Going Abroad, Staying Connected:

Contemporary Media Technology and the Study Abroad Experience

BY

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THESIS

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Jeremy and Violet, you are my constant source of motivation and support.
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<tr>
<td>FTF</td>
<td>Face-To-Face</td>
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<td>GPI</td>
<td>Global Perspectives Inventory</td>
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<td>IIE</td>
<td>Institute for International Education</td>
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SUMMARY

Travel and education have been linked since ancient times, establishing an age-old tradition that is still actively practiced by academic institutions worldwide. Today, traveling for educational purposes manifests itself in a variety of forms, but in U.S. colleges and universities this experience is most commonly referred to as studying abroad. For nearly 100 years, the study abroad experience has been a part of higher education in the United States. From their humble beginnings in a handful of liberal arts institutions in the 1930s, study abroad programs have now expanded to most U.S. colleges and universities. Study abroad programs, which in most cases offer an optional supplement to degree requirements, are promoted as structured educational experiences that allow students to explore a different part of the world. During their study abroad experience, students not only learn about life in their host country, but hopefully also learn about themselves. The study abroad experience was created to remove the student from their native environment therefore giving that student an opportunity to reflect on his or her values, beliefs and way of life, and how this may be similar or different from people in other parts of the world.

Throughout its long history, the study abroad experience has faced many obstacles including gaining institutional and governmental support, international conflicts and unrest, escalating costs, and most recently, advancements in media technology that can theoretically allow students to maintain a strong link to home, even while traveling abroad. In this dissertation, I explore the contemporary study abroad experience in the digital age, and how a student’s experience may be impacted by their ability to connect to others (both at home and in the host country) while abroad.
SUMMARY (continued)

I begin by detailing the history of study abroad, tracing its development from ancient times to today. I then examine extant research that has been carried out on the study abroad experience to establish what has been learned about the phenomenon, and what questions still remain. The theoretical foundation for my research is based on both intercultural communication theory and media effects theory. By incorporating these two theoretical perspectives, I am able to explore the interplay between cultural adjustment and developments in media technology. I use two research questions to focus on role of social media in the study abroad experience; first, in relation to engagement with locals while abroad, and second, in relation level of global perspective reported by participants post-study abroad experience. Using a web-survey, I collected data from study abroad program alumni. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, I analyzed data provided by survey respondents. My findings revealed some of the complex dynamics that are commonplace for one studying abroad in the digital age.

The majority of survey participants indicated the use of media technology played a significant role during their time abroad. Although media technology was most commonly used to connect to friends and family back home, and with study abroad cohorts, media technology was also used by many to contact host nationals. Survey data revealed that overall frequency of social media use had no relationship with level of face-to-face contact with locals, or level of global perspective—although being in contact with locals via media technology was strongly related to both level of face-to-face contact with locals, and level of global perspective. This suggests that media technology can potentially play a big role in helping students to both initiate
SUMMARY (continued)

and maintain contact with locals, which has long been considered the best way to achieve the desired outcomes of the study abroad experience. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of my findings, as well as how these findings might serve to benefit study abroad programs as they adapt their curriculum to life in the digital age.
I. INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1970, U.S. anthropologist Barbara Anderson, along with a group of 14 other scholars, embarked on a field trip to India. Anderson (1971) recounted the experience and noted that neither she nor her colleagues had ever confronted a culture so drastically different from their own. Throughout the article, Anderson described the hardships encountered by the group, detailing their experience of a phenomenon referred to as culture shock, a term commonly attributed to a work published by Oberg in 1960. Oberg (1960) defined culture shock as “anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (p. 142). This loss, or removal, of familiar cues is coupled with an inundation of unfamiliar signs and symbols of social intercourse.

Anderson (1971) described the experience of culture shock as a “crisis” phase characterized by overwhelming feelings of disconnection precipitated by having the signs and symbols of one’s home culture “repressed, displaced and hence obscured” by those of a foreign culture (p. 1121). Interestingly, Anderson found that what helped her group cope during this crisis phase was the creation of a “secondary system of cultural identification” while asleep. According to Anderson (1971), she and the other sojourners found respite from their culture shock in their dreams where they could produce images of home—“in dreams we were in full cultural retreat” (p. 1124). As such, dreaming provided “cultural re-entry” (p. 1124). Anderson (1971) interpreted this as communication with their home culture, communication that she deemed necessary for “psychic health” and “social survival” (p. 1123) that helped the sojourners cope in the midst of this crisis phase. Oberg (1960) argued that the only way to move beyond...
culture shock and adjust to operating within the host culture was to “get to know the people of the host country” (p. 145)—something Anderson and her colleagues had no choice but to do.

In the nearly 50 years since the experience of Anderson, much has changed in regard to the experience of the international sojourner. In most cases, today’s international sojourner’s opportunities for cultural re-entry are no longer limited to R.E.M. sleep and the occasional letter or long-distance call. Although culture shock is still likely to be part of the experience of going abroad, the sojourner’s options for coping with this “crisis” phase have drastically increased as new channels of communication have been introduced. Today, familiar signs and symbols are often just a click away for those traveling far from home, and the continuation of communication with social networks back home, as well as connection to a vast range of information networks, can now occur virtually uninterrupted for those with access to contemporary media. Contemporary media technology (or new media), including the Internet and its varied applications such as social networking platforms, has dramatically changed the experience of the international sojourner. As such, while the desire of the sojourner to find familiar cultural signs and symbols has not changed, the post-digital revolution has changed the sojourner’s ability to do so.

A trip similar to Anderson’s taken today would undoubtedly be significantly different. On many levels, the logistical and emotional hardships experienced by the international sojourner have decreased. First, social links back home are infinitely more accessible for today’s sojourner, and undoubtedly this can serve to benefit the international sojourner. Anderson (1971) argued that communication with one’s home network and culture was necessary for “psychic health” and “social survival” (p. 1123). Maintaining a connection with home can indeed help to
provide a sense of security that potentially encourages the sojourner to explore a new environment. At the same time, having the ability to maintain the connection through an online network allows the sojourner to preserve and reinforce his or her preexisting identity and perspective more easily.

The torn feeling of being physically in one place while psychologically rooted in another characterizes both the challenges and rewards of the sojourner experience, and thus features in the experience of those seeking education abroad. While being disconnected from home undoubtedly poses many challenges, both logistically and emotionally, the process of facing the struggles of an unfamiliar environment (i.e., culture shock) has long been regarded as both a meaningful and transformative experience (Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1990). As Anderson (1971) reflected, the trip to India was undoubtedly challenging, but the experience prompted a “re-ordering” not only of her group’s connection to their home culture, but also of their identity, leading them to be more likely to acknowledge or incorporate a more diverse worldview.

That being said, ease of communication with home networks represents only one piece of the complex role that new media plays in today’s experience of education abroad. A second factor involves the seemingly limitless access to information on how to navigate unfamiliar places both geographically and culturally. This, along with access to home network social support, may also provide a sense of security to sojourners. Conversely, however, this could decrease the necessity to interact and learn from host nationals. Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that the multiplexity of new media makes it just as easy to seek out, connect with,
and stay connected to new networks of host nationals, both while abroad and upon return home (Godwin-Jones, 2016; Mikal, 2011; Mitchell, 2012).

New media’s impact on education abroad is highly complex and prompts a plethora of questions, such as: At what point, if any, does an increased access to networks of people, information, and resources help or hinder the achievement of objectives tied to the experience of education abroad? Can too much communication/connection with the home network impede the identity reordering process that is ultimately the objective of most education abroad experiences? Culture shock, or the experience of detachment from the home network coupled with immersion into an unfamiliar culture, is inherently stressful. However, the experience of this stress has long been assumed to trigger a cognitive reordering or learning cycle, which can allow the student to gain a greater perspective on his or her own identity and the world. The role of developing media technology has resulted in the creation of the ‘networked self’ (Papacharissi, 2010), in which identity—both individual and collective—is developed and maintained in an online or virtual context, regardless of geographical location. Although and international sojourner may leave behind a physical home network, the identity of the networked self is mobile and can theoretically be maintained regardless of geographical location. As the digital revolution progresses, connectivity and access to information increase with every passing year, but the impact of that continuously developing relationship on the objectives of education abroad remains unclear.

Sandel’s (2014) study investigating social media’s impact on the experience of students studying abroad revealed that the role that social media networks play in the study abroad
experience is very complicated. For some students, access to and use of new media while abroad enriched the experience, helping to reduce the anxiety related to culture shock:

[It] comforted me knowing that I could talk to them and they’re ok. You know I can give them pictures on Facebook so they can see what I’m doing. And, you know it helped it because it gave me a peace of mind knowing that, you know they were there. (Sandel, 2014, p. 17)

However, other students did not regard the constant connection to home as a positive aspect of the study abroad experience, instead regarding it as a hindrance. One student commented: “I feel that they [social media] make me feel as though I’m not studying abroad . . . Because they [social media] make you feel as the distance has shrunk to zero” (Sandel, 2014, p. 17). Godwin-Jones (2016) argues that “overreliance on home networks” may weaken the value of the study abroad experience, as it has the potential to decrease a participant’s opportunities to gain a new perspective on their own culture and beliefs, as well as the culture and beliefs of those in the host country. Similarly, Huesca (2013) chronicled an exchange program to Africa, finding his digitally connected sojourner students “surprisingly immune to culture shock.” This is one of many recent warnings by those in the education abroad field. Lee (2015) wrote about the “Benefits of Study Abroad WITHOUT Technology,” and Keck (2015) argued that “Tech may get in the way of good culture shock while studying abroad.” This supports the notion that immersion may be limited when the home network is so easily accessible.

Study abroad programs can physically transport students outside the boundaries of their home and structure an experience to facilitate learning cycles that prompt processes of psychological and sociocultural transformations. However, in the digital age, culture has in many cases become detached from physical settings as new media has freed communication from the constraints of time and space—a shift triggered by the invention of the telegraph (Carey, 1989).
The argument can now be made that culture has become as mobile as the technological devices of the digital age, and that traveling abroad no longer necessarily results in the repression, displacement, or obscuring of the sojourner’s home culture—at least in a virtual sense. Study abroad educators increasingly express growing concern over this issue: “It’s nice that students get connected and feel safe. But then on the other hand we feel like we’re losing quite a bit of the full student when they’re plugged to the other side” (Keck, 2014). Moreover, communication with host nationals may become less of a necessity. New media has the ability to absorb psychological and social shock, much of which is rooted social intercourse with host nationals.

Arguably, if any transformations are to be experienced by study abroad participants, the participants must be willing to step beyond the bounds of their homes, their cultures, and ultimately, their worlds. While this experience may be uncomfortable, jarring, and shocking, it is also what makes study abroad such a meaningful and transformative experience. If new media technology is used to circumvent the shock that was once rooted in social intercourse with host nationals and inherent to this experience, an overall decrease in host national interaction may also result. On the other hand, although media technology can serve to absorb social and psychological shock by providing access to familiar social support (Lee, Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2012; Mikal & Grace, 2012; Sandel, 2014; Ye, 2006,) it can also serve as a vehicle to introduce new ideas and environments by facilitating connections with expanded networks (Mikal, 2011), as well as help students connect with and keep in contact with individuals and communities outside of their own (Mitchell, 2012).

Digital media technology—inclusive of both devices and the networks they provide access to—has become an increasingly integral part of daily life and has changed how
individuals live their lives, both at home and abroad. This raises many questions in regard to the impact of new media on experiences of international travel, and even more so for structured international experiences for college students created with specific learning outcomes, such as increased self-awareness and open-mindedness. Many unanswered questions remain about how new media fundamentally changes or redefines the study abroad experience. One of particular relevance is: Are learning outcomes of the study abroad experience truly under threat as uninterrupted access to new media technology has become more commonplace? To address this question, more must be learned about how study abroad participants use media technology while abroad (i.e., how often is new media used and for what purposes?). Only then can the impact of such usage on participants’ social and psychological transformation be assessed.

While current research has shown that study abroad participants are very likely to communicate through new media while abroad (Godwin-Jones, 2016; Mikal, 2011; Mikal & Grace, 2012; Sandel, 2014), current scholarship has yet to thoroughly explore the breakdown of communication networks used by students studying abroad. In other words, are study abroad participants using media technology mainly to communicate with friends and family back home? Or, is new media being used to connect with host nationals and the host culture? Or both? While the former may lead to reduced host national interaction, the latter may actually increase such interactions. Although the developing dynamic between media technology and the study abroad experience raises a myriad of questions, my research is guided by two questions in specific: 1) What is the relationship between social media use while abroad and level host national contact while abroad reported by alumni of U.S. college/university study abroad programs? 2) What is the relationship between social media use while abroad and level of global perspective reported by alumni of U.S. college/university study abroad programs?
In the coming pages, I investigate these research questions and the overarching question of how contemporary media technology can impact the U.S. college student study abroad experience. The importance of this research is articulated alongside an explanation of the direction of my study, and followed by a discussion of my findings and the implications of those findings. I start with a chronological history of the study abroad experience in the United States, including both a timeline of the development of government/university sponsored programs, and the progression of academic research related to the topic. Next, I explore media theory to create the theoretical foundation to examine the intersect of developing media technology and the study abroad experience. The discussion of media theory is followed by an explanation of the methods that were used in my study, as well as an explanation of the subjects of my research project, which involved the development a questionnaire that was delivered to alumni of a U.S. university’s study abroad program. The questionnaire was used to gather data on study abroad participants’ 1) program demographics, 2) media use and motivations while abroad, 3) network connections while abroad, and 4) level of intercultural competence. The results of my study are then delivered with the use of both descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis. I conclude with an explanation of the implications of the results, and suggestions for future research.

Ultimately, my study focuses on the interconnected relationship between the extent to and frequency of which study abroad participants use new media to maintain contact with their home networks; the extent of their interaction with host nationals; and the evidence of certain psychological and sociocultural learning outcomes of the study abroad experience. My research expands on knowledge of how study abroad participants use new media to communicate while abroad and to navigate the challenges inherent to the study abroad experience.
II. THE STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the history and development of the study abroad experience. First, I explicate the term *study abroad* and follow this with an explanation of the historical origins of the phenomenon. Second, I detail the history and development of study abroad programs and policy in the United States throughout pivotal moments in U.S. and world history. Third, I address the current state of study abroad, recognizing both the successes of the movement and challenges that have yet to be met. I conclude this chapter with an exploration of extant study abroad research and the implications of intercultural communication theory (e.g., culture shock and cultural adjustment) in the study abroad experience.

A. **What is Study Abroad?**

The Forum on Education Abroad (2014a), a U.S. nonprofit organization created exclusively to serve the education abroad community, recognizes *study abroad* as “a subtype of Education Abroad that results in progress toward an academic degree at a student’s home institution.” *Education abroad* is defined as “education that occurs outside the participant’s home country” (Forum, 2010, n.p.). Many experiences exist within the realm of education abroad, including that being an international student who travels abroad to obtain a degree from an institution outside of their home country. The main distinction between a study abroad participant and an international student is that a study abroad participant does not fulfill the requirements for an academic degree in a foreign country. A study abroad participant’s education abroad serves as a supplement to the education received at a domestic degree-granting institution.
Over the past three decades, the experience of study abroad has gained significant attention and popularity. Today, study abroad is a burgeoning part of the U.S. college experience, acknowledged by a wide range of international nonprofits, academic researchers, university administrators, and the U.S. government as a highly valuable experience in cultural learning (Hoffa & DePaul, 2010). Today, hundreds of thousands of U.S. college students participate in a wide range of program types every academic year, commonly referring to their experiences as “life-changing” (Chew, 2012).

As detailed below, the study abroad experience—also known by other terms such as exchange programs and foreign/overseas study, gap year, and junior year aboard (JYA)—has a very rich history and has changed drastically over the years. In order to fully understand the role that the study abroad experience plays in the education of both a country and its people, it is important to acknowledge its origins and the foundations on which it has been built, as well as the obstacles and struggles it has faced to gain both governmental and institutional support.

B. A Chronological History

The roots of study abroad can be traced back to the ancient centers of learning found in India and Greece before the Common Era that attracted the wandering scholar. Such scholars were perhaps the first to embody the axiom that “all one needed to know was not available at home” (Hoffa, 2007, p. 3). Hundreds of years passed before the first formal universities began to form in Europe during the Renaissance of the 12th century (Perkin, 2007). As these young European universities began to develop liberal arts curricula, the experience of the grand tour emerged, an exclusionary form of experiential education sought by the young and powerful to
gain experience through world travel. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, the grand tour grew in popularity. Though the French Revolution stymied the travel of the young British elite, the grand tour took on new life in the 19th century when the experience expanded to include more middle-class youth. As the grand tour evolved into a well-known European tradition, so did the Wanderjahr—the former contributing to a young man’s education, and the latter to his edification. The wanderjahr was similar to the grand tour in that it provided an opportunity for experiential learning for young adults. However, it had a key difference: during a wanderjahr “there were no expectations that they [students] would learn from books, course, or teachers” (Hoffa, 2007, p. 18). The two experiences represented two types of education abroad, one formal and more refined, the other more freeform and unpolished. As they grew in popularity, both gained a reputation for being a valuable experience where students could learn lessons about themselves and the world that could not be learned in a classroom.

C. Education in the American Colonies

As the British colonies in the Americas were established and began to grow, so did their education system. Due to the isolation of the colonies, most students during this time period did not go abroad because of the combination of extreme cost and a perceived heightened danger fueled by news of international conflicts. Students in Colonial America were thus not encouraged to think about the world beyond U.S. borders (Hoffa, 2007). Well before having gained their independence, the American colonies opened an institution of higher education, Harvard College, in 1636, which was modeled after the more established British universities but limited to undergraduate studies. Without medical, law, or other specialized schools, most aspiring
professionals in Colonial America had no choice but to return to England to complete their education (Dubois, 1995).

As the American colonies fought for their independence, the increasingly self-sufficient government began to build its education infrastructure, raising its rigor and standards. In 1746, Benjamin Franklin founded Patriot Franklin’s Academy (now the University of Pennsylvania). The Academy was created with the mission of providing the youth of the American colonies a first-class education at home, therefore eliminating the need to seek out education abroad (Franklin, 1749). As self-sufficiency grew, so did ethnocentric sentiments that became ubiquitous post-revolution. In 1892, Jefferson wrote, “An American coming to Europe for education loses in his knowledge, in his health, and in his habits” (as cited in Brickman, 1960). As graduate study began and flourished in the United States, the argument for education abroad weakened due chiefly to the hurdles posed by cost and safety. It was not until more than a century later that institutions of higher learning began to initiate and sponsor group education abroad programs.

By the end of the 19th century, most institutions of higher learning across the globe had adopted the modular credit system, allowing for more uniform educational material internationally (Hoffa, 2007). Logistically, this removed a big hurdle in that standardization made it much simpler for institutions to award course credits to students studying at accredited institutions, both at home and abroad. This resulted in a surge of popularity in education abroad in the U.S. as many in the upper class could now embark on a tour of Europe as a formal part of their education (Katula & Threnhauser, 1999). Although popularity and participation in such programs grew during this period, the U.S. government still had little interest in establishing or
supporting these first programs for education abroad. Many factors contributed to the
government’s lack of involvement including the United States’ tradition of isolation, a domestic-
centric education system, and the State Department’s disconnect from the public (Dubois, 1995).
The United States’ disengagement with the rest of the world would prove to have negative
consequences not only for the education of its citizens, but also on the dynamics of the
international community.

1. **The Impacts of World War I on Education Abroad**

   In 1914, international politics became increasingly difficult to ignore as conflict in
Europe evolved into World War I. At the war’s commencement, the isolationist attitude of the
U.S. government was manifested in a strict policy of neutrality. The first U.S. American
casualties of the war occurred with the sinking of the Lusitania by the German Military. This
event finally garnered the attention of those in the United States. Though the nation was split on
the decision, the United States formally joined WWI in 1917, thus putting an end to U.S.
isolationism both in theory and practice. The U.S. government’s decision to participate in WWI
in many ways pushed the country to the forefront of the global community, where it began to
assume a powerful role (Zieger & Zieger, 2001).

   The post-WWI environment brought with it new priorities and responsibilities for the
United States. The Institute of International Education (IIE) was founded in 1919, and grew out
of the recognition of the United States’ key role in this new environment. The IIE was
established as an intermediary between universities and the U.S. government, designed to
“facilitate educational exchange, serving U.S. higher education and those who wished to
establish educational relations with the United States” (IIE, 2014). The IIE took on the ambitious mission of making the U.S. population internationally aware (Hoffa, 2007). From its founding in 1919 to present day, the IIE has held the belief that this goal could be accomplished through the exchange of people and ideas across national borders. The IIE was arguably the first significant step in creating an infrastructure to support all forms of education abroad in the United States. The establishment of the IIE proved to be a wise investment, as it was a key piece in helping to ensure that future generations of young students would be given the opportunity to benefit from an eye-opening, life-changing, study abroad experience.

With WWI as its impetus, the official history of study abroad in the United States began in the early 1920s. The first study abroad programs had limited participation and impact, focusing mainly on language and cultural immersion curricula for foreign language students. In addition to “study”-focused programs were a significant number of volunteer and humanitarian programs in which U.S. students travelled to war-torn parts of Europe (Hoffa, 2007).

By the 1930s, the case for study abroad had gained increasing support. In the 1930s, Donald Watt began a project he dubbed the “Experiment in International Living.” Watt (1967) believed that “the cause of building peace and understanding between nations could be greatly enhanced by providing young people with an intense period of living and learning on each other’s cultural terms” (p. 64). This was a novel idea in the early 20th century, one that slowly proved its value over time thanks to the pioneers of U.S. study abroad, including institutions such as the University of Delaware, Smith College in Massachusetts, Marymount College in New York, and Rosary College in Illinois (Hoffa, 2007). Starting in the 1930s, small groups of students from each of these schools sailed to a handful of European capitals. Although university
and college study abroad programs in the United States had indeed gained momentum during the 1920s and 1930s, the breakout of World War II forced all schools to suspended programs indefinitely (Hoffa, 2007).

2. **The Post-World War II Era and the Crusade for International Peace**

After World War II, peace was regained and the United States emerged atop the global power hierarchy. It was also during this time that the United States assumed its role as the leader in higher education. The GI Bill resulted in drastic enrollment increases, and U.S. colleges and universities received an unprecedented amount of funding (Mettler, 2005). The value of a U.S. education soon skyrocketed. This prompted a debate over foreign policy. Many in the United States believed that the “American way” was supreme, and that the rest of the world—Europe in particular—offered very little in terms of education to U.S. college students or the U.S. population in general (Hoffa, 2007). Although this was a popular attitude post-WWII, there were still those willing to voice their dissent. In 1946, in an article published in *The Modern Language Journal*, De Vito wrote a “plea” arguing that the American soldier in his interactions with Europeans during the years of World War II suffered from “intellectual blindness” at worst, and “intolerance” at best. De Vito (1946) urged for “tolerance and eradication of provincialism on the part of teachers as a means for broadening educational horizons” (p. 265). Broadening educational horizons could only be achieved by actively seeking out education beyond the classroom and U.S. borders. Because the social realities of the aftermath of WWII were impossible to ignore—such as a heightened awareness of the existence of intercultural intolerance—the value of education abroad became more evident.
During the mid-1940s, proponents of education abroad within the U.S. government carried out significant legislative measures that helped to facilitate the flow of students both to and from the United States. Such legislature, including the Fulbright Act, proved to have a lasting impact. In the years that followed World War I, a successful exchange program between the United States and Belgium, financed by liquidated Belgian relief funds, provided evidence of the value of international exchange programs (Dubois, 1995). Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas put forth legislation that was financed in a similar manner post-World War II, with the appropriation of government surplus. President Truman signed the Fulbright Act in 1946. As Dubois (1995) explains, “the international exchange program was intended to prepare the leaders of the future, in hopes of achieving permanent peace based on mutual understanding” (p. 2).

In 1948, the Fulbright Program officially began and flourished in the new peace-seeking climate post-WWII (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2003). This was the same year that the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors, or NAFSA, was founded to "promote the professional development of U.S. college and university officials responsible for assisting and advising the 25,000 foreign students who had come to study in the United States after World War II" (NAFSA, 2003). This organization, now known as NAFSA: Association of International Educators, evolved into a leader in the creation of opportunities for U.S. students in several areas of education abroad, including study abroad, exchange programs, and foreign language study. During this time, the IIE also grew, and in 1949 began to publish its annual report titled *Open Doors*, which would eventually be funded by the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Since 1949, *Open Doors* has provided a “comprehensive information resource” on international education exchange (IIE, 2014). The
report provides evidence of the constant expansion of study abroad programs, thus reflecting the desire of U.S. students to receive a more international education.

By the 1960s, study abroad in U.S. higher education continued to expand, and by the mid-1960s, U.S. students were studying abroad in more than 100 countries and territories (Hoffa, 2007). A landmark event in the history of the development of study abroad occurred in 1966 when President Johnson passed the International Education Act, which allocated federal funding to international education efforts at home and abroad. Among other things, the 1966 International Education Act called for “encouragement of innovations in international education programs for building international understanding” (Read, 1966, p. 406). This legislation paved the way for more study abroad opportunities for U.S. students and more reciprocal exchange, which led to the internationalization of U.S. college campuses. By the mid-20th century, study abroad had evolved into a respected and valuable vehicle for international education and understanding (Hoffa, 2007).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, U.S. student participation in study abroad programs continued to grow despite international conflicts in which the U.S. government was involved in Latin American and the Middle East, and terrorist attacks at home and abroad. At this point, the vast majority of students were traveling by commercial air to Western European nations (Hoffa & DePaul, 2010). By the late 1980s and the early 1990s, times were favorable for even further expansion of study abroad programs within the United States. The end of the Cold War led to the opening of borders and minds, and the forces of globalization became increasingly difficult to ignore. As the forces of globalization gained momentum, an obvious pattern of rapid expansion became very noticeable within the pages of Open Doors (IIE, 2013). During the 1990s, study
abroad was further supported by the U.S. government with the passing of the Boren Act, which included initiatives to create: (a) a stronger emphasis on the critical relationship between foreign relations and education, and (b) an allocation of significant government funds for students and institutions to advance international studies, foreign language studies, and study abroad programs (Dubois, 1995). The combination of these factors led to a significant surge in study abroad participation. Between 1991 and 2001, the number of U.S. students studying abroad more than doubled (IIE, 2013), though major world events were on the horizon at the dawn of the new millennium that would impact not only education abroad, but also international relations worldwide.

3. **American Study Abroad in a Post-9/11 World**

The terrorist attacks of 2001 altered global dynamics, bringing the East/West conflict to the surface, strengthening the case for increased international understanding and study abroad (Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, & Klute, 2012). Surprisingly, this event did not significantly impact the number of U.S. students participating in study abroad programs, though it did pose new challenges to international educators who needed to adapt to a new geopolitical landscape. Several major initiatives were taken in the years that followed 9/11 including the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program of 2004. The mandate of the commission was to examine new opportunities for the expansion of study abroad programs within the United States, and to strengthen the national framework to facilitate an increased number of undergraduate study abroad participants with each academic year. In addition to
creating the Lincoln Commission in 2004, at the end of 2005, the U.S. Senate voted unanimously to name 2006 as the “Year of Study Abroad.” In doing so, the U.S. government resolved to:

- Encourage secondary schools, institutions of higher learning, businesses, and government programs to promote and expand study abroad opportunities; and encourage the people of the United States to (A) support initiatives to promote and expand study abroad opportunities; and (B) observe the ‘Year of Study Abroad’ with appropriate ceremonies, programs, and other activities. (Senate Resolution 308, 2005)

In 2007, the most ambitious study abroad legislation occurred to date when the bipartisan Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act was introduced. This act aims to “address American students’ lack of information about international affairs and the needs to produce more foreign language speakers” (Crawford, 2007, p. 1). The ultimate goal of the legislation is to send at least 1 million U.S. undergraduates abroad every year funded with 80 million U.S. government dollars (Crawford, 2007). The U.S. House voted twice to pass the Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act, but it did not gain approval in the senate. Though it has yet to gain senate approval, the Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act signifies a triumph for proponents of the study abroad experience, for it recognizes the value and significance of nearly a century of official study abroad programs in the United States—programs which have given the gift of education abroad to generations of youth. Today, study abroad programs in the United States continue to grow and develop in terms of both participation and program diversity. In doing so, they are faced with new challenges, such as increasing overall participation, diversifying program options and participants, and figuring out how they might adapt their programs in the digital age—which was slowly beginning to impact the notion of immersion.
4. **Enrollment and Program Expansion**

Recent trends show that participation in U.S. study abroad programs has steadily increased. Aside from seeing a slight dip during the 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 academic years (attributed to the recession), participation in U.S. study abroad programs has more than tripled during the past 20 years. In the 2015–2016 academic year, approximately 313,415 U.S. students studied abroad for academic credit. This only represents approximately 1.6% of the U.S. higher education student population (IIE, 2016). At participation rate of less than 2%, this leaves room for significant expansion.

Virtually all disciplines are represented in modern-day study abroad programs from mathematics and computer sciences to the fine arts. Study abroad destinations also continue to diversify. At the official start of U.S. study abroad programs nearly a century ago, destinations were very limited, including mainly France, Spain, and a few other Western European countries. Program destinations slowly diversified in the 1930s–1950s as U.S. institutions starting sending groups to Mexico and Asia, and then Central and South America (Hofa, 2007). Today, while destinations in Western Europe remain the most popular, study aboard locations continue to expand with each passing academic year. Even though the United Kingdom, Italy, France, and Spain held the top four spots, nearly 13,000 U.S. students studied abroad in China during the 2014–2015 academic year (IIE, 2016). While Europe has always been the most popular host region—still currently accounting for just over 50% of all study abroad program destinations—the 2014-2015 academic year showed gains for other host regions including Latin America and the Caribbean, including Mexico (2%), Oceania (5.8%), and the Middle East and North Africa (7.8%) (IIE, 2016).
As funding and support continue to increase for study abroad, so do the range of experiences made available to participants. However, while destinations and focus of study have increased, the average program duration has decreased. In the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century, nearly three-fourths of U.S. students who studied abroad did so for an entire year (IIE, 2013). Today short-term study abroad programs (i.e., summer programs and those lasting less than 8 weeks) are the most popular, accounting for approximately 63\% of all U.S. study abroad (IIE, 2016). In the 2014–2015 academic year, long-term programs that sent students abroad for an academic or calendar year represented less than 2.5\% of all participation. The remaining percentage of students participated in mid-length programs lasting one quarter or semester (34.3\%), raising questions about the link between program duration and effectiveness.

While programs have made significant strides in terms of diversifying program type and destination, most study abroad programs struggle to diversify in terms of participants. College enrollment trends during the past few decades reveal an increase of the overall percentage of ethnic minority students, but this growth has not been reflected in study abroad participation (IIE, 2016). With the exception of Asian-American students, the representation of all other ethnic minority students in study abroad programs does not reflect overall enrollment percentages (Hoffa & DePaul, 2010). Not until the early 1990s did \textit{Open Doors} track the ethnicity of study abroad participants, but soon after it did, the underrepresentation of students of color was evident, thus prompting more of an emphasis on diversifying the pool of study abroad participants. Although some efforts have been made to increase the numbers of U.S. students of color in study abroad programs, including minority scholarships, underrepresentation persists, resulting in a significant racial gap.
Since the early 1990s, numerous authors have made note of the underrepresentation of Black participants in international education and study abroad programs (Conciatore, 1990; Hembroff & Rusz, 1993; Norton, 2008; Simon & Ainsworth, 2012; Zambito, 2002). Others have explored the underrepresentation of U.S. students with disabilities (Hebel, 2002; Shames & Alden, 2005) as well as student members of the GLBTQ community (Bryant & Soria, 2015; Jesurun, 2001; Phelps, 2002). Even though study abroad scholarship opportunities increase every year, today’s average study abroad participant is Caucasian and comes from a middle- to upper-class, educated family.

5. **Making the Case for Study Abroad**

Certainly, there is room for improvement in terms of both overall participation and diversity of participants in study abroad programs. This is why funding, both from government and private sources, is so important to help support access to the study abroad experience. Being that sentiments such as “it will change your life” or “you’ll come back a new person” (Dwyer & Peters, 2004) are commonly heard from students who are fortunate enough to get the opportunity to study abroad, concerted efforts should be made to ensure that the study abroad experience is more accessible. However, making the case for study abroad becomes increasingly difficult as costs for study abroad programs, as well as higher education in general, continue to rise. Because the costs to participate in a study aboard program are in addition to the costs for a student enrollment to their home institution, the financial investment needed to participate in a study abroad program is substantial. As with any substantial investment, evidence of return on investment is always in high demand. As the new variable of digital media
technology becomes an increasingly central aspect of the study abroad experience, new realities must be faced. Because contemporary media technologies keep parents and students in constant contact, “there is now less time for students to literally cut the strings and be independent” (Hoffa & DePaul, 2010, p. 319). This calls into question if learning objectives tied to psychological and sociocultural transformation can still be achieved in the digital age. In the following section, I trace the history of study abroad research which has led to current research focused on how the use of contemporary media technology while abroad may impact a student’s study abroad experience.

D. Investigating the Outcomes and Benefits of the Study Abroad Experience

As is evident in the discussion above, education abroad has evolved significantly over the course of history. Many factors (e.g., advancements in transportation, economic fluctuations, global politics, and technological developments) have impacted the experience. What has remained constant from the days of the grand tour to modern-day study abroad programs is that the experience has always required a costly investment, both in terms of time and money. As study abroad expanded within the United States, more students experienced its powerful educational benefits first-hand. Proponents of study abroad were quick to recognize that anecdotal evidence was not enough to gain the support needed to send more students abroad. As such, researchers have worked to compile evidence that the study abroad experience is worth the investment throughout the development of study abroad. Early research was very practical and applied, and offered anecdotal evidence of the benefits of the study abroad experience. The early literature also heavily focused on foreign language acquisition. The scope of research on study
abroad expanded as scholars began to explore research questions related to psychological and sociocultural impacts of the experience. As the pool of study abroad research expanded in scope, it became increasingly interdisciplinary, attracting scholars with backgrounds in many academic fields including education and linguistics, sociology, psychology, and communication. Today, a wide range of methods, both qualitative and quantitative, are represented in the research, and many tools (i.e., scales and indices) have been developed and applied to measure outcomes of the study abroad experience. In addition to the development of research tools, a development of a theoretical framework has helped to facilitate the evaluation, explanation, and prediction of such outcomes.

1. **Early Study Abroad Research**

As the first official study abroad programs commenced in the United States post-WWI, literature on the study abroad experience began to populate the pages of academic journals (Anibal, 1922; Breazeale, 1929; Coleman, 1925; Gibb, 1924; Harris, 1926; Harrington, 1931). Early study abroad literature was very practical and it was common for articles to include details on logistics such as finances, language requirements, and sample curricula for programs. Many of these early articles were published by *The Modern Language Journal* and had a heavy focus on foreign language acquisition as a by-product of the study abroad experience. Although foreign language acquisition has been a chief focus of study abroad research from the beginning, even the earliest literature acknowledged the experience offered powerful educational benefits that went beyond acquisition of new language skills. One of the first articles recounted one U.S. student’s experience attending a Spanish university (Anibal, 1922). Although the author
addressed some of the difficulties of the experience, an emphasis was put on all Spain had to offer intellectually and culturally. The article concluded with a request: “I plead on behalf of other graduate students that credit be given by American universities for mere sojourn in France or in Spain” (Anibal, 1922, p. 327). Anecdotal evidence was soon supplemented by the development of empirical evidence of the value of study abroad.

In 1934, Holden carried out one of the first empirical studies was published that investigated the study abroad experience, having gathered data by surveying study abroad alumni. Data was collected on geographical location and occupation of survey participants. Open-ended questions about the experience were also posed to participants. “Typical judgments” of the value of participants’ experiences included “immeasurable benefits—one cannot have such an experience without having his whole outlook consequently widened. . . . I can’t even begin to estimate its value—in every way it has been the greatest experience in cultural education for me” (Holden, 1934, p. 199). Holden (1934) was the first of many to tap into the wealth of positive, even glowing sentiments and endorsements offered by study abroad alumni.

As U.S. study abroad programs began to grow in support and participation post-WWII, so did the academic work carried out on study abroad and other international experiences. While many articles were still only theoretical or anecdotal (Abrams, 1960; Hendrick, 1960), some scholars empirically tested hypotheses related to psychological and sociological transformations of study abroad alumni (Burnham, Trendler, & Harris, 1966; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1966). This early research found preliminary evidence linking the study abroad experience and positive attitude changes among participants. In Gullahorn and Gullahorn’s (1996) study, attitude
changes experienced by study abroad participants were framed as “personal developments,” which related to both self-perspective and general perspectives about participants’ home and host country. Participants who reported greater personal development also reported “extensive interaction with host nationals” (p. 42).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, much of the research of study abroad still maintained a heavy focus on investigating the link between study abroad and foreign language acquisition/mastery (Ali, 1982; Armstrong, 1982; Balke, 1980; Luce, 1976). Not surprisingly, these studies provided strong evidence that the study abroad experience aided in the achievement of language fluency. As programs continued to develop and diversify, more scholars began to investigate more thoroughly potential benefits beyond language acquisition. This research proved to be vital for the development of study abroad programs, which were on average becoming shorter in duration, and therefore increasingly less likely to have foreign language acquisition as a primary goal.

2. **Contemporary Study Abroad Research**

Today, the case for study abroad rests largely upon scholars’ ability to produce evidence that the experience is likely to result in beneficial outcomes for its participants, and is therefore worth the costly investment for both students and academic institutions. The range of beneficial outcomes expanded over time from foreign language skills to include a wide range of personal developments, which can also be regarded as processes of mental maturation. Within the extant collection of contemporary study abroad research, two major categories of beneficial outcomes emerge outside of language acquisition: psychological and sociocultural. Examples of
the psychological benefits that have been linked to the study abroad experience include personal growth (including increased levels of self/emotional awareness, open-mindedness, and self-esteem), as well as both intellectual and professional development. Examples of sociocultural benefits include worldview shifts (including increased levels of global mindedness/perspective), and improved intercultural competence and sensitivity, which can involve among other things a decreased reliance on stereotypes. In the past 25 years, many research projects have been successful in adding evidence to the argument that these psychological and sociocultural outcomes are commonly linked to the study abroad experience, in other words moving beyond “It was great” (Wong, 2015, p. 121).

a. **A new age for study abroad research**

In 1990, one of the most famous, if not the most significant, attempts to investigate comprehensively the psychological and sociocultural impact of the U.S. study abroad experience was published. In their pivotal work, Carlson et al. (1990) reported the findings of the Study Abroad Evaluation Project (SAEP). The authors noted that although study abroad was a quickly expanding field within U.S. higher education, very little systematic research had been carried out on outcomes of the experience. The research was regarded as a landmark study because it was not only comprehensive, but also gathered data from a comparison group—students that had stayed on campus during their junior year. Carlson et al. (1990) investigated several questions including who chose to study abroad, and what changes occurred in the control and treatment groups. Although the demographics of the control and treatment groups did not differ significantly on most dimensions (i.e., age, gender, socioeconomic background), one
distinguishing factor was that the students who participated in the study abroad programs were more likely to be pursuing degrees within the humanities, social sciences, and education. They were also much more likely to report a desire to “experience new cultures and to learn the language of the host country” (Carlson et al., 1990, p. 9).

Carlson et al.’s (1990) findings revealed that the treatment group reported significantly higher levels of “cultural interests,” defined as an awareness of problems in countries outside of the United States, while the control group reported higher levels of “domestic orientation,” which related to increased levels of ethnocentric sentiments. In regard to changes reported after their junior year, the findings revealed that the treatment group (i.e., those who studied abroad) demonstrated an increased ability to evaluate their college experience at home with a much more critical eye. Not surprisingly, the treatment group also reported to have learned more outside of the classroom. Similar to Gullahorn and Gullahorn’s (1966) earlier findings, Carlson et al. (1990) argued that the most important aspect of the study abroad experience was interaction with locals, which took place outside of the classroom in contexts such as participating in extracurricular clubs, attending cultural events, traveling, or people watching. Engaging in conversation with host nationals was also strongly linked to increased levels of personal knowledge, self-confidence, independence, cultural awareness, and social abilities.

b. \textit{Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad}

Since the 1990s, research on the study abroad experience has continued to develop as new questions have emerged. Evidence of the mounting importance of the development of study abroad research was made evident in 1995 when \textit{Frontiers: The}
Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad was founded. Frontiers is the first and only academic journal dedicated to research on study abroad, publishing a wide range of literature from intellectual essays and reflections on the study abroad experience (Honigblum, 2002; Johnson, 2013; Reilly & Senders, 2009), to empirical assessments of the impact of study abroad program effectiveness both in the short-term and longitudinally (Bender, Wright, & Lopatto, 2009; Rexeisen, Anderson, Lawton, & Hubbard, 2006; Stebleton, Soria, & Cherney, 2013; Stephenson, 1999). Frontiers also provides a venue for scholars to develop and introduce more robust theoretical frameworks including classifications of study abroad models and assessment matrices (Engle & Engle, 2003; Kaufman, Ekstrom, & Shortridge-Baggett, 2006).

One such framework was presented in 2003 by Engle and Engle who argued that in order to “intelligently analyze” data gathered about study abroad outcomes, analysis of the data needs to include a categorization of the types of experiences that occur. Noting that “no classification system could take into account the unlimited variety of combinations,” Engle and Engle (2003) proposed a five-level typology which reflected differences on the following dimensions: (a) duration (i.e., short- to long-term), (b) entry target-language competence, (c) language used in coursework, (d) academic work context (i.e., is curriculum led by home institution faculty? local faculty? a combination of the two?), (e) housing, (f) provisions for cultural interaction/experiential learning, and (g) guided reflection on experience. It should be noted that all but one of these variables impact the degree of host national interaction.

Different combinations of these variables distinguish between types of programs. For example, in a study tour, participants go abroad for several days to a few weeks, are housed collectively in dorms or hotels, and are instructed by faculty from their home institution, thus
limiting participants’ interaction with host nationals and the host culture. A *cultural immersion program* alternatively sends students abroad for an entire semester or academic year; students stay individually with local families and are often directly enrolled in local universities. This is believed to maximize participants’ interaction with host nationals and the host culture (Engle & Engle, 2003). In addition to host national exposure, program duration is one particular variable of special interest to researchers.

Many studies have focused on finding a relationship between program duration and the achievement of certain outcomes (i.e., program effectiveness). While the idea that ‘more is better’ has long been supported in the literature, the influx of shorter programs has spurred new evidence that such programs can be “enormously effective” in enabling study abroad participants to achieve desired outcomes of the experience (Dwyer & Peters, 2004). Research on short-term programs reveals that key outcomes such as global awareness, global competence, and language acquisition can result from short-term programs that last as little as 2 weeks (Motley, 2013). However, there is strong evidence that these and other sociocultural variables are experienced in significantly higher levels in long verses short-term programs (Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Kehl & Morris, 2008; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Zorn, 1996).

Although options were limited in the earlier study abroad programs, today’s study abroad experience for the U.S college/university student varies on a wide array of dimensions from program duration to level of foreign language use. The goal of early programs was somewhat narrowly focused on second language acquisition/mastery, but the goals of the modern-day experience are much less clear-cut. This is evidenced in the ever-expanding pool of research that investigates the outcomes of the study abroad experience (i.e., if the goals of study abroad
programs been achieved). Indeed, the outcomes measured vary just as widely as the study abroad programs.

A meta-analysis of study abroad research carried out in 2008 revealed two main findings. First, out of a sample of 20 studies (all focused on measuring the psychological shifts/gains in study abroad participants), each examined at least one culturally-related variable. Second, out of those 20 studies, 25 different variables were assessed, and of those 25, only three variables were included in multiple studies (Stoner, 2008). While several studies measured similar-sounding variables like “global perspective” and “world mindedness,” the extent to which these key terms were defined made it unclear if any significant difference exists. Labels are not routinely given to variable categories in most study abroad research, but the two major themes of psychological and sociocultural transformation are still evident. Although the two categories of psychological and sociocultural outcomes are not routinely given, these categories are much more clearly represented in the theoretical literature on cultural adjustment, which I will explore further in the next section. Even though patterns from research reveal that the goals of most study abroad programs include a range of psychological and sociocultural outcomes, what is specifically included within these two categories is not always clearly articulated.

c. **Identifying and finding evidence of desired outcomes**

The range of variables involved in a given study abroad experience is expanding continuously. As variables increase, so does the range of goals/desired outcomes for those who create and oversee study abroad programs as a component of the higher education learning experience. In an effort to address issues of inconsistency and ambiguity in terms of
study abroad program outcomes, the Forum on Education Abroad began a collaborative project with the International Beliefs and Values Institute (IBAVI) in 2007 to identify the principle “outcomes of international, multicultural, and transformative learning” (Forum, 2010, n.p.). These outcomes include: “(a) basic openness, (b) the tendency not to (or not to) stereotype in certain ways, (c) self- and emotional awareness, (d) preferred strategies for making sense of why ‘other’ people and cultures ‘do what they do,’ (e) global engagement (e.g., receptivity to different cultures, religions and social practices), and (f) worldview shift (e.g., to what degree do beliefs and values change as a result of specific experiences)” Forum, 2014, n.p.). Broadly, each of these six dimensions is representative of a psychological or sociocultural trait, which reflect the history of research assessing these desired outcomes.

Although there are some contradictions, the majority of recent study abroad research has helped to build the argument that study abroad is indeed worth the costly investment required, providing evidence of a strong link between the study abroad experience and the desired psychological and sociocultural transformation for participants. Specific psychological transformation that empirical evidence has linked to the study abroad experience include: (a) intellectual growth (Bates, 1997; Carlson et al., 1990; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Raby, Rhodes, & Biscarra, 2014); (b) personal growth or self-awareness (Black & Duhon, 2006; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Hadis, 2005; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Raby et al., 2014; Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005; Zorn, 1996); and (c) professional development (Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Lindsey, 2005). Specific sociocultural benefits include: (a) intercultural sensitivity (Anderson et al., 2008; Engle & Engle, 2004; Williams, 2005); (b) world mindedness (Boatler, 1992; Bond, Koont, Stephenson, 2005; Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001; Hadis, 2005); (c) intercultural competence (Penington & Wildermuth, 2005; Salisbury, An, & Pascarella, 2013;
While the vast majority of study abroad research provides evidence that these desired psychological and sociocultural outcomes are byproducts of the study abroad experience, it should be noted that there are a small number of studies that examine potential negative impacts of study abroad (e.g., Herman, 1970; Nash, 1976; Salter & Teger, 1975; Schroeder, Wood, Galiardi, & Koehn, 2009; Tusting, Crawshaw, & Callen, 2002). For example, Tusting et al. (2002) found evidence that even though study abroad participants were made more aware of certain cultural generalizations, they nonetheless continued to rely on those generalizations post-sojourn. Schroeder et al. (2009), suggest that short term study abroad programs may do damage and impose hardships on their host communities exacerbating environmental issues such as water shortages, proper garbage disposal and pollution.

Interestingly enough, with the exception of a few studies (Carlson et al., 1990; Engle & Engle, 2004; Stebleton et al., 2013), the majority of research focused on psychological and sociocultural outcomes on does not account for the variable of level of host national interaction, which can vary widely based on the type of program and even the personality of the individual participant. If host national interaction is arguably one, if not the, significant variables in regard to for both sociocultural and psychological development, then it stands to reason that this would be an important variable to measure in relation to reported developments. However, this variable is only one of many that can have a major impact on the experience.

With each with passing academic year, more is learned about the study abroad experience. But as the experience evolves, it becomes increasingly more complex and therefore
more difficult to study. As study abroad becomes a more common component of the traditional college experience, new questions emerge. Since the experience is dynamic in nature, it is constantly changing and evolving. Therefore, the question, “what are the outcomes of the study abroad experience?” must be continually investigated. As one of the participants from one of the first empirical studies poignantly stated, the study abroad experience brings with it “immeasurable benefits” (Holden, 1934). Over the years, many have taken on the challenge of measuring what may seem immeasurable—the outcomes and benefits of the study abroad that make it such a valuable experience. The vast majority of resulting research provides evidence that these desired outcomes are byproducts of intercultural contact (i.e., interaction with host nationals) afforded by the study abroad experience. As discussed in greater detail below, intercultural contact is a very difficult phenomenon to both conceptualize and operationalize, especially in the case of study abroad, which is by no means a uniform experience for those who have the opportunity to participate.

d. **Study abroad as intercultural contact**

*Intercultural contact*, defined as the experience of communicating with a different culture, is “as old as recorded history” (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001, p. 4). What has changed in regard to this phenomenon in recent history is the scope and capacity with which this contact is taking place. Ward et al. (2001) described this change as a “quantum increase in the movement of people across national and ethnic boundaries” (p. 4). The potential consequences of intercultural contact are vast. The phenomena of culture shock and cultural adjustment are two such consequences.
Within the realm of study abroad research, cultural adjustment is a major issue, though only a fraction of the research has investigated it (Anderson, 1971; Befus, 1988; Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Brislin, 1981; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Church, 1982; Cox, 2004; Cullingford & Gunn, 2005; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Gudykunst, 2005; Harrison, 2011; Kim, 2001; Lysgaard, 1955; Mumford, 1998; Oberg, 1960; Pedersen, 1995; Searle & Ward, 1990; Wu & Mak, 2011; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). For the purposes of this research, the term *cultural adjustment* is used to refer to psychological and/or sociocultural changes or transitions (as described above) experienced by study abroad participants during or after a period of intercultural contact. This is inclusive of interaction with host nationals as well as other general experiences with the host culture. The following section approaches culture from a theoretical standpoint, first examining the question, “what is culture?” followed by the concepts of culture shock and cultural adjustment.

3. **Conceptions of Culture**

As the concept of cultural adjustment is rooted in the notion of *culture*, it is a construct that is very difficult to define. “Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language . . . mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought” (Williams, 1976, p. 87). Due to its conceptual complexity, the word *culture* has been defined in a seemingly infinite number of ways. Ask 100 individuals to define culture and you are likely to get 100 different replies, none of which are necessarily more accurate that another. The notion of culture is completely subjective—this is what makes the study of culture such a daunting task.
Even though defining culture poses a wide range of problems, many scholars have offered an explanation. Some describe it as a “philosophy of life” (Gullestrup, 2002, p. 2) or “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings” (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). Zaiontz, Arduini, Buren, and Fungi (2012) referred to culture as “a network of meaning” (p. 79). A more detailed definition emphasizes the notion that culture is constantly evolving:

An inter-generational and continually changing pattern of collective intellectual creativity accruing from the challenges posed by historical, physical, geographical and social environments, and reflected in the knowledge created, skills, values, beliefs and general world view of an identifiable people. (Mushi, 2004, p. 181)

Mitchell (1995) contended that culture is “victim of infinite regress,” and that “if culture is assigned ontological status, then it must be definable in an internally coherent and inclusive manner” (p. 107). But, as Mitchell (1995) further explained, theorists almost always find themselves calling upon external concepts which can then not be defined in an “internally coherent and inclusive manner”; the result are definitions of culture that “end up referring to nothing (or everything)” (p. 108).

Even though individuals throughout history have struggled to define the meaning of culture—and will undoubtedly continue to do so in the future—it is perhaps less important to put into words what culture is, than to acknowledge culture as a powerful guiding force of behavior which is developed in a unique context. In investigation of study abroad, it is vital to recognize the impact of that force when taken out of its context of origin, which commonly results in a jarring and unsettling experience often referred to as culture shock. Culture shock is commonly regarded as the initial stage of the larger process known as cultural adjustment or adaptation. Sobre-Denton and Hart (2008) noted that the term culture shock has “often been used
interchangeably” with the term cross-cultural adaptation, but that culture shock is considered by many scholars to be “a stage in the cross-cultural adaptation process” (p. 538).

4. **Culture Shock**

The discussion of culture shock is very common within the larger field of cross-cultural adaptation in relation to all groups of sojourners (Anderson, 1971; Befus, 1988; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Church, 1982; Cox, 2004; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Mumford, 1998; Nolan, 1990; Oberg, 1960; Pantelidou & Craig, 2006; Sobre-Denton & Hart, 2008; Ward et al., 2001; Zaiontz et al., 2012; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). Oberg (1960) is credited with creating the term *culture shock*. However, Cox (2004) pointed out that the term was actually coined by Dubois in 1951, then popularized by Oberg in his 1960 article—an article which has been cited in numerous subsequent articles. Oberg (1960) defined culture shock as “anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (p. 177). Oberg (1960) called culture shock an “occupational disease of people who have been suddenly transplanted abroad” (p. 177). This loss of all familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse is coupled with an inundation with unfamiliar signs and symbols of social intercourse, and has long been characterized by the use of extreme negative constructs such as fear, helplessness, hostility, anger, frustration and a “terrible longing to be back home” (p. 178). Berry (2009) argued that the experience of culture shock has negative consequences on the emotional health and overall satisfaction of the sojourner, motivating the sojourner to learn a new set of social skills specific to the new culture that allows him/her to better fit into the new environment. Kim (2006) referred to this process as the “reorganizing” of oneself.
The majority of literature on culture shock operationalizes the phenomenon by its negative characteristics. Befus (1988) wrote, “Culture shock may be briefly defined as that period of transition and adjustment during which a person who has been relocated experiences some degree of anxiety, confusion, and disruption related to living in the new culture” (p. 381). Taft’s (1977) explanation of the phenomenon identified six components: strain, loss, rejection, confusion, surprise, and impotence. Although the process begins as a negative/unpleasant experience, culture shock is believed to trigger positive psychological and sociocultural effects.

Clearly the term shock was strategically chosen to indicate some sort of extreme reaction which occurs when “an individual is plunged into a culture vastly different from his own” (Anderson, 1971, p. 1211). As Nolan (1990) pointed out, frustration and a sense of loss “are an essential part of the transition process” (p. 20). Nolan (1990) argued that the experience of culture shock should not be labeled as a disorder; that culture shock is an essential part of the “learning cycle,” which is inherently stressful. By means of these stressful encounters, individuals integrate “new patterns of meaning” and have the opportunity for “self confrontation” (Nolan, 1990, p.11). Nolan (1990) also stressed the value of any transnational experience, explaining it can act as a “looking-glass self” and allow individuals to gain insight into their lives and personalities as products of a particular culture (Nolan, 1990, p. 20). Based on this argument, the experience of culture shock can serve as a trigger to allow individuals to experience new patterns of learning, which can result in both psychological and sociocultural development.
5. **Cultural Adjustment/Adaptation/Transition**

Just like culture itself, the concept of cultural adjustment involves a vast number of interacting elements. The phenomenon of cultural adjustment often begins with a stage of disorientation or shock, and is a dynamic and complex process. In the literature, both academic and nonacademic, the concept goes by many names including various combinations of *cultural, intercultural, or cross-cultural; and transition, adjustment, or adaptation*. This concept—regardless of how it is termed—features in the study abroad literature that investigates the processes that lead to specific outcomes like increased self-awareness and global mindedness. Although the dictionary definition of *intercultural*—“of, relating to, involving, or representing different cultures” (Intercultural, 2017)—and *cross-cultural*—“comparing or dealing with two or more different cultures” (Cross-cultural, 2017), are distinct within study abroad research, there seems to be flexibility in the definitions that allow the terms to be used interchangeably. There is also little to no evidence in the literature to suggest that these terms are used differently when referring to the process of cultural adjustment.

While *transition* is used as an umbrella word for *change*, parsing out the difference between the notions of *adjustment* and *adaptation* within the literature is much more complicated. Adaptation and adjustment have different connotative meanings, but the denotative meanings of the two words refer to one another in their definitions (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2005). Kim (2001) was one of the few scholars to make a distinction between the terms adjustment and adaptation, and essentially made the argument that one encompasses the other. Kim (2001) argued that the term *adjustment*, along with the word *coping*, has been “employed to refer to psychological responses to cross-cultural challenges” (p. 31). For Kim (2001), cross-cultural adaptation is the “more generic and overarching” concept defined as “the
dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments” (p. 31). Kim’s (2001) distinction is not widely acknowledged in the field, and as a result both adaptation and adjustment are used to refer to psychological and sociocultural changes that occur for the international sojourner as a result of intercultural contact (i.e., interaction with host nationals) and the challenges that it poses.

Searle and Ward (1990) also noted that words adjustment and adaptation “have been used interchangeably” (p. 450). Harrison and Voelker (2008) defined cross-cultural adjustment as “the degree of a person’s psychological comfort with a variety of aspects of a host culture” (p. 70). Gudykunst (2005) similarly recognized this idea of comfort, describing intercultural adjustment as “a process involving feeling comfortable in the host culture, as well as communicating effectively and engaging in a socially appropriate behavior with host nationals” (p. 425). In this sense, cultural adjustment involves meeting the challenges of being in a new culture, and navigating a process that begins with discomfort (or shock), but often ends in finding a place of comfort within that new culture. Scholars acknowledge that this journey involves both psychological (Gudykunst, 2005; Harrison & Voelker, 2008) and sociocultural changes (Bochner, Lin, & McLeod, 1980), which can then be observed through the acquisition of new behaviors, skills, and norms that are deemed appropriate within the context of the new environment. As Searle and Ward (1990) contended,

a review of the literature demonstrates that the construct [adjustment] has implicitly incorporated both a psychological dimension—feelings of well-being and satisfaction—as well as socio-cultural component—the ability to ‘fit-in’ and negotiate interactive aspects of the new culture. (p. 450)
The concept of *acculturation*, which has also been used interchangeably with the terms adjustment and adaptation (Seale & Ward, 1990), has been defined in several different ways. Wu and Mak (2012) referred to it as an “umbrella term used to describe the degree of identification with a host culture and the adoption of a host cultural practices” (p. 85). Zaiontz et al. (2012) described acculturation as “the process by which an individual acquires a new set of cultural information by means of contact with other cultures and/or influenced by an ‘external’ culture” (p. 67). Most of the literature that explicitly defines acculturation converges upon an interpretation that focuses on how international sojourners incorporate aspects of a new culture into their lives.

6. **Cultural Adjustment: Then and Now**

Regardless of the term used—adjustment, adaptation, or acculturation—each has been traditionally regarded a process that challenges an individual’s worldview, perspective, and way of life, which is commonly accompanied by psychological and sociocultural changes. Culture shock as an early stage of the larger process of cultural adjustment has been regarded as an essential part of the learning process that motivates individuals to reflect, “re-organize” themselves, and create “new patterns of meaning” (Nolan, 1990). Until fairly recently, culture shock was likely for those who chose to venture out on an international sojourn, including the average study abroad participant. In the digital age, however, it can no longer be assumed. Although today’s study abroad participants still experience the loss of familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse, and are inundated with unfamiliar social cues in the physical sense, they are
likely to maintain easy access to familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse in a digital or virtual context.

A set of underlying assumptions of the study abroad experience has long been held. First, through the study abroad experience, a participant is exposed to intercultural contact of varying intensity. Second, the process of being removed from one’s own culture and being exposed to an increased level of intercultural contact is likely to prompt the feeling of culture shock. Third, the experience of culture shock has been explained as an early stage of the broader process of cultural adjustment, which research has shown to be frequently embodied by the study abroad participant through evidence of certain psychological and sociocultural transformations. Finally, these transformations (e.g., open mindedness, worldview shifts, and self-awareness) are considered to be valuable learning outcomes of the study abroad experience.

As previously discussed, the rise of the digital age has added a new variable into the equation, and calls into question many of the dynamics in the process of cultural adjustment. Although today’s international sojourner (here, the study abroad participant) is still likely to experience the phenomenon of culture shock, that individual’s options of coping with the “occupational disease” (Oberg, 1960) have increased. Culture shock is still a reality for the international sojourner in the digital age as the experience of being suddenly physically transplanted abroad can indeed still bring with it negative consequences on the emotional health and overall satisfaction of the sojourner. What has changed are the options that are now available to cope with this “occupational disease.” In the past, the experience of culture shock was more likely to motivate the sojourner to learn a new set of social skills specific to the new culture that allow him/her to fit better into the new environment, simply because that was more or less the
only option for coping. In the digital age, the international sojourner has more options for dealing with culture shock, and some of these options for coping may have the potential to change or inhibit subsequent stages of cultural adjustment.

Being that today familiar signs and symbols are often just a click away, the constant connectivity afforded by contemporary media technology allows individuals to maintain all personal and social links while abroad. Constant connectivity means not having to be disconnected from a social network and, more broadly, not having to disconnect from one’s culture or “network of meaning” (Fungi, 2012). Coping with culture shock by maintaining a strong connection to home networks impacts the cultural adjustment process traditionally marked by a high level of interaction with and subsequently learning from host nationals. This raises many questions, including how have the experiences of the international sojourner (i.e., the study abroad participant) changed in the digital age? Before exploring these questions in greater detail, a review of the development of the media technology that created this shift is useful. In the following chapter, I explore media theory and the concept of technology in order to establish a theoretical foundation with which to examine the intersect of developing media technology and the study abroad experience.
III. THE IMPACT OF MEDIA TECHNOLOGY ON THE STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE

In the following chapter, I explore the role of technology and media both within the context of the human experience and the study abroad experience. First, I discuss technology as a form of human expression. Second, I explore the phenomenon of media as technology and its impact. Lastly, I discuss the role of new media along with its potential impact on cultural adjustment and potential learning outcomes in relation to the study abroad experience.

A. **Technology as Human Expression**

The role that technology plays in society is constantly evolving and exceedingly complex. This relationship between the human and technology has been a subject of scholarly inquiry since Ancient Greece as evidenced in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (Nicholson, 1999). Because the role of technology is so deeply embedded in the human experience, its influence on humanity is difficult to interpret, often creating a paradox: technology simultaneously helps overcome obstacles, while often creating new problems. Technology is embodied in both the physical products of innovation and the abstract products of the mind, but all too often it is conceptualized in a manner that detaches it from the larger processes of human communication, to which it is inextricably linked (McLuhan, 1964).

Although some authors suggest that defining technology is an exercise in futility (Misa, 2009), many have put forth an interpretation (Forbes, 1968; Greenfield, 2006; Leiss, 1990; Mesthene, 1979). Although the binary of human and machine in many cases persists—Elizabeth
Goodman of Intel Research asserts that “technology is . . . that which by definition is unnatural” (as cited in Greenfield, 2006, p. 28)—it is important to acknowledge technology as a form of human expression. A definition offered by Forbes (1968) helps to communicate this human aspect more effectively: technology is “the product of interaction between man and environment based on a wide range of real or imagined needs and desires which guide man in his conquest of nature” (as cited by Leiss, 1990, p. 25). I have adopted this definition for use in this study, though the word “conquest” has been omitted in favor of the word “interaction,” for the product of the relationship between humankind and its environment need not involve defeat or takeover, and can just as easily facilitate harmony between the two. Because of its symbiotic relationship to society and social interaction, technology impacts the human experience on all levels imaginable, ranging from how individuals fulfill their most basic physiological needs, to more complex needs involving individuals’ sense of interpersonal connection and self-actualization.

1. **Media as Technology**

If technology is a product resulting from the interaction between humankind and its environment, then perhaps media also can be described as a product—a product of the human need or desire to communicate and create shared meaning. This desire to communicate is evidenced through the evolution of media technology from written language, to the telegraph, to the Internet—each of which has enabled humankind to communicate more efficiently and have effectively led to the erosion of boundaries once created by time and space. Media’s ability to transcend time and space is a concept of paramount importance in many canonical media theory
texts (Carey, 1989; Innis, 1950; McLuhan, 1964; Postman, 1993). In the literature, the terms *media* and *technology* are often seen in tandem, and in other cases used synonymously. Meyrowitz (1985) wrote, “media are many things at once: technologies, cultural artifacts, personal possessions, vessels for storing and retrieving cultural content and forms, and political and economic tools” (p. 331). Media can be viewed as the technology of communication and therefore how information is created and shared. Thus, developments in media drive the information revolution.

According to Postman (1993), there have been five stages in the information revolution. The first stage, the print revolution, brought about an explosion of information—the book begot a mobility of communication and ideologies like never before. The second stage was ushered in by telegraphy, which birthed the watershed moment when communication and transportation were first separated from one other. Postman (1993) argued that soon after the invention of the telegraph, the idea that “if something could be done it should be done” was born (p. 42), further arguing that the aim of invention was “objectivity, efficiency, expertise, standardization, measurement and progress” (p. 42). The invention of photography triggered the third stage in which society was given what began as a complement to language, but soon began to replace language as the leading way to perceive, interpret, and question reality. In the late 19th century, broadcast technology created the next stage, bringing information in new forms with unprecedented amounts and speeds. Digital/modern computer technology emerged as the latest stage of the information revolution. At its most basic level, digital communication involves “systems and media dependent on electronic computation” (Lunenfeld, 2000, p. xv), which translate input into binary structures allowing for unprecedented ease of storage, transfer, and manipulation.
Modern media technology (i.e., new media) has resulted in the hypermobility of people, information, and culture. The term new media—while perhaps a moving target for definition—can be defined as the amalgamation of technology, skills, and processes that result from advances/progress in how media is used. Today’s new media is electronic or digital, and the technology skills and processes involved make new media change so quickly that it is impossible to define fully just what those tools and processes are. The new media of today offers unparalleled opportunities to transcend constraints of time and space, which are a hallmark of the digital age.

2. **Investigating Media Effects**

Throughout each of the five stages of the information revolution, media use and dependency has grown in society. By the mid-20th century, the use of electronic media had begun in earnest to be tracked systematically by researchers both in the academic and commercial industry realms (Bartlett, 1947; Coffin, 1955). Early research showed significant trends and revealed that with each passing year, electronic media consumption played a more integral part in the lives of individuals, families, and communities, and resulted in significant social consequences (Bartlett, 1947). Since this time, questions surrounding media effects have only grown in relevancy as use of and dependency on media technology has exponentially increased.

Bartlett (1947) argued early on that an increased listenership of broadcast radio was beginning to have significant impacts on a societal level, including public affairs and, more specifically, government election results. By the 1950s, television had overtaken radio as the newest new media—the growth of broadcast television as an industry was unparalleled (Coffin,
1955). This was the catalyst for a spike in media research that posed an increasingly wide range of questions on how media consumption can affect its users, thus establishing the foundation for the branch of communication research that would eventually be labeled “media effects.” As electronic media use continued to grow, more robust media effects research developed and a variety of theoretical approaches emerged. Two of the most widely recognized approaches in media effects research are cultivation analysis and uses and gratifications. Although the two theoretical approaches, detailed below, were developed in the mid- to late 20th century, these ideas aid in the exploration of questions surrounding the use of today’s new media.

Cultivation analysis grew out of early media violence research with a media effects research project led by Gerbner and Gross (Gerbner, Gross, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, & Signorielli, 1977) called Cultural Indicators. The aim of this long-term project was to trace trends in the dramatic content of network television along with how viewers conceived reality. Cultural Indicators is a three-pronged approach to media effects. The first prong, institutional process analysis, focused on the structure of the media industry; the second, message system analysis, investigated media message; and the third prong, cultivation analysis, was aimed as assessing the impact of the media’s messages. Of the three prongs, cultivation analysis is the most widely recognized aspect of the project. Cultivation analysis broadly is the idea that television consumption impacts a viewer’s perception of everyday life, positing that the higher the frequency or heavier the use of television, the more that the viewer is inclined to believe that media messages are representative of society. This assertion was based on the argument that television had grown to become “the primary common source of socialization” and was therefore “the single most pervasive source of certain conceptions and actions” (Gerbner, 1998, p. 3).
Since its creation, cultivation analysis has become a well-established perspective with a legacy that is still “vibrant and thriving” in the digital age (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010), though it has been subject to harsh criticism (Hirsch, 1980, 1981). Williams (2006) outlined some of the major criticisms including its irrefutability, false claims of causality, imprecise measurements of both content and exposure, and its tendency to overlook variation in individuals, such as their motivations for media use. Another critique is that although television does represent a primary source of socialization, it competes with other forces such as education, family and peers.

Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) is also a popular and enduring media effects theory. It was developed to examine the gratifications of media consumption that draw users, and in what ways media content can serve to fulfill social and psychological needs (Ruggiero, 2000), including but not limited to information gathering, entertainment/diversion, companionship, and escape (Lin, 2002). The theory also acknowledges that the content of any particular medium can serve a similarly wide range of functions. However, UGT has also been subject to criticism including the validity of its self-reported data, its focus on the individual, which is then problematic in term of its generalizability, and an incongruity of key concepts (i.e., needs and motives) (Ruggiero, 2000). Critiques notwithstanding, when compared to cultivation analysis, the greatest value of UGT lies its ability to go beyond questions of “how much” to explore questions of “why.” It is important to recognize that the dynamics of the media environment in the digital age are significantly different than those in the age dominated by the traditional mass media, when both cultivation analysis and UGT were created. Ruggiero (2000) explained digital media as a continuum with mass media on one end and interpersonal communication on the other. Nonetheless, researchers have adapted both approaches to use in the exploration of new media.
As new media grows in influence, so does its role in socialization. As mentioned above, one of the assumptions of cultivation analysis was that television represented an incredibly powerful agent of socialization in that it was a source for particular ideas and behaviors (Gerbner, 1998, p. 3). However, Chitosca (2006) argued that for younger generations, the Internet has emerged as a socializing agent just as powerful as traditional ones (i.e., education, family, and peers), due to its ability to facilitate “the relation of interdependency between the traditional agents of socialization” (p. 1). In other words, the Internet plays an even more key role in socialization, in that it has become intertwined with traditional agents of socialization in ways old media did not by facilitating the creation and maintenance of social networks. As the Internet evolves into an increasingly significant hub of human interaction, the cultivation perspective could perhaps have more heuristic value than ever before. This is largely as it was created to assess the impact of media as a source of socialization, asserting that the sheer amount of use of a pervasive medium can impact an individual’s perception of the world. Where the cultivation perspective aids in the analysis of the amount of media used, UGT can aid in the analysis of why media is used.

Early developers of UGT were quick to point out that not everyone consumed media (in this case television) with the same motive, and that television was not solely watched as an escapist activity (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972). McQuail et al. (1972) hoped to advance a “typology of viewer gratifications” (p. 444) which could help advance the understanding of media use beyond escapism, and recognize as well as examine a number of other important motives. The theory has proven productive in research of contemporary media (including social media) because it acknowledges the existence of a wide range of possible motivations for media use (Haridakis, 2012). For example, motivations for social media use include companionship, giving
and receiving showing affection, voyeurism, habitual behavior, entertainment, escapism, and professional development (Quinn, 2016). A multiplicity of uses and gratifications are characteristics of today’s digital media, thus creating an increasingly dynamic and complicated site of media consumption.

B. **Digital Media in Contemporary Life**

Contemporary society is a media-saturated environment. Recent figures indicate that the average U.S. adult is exposed to media a little over 12 hours a day, and 2013 marked the first year in which digital media consumption surpassed all other forms of media in time spent (Tribune Media Group, 2013). Digital media—including cellular phones, DVRs, personal computers, laptops and tablets—is now ubiquitous and consumed heavily. The versatility of digital media brings with it a growing number of platforms, which can be accessed from a growing number of geographical locations, further increasing media consumption. But just as digital media has impacted the rate of media consumption, it has perhaps more so impacted the dynamics of the media environment. Until recent years, an average individual’s media consumption was overwhelmingly dominated by messages produced by the traditional mass media (Short, 2013).

In the media environment of the recent past, the power held by the mass media was immense. However, digital media has brought with it a wide array of platforms, the power of which is being harnessed by a growing number of individuals that are not associated and/or affiliated with the organizations that make up the traditional mass media. The power lies in its versatility and its seemingly limitless reach, which gives users the opportunity to interact and
communicate with other individuals and groups based on personal wants and needs almost instantly. Digital communication “affords opportunities to communicate as desired”; a compulsion perhaps “more easily enacted via technology” (Walther, 1996, p. 33). Though this is arguably not a new trend—Postman (1993) declared a similar sentiment was born along with the telegraph—digital media has brought this notion to new heights with a new world of platforms and possibilities. Digital media technology has not only had a dramatic impact on the media landscape, it has also had an undeniable impact on social life and how its users perceive reality. As such, the trend of heavy media use in the United States is commonly attributed to the rise of social media, which attracts users with an interactive, customized and, more often than not, mobile experience. As consumption of social media continues to increase, so do questions and concerns about its psychological and sociocultural impacts on users both at home and abroad (Carr, 2011; Huesca, 2013; Turkle, 2012).

1. Social Networking and Social Media

Social networks have been at the center of human interaction since the age of the hunters and gatherers (Kadushin, 2012). Social networks provide a blueprint of the relationships between social entities. Developments in media and technology—from the telegraph to the automobile—have had great impacts on the structure and size of networks. Digital technology has ushered in a new era in which social networks are quickly migrating from a face-to-face setting to a virtual or online environment. Today, online social networks are developed and maintained through an ever-increasing number of portals and platforms broadly referred to as social networking sites. Ellison and boyd (2013) defined a social network site as
a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connection on the site. (p. 189)

Social networking sites are more commonly referred to as social media. Even though all media is inherently social, the term has only recently become ubiquitous as social networking sites have started distinguishing themselves from traditional forms of mass media in their ability to enable content sharing and more active participation by their users. Thus, the new world of social opportunities afforded by social media began to grow. The definition of social media has been expanded in this particular study because opportunities for digital social connection are not limited to social networking sites.¹ New media users can communicate with their social network through a number of digital platforms—many mobile—that can ultimately serve to maintain a connection both on the interpersonal and group level.

As social media infiltrates further dimensions of human interaction, scholars have started to investigate the effects of this newest media on society and the individual (Antheunis, Valkenburg, & Peter; 2012; Chen & Lee, 2013; Deters & Mehl, 2012; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Fox & Warber, 2013; Furukawa & Driessnack, 2012; Hu, Kim, Siwek & Wilder, 2017; Jiang & Hancock, 2013; Jordan et al., 2011; Kross et al., 2013; LaRose, Wohn, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2011; Martin & Rizvi, 2014; Papacharissi, 2010; Sandel, 2014; Valenzuela, Park, &

¹ For the purposes of this present research, the definition of social media will not only include social networking sites as defined above, but also any application of the Internet/World Wide Web (e.g., email, text chat, video chat), as well as the application of mobile networked devices (e.g., mobile phones) such as texting and voice/video calling.
Kee, 2009). The impact of social media is multidimensional, and the range of impact is not only wide, but often paradoxical for it simultaneously creates advantages and obstacles.

The use of social media can have significant impacts on interpersonal relationships, communities and one’s sense of identity—but research findings are often contradictory. Many scholars (Deters & Mehl, 2012; Ellison et al., 2007; Furukawa & Driessnack, 2012; Jiang & Hancock, 2013; Valenzuela et al., 2009) have reported findings on the benefits of social media use, such as increased satisfaction with life and self-esteem. Others (Jordan et al., 2011; Furukawa & Driessnack, 2012; Chen & Lee, 2013; Kross et al., 2013), however, have reported adverse effects such as loneliness and decline of well-being. This is also reflected in the research on the social media use of the international sojourner. Social media has shown the potential to enhance the experience of education abroad (Kim, Yun, & Yoon, 2009; Lee et al., 2012; Ye, 2006), but also to interfere with key goals of the experience (Kim, Izumi, & McKay-Semmler, 2008, 2009).

As the popularity of social media rises, so do the number of questions about this new media’s potential impacts. Quinn and Papacharissi (2014) outlined three major questions that are raised in both public discourse and in the research on social media: (a) What new dimensions of identity can develop in these rapidly evolving virtual environments (e.g., the networked self and networked individualism)?; (b) What new dimensions of social interaction are emerging when context converge (e.g., context collapse)?; and 3) What behaviors do different social spaces invite, on both online verses offline context? Quinn and Papacharissi (2014) argued that as social media research has developed, these questions have been addressed in relation to three themes: publicity, sociality, and privacy. This model offered by Quinn and Papacharissi (2014) provides
a valuable framework with which to analyze the complex interactions that occur on social media platforms while students travel abroad. In this research, I focus on the themes of publicity and sociality as part of the complex phenomenon of identity development and maintenance in an online context, a process which becomes even more complex when individuals are physically relocated to an unfamiliar physical environment—as is in the case of the study abroad experience. The third theme of privacy indeed plays an integral role in all social media interactions, but is beyond the bounds of this particular study. Study abroad participant’s social media interaction is further examined through the additional theoretical constructs of the networked individual, cocoon effect and echo chamber (discussed in more detail below).

a. **Publicity**

As explained by Quinn and Papacharissi (2014), publicity as an element of social media use begins at profile creation, which serves as a vehicle that enables the construction of identity. On social media sites, this identity is created through a combination of media including photos, videos, comments, and links to other materials. This performance of identity is also characterized by its social connections, which are displayed publicly as “friends” or “connections,” thus creating the networked self. The networked self can represent a more complex identity, as it has no geographical constraints. The networked self can be maintained within a network where one is not physically present, both in a nonnative culture while at home and in its native culture while abroad, which just as easily promotes or impedes the development of global perspective. Through the networked self, individual and collective identities are “presented and promoted” in tandem (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 305).
As the user develops their online identity through profile creation and maintenance, the individual works, whether consciously or subconsciously, to balance the dialectical tension between the public and the private. Self-disclosure plays a fundamental role in this process, and its relationship with personality dimensions such as self-esteem and overall satisfaction with life is the focus of an increasing amount of research. More specifically, recent research has shown contrasting findings in terms of the impact of social media issues surrounding self and identity. Kross et al. (2011) revealed a link between Facebook use and a decline in cognitive and affective well-being, and Jordan et al. (2011) found people perceive that their peers are happier than they are in reality. This distortion results in loneliness and dissatisfaction with life—a situation exacerbated by social networking sites like Facebook. Today, this phenomenon is commonly referred to as “Facebook envy” (Chen & Lee, 2013). However, other studies have revealed that use of the Internet’s social networking sites has been linked to increased satisfaction with life (Valenzuela et al., 2009), reduced feelings of loneliness (Deters & Mehl, 2012), and increased levels of self-esteem attributed to greater access to social capital (Ellison et al., 2007).

b. **Sociality**

Social connection, online or off, verifies an individual’s sense of identity and also defines social position. In both contexts, connections are created and maintained through the social practice of sharing. Early computer network researchers were quick to point out that the Internet can help build community with its ability to increase “people’s social capital, increasing contact with friends and relatives who live nearby and far away” (Wellman, 2001, p. 2001). That being said, a characteristic that distinguishes online networks from those offline is
that online networks are “inescapably flat” (Quinn & Papacharissi, 2014). In online spaces, it becomes a challenge for individuals to separate the content that they choose to share. This phenomenon has become known as *context collapse* (Marwick & boyd, 2010), as often relationships become decontextualized. This often results in uniformity between connections, resulting in the loss of nuances of each connection.

Although context collapse poses challenges to the management of social connections, research has shown that the use of social media can serve to benefit a range of interpersonal connections. Recent studies have revealed that being active on social networking sites can help increase the quality of online, offline, and mixed-mode friendships (Antheunis et al., 2012); that video-mediated communication can increase feelings of family connectedness and function (Furukawa & Driessnack, 2012; McClure & Barr, 2017); and that with the help of digital interpersonal media, long-distance romantic relationships are likely to have “equal or even more trust and satisfaction than their geographically close (GC) counterparts” (Jiang & Hancock, 2013). However, Fox and Warber (2013) found evidence that romantic couples that were active on social networking sites faced challenges and experienced conflict as a result of dialectical tensions including the balance between privacy and expression, dependence and independence.

c. **Networked individualism, the echo chamber, and the cocoon effect**

Even though research provides evidence that social media use can increase the size and diversity of a network and, in some cases, strengthen connections between dyads, some argue that *network individualism* is on the rise. “In the world of networked individuals, it is the person who is the focus: more than the family, the work unit, the neighborhood, and the
social group” (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Network individualism is further explained as a state in which networks are more loose and fragmented but can provide support on demand. This can thus weaken the strength of the community and increase the perceived strength and importance of the individual.

The phenomenon of networked individualism can also impact the pursuit of knowledge and subsequently how the individual perceives the world. Digital media technology is celebrated for having made possible an environment in which one can access a seemingly endless world of information at the touch of a button. As information, data and ideas quickly began to populate the pages of the World Wide Web, users of the Internet needed new ways to manage content. Eventually, with the use of special applications and software, the content of the World Wide Web became more customizable and personalized. What resulted was a “unique universe of information” for every individual user (Pariser, 2011). This customization has benefits in that an individual user is exposed less to messages that are not of interest to them. At the same time, individuals are also exposed less to messages that challenge their ideas and way of life.

Research has shown that technology supports the tendency to “read and link to like-minded sources” (O’Hara, 2014, p. 79), a phenomenon often referred to as the *echo chamber*. A 2013 study by the Pew Research Center provided evidence of the existence of echo chambers on the social media site Twitter (Mitchell & Hitlin, 2013). The study found that the repetition of certain ideas effectively drowned out competing ideas. Therefore, the representation of certain issues on Twitter did not mirror public opinion as measured by surveys (Mitchell & Hitlin, 2013). Martin (2013) similarly argued that when individuals accept the customization of digital media, they effectively insulate themselves from contrasting viewpoints, which inadvertently
reinforces their worldview and closes off their minds to “new ideas and experiences” (Martin, 2013, n.p). In this sense, the rise of networked individualism may hinder an individual’s ability to keep an open mind and develop perspectives based on new ideas and experiences.

Regular exposure to an echo chamber can lead to what is referred to as the cocoon effect, where people “surround themselves with only the political and social information that they find comforting, appealing and acceptable” (Dominick, 2013, p. 450). Media has arguably always had the ability to envelope, but today’s cocoon spun by digital media can be as mobile as the individual who lives inside, making its impact even more powerful.

How communication online impacts individuals’ lives offline has become a more salient question as online communication portals such as social networking sites surge in popularity. As recently as November 2016, it was reported that 69% of U.S. adults use social networking sites (Pew Research Center, 2017). Social networking sites are so popular that they have been acknowledged as an “obsession” for some (LaRose, Kim, & Peng, 2011). This raises questions about the possible harmful effects of heavy, habitual, or compulsive Internet use, including the potential for psychosocial maladjustment. The social skills model of Problematic Internet Use posits that compulsive Internet use can be a consequence of a preference for online communication (LaRose et al., 2011). This then serves as a precursor for negative social outcomes in professional, academic, and social contexts, including neglecting activities such as social gatherings, academic assignments, and work responsibilities (Caplan, 2005). While heavy Internet use can be linked to habitual or even compulsive use (Verplanken & Orbell, 2003), the amount of use alone does not qualify the behavior as compulsive. LaRose et al. (2011) found that
compulsive use “which is out of control of the user” was linked to maladjustment in first-year college students.

Part of the appeal, or even seduction, of digital media communication is that it can provide an individual with a line of constant connection to his/her network—a connection that now can go wherever the individual goes. “Ubiquitous network coverage and mobile digital communication devices” are likened to “putting everyone you know in your pocket” (Schandorf, 2012, p. 320). In this new reality, an individual does not need to disconnect from his/her social network, and is therefore more likely to be connected in an online (as opposed to offline) context. So, while new media offers the constancy of online connection, it has the potential to decrease an individual’s connection to the corporeal world. Digital technology can indeed expose individuals to new worlds online, but it can, at the same time, insulate and isolate individuals from the world offline.

Over the course of history, developments in media technology have changed how individuals experience the world. The impact of the digital revolution is apparent on a multitude of levels, and represented in the research through themes of identity creation and maintenance (publicity), personal relationship development (sociality), and the choice to isolate oneself from ideological challenges, thus creating an echo chamber. As social media quickly becomes a primary source of socialization, many questions are left unanswered involving digital media’s impact on different dimensions of human interaction.
C. **Digital Media’s Impact on Intercultural Communication and Adjustment**

Shuter (2011) acknowledged the escalating need for scholars “re-conceptualize” the meaning of intercultural communication in the digital age, as “new media has drastically altered intercultural contact, both enhancing and constraining intercultural transactions” (p. 241). Media technology has given people the ability to communicate across culture and countries, time and space in ways never before imagined; however, it has also shown its ability to insulate, isolate, and absorb shock. As mentioned above, it is difficult to exaggerate the role that media plays in the day-to-day life of the average person. Modern life is saturated with media, and as mobile capabilities increase, society comes closer to the realization of “ubiquitous computing,” which translates to “information everywhere” (Greenfield, 2006, p. 23). This presents another paradox: today individuals can just as easily explore the world from their computers or mobile devices from the comfort of home, as they can retreat back to the comfort of home while abroad. These possibilities are discussed below.

Creating new opportunities for the “virtual” exploration of new cultures is one of many ways that new media increases communication across cultures. As such, scholars have examined opportunities for intercultural learning in virtual or meditated environments (Aoki & Kimura, 2009; Diehl & Prins, 2008; Muller-Hartman, 2000). Aoki and Kimura (2009) explored cultural exchange via Facebook, and Diehl and Prins (2008) experimented with studying abroad in the virtual 3D-world of Second Life. Both studies provided evidence that virtual experiences can indeed prompt intercultural learning and lead to increased intercultural communication skills, phenomena often associated with more traditional processes of cultural adjustment such as the traditional study abroad model.
A growing number of scholars have attempted to find out more about the relationship between digital media technologies and the traditional process of cross-cultural adjustment/adaption that results through physical transportation to a new culture (Cemalcilar, Falbo & Stapleton, 2005; Chen, Bennett, & Maton, 2008; Kim, Izumi et al., 2008, 2009; Kim, Yun et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2012; Ruble, 2011; Sawyer & Chen, 2012; Shiau, 2015; Trebbe, 2007; Ye, 2006). A key theme throughout this research is the role that social support afforded by digital media plays in the adjustment process for international sojourners. The integral role of social support in the cultural adjustment process is also highlighted in research predating the digital revolution (Anderson, 1971; Church, 1982; Gudykunst, 1998). Social support is defined here as:

> [V]erbal 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 life experience. (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987, p. 19)

Ruble (2011) examined the role of online discussion boards/support groups in the adaptation processes of English-speaking individuals working temporarily in France. Ruble’s (2011) findings suggested the use of these discussion boards/support groups websites gave sojourners access to invaluable resources, arguing “the connections they are able to make on this website to individuals knowledgeable about their particular situation would not be possible otherwise” (p. 416). Ruble (2011) concluded that this was a valuable tool in the adaptation process.

In a study of Internet usage patterns of Chinese immigrants in Singapore, Chen (2010) measured time spent on three types of websites (i.e., Chinese websites, Singaporean websites, and overseas Chinese websites) and how use of these sites impacted overall adaptation processes. Chen’s (2010) findings revealed a positive correlation between social communication with host
nationals online and successful adaption in the host country. Chen (2010) also wrote that those who reported heavier use of the Chinese websites were “less adaptive” to the host country. While the role of social support is almost universally regarded as important, questions remain about the functions of different sources of social support in the adjustment process.

1. **Digital Media and International Education/Education Abroad**

   The objective of the study abroad experience is to expose participants to a social reality/network different from their own. However, if the social reality/network is increasingly experienced online and, therefore, mobile and constantly accessible, does this limit participants’ opportunity for reflection/reorganization and resulting psychological or sociocultural transformation? Martin and Rizvi (2014) pointed out that the binary of “back home/out here” is inadequate in the context of the diasporic mediasphere.

   The literature on the impacts of social media use on the traditional study abroad participant (aged 18–24) offers a particularly pressing case in point. Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts (2010) dubbed the current generation of youth “Generation M” for their extreme levels of media consumption. Generation M is not only more likely to attend college than other preceding generations (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), it is also more likely to participate in education abroad (IIE, 2013). The role of digital media in these experiences seems to increase with each passing year (Hoffa & DePaul, 2010). As the role of social media and the networked individual continue to increase, so do questions regarding their impact on the desired objectives of the study abroad experience.
As social media use while abroad fundamentally redefines the study abroad experience, the impact of how and why study abroad participants use social media warrants further exploration. Based on this reasoning, cultivation analysis used in conjunction with UGT present opportunities to address questions about media effects in study abroad participants in terms of amount consumed as well as motivation to consume. The following section provides a detailed discussion of the role of digital media use in the lives of students participating in education abroad.

Recent research on the experience of international students has provided evidence that using social media to keep in contact with home networks can aid in maintaining psychological well-being by reducing stress (Lee et al., 2012; Ye, 2006). It also affects processes of cultural adjustment positively in relation to the level of face-to-face, interpersonal communication with host nationals (Kim, Izumi et al., 2008, 2009). Digital communication with host nationals plays a much less significant role in processes of cultural adjustment that face to face communication (Kim, Izumi et al., 2009). While perceived support from long-distance social networks has been identified as a significant predictor of psychological adjustment (i.e., pertaining to maintenance of psychological well-being), there is less evidence on perceived support from long-distance social networks and sociocultural adjustment (i.e., pertaining to shifts in cultural perspective).

In another study of international students in the United States, Cemalcilar et al. (2005) found that “continuous contact” (p. 93) with home via communication technology helped students to maintain cultural values, national identity, and existing social networks; and this support allowed them to adjust psychologically better to their new environment. However, Croucher (2011) pointed out that use of social media while abroad often results in the
“strengthening of in-group identity” (p. 262), which can create barriers to intercultural learning and intercultural communication. Shiau (2015) further explored this particular dynamic and internal struggle students faced to find a balance between forging new connections abroad while still needing the type of social support that only home networks could provide. Shiau (2015) explained that parents of international students from both the United States and Taiwan pushed children to “immerse themselves among local stranger and avoid people of their own ethnicity” or risk wasting their time abroad (p. 59). This extreme viewpoint illustrates the importance of finding and maintaining a balance of communication between local and home networks. Sawyer and Chen (2012) similarly found that for international students in the United States, using social media to connect to host nationals helped contribute to an increased sense of belonging and integration into U.S. culture, while simultaneously using the same technology to feel connected to home.

The role of new media in processes of intercultural adaptation is multidimensional and complex. Although access to the Internet while abroad can inarguably provide valuable links to sources of information and social support that can help individuals adapt, to what extent, if any, does use of this resource conflict with processes of learning and level of host national interaction? As discussed above, culture can be defined as a “network of meaning” (Fungi, 2012), and it embodies a powerful guiding force that is often undetectable in the context of day-to-day life. When an individual is removed from the boundaries of his/her culture, he/she is made starkly aware of the immensely powerful guiding force that the network of meaning has on behavior and communication. In the digital age, the boundaries of culture have become less constrained by geography. Now more than ever before, “home” is mobile. This mobility
potentially decreases the need to adjust/adapt to a new environment, and therefore limits the transformation spurred by this process.

In a corporeal sense, today’s sojourner may still lose all “familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (Oberg, 1960). However, having access to the global digital network, a sojourner can instantly connect to familiar signs and symbols. Contemporary digital media technology has created “wormhole” that can transport the individual home in an instant (Case, 2010)—that is if he/she chooses to leave home in the first place. Turkle (2012) wrote of a trip to Paris with her daughter the summer after getting her daughter a mobile phone. Turkle (2012) compared her experience of Paris as a youth—“My Paris came with the thrill of disconnection from everything”—to that of her daughter’s in the digital age: “wherever she goes, she never leaves home” (p. 156).

Digital media’s role in intercultural contact is paradoxical. Digital media serves to reduce the anxiety that inevitably accompanies a journey outside of an individual’s culture. Mobile media devices provide a wealth of information to reduce uncertainties about location, language, and local customs. In addition, digital media provides a link to social support and interpersonal connection. As a result, individuals no longer need to suffer from the same level of “anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols” (Oberg, 1960, p. 177). But do these feelings of discomfort, disconnection, and anxiety serve a purpose? Most study abroad proponents argue they do, and that getting an individual to step outside of their comfort zone or cocoon is key to processes of development, to learn new ideas and different ways of life. Indeed, the uncomfortable feelings associated with culture shock have been traditionally regarded as motivation for the participant to learn a new set of social skills specific to the new culture,
prompting a reorganization of self. Today, the question has become: how does the study abroad participant become motivated to learn a new set of social skills and reorganize themselves, when their social comfort zone is only a click away?

2. **Maintaining the Value of the Study Abroad Experience in the Digital Age**

The worth of study abroad is evident anecdotally through the testimonials of former participants who describe the experience as “life-changing” (Chew, 2012). Its worth has also been made clear through the body of empirical research that suggests strong links between psychological and sociocultural transformations and the experience of intercultural contact given to students who participate in study abroad programs. In a world increasingly faced with the effects of globalization, study abroad gives participants the opportunity to become more engaged as educated citizens of the world, and does its part to create a global environment that is more conducive to peace and diplomacy. However, the study abroad experience is potentially under threat in the digital age, as constant access to all forms of media has become more commonplace. As a result, the experience of disconnection from home is becoming increasingly rare. Students while abroad use a wide range of digital media technology to keep in touch with home networks, including social networking sites, blogs/microblogs, video/photo sharing sites, video chat, text and voice calls. Indeed, one director of a study abroad program in a large public U.S. university acknowledged that for the students that participate in his study abroad programs, “a separation with technology is impossible,” adding that the assumption is made that any digital device that a student uses at home will be brought on their study abroad experience (Deegan, 2012).
Today’s traditional undergraduate—and average study abroad participant—is a member of “Generation Y,” the first generation of “digital natives” or those who grew up using digital technology. Goldenberg (2007) wrote, “Generation Y feel that it is a God-given right to be continuously plugged in to the Internet and to each other” (p. 12). Although study abroad programs can physically transport a student outside the boundaries of their world and structure an experience to facilitate certain processes of psychological and sociocultural transformation, are programs still able to disconnect the participant enough from their home culture to trigger cultural adjustment and desired outcomes?

As detailed above, there are many desired outcomes of the study abroad experience. The Forum on Education Abroad (2014b) has outlined six, including: (a) basic openness, (b) stereotyping tendencies, (c) self- and emotional awareness, (d) preferred strategies for making sense of why “other” people and cultures “do what they do,” (e) global engagement, and (f) worldview shift. For the purposes of the present research, a singular phenomenon that encompasses many of these outcomes is particularly relevant: global perspective. Global perspective incorporates aspects of both psychological and sociocultural transformation and is defined as

the capacity and predisposition for a person to think with complexity taking into account multiple perspectives, to form a unique sense of self that is value based and authentic, and to relate to others with respect and openness especially with those who are not like her. (Chickering & Braskamp, 2009, p. 28)

Global perspective represents a holistic concept of human growth and development which includes three interconnected dimensions: (a) cognitive (e.g., how do I know?), (b) intrapersonal (e.g., who am I?), and (c) interpersonal (e.g., how do I relate to others?; Braskamp, Braskamp, & Engberg, 2014). In 2008, the Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI) was designed to measure these
three interrelated elements. The GPI represents a valuable tool for use in identifying and measuring variables associated with student learning and development and adjustment, and has been specifically designed to measure the impact of the study abroad experience.

During the past ten years, study abroad programs have not only been challenged with trying to make the experience more accessible to a wider range of participants, but they have also been faced with an increased presence of mobile digital media technologies that potentially provide constant and instant access to home networks for those who do get the opportunity to participate. This raises several questions including, are participants able to experience enough distance and separation from their home cultures to gain new perspective, perspective on both their culture and foreign cultures that allow for the significant psychological or sociocultural transformations that give the Study Abroad experience its educational value?

As discussed above, prior to the digital revolution, research on sojourner adjustment and well-being (both psychological and socio-cultural), was strongly linked to extensive social contact with host-nationals, but extensive social contact with host-nationals was perhaps much more likely to occur given that it—in addition to contact with other co-nationals abroad—was the only option for socialization while abroad. Today’s study abroad participant, still has access to host-national networks and fellow co-nationals abroad, but is also very likely has instant access to the home social network they have physically left behind. While having this constant access can undoubtedly have its benefits, such as interpersonal support, this complicates and perhaps comprises the study abroad experience by putting native and non-native networks in competition for the study abroad participant’s attention. Can extensive contact with home networks impact one’s motivation or ability for exposure to the host culture?
Sandel (2014) conducted research on the impact of digital media use specifically within the context of the study abroad experience, gathering data from a sample of students traveling both to and from the United States. Sandel (2014) came to several conclusions. First, all study participants engaged in digitally-mediated communication on a routine basis, which they used to keep in contact with home networks as well as newly formed networks while abroad. Second, the average time spent using different forms of social media (e.g., Facebook, Skype, cell phones, or instant chat) was 2 hours, with the range including anywhere from 10 minutes to 10 hours a day. Sandel (2014) suggested that the majority of that time was spent keeping in contact with home networks, but did not specifically indicate how time was allocated. Third, participants used social media to maintain close ties within home networks and build bonds with individuals in similar situations (i.e., other students studying abroad). Fourth, several participants expressed what they considered to be problems with digital or online communication arguing, in essence, “successful adaptation is the process of leaving the former culture and getting closer to the new, host environment” (Sandel, 2014, p. 24). This could mean that maintaining close ties to home networks while abroad hindered participants’ ability to learn from and adapt to a new environment, therefore making the study abroad experience not worth the costly investment necessary, in terms of both time and money.

Hofer, Thebodo, Meredith, Kaslow, and Saunders (2016) investigated similar issues regarding the impact of the “digital tether.” The focus of their research was to investigate the level of parental contact for U.S. students traveling abroad. Hofer et al. (2016) discussed the tendency for some parents to regulate and monitor from afar, and claimed that this occurred in equal percentages in regards to students studying domestically and those studying abroad—a
tendency being fueled as media technology continues to advance. The authors noted that it is not clear how this connection impacts student autonomy as it relates to intercultural development.

Prior to both Sandel (2014) and Hofer et al.’s (2016) research, Mikal and Grace (2012) carried out a study to examine the role of “Internet-mediated communication” in education abroad. Mikal and Grace (2016) identified two models of study abroad. The first is the old or traditional model, which assumes that cultural leaning “takes place in FTF [face-to-face] encounters with the host culture,” in which the Internet is “merely a distraction and ought to be avoided during study abroad” (p. 287). The second model, or the new model, still highly values face-to-face (FTF) encounters with locals, but advances the notion that new media communication is not “diametrically opposed” to FTF encounters with locals for students while studying abroad. Results from focus group interviews with study abroad alumni revealed that the Internet was credited with boosting confidence and increased risk taking by providing individuals with “the perception of available support, valuable informational support, and access to a broader social network” (p. 287). Based on this observation, Mikal and Grace (2012) opposed an “abstinence-only” approach to Internet use for students studying abroad, and argued it should be reimagined as a tool that can enhance the experience.

These preliminary findings highlight the significant role that social media has come to play in the study abroad experience. There is some evidence of the positive impact of the social support provided via digital media, which helps the international sojourner cope with the unpleasant experiences related to culture shock. But at what point, if any, does the use of social media to keep in contact with a previously established network inhibit the participant from
experiencing a new culture and the psychological or sociocultural changes prompted by the experience? Sandel (2014) noted that there was a wide range in the reported use of social media—from 10 minutes to 10 hours a day—but did not explore the potential impact of this variable. Therefore, future research is needed to address this issue.

D. **Research Questions**

There is a wide range of literature on the process of cross-cultural adjustment and the psychological and sociocultural variables that impact it. However, the use of new media by sojourners and its potential to impact processes of cultural adjustment has not thoroughly been examined. As such, through the use of the GPI (and other tools discussed in more detail in the following chapter), my research explores the transformative impact of developments in and participants’ use of media technology on the study abroad experience. More specifically, this research addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between social media use\(^2\) while abroad and level of host national contact\(^3\) while abroad reported by alumni of U.S. college/university study abroad programs?

2. What is the relationship between social media use while abroad and level of global perspective\(^4\) reported by alumni of U.S. college/university study abroad programs?

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\(^2\) Social media is defined as explained above.

\(^3\) Both online and face-to-face.

\(^4\) As measured by the Global Perspective Inventory.
Many of the dynamics of the contemporary study abroad experience remain unclear, but what has become increasingly clear is that the instances in which one must completely disconnected from their communication network—regardless physical location—have become fewer and fewer, thus creating the networked individual. On one hand, social media’s ability to decrease the stress associated with culture shock and even allow for the initiation and maintenance of new intercultural connections are positive consequences the rising role of this new media in the study abroad experience, but at the same time social media’s potential impact on identity and social maintenance that can result in networked individualism arguably poses a serious threat to cultural adjustment as its focus on the individual is seemingly at odds with the creation of an expanded worldview/global perspective.

According to cultivation analysis, the heavier the use of a pervasive medium, the more likely its user is to believe the messages of that medium are representative of reality. If use of the internet, and social media in particular, represents a reality that is focused on the individual, it stands to reason that its user would have increased difficulty developing a sense of global perspective. But frequency of use alone leaves many questions unanswered including those of motivation (i.e., Uses and Gratifications). Do study abroad participants use social media to reinforce networked individualism and existing ideologies in situations where this identity is threatened—thus decreasing the likelihood of developing a more global perspective, or do they use it as tool that can decrease stress, allowing participants to enhance and more efficiently navigate intercultural experiences—thus increasing their likelihood developing a more global perspective?
In this research, I aim to explore the transformative impact of developments in media technology on the study abroad experience. The question this begs in the digital age is, how is the experience of the international sojourner, specifically the study abroad participant, impacted by advancements in media technology? Access to social media while abroad allows for a significant increase in communication with home networks while abroad, but does an increased amount of contact with home networks via social media while abroad impact level of communication with host nationals, and therefore level of global perspective? In the following chapter, I detail the method and rationale used to address my research questions.
IV. METHOD

The goal of my research was to investigate the relationship between contemporary media technology and the study abroad experience. In this chapter, I provide an explanation of the method and rationale this study. I begin the chapter begins with a review of the methods commonly used within the field of study abroad research, as well as an explanation of tools that have been used in the past to gain knowledge about the study abroad experience. This is followed by an explanation of the variables measured in this research. Next, I present a description of the specific materials that were employed in this study, a description of the participants in this study, and lastly, the procedure for data collection.

A. Methods Used in Study Abroad Research

The vast majority of study abroad research is experiment-based, and within the pool of extant research there is a good representation of both quantitative (survey research) and qualitative methods (field research). A 2008 meta-analysis of study abroad research on U.S. participants revealed that 20% of studies relied solely on qualitative methods (including interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and the coding of study abroad participant journal data), 35% relied solely on quantitative methods (all using some sort of questionnaire or survey to gather data from participants/alumni), and the remaining 45% of the sample research employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Stoner, 2008).
1. **Qualitative Methods**

The strength of qualitative study abroad research lies in its ability to relay the strong emotions that are often felt by study abroad participants as a result of their experience. Ethnography, in-depth interviews, and field note analyses that elicit thick description of events can be used to achieve external validity, even in cases of small sample sizes. McCabe (1994), analyzing the field notes of participants of the Semester at Sea program, revealed the passionate feelings that the studying abroad experience evoked for certain participants. One student wrote, after traveling to a township in South Africa:

> God I ask how people live this way. How can people suppress people like this? Don’t they have a conscience, and how do they live with it? . . . It slapped me in the face, it hurt! It left a scar like a wound. . . . Although I did not show on the outside, I cried! I’m still crying. . . . No one ever told me life was hell! (McCabe, 1994)

In-depth interviews also allow participants to gain insight into their transformative experiences abroad: “I’m having to kind of take a step back and say, okay, what is really important to me? Why am I living this way?” (Doyle, 2009).

While survey research generally qualifies as a quantitative method, surveys can also be used to gather qualitative data through the utilization of open-ended questions, the analysis of which can be used to supplement quantitative data. Open-ended questions are exploratory in nature and, when added to quantitative survey questions, can provide a wealth of information about study abroad participants’ unique experiences. Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) asked survey participants to describe the most important thing they learned. Responses included “the whole world is not like the U.S.,” and “there are other cultures that exist very differently from our own” (p. 171). In cases such as these, the qualitative analysis of this data through coding is able to reveal even more about the experience.
2. **Quantitative Methods**

While many study abroad research projects focus solely on qualitative methods to gather thick descriptive data from participants, the most popular method within study abroad research is use of the survey. The majority of these surveys rely on scales and indices to investigate the experience. Many studies have used general personality scales (whose reliability, validity and generalizability have been proven in a wide range of contexts) in an attempt to identify and predict what personality traits that can be linked to desired psychological and sociocultural outcomes of the study abroad experience. These scales include the Big Five Inventory, the NEO-Five Factor Inventory Intelligence, and the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (Harrison, 2011; Matsumoto et al., 2007). For example, the Big Five Inventory measures personality traits including conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness, and extraversion. Harrison (2011) found that agreeableness and openness were key personality traits in achieving desired outcomes of a study abroad experience, because individuals who scored high on these scales also scored high on a scale that measured participants’ ability to adjust effectively to the context of a new cultural environment.

In addition to general personality scales borrowed from the psychology field, several scales have been created specifically to predict the extent to which a person will successfully adjust to different cultural environment. Two of the most widely used measures are the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS; Ward & Kennedy, 1994) and the Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS; Matsumoto et al., 2001). While these scales offer a prediction of the participants’ ability to adapt/adjust, scales that are used to measure psychological and sociocultural outcomes of intercultural contact are more commonly used in study abroad research such as the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), the Cross-Cultural
Adaptability Inventory (CCAI), the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI), and the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). These scales, most of which have a pretest/posttest design, are administered before and after the study abroad experience to determine whether marked changes have occurred in participant perspectives. The SWLS is limited in that it only measures adjustment or transition on one dimension of psychological transformation. Conversely, the CCAI and the IDI measure more dimensions of cultural adjustment (e.g., the IDI combines six unidimensional scales), but were not created expressly to measure outcomes of international or multicultural learning. The BEVI also measures several dimensions of cultural adjustment, and has embedded within it seventeen scales, but is the most lengthy and time consuming consisting of 185 survey items. It was also not created expressly to measure outcomes of the study abroad experience.

The main analytic tool that I used to in this study to measure interculturally related variables is the GPI. I chose to incorporate the GPI into the materials of this research over other scales and inventories commonly used in study abroad research because the items in the GPI were created to represent markers in an individual’s journey to toward intercultural maturity on three dimensions, including cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal (Braskamp et al., 2014). This holistic approach reflects key dimensions related to psychological and sociological transformations that study abroad administrators hope take place as a result of a study abroad experience. In the following section, I discuss the creation of the questionnaire for my study. To construct my survey, I had to combine items on intercultural dimensions with items on media use and host national interaction. This being the case, the 35 items of the GPI made it the most relevant and time efficient option when compared to other scales and inventories commonly used in study abroad research.
B. **Materials**

The questionnaire that was used in my research was created to measure multiple variables. The independent variable in this research was *social media use while abroad*. This variable was examined on multiple levels, including motivation and frequency. In addition to being asked what motivated participants to use social media while abroad,\(^5\) research participants were asked a series of questions regarding: (a) the frequency with which they accessed the Internet, (b) what social media websites they used most often while abroad, and (c) how often they connected with home networks using social media. The two dependent variables in the present study were: (a) *contact with host nationals* (both online and FTF), and (b) *reported level of global perspective*. (A conceptual map of the research variables is located in Appendix A.) By measuring these variables, I was able to address the two research questions of my dissertation which regard the relationship between social media use by study abroad participants while abroad with 1) level of host national contact while abroad, and 2) level of global perspective.

The questionnaire created for this research contained 76 questions (copy of questionnaire located in Appendix C), and was pre-tested with potential respondents and university faculty members. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section included demographic items regarding the respondent’s study abroad experience including year of program, destination and duration. The second section included questions about FTF interaction with locals while abroad taken from Carlson et al. (1990). The third section of the questionnaire focused on social

\(^5\) See survey items for measurement scale.
media use while abroad. These questions were adapted from Quinn (2016). The final section contained the 35 item GPI. The items incorporated from each source are detailed below.

1. **Host National Interaction**

   As described above, Carlson et al.’s (1990) research was a landmark study of U.S. study abroad programs. Carlson et al. (1990) research involved both control and treatment groups that allowed the authors to compare the experiences of students who studied abroad and those that did not. Their research questions focused on: 1) how students who study abroad differ from those who remain in the U.S., 2) changes that occurred within the two groups during their junior year, 3) characteristics of the individual/study abroad experience may have contributed to any observed changes, and 4) the long-term impacts of the study abroad experience. These research questions were examined through the use of a pre-test and post-test questionnaire distributed to both the control and treatment groups. Although the results of the study revealed that the demographics of the control and treatment groups did not differ significantly on most dimensions (i.e., age, gender, socioeconomic background), Carlson et al. (1990) did observe more of a tendency for those in the treatment group to engage in critical thinking after their junior year. Also, in regard to longer-term impacts, students who participated in the study abroad programs were more likely to report a desire to “experience new cultures and to learn the language of the host country” (Carlson et al., 1990, p. 9). But of Carlson et al.’s (1990) four research questions, the third, “What aspects of the individual and/or the sojourn abroad contribute to variations of the changes observed?” (Carlson et al., 1990, p. 1), is most relevant to the goals of my research. Many of the items on Carlson et al.’s (1990) post-test study abroad group questionnaire were
designed to measure changes in language skills, but others were designed to measure amount of FTF contact with locals. As noted above, Carlson et al. (1990) argued that host national interaction was likely the most important medium for both sociocultural and psychological development for those who studied abroad. According to Carlson et al. (1990), this resulted from joining extracurricular clubs, attending cultural events, traveling, or people watching. Engaging in conversation with host nationals was also strongly linked to increased levels of cultural awareness, intrapersonal knowledge, autonomy, self-confidence, and overall social abilities. Based on these findings, Carlson et al.’s (1990) items that measured host national interaction were incorporated into the questionnaire for my research. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they engaged in five activities while abroad, based on a Likert scale where 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = very often. These activities included 1) participation in local clubs, 2) attendance at cultural events, 3) travel to other cities and countries, 4) people watching and 5) engaging in FTF conversation with locals. An item regarding accommodation while abroad was included as a supplemental metric to gauge interaction with host nationals for a total of six items used to measure host national interaction.

2. **Social Media Use While Abroad**

I measured the use of social media while abroad by incorporating 30 items into my questionnaire, thus creating a media use profile for each respondent. The first of this series of questions regarded whom respondents contacted via media technology while abroad. Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they were in contact with three groups of people 1) people back home, 2) people traveling with them in their study abroad cohort, 3)
people they met while abroad. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they used media technology in general while abroad, in addition their use of social media website in particular (this included frequency of visits, platforms used abroad, and number of connections). Questions about media use while abroad were followed by 21 questions aimed at measuring media use motivation. The media use motivation questions were adapted from Quinn (2016). Quinn’s (2016) were based on multiple previous studies in uses and gratifications (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). The 21 media motivation questions used a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = not at all, 2 = not much, 3 = somewhat, 4 = a lot, 5 = exactly, and respondents were asked to indicate how much each reason/motivation was like their own while abroad. Motivations were grouped into six categories, habitual time passing, relaxing entertainment, escapism, social interaction, companionship and inclusiveness.

3. The Global Perspective Inventory

The GPI (Braskamp et al., 2009) was developed in 2007 as an analytic tool to help explore human development through the lenses of two theoretical perspectives: intercultural maturity and intercultural communication (Braskamp et al., 2014). The GPI measures development in three interconnected domains. Braskamp et al. (2014) explained that the first domain, the cognitive domain, is based in the development of “one’s knowledge and understanding of what is true and important to know” (p. 3). Second, the intrapersonal domain is focused on the development of “one becoming more aware of and integrating one’s personal values and self-identity into one’s personhood” (p. 3). Lastly, the interpersonal domain centers on “one’s willingness to interact with persons with different social norms and cultural
backgrounds, acceptance of others, and being comfortable when relating to others” (p. 3). The combination of the three domains represents a holistic perspective on human development. The GPI was created to highlight the importance of creating a global perspective campus:

In our pluralistic world today, students now need to develop a global perspective. They need to think and act in terms of living in a world in which they meet, work, and live with others with very different cultural backgrounds, habits, perspectives, customs, religious beliefs, and aspirations. (Braskamp, 2011, p. 2)

The GPI can be used to gauge levels of global perspective at institutions of higher learning, and to expose opportunities for the development of global perspectives in students, faculty, and staff. Since its creation, over 120,000 individuals have taken the GPI representing nearly 200 institutions both in the United States and abroad. More than 19,000 undergraduate students have taken the GPI between the years of 2012 and 2014 (Braskamp et al., 2014).

The GPI is comprised of six scales, two for each of the three domains. The cognitive domain includes the scales: (a) knowing (i.e., one understanding the importance of cultural context when judging a message’s value) and (b) knowledge (i.e., awareness and understanding of other cultures’ impact on global society). One example of a cognitive domain survey item is: “I am informed of current issues that impact international relations.” The intrapersonal domain scales include: (a) identity (i.e., awareness and acceptance of one’s unique identity) and (b) affect (i.e., emotional intelligence, or one’s willingness to accept and respect a range of different cultural perspectives). One example of an intrapersonal domain survey item is: “I am accepting of people with different religious and spiritual traditions.” Lastly, the interpersonal scales include: (a) social responsibility (i.e., interdependence and concern for others’ well-being) and (b) social interactions (i.e., cultural sensitivity and level of engagement with others who differ from oneself; Braskamp et al., 2014, p. 5). One example of an intrapersonal domain survey item
is: “I work for the rights of others.” Each survey item employs the same 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = strong disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Throughout its continued development, the creators of the GPI have evaluated it on three aspects, acknowledging trustworthiness of self-reports, reliability, and validity (Braskamp et al., 2014). It is first and foremost noted that all self-report methods of gathering data are subject to the honesty of those participating; because of this any survey items perceived as being easy to respond to in a “highly socially desirable” way were removed from the questionnaire. Over the course of its development the creators of the GPI have tested both its reliability and validity. The Coefficient alpha reliabilities of the each of the six GPI scales are presented in Table I. In addition, the face, concurrent, and construct validity have been evaluated in several studies and reviews, the feedback and findings from which have been used to revise and improve the GPI survey items (Braskamp et al., 2014). The GPI exists in three forms, the General Student Form, the New Student Form, and the Study Abroad Post Test Form, which was designed specifically for students who have studied abroad. The Study Abroad Post Test Form contains 35 questions. The Study Abroad Post Test Form was included in its entirely to my questionnaire. The GPI items were supplemented with one open-ended question that concluded the questionnaire. The open-ended question prompted respondents to write a response the following question: Overall, what role did social media technology play in your study abroad experience?
TABLE I

COEFFICIENT ALPHA RELIABILITIES OF THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE INVENTORY SCALES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Coefficient alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive—Knowing</td>
<td>.657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive—Knowledge</td>
<td>.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal—Identity</td>
<td>.740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal—Affect</td>
<td>.734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal—Social Responsibility</td>
<td>.732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal—Social Interaction</td>
<td>.700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. **Participants and Procedure**

The questionnaire that I created for my research was administered as post-test web-based survey hosted by the University of Illinois at Chicago’s Qualtrics secure online survey software. Individuals were eligible to take part in my research if they participated in one of the subject university’s study abroad programs. The subject university for this study was a large private Midwestern university. The subject university’s study abroad program has been in operation for over 30 years. Comparable to the national trend, the subject university’s study abroad program has grown steadily in the past several decades, but has experienced significant growth in the past five years in which student participation in study abroad programs has doubled. The program currently offers approximately 35–40 mid-length to long-term programs (10 weeks or more), and depending on the year, anywhere from 40–55 short-term programs (1–3 weeks). In the 2016–2017 academic year, the subject university sent approximately 1000 students abroad, which was close to 4% of the student body, though the majority of students participated in short-term programs.
Eligible participants were identified by the administration of the subject university. A recruitment email for the web-survey was sent to eligible research participants by a member of the administration for the subject university’s study abroad program on my behalf (see recruitment email in Appendix B). For privacy reasons, I was not given access to the subject university’s study abroad program’s database or email list. The list contained emailed addresses of both current and former students of the subject university who have participated in a study abroad program. In the recruitment email to eligible participants, it was explained that they had been identified by the subject university’s study abroad program as an alumnus/alumna of one of their programs. The recruitment email further explained that they were being asked to take a survey that contained questions on their media use while participating in your Study Abroad program in addition to questions from the Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI). The recruitment email also detailed the potential risks and benefit, and informed potential research participants that all responses would be confidential (i.e. neither names nor email addresses would be associated with individual survey responses). Eligible participants were also informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the survey at any time without consequences of any kind.

If eligible participants clicked on the link to the survey, they were again informed that they had been identified as an alumnus/alumna of the subject university’s study abroad program and reminded of the purpose of the study and that they were free to withdraw from the survey at any time. At this time, eligible participants were also informed that the survey would take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Before beginning the survey, each respondent was asked if they consented to participating in the research.
In the following section, the results of the survey are detailed. Data was quantitatively analyzed to see if any significant relationship existed between the three main variables (i.e., social media use while abroad, interaction with host nationals while abroad, and level of global perspective). The open-ended question that concluded the survey was analyzed qualitatively to determine if any themes were present in participant responses.
V. RESULTS

Every study abroad experience is unique, and each participant’s one-of-a-kind experience is determined in part by destination, duration, accommodation, and access to new media, as well as the participant’s personality and attitude before and during the program. This makes it difficult to compare study abroad experiences and their outcomes. By examining the variables related to a study abroad participant’s communication while abroad (i.e., (a) FTF communication with locals and (b) time spent connecting virtually with home, study abroad cohorts, or locals), patterns emerge that foster increased understanding on how the use of new media impacts the study abroad experience. Examining this information in conjunction with data gathered through the GPI, provides insight on patterns that may exist between the contemporary study abroad experience and the objectives of study abroad program administrators. In this chapter, I detail the results of the web survey and address the two research questions of my study.

A. **Sample Characteristics**

The administration of the subject university’s study abroad program sent out an email invitation to participate in the web survey on my behalf. The email was sent to an email list containing 4,435 addresses identified by the subject university’s study abroad program as alumni. Of those email addresses, 133 were undeliverable for a total of 4,302 delivered emails. One week after the initial invitation to the survey was sent, a follow up email was sent. The survey was accessible to those who received the email invitation for approximately one month. Participation in this study was on a voluntary basis; no compensation was provided. Of those who consented to taking the survey, 245 individuals partially completed the survey and 178
individuals completed the survey in its entirety ($N = 178$). Survey results indicated that the sample included study abroad alumni who participated in a program between the years 2009 and 2016. Alumni surveys often suffer from low response rates due to outdated contact information. As such, response representativeness is often more of a concern than response rates (Lambert & Miller, 2014). To measure the response representativeness of the sample, I compared the distributions of the variables of both program duration and program destination in the sample verses those reported by the 2016 annual *Open Doors* comprehensive report (IIE, 2016). The *Open Doors* annual report published by the Institute of International Education is representative of the target population (i.e., U.S. college students studying abroad). The purpose of comparing the sample to the target population is to determine if the sample population is proportionately representative of the target population when it comes to the two key variables of destination and duration.

College students in the U.S. that participate in study abroad programs travel to an increasingly diverse collection of countries with each year that passes. The IIE reported that in the 2014–2015 academic year, U.S. college students studied abroad in 183 of the world’s countries and territories (IIE, 2016). In the sample, there were 38 countries identified as destinations. These 38 countries represent five out of seven of the world regions as identified by the IIE. As demonstrated in Figure 1, the overall distribution across the six outcomes in both the sample and representative populations is proportionate. The percentage distribution for both the sample and representative populations for the regions of Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean (including Mexico), and the Middle East, were all within three percent, and the percentage distribution for Europe was within 6 percent. The percentage of those in the sample who traveled to Asia was 11% higher than those in the representative sample.
In regard to program duration, there is also an increasing diversity of options for students who choose to study abroad. Although most U.S. institutions offer long-term (academic or calendar year), mid-length (1–2 quarters/1 semester), and short-term (up to 8 weeks) programs, the number of short-term programs and program participants has risen dramatically over the past decade (IIE, 2016). Short-term programs are now the most popular option for the majority of students. Short-term programs make the study abroad experience more accessible to students.
who otherwise would not be able to travel due to limited financial recourses, family or job responsibilities, and/or rigid degree completion requirements. For many, students traveling abroad for a semester or more is simply not an option.

The IIE (2016) *Open Doors* data separate population statistics by duration of study, so it was relevant to carry out a second comparison to determine that the sample population was also representative of the IIE’s (2016) data with respect to program duration. As demonstrated in Figure 2, the overall distribution across the three outcomes in both the sample and representative populations is proportionate. Due to the overall representativeness of the sample population, data was not weighted in an effort to maintain its integrity.

![Figure 2. Comparison of sample data to representative data on the variable of program duration](image)
B. **Preliminary Analyses**

As mentioned above, my research was guided by two research questions. First, 1) What is the relationship between social media use while abroad and level of host national contact while abroad reported by alumni of U.S. college/university study abroad programs? 2) What is the relationship between social media use while abroad and level of global perspective reported by alumni of U.S. college/university study abroad programs? Both specifically target the role of social media in the study abroad experience, but in order to more thoroughly understand the findings in regard to these specific research questions, it was necessary that first I perform some preliminary analyses in regard to overall media access and use in the sample.

In many ways, the notion that social media, and media technology in general, is used regularly by today’s study abroad participants, is a foregone conclusion. My research was not only concerned with how frequently social media was used by study abroad participants, but I hoped to reveal patterns concerning to whom participants used media technology to connect to, as well as how this could have impacted contact with host nationals while abroad. As the data revealed, students indeed stayed connected while going abroad, but an examination of their communication behavior while abroad revealed a complex communication network.

In my preliminary analyses, I addressed more general questions regarding media access and use. I have done this to provide more context to my findings in regard to the specific research questions posed in my study. In the following section, I detail the results of the preliminary analyses that include overall media use patterns within the sample. I have also compared select results of my study to data from Pew Research Center reports (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016; Perrin, 2015; Smith, 2014; Smith, 2017) to provide a sense of how
media use in the sample population (while abroad) may contrast with media use in the general U.S. American population.

1. **Frequency of Internet Access**

   In 2015, Perrin identified U.S. American younger adults (18–29 years old) as the “vanguard of the constantly connected,” reporting that 36% are “constantly online,” and that 50% go online multiple times a day (Perrin, 2015). In my survey, respondents were asked to indicate how often they accessed the Internet while abroad. The sample revealed only slightly less Internet usage while abroad than the general population of U.S. American younger adults. Survey participants reported frequency of Internet access while abroad (Internet use score) using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = never to 7 = several times a day. All Likert scales used in the survey were converted to their numeric values for analysis. On average, respondents indicated that they accessed the Internet “about once a day” while abroad ($M = 6.03$, $Mdn = 7$, $SD = 1.53$), and over half of respondents indicated that they accessed the Internet “several times a day” while abroad. Table II shows the percentage distribution of responses by program year, and Table III shows average reported media use by region.
### TABLE II

**REPORTED INTERNET USE BY PROGRAM YEAR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Internet Use</th>
<th>2009 (n = 2)</th>
<th>2010 (n = 15)</th>
<th>2011 (n = 16)</th>
<th>2012 (n = 31)</th>
<th>2013 (n = 22)</th>
<th>2014 (n = 31)</th>
<th>2015 (n = 19)</th>
<th>2016 (n = 42)</th>
<th>Total (n = 178)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Several times a day</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About once a day</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–5 times a week</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2 times a week</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every few weeks</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than every few weeks</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE III

**AVERAGE INTERNET USE BY PROGRAM DESTINATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Frequency of Responses</th>
<th>Average Internet Use Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>6.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean (includes Mexico)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Overall Average Internet Use Score = 6.05
2. **Devices**

Respondents were also asked to indicate how often they accessed the Internet using a mobile phone or computer/tablet using the same 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = never to 7 = several times a day). I converted Likert scale responses to numeric values for analysis. The data revealed that overall, respondents were slightly more likely to access the Internet using a computer/tablet ($M = 5.26$, $Mdn = 6$, $SD = 2.11$) than via a mobile phone ($M = 4.84$, $Mdn = 6$, $SD = 2.48$). Figure 3 displays the overall average frequency of use of each device by program year. The amount of mobile phone use (to access the Internet) surpassed computer/tablet use after 2014. This reflects the increase of smart phone use in the general U.S. American population, and particularly in the younger adult population. In 2016, 92% of 18- to 29-year-olds reported owning a smart phone (Smith, 2017).

![Figure 3](image-url)

**Figure 3.** Computer/tablet versus mobile phone use by program year. The year 2009 was excluded from the graph due to small sample size.
3. **Network Communication**

In addition to responding to questions about Internet use frequency and device use, I asked survey participants who they communicated with when using media technology abroad. Respondents were given three categories of contacts: people back home, cohorts (i.e., people in their study abroad programs), and host nationals (i.e., locals met while abroad). I then asked respondents to indicate how often they communicated with each group via media technology (e.g., email, text, voice call, video chat, instant message, blogs, social networking sites, or video sharing sites) during their study abroad experience. Respondents recorded their frequency of contact with each group using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = never, to 5 = very often). Data revealed that overall, respondents used media technology the most to communicate with people back home \((M = 3.85, Mdn = 4, SD = 1.16)\), and to a slightly lesser extent with their study abroad cohort \((M = 3.72, Mdn = 4, SD = 1.40)\). Respondents were less likely to use media technology to connect with locals \((M = 2.85, Mdn = 3, SD = 1.35)\). Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of responses by frequency and group. Although 21% of survey respondents indicated that they were never in touch with locals via media technology, 79% reported having been in contact with locals via media technology at least once, 57% reported having been in touch with locals via media technology at least some of the time, and 35% reported being in contact with locals via media technology either “often” or “very often.”
These findings on media use while abroad help to demonstrate three points: First, participants in this sample, for the most part, used their devices to access the Internet and communicate with others regularly; Second, most respondents used their devices to keep in regular contact with their home networks; Third, although the average survey respondent did regularly use a device(s) to keep in touch with home, they did not solely use their device(s) for this purpose, and were actually very likely to use their devices to connect to locals at some point.
while abroad. In the following section, I address RQ1 and the relationship between social media use while abroad (as opposed to general media use) and contact with locals.

C. **RQ1: What is the relationship between social media use while abroad and level of host national contact while abroad reported by alumni of U.S. college/university study abroad programs?**

   In order to address this research question, I needed to first measure survey respondents’ use of social media while abroad. I did this by analyzing survey questions that addressed frequency of social media use, preferred social media platforms and number and type of social media connections. In addition to measuring social media use, I needed to measure host national contact, this was done by analyzing survey items that addressed both FTF contact with locals and contact with locals via media technology. In the following section, the survey results in regard to both social media use and contact with locals are detailed in relation to RQ1.

1. **Social Media Use**

   In order to answer RQ1, survey respondents were first asked how often they accessed social networking sites on any device using the same 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = never to 7 = several times a day). The average response was between “3–5 times a week” and “about once a day” (M = 5.5, Mdn = 6, SD = 1.85). This implies that students accessed social media sites most days that they accessed the Internet while abroad. An overwhelming majority of respondents (69%) reported visiting social media website(s) a minimum of “about once a day.” By comparison, Greenwood et al. (2016). reported that in 2016 approximately 76% of users of the
most popular social media platform (Facebook) visited the site daily, and that the majority of daily visitors to Facebook visited several times a day (Greenwood et al., 2016). Figure 5 displays frequency of visits to social media sites while abroad from the sample.

![Figure 5. Frequency of social media use while abroad](image)

In regard to specific platform popularity, the data from the sample also reflected the general trends in the U.S. American population. I asked respondents to indicate the social networking sites they used the most while abroad. It is important to note that participants were not asked to indicate their favorite or preferred social networking site, but instead the social network sites they “used most often while abroad.” Depending on destination country, many
popular social networking sites are inaccessible or even blocked by the local government. Facebook was reported as the most popular social networking site in the sample, with over 56% of respondents ranking it as their most visited social media site while abroad. This is consistent with data reported by Greenwood et al. (2016), which identified Facebook as the most widely used of the major social media platforms by U.S. American adults. Similarly, 79% of all online adults reported using Facebook—more than double the share of any other major platform (Greenwood et al., 2016). Although Facebook was reported to be the most frequently used by survey respondents, over 50% of survey respondents reported having accounts on Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and LinkedIn, though these sites were much less likely to be used as a primary site while abroad. Instagram was used by 13% of respondents as their primary social media platform, and Snapchat was reported as a primary platform for 8% of respondents. All other platforms were used as a primary social media platform by less than 5% of respondents. Table IV shows platform popularity within the sample, primary verses secondary social media site. Figure 6 illustrates major site popularity over time. Although Greenwood et al. (2016) reported that Facebook usage and engagement was on the rise in 2016, Figure 6 illustrates that in the sample, Facebook use decreased over time while other platforms saw marked increases (e.g., Instagram and Snapchat). The sample reflects the surge in popularity for both Instagram and Snapchat in the U.S. American younger adult demographic (Greenwood et al., 2016).
### TABLE IV

**PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOCIAL MEDIA SITE USE WHILE ABROAD\(^a\)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Site</th>
<th>Primary Social Media Site Used Abroad</th>
<th>Secondary Social Media Site Used Abroad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WeChat</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumblr</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Plus</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Did not specify</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not access the internet</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Percent distribution may not total 100.0 due to rounding.

![Figure 6. Primary social media site use over time](image-url)

*The year 2009 was excluded from the graph due to small sample size.*
To gauge the level of connectedness in their social media networks, I asked respondents to indicate the number of connections/friends/followers they had on the social network site they frequented the most while abroad. Respondents reported having an average number of 484 connections/friends/followers ($\text{Mdn} = 349$, $\text{SD} = 635$). The standard deviation of 635 indicates the responses to this particular question were spread out over a very wide range—from zero for those who did not use social media, to up to 5000. Table V shows the average number of connections by program year. Smith (2014) reports the average number of Facebook friends for U.S. adults is 338 ($\text{Mdn}= 200$), noting that younger adults tend to have significantly larger friend networks with 27% of 18–29 year-olds having more than 500 friends in their network. The sample reflected these statistics in that the average number of connections was higher than that of the average U.S. American adult, though again, the standard deviation in the sample was indicative of a large range of responses.

### TABLE V

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average number of connections/friends/followers</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>445.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>1204.9</td>
<td>248.1</td>
<td>382.8</td>
<td>524.8</td>
<td>542.2</td>
<td>796.0</td>
<td>589.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The year 2009 was excluded from the table due to small sample size.
In order to learn more about the characteristics of their online social network composition, I asked survey respondents to categorize their connections/friends/followers into groups including individuals they knew from high school, college, family, and other contexts. Overall respondents reported that their highest percentage of connections were individuals from college ($M = 33.6\%, \text{Mdn} = 30\%, SD = 20.42\%)$. The second highest percentage was reported as individuals from high school ($M = 27.72\%, \text{Mdn} = 25\%, SD = 17.95\%$), and the third highest was “other” ($M = 22.05, \text{Mdn} = 15, SD = 24.77$). “Other” included work/professional connections, friends from childhood, and religious and social organizations. Family connections made up the smallest percentage of the average respondent’s network ($M = 16.63, \text{Mdn} = 110, SD = 13.97$).

2. **Contact with Locals**

Once I had determined the extent to which, and some details on how individual survey respondents used social media while abroad, I then needed to see what level of FTF contact with locals was experienced by each survey respondent. It is clear that this level of contact not only varies from program to program, but also from participant to participant. I asked survey respondents to indicate how often they engaged in five activities while abroad. The activities provided in the survey were the same as those used identified by Carlson et al. (1990) to be the contexts in which FTF conversation with locals is most likely to take place. For the purposes of the survey, these five “FTF interaction with locals” items included: (a) participation in local clubs or organizations, (b) attendance at local cultural events, (c) travel to other cities and countries, (d) people watching at locations popular with locals, and (e) FTF conversation with
locals. Using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = very often), respondents indicated how often they took part in these activities while abroad. I converted respondents’ answers into numbers for analysis. As shown in Table VI, on average, survey respondents were most likely to engage in people watching at locations popular with locals \((M = 4.17, \text{Mdn} = 4, SD = 0.94)\), and only slightly less likely to engage in FTF conversation with locals \((M = 4.04, \text{Mdn} = 4, SD = 0.90)\). Sample data revealed that respondents were least likely to participate in local clubs or organizations \((M = 2.60, \text{Mdn} = 2.50, SD = 1.42)\).

**TABLE VI**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often did you:</th>
<th>Very Often (5)</th>
<th>Often (4)</th>
<th>Sometimes (3)</th>
<th>Rarely (2)</th>
<th>Never (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participate in local clubs and organizations?</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend local cultural events?</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel to other cities and countries?</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People watch at locations popular with locals?</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in FTF conversation with locals?</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After converting respondent’s answers to a numeric value, I gave each respondent an overall FTF interaction with locals score (FTF local score), which was the average of their responses to each of the five “FTF interaction with locals” items \((1 = \text{never} \text{ and } 5 = \text{very often})\).
Figure 7 shows the distribution of scores among the sample. Most respondents reported interacting FTF with locals between “sometimes” and “often” (\(M = 3.62, Mdn = 3.6, SD = 0.68\)).

![Figure 7. Face-to-face interaction with locals score](image)

(Figure 7. Face-to-face interaction with locals score)

After determining each respondent’s social media use frequency and FTF local score, I then performed a single linear regression\(^6\) to address RQ1 to determine if survey respondents’

\[^6\] All regressions performed in this study were partial regression analyses.
frequency of social media use while abroad had a statistically significant relationship with their FTF local score. Using an alpha of .05, a statistically significant relationship was not found $t(1) = -.61481, p = .539475$, with an $R^2$ of .002143. This suggests that overall frequency of social media use while abroad had no relationship with FTF interaction with locals.

I performed a second simple linear regression to determine if the relationship between FTF local score had a statistically significant relationship with frequency of contact via media technology with participants’ home network, study abroad program cohorts, and host nationals. The results of the regression (see Table VII) show a statistically significant relationship between the FTF local score and contact with program cohorts (via media technology) at the 95% confidence level. The results also indicate a statistically significant relationship between FTF local score and contact with host nationals (via media technology) at the 99% confidence level ($R^2 = .1626, p$ value $= 2.3856E-08$). This suggests that those who used media technology frequently to contact host nationals also had more frequent FTF contact with locals.

**TABLE VII**

SINGLE LINEAR REGRESSION RESULTS: FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION WITH LOCALS SCORE VERSUS FREQUENCY OF CONTACT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>R Squared</th>
<th>p Value</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home Network</td>
<td>0.0076</td>
<td>0.24716</td>
<td>.2569</td>
<td>3.415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Cohorts</td>
<td>0.0384</td>
<td>0.00875**</td>
<td>.4781</td>
<td>3.361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host Nationals</td>
<td>0.1626</td>
<td>2.3856E-08***</td>
<td>1.018</td>
<td>3.137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**$p < 0.01$.**

**$***p < 0.001$.**
Overall social media use was not related to FTF contact with locals at a statistically significant level, but the survey results did reveal that being in contact with program cohorts via media technology, and to an even greater extent, being in contact with locals via media technology, was related to FTF contact with locals at a statistically significant level.

D. **RQ2: What is the relationship between social media use while abroad and level of global perspective reported by alumni of U.S. college/university study abroad programs?**

Carlson et al. (1990) argued that the most important aspect of the study abroad experience in regard to both sociocultural and psychological development for those who studied abroad was FTF interaction with host nationals, illustrating a strong corollary between the variable of FTF contact with host nationals and increased levels of personal knowledge, self-confidence, independence, cultural awareness, and social abilities. Measuring survey participants’ perceptions of their FTF interaction with locals shows to what extent they are exposed to/communicate with host nationals while abroad. In order to gain some understanding of how this variable may relate to participants’ perspective of both themselves and other cultures, I also asked survey participants to take the GPI. This research question addresses how GPI score relates to communication behavior while abroad, in particular social media communication, which is often perceived as being incompatible with desired study abroad outcomes.

I calculated survey respondents’ GPI scores analyzing the 35 GPI items included in the survey. Each item asked respondents to reply on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Eight of the 35 items were reverse coded (1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree). An overall GPI score was determined per participant by averaging each
participant’s 35 responses. GPI scores in the sample ranged from 3.0 to 4.8. The average GPI score for the sample was 4.06 ($Mdn = 4.03$, $SD = 0.37$) out of a maximum score of 5. This is compared to the national norm average of 3.73 for college students at a private institution who have not participated in a study abroad program (Global Perspective Institute Inc., 2014).

Consistent with Carlson et al. (1990), the survey data revealed that respondents’ FTF local score was positively correlated with respondents’ GPI score. A statistically significant relationship was found between the two variables $F(1,176) = 20.831, p < .05$, with an $R^2$ of .1058. Participants’ predicted GPI score was equal to 3.421+.1756(FTF local score), where FTF local score was measured as an average of 5 Likert scale responses. The GPI score increased .1756 for each 1 point in FTF locals score. The $R^2$ of .1058 indicates that 10.58% of the variation of GPI score was predicted by the FTF local score.

I carried out a single linear regression in regard to RQ2 to determine if survey respondents’ frequency of social media use while abroad had a statistically significant relationship with their GPI score. Using an alpha of .05, a statistically significant relationship was not found, $t(1) = -.083, p = .93362$, with an $R^2$ of 3.95E-05. This suggests that overall frequency of social media use while abroad had no relationship with GPI score.

To determine if survey respondents’ more general media technology use was related to GPI score, I compared each respondent’s GPI score to their reported contact (via media technology) with the three groups discussed above (i.e., home network, program cohorts, and host nationals). I used a regression analysis to determine if participants’ GPI score had a statically significant relationship with participants’ communication to each of the three groups. The results of the regression (see Table VIII) show a statistically significant relationship between
GPI score and contact with home network (via media technology) at the 95% confidence level. The results also indicated a statistically significant relationship between GPI score and contact with host nationals (via media technology) at the 99% confidence level. This suggests that GPI scores increased with respect to an increase in frequency of contact with locals (via media technology).

**TABLE VIII**

SINGLE LINEAR REGRESSION RESULTS: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE INVENTORY SCORE VERSUS FREQUENCY OF CONTACT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>R Squared</th>
<th>p Value</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home Network</td>
<td>0.0262</td>
<td>0.03085*</td>
<td>.0515</td>
<td>.3651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Cohorts</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.05987</td>
<td>.0372</td>
<td>.3663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host Nationals</td>
<td>0.0734</td>
<td>0.00025***</td>
<td>.0739</td>
<td>.3561</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05.

***p < 0.001.

These finding suggest that being in contact with home is positively correlated with GPI score, and to an even greater extent, that being in contact with locals via media technology while abroad is positively correlated to GPI score.

E. **The Role of Duration and Accommodation**

As detailed above, my analysis of the survey data indicated that there was a positive correlation between GPI score and contact with locals—both FTF and via media technology. If
research, such as the present study, offers some evidence that contact with locals is related to GPI score, then it is important to determine whether there may be other variables present (in regard to program characteristics) that can predict participants’ level of contact with locals, or even GPI score. In the next section, I examine the variables of 1) program duration, and 2) type of accommodation while abroad, both in relation to level of contact with locals and GPI score.

I first compared survey participants’ FTF local score to type of accommodation abroad (see Table IX) and program duration (see Table X). In regard to accommodation, the lowest average FTF local score was reported among students staying in a hotel, and the highest average was reported by students staying in a combination of accommodations while abroad. As seen Table IX, “other” accommodation had the second highest overall average score; the most commonly reported “other” accommodation was “hostel.” Examining the variation in sample size per accommodation type along with the relatively small standard deviation among accommodation FTF local score (.191) implies that a relationship between accommodation and FTF interaction score was not evident in the sample.
TABLE IX

AVERAGE FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION WITH LOCALS SCORE BY ACCOMMODATION TYPE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation While Abroad</th>
<th>Frequency of Responses</th>
<th>Average FTF Local Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment with local and/or other international students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorm with U.S. students</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment (alone or with U.S. students)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorm with local and/or other international students</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestay</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To determine if a statically significant relationship existed in the sample between FTF local score and program duration, I performed a regression analysis. First, I converted duration to an interval variable by converting duration categories to “number of days” categories (see Table X). Next, I calculated a simple linear regression to determine if the relationship between individual FTF local score and program duration was statistically significant. Using an alpha of .05, a statistically significant relationship was not found, although there was a nonsignificant trend showing a relationship between the two variables $t(1) = 1.620, p = .1070$, with an $R^2$ of .01469.

I also carried out a single linear regression with regard to program duration to determine if duration had a statistically significant relationship with students’ contact with locals via media technology. A statistically significant relationship was found between the two variables $F(1,176) = 56.096, p < .05, SE$ of 1.181 with an $R^2$ of .2417. Participants’ predicted media contact with locals score was equal to $2.3888 + .0074(\text{Duration(In Days)})$, where media contact with locals
score was measured as an average of 5 Likert scale responses. The media contact with locals score increased .0074 for each additional day abroad. The \( R^2 \) of .2417 indicates that 24.17\% of the variation of media contact with locals score was predicted by the program duration.

### TABLE X

**AVERAGE FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION WITH LOCALS SCORE BY PROGRAM DURATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Duration (In Days)</th>
<th>Frequency of Responses</th>
<th>Average FTF Local Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>270</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>365</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, I compared GPI score with the same two variables of accommodation (see Table XI) and duration (see Table XII). In regard to accommodation, the lowest average GPI score was reported among students staying in an apartment with local and/or other international students, and the highest average was reported by students that stayed in “Other” (the most commonly reported “other” accommodation was hostel). Examining the variation in sample size per accommodation type along with the relatively small standard deviation among accommodation GPI scores (.095) implies that a relationship between accommodation and GPI score was not evident in the sample. In order to further examine any potential relationship between GPI score and program duration, a regression analysis was performed. Using an alpha
of .05, a statistically significant relationship was not found between the two variables, $t(1) = 0.903, p = .368$, with an $R^2$ of .00461.

### TABLE XI

**AVERAGE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE INVENTORY SCORE BY ACCOMMODATION TYPE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation</th>
<th>Frequency of Responses</th>
<th>Average GPI Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apartment with local and/or other international students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorm with local and/or other international students</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestay</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment (alone or with U.S. students)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorm with U.S. students</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE XII

**AVERAGE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE INVENTORY SCORE BY PROGRAM DURATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Duration (In Days)</th>
<th>Frequency of Responses</th>
<th>Average GPI Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>270</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>365</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
F. **Supplementary Analysis: Social Media Use Motivation**

Although it was determined that overall social media use did not have a statistically significant relationship with FTF local score or GPI score in the sample, there was evidence that using media technology to keep in touch with home and make/maintain connections abroad was positively correlated with GPI score—more so with the latter. In an effort to learn more about why participants used social media while abroad, I incorporated a series of questions in which I asked survey participants to indicate what motivated them to use social media while abroad. I gave survey participants a list of motivations and asked them to indicate their agreement with each statement on social media use while abroad using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = not at all to 5 = exactly). I converted all responses to numeric values for analysis. Figure 8 shows the average response to each social media motivation question.
Figure 8. Motivations for social media use while abroad
The motivation most frequently identified as exactly matching their experience was “to keep in touch with friends and family” \((M = 4.26, Mdn = 5, SD = 1.14)\). The motivation that was most frequently identified as not at all reflecting their experience was “so that I could get away from what I was doing” \((M = 1.54, Mdn = 1, SD = 0.85)\). Respondents were also slightly more likely to indicate that they used social media because it was:

- “enjoyable” \((M = 2.96, Mdn = 3, SD = 1.24)\)
- “entertaining” \((M = 2.92, Mdn = 3, SD = 1.21)\)
- “a habit” \((M = 2.8, Mdn = 3, SD = 1.24)\)
- “because they didn’t want to be left out of things going on back home” \((M = 2.61, Mdn = 3, SD = 1.26)\)

Interestingly, the motivation with the sixth highest average score was “to meet people in my new host culture.” Even with an average response of 2.46 \((Mdn = 2, SD = 1.32)\), which fell between “somewhat” and “not much,” respondents were still more likely to report this as a motivation than the remaining 15 social media motivation survey items.

Whiting and Williams (2013) identified seven common themes in social media research on uses and gratifications: social interaction, information seeking, passing time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, and convenience utility. Using this framework, Whiting and Williams (2013) carried out UGT research in the form of in-depth interviews, and upon doing so, added three additional themes: information sharing, surveillance/knowledge about others, and expression of opinions. Whiting and Williams (2013) reported the percentage of research participants that mentioned each motivation. Of these 10 themes, five were mentioned by at least 60% of participants. These motivations included (in this order): social interaction (88%),
information seeking (80%), passing time (76%), entertainment (64%), and relaxation (60%). When comparing Whiting and Williams’s (2013) results to the sample, social interaction was the dominant motivation for both, however the use of social media to pass time was much more likely to be mentioned by those in Whiting and Williams’s (2013) study than this sample of study abroad alumni ($M = 2.11$, $Mdn = 2$, $SD = 1.19$). Survey respondents in the study were also less likely to use social media to “occupy” their time ($M = 2.05$, $Mdn = 2$, $SD = 1.13$) or because they had “nothing better to do” ($M = 2.31$, $Mdn = 2$, $SD = 1.18$). This suggests that what motivates students to use social media while studying abroad may differ from what motivates them to use it at home. To expand upon the Likert responses to these survey items concerning participants’ social media use abroad, media motivation is detailed below in the analysis of participants’ opened-ended responses to “explain the role that social media technology played in their study abroad experience.”

E. **Open-Ended Responses**

At the conclusion of the survey, respondents were asked to “explain that role that social media technology played in their study abroad experience.” Out of 178 completed surveys, 149 survey participants left a response to the open-ended question, and many elaborated in great detail. Several themes emerged in the responses that shed light on the role social media can play in the study abroad experience. These themes included:

1. Limited or restricted access to media technology while abroad;
2. Social media as a distraction from the study abroad experience; and
3. Social media as a valuable tool for participants to
a. Communicate with
   i. Home networks/home networks to communicate with participant,
   ii. Program cohorts, and
   iii. Individuals met while abroad; or

b. Maintain emotional health.

Below, open-ended responses are discussed by theme to provide further insight in regards to the research questions.

Limited or restricted Internet access was a noteworthy aspect of the study abroad experience for 16% of survey participants who responded to the open-ended question at the conclusion of the survey. The majority of respondents who commented on limited/restricted access to the Internet or social media websites discussed this issue in conjunction with program destination. Specific countries that were associated with this theme were China, Cuba, Kenya, and India. Most of the comments on media access in China in particular noted government imposed restrictions:

In Communist China, social media is pretty limited and sometimes not available at all. I don’t think I went on any social media at all when I was there for 2 weeks as most of the websites were blocked.

Some respondents also mentioned surveillance of Internet activity by the local government:

In China, we were told to watch what we post very closely since the government was most definitely monitoring our moves online. Not that the concern is lost here in the States, but it was understood that caution was prudent. Mostly, I used it to post pictures of various important or well-known cultural/historical sites.

For other students studying in China, alternatives were discovered as effective ways to connect:
China has a weird system of social media restriction, so I just seized on whatever sites were open to me. Tumblr, oddly enough, was available, so I made use of that. I also played games on sites where I had found a community, which helped alleviate my loneliness. I also used the Chinese-based WeChat app, but that was mostly as an alternative to expensive phone calls.

According to survey respondents, Internet access in Cuba was also limited in addition to being costly and unreliable:

*Cuba had very bad Internet and we had to pay for access, so I used it on two different occasions to contact friends and family back home.*

One respondent who studied abroad in India also noted the cost for connection as a reason for limited access, but to this particular student, limited access was not viewed as a negative:

*Because the majority of my time studying abroad was spent in rural villages, it was difficult for me to use social media technology to keep in touch with the outside world. When I was in major cities in India, Internet access was expensive, so I used it very rarely. I believe that experience allowed me to be more open to experiencing the culture instead of trying to take selfies and share images on social media. It allowed me to be totally present in what I was doing, when I was doing it and immersing myself into the culture.*

A similar sentiment was echoed by students who studied abroad in Kenya and Panama, respectively:

*[Social media] did not pay much of a role, other than to reach out to friends and family to say, “Hey, I’m ok. I’m alive.” I did not have the luxury of posting pics, or going live while in Kenya, and I was totally okay without the distraction of feeling obligated to keep people and the world “posted.”*

*Due to the change in signal and phone service availability, I was rarely able to use my cell phone while abroad. I enjoyed the experience of being present in the place and time that I was. It allowed me to not be distracted with the tech world and view the world in front of me.*

This theme of social media as something that distracts from the study abroad experience and should otherwise be avoided was mentioned by a handful of respondents (12 out of 147).
One respondent voiced the opinion that FTF communication is the best medium for “understanding other cultures/perspectives, etc.” Another respondent commented that not having access to a smart phone “was a strong reason why I was able to be present for most of the time during my study abroad experience.” Another respondent shared a similar thought, explaining:

I rarely used technology while in my host country as I did not want to be distracted from the experience. It was more important for me to present and absorb my feelings, surroundings and the people. I could always share my experience once I returned home.

Multiple respondents wrote that they actively tried to disconnect from social media as a way to get more out of their experience:

I tried to not use social media as much so that I could experience the culture of the country I was in thoroughly.

For me I tried to use my study abroad experience as a way to ‘disconnect’ from social media. I wanted to immerse myself in the culture and experience all that I was able to. I used social media to post a single photo a day in order for my family and friends to know what I was up to.

Others remarked on how social media was not a “focus” while abroad:

It was not a huge focus during my travels.

It wasn’t a priority, nor was it the primary focus of my day.

It seems clear that for some, actively disconnecting from social media while abroad was a goal, albeit not an especially popular goal based on respondents’ comments overall to the open-ended question. The overwhelming majority of respondents saw social media as a valuable tool to help them keep in touch—and not only with people back home. Over 50% of those who responded to the open-ended question commented on the value of social media in terms of keeping them connected to home:
Social media was an excellent way to keep in touch with family and friends during my experience traveling abroad.

Social media was a great tool to connect with new friends while staying in touch with old friends and family back home. It was a way to share what was going on in my life while traveling while keeping tabs on the lives of those I care about, too.

Although the majority of respondents mentioned using social media to stay connected to home, only 8% of respondents commented on the value of social media when it came to communicating with program cohorts while abroad:

Social media allowed me to interact with my instructors and students while on the study abroad trip to ensure I had the proper times for meeting up for bus departure and if there were any changes in our daily schedule.

Lastly, there were 18% of respondents that commented on the value of social media to help them connect to people they met while abroad:

I use social media to keep in contact I made with locals from my travels. Talking to those I met is very important to me because I can further understand their culture, values, and possibly visit again.

Social dating apps gave me the ability to practice my French with more and more people. I’m friends with these people still to this day.

I used social media to connect with people from other countries, so we can share our future experiences and stay in touch.

Several of the respondents’ comments helped to reveal the multiplicity of social media in this particular context, and its ability to not only initiate and maintain relationships, but also as a resource for information on locations abroad:

Social media was a great tool for many reasons: it allowed me to stay in touch with friends and family at home; learn more about the U.S. students I was traveling with; connect with new local friends I met in India; helped research places we were going to while abroad; and allows me to still keep up to date with Indian friends and businesses/cultural areas 7 years later.
Social media allowed me to communicate be home with family and friends. It also allowed me to share my experience abroad in real time. I was able to connect with people I met abroad through social media. I continue to have communication with those I’ve met while in Tanzania.

I primarily used social media to stay in touch with family and friends back home. I also used it to connect with new friends so I’d have their contact info when I was back home. I also sometimes used it to look for local events in my area abroad.

Social media was praised frequently by respondents for its ability to create and maintain connections, but it was also specifically credited by multiple students as a way to maintain mental wellness in the stressful environment that is often part of the study abroad experience.

Nine respondents commented on how social media, in some way, helped them maintain mental wellness. For some it offered an opportunity to “be alone”:

I used it as an escape sometimes, cause seeing the same nine people every single day can get a bit annoying so it was nice to have some time alone and relax.

Social media allowed me to spend time alone and relax after emotional experiences.

For others, social media was used to feel less alone:

Social media—Facebook, in particular—served as an outlet for me when I felt at my loneliest. It’s hard living in a foreign country, where people outright ignore you or look at you strangely when you don’t speak their language perfectly. Parisians are honest, (but savage), and it can be hard for an American to connect with them. Social media made me feel more connected to home, and made me feel less alone.

I used it to keep in touch with family and friends back home, but didn’t use it often. I was lonely and wanted a reminder of who I loved.

Living for the first time with a French family, I definitely had moments where I felt isolated and unable to communicate effectively with the people around me. Social media provided a nice break from the constant struggle to navigate a foreign language and a foreign environment.
Another respondent commented on how social media served as an outlet for self-expression:

*Social media played an important role in my study abroad experiences because it allowed me to express myself and my experiences while abroad.*

One respondent commented on how social media was valuable in terms of helping family back home maintain their mental wellness, simply by being connected to their loved one abroad.

*My family was worried about me traveling . . . plus I did not speak the language. So it was a way to reassuring my family (mostly my mother) that I was ok and doing what I do best. Exploring and discovering strange places and people. So I used it was a digital journal so people would know where I was on my trip and how things were going. I made it a point to post every 8 hours so if I did go missing (most likely lost) there would be a trail for people to follow. It was a safety net that helped my mother mostly.*

Another respondent simply commented,

*It [social media] allowed me to share my experiences with family and friends and to assure them I was safe/OK.*

Overall, the results from the open-ended survey item were consistent with the results from the social media use and motivation survey items in that they suggested that using social media to “keep in touch with friends and family” was the most commonly reported motivation of social media use for study abroad participants. Although a range of other motivations were reported, from loneliness to escape, it appears that the primary function for most was to keep in touch. While the reasons for use range widely, it cannot be assumed that social media will be used abroad the same way it is at home. For this sample, it appears that the potential benefits of media use while abroad (i.e. social support and stress relief) may outweighed the potential harms (i.e. avoidance of host nationals and host culture).

The results of my web survey revealed the complex role that social media and media technology in general can play in the study abroad experience. Although the survey data was not
void of negative sentiment in regard to the role that social media can potentially have in the study abroad experience, there was much more evidence (both qualitative and quantitative) to suggest that social media and other media technology can play a positive role in the study abroad experience. As a whole, the data from my research paints a picture of media technology adding value of the study abroad experience, whether it be helping students cope with stress associated with isolation and separation, or by creating more opportunities for students to connect with locals face-to-face. In the following section, I explore what the findings of my study may imply in regard to the future of study abroad experience in U.S. institutions of higher learning.
VI. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of new media technology in the study abroad experience, not just in terms of communication behavior while abroad, but also in terms of the desired outcomes of the experience. My study was guided by the notion that the study abroad experience is offered to college students as an opportunity to travel to a location outside of the United States, where cultural adjustment, development, and learning can take place. The study abroad experience has a long, rich history as a part of the higher education system in the United States, and has faced many challenges in its development. Perhaps one of the most daunting challenges to the institution of study abroad has come on the heels of the digital revolution as the development of media technology is perceived by many to be at odds with a student’s ability to engage in valuable new learning experiences while abroad – both psychological and sociocultural (Godwin-Jones, 2016; Huesca, 2013; Keck, 2015; Lee, 2015). In this chapter, I present a summary of my findings, detail the limitations of my research, and discuss implications for further research.

A. **Summary of Findings**

My study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to understand further the dynamic created by new media as a tool for communication in the study abroad experience. In this section I highlight three principal themes that emerged in my research on the developing dynamic between communication technology and the study abroad experience: (a) Contact with home (via media technology) while abroad does not necessarily interfere with the desired outcomes of the experience; (b) Contact with locals (via media technology) while abroad is
positively related to FTF interaction with locals and GPI score; and (c) The digital divide will always exist in the context of the study abroad experience, but can provide opportunities for new dimensions of cultural learning.

1. **Contact with Home**

Several studies have examined the use of media technology by students living/studying abroad, but none have broken down students’ communication according to network. It has been well established that students are connected while traveling abroad, but not to whom they are connecting. Survey results revealed an expected trend in that those in the sample were in more frequent contact (via media technology) with their home network and program cohorts than they were with locals. As discussed above, study abroad educators fear new media in part because they worry that students will spend so much time communicating with home that they will fail to interact FTF with host locals and therefore fail to achieve some level of cultural adjustment and/or learning. The results of my research do not support this point of view, and on some level, even contradict it.

The survey results revealed that there was no relationship between frequency of media technology use to connect home network while abroad and reported FTF contact with locals. Survey results also revealed that there was a positive relationship between frequency of use of media technology (used to connect to the home network) while abroad, and GPI score. This begs the question: if keeping in contact with the home network while abroad does not negatively impact (a) level of FTF interaction with locals, or (b) the desired outcomes of the study abroad experience, could it possibly have a positive impact on the experience in either of these areas?
There does not seem to be any evidence in this sample that communication with home impacts level of FTF interaction with hosts, but there is some evidence to support the idea that being able to maintain contact with home while abroad is positively related to GPI score. This finding, along with responses from the open-ended survey question, supports the notion that maintaining contact with home while abroad has the potential to aid in processes of cultural adjustment and learning. As pointed out by several respondents in the open-ended question, the use of social media was a valuable tool that aided in the maintenance of their mental health while abroad in a wide range of ways—from helping students to feel less isolated to proving a medium for self-expression. Regardless, many study abroad educators still commonly perceive social media as an interference. On the surface level, the results of the survey in regard to social media use motivation may add to that suspicion that social media detracts from cultural learning, as those in the sample indicated that they were highly motivated to use social media to keep in touch with their home network—demarcating it as the primary reason for social media use abroad. Although this supports the idea that students want to use social media to stay in contact with home, this was by no means the only motivating factor for social media use. By incorporating a UGT approach, results from the survey were able to reveal that social media was used to fulfill a wide range of needs for students while abroad.

When considering motivations for social media use, context plays a significant factor. What motivates a student to use social media at home may very well be different from their motivations to use social media while abroad. As mentioned above, seven common themes in social media research on uses and gratifications include: social interaction, information seeking, passing time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, and convenience utility. These motivations can still apply in the context of the study abroad experience; however, one of the
fundamental purposes of study abroad is to place an individual in an unfamiliar environment in which familiar cues are lost and value systems are challenged. In this unfamiliar environment, individuals seem less likely to be motivated to kill time or cure boredom simply due to the novelty of their surroundings; they would though seem more likely to use it to reconnect with familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse that are absent in their immediate environment. Survey results provide some evidence of this in terms of reported social media use motivation. Whereas “keeping in touch with friends and family” was the strongest motivator of social media use for the sample, survey respondents were significantly less likely to report using social media to “pass the time.” Survey results also indicate that, for the sample, social media was not regularly used a refuge from boredom, or even a refuge from their physical environment. “So that I could get away from what I was doing,” was the motivation with the lowest average response. This may come as a surprise if you consider it in the context of an individual who is likely to be experiencing culture shock. This finding coupled with a relatively high score for the motivation “to meet new people in my host culture,” suggests that those in the sample wanted to engage not only with their home networks, but also with the local environment via social media. It should also be noted that the two are not mutually exclusive. The question is whether study abroad participants can find balance in this precarious situation; a balance between maintaining enough connection to home to help cope with the stress of culture shock, while also taking advantage of opportunities to engage with the people and culture of the host country.

2. **Contact with Locals**

The finding that students studying abroad are frequently in contact with their home networks (more than any other group) is not surprising, but what was not necessarily
expected was the 79% of survey respondents who were in contact with host nationals (via media technology) at least once during their study abroad experience. This shows that those who did not make digital connections to locals were in the minority in this particular sample. This suggests that students’ online networks expanded/diversified as a result of their study abroad experience. This expansion or diversification of one’s online network would appear, at least on the surface level, to help counteract phenomena that can occur within a network characterized by homogeneity such as the echo chamber and cocoon effect. Engaging with locals while abroad has always been one of the principal objectives of the study abroad experience, but the results of this research suggest that some of this interaction has migrated online.

The gold standard for cultural learning has long been FTF contact, and more specifically, FTF conversation with locals. In many ways, it is still privileged over any other type of interaction when it comes to achieving the desired outcomes for the study abroad experience. Although the argument that students can learn a lot about a culture in a virtual environment is being increasingly accepted (e.g. studying abroad in Second Life)—especially in light of the escalating costs of international travel—it is unlikely that study abroad educators will follow the trend in higher education and abandon the traditional model in favor of fully online study abroad programs anytime soon. So, in the meantime, it seems to be of the utmost importance for study abroad educators begin to acknowledge the power of creating online connections (as well as FTF connections) for students studying abroad.

In this study, FTF interaction with locals was compared to frequency of use of media technology used to contact home, program cohorts, and locals. Results of my survey revealed a positive relationship between frequency of use of media technology used to connect to program
cohorts and FTF local score, and an even stronger positive relationship between frequency of
use media technology used to connect to locals, and FTF contact with locals score. This reveals
that participants that were more frequently in touch with locals via media technology were more
likely to report higher levels of FTF interaction with locals. One respondent remarked on the
value of dating apps to connect with locals. This could imply that media technology acts as a
gateway to FTF contact with locals. Another respondent commented on how social media made
it easier to arrange meeting up with locals, after having met initially face-to-face. This could also
imply that media technology can help students maintain connections with locals while abroad.
As a whole, this provides evidence that using media technology while abroad can not only help
to initiate FTF contact (and therefore relationships with locals), but can also help maintain
relationships with locals while abroad. My study also revealed that program duration was
strongly related to a student’s level of contact with locals via media technology while abroad.
This finding is logical in the sense that the longer one visits a particular destination, the more
likely they are to build connections (both online and FTF), but this notion that there are valuable
new connections to be made in both offline and online contexts, could very much help study
abroad programs adapt to an updated, more media friendly model.

The results of my survey also revealed that level of contact with locals via media
technology and GPI score were strongly related. This suggests that any contact with locals—
whether it be FTF or via media technology—while abroad may contribute to the desired
outcomes of the study abroad experience. If cultivation analysis posits that the Internet can serve
as a powerful socializing agent, then depending on your connections, social media can be either a
problem or a solution when it comes to achieving the desired goals of the study abroad
experience (based on who is in a student’s network and how often they are in touch). In sum,
results of the current research suggest that media technology has much potential in terms of its contribution to the study abroad experience, both in terms of increasing FTF contact with locals and GPI score.

3. **The Digital Divide**

The results of the survey demonstrate that the sample population, on average, was far from disconnected during their travels abroad. This provides evidence that modern media technology, including mobile media and social media, have been fully integrated into the majority of study abroad experiences—though there are exceptions. The survey results did not demonstrate many clear trends in terms of overall Internet use over the range of years included in the sample. On some level, this is explained by small sample size, but another possible explanation is the varying impact of the digital divide on the sample population, which also impacts the target population as a whole. It is critical to note, that even if frequency of Internet use for students studying abroad increases with each year, which is to be expected, the digital divide will continue to exist in the target population and the explanation as to why is far from simple.

The term *digital divide* is commonly used to refer to inequalities in society that are based in differing levels of access to technology and technology related skills (Epstein, 2011). Inequalities are not limited to economics factors, but are also impacted by geography, culture, age, disability, and perspective on technology. Each of these factors can impact Internet access both at home and abroad. For the purposes of the analysis of the sample data, I have examined
the factors economics, geography, culture, and perspective. It should be noted that factors contributing to the digital divide commonly overlap.

Economic factors of the digital divide can be impactful on both the individual and societal level. The digital divide can be experienced by a student who travels to an economically depressed region in the world without a modernized telecommunications infrastructure, but also by a student who travels to one of the world’s most developed nations but does not have the resources to afford the use of a mobile device while abroad. Data from the sample revealed that by 2016, 62% of participants reported accessing the Internet “several times a day,” but this was down from a peak of 74% reported by participants in 2014.

Even in the unlikely event that all students traveling abroad have the financial resources to have a computer and/or mobile device, geography (at least for the foreseeable future) will be a common contributing factor to the digital divide for students studying abroad. When average Internet use was broken down in the sample by program destination region, survey results showed that students traveling to Europe accessed the Internet most frequently when compared to students traveling to other regions. This suggests that Internet access was most readily available to students traveling to European destinations as compared to the other world regions, which reflects current estimates on global Internet user penetration (Internet Society, 2016).

Another factor of the digital divide that is salient to students from the United States who study abroad, is the cultural factor. Although the majority of the content on the web is written in English, the majority of communication that takes place on the Internet is not carried out in English (Papacharissi & Yuan, 2011), and the diversity of languages that populate the World Wide Web will only continue to grow as more and more of the world’s population gains access
to the Internet. The language barrier can also impact individuals’ online activity in terms of accessing information or making social connections. The cultural factor is not limited to language, but can also include cultural factors on any scale from individual family or local culture, to national culture. One example of this on a smaller scale would be a student living with a family in Europe who chooses not to have Internet access in their home. On a larger scale, there is the example of national governments restricting or monitoring access to the Internet.

Another factor to consider is that most study abroad participants bring with them to the experience a set of opinions on new media and social media. Some students will inevitably use it for the majority of their communication, while others may look down on it as a form of communication. Those who heavily rely on it for its social or informational function may be likely to continue this practice while abroad if available and those who do not see its value as a social or informational tool, may avoid it intentionally. For every student on this range of perspectives, the concept of the digital divide can still present a valuable learning tool and a powerful theoretical lens with which to interpret differences observed in media use in their host culture.

Among its many learning opportunities, the study abroad experience can help illustrate the multitude of ways in which the digital divide can manifest itself. The study abroad experience provides new opportunities to explore the impact of the digital divide, not only from a global perspective, but also from a personal perspective. It stands to reason even though Internet access is becoming more ubiquitous worldwide, most students traveling to a foreign country are likely to, at some point or another, find themselves in a foreign position in regard to the digital divide (i.e., experience the digital divide from a new perspective). This experience could result
from a range of experiences from limited access to complete disconnection. Even though
students can take their devices with them when they travel abroad, odds are they will not be able
to use them in the same manner as they do at home, and even the slightest change has the
potential to offer new perspective. Study abroad administrators have been grappling for years
with the problem of students staying connected while going abroad, but in this battle against
media technology many have failed to see the opportunity for students to learn about how
different cultures in the world use technology to communicate. In this sense, using new media
while abroad does not have to be seen as taking away from the experience, but instead adding a
new dimension of cultural learning. Papacharissi and Yuan (2011) pose the following question:
What if the Internet did not speak English? They make the argument that the architecture of the
Internet is strongly biased to a Western perspective. This argument is one example of thinking
that provides new opportunities for study abroad administrators to turn media technology use
into an exercise in cultural comparison, reflection and analysis. For students who do not have
access or choose to not use media tech while abroad, being prompted to observe how locals use
media can provide a heightened perspective of their media use and habits at home.

Results from my study provide evidence that U.S. students who study abroad commonly
use new media technology, and that social media in particular plays a significant role in the
average student’s study abroad experience. Survey results also indicated that students traveling
abroad also use social media platforms popular in the United States, but for some, traveling
abroad provides an opportunity to seek out and experience new media platforms (e.g., WeChat,
Line, WhatsApp). Herein lies another opportunity for study abroad administrators to use social
media to help students connect to locals abroad. Being that today’s college students are digital
natives, it is a logical conclusion that most millennials feel comfortable communicating with
media technology and on social media platforms. If the students’ primary or only platform is not popular in their destination country, this limits the chance that students will connect with locals on social media. It also stands to reason that students will typically use social media as a tool to keep in touch with their home network (given their primary social media network is accessible at their program destination). The powerful force that is social media can also be used to connect students studying abroad to locals and local culture. Instead of discouraging new media/social media use while abroad, its use should be encouraged as another way to help students immerse themselves into the culture. Incorporating this into a predeparture agenda (e.g., making students aware of what sites and platforms are used in the local culture) can help enhance a student’s exploration of a new culture both in the physical and the virtual world. The value of stepping outside of one’s virtual comfort zone should not be overlooked.

B. **Limitations**

Before discussing opportunities for future research, it is important to note the limitations of this study’s method and data collection. A web survey as a method is very valuable in that it allows the researcher to gather data from a geographically dispersed population in a manner that is both cost and time efficient, but the survey data only represents one point in time in a rapidly evolving relationship. Additionally, the web survey for the present research was administered only as a posttest, which was done as an effort to increase sample size. This makes it difficult to determine the magnitude of the outcomes, and also whether particular outcomes were due to the study abroad experience or some other factor. Self-reported data is also subject to social desirability bias. Although it was noted on the survey before the GPI items that, “there are no
right or wrong answers,” most study abroad alumni having gone through predeparture workshops and guided reflection upon reentry, are well aware of what perspectives are valued in the context of education abroad. Furthermore, Dewyer (2004) raised the question of whether the study abroad experience promotes outcomes such as acceptance (in term of race, ethnicity and culture), or if students who willingly choose to participate in a study abroad program are a priori a self-selected, more accepting group.

In regard to data collection, the sample for this study was a convenience sample taken from one U.S. university. This raises the issue of generalizability of findings. Although a comparison of the sample population data to higher quality, generalizable data on the target population demonstrated that the frequencies of two key variables (i.e., program destination and duration) were similarly distributed, the inability to use a probability sampling technique, a small sample size, and a response rate of approximately 4% significantly limits the ability to make generalizations about the target population.

C. Implications for Future Research

The findings of the current study provide many possibilities for further research on the relationship between media technology use and the study abroad experience. The results of the current study suggest that the role of developing communication technology in the study abroad experience may present more opportunities to study abroad educators than threats. Areas ripe for future research include:

- How creating digital connections to locals while abroad might enrich/elevate the study abroad experience;
Ways social media can be used as a tool to stimulate more FTF interaction with locals and what platforms produce the most connections by program destination;

- Updating Carlson et al.’s (1990) study for the digital age; and

- How new media theory can further develop levels of cultural learning in the study abroad experience.

Previous research has illustrated that media technology can play a positive role in the study abroad experience in that it allows students to maintain contact with their home networks (which arguably reduces levels of stress while abroad). However, scholars have yet to explore how using media technology to create connections to host nationals can contribute to desired cultural learning outcomes. This study provides evidence that students connect to locals using media technology, but how might these digital interactions contribute to their study abroad experience? The students who choose to connect with locals via media technology benefit from being exposed to another dimension of cultural norms that may contrast with their own (i.e., how the host national’s use of media technology/social media differs from how it is commonly used in the United States?). Can interacting with locals via media technology also help students to gain more perspective on how they use media technology back home, helping them realize that technology is adapted for use in a multitude of ways?

My research supports the idea that some students are motivated to make connections to locals via social media, but on what platforms are students most likely to make these connections? Are these connections most likely to take place on international platforms or local platforms? Can popular dating apps provide easy opportunities for FTF interaction? Study abroad educators regularly use social media to market and advertise their programs, and it is also
now commonplace for program administrators to encourage participants to join/follow official program social media accounts and post about their experiences while abroad. Social media can be valuable to programs in these contexts, but there seems to be many missed opportunities when it comes to using social media to help students immerse themselves into the local culture in ways in which they are likely to gravitate.

The current study has relied upon the findings of Carlson et al. (1990) to measure how contemporary study abroad students interact with locals while abroad. Although this work is still heavily cited in study abroad research, it was published at the dawn of the digital revolution. In the past 25 years, the role of digital technology has indeed become a relevant factor in the study abroad experience. Carlson et al.’s (1990) scale for FTF interactions with locals should now be supplemented with similar contexts for online or digital interactions with locals (e.g., How often did you use messaging apps to contact locals? How often did you initiate contact with a local via social media? How often did you use media technology to keep in touch with locals while abroad?). Communication technology presents an entirely new dimension of a foreign culture for study abroad participants to learn from through engagement and exploration.

Media technology not only provides new opportunities for students to engage, it also offers new ways for students to reflect on how their experience with media technology differs from other people around the world. Traveling outside of the United States can also serve as experiential learning about the digital divide. This element can be added to any program’s guided reflection already in place. For example, students could be prompted to reflect on: (a) how media access is different and/or limited in their destination country, (b) factors that contribute to more or less media access in their destination country, and (c) the role of digital privilege in their lives.
Such reflection presents a further opportunity to understand the role of media technology in the lives and experiences of U.S. study abroad students.

D. **Conclusion**

In this dissertation, I have detailed the rich history of study abroad in the U.S., and the important role that it has come to play in the educational experience of an ever-increasing number of U.S. university and college students. I have also outlined the development of media technology and the role it has come to play in the contemporary study abroad experience. Although some might see developments in technology to be at odds with the desired outcomes of education abroad, this perspective seems to overlook an entirely new dimension of opportunities for students to learn from their experience abroad—both about themselves and the world.

In 1971 Anderson documented the woes of culture shock noting that the only way to get over culture shock was to “get to know the people of the host country” (p. 145). Today’s international sojourner is likely to have more options when it comes to dealing with culture shock, and indeed options offered by new media technology can allow one to stay in touch with family and friends at home while traveling abroad, but at the same time new media technology can also provide new opportunities for one traveling abroad to engage with and get to know the people of the host country. But this progression of communication technology seen since the digital revolution, that has ancient origins, is very much a natural progression. If technology can be defined as “the product of interaction between humankind and environment based on a wide range of real or imagined needs and desires” (as cited by Leiss, 1990, p. 25) that guide us in our interactions with the world, then it seems as though being able to continually incorporate new
technology into traditional learning practices (here in the context of the study abroad experience), is just another way to learn about ourselves and the different communities that make up the world.

For most U.S. students who study abroad today, the networked self represents an important part of their identity. In other words, a seemingly increasing portion of their understanding of who they are is both developed and maintained in an online context. This is done through regularly negotiating sociality, publicity and privacy in their online interactions. As a result of the rise of the networked self, our identities have become more complex, and if the study abroad experience is at its core about reflecting on who you are and why you are the way you are, this piece of human identity—although relatively new—shouldn’t be ignored. It should instead be explored, as it now more than ever contributes to our understanding of the world.

The findings of my research suggest that connecting to locals via media technology is positively related with FTF interactions with locals, and that interaction with locals in offline and online contexts, are positively related to GPI score. Overall these findings suggest that the use of media technology may help students engage more with locals, which was has arguably always been the primary objective of study abroad programs. Perhaps a study abroad program’s best chance of maintaining these traditional objectives in the digital age is by incorporating what may seem like novel practices. Students should be encouraged to experience the world not only as their physical selves, but also as their networked selves.

By letting technology play a more central role in the study abroad experience do we risk making the overall experience less valuable? Perhaps, but whether it adds or detracts from the experience is directly related to how mindful study abroad educators are in how they incorporate
the use of media technology into their curriculum. Any number of factors can spoil a study abroad experience, such as poorly executed pre/post departure curriculum, individual personalities, cohort dynamics, international conflict, etc., but the results of my study seem to suggest that thoughtful incorporation of new media technology (coupled with media use analysis/reflection can) offer a much-needed update to the traditional study abroad model.

The study abroad experience is complex and dynamic, and while many questions are left to be addressed in regard to how the experience will develop to serve future generations of U.S. college and university students, two things (at the very least) remain clear. First, that the study abroad experience will continue to play a crucial role in the campaign for international peace—and fostering the development of intercultural understanding within the U.S. population is perhaps more important now than ever. Second, media technology will continue to evolve, and the challenge now faced by study abroad programs: Find a way to evolve by reimagining media technology as more of an opportunity than a threat.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: CONCEPTUAL MAP

The Study Abroad Experience & The Networked Self

Pre-Digital Revolution
U.S. Undergraduate Study Abroad Participant
Communication While Abroad

↓ Comm with home & Comm with hosts

↑ Stress “Culture Shock”
   (loss of familiar signs of social intercourse & inundation with unfamiliar sign of social intercourse)

↑ Cultural Adjustment

↑ Global Perspective

Post Digital Revolution
U.S. Undergraduate Study Abroad Participant
Communication While Abroad

Scenario A: (No or limited access to social media)

↓ Comm with home & Comm with hosts

↑ Stress “Culture Shock”
   (loss of familiar signs of social intercourse & inundation with unfamiliar sign of social intercourse)

↑ Cultural Adjustment

↑ Global Perspective

Scenario B: (Easy access to social media)

↑ Comm with home & Comm with hosts?

↑ Stress “Culture Shock”
   (physical loss of fam signs of social intercourse, but virtual access to fam signs and access to info about host city and culture)

↑ Cultural Adjustment?

↑ Global Perspective?

*Contact with home is linked to a decrease in stress

Figure 9. Conceptual map
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Attention **** Study Abroad Participants:
You are being asked to participate in a research study. You have been selected to participate in this research because your email address was included in an email address list provided by ****’s Study Abroad Program identifying you as an alumnus/alumna of the program.

The purpose of this study is to understand the role that social media played in your Study Abroad experience. Your responses are crucial in helping faculty, administrators, researchers, and policy-makers understand better how and under what circumstances social media use impacts the Study Abroad experience.

Research Procedures
This study consists of a secure online survey, which includes questions on your social media use while participating in your Study Abroad program in addition to questions from the Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI). Should you decide to participate in this confidential research you may access the survey by following the web link below.

Time Required
Participation in this study will require approximately 30 minutes.

Risks
The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study

Benefits
The potential benefits of your participation include helping to faculty, administrators, researchers, and policy-makers understand better how social media is impacting the U.S. undergraduate Study Abroad experience.

Confidentiality
When you complete the survey, your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. All of your answers will be treated with strict confidence. Once all data for you have been entered, your identification number will be recoded. While individual responses are anonymously obtained and recorded online through a secure web-based system, data are kept in the strictest confidence. Names and email addresses are not associated with individual survey responses. The researchers will know if a participant has submitted a survey, but will not be able to identify individual responses, therefore maintaining anonymity for the survey. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent’s identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. Although it is expected that the results of this research will be presented in conferences and other relevant scholarly forums, the answers you give to questions will never be linked to you in any way. Aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Final aggregate results will be made available to participants upon request.
Participation & Withdrawal
Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

Please go to the following location to participate:

https://uic.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_26oF4JCuitY9Uq1

Questions about the Study
If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Adriane Stoner
Department of Communication
University of Illinois at Chicago
astone6@uic.edu
APPENDIX C: COPY OF SURVEY

Social Media Use and the Study Abroad Experience

Department of Communication

University of Illinois at Chicago

Study on Social Media Use and the Study Abroad Experience

Thank you for participating in the survey titled Study on the Effects of New Media on the Study Abroad Experience, sponsored by the Department of Communication, University of Illinois at Chicago. By participating, you are helping to further research on the relationship between new media technologies and the Study Abroad experience.

You have been invited to participate in this survey because the Study Abroad Office of **** has identified you as an alumnus/alumna of a study abroad program.

The survey is approximately 30 minutes in length, and includes questions about your Study Abroad experience such as program destination and length, living accommodations, interaction with locals and use of new media technologies while abroad.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. You retain the right to terminate the survey at any time. Your decision to participate, decline or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your current or future status with ****, the University of Illinois, or your study abroad host institution. The answers that you provide will be anonymous, and no names will be connected to individual responses.

If you have any questions, please contact Research Coordinator at 312-545-4491 or via e-mail at astone6@uic.edu. You can also visit our department website at http://www.uic.edu/depts/comm/ for more information.

Do you consent to taking this survey?
( ) Yes, I would like to continue with the survey.
Study Abroad Experience Information

1. In what year did you study abroad?
   ( ) 2000
   ( ) 2001
   ( ) 2002
   ( ) 2003
   ( ) 2004
   ( ) 2005
   ( ) 2006
   ( ) 2007
   ( ) 2008
   ( ) 2009
   ( ) 2010
   ( ) 2011
   ( ) 2012
   ( ) 2013
   ( ) 2014
   ( ) 2015

2. Where did you study abroad?

3. What was the duration of your study abroad program (i.e., 10 days, 3 weeks, 3 months, 1 year)?

Face-to-Face Interaction with Locals While Abroad

4. How often did you engage in the following activities while abroad?

   Participate in local clubs and organizations:
   ( ) Very often ( ) Often ( ) Sometimes ( ) Rarely ( ) Never

   Attend local cultural events:
   ( ) Very often ( ) Often ( ) Sometimes ( ) Rarely ( ) Never

   Travel to other cities and countries:
   ( ) Very often ( ) Often ( ) Sometimes ( ) Rarely ( ) Never

   People watch at locations popular with locals:
   ( ) Very often ( ) Often ( ) Sometimes ( ) Rarely ( ) Never

   Engage in conversation with locals:
   ( ) Very often ( ) Often ( ) Sometimes ( ) Rarely ( ) Never
5. In what type of housing did you live while abroad? (Check all that apply.)
   ( ) Dorm with local and/or other international students
   ( ) Dorm with U.S. students
   ( ) Apartment with local and/or other international students
   ( ) Apartment (alone or with U.S. students)
   ( ) Homestay
   ( ) Hotel
   ( ) Other (Please specify)

Social Media Use While Abroad

6. Indicate the extent to which you used social media technology (this includes email, text, voice call, video chat, instant message, blogs, social networking sites, or video sharing sites) to communicate with:

   People back home:
   ( ) Very often ( ) Often ( ) Sometimes ( ) Rarely ( ) Never

   People in your Study Abroad program:
   ( ) Very often ( ) Often ( ) Sometimes ( ) Rarely ( ) Never

   People you met while abroad:
   ( ) Very often ( ) Often ( ) Sometimes ( ) Rarely ( ) Never

7. While abroad how often did you use the internet?
   ( ) Multiple times per day
   ( ) Daily
   ( ) Several times per week
   ( ) Weekly
   ( ) Several times per month
   ( ) Monthly
   ( ) Less often
   ( ) Never

8. Using your cell phone, how often did you access the internet or email?
   ( ) Several times a day
   ( ) About once a day
   ( ) 3-5 times a week
   ( ) 1-2 times a day
   ( ) Every few weeks
   ( ) Less often
   ( ) Never
9. Using your cell phone, how often did you access social networking sites?
   ( ) Several times a day
   ( ) About once a day
   ( ) 3-5 times a week
   ( ) 1-2 times a day
   ( ) Every few weeks
   ( ) Less often
   ( ) Never

10. On which social network sites do you have an account? (Check as many as apply):
    ( ) Facebook
    ( ) Twitter
    ( ) You Tube
    ( ) Snap Chat
    ( ) Tumblr
    ( ) Instagram
    ( ) Pintrest
    ( ) Other (SPECIFY)

11. Which social network site do you use the most often?
    ( ) Facebook
    ( ) Twitter
    ( ) You Tube
    ( ) Snap Chat
    ( ) Tumblr
    ( ) Instagram
    ( ) Pintrest
    ( ) Other (SPECIFY)

12. Approximately how many connections do you have on the social network site that you visit the most often?

13. Thinking about all of your connections, approximately what percentage do you think fall into each of the following categories?
    ( ) Friends/followers from High School
    ( ) Friends/followers from College
    ( ) Friends/followers from Family
    ( ) Friends/followers from other categories (please list other categories of friends you have in your network)
Thinking about your social network site used most often while abroad, please read through the following reasons people give for using social network sites, indicating how much each reason is like your own reasons by marking the appropriate response.

On a scale of 1-5, 1= Not at all, 2= Not much, 3= Somewhat, 4= A lot, 5= Exactly

14. “I use Facebook/LinkedIn/Twitter/other similar social network sites while abroad…”
   ( ) Because I just like to play around on Facebook.
   ( ) Because it is a habit, just something I do.
   ( ) When I had nothing better to do.
   ( ) Because it passed the time away, particularly when I was bored.
   ( ) Because it gave me something to occupy my time.
   ( ) Because it was enjoyable.
   ( ) Because it was entertaining.
   ( ) Because it relaxed me.
   ( ) Because it allowed me to unwind.
   ( ) Because it was a pleasant rest.
   ( ) So I could get away from what I was doing.
   ( ) So I could get away from people I regularly had to interact with face-to-face.
   ( ) To keep in touch with friends and family.
   ( ) To meet new people in my new host culture.
   ( ) So I wouldn’t have to be alone.
   ( ) When there was no one else to talk to or be with.
   ( ) Because it made me feel less lonely.
   ( ) Because it was reassuring to know that someone else was there.
   ( ) I didn’t want to be left out of what was going on back home with my friends and family.
   ( ) I didn’t want to miss out of things going on with my friends and family back home.
   ( ) Because everyone else was doing it.

Global Perspectives Inventory
For each of the following statements please indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree of strongly disagree. There are no right or wrong answers.

15. When I notice cultural differences, my culture tends to have the better approach.
16. I have a definite purpose in my life.
17. I can explain my personal values to people who are different from me.
18. Most of my friends are from my own ethnic background.
19. I think of my life in terms of giving back to society.
20. Some people have a culture and others do not.
21. In different settings what is right and wrong is simple to determine.
22. I am informed of current issues that impact international relations.
23. I know who I am as a person.
24. I feel threatened around people from backgrounds very different from my own.
25. I often get out of my comfort zone to better understand myself.
26. I am willing to defend my own views when they differ from others.
27. I understand the reasons and causes of conflict among nations of different cultures.
28. I work for the rights of others.
29. I see myself as a global citizen.
30. I take into account different perspectives before drawing conclusions about the world around me.
31. I understand how various cultures of this world interact socially.
32. I put my beliefs into action by standing up for my principles.
33. I consider different cultural perspectives when evaluating global problems.
34. I rely primarily on authorities to determine what is true in the world.
35. I know how to analyze the basic characteristics of a culture.
36. I am sensitive to those who are discriminated against.
37. I do not feel threatened emotionally when presented with multiple perspectives.
38. I frequently interact with people from a race/ethnic group different from my own.
39. I am accepting of people with different religious and spiritual traditions.
40. I put the needs of others above my own personal wants.
41. I can discuss cultural differences from an informed perspective.
42. I am developing a meaningful philosophy of life.
43. I intentionally involve people from many cultural backgrounds in my life.
44. I rarely question what I have been taught about the world around me.
45. I enjoy when my friends from other cultures teach me about our cultural differences.
46. I consciously behave in terms of making a difference.
47. I am open to people who strive to live lives very different from my own life style.
48. Volunteering is not an important priority in my life.
49. I frequently interact with people from a country different from my own.

**Concluding Thoughts**

50. Overall, what role did social media technology play in your Study Abroad experience?
VITA

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