ONLINE SUPPORT FOR JAPANESE STUDENTS STUDYING ABROAD: A VIRTUAL UMBILICAL CORD

Douglas Rapley

University of Sharjah

Abstract

This paper looks at eight study abroad students from Japan and their use of the Internet to receive emotional support from home. The research was longitudinal and data was collected via six interviews per participant spread over a period of approximately two years. The setting was a private tertiary college in a provincial city in New Zealand. Previous research in the literature indicates that due to the Internet's influence, study abroad can no longer be considered a time of true separation from family nor friends nor culture. The current research reveals that seeking emotional support via online social media occurs predominantly in the initial stages of a study abroad when students feel most vulnerable. The study also shows that the Internet can be a double-edged sword in a study abroad context. Although it can assist students in settling in, it can also inhibit their independence and, ironically, induce homesickness. The Internet can undoubtedly play an important role in study abroad students' emotional wellbeing, enabling them to receive support from afar, but it can also distract from them fully experiencing their time overseas.

Keywords: study abroad, online support, Japanese international tertiary students

Introduction

Studying abroad has traditionally been based on an assumption of separation, where "students separate from friends and family to enter a new culture that is theoretically separate from their home culture" (Mikal & Grace, 2012, p. 288). Even as recently as the 1990s, going from Japan to New Zealand was a long journey, with a real feeling of leaving home for a distant land. Nowadays, however, although physical distances remain constant, the Internet has decreased perceptual distances and enabled students to stay virtually connected to family and home-based friends. For many contemporary study abroad participants, the Internet has caused the physical and virtual worlds to become intertwined and inseparable (Mikal, Yang & Lewis, 2014; Sandel, 2014). This virtual access to borderless social connections in the context of study abroad has allowed many

students to receive immediate and ongoing emotional support that would not have been possible in the past. However, there may also be associated negative factors.

This article begins by introducing the study abroad concept and focuses on online social media usage in the study abroad context. Following this, the research cohort, context and methodology are introduced. The findings are then presented under three headings based on themes that emerged from the data. The findings are then discussed before conclusions are presented.

Study abroad

The term *study abroad* relates to the pursuit of education in a country other than one's own and can encompass both students who study for a short period overseas and those who undertake long-term study to complete a qualification in its entirety (Coleman, 2013; Asaoka & Yano, 2009; Andrade, 2006). Increasing proficiency in a second language (L2) has often been considered as a main motivator for students embarking on study abroad. This is because of a perception that through the combination of being immersed in the L2 speech community, together with formal classroom tuition, students can soak up the L2 like a sponge (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Sanz, 2014; Tanaka, 2007). Undoubtedly, study abroad can offer opportunities for this to happen, but that is not to say that great improvements in L2 proficiency are a given. However, one thing that does appear certain, many study abroad students will experience escalated levels of stress, at least initially.

Study abroad, stress and the Internet-based support

Unlike travellers in general, international students potentially face more stressors, such as the pressure of studying in a L2 while still building their proficiency, language problems leading to misunderstandings and adjusting to new cultures of education (Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Shadowen, Chieffo, & Guerra, 2015). The initial period in a foreign environment is usually when stress levels peak as international students struggle to position themselves and tend to suffer from anxiety, stress, homesickness and loneliness (Andrade, 2006; Ayano, 2006; Kim & Okazaki, 2014; Mikal, Rice, Abeyta, & DeVilbiss, 2013; Yue, 2009). The Internet offers positive aspects, such as reducing the perceived distance to friends and family, and providing a source of support to students who have not developed strong in-person social networks (Cole, Nick, Zelkowitz, Roeder, & Spinelli, 2017).

In the past, maintaining personal ties was difficult when moving overseas, but, as Hossain and Veenstra (2013) point out, the availability of online social network sites allow people avenues for "diasporic usage" (p. 2697). Cemalcilar, Falbo, and Stapleton

(2005) observe that when people are stressed, such as when entering a new culture, they turn to social media to search out and rely on others familiar to them who can minimize self-doubt and act as pillars in reaffirming home values. These people can provide emotional support, validate self-worth and create a sense of belonging, which in turn decreases homesickness and perhaps the disorientation that may accompany adjustment to a new language or culture.

The value of support from home for study abroad students should not be overlooked. Research has shown that international students with higher stress generally communicate more with their family, demonstrating how important parental support is in dealing with stress (Kline & Liu, 2005; Mikal & Grace, 2012). Lin, Wu, You, Chang, Hu, and Xu (2018) argue that online relationships "reflect a weak network tie" because they are superficial and cannot provide "concrete assistance", and as a result "can be easily broken" (p. 5). However, other research, such as that conducted by Mikal and Grace (2012), has shown that online support provided real substance to those in need. International students who maintained strong connections with home have been found to be "far more resilient than those who do not" (Baker & Hawkins, 2006, p. 22). Mikal and Grace (2012) note that previous research has found that even with international students who don't tend to contact home much, just the realization that support is available if needed is beneficial. International student-to-family contact is often a mutual engagement as it also allays the worries of the students' parents (Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukophadhyay, & Scherlis, 1998; Sandel, 2014). Although these are positive points, we need to recognize that some factors associated with social media are less positive.

Online connections: The double-edged sword

The use of social media for support has some negative aspects which can restrict a study abroad experience. Hofer, Thebodo, Meredith, Kaslow, and Saunders (2016) highlight that in the past, the changes that young people go through while maturing during college years often happened away from parents, but the rise in online communication has meant that parental influence can be maintained, which could influence a child's levels of independence. In this way, the Internet can function as a type of "electronic umbilical cord" (Allen & Dupuy, 2012, p. 475).

Having the ability to choose when, where and from whom to seek support is certainly a positive of the Internet. However, given that study abroad is designed to provide the opportunity for face-to-face interactions, spending long periods of time focused on digital interactions must come at a cost. With their hearts and minds focused on life back home, some students may struggle to learn the L2 and, according to Mikal and Grace's (2012) research, those students who "retain close ties with their home cultures beyond

the initial transition abroad may fail to ever engage fully enough in the target culture to lose their own cultural referents" (p. 302). One of Sandel's (2014) research participants stated: "I feel that they [social media] make me feel as though I'm not studying abroad" (p. 17). This can result in students failing to "reach a stage of biculturalism, always seeing the target culture as 'other' and exaggerating cultural differences" (Mikal & Grace, 2012, p. 302). The abandonment of cultural integration goals appears to be a major concern surrounding communication with home via the Internet and, in the long-term, an over-reliance on this can lead to an increased sense of isolation from the host culture (Lee, Lee & Jang, 2011; Mikal et al., 2014). Another issue found by Sandel (2014) is that contacting home via the Internet can actually cause increased feelings of homesickness when students see messages and photos from home and realize what they are missing. Considering the points above, connecting with home via the Internet is a true double-edged sword in regard to study abroad. In line with this idea, this paper examines the influence of online support via social media on a group of Japanese tertiary study abroad students in New Zealand.

Introducing the research

Despite a history of Japanese tertiary level students studying in New Zealand, there is sparse research on them in the New Zealand context and none focusing on their Internet use to seek support from personal and family networks. Although the research setting has unique characteristics, as any institution has, it is hoped that this research will contribute to understanding in the area of online support in regard to study abroad students in general. The research questions that follow were developed to meet this end.

1. How important was online support for the students?

2. To what extent did Internet usage patterns for contact between the students, and their friends and family change over time?
3. What were some perceived negatives regarding Internet use for contact between students and their friends and family?

Participants and context

The foundation of this article is from doctoral research data focused on the experiences of a group of 13 students, seven males and six females, aged 17 to 21. However, only eight are mentioned in this article as they illustrated the themes strongest amongst the cohort. The participants were selected from a pool of volunteers of first-year students from Japan (approximately 40) who came to New Zealand to study for an undergraduate degree in a private tertiary institution called Global Family College (GFC) (pseudonym) in the outer suburbs of a provincial city.

All Japanese students studying at GFC were accommodated in two designated dormitories on campus, separated from other international students. Depending on their English proficiency levels, the Japanese students studied in a foundation program for six months to a year before entering diploma or degree studies. The foundation and diploma programs consisted almost exclusively of Japanese students, so their contact with non-Japanese was limited. However, if Japanese students progressed to degree, which all participants in this paper did, they were sometimes the only Japanese student in the class.

Data collection

Data collection started in the students' initial days at the college and continued through to the end of their second year of studying. The selection of the cohort was based on the students' English proficiency test scores and the proviso that they would not be my students during the research period. Although selection based on English proficiency created a potential bias, English communication and understanding was important because the interviews needed to be conducted predominantly in English due to my low Japanese proficiency. That stated, research data not presented in this paper indicated that factors which may have reduced the need for online support, such as foreign friendships, seemed independent of proficiency.

To gain a deep insight into the students' experiences, I undertook a longitudinal interviewing process lasting approximately two years that involved six interviews per student (generally conducted every three months). The longitudinal nature of the data collection allowed me to monitor each student's trajectory and identify key points that emerged over time. The Constructivist Grounded Theory approach of Kathy Charmaz (e.g. 2006) was a perfect fit for my research because under this approach analysis runs in tandem with data collection (Clarke, 2007; Seidman, 2006), and the researcher moves to and fro between data collection and analysis, controlling the data while still maintaining momentum.

Ethics applications were made to and accepted by the human ethics committee of both the university at which I was studying, and also GFC. Before beginning initial interviews, each participant received an information sheet detailing their ethical rights and a consent form (both in Japanese) to sign.

Interviews usually took 60-90 minutes and were held in a room on campus with just the interviewee and myself present. I used interview guides to provide direction and act as prompts on focus areas. The main topics in the initial interview were: Contact with Japan, college clubs, friendships, and the college environment. Topics changed in

subsequent interviews as information gaps were filled and new themes emerged. Participant individuality became evident in the early interviews, so from interview three onward interviews were individualized in order to track each participant's unique trajectory. All interviews were audio recorded to allow me to concentrate on the interviewees' words. I transcribed all interviews within 48 hours of being conducted and sent each student their interview transcript to check over.

Transcribing the interviews provided me with an immediate connection to the data, permitting me to attend closely to the meanings in the participants' words and note patterns emerging across the cohort. I read transcripts word by word, and coded and classified each participant's words into themes and concepts. I then wrote memos for each participant's subsequent interview. Following this, I made a list of the themes, under which the main points and connected quotes from the transcripts were inserted. At the completion of each interview round, I also analysed the data across the participants to ensure that I did not miss any common themes that were emerging. Through this process the research became entirely grounded in the participants' words.

After finishing the fourth interview round, I defined categories and built summaries from all of the data gathered up to that point. From this information, I drew posters specific to each student and reviewed their posters with them in their fifth interview, checking for inaccuracies and digging deeper into selected areas (see Appendix 1).
In the next section, the findings, the reader will notice numbers in parentheses: these numbers indicate the interview in which the information was given. Table 1 shows when the interviews were in relation to the participants' arrival at GFC. The interview times are significant because they reveal the students' attitudes over time.

Table 1.   Interviews relative to arrival

Interview	Date after arrival at GFC
1	1 month
2	4 months
3	7 months
4	12 months
5	16 months
6	20 months

Findings: Remaining connected while abroad

The Internet as a means of connection with the outside world emerged as an important part of the students' lives from the first interview. The online communication applications predominantly used by the students were Facebook and Skype. Contact between the cohort and their families tended to be most frequent while the students were

settling into New Zealand and struggling with their new life. However, Kami was an exception and her experience highlights the ongoing importance of online support for some students. Kami talked of how, after six months in New Zealand, she still regularly contacted her mother to get advice and support when she faced personal issues with other students:

> I'm trouble in something between my friends or in studying, so I consult to my mum and my mum will give me advice so I can be fine…my mum is very important. (Kami 3)

Some students only contacted home under special circumstances: "When I want my parents to send some money I contact, but normally I don't contact with them" (Kayo 5). Even in cases where participants did not regularly contact Japan, many members of the research cohort indicated that the knowledge that they could easily reach out to people back home reassured them. Despite a year passing since her quote in the previous paragraph, Kami indicated that she still remained closely connected to home and regularly sought solace in her mother's voice:

> When I didn't wanna meet my friends or hangout with my friends I always Skyped my mum and she said, 'If you don't wanna meet someone, you can just talk to me in your room.' It was really make me more comfortable. (Kami 6)

When Kami struggled socially in the close confines of her dormitory, Kami's mother appeared to take on the role of a substitute friend, albeit an online one.

Remaining connected with home was not always easy and it did pose challenges to some individuals. Before leaving Japan for New Zealand, approximately half of the participants and their parents practised using computer communication applications together to prepare for the study abroad. Some participants did not bother because, in addition to themselves, at least one other family member was computer literate. However, this occasionally meant that less digitally literate family members were reliant on others to help them make contact. In their interviews, Kami and Shihoko echoed Kang's (2012) research where older female family members tended to lack voice or autonomy in regard to communication with their children residing abroad. Kami asked a Japan-based friend to help her mother set up Facebook, so that she could view Kami's online photos:

> I told her [Kami's mother] 'Please make Facebook to watch my photos', but she said, 'I don't know how to make Facebook', so I told my friend, 'Please teach my mother to make Facebook' and she could. Recently she [Kami's mother] said, 'I

don't know. I forget how to use Facebook. I can't watch your photos. Please tell me'. My mum really, absolutely don't know how to use computer. (Kami 2)

Kami commented that her mother "didn't know how to turn on the power and she never touched the computer" (4). To combat this problem, Kami had to ask another Japan-based friend to visit her mother and teach her some of the essential points about using online social media applications.

Shihoko's family took steps to create a regular communication timetable, arranged to coincide with her father's holidays and her grandmother's visits to her family home. In addition to this, at weekends, Shihoko's father would log into Skype and leave the house so that Shihoko and her mother could talk in private. Somewhat at odds with Kang's (2012) research, where female family members were the ones who lost their voice, was the experience of Yuka, whose father could not operate a computer. Yuka's online communication with family was restricted to her mother. The only time Yuka talked to her father was when she returned to Japan during her annual holiday at home. She felt that his lack of computer literacy was behind a downturn in their relationship.

The ability to remain connected to Japan via the Internet seemed to assist the students in their gradual transition to living in New Zealand. After six months at GFC, the students, with the exception of Kami, began to reduce contact with their parents as they felt increasingly comfortable. In an interesting switch of roles, the initiation of contact shifted to be mostly made by parents, which indicated that remaining connected via the Internet was not just important for the participants, but it also reassured parents that their children were safe. As this switch of roles occurred, some members of the research group started mentioning some less positive aspects of parental contact via the Internet.

A compromised independence

Parental contact became an unwelcome intrusion in some participants' lives. Hiro, for example, valued his independence and became tired of his father monitoring his online activity: "Father always checks my mood message on Skype. Sometimes I wrote something, he asked me what happened. I can't write bad thing!" (4). It seems clear that Hiro was frustrated by his father's snooping, which could have been limiting his ability or desire to post honest messages online. In the following quote, we can see that Hiro may have started to regard Facebook as more of a burden than an asset in his life because it had become an application that limited his independence:

> My father likes Facebook, he usually check the Facebook and he knows my friends and my friends' profile and who my friends dating. I don't like that...

> Maybe if I don't talk with him he knows what is happening from Facebook, that's enough. 'Why you know that?' I said to my father. (5)

Some parents also checked to see if their child was studying diligently. Participants often dealt with this by simply ignoring the Skype calls or messages. However, due to disastrous academic results in prior tertiary study in Japan, Ken felt he could not ignore his father's frequent calls to push him and remind him of his past failures, which often left Ken depressed. These factors, along with further reasons provided below, seem to have contributed to many students choosing to use different social media applications when contacting friends to what they used when contacting family.

The tools of connectivity

The research participants used a variety of online communication applications to remain connected, the main ones being email, Skype and Facebook. The data collected over successive interviews revealed an interesting pattern in regard to computer-based communication application choices. Similar to the findings of Sandel (2014), Skype was generally the main communication tool used in contact with parents, while Facebook was the most prevalent way in which participants stayed in touch with their Japan-based friends. The reason for this dichotomy, it seems, was because students used Facebook to routinely post on aspects that their parents may have considered to be the less desirable parts of studying abroad, such as partying. Some participants, such as Kami, appeared to initially become addicted to Facebook as they desperately wanted to maintain links with Japan while they were still establishing trusted friendships in their new surroundings:

> I watch twice or three times every day and sometimes I upload my photos. I have many friends on Facebook. If I don't check the Facebook maybe the Facebook will be new one, new one, new one, new one, so I have to check regularly. (Kami 2)

However, it is also important to acknowledge that as friendships are made overseas, so too can home-country friendships grow increasingly distant. In this research, some participants, such as Yoichi, drifted away from their Japan-based friendships over time. Although, in his second interview Yoichi stated that he enjoyed checking Facebook daily to maintain his link to his Japan-based friends, a year later he revealed that he had lost contact with them and was now much closer to his Japanese GFC-based friends.

Facebook was also used by some students to show off their life, and envious and positive comments from their Japan-based friends lifted the participants' spirits and made them feel better about their life in New Zealand:

I had black and white party in Mr. Cue[1] and I put [photos] on Facebook and I weared dress and they say, 'You wear dress?' She [Shihoko's friend in Japan] really wants to wear a dress, but there is no opportunity to wear dress in Japan because we don't have party quite often. We just wear dress farewell party. Yeah, and they can't go to club because of age, 'You can go to club?', 'Yes, of course!' (Shihoko 2)

However, Facebook contact with Japan-based friends sometimes resulted in melancholy, such as when students saw photos from Japan that made them nostalgic for home. Participants commented in interviews that they felt homesick after viewing Facebook posts of festivals and other events that they would have attended had they been home. Kami openly questioned her choice to live in New Zealand based on what she saw on Facebook. In her final interview she stated: "If I see the Facebook and my friends in Japan are really enjoying that time. That time compared with my life, 'Am I enjoying here?' I asked myself"(6).

That stated, only one participant truly voiced concerns about the negative effects of Internet-based communication on the study abroad experience and took personal measures to overcome them. Taka, like most of his peers, used Facebook every day to upload photos, check people's status and send messages. Although he referred to Facebook as his "life tool" in his second interview, he also spoke of it being a distraction and how some types of electronic communication were sterile and potentially damaging to the future of face-to-face communication.

Later in the research, Taka revealed that he had taken the bold step of closing his Facebook account. Taka's Facebook account seems to have fallen victim to his decision to concentrate more on his studies because his grades were below his expectations and he subsequently believed that he had let his parents down.

I closed my Facebook account because Facebook became a distraction. If I open the Facebook I have to see some photos of my friends in Japan…and sometimes I can't concentrate the things in front of me, like job, or study or assignment. So, I decided to close, the distraction has gone. Facebook is working as one of the ways to connect with other people in Japan, messaging and chatting, but it is not needed for study. (Taka 5)

Showing strength of character, Taka kept his Facebook account closed until he felt satisfied with his academic results; once achieved, he reopened his account:

[1] A nightclub in the local city

I think all student should close it because Twitter, Facebook, other social website will be definitely distraction…this stuff can waste time easily, it's cool, but it's not cool for student. So, if a student can get good grade while using the Facebook or other social website, fine, no problem for that student. But I think almost all students can't do it, that's why closing Facebook or social website will be fine. (Taka 6)

That said, Taka admitted that during this period he still used Skype every day to chat and sometimes video-called his friends and family in Japan, which suggested that he considered Skype less distracting than Facebook. This, along with other findings, will be looked at further in the discussion section.

Discussion

Like an online umbilical cord, the Internet kept the students connected to home and was an important source of support throughout their time studying in New Zealand, allowing them to receive advice and affirmation from family in Japan and to remain connected to Japan-based friends. The importance of contacting home can be comprehended through Kami's actions, and also those of Shihoko, who fixed contact schedules so that family members could gather together and communicate with her at one time. It should also be acknowledged that the support that travelled between the students and Japan was not one-way; family members also sought assurances that their child was in good health and doing well at college. The longitudinal aspect of my research revealed that with time there was a switch from predominantly participant-to-parent-initiated contact to parent-to-participant-initiated contact. This was clearly a point of frustration for some participants, particularly Hiro.

The issue of family members experiencing a loss of voice due to a lack of computer skills was revealed in the findings. The cases of Shihoko and Kami, for instance, concur with Kang's (2012) findings, where participants' mothers and grandmothers initially relied on the males' or younger family members' computer knowledge to initiate contact. Yuka contrasted this trend and her experience with her father perhaps demonstrated a need to remain connected to parents to maintain a healthy relationship.

Taka's response to close his Facebook account while maintaining his Skype and email accounts indicates that Facebook was distracting, perhaps due to it being more public and emphasizing visual aspects, such as photographs. This assumption is strengthened by other participants' negative comments on seeing photos of events in their hometown that they missed. Taka's choice to close his Facebook account could also be seen as a form of withdrawal from comfort towards something more constructive. It may be that such decisions to withdraw from the comfortable were an indication that some focal

students were looking for ways to embrace the adventure that study abroad seems to offer.

The pattern of Skype for parental connections and Facebook for connecting with friends may be explained through an understanding of different roles that parents and Japan-based friends played. Parents predominantly played a support and guidance role. However, old friends filled a social void, particularly in the initial stages in New Zealand, and posts of photographs and interesting comments sometimes temporarily relieved the participants' stress. However, as stated above, they did not always result in positive feelings.

There were other differences between being connected to family and being connected to friends. One of the negatively perceived issues for the participants regarding parents was unsolicited attention and the feeling that parents were monitoring their lives in New Zealand. Another trade-off of social media is that it may have distracted some participants from using English and, in a sense, watered down their ability to have an international experience on their study abroad. Interestingly, the open link with Japan that the Internet provided may have helped the students resettle after their study abroad; it allowed them to maintain friendships in Japan and, it seems, also enabled cultural maintenance through regular contact with Japan-based friends and family.

Conclusion

The Internet can be an important tool in the initial stages of a study abroad. It provides online access to personal and family networks, enabling students to hear familiar voices and feel accepted when they are vulnerable. The current study shows that online social media also benefited parents: they could seek reassurance in regard to their child's wellbeing and also check on their studies. Although some family members struggled to find a voice due to computer literacy issues, these issues were overcome with time and relative ease.

While study abroad has held an assumption of literal and figurative distance in the past, in the contemporary world, communication platforms such as Facebook and Skype may discourage engagement with the L2 and host culture because students may simply remain virtually immersed in their own language and culture. It seems clear from previous literature and data from this research that establishing a suitable amount of Internet social media use on study abroad, which still allows for a fulfilling international experience and does not create a distraction from studying, may be difficult to achieve. The Internet is here to stay in some form, and online connections will only become more mainstream and important. In regard to study abroad, the online environment has become an essential space which can play a very important role in student support. That

stated, in the future, study abroad providers may need to look at limiting the amount of time that international students spend engaged on the Internet or the meaningfulness of study abroad experiences may decline.

Future research could focus on online communication application choice when connecting with family or friends. Other research could look at whether differences exist between study abroad students from different cultures/countries in the way that they utilize the Internet as a source of support.

References

Allen, H., & Dupuy, B. (2012). Study abroad, foreign language use, and the Communities standard. *Foreign Language Annals, 45*(4), 468-493.

Amuzie, G., & Winke, P. (2009). Changes in language learning beliefs as a result of study abroad. *System, 37*, 366-379.

Andrade, M. (2006). International students in English-speaking universities: Adjustment factors. *Journal of Research in International Education, 5*(2), 131-154.

Asaoka, T., & Yano, J. (2009). The contribution of "study abroad" programs to Japanese internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 13*(2), 174-188.

Ayano, M. (2006). Japanese students in Britain. In M. Byram & A. Feng (Eds.), *Living and studying abroad: Research and practice* (pp. 11-37). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Baker, G., & Hawkins, K. (2006). The international student journey. *The Australian Universities Review, 48*(2), 20-25.

Cemalcilar, Z., Falbo, T., & Stapleton, L. (2005). Cyber communication: A new opportunity for international students' adaptation? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29*(1), 91-110.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London, England: Sage Publications Ltd.

Clarke, A. (2007). Grounded theory: Critiques, debates, and situational analysis. In W. Outhwaite & S. Turner (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of social science methodology* (pp. 423-442). London, England: Sage Publications Ltd.

Cole, D., Nick, E., Zelkowitz, R., Roeder, K., & Spinelli, T. (2017). Online social support for young people: Does it recapitulate in-person social support; Can it help? *Computers in Human Behavior, 68*, 456-464.

Coleman, J. (2013). Researching whole people and whole lives. In C. Kinginger (Ed.), *Social and cultural aspects of language learning in study abroad* (pp. 17-44). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Hofer, B., Thebodo, S., Meredith, K., Kaslow, Z., & Saunders, A. (2016). The long arm of the digital tether: Communication with home during study abroad. *Frontiers:*

The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 28, 24-41.

Hossain, M., & Veenstra, A. (2013). Online maintenance of life domains: Uses of social network sites during graduate education among the US and international students. *Computers in Human Behavior, 29,* 2697-2702.

Kang, T. (2012). Gendered media, changing intimacy: Internet-mediated transnational communication in the family sphere. *Media, Culture & Society*, *34*(2), 146-161.

Kim, H., & Okazaki, S. (2014). Navigating the cultural transition alone: Psychosocial adjustment of Korean early study abroad students. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *20*(2), 244-253.

Kline, S., & Liu, F. (2005). The influence of comparative media use on acculturation, acculturative stress, and family relationships of Chinese international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29*(4), 367-390.

Kraut, R., Patterson, M., Lundmark, V., Kiesler, S., Mukophadhyay, T., & Scherlis, W. (1998). Internet paradox: A social technology that reduces social involvement and psychological well-being? *American Psychologist, 53*(9), 1017-1031.

Lee, E., Lee, L., & Jang, J. (2011). Internet for the internationals: Effects of Internet use motivations on international students' college adjustment. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 14*(7-8), 433-437.

Lin, M., Wu, J., You, J., Chang, K., Hu, W., & Xu, S. (2018). Association between online and offline social support and Internet addiction in a representative sample of senior high school students in Taiwan: The mediating role of self-esteem. *Computers in Human Behavior, 84*, 1-7.

Mikal, J., & Grace, K. (2012). Against abstinence-only education abroad: Viewing Internet use during study abroad as a possible experience enhancement. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 16*(3), 287-306.

Mikal, J., Rice, R., Abeyta, A., & DeVilbiss, J. (2013). Transition, stress and computer-mediated social support. *Computers in Human Behavior, 29*(5), A40-A53.

Mikal, J., Yang, J., & Lewis, A. (2014). Surfing USA: How Internet use prior to and during study abroad affects Chinese students' stress, integration, and cultural learning while in the United States. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 19*(3), 203-224.

Ryan, M., & Twibell, R. (2000). Concerns, values, stress, coping, health and educational outcomes of college students who studied abroad. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 24*, 409-435.

Sandel, T. (2014). "Oh, I'm here!": Social media's impact on the cross-cultural adaptation of students studying abroad. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 43*(1), 1-29.

Sanz, C. (2014). Contributions of study abroad research to our understanding of SLA processes and outcomes: The SALA Project, an appraisal. In C. Perez-Vidal (Ed.), *Language acquisition in study abroad and formal instruction contexts* (pp. 1-13). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Shadowen, N., Chieffo, L., & Guerra, N. (2015). The Global Engagement Measurement Scale (GEMS): A new scale for assessing the impact of education abroad and campus internationalization. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, *26*, 231-247.

Tanaka, K. (2007). Japanese students' contact with English outside the classroom during study abroad. *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics, 13*(1), 36-54.

Yue, Y. (2009). *Cultural adaptation of Asian students in Australia.* Retrieved from http://www.aare.edu.au/09pap/yue091551.pdf

Appendix 1. Member checking poster (Hiro)