is helpful in navigating the sometimes perilous

landscape of online communication. In the context of migration, because technology is so ingrained in the everyday lives of many young migrants, they are well-informed about the potential risks and challenges involved in using SNSs (such as misinformation or flaming) and therefore learn how to be selective about which information to trust and use. In this sense, this study shows that young migrants can harness their knowledge of new technologies in order to better prepare themselves for migration to a new country and what to expect once arrived.

Finally, my study also makes a contribution in terms of research methodology, by confirming the strength of triangulating multiple data sources. Being able to compare findings from the analysis of the wallposts made to the Facebook groups with the perspectives of actual members of these groups through the in-depth interviews was extremely beneficial for the interpretation of the findings. As I have shown, many findings from the analysis of wallposts made to Facebook groups were confirmed by the interview participants themselves. Further, in-depth interviews allowed me to explore issues that were raised by the participants themselves, including their feelings about the presence of anti-social behaviour within the groups.

As with all research projects, this study also suffers from some limitations. The first limitation of this study is the lack of coverage in the in-depth interviews. In comparison to the 3000 wallposts analysed, which were posted by hundreds of different individuals, the 15 Italians interviewed cannot be taken as representative of *all* new Italian migrants in Australia. Further, although Kvale (1996) maintains that there is no set or recommended number of participants for in-depth interviews, a

larger number of participants might have been able to produce an even richer amount of data to be reviewed and analysed. Nonetheless, as discussed, I had already found it challenging to find the 15 participants who *did* participate in the in-depth interviews (see Chapter Four).

A second limitation is based on the medium of Facebook in that due to its privacy restrictions, participant demographics could not be collected, so it is not possible to verify genders, age groups, or other demographic characteristics represented in the data from the analysis of the Facebook groups.

### **7.3 Future Research**

Being among the first studies to explore online communities and Italian migrants in Australia, this thesis has the potential to pave various paths for future research, and I believe that the following directions should be considered. First, a longitudinal study which follows the same migrants throughout the entire migration process would yield different insights into the use of online communication by new migrants. For example, while my study was cross-sectional, conducting interviews with prospective migrants while they are still in their home-country would ensure even richer data about the under researched area of how initial pre-migration expectations are influenced by the interactions within online migrant communities.

Second, the theoretical framework of this study could be employed to investigate other Facebook groups for new migrants in Australia from other countries in order to compare the influence of Facebook groups on pre-migration expectations and post-

migration experiences. Such studies could also analyse the internal dynamics of online migrant communities; including what role cultural differences play in the negotiation of identity online or on in-group behaviours such as anti-social behaviour. Indeed, more research is needed in order to understand *how* these negative in-group behaviours develop and why, how they influence the in-group dynamics, and to what extent they also affect migrants' lives in the host country.

Finally, the medium of Facebook groups could be researched more broadly, such as the role that moderators play. Since migrants use ethnic-specific Facebook groups for the dissemination of unofficial knowledge and at times produce conflicting or incorrect information and advice, it would be useful to consider the role of the administrators in moderating and monitoring Facebook groups' content and interactions between members. Future studies could conduct research on the role of Facebook group moderators in screening the posts for accuracy and irrelevant information, as well as how best to manage instances of anti-social behaviour.

#### **7.4 Concluding Remarks**

As online communication is increasingly ingrained into our everyday lives, it can have a variety of both positive and negative implications. It is not so surprising, then, that a complex picture has emerged as to how participation in Facebook groups among Italian migrants in Australia shapes both pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences.

On one hand, this study confirms that new technologies are indeed powerful avenues for migrants to gain personalised, *unofficial insider knowledge* and information about the host country pre-migration, as well as to gain support and solidarity from like-minded others who are in the same situation. The *sense of virtual community* (Koh & Kim, 2003) creates a shared experience of migration which makes members more reliant on and thus more susceptible to being influenced by one another. It also creates a *safe space* (Mitra, 2006) where members feel they can disclose personal details about their migration experiences, giving prospective migrants insights into life in Australia today which, in turn, shape realistic expectations.

To the Italians in my sample, Facebook groups are online communities for sharing and managing the experience of migration, and maintaining their cultural identity in Australia. In fact, as Butcher (2009) has argued, the motivation for individuals to join online ethnic communities often derives from the need to manage migration and to re-create spaces of familiarity in the host-country (p. 1359). By accessing these groups, new Italian migrants can reconstruct their Italian based social networks which, in turn, help them find practical opportunities post-migration, and ultimately, a *virtual home away from home*.

It is in stark contrast, then, that the ostensible *safe space* (Mitra, 2006) and *virtual home away from home* created within these online communities for Italian migrants are simultaneously marred by intermittent displays of anti-social behaviour. The fact that the majority of my participants felt frustrated and even distressed by the online dynamics between group members indicates that online migrant communities also

create disharmony and tension. For this reason, I would argue that the presence of anti-social behaviour within online migrant communities could, in certain cases, exacerbate the challenges and stresses associated with migrating to a new country and potentially mar the migration experience for some migrants.

Overall, in writing this thesis, I have aimed to provide a greater understanding of the experiences of migration for new Italian migrants to Australia and the role that Facebook groups play in their lives both pre- and post- migration. I hope that by exposing both the affordances and challenges of belonging to these online communities on Facebook groups, other prospective Italian migrants will still turn to the groups in order to gather stories, images, information and advice about what to expect in Australia today and how to manage their lives once arrived. Moreover, I very much hope that this thesis has provided a starting point for future research on other Facebook groups for new migrants around the world, and for a broader examination of the complexities inherent within such online migrant communities.

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# **Appendix A – Interview Guide (English version)**



## **Interview Guide**

### **Pre-migration expectations example questions**

- 1) Before coming to Australia, apart from Facebook Groups, which other social media did you use to find out about Australia (eg. Forums, Twitter, blogs, websites etc.)?
- 2) What were some of the expectations you had before coming to Australia- from whom/from where did you form these expectations?
- 3) Before arriving in Australia when and why did you use Facebook Groups for Italians in Australia/Sydney? What type of information were you looking for? What questions did you post on the walls of the Facebook groups? What kinds of responses did you receive? How did the responses make you feel?
- 4) What expectations did these Facebook groups create about life in Australia based on what you read?
- 5) Before arriving in Australia in what ways do you think your use of these Facebook Groups helped you prepare for coming to Australia? How?

### **Post-migration example questions**

- 6) Now that you're in Australia when and why do you use these Facebook groups?
- 7) How has Facebook groups (or other social networking sites) helped you to make friends/acquaintances with both Australians and non-Australians- How have these new friends/acquaintances helped you?
- 8) What are some of the problems you have encountered during your experience in Australia (so far) that you hadn't expected – how did they make you feel?
- 9) How did using these Facebook groups help you with these problems? Did you receive any form of social support from other Italians on these Facebook groups– If so, how did the support make you feel?
- 10) How would you describe the interactions between group members on Facebook groups? Have these interactions had an effect on your experience of migrating to Australia?
- 10) Overall, do you think these Facebook groups have been a positive or a negative influence on your expectations prior to coming to Australia? Why?
- 11) Overall, in what ways do you think these Facebook groups have influenced some of your more significant experiences after arriving in Australia? How?

**Appendix B –  
Participant Information  
Statement (English Version)**

ABN 15 211 513 464

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**Associate Professor Antonia Rubino**  
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## **The influence of Social Media on newly arrived Italian migrants in Australia**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT**

#### **(1) What is this study about?**

You are invited to take part in a research study about the influence of social media on your expectations, attitudes and experiences in Australia.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a newly arrived Italian migrant in Australia who uses Facebook group(s) for Italians in Sydney and/or Australia. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. So it's up to you whether you wish to take part or not.

By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- Understand what you have read
- Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below
- Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

You will be given a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

#### **(2) Who is running the study?**

The study is being carried out by the following researchers:

Catherine Davis

Associate Professor Antonia Rubino

Catherine Davis is conducting this study as the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at The University of Sydney. This will take place under the supervision of Associate Professor Antonia Rubino.

**(3) What will the study involve for me?**

This study will involve either a one hour (approximate) audio recorded interview in Italian to find out your ideas about how using Facebook groups created for Italians in Sydney and/or Australia has influenced you. For example, I will be asking you about social media you may have used to find out about Australia (eg. forums, twitter, myspace, other websites) or about your expectations before coming to Australia.

The information you give will be used in the PhD Candidate's (Catherine Davis) thesis and some academic articles. Your personal information and any identifiable information will not be included in the published results.

**(4) How much of my time will the study take?**

This study will take approximately one hour of your time.

**(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?**

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by contacting Catherine Davis (PhD Candidate) at [cdav3458@uni.sydney.edu.au](mailto:cdav3458@uni.sydney.edu.au) or on xxx xxx xxx.

You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want us to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview.

**(6) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?**

Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

**(7) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?**

We cannot guarantee or promise that you will receive any direct benefits from being in the study.

**(8) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?**

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise.

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will only be disclosed with your permission, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be identified in these publications unless you agree to this using the tick box on the consent form.

**(9) Can I tell other people about the study?**

Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the study.

**(10) What if I would like further information about the study?**

When you have read this information, Catherine Davis and Associate Professor Antonia Rubino will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact Catherine Davis (PhD Candidate) at [cdav3458@uni.sydney.edu.au](mailto:cdav3458@uni.sydney.edu.au) or on xxx xxx xxx.

**(11) Will I be told the results of the study?**

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the relevant box on the consent form. This feedback will be in the form of a one page lay summary. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished by email.

**(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?**

Research involving humans in Australia is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the HREC of the University of Sydney. As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the study according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*. This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to take part in research studies.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the university using the details outlined below. Please quote the study title and protocol number.

The Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney:

☎ **Telephone:** +61 2 8627 8176

☎ **Email:** [ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au](mailto:ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au)

☎ **Fax:** +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile)

*This information sheet is for you to keep*

# **Appendix C – Participant Consent Form (English version)**



**Discipline of Italian Studies  
School of Languages and  
Cultures  
Faculty of Arts and Social  
Sciences**

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### **The influence of social media on newly arrived Italian migrants in Australia**

#### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

I, ..... [PRINT NAME], agree to take part in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney now or in the future.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be

erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.

- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
- I understand that the results of this study may be published, but these publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me unless I consent to being identified using the "Yes" checkbox below.

Yes, I am happy to be identified.

No, I don't want to be identified. Please keep my identity anonymous.

I consent to:

**Audio-recording** YES  NO

**Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?**

YES  NO

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your email address:

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

.....  
**Signature**

.....  
**PRINT name**

.....  
**Date**