



**Immersion and new media:
A study of the impact of new media usage on the experience of study abroad
participants¹**

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Abstract

Over the past few decades studying abroad has turned from an exceptional experience to common element of U.S. undergraduate education. The existing literature on study abroad has documented both the substantial expansion of study abroad programs across the world and the numerous positive outcomes experienced by study abroad participants, but the literature has yet to thoroughly explore the possible effects of emerging media technologies on the study abroad experience. Such emerging media technologies, commonly referred to as “new media,” include the internet, as well as cellular and satellite capabilities. Access to the internet and other forms of new media mean that study abroad participants, through physically removed from their native culture, may continue to play an active role in their native culture and home communities. Thus new media technologies may have the potential to reduce the levels of cultural immersion so valued by proponents of the study abroad experience. The role of new media in this experience has not yet been thoroughly explored by scholars. Using data gathered from a survey of study abroad alumni, this paper takes the first step in exploring the potential effects of new media on the highly regarded study abroad experience.

Introduction

The contours of the world have changed dramatically over the past fifty years. The juggernaut commonly referred to as globalization has altered social dynamics pertaining to economics, technology, politics, the environment, human rights, and education worldwide (Lechner & Boli, 2004). Resulting changes have quickly filtered into many aspects of everyday life, making it clear that globalization’s effects are not limited to the mobilization of resources and capital, but are also a driving force behind the mobilization of people. As a result, intercultural interaction has increased in likelihood and frequency for billions of individuals across the globe (Friedman, 2005). The need to prepare people to function in this new global reality has triggered a surge in

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international education, as the ability to interact with the people of other cultures has become a commodity in itself.

Evidence of the ever-increasing value of international education in contemporary society can be witnessed at colleges and universities across the United States, specifically in the form of study abroad (SA) programs. SA is defined here as a form of experiential education in which students travel to an area of the world outside of their institution's country to take classes as part of degree completion. Over the past half century, SA has gone from an exceptional experience to a central part of the curriculum in many colleges and universities throughout the world and has aptly been defined as a "growth industry" (Paige, Cohen, & Shively, 2004).

The existing literature on SA has documented both the substantial expansion of SA programs across the world (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2008) and the myriad positive outcomes experienced by SA participants (Chao, 2001; Comp, 2004). But the literature has yet to thoroughly explore the possible effects of emerging media technologies on the SA experience. Such emerging media technologies, commonly referred to as "new media," include the internet, as well as cellular and satellite capabilities. Access to the internet and other forms of new media mean that SA participants, though physically removed from their native culture, may continue to play an active role in their native culture and home communities. Thus new media technologies may have the potential to reduce the levels of cultural immersion so valued by proponents of the SA experience. The role of new media in this experience has not yet been thoroughly explored by scholars, this paper takes the first step in exploring the potential effects. It begins by detailing the phenomenon of study abroad in the U.S. from a historical context. A historical approach is used so the potential effects of new media on SA may be placed in a broader context of development of the SA movement. Next SA will be examined from an academic context as a way to acknowledge the extant body of research as well as to identify any gaps in the research. The paper will conclude with a discussion of the emergent relationship between SA and new media, and the role that new media may have in altering the overall SA experience.

The Significance of Study Abroad in Historical Context

The SA experience (formerly referred to as "foreign study") has a rich history in the U.S. that can be traced back to the colonial age. The new institutions of higher



learning that were established in Colonial America were, unsurprisingly, modeled after the more established British universities, and it was not uncommon for men attending these new colleges to return to Europe as part of their advanced education (Dubois, 1995). By the end of the nineteenth century, it was fashionable for those in the upper class to embark on a tour of Europe as part of their education (Katula & Khrenhauser, 1999).

The first noteworthy government-sponsored educational exchange in the U.S. did not occur until after World War II. This exchange was funded by liquidated Belgian relief funds and was used to send U.S. students to Belgium and vice versa (Dubois, 1995). The exchange was touted as a success by the U.S. government and was arguably the first step in making the SA experience into the familiar phenomenon it is today. This exchange also paved the way for one of the most commonly recognized international education scholarship programs, better known as the Fulbright Scholarship Program (Dubois, 1995). Senator William Fulbright's legislation, known as the Fulbright Act, was signed by President Truman in 1946 (HIE, 2008). "The international exchange program was intended to prepare the leaders of the future, in hopes of achieving permanent peace based on mutual understanding" (Dubois, 1995, p. 2). Thus, the Fulbright Program flourished in the new peace-seeking climate post World War II (NAFSA, 2003).

After World War II, foreign policy became increasingly important to the U.S. government. The idea that education is one of the best ways to maintain healthy relationships with other countries has since surfaced many times on Capitol Hill. In 1991 the Boren Act, which emphasizes the critical relationship between foreign relations and education, allocated significant government funds to students and institutions to boost international studies, foreign language studies and SA programs (Dubois, 1995). Not long after this, SA emerged on its own in U.S. government legislation. Near the end of 2005, the United States Senate voted unanimously to name 2006 as the "Year of Study Abroad." In doing so, the U.S. government had 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 (Year of Study Abroad, 2006, p. 1).



As recently as the summer of 2007, SA made it back onto the floor of the House in the form of the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act. “The 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). If passed into law, the ultimate goal of the legislation is to send at least one million U.S. undergraduates abroad every year funded with 80 million U.S. government dollars (Crawford, 2007). In December 2008 Congress “ended one step short of finishing the work to pass the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act” (NAFSA, 2008).

Strong government backing is just one of the reasons that SA within the U.S. has experienced such significant growth. Not surprisingly, colleges and universities across the U.S. are becoming more and more committed to providing their students with an opportunity to study abroad. The sheer number of U.S. participants would suggest that most institutions encourage their students to study abroad, but it is becoming more common for colleges and universities to make SA a requirement for graduation. Today both private (e.g. Marquette University) and public institutions (e.g. University of Minnesota) require students in certain majors such as international business and international relations, to participate in SA programs. In the fall of 2006, Goucher College, a small liberal arts school located in Baltimore, Maryland, became the first U.S. college to require all undergraduate students to participate in a SA program before graduating. Goucher’s president, Sanford J. Ungar, stated, “I don’t see how we can claim to have educated a young person, give them a liberal arts education, if we don’t provide them with study-abroad programs” (Chmela, 2005, p. 9). Trailblazers such as Goucher College aim to make the SA experience a part of every undergraduate’s educational experience, and when one takes into account the current growth rate, such a reality seems more possible every year.

The Institute of International Education (IIE), a U.S. not-for-profit educational and cultural exchange organization, publishes an annual report titled “Open Doors,” which is based on a survey of nearly 3,000 accredited institutions. Data from this yearly report provides documented evidence of the ever-increasing number of SA participants from the United States. A brief overview of the data collected by IIE shows the steady increase in participation and the large numbers reported in recent years. SA participation has experienced growth with every passing academic year, increasing 150% in the past decade alone. “Open Doors” (2008) also reveals that twenty-seven



institutions across the nation report that more than two-thirds of their students participate in SA programs.

Significant growth in participation has been accompanied by an increase of destination diversity. More U.S. students have started traveling to regions outside of Europe—over half of the twenty most popular destinations of the 2006-2007 academic year were countries outside of Europe. Of those twenty, fifteen do not have English as the primary language (IIE, 2008). Additionally, the 2006-2007 academic year saw more students study abroad in non-traditional destinations than ever before. Notable increases were seen in Asian and Middle-Eastern destinations (IIE, 2008).

Taking all of the above into account, it would seem logical to conclude that the development of the SA movement over the past century has been a success, but those truly dedicated to the educational value of cultural immersion are likely to argue that success can only be measured by the outcomes of the experience. Sutton and Rubin (2004) made this same argument, “Simply knowing how many students studied abroad is not equivalent to knowing what knowledge those students acquired (or failed to acquire) as a result of the experience” (p. 67). So even though on the surface it appears that the SA movement in the U.S. is making great progress, there is an onslaught of other factors that must be taken into account. One such factor is the access to, and use of new media by SA participants while abroad. Do new media technologies have the potential to affect the likelihood that the educational objectives are being achieved (i.e. the acquisition of language and cultural skills)? As detailed below, this question and others like it about the relationship between new media and the SA experience, have yet to be explored by extant SA research.

Study Abroad in an Academic Context

Academic literature on the SA experience can be found as far back as the early twentieth century (Anibal, 1922; Breazeale, 1929; Coleman, 1925; Gibb 1925;). In 1934, one of the first surveys was conducted with SA alumni. Data was collected on geographical location and occupation of survey participants, and opened ended questions were asked about the experience. “Typical judgments” of the value of participants’ experience 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 indeed onto something, as these sentiments have been expressed in innumerable studies to follow.

In the mid-twentieth century, as SA gained support from both universities and the U.S government, research on SA began to increase in popularity and subsequently split into several different subcategories. One of the largest areas of SA related research both then and now, looks at the effects of SA on second language acquisition (SLA). Most of these studies have concluded that SLA can only be successful in certain conditions. For example, Parr (1988) found that increased language gain was correlated with participants’ interaction with native-speaking friends, while Dekeyser (1991), Yager (1998) and Wilkinson (2002) found that SLA was dependent on individual participants’ attitude. Ginsberg (1992) found that male participants displayed greater language gain than female participants. Milleret (1991) concluded that intermediate language students experienced more language gain than advanced students, while Iino (1996) found that homestay was key to speaking proficiency. This offers proof that a wide range of factors have the potential to affect the process of second language acquisition. It seems plausible that a participant’s access to new media may also be a condition that could potentially have an effect on SLA as the use of new media is most likely to be used to communicate with home communities. When communicating with home communities SA participants are removed from the opportunity to practice any second language skills.

SLA, while often a very significant effect of the SA experience, is only one of an extensive list of effects that the experience of studying abroad can potentially have on its participants. Another sub-category of studies examining effects focuses on re-entry (Citron, 1996; Rogers & Ward, 1993) and culture shock (Anderson, 1971; Befus, 1998; Nolan, 1990). These sub-fields developed as scholars began to recognize patterns in intercultural experiences. Lysgaard’s (1955) U-shaped curve hypothesis introduced a pattern of adjustment, which contended that sojourners experience four stages of adjustment: the “honeymoon stage,” the “culture shock stage,” the “adjustment” stage and finally the “mastery” stage (Black & Mendenhall, 1991, p. 226). Although this model has its share of critics, both its parsimony and heuristic value have allowed it to yield a significant influence on the field (Ward et al., 2001, p. 82). It seems very likely that the use of new media could have an effect on the stages of culture shock as it may lessen one’s sense of detachment from their home environments, therefore making the



“shock” less severe. A modified version of the traditional U-shaped curve is presented in Kim’s (2006) “Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic.” This model posits that a cycle of stress and adaptation in “interethnic” situations leads to growth over time. Kim (2006) argues that the stress that is experienced in interethnic/intercultural situations “‘pushes’ individuals to adjust and restructure their existing conditions to regain an internal balance and, in so doing, to realize an increased adaptation to the external challenge” (p. 292). If access to new media lessens the stresses that were once inherent in these situations, does this mean that the potential for growth over time is also decreased?

Of all of the literature on SA from each of the subcategories, the most famous, if not the most significant is the 1990 book by Carlson, Burn, Useem and Yachimowicz titled, *Study Abroad: The Experience of American Undergraduates*. Carlson et al. (1990) gathered data from two groups of college juniors, one group that had studied abroad and one group that had stayed on campus. With a sample consisting of 303 students, this was the most ambitious SA study to date. Carlson et al. (1990) found differences between the control and treatment groups in levels of cultural interest (higher for those who studied abroad) and domestic orientation (lower for those who studied abroad). While the significance of this study within the field of SA research is undeniable, this book was published almost twenty years ago—a time when the new media technologies were accessible to a very limited population. Being that this was the case, the role of new media in the SA experience was not a factor in research even a decade ago. But an argument can easily be made that as access and usage increase, the emergent relationship between SA and new media is deserving of significant attention—although a review of the most recent SA research shows that efforts are focused elsewhere.

What has been proposed here is that the use of new media by SA participants has the potential to affect the levels of cultural immersion into a new culture by providing constant and instant access to one’s native culture. The key concept here is immersion. This begs the question, just how important is this element of immersion is in the SA experience? Engle and Engle (2003) attempt to answer this question in their article “Study Abroad: Toward a classification of program types.” Engle and Engle argue, “It is undeniable that there are fundamental differences in the academic and cultural experience offered by study abroad programs today” (p. 3). Recognizing this



fact, they make the case that SA programs should be distinguished from one another in terms of duration, immersion and academic rigor among several other variables.

Engle and Engle (2003) argue convincingly that the details of a SA experience do make a difference. In recognizing this issue, they established seven program classifications, urging distinctions to be made between different programs that provide fundamentally different experiences. These classifications include “1) Length of student sojourn, 2) Entry target-language competence, 3) Language used in course work, 4) Context of academic work, 5) Types of student housing, 6) Provisions for guided/structured cultural interaction and experiential learning, 7) Guided reflection on cultural experience” (p.8). By breaking SA programs down into these classifications, it becomes clear that the term “study abroad” does not refer to a singular experience, but encapsulates a sprawling range of experiences which can have significant fundamental differences. Engle and Engle make it clear that their classifications are not exhaustive. In the pages that follow, the argument to include new media access as a classification in itself is detailed, as it is believed that access to new media while abroad creates a fundamental distinction between two very different experiences: the study abroad experience inclusive of access to new media technologies and the study abroad experience void of access to new media technologies.

Defining New Media

In order to explore any possible relationship between the SA experience and new media, the term new media must first be unpacked. Due to the relative nature of anything deemed “new,” clearly defining the term new media is by no means a straightforward task. Although the term has become very popular only in recent years, media scholars have been using the term for decades. In his canonical text *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan (1964) uses the term new media in reference to William Shakespeare, whom he argues foresaw the powers of the transformative phenomenon.

In Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, which was almost completely devoted to both a psychic and social study of communication, Shakespeare states his awareness that true social and political navigation depend upon anticipating the consequences of innovation” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 10).



In its most basic sense, this notion of new media—which McLuhan (1964) demonstrates is no new idea—involves changes that take place in social behavior as a result of technological innovation. Although new media is no new phenomenon, it has only recently evolved into its own field of study as a result of significant attention from the academic community. Today, new media studies has emerged on its own as a subfield of communication research (Jones, 2003).

The first sentence of the *Encyclopedia of New Media* poses the question, “What is new media?” The response: “There is no single answer to be given” (Jones, 2003, p. 1). Perhaps the concept of new media can be most easily absorbed when it is presented as both a concrete and an abstract phenomenon. New media as a concrete phenomenon takes form in a list of technologies. A contemporary list of these technologies is likely to include items such as, “CD-ROM, HTML, streaming media, DV editing, web applications and DVD-video” (Sauer, 2008), others add cellular technologies to this list, stressing the significance of the texting revolution (Gordon, 2002). But this list is by no means exhaustive, and can never truly be. What is crucial to understand about any list of new media technologies is that it is constantly evolving and updating. While what constitutes new media is always changing, concrete definitions such as those listed above, are not only helpful, but necessary to scholars in the operationalization of the phenomenon. But the operationalization of the phenomenon is only one piece of the puzzle, by giving the term new media a more abstract, or conceptual definition, researchers can illustrate the significance of the phenomenon in a social context.

For the purpose of this paper, new media will both operationalized and conceptualized by drawing upon a specific trend that is commonly recognized within the realm of new media studies: Web 2.0. Web 2.0 is a concept that rose to fame as a result of an industry conference of the same name that took place in 2004 (O’Reilly, 2005). Tim O’Reilly, whose media consulting firm O’Reilly Media, sponsors the now annual conference, describes Web 2.0 as an:

‘Architecture of participation’—a constellation made up of links between web applications that rival desktop applications, the blog publishing revolution and self-service advertising. This architecture is based on social software where users generate content, rather than simply consume it, and on open programming interfaces that let developers add to a web service or get at data (Singel, 2005).



Web 2.0 is said to differ from its predecessor Web 1.0, in that it has transformed the Internet into a “platform” for participation (O’Reilly, 2006), as opposed to mere interactivity. Henry Jenkins (2006), who also discusses the importance of emerging media platforms in his book *Convergence Culture*, distinguishes between the two seemingly similar concepts: participation and interactivity. “Interactivity refers to the ways that new technologies have been designed to be more responsive to consumer feedback” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 133). Alternatively, Jenkins (2006) argues that participation is “more open-ended, less under control of media producers and more under the control of the media consumers” (p. 133). As a result of this new participatory role, internet users are empowered in that they are able to create their own content, share information and join ever-expanding social and professional networks.

This “architecture of participation” manifests itself in numerous forms. Any website that offers its visitors a participatory role can be considered an example of Web 2.0. This includes immensely popular social/business networking sites such as myspace.com, facebook.com, twitter.com, linkedin.com, and orkut.com. It also includes blogging sites such as zanga.com, wordpress.com and blogger.com, as well as media sharing sites such as youtube.com, flickr.com, snapfish.com and thepiratebay.org, just to name a few. Having access to the new media technologies encompassed in Web 2.0 has granted internet users entry to an expansive virtual world in which they can experience seemingly unlimited opportunities to share, connect, interact and participate with other internet users regardless of geographic location. In this virtual world geographic location has become less salient. In contrast, geographic location is arguably one, if not the most salient aspect of the SA experience.

An Emphasis on Participation

Within the context of this paper, SA has been defined as “a form of experiential education in which students travel to an area of the world outside of their institution’s country to take classes as part of degree completion.” This definition is very much based upon a distinction in geographic location. Here the SA experience involves removing the student from the community in one geographic location and placing (or immersing) that student in a different community living in a different geographic location. The most basic purpose of this act is to immerse that student in a new community as well as giving that student the opportunity to participate in this new



community. Although this is an obvious oversimplification of the process, what is meant to be made clear is the importance of immersion and participation in the SA experience.

NAFSA: Association of International Educators, the “leading professional association promoting the exchange of students and scholar to and from the United States” (NAFSA, 2008), outlines the benefits of SA in their public policy on the issue:

Americans who study abroad in quality programs for academic credit; engage in service and experiential learning, internships, and research; and study foreign areas and languages are far better prepared for the demands of the twenty-first century (NAFSA, 2008).

NAFSA (2008) uses the word engage to reference this idea of participation, which is a fundamental element of the SA experience. But it is now becoming clear that the participation experienced by students in SA programs is not bounded geographically. While SA students are indeed removed from their home communities in a geographic sense, students are increasingly more likely remain active members of their virtual communities. This is made possible as a higher percentage of the globe links in to the world-wide-web, and applications such as those described as Web 2.0 grow in popularity. Participation in a virtual community was, for the most part, not an option for students that studied abroad even ten years ago. Does access to new media technologies and therefore the virtual world, fundamentally change the SA experience? More specifically, does participation in a virtual community while abroad have any effect on the level of participation or engagement between a SA student and their host community?

One indication that the SA experience is undergoing a transformation as a result of new media technologies, is that the traditional definition of SA—which as mentioned above is based upon a distinction in geographic location—is currently being challenged. Peter (2008) argues that students need not physically travel to a different geographic location in order to have the SA experience, but that students can “study abroad” in Second Life. Secondlife.com, an exemplary example of Web 2.0, is explained by its creators as a “free online virtual world imagined and created by its residents” (Linden Research Inc., 2009). Second Life users create avatars to use to interact, travel, explore and participate with other users (Linden Research Inc., 2009). Peter further explains that, “around the world, universities, and even the US Department of State, are turning



to online virtual worlds to create cultural exchanges” (Peter, 2008, p. 1). Without a doubt new media and the SA experience have collided, collided in both geographic world and the virtual world. The example of Second Life SA, demonstrates how the traditional definition of what constitutes SA is being questioned. The fact that increasing numbers of Internet users are experiencing intercultural interactions online, may be only one of many fundamental changes that are currently taking place within the SA experience as a direct consequence of new media.

Research Questions

Over the course of U.S. history, SA has transformed from a rare experience into a common feature of undergraduate education. Government and institutional backing have no doubt led to the steady increase of student participation. As discussed above, these significant increases in student participation have triggered a surge in SA research, but extant SA research has failed to investigate a new transformation taking place within the SA phenomenon as a result of new media technologies. The questions that are now emerging and need to be explored are: 1) What percentage of students studying abroad use the Internet? 2) How frequently do students studying abroad use the Internet? For those students that do use the internet while studying abroad, 3) What do they use it for? And lastly, 4) What percentage of the sites frequently visited enabled access to Web 2.0? (see conceptual definitions above). Exploring these research questions will help to gain understanding about the ways in which new media may be altering the highly regarded study abroad experience.

Research Design

The aim of this research project was to gain understanding about the relationship between new media and the study abroad experience. Original data were gathered via web-survey. The web-survey vendor used in this project was SurveyGizmo.com. The many advantages of using a web-survey include its efficiency in terms of time and money, and its ability to gather data from unique populations spread out in terms of geographical location (Couper, 2008). The web-survey included fifteen questions (copy of survey located in Appendix A).

The participants in this study were recruited via email invitation (copy of recruitment email located in Appendix B), which was sent on March 17, 2010. The



inclusion criteria for participation in this study were based on participation in a study abroad program while enrolled as a student at DePaul University. Eligibility to participate in the survey was documented by subjects' inclusion in the email list provided by DePaul University's Study Abroad Office, which serves both undergraduate and graduate students. The email list provided by DePaul University's Study Abroad Office included just over 3600 email addresses. Data for this research project was collected anonymously and the web-survey instrument did not ask participants for any personal information or identifying material.

In order to test the research questions, data were analyzed quantitatively. Results showed what percentage of respondents had access to the Internet while abroad. Data also revealed details on Internet access frequency, points/locations of access and which sites were most commonly visited by students while abroad. Lastly, data were also examined for the evidence of any trends (e.g. access, frequency, popular sites) that may have developed over the time period of the sample.

Results

As mentioned above, the recruitment email for the web-survey was emailed to over 3600 email addresses, but approximately 500 of the emails were undeliverable due largely to invalid email addresses. The web-survey remained open for approximately one month after the recruitment email was sent. The final response rate was just over 3% (N=99). According to SurveyGizmo.com (2010), "Survey response rates vary widely and depend on a variety of factors," and internal surveys often yield higher response rates (30-40% on average), than external surveys (10-15% on average). The fact that this survey was an external survey may help to explain the low response rate. Other factors contributing to the low response rate likely include that no reminder emails were sent after the initial invitation, and the only incentive offered was a copy of the results of the study.

The 99 participants of the web-survey studied abroad in an eleven-year time period from 1999-2009. The majority of respondents (64%) studied abroad in 2007, 2008 and 2009. Study abroad destinations of respondents included 31 countries, and represented six of the eight world regions identified by the IIE in the yearly "Open Doors" report. Destination regions represented in the sample were Europe, Latin America, Asia, Oceania, Africa, and the Middle East/North Africa. Region destination



percentage breakdown for the sample was very similar to that of the 2008 “Open Doors” Report with the exception of Africa and Latin America (which were higher in the sample), and Europe (which was lower in the sample). One hundred percent of the survey participants received academic credit for their study abroad experience. Nearly half of survey participants (46%) studied abroad for one month or less, this is slightly lower than the percentage reported by the IIE for short-term U.S. SA participants for the 2007/2008 academic year, which was 56%. The maximum length of study abroad experience of those surveyed was 12 months (1% of survey respondents). The largest proportion of respondents (38%) reported to have lived with a local family while abroad (homestay), 33% reported that they lived in university dorm, 20% stayed in a hotel, and the remaining 9% lived in an apartment while abroad.

Not surprisingly, 96% of survey respondents reported that they did access the Internet during their study abroad experience. Fifty four percent of respondents reported having daily access to the internet, and 88% had access to the Internet at least once a week. This high level of Internet access suggests that students while abroad are likely to use the internet as a way to stay in contact with their friends and family back home, and the survey data strongly supports this assumption. More than two-thirds of the respondents said that they most often contacted friends and family via the internet—46% used email most frequently, and 23% said that they used web-chats (text, voice or chat) most frequently. Although 96% of respondents had access to the web while abroad, internet access points varied. Data revealed that there was no consistent trend over the eleven years in terms of where participants accessed the internet, but “home” was not a response for any respondents who studied abroad prior to 2003. The largest number of respondents said that they accessed the internet most regularly from an internet café (39%), while an almost identical number of respondents said to have most regular access from either home (31%) or school (30%). Respondents spent an average of 1.7 hours on the internet each week while abroad.

The vast majority of respondents that did have access to the internet while abroad reported using the internet for a wide range of purposes. One hundred percent of respondents used the internet to check their email, while 59% used the internet to get news, 55% used the internet to visit social networking sites, 32% used it to chat (whether it be text, voice or video), and 26% of respondents went online for entertainment. Overall, the most popular sites included Gmail.com, Facebook.com,



Yahoo.com and CNN.com. Facebook.com and Gmail.com gained popularity over the years while the popularity of CNN.com and Yahoo.com were more consistent over the time period of the sample. As seen in the chart below, several of the most frequented websites can be classified as examples of Web 2.0 including the social networking, video/photo sharing and blogging sites. Social networking sites in particular were listed as one of the top three most frequented sites for almost half of the survey respondents. This means that not only was internet access common for respondents while abroad, but that a majority of respondents used that access to go on to websites which offer the features of Web 2.0.

Most Frequented Websites
1. Email (Gmail, Hotmail)
2. Social Networking (Facebook, MySpace)
3. General News (CNN, BBC)
4. News/Search (Yahoo, MSN)
5. Chat (Meebo, AIM)
6. School (DePaul.edu)
7. Search (Google.com)
8. Video and Photo Sharing (YouTube, Photobucket)
9. Blog Sites (Blogger.com, LiveJournal.com)
10. Banking (Chase)
11. Travel & Transit (Expedia, Trip Advisor)
12. News Sports Ent (ESPN, Perez Hilton)
13. News Aggregate (Google Reader)

Discussion

The results of this survey shed light on several of the dynamics involved in the relationship between new media and the study abroad experience. What will come as a surprise to very few is that the internet plays a vital role in students' lives while studying abroad in terms of staying in touch with friends and family at home, it also helps students stay informed. What may be more surprising is that respondents only spent an average of less than 2 hours online each week while abroad, and they most



commonly did so at internet cafes. Furthermore, while they were online, students studying abroad were more likely to visit Web 1.0 sites (e.g. email portals) than they were to visit Web 2.0 sites (e.g. social networking portals). While this survey gathered data on what sites are most frequented by students studying abroad, learning what students do on these sites would reveal much more. The findings of this study would suggest that the majority of students studying abroad do not spend a large portion of their time online which is sure to relieve many study abroad proponents worried about students giving themselves enough opportunities to become immersed into local culture.

There were several limitations to this study. While respondents studied abroad in a wide range of countries, they are only representative of one U.S. university. Additionally, respondents who studied abroad in more recent years were represented in much larger numbers in the sample. While the survey asked respondents what websites they spent the most time on, it did not ask what they did while they were on those sites. While this may not be problematic in the case of sites that offer limited features (e.g. those that only provide news updates), it leaves many unanswered questions in the case of sites that offer many features including interactive components. These issues should be examined in a larger study, which can continue to answer questions relating to the relationship between new media and the study abroad experience.

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