Social media in study abroad

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Social media in study abroad

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine what study abroad related topics are salient on Facebook and Twitter used by study abroad offices. National organizations provide standards of good practice for study abroad offices, but currently there is not a standard to govern the use of social media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter). While proper Facebook and Twitter use is not a magic bullet to increase study abroad participation, it is important to examine the salient topics in media used by study abroad offices to determine if the offices are addressing perceived barriers to and career benefits of study abroad through their communication. This study examined Facebook and Twitter use by study abroad offices through a framing content analysis.

Keywords: Study Abroad, Social Media, Facebook, Twitter
CHAPTER 1

Social Media in Study Abroad

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the Higher Education Research Institute conducts a survey each year on incoming college freshmen. This survey is *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2013* and indicates that 34.3% of incoming freshmen to public universities show an intent to participate in study abroad. According to the most recently published *Open Doors Report* there were a total of 19.8 million U.S. students enrolled in higher education in the year 2012/13 (Open Doors 2014 Report, IIE). During this time, 289,408 students studied abroad. Alone, this is an impressive number. However, the percentage of total enrolled U.S. students who studied abroad is merely 1.5% according to this *Open Doors Report*. If 34.3% of incoming freshmen show an intent to participate in study abroad, then how does that number decrease to only 1.5% actually participating?

**Statement of Problem**

The salient topics on Facebook and Twitter used by study abroad offices at land-grant institutions frame the experience of study abroad in a way that does not address perceived barriers, career benefits, or the relation of study abroad to global citizenship. This study will show how study abroad experiences support the land-grant mission by creating global citizens, and the data show which topics were salient in 2014 on Facebook and Twitter.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature reviewed supports two main ideas. First, it is the purpose of land-grant institutions to create individuals who can contribute to society, and this contribution to society today requires global citizens. Second, study abroad and international experiences develop students’ soft skills. These skills are valued by employers and are attributes of global citizens. The literature review provides a background on national organizations dedicated to international experiences, addresses perceived barriers to study abroad, and outlines definitions of Facebook, Twitter, and study abroad. As a result of the ideas supported here, there is evidence that study abroad offices aid in the land-grant mission, and that development of soft skills, career development, and barriers to study abroad should be salient in communication from study abroad offices.

Background on Study Abroad

Study abroad has become an increasingly important aspect of universities’ ability to prepare students for the world after graduation. “International experience is one of the most important components of a 21st century education, and study abroad should be viewed as an essential element of a college degree.” This quote is from the Institute of International Education’s (IIE) President Dr. Allen Goodman (Press Release, IIE, 2014). Each year IIE collects data on the number and type of students who study abroad and who enter the United States as international students. This information is released in a report called the Open Doors Report. According to the most recent Open Doors Report, the number of American students studying abroad increased by two percent to 289,408, students with the United Kingdom being the leading destination. Since it takes time for
universities to report the data, the Open Doors Report is usually released a year late. Therefore this number of 289,408 students is from the year 2012/13. IIE is one of three national organizations that can be viewed as authorities within education abroad. There is also a national organization called NAFSA: Association of International Educators. Originally founded in 1948 in order to support foreign students within the United States, the scope and size of NAFSA have changed dramatically throughout the years. It includes today the fields of international student services, admissions, education abroad, and teaching English as a second language. As an organization, NAFSA is made up of members from academic institutions, governmental agencies, and private organizations. Finally, another organization in study abroad is known as the Forum. Its official name is The Forum on Education Abroad. It was incorporated in 2001 and was recognized in 2005 by the U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Trade Commission to serve as the Standards Development Organization for the field of education abroad (About Us, Forum). The Forum is considered the national authority on standards of good practice for providers and institutions in the field. It is the only organization that serves this purpose. There are currently nine standards of good practice listed on the Forum’s website (Resources/Standards, Forum): mission and goals; student learning and development; academic framework; student selection, preparation, and advising; student code of conduct and disciplinary measures; policies and procedures; organizational and program resources; health, safety, security, and risk management; and ethics. (Resources/Standards, Forum). The standards are presented in bullet points, and then followed by queries. The queries are short questions that serve as a guide for offices to
test whether or not they meet the standards. For example, the health, safety, security, and risk management standards are as follows:

- The organization prioritizes health, safety, and security in program development, implementation, and management conducting appropriate risk assessments for program sites and activities, maintaining written emergency plans and protocols, and identifying and leveraging relevant authorities, networks and resources.

- Staff are trained to anticipate and respond responsibly to student health, safety, or security issues; students are trained to responsibly manage their own health, safety, and security while abroad; and measures are in place for ongoing monitoring of and advising on health, safety, and security issues through a range of U.S. Department of State and other appropriate resources.

- The organization maintains appropriate kinds of insurance at recommended levels, operates in compliance with local laws, and follows best practices in reporting on critical incidents.

Two examples of the queries are below.

1. Do you regularly conduct risk assessments for program sites and activities?

2. Do you maintain written emergency plans and protocols, and do they utilize both U.S. and local authorities and resources?

The Forum’s standards cover a variety of issues related to study abroad (Resources/Standards, Forum); however, there are no standards in regards to communication and media use by study abroad offices. There is a short section in Appendix III of the Standards of Good Practice that covers “written and electronic materials” (Standards of Good Practice, Forum). In Appendix III, the queries are broad
and quite open to interpretation. The third query touches on what topics should be present in communication but does not fully create a guideline for what study abroad offices should be including in communication through media. There is a need for a new standard that includes information about proper media use.

**Barriers.** There are some perceived barriers to study abroad, which could be the reason for lack of participation. The most common perceived barriers to study abroad are lacking knowledge of opportunities, lack of language skills, delay of graduation, and cost of participation (Harder & Bruening, 2011). Recruitment strategies need to address these barriers. Current recruitment strategies for study abroad participation consist of three elements: program development, curriculum integration, and marketing, according to a study done by Sideli, Dollinger, and Doyle (2003). Marketing of study abroad focuses on four main areas, which are career preparation, personal development, sensitivity to diversity issues, and work with returnees (Sideli et al., 2003). The current methods of recruitment call for a high involvement and often require a high cognition with potential study abroad participants, which can be useful in persuasion but only in certain conditions (Sideli et al., 2003). There are many aspects of recruitment that relate to participation in study abroad, and marketing of study abroad is a branch of current recruitment strategies. This study focuses on the salient topics present in communication about study abroad. This could be included in the marketing aspect of current recruitment strategies. In theory the salient topics should be aligned with the four main areas of marketing presented by Sideli et al. (2003). However, it is worth noting that proper communication is not a magic bullet to increase study abroad participation. The purpose of this study is to collect data on current topics; it is not to say that increased
communication use will lead to increased participation in study abroad. Finally, social
media are also used in the marketing aspect of recruitment strategies and will be for this
reason discussed next.

**Facebook and Twitter**

Facebook can be considered simply a social networking site by using this
definition: “a social network is a website where people connect with friends” (Zarrella, 2009). But is there more to Facebook? Rory O’Connor is the author of a book titled
*Friends, Followers and the Future*, in which he makes the argument that Facebook is
actually a technology. O’Connor states that in the beginning it was the goal of Facebook
to connect the world through a “social graph.” It was a system in which all sorts of news,
information, and entertainment could be distributed, and all of it would be social
(O’Connor, 2012). This idea is highlighted in the many applications on Facebook today.
As a result, Facebook can be labeled a technology instead of merely a social networking
site.

According to the company’s *About* page, Twitter’s mission is “to give everyone
the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers.” There are
two important pieces of this statement to point out. First is the phrase “instantly, without
barriers.” Twitter functions in real time and globally and is often touted for its ability to
break news and trends. “Although Twitter remains fundamentally about communication,
it is becoming less conversational and more like a networked news organization”
(O’Connor, 2012, p. 136). Twitter provides early warnings about people, trends, and
news (O’Connor, 2012). The second important phrase is “give everyone the power to
create and share.” This highlights the way in which Twitter is slightly different from a
social networking site. Twitter can be more specifically defined as a microblog or microblogging platform. “Microblogging is a form of blogging that limits the size of each post” (Zarrella, 2009, p. 31). Twitter limits post to 140 characters, and because of this limitation there are features and behaviors unique to the medium (Zarrella, 2009). Safko’s *The Social Media Bible* (2010) also refers to Twitter as a microblogging site and states that the “character limitations of a microblog force us to communicate in a more succinct manner” (p. 257). Safko compares microblogging to text messages, but adds that microblogging may include video and attached files.

It is clear that there are differences between the two platforms. Facebook’s goal was to be a technology with a social graph (O’Connor, 2012), and Twitter is a microblog that is transitioning to a communication form. Both platforms produce content. For this study there must be a conceptual definition of content. Content is “a broad term that refers to anything created and uploaded to the website: the words, images, tools, or other things that reside there” (Handley, 2012, p. 6). Forms of content can include a Facebook page and Twitter stream (Handley, 2012). According to McQuail’s *Mass Communication Theory* (2010, p. 39), messages and information in digital form can be classified as new media. Facebook and Twitter could be classified as new media, but the concept of new media may be too broad, as it would include websites and other forms of social media. For this study, the terms Facebook and Twitter will simply be used to refer to each platform individually.

**Facebook and Twitter and Study Abroad.** Penny Schouten conducted a survey of 515 education abroad office directors and assistant directors to determine their use of social media. The results revealed that few offices were using social media. In the words
of Schouten, “whether it is staffing issues, or college administrators reluctant to adapt to social networking … study abroad professionals have not yet embraced social media” (Schouten, 2009, p. 127). Of the offices surveyed, 378 had a Facebook page and 114 had Twitter, 73% and 22% respectively. Social media that are popular today, such as Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat, were not on the survey. This researcher has not found a survey similar in scale, and related to study abroad office social media use, completed since Schouten’s.

**Usage.** While there is little information about current media use by study abroad offices, there are many studies about the rise in social media use among adults and teens. Two of these studies were completed by Pew Research Center. The studies show that Facebook is still by far the most popular medium. Twitter, however, falls behind both Instagram and Pinterest for adult usage, and Twitter is behind Instagram and Snapchat for teen usage (Teens and Tech., Pew Research Center). The Pew Survey was conducted in September of 2014, and the results show that 71% of adults, persons 18 years old and older, use Facebook while 28% use Pinterest, 26% use Instagram, and 23% use Twitter. A similar study from Pew in 2015 shows that 71% of teens, persons 13-17 years old, use Facebook, while 52% use Instagram, 41% use Snapchat, and 33% use Twitter. So 71% of adults and teens use Facebook, and 23% of adults and 33% of teens are on Twitter. This means that communication is changing. “The social networking site phenomenon has completely and rapidly changed the way that people interact – in regard to personal and professional relationships” (Safko, 2010, p. 23). “Anytime there is a tool that millions of people in one place at one time, all with common interests, are clamoring to use, you, as a businessperson, need to understand it and be a part of it” (Safko, 2010, p. 24).
The Pew Research Center studies show that Facebook and Twitter are used by a variety of audiences and that social media use in all forms is popular today. Therefore, as Safko (2010) claims, communication is changing, and businesses need to understand it. There are a number of ideas businesses need to consider for Facebook and Twitter use. For example, what time of day is best? For Facebook “office hours are often the worst time to blast content. Blasts outside of office hours had 20% higher engagement rates” (Goldman, 2012, p. 149). Goldman also notes that Facebook activity peaks in the early morning at 7am, after work at 5pm, and late night at 11pm. For Twitter, it is not specifically a time of day, but rather certain days that result in more engagement of content. Twitter users engage with more tweets on Fridays (Goldman, 2012). Generally speaking Thursdays and Fridays have 18% more engagement than other days for both Facebook and Twitter. These data from Goldman (2012) show that while content is important, engagement is equally important. “In other words your content must not only be good, it must encourage interaction as well” (Goldman, 2012, p. 60). In *Content Rules*, Handley and Chapman (2010) outline a communication plan that can be used by businesses to manage social media. The plan includes daily updates on Twitter and sharing of relevant news items on Facebook. A full outline of the communication plan can be found in the recommendation section. Funk (2011) offers *15 Facebook Tips for Business*. These tips state that a business should post seven times a week, and these posts should be a combination of informative, newsy, or entertaining posts (Funk 2011). There are also *12 Tips for Successful Corporate Twittering* in Funk’s (2011) book, including posting 15 to 20 posts per week on Twitter. Finally, Funk outlines the *Top 10 Social Media Mistakes*. These mistakes include *social media ghost town*, and *phoning it in*. Both
topics relate to pages and accounts with no content, or in other words, businesses’ blogs, Facebook pages, and Twitter accounts that are not being posted to regularly. In short, content must be created and shared regularly for successful social media use. There are many books about social media marketing, and the overwhelming conclusion is that proper social media use by businesses, requires consistent creating and sharing of content. *The Social Media Bible* (Safko, 2010) presents seven commandments for microblogging that can be applied to Twitter:

1. Thou shalt begin microblogging
2. Thou shalt tweet
3. Thou shalt follow twitterers
4. Thou shalt invite others to follow you
5. Thou shalt set up groups
6. Thou shalt use news feed tweets
7. Thou shalt use tweets for internal communications

The second commandment is “thou shalt tweet.” This emphasizes the need to send tweets regularly: “the technology isn’t any good unless you use it” (Safko, 2010, p. 275). “Another thing that customers expect is ongoing communication,” and “if you want ongoing loyalty, you have to engage frequently and with valid messages” (Goldman, 2012, p. 144). To further support his point Goldman adds “people are using social networks as an entry point of sorts to the internet,” and “they will follow recommended content from Facebook or Twitter and then follow links off-site” (p. 7). This makes it clear that “consistency and reliability are important to your reputation” (Goldman, 2012, p. 151). The information above about Facebook and Twitter use is related to businesses
using media. This study examined Facebook and Twitter use by study abroad offices, which could be considered businesses since they provide a service to students. To provide more background information on the mission of the offices, it is necessary to look at land-grant institutions as a whole.

**The Land-Grant University**

The eleven universities selected for this study are peers with the designation of land-grant institution as described in the Morrill Act of 1862. According to Iowa State University’s Office of Institutional Research, the eleven were adopted as a peer comparison group in 1986; each is the public land-grant university in its state, and all are classified as Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive in the 2000 Carnegie Classification of Higher Education. The institutions are University of Arizona, University of California-Davis, University of Illinois-Urbana, Iowa State University, Michigan State University, University of Minnesota, North Carolina State University, Ohio State University, Purdue University-Main Campus, Texas A&M University, and University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Eddy (1963) outlines contributions of land-grant institutions through the first hundred years. One of the contributions is the “combination of vocational and liberal education” (p. 8). Eddy states that land-grant institutions have “been a major force in making vocational education respectable not just in America but throughout the world” (p. 8). The programs of land-grant institutions are often based on the idea that individuals can contribute to society through work that is important to society (Eddy, 1963).
This idea of contributing to society is in more recent studies discussed below and is referred to as creating global citizens. The mission statements of the study abroad offices provide further support for the goal of creating global citizens.

**The eleven Land-Grant Universities and Study Abroad.** Study abroad at University of California-Davis has this sentence in their mission statement: “we promote an internationalized campus that cultivates an understanding of our diverse global community” (UC Davis Study Abroad, About Us). The University of Arizona “engages our students and faculty in issues and opportunities of global relevance” (Office of Global Initiatives, Homepage). The Texas A&M University Study Abroad Programs Office states “study abroad will broaden the students’ intellectual and personal horizons” (Study Abroad Programs Office, About Us). Finally, the two most complete mission statements in regards to soft skills and global citizenship are as follows:

“The Office of Study Abroad at Michigan State University is dedicated to providing all MSU students with high quality international academic opportunities that allow them to develop knowledge and skills needed to become productive and successful members of the global community. In partnership with MSU colleges, departments, support units, faculty, and staff, we seek to increase awareness of education abroad opportunities, to promote intercultural learning, and to advocate for diversity in participants and programs.” (The Office of Study Abroad at Michigan State University, About)

“In order for Iowa State University students to become leaders at the local, national and international levels, they will need to meet the challenges created by the global community of nations in which cross-cultural and language skills will
be increasingly important and in which knowledge of other nations and their customs and traditions will be no longer just desirable but imperative.”

(Iowa State University Study Abroad Center, Mission and Reports)

**Global Citizens**

So far, this review of literature shows that study abroad offices support the land-grant mission by helping to create global citizens. So what does it take to be a global citizen? The following sections discuss soft skills that can be gained through international experiences. Study abroad is an international experience, according to the definition below:

“Education that occurs outside the participant’s home country. Besides study abroad, examples include such international experiences as work, volunteering, non-credit internships, and directed travel, as long as these programs are driven to a significant degree by learning goals” (About the Initiative, IIE, 2014).

Harder (2015) aligns soft skills with the idea of cultural and global competencies. Two additional studies by Perry (2013) and Stoner (2014) highlight universities’ increasing development or dedication to creating global citizens. Perry (2013) states that an institutions’ ability to develop global citizens strengthens the employability of its graduates in an ever-globalizing context. This is in line with the mission of land-grant institutions and with Eddy’s (1963) essay on contributions in the first 100 years of land-grant institutions. These institutions combine vocational and liberal education to educate individuals who will contribute to society (Eddy, 1963). Since Perry (2013) states that the environment for graduates is in a globalized context, then the institutions’ ability to contribute to society depends on creating global citizens. Within study abroad literature
there are broadly three key dimensions that define global citizenship (Perry, 2013). These dimensions are social responsibility, global awareness, and civic engagement. Perry argues that, through technology and access to higher education, individuals have opportunities for global experiences. These opportunities allow a deeper understanding of cultural differences, and globalization is a fundamental component to the learning process (Perry 2013).

**Soft Skills.** In August of 2011, Crawford published a study titled *Comparative Analysis of Soft Skills: What is Important for New Graduates?* The study addressed the question, “What soft skills are employers looking for in new graduates?” (Crawford, 2011, p. 1) Crawford surveyed employers, alumni, faculty, and students and developed seven clusters of soft skills. The results ranked the clusters as a whole based on importance, and ranked the characteristics within each cluster. The results are as follows in order from most to least important: communication skills, decision making/problem solving skills, self-management skills, teamwork skills, professional skills, experiences, and leadership skills (Crawford, 2011). International experiences, which include study abroad programs, were listed as a characteristic under the experiences cluster. The Crawford study shows that soft skills are valued by employers and that communication is the most important of the soft skills. Crawford ends the study with a simple question, “So where do students learn soft skills?” (p. 22)

In March 2015, Harder surveyed career expo representatives to find out what skills and experiences were sought by recruiters. The results support Crawford’s claims that soft skills are valued. The top three skills sought by recruiters were leadership and communication skills, relationship building, and adaptability and flexibility (Harder,
This study also gauged recruiters’ interests in hiring students who have studied abroad. Seven of the eleven recruiters stated that study abroad experience was a consideration in the hiring process (Harder, 2015), but that it is important for students, or prospective employees, to communicate how a study abroad experience would be of value to the company (Harder, 2015). Therefore “recruiters may not realize the soft skills they seek are often the same skills included in conceptualizations of cultural and global competencies” (Harder, 2015, p. 46). In other words, the recruiters do not know that potential employees have gained soft skills from studying abroad. It is the responsibility of the student or potential employee to communicate this to the recruiter. It is therefore the responsibility of study abroad offices to provide resources and make the topic of soft skills salient in communication about study abroad, which in turn would aid study abroad offices in supporting the land-grant mission.

VanDerZanden from Iowa State University conducted a survey of horticulture students who participated in a single study abroad course. The purpose of the survey was to determine if the expected learning outcomes of international and multicultural awareness were met (VanDerZanden, 2007). The survey consisted of 23 questions addressing previous international experience, the preparatory class, study abroad experience, and how these experiences influenced career development. The results of the survey showed increases in personal growth of students in the following areas: written and oral communication skills, ability to work as part of a group, problem-solving skills, and self-esteem. The categories of this study parallel the seven clusters of soft skills developed by Crawford, and show that there was increased personal growth in these areas.
In conclusion, when Crawford, Harder, and VanDerZanden studies are viewed together, they show that study abroad experiences increase soft skills that are valued by employers and recruiters. Harder (2015) aligns these soft skills with cultural and global competencies. Perry (2013) and Stoner (2014) show universities increasing dedication to creating global citizens, as discussed earlier. Finally all of these studies further support a goal and contribution of land-grant institutions, which is the idea that individuals can contribute to society through work that is important to society (Eddy, 1963). Today, the work that is important to society requires global citizens who can gain skills from study abroad.
CHAPTER 3

THEORY

Framing

For this thesis, the theories I am going to use are Framing and the Elaboration Likelihood Model. Framing can simply be described as the “selection of some aspects of a perceived reality to make them more salient in a communicating text” (Entman, 1993, p. 52) In this case salient can be defined as “making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences” (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Entman also states “communicators make conscious or unconscious framing judgments in deciding what to say, guided by frames (often called schemata) that organize their belief systems” (p. 52). My framing content analysis will determine what aspects of study abroad the communicators (study abroad offices) are selecting, either consciously or unconsciously, to make more salient on social media.

Persuasion

Technology. As noted earlier, regular creation and sharing of content was suggested for successful Facebook and Twitter use. It is already established that Facebook is a technology. In the SAGE Handbook of Persuasion, Dillard and Shen (2012) argue that technology can persuade individuals in multiple ways. One of those ways is by triggering cognitive heuristics. These cognitive heuristics could be called “mental shortcuts” for judging the quality and credibility of content (Dillard and Shen, 2012 p. 6). One example of this is called the “bandwagon heuristic” (Dillard and Shen, 2012 p. 8). Social media have made it possible for users to act as a collective (Dillard and Shen, 2012). According to Dillard and Shen, users’ actions, not only active sharing and
commenting, are collected and compiled to produce metrics. The heuristic is triggered by a cue that signals the popularity of a product. Also, the interface of a technology can create these heuristics because it possesses cues that lead to quick evaluations (Dillard and Shen, 2012 p. 6). For example, there is a control heuristic that can be triggered by the interface affording the user control over the flow of information (Dillard and Shen, 2012 p. 6). As discussed previously, Facebook and Twitter can be considered new media. According to McQuail (2010), key characteristics of new media include autonomy and personalization (p. 144). Hence the characteristics of Facebook and Twitter can trigger a control heuristic, which leads to more favorable judgment of the quality of content. “In other words, the perception of a certain action possibility in the interface can directly contribute to positive or negative judgments” (Dillard and Shen, 2012, p. 6).

**Elaboration Likelihood Model.** Why are quality arguments and positive or negative judgments important? These ideas are important because they are directly related to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986). The ELM states that persuasion happens on a continuum, which has end points of central route and peripheral route processing. The central route of processing consists of thoughtful consideration of arguments (ideas, content) in the message. This occurs when the listener has both the motivation and the ability to think about the message and its topic. The listener is therefore an active part of the persuasion process. In the central route, a key to persuasion is the strength and quality of the arguments in the messages, not necessarily the number of messages. Attitude change that occurs through the central route takes place in a more predictable manner and is more persistent in behavior change (Petty and Cacioppo). For example, students who engage in high cognition when
presented with study abroad options would be more likely to participate in study abroad programs.

The term “elaboration likelihood” refers to the motivation and ability of a person to engage in issue-relevant thinking (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Therefore we know that high elaboration likelihood results in central processing, and that when one has the ability and motivation to engage in issue relevant thinking then one has high likelihood for elaboration. In other words, when students are able and motivated, they will think about study abroad through the central processing route.

Another important aspect of persuasion with ELM is the kind of cognitions present. A receiver forms both favorable and unfavorable thoughts when presented with a message (Benoit and Benoit 2008). Strong, quality arguments will produce more favorable thoughts than unfavorable thoughts. So, likelihood for favorable thoughts can be increased by presenting strong, quality arguments in the central route (Benoit and Benoit, 2008). Also, the quality of arguments in a message has a greater impact on persuasion under conditions of high elaboration (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). As noted previously, marketing of study abroad focuses on four main areas, which are career preparation, personal development, sensitivity to diversity issues, and work with returnees (Sideli et. al., 2003). These current methods of recruitment call for a high involvement and often require a high need for cognition with potential study abroad participants, which can be useful in persuasion but only in certain conditions (Sideli et. al., 2003). Therefore the ELM theory fits well with the goal of current marketing strategies to provide quality arguments about study abroad. In the peripheral route, the receiver does not expend the effort to think carefully about the ideas of the message.
Instead, the receiver uses cues to decide whether or not to agree with the message. These cues are number of arguments in message, length, and source creditability. Peripheral route processing occurs when a receiver lacks motivation and/or ability to engage in much thought on the message. One of these cues is simply the number of messages, which is where the popularity of the product, “bandwagon heuristics,” comes into play in persuasion by increasing the number of peripheral cues. The peripheral route could relate to Goldman’s claim that “people are using social networks as an entry point of sorts to the internet,” and “they will follow recommended content from Facebook or Twitter and then follow links off-site” (Goldman, 2012, p. 7).

In conclusion, these ideas of persuasion and processing are important to consider when talking about Facebook and Twitter use in study abroad as the central route is present in current recruitment strategies and the peripheral route is related to how Facebook and Twitter serve as an entry point to the internet.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

We know that Facebook and Twitter are in use by study abroad offices and the desired audiences. According to Safko (2010) and Goldman (2012), technology is no good unless it is being used, and the SAGE Handbook of Persuasion states that simply using technology can lead to persuasion because of its ability to create cognitions, which are processed through the central route of ELM. Finally we see that cognitions about the topic can create favorable and/or unfavorable thoughts, according to ELM. Therefore there is a need for consistent use of quality arguments through technology in order to persuade. In other words, study abroad offices should use Facebook and Twitter regularly, or in line with a communication plan presented by Goldman (2012) and Funk (2011). And this regular use should feature quality posts and tweets about the benefits of study abroad that can lead to creating global citizens. Persuasion is discussed in regards to ELM, because persuasion, in this sense, is the ability to overcome the barriers to study abroad. This study is not claiming that increased Facebook and Twitter use will directly lead to increased study abroad participation; rather it is saying that the salient topics on Facebook and Twitter, and the use of such media, aid in the decision-making and cognition process of study abroad participants. The purpose of this study is to determine what study abroad related topics are salient on Facebook and Twitter used by study abroad offices. With this in mind, there are two research questions that are the focus of this study.

1. What social media are in use by study abroad offices at Iowa State University and its ten Peer Institutions?
2. How do Facebook and Twitter used by study abroad offices at Iowa State University and its ten Peer Institutions frame the experience of study abroad?

The answers to these research questions will provide a baseline for how study abroad offices are using Facebook and Twitter and framing the experience of study abroad. Collecting and analyzing data on the current situation is the first step to determining the effects of social media. This is why the theory of framing is included in the research question. According to Entman (1993), texts contain frames, and according to Scheufele (1999), framing can be used to broaden our understanding of media effects. It is important to gain an understanding of the effects of Facebook and Twitter being used by study abroad offices since the use of these media is increasing.

In addition, the results of this study will show whether or not perceived barriers, soft skills, and career development are salient topics in media. These three factors also contribute to the quality of arguments about study abroad, and so they can be used in persuasion through central route processing in the ELM.

Finally, the results of this study will be a foundation for further research on media effects and audience experience in regards to social media in study abroad.
CHAPTER 5

METHOD

This study used the method of framing content analysis. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2013), there are many definitions of content analysis. The one used by Wallizer and Wienir (1978, as cited in Wimmer & Dominick, 2013, p. 159) defines content analysis as “any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information.” This is a broad definition. A more narrow definition is offered by Krippendorf (2000), who states a “content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables” (as cited in Wimmer & Dominick, 2013, p. 159). The paragraphs below show how the content analysis for this study has met the three criteria, which are mentioned in Krippendorf’s definition, through the sample, coSTder training, and selection of content categories, which will ultimately lead to quantitative results.

Additionally, content analysis can be divided into three categories, one of which is frame description and comparison (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013, p. 162), that can be used to identify how media frame specific issues. According to Entman (1993), frames are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments (p. 52). For the purposes of this study, the specific issue being analyzed is the idea of study abroad as defined previously.

Universe and Unit of Analysis

It is necessary to define a universe for a content analysis (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013, p. 164). Schouten’s (2010) article listed many platforms of media used by study abroad offices. After examination of Iowa State University and its ten peer institutions,
only two platforms were found to be in use by all eleven universities. These two new media platforms are Facebook and Twitter. In an effort to represent a complete year, the time period for data collection was January 1st 2014 to December 31st 2014. The universe of this content analysis is then defined as Facebook and Twitter data from the year 2014 from study abroad offices at Iowa State University and its ten peer institutions.

In this study, the unit of analysis is the theme of text in the Facebook status updates and Twitter tweets from study abroad offices. The conceptual definition of this unit of analysis is the message sent by the study abroad office. There are then two operational definitions of this unit of analysis, which depend upon the media platform from which the message originated: the operational definition for Twitter is the individual tweet sent from the office; the operational definition for Facebook is the individual status update or photo with text posted by the office. This definition does not include photo albums. It could, however, include links to webpages and Facebook events as long as the post has originated from the office’s media platform. Therefore the type of data collected is individual Facebook posts and Twitter tweets.

The researcher used emergent coding to develop content categories (Appendix). The categories are based on preliminary examination of the social media used at Iowa State University. The researcher developed a category system based on common themes that emerged from the data. This is in accordance with the definition of emergent coding (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013, p. 168).

Sample

The sample for the content analysis was collected from the media used by study abroad offices at Iowa State University and its ten peer institutions. It is a stratified,
random sample in the form of a constructed week. The stratification will lead to a better representation of the population, as the fall and spring semesters as well as summer provide varying information regarding study abroad. If variations in content are known, these variations can be used to select subsets of the sample, which will be just as representative as a larger simple random sample (Riffe et al., 2006, p. 112). Previous research by Stempel (1952) and Riffe, Aust, et al. (1993) established that one to two constructed weeks were efficient enough to represent six months of daily newspaper editions (Riffe et al., 2006, pp. 112-114). The idea of constructed week sampling was applied to online, aggregated news by Hester and Dougall (2007). The results of the study showed that constructed week sampling is still the most efficient type of sample, but for online sources two constructed weeks are needed to represent six months of data (Hester and Dougall, 2007, p. 820). A constructed week was also used by Lee et al. (2014) for a study titled *The Dialogic Potential of Social Media: Assessing the Ethical Reasoning of Companies’ Public Relations on Facebook and Twitter*. They used one constructed week from a six-month period. This study showed that a constructed week is efficient for representing individual Twitter tweets or Facebook posts as well as online news. Finally, Thornton (2013) used a constructed week in her *Time of the Month* study. This study collected individual tweets based on Twitter time stamp within a 24-hour time span (Thornton, 2013, p.45) and shows that it is appropriate to use media time stamps in relation to constructed week sampling.

In order to represent the variations of the fall and spring semesters as well as the summer, my sample has been divided into three subsets. The semester subsets contain approximately five months worth of data, so two constructed weeks were created for each
semester. The summer has only three months and therefore only one constructed week was created. The constructed weeks were created in an Excel file. Each day was randomly selected on 2/24/15 from a list of all possible days in the subset (Formula in Appendix). The dates randomly selected by the formula are in the following tables:

Table 1 Spring 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/2/14</td>
<td>2/17/14</td>
<td>4/8/14</td>
<td>1/15/14</td>
<td>3/6/14</td>
<td>1/31/14</td>
<td>3/1/14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Summer 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5/18/14</td>
<td>8/18/14</td>
<td>7/30/14</td>
<td>6/25/14</td>
<td>6/12/14</td>
<td>5/23/14</td>
<td>5/31/14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Fall 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/7/14</td>
<td>9/22/14</td>
<td>10/21/14</td>
<td>9/17/14</td>
<td>10/16/14</td>
<td>8/29/14</td>
<td>10/18/14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For this study, Facebook was an obvious choice due to its popularity, but it also provides a date stamp for the content. It is possible to find Facebook content from a year
ago or even the first post on a page. Thus Facebook works well for data collection and a constructed week.

The Pew studies mentioned above show that Twitter is fourth among adult and teen use. So why collect data from Twitter? There are four reasons. First, it was the second most popular platform in use by the study abroad offices. Second, Twitter also has the benefit of a date stamp for content. However, it is worth noting that Twitter streams only save the latest 3800 tweets. Third, Twitter has been used in previous content analysis studies and other studies that used constructed weeks. So while Pew research shows that Twitter is fourth among users, for the purposes and subjects of this study Twitter is number two, second only to Facebook. Finally, the demographics of Twitter have shown significant increases among men, college graduates, and urbanites from 2013 to 2014 (Duggan, 2015). So while the visual media such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest are dominated by females, Twitter shows a statistically significant increase in male participation (Lenhart, 2015, and Duggan, 2015). The *Open Doors Report* states that the ratio of male to female participation in study abroad was 34.7 to 65.3 in 2012/13. Women are 87% more likely to study abroad than men (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2014). Since the demographics of Twitter are predominately male, understanding the current use of Twitter by offices could help solve a current hot topic in study abroad, which is male participation. So, Facebook was chosen for its overwhelming popularity; Twitter was chosen for its popularity among study abroad offices and for its potential to help solve a current issue in the field. Data were collected by taking screenshots of the individual posts on Facebook and Twitter during a 24-hour time span on the days of the constructed week. These screenshots were saved and coded by independent coders after training from
the researcher. It is recommended that 10% to 25% of the data is coded to check for reliability (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013, p. 175). As there were five constructed weeks, the one constructed week representing summer 2014 was used to check for reliability. This was 20% of the data. Reliability was tested using Scott’s $\pi$ in order to account for chance agreement between the researcher and coder (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013, p.176).
CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS

Social Media

Data were collected by the researcher during the month of April 2015. Of the eleven institutions researched, Facebook and Twitter were the only two media platforms in use by all of the study abroad offices at this time. Iowa State University has a decentralized model for study abroad, and because of this four Facebook pages and three Twitter accounts from Iowa State were included in the data collection. Six of the eleven universities had Instagram. Five of the eleven had Pinterest. Seven of the eleven had blogs. Other noteworthy platforms are LinkedIn and Flickr. The researcher collected these numbers by using social media badges listed on the website of the study abroad offices. Only profiles, accounts, and blogs that were completely dedicated to study abroad were counted. For example, the University of Arizona Study Abroad Office is under the umbrella of the Global Initiatives Office, which has its own “UA Global” social media accounts including but not limited to Facebook and Twitter; these accounts were not included in this study.

Frames

The coding was conducted by two coders, who received training from the researcher. Coder One examined posts and tweets screenshots from the spring semester, and Coder Two examined posts and tweets screenshots from the fall semester. Both coders and the researcher coded screenshots from the summer. The summer results were used to check for reliability using Scott’s $p_i$, which was achieved with Coder One at 74.9% but was not achieved with Coder Two at a level above 70%. In consequence, a
third coder was trained, and fall semester screenshots were re-coded. This time a reliability of 71.1% was achieved. The total data coded was 530 screenshots. 210 of these came from the spring semester, and 213 came from the fall semester. Finally, there were 107 coded screenshots from the summer. The coding results show a bias towards Facebook posts and Twitter tweets with the frames of travel (16%) and entertainment (28%). There were also numerous posts and tweets in the News frame, which account for 12% of the total, and the Events frame at 23% of the total. Examples of the frames are shown in the Appendix along with definitions used to train coders. The results show that Career, Study, and Process frames make up only a small percentage, at 15% combined, of salient topics in social media. Figure 1 below shows the distribution of the posts among the frames.

**Figure 1 2014 Year**
Figure 2 Spring 2014

Figure 3 Summer 2014
Finally, the data can be divided by days of the week for Facebook and Twitter (Figure 5 and Figure 6), and by total number of Facebook posts and Twitter tweets from each office during the constructed week (Figure 7 and Figure 8).

**Figure 4** Fall 2014

**Figure 5** Facebook by day
Iowa State University. Iowa State University (ISU) has a decentralized model of study abroad, which means that each college has its own study abroad office and there is
a campus-wide study abroad center. Figures above include the data from Iowa State University’s Study Abroad Center only. For a more specific breakdown of the data from all of ISU please refer to Figure 9 through Figure 12 below. The colleges of Business, Veterinary Medicine, and Design did not have Facebook pages specifically for study abroad. The College of Engineering does have an International Program Facebook page; however, the first post on the page is from August 18th, 2014, and so data could not be collected for the full span of the constructed weeks. Finally, at the time of data collection only two offices had Twitter accounts. This has since changed.

Figure 9 ISU Facebook by day

Figure 10 ISU Facebook by office
Figure 11 ISU Twitter by day

Figure 12 ISU Twitter by office
CHAPTER 7

LIMITATIONS

This study is just the beginning. As social media are adopted by study abroad offices, research of those media is also needed. This study, or a similar study, should be repeated to track changes in usage of media and to examine the salient messages on other platforms. For example, according to Pew Research Center surveys, Instagram is a leader in platforms used by adults and teens (Teens and Tech, Pew Research Center). Also six, of the eleven institutions in this study, were using Instagram at the time of data of collection. A framing content analysis may not be the best choice for method of study due to the visual aspect of Instagram. That does not change the fact that the field of study abroad needs additional research in regards to audience needs, communication, and media usage.

Also, there were issues with data collection from some universities. NC State, Ohio State, and Wisconsin-Madison must be addressed separately in regards to Twitter. Ohio State twitter account is not specifically for study abroad, but is called OSU global, which includes international student services. I have included only study abroad dedicated accounts in the data collection, so OSU has been excluded. NC State is a study abroad specific Twitter account, but the stream only dated back to March 12 2015. In consequence data during the time frame of the constructed weeks could not be collected. Wisconsin-Madison’s Twitter account stream dated back to October 7th, 2014. In this case partial data was collected from the fall semester constructed weeks. There were a total of 18 Tweets collected.
CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION

Content posting

First the total number of posts should be increased for most study abroad offices. According to Funk (2011), businesses should post to Facebook seven times a week and to Twitter between 15 and 20 times a week. There is a need for consistent communication through Facebook and Twitter. “The technology isn’t any good unless you use it” (Safko, 2010, p. 275). “Another thing that customers expect is ongoing communication,” and “if you want ongoing loyalty, you have to engage frequently and with valid messages” (Goldman, 2012, p. 144). As illustrated in Figures 3 and 3.1, there is inconsistent posting from study abroad offices. The good news is that offices are posting on days that are better for engagement. As discussed, Twitter users engage with more tweets on Fridays (Goldman, 2012), and Thursdays and Fridays have 18% more engagement than other days for both Facebook and Twitter. Figures 2 and 2.1 show the days of the posts, which are in agreement with the ideas of Goldman.

Frames

Second, the frames that relate to the barriers of study abroad and that could be used as quality arguments in persuasion with regards to ELM make up only 15% of the data when combined. These frames are career, process, and study. Again the most common perceived barriers to study abroad are lacking knowledge of opportunities, lack of language skills, delay of graduation, and cost of participation (Harder & Bruening, 2011). We also know that soft skills are valued by employers (Crawford, 2011) and that these skills can lead to cultural and global competencies (Harder, 2015). Perry (2013) and
Stoner (2014) show universities’ increasing dedication to creating global citizens, which happens through the development of soft skills. For these reason, it is vital for career, process, and study frames to be salient in social media, yet they are not.

In conclusion, we know that Facebook and Twitter are in use by study abroad offices and the desired audiences for study abroad participation. We also know that study abroad has become an increasingly important aspect of universities’ ability to prepare students for the world after graduation. Land-grant institutions make a contribution to society by creating individuals who do work that is important (Eddy, 1963). Today this work requires global citizens, who can gain soft skills from study abroad, according to Crawford (2011), Harder (2015), and VanDerZanden (2007). Technology can be used in persuasion to create cognitions (SAGE Handbook of Persuasion), which are processed through the central route of ELM so there is a need for consistent use of quality arguments through technology in order to persuade. Consistency is important because technology is no good unless it is being used (Safko, 2010). In other words, study abroad offices should use Facebook and Twitter regularly and in line with a communication plan. And this regular use should feature quality posts and tweets about the benefits of study abroad, which can lead to creating global citizens. The most common perceived barriers to study abroad are lack of knowledge of opportunities, lack of language skills, delay of graduation, and cost of participation (Harder & Bruening, 2011). These barriers can be overcome by presenting quality arguments in a persuasive manner through social media, and by making these topics salient in the conversation about study abroad. With these ideas in mind, it is of the utmost importance, and the responsibility of study abroad
offices, to ensure that the ideas of perceived barriers, soft skills, and global citizenship are salient in communication with regards to studying abroad.

**Recommendations**

**Communication Plan.** It is recommended that study abroad offices create and use a communication plan. A great strategic communication plan includes a publishing scheduling. A common structure for the schedule is 1-7-30-4-2-1 (Handley and Chapman, 2011, p. 59). The numbers refer to how often content is posted, and they represent daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and biannually/annually. I have listed the content below by category:

**Daily**

- Twitter updates that offer something of value
- New items you read elsewhere that are relevant to your core content, posted to Twitter or Facebook page
- Response to comments
- Share user-generated content on own site

These daily updates could be deadline reminders, presentation notifications, news from around the world, news from around the university, and/or office updates. These updates relate to the process and news frames of this study. This also provides time for engagement, as study abroad offices must respond to any comments or feedback on the social media, blog, and/or other study abroad sites.

**Weekly**

- At least one new blog post
- A short video
• Participation in related forums, discussion groups, LinkedIn

• Update primary website’s pages or sections

**Monthly**

• Write a meatier blog post or article based on deeper research, or an interview with a subject-matter expert

• Newsletter

• Organize a coffee hour or social event

The weekly and monthly sections of the communication plan provide many opportunities to address the perceived barriers of study abroad, and to make soft skills and career development salient in the conversation through blog posts, articles, and participation in forums and discussion groups.

**Quarterly**

• Case study or featured story

• Special issue of newsletter

• Video series

**Biannual/Annual**

• Bigger events

• Produce best practices guide

• Speak or present at annual conference

Finally, the quarterly and biannual sections of the communication give the study abroad offices time to promote large event such as study abroad fairs, and a platform to feature special study abroad related projects such as pre-departure orientations and returnee conferences.
Forum Standard. It is also recommended that the Forum on Education Abroad strongly consider adding a standard to regulate the use of Facebook and Twitter, and other social media, by study abroad offices. These media could be useful in meeting current standards set forth by the Forum, as well. For example, Twitter provides early warnings about people, trends, and news (O’Connor, 2012), which could be useful in meeting the health and safety standards, specifically “measures are in place for ongoing monitoring of and advising on health, safety, and security issues through a range of U.S. Department of State and other appropriate resources” (Resources/Standards, Forum). Listed below are suggestions for a 10th standard, which would regulate the communication by study abroad offices through Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.

- The content is in a form that meets the needs of the specific media platform on which it is shared.
- The content shared meets the needs of the audience present on the media platform.
- There is consistent sharing of content that is related to study abroad processes, benefits, and perceived barriers.
- The content shared supports both the mission of the study abroad office and of the institution as a whole.
- The content is up-to-date, accurate, and corresponds with other forms of recruitment strategies and marketing, such as printed materials and in-person presentations.
APPENDIX CODE SHEET AND FRAMES

Random Selection Formula

=VLOOKUP(RANDBETWEEN(1,16),B4:C19,2,FALSE)

There were 15, 16, or 17 options for all possible days of the week. The (1,16) section of the formula represents all possible Mondays, all possible Tuesdays, etc. This part of the formula changed with respect to the number of possible days. For the example in the index, column B contains numbers 1 through 16 starting in cell B4, and column C contains dates of all possible Sundays for Fall Semester 2014 in day-month format. For Fall 2014 and Spring 2014, Sunday was the only day with 16 options as all others had 17 possibilities. During Summer 2014, Sunday had 16 options and all other days had 15 possibilities.

Code Sheet and Frames

This study will be coding the text in individual Facebook posts and Twitter Tweets. This coding will be based on the overall theme of the text, and not simply on words present. For example a post/tweet that reads: “Register for our returnee conference to learn how to add study abroad to resumes and talk about your experience in interviews” would be coded as Event not as Career. Other examples and clear explanations will be provided in coder training. There will be eight possible frames. See description of the frames below:
Travel Frame. (01)Yes/(02)No - Does the post/tweet contain quotes, mention of an ‘escape’ from home university (e.g. why be in class, if you could be here), or travel tips such as: hostel/hotel/train/plane/bus information, links/information about deals, student stories of weekend travel or situations.
**Cultural Frame.** (01)Yes/(02)No - Does the post/tweet relate to culture, language, specific destinations points of interest, food, drink, or international holidays and/or foreign holidays (e.g. chinese new year).
Study Frame. (01)Yes/(02)No - Does the post/tweet contain information about: classes, foreign universities, classrooms, homework, academic differences, course catalogs, and/or information about study abroad programs with specific focus. The information should be within the post/tweet or the post/tweet must contain a direct link to the source of information.
Process Frame. (01)Yes/(02)No - Does the post/tweet offer information about updates on study abroad applications and the deadlines of such as well as scholarships and/or financial aide?
Entertainment Frame. (01)Yes/(02)No - Is the post/tweet purely a post for entertainment. These posts/tweets could include “top” lists from online blogs or websites, youtube videos, memes, pictures (not accompanied by text, although not judging the qualities of the picture) or albums, and/or anything related to or mentioning buzzfeed.
Career Frame. (01)Yes/(02)No - The career frame encourages students to focus on skills gained while abroad, and how to incorporate study abroad/international experiences into resumes and job interviews. There must be information about these topics in the post/tweet. Or the post/tweet must contain a direct link to the sources of this information.
News Frame. (01)Yes/(02)No - Does the post/tweet contain links and/or information about: world news and/or politics, articles and/or links from newspapers or other news sources, articles about/from other departments/colleges/events from home university.
**Event Frame.** (01)Yes/(02)No - Does the post/tweet specifically related to activities held or sponsored by the study abroad office. These posts/tweets could contain: date and time information; links to Facebook event/calendars; information about ‘what to expect’ at events.
REFERENCES


