An Internet-Connected Community: How College Students Experience Residential Living in the Age of New Media

Jared Hobson

AN INTERNET-CONNECTED COMMUNITY: HOW COLLEGE STUDENTS

EXPERIENCE RESIDENTIAL LIVING IN THE AGE OF NEW MEDIA

_____

A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

_____

by

Jared Butler Hobson

May 2022

**Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL
_____

MASTER'S THESIS
_____

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Jared Butler Hobson

entitled

AN INTERNET-CONNECTED COMMUNITY: HOW COLLEGE STUDENTS
EXPERIENCE RESIDENTIAL LIVING IN THE AGE OF NEW MEDIA

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree
in Higher Education and Student Development

May 2022

_____   _____
Jeffry Aupperle, Ph.D.   Date   Scott Gaier, Ph.D.   Date
Thesis Supervisor   Member, Thesis Hearing Committee

_____
Todd Ream, Ph.D.   Date
Member, Thesis Hearing Committee

_____
Skip Trudeau, Ed.D.   Date
Director, M.A. in Higher Education and Student Development

Abstract

Higher education professionals, particularly those in the realm of residence life, are working with outdated knowledge. Emerging research is showing that the incoming cohorts of college students are fundamentally different than their predecessors because of new media technology's prevalence in our society. This study aims to determine if the usage and presence of internet-connected technology impacts how students experience community within their residence halls. In this context, students' sense of community is defined as the extent to which these individuals develop senses of attachment, belonging, and involvement. To answer the guiding research question, an online survey was distributed to two select groups of college students living on a campus at a private institution located in the Midwest region of the United States. Participants' responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results showed a negligible relationship between students' sense of community in their halls and students' usage of new media technology. These results suggest that effective communities are formed by college students in their residence halls regardless of new media technology's prevalence. On this basis, higher education professionals should take heart that students' desire for community is not waning, but these professionals should consider how they are supporting community development in the age of new media.

Acknowledgements

In August 2020, when I embarked on my master's degree journey at Taylor University, I truly had no idea how transformational the MAHE program would be for me. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I knew I was vocationally called to the field of higher education—two years later, I have fallen deeply in love with the incredible work of higher education and student development. A separate thesis-length document might not be long enough for me to address every person who has blessed my life in these past years. Before presenting my research, though, I need to acknowledge the heroes in my life who not only supported my research pursuit but, ultimately, shaped who I am today.

Jeff, my thesis supervisor—As one of your first-ever thesis supervisees, I hope my propensity for trouble does not dissuade you from overseeing future MAHE students, because future cohorts need the type of inspiring guidance that you provided for me. Thank you for never giving up on me, even when I neglected my literature review for a whole semester or when I decided to completely change my methodology. I mean it literally when I say you have been a lifesaver for me; I hope one day I can be a supervisor to students in the incredible way you have been for me.

Scott and Todd, my professors and thesis committee—both of you have been pillars for my MAHE experience; I could never thank either of you enough for your teaching and mentorship. Without you two, I fully believe I would not have become the man that I am today: a faithful Christ-follower, a life-long learner, and someone who has been inspired to continue your efforts of making this world a better place.

Jacob, my predecessor and hall director—Even though I avoided you during interview weekend because you were wearing your Blues sweater, I owe so much of my success to you. You, so thoughtfully, helped me transition into the GA role, and it was an honor to be a part of your spectacular return to Wengatz as hall director. You never failed to provide advice, laughter, and books for MAHE courses every time I needed them.

Wengatz Hall, my home—Despite the chaos and uncertainty of the global pandemic happening at the time of my arrival, you totally embraced me as de facto mayor. It has been a privilege to be included in all of your traditions and shenanigans, and I will never forget how prolonged our all-hall meetings became due to your ridiculous cheering. To First West Wengatz, I would not want my apartment to be anywhere else. Proud to be from PDUB, even if it can be a zoo sometimes. And to my weekly Dungeons & Dragons group, you are what kept me sane throughout some of my most challenging times. Ethan, Levi, and Jake, it was a total blast to be your Dungeon Master, even when the final boss fight kept us awake past 4:00 AM.

Both of my DA teams, absolute legends—Bartram, Ben, Bennett, Carson, Dylan, Eli, Ethan, Getgen, Harrison, Jacob, Jed, Johnny, Jon, Noah, Ryan, and Zach. You are sixteen of the bravest men I have ever met; each of you has shown to me the real meaning of servant leadership. I will forever be thankful for each of you, and the ways you all continue to inspire me. Wengatz Hall is better because of you. The world is better because of you.

Tim, my cornerstone in the hall—from the moment we crossed paths on our separate walkthroughs of Wengatz, you have been a consistent part of my time at Taylor. Even when times felt at their hardest, thank you for being a steadfast light in the

darkness. Thank you for FaceTime calls in the summer, thank you for the best conversations while (finally) riding bikes through upper Michigan, and thank you for showing me what it looks like to love how Jesus loves. Most of all, thank you for becoming a forever friend.

Alex, my first TU student I met—I could always count on you to poke your head in my doorway to say hello as you wheeled your bike down the hallway, and our monthly coffee dates were some of the highlights of my time at Taylor. I am so grateful for the genuine conversations we shared, for your wisdom, for your ambition, and for the ridiculous moments that would be best kept between us. Alex, it has been pure joy to become your friend. No matter where life takes you, know that I will always be rooting for you.

Eric, my best LinkedIn connection—whether by a stroke of good luck or divine intervention, we found each other exactly when I needed your friendship the most. There is no way I could thank you enough for all the ways you have encouraged me and pushed me to be the best version of myself. In a season of life when I felt the most lost and incapable, you shared with me a piece of advice that ultimately became the driving force behind my entire two-year experience: "MAHE will be whatever *you* make of it, not what anyone else tells you it should be, so make it the best for you."

Cohort XIV, my friends that feel like family—Oh, fantastic cohort fourteen, there is no greater group of people I could ask for to be a part of along this quest for our master's degrees. From the classroom to the lakeside, we have been through it all, together; exciting victories and heartbreaking losses, tears from sorrow and tears from laughter, and so many late nights. You have proven to me, time and time again, that

family is not only by blood—family can be ten (well, technically twelve?) classmates.

Lastly, I need to acknowledge my cohort-mates and partners-in-crime, the two people

who played the most critical roles in my MAHE career: Shelby and Kimie. There is no

way to actually express how much you mean to me. You two have seen me at my worst

and at my best, yet have abundantly loved me the same, regardless. Shelby and Kimie,

my time at Taylor in the MAHE program has given me an overwhelming number of

blessings, but nothing and nobody could ever be better than the extraordinary friendship

you have shared with me.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Introduction

As students move into their residence halls, their devices move in with them. Campus living spaces have historically been known as meaningful environments where students not only encounter opportunities to develop their individual identities and values but also develop a sense of meaningful community (Worley, 2020). However, since the turn of the century, the ever-growing progress and prominence of technology has fundamentally changed how modern college students live and understand their worlds.

Considering the vast amount of higher education research that emphasizes how students' success is linked so closely with their integration into campus communities, it should be no surprise that many people wonder how new media technology might impact the college student experience. This is not the time to be distracted with optimistic or pessimistic predictions of how computers will shape the future of humanity—now is the time to recognize the reality that campuses are presently occupied by digital natives (Prensky, 2001). Knowing that today's students are fundamentally different from the students who formerly called the same residence halls their homes, a better understanding of new media technology's influence on students' living environments is vital for higher education professionals.

New Media

New media technologies, simplified as "new media," are dynamic by nature. They are constantly evolving and taking on new shapes and forms, so there has yet to be a

commonly accepted, accurate definition. A more effective means of understanding the concept of new media is identifying the key features. According to the work of scholars Socha and Eber-Schmid (2014), as part of the New Media Institute, these key features are: universal access to digital content essentially on-demand, content creation marked by community participation and interaction, expected democratization of media content production and distribution, and real-time content creation.

It is important to avoid the common misconception that new media are just social media, such as Facebook or Twitter. While these platforms are significant, the scope of new media also includes streaming services such as Netflix or Spotify, telepresence tools like FaceTime and Zoom, video games ranging from *Call of Duty* to *Candy Crush*, and even the massive information-sharing website Wikipedia. With the world's compulsion toward the Internet of Things (Clark, 2016), there are more and more ways to engage with new media.

Community (in Residence Halls)

Introductory courses in Psychology cover Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which explains that a primary human motivation is the need for belonging with others. On college campuses, students living with a roommate or with other students in a residence hall report significantly stronger feelings of belonging among their peers (Dumford et al., 2019). A developed sense of belonging is a key aspect of students' sense of community. Higher education scholar Terrell Strayhorn (2018) reports that students with low levels of integration, or community, suffer socially and academically and often abandon their college careers. While research on student belonging has been happening for decades, recent years' discussion has become more nuanced and complex. According to Strayhorn,

although a good deal is known about sense of belonging as a basic human

motivation, factors that influence students' sense of belonging, and the

influence of sense of belonging on important outcomes such as achievement,

adjustment, and plans to stay in college, comparatively little is known about

differences that exist in terms of college students' sense of sense of belonging,

as well as social identities and campus environments that create a sense of

belonging for such students. (p. 3)

For students, their experience is about more than just their sense of belonging; factors

such as environment and involvement are also key in grasping the concept of students'

sense of community. While this could be researched across many locations on a college

campus, the noteworthy development happening in residence halls lends itself naturally

to this idea of student community.

Purpose Statement

The responsibility of higher education leaders and professionals is to recognize

the nature of the current college student, ensuring residence halls continue to promote

powerful student community. The purpose of this study was to investigate how the

presence of new media impacts college students who live in residence halls at four-year

institutions as they develop a sense of community in their living spaces. This study,

including literature reviewed and research conducted, was guided by the following

questions:

- What, if any, is the impact of new media technology on students' sense of
  community within their residence hall environments?

- If new media does impact community, how so?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Utilizing preexisting literature across a wide range of fields, one can begin to see a fuller picture of the college student experience. The guiding question regarding new media impact on students' sense of community within their residential living spaces can be explored in its significant parts. First will be a review of new media, incorporating literature on media ecology, video games, and social media. Second, students' sense of community will be explored by reviewing literature on theories of attachment, belonging, and involvement. The chapter will finally conclude with a review of relevant literature regarding residence halls, specifically highlighting studies on proxemics. Altogether, the overall literature review will be foundational for grasping further research.

New Media

Comparative to the revolutionary influences of the printing press and photography, new media technology has profoundly impacted society and culture. New media has altered not only how people communicate with each other, but how people produce and distribute content (Manovich, 2001). The hallmark of new media is its relationship with computer technologies; as opposed to a printed book or photograph, new media content is computable. This synthesis of computing processes and media is explained as

> the translation of all existing media into numerical data accessible through
> computers. The result [of the synthesis] is new media—graphics, moving

images, sounds, shapes, spaces, and texts that have become computable; that is,

they comprise simply another set of computer data.… All new media objects,

whether created from scratch on computers or converted from analog media

sources, are composed of digital code; they are numerical representations.

(Manovich, 2001, pp. 6)

It should be noted that this definition does not perfectly describe what new media are, but

it is a helpful foundation for understanding what forms of media qualify as new media.

Media Ecology

Since new media are tied so tightly to emerging computer technology, it should

not be a surprise that new media pervade so much of daily life in the Western world.

Communication theorists understand this as an all-encompassing media environment,

called *media ecology*. In the field of biology, ecology is the study of organisms' settings

and how organisms interact within their settings ("Ecology", 2021). Therefore, media

ecology "looks into the matter of how media of communication affect human perception,

understanding, feeling, and value; and how interaction with media facilitates or impedes

chances of survival" (Postman, 1980, p. 161).

In considering the presence of new media throughout physical environments, a

relevant emerging discussion to include is about the *internet of things*. The internet of

things refers to a new media-related trend where internet-connected devices are no longer

just smartphones and laptops (Meola, 2022). Today, internet-connected devices include

televisions, wearable accessories, cars, kitchen appliances, and even implanted health

monitors. When student development professionals consider the devices that are integral

in their students' lives, their understanding of "devices" must continue to evolve just as new media devices continue to evolve.

Video Games

One extremely popular pastime for many college students is video gaming. Back in 2003, Pew Research Center reported that about 70% of college students engage in some form of digital gaming (Jones, 2003). Video games have only skyrocketed in popularity since 2003, so it is reasonable to believe that Pew's findings have maintained consistent if not increased. This popularity of video games may call into question the influence that they have over students' behavior and development.

The common myth that violent video games cause violent behavior has been repeatedly debunked. Notably, the American Psychological Association (2020) released a formal statement saying that "attributing violence to violent video gaming is not scientifically sound." Furthermore, more and more studies over recent years have highlighted the potential benefits of video gaming, including cognitive benefits such as increased attention, more thoughtful problem-solving, and strategic flexibility (Gray, 2018). Additionally, published research focused on the social aspect of video games reveals that many people who participate in online multiplayer games consider their online peers as valuable and impactful as their in-person peers (Kowert & Kaye, 2018).

Social Media

A prominent form of new media that has emerged are social networking sites, typically referred to as social media. Social media platforms allow individuals to share ideas, communicate, and discover more about the lives of others (Gray et al., 2013). With the prominence of social media in today's generation, especially among incoming college

students, it is more than likely that these social tools influence how today's students form their relationships.

As students adjust to social life on campus, social media has potential to be both a help and a hindrance. By design, social media platforms allow students to maintain connections whether on-campus or while away from campus. However, this same connective design might enable newer students to ignore opportunities for relational development by opting for only connecting with their online friends (Gray et al., 2013). Overall, though, it is crucial to remember that social media is not vapid, but rather it is an influential factor in the social life for college students.

Students' Community

Community may be a common buzzword on university campuses, yet the definition seems to fluctuate depending on the institution. For both this review and this overall report, *sense of community* will comprise three major theories: attachment, belonging, and involvement.

Attachment

The historical and typical means of researching attachment theory have focused primarily on romantic or parental relationships (Robey, 2019). Recent discussion on higher education attachment orientation poses the idea that individuals, such as college students, may develop various forms of attachment to environments as well. Environmental attachment orientation explores how students interact with their physical and social environments (Robey, 2019). Strong feelings of attachment to environments not only impact how students create friendships, but strong attachment orientation is also responsible for facilitating group identification and involvement.

Belonging

Students' sense of belonging refers more specifically to the social integration of individuals and their perspective of self within their environment. While belonging can be researched at any stage of a person's life, Strayhorn (2018), states:

> In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers. (p. 4)

To unpack this theory more, one study investigated the relationship between students' sense of belonging and their campus housing experience. If students perceive their housing situation as socially supportive, they are more likely to report stronger feelings of belonging (Ingram, 2012).

Involvement

Alexander Astin (1984) describes his developmental theory of involvement as the "amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience." Student involvement can take many various forms, even within a single student. Furthermore, levels of involvement can be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively, highlighting the diverse nature of involvement.

As far as students' success in relation to involvement within their residence spaces goes, Astin (1984) reports that

> living on campus substantially increases the student's chances of persisting and of aspiring to a graduate or professional degree. Residents are more likely than

commuters to achieve in such extracurricular areas as leadership and athletics and to express satisfaction with their undergraduate experience, particularly in the areas of student friendships, faculty–student relations, institutional reputation, and social life. (p. 525)

Knowing the benefits of campus residential living, a review of literature centered on residence halls and the campus living experience will complement Astin's claims.

Residence Halls

Residence halls, in the sense of United States campuses, are standard housing for college students. Traditional halls are known for their two-person rooms and communal bathroom facilities; suite-style room layouts are common in more recently built halls. While difference in physical layout is an important dynamic to consider, the predominant factor is that residence halls are places where students coexist with their peers.

Proxemics

Studies on physical space show that environment has a strong impact on behavior—environment defined as everything and anything surrounding an individual (Scott-Webber, 2004). Proxemics is the study of human space; it is a nonverbal element of interpersonal communication. E. T. Hall, a historical leader in the field of proxemics, categorizes three forms of space: fixed, semi-fixed, and dynamic (Hall et al., 1968). These forms are understood differently according to culture; according to an example from Hall et al. (1968), people from American culture tend to freely adjust furniture whereas people from Chinese culture see furniture as fixed and that it would be improper to move furniture without permission.

Not only does proxemics seek to understand physical space, but it also has branches in studying individuals' personal space. Hall et al. (1968) define four distinct proxemic zones: intimate, personal, social, and public. Understanding situational factors, such as acceptable or stressful behaviors, allows for the creation of environments to properly address these factors.

Altogether, these constructs of new media, students' sense of community, and residence halls come together to build a framework for more effectively comprehending the nuanced experiences of students' campus living. With these ideas now presented, there is a better sense of the currently existing gap in the literature, which is concerned with how these constructs might influence each other. In the following chapters, this thesis study will attempt to begin filling that research gap.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The guiding questions for this research were: What, if any, is the impact of new media technology on students' sense of community within their residence hall environments? And if new media does impact community, how? To investigate the relationship between these factors, a quantitative approach was used to best evaluate and discuss the dynamic; an electronic survey questionnaire created the greatest opportunity for participation and accessibility.

Design

A quantitative descriptive design was used to explore the dynamic between new media technology usage and students' sense of community in the residence halls. The goal of this research was to recognize and relate specific variables—technology usage and sense of community—within the context of private higher education campuses.

An attitudinal survey was implemented for this research, considering the dynamic nature of the constructs in this study. Specifically, participants responded to eight questions by assessing their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale of 0 (Do Not Agree)–4 (Absolutely Agree). Survey participants were also asked to provide three preliminary demographic details: Gender [Options: Male, Female, Prefer not to respond], Class [Options: Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior], and Residence Hall.

The survey (see Appendix A) was created and distributed via Google Forms, a web application software. This software allowed for participants' answers to be carefully organized within a Google Sheet document in real-time.

Context

The study was conducted at a small faith-based liberal arts university in the Midwest. The university is a predominately White institution and has approximately 1,800 undergraduate students. The gender makeup is about 60% female and 40% male, and 99% of students are under the age of 25. The institution makes known its value of living in community to inspire personal growth for students beyond the classroom.

Knowing these values, along with the rural location of the university, it is important to understand that more than 90% of students live in university-owned and overseen housing, according to the institution's website. This campus features a total of eight residence halls and two apartment complexes.

Participants and Procedures

At this institution, the communities of two traditional residence halls were studied: an all-male hall and an all-female hall. Although certain demographics will be collected for the purpose of research—as already explained—participants' identities remain anonymous. To protect participants, names and contact addressed were not collected.

Students residing in these residence halls received an email introducing the study and requesting participation, the link to the online survey was included in this email. To increase awareness and participation, infographic posters were designed and displayed throughout the designated residence halls; these posters featured a QR code that linked to

the online survey. Students had a week to complete the survey. After several days, follow-up emails were sent to potential participants to remind them of the study. The survey closed after a single week concluded.

Before launching the full survey, the researcher distributed a pilot survey to a small group of students decided by data available using the institution's internal database. Feedback from this initial survey was overall positive for the researcher, meaning that no changes to the instrument were made before fully launching the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Because the collected results were designed to be ordinal, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. First, the data were examined individually, then carefully examined according to demographic labels for further interpretation. Additionally, graphs and charts were generated based on the data to visualize the results of the questionnaire more clearly.

Benefits

Because new media studies are an emerging field of research, a quantitative study into the relationship between technology and mankind only adds to the growing conversation. More specifically for the realm of higher education, additional information on the presence and usage of new media is a boon to educators. As university staff and faculty grapple with the evolving reality of incoming students being digital natives, it is important for higher education professionals to stay informed on the subject. Finally, the implications of this research may assist residence hall coordinators in their developmental work with students, inspiring new approaches to facilitating residence community development.

Chapter 4

Results

The field of higher education faces a gap in the research literature: how emerging students experience proper campus community in the new age of internet connectivity. Although the gap in the literature for communication theorists may focus on broader generational identities rather than college students, the nature of the problem is quite similar. This chapter aims to begin filling these gaps of knowledge by codifying the results collected from the assessment instrument explained in the previous chapter. Statistical analysis will guide the dissemination of data—beginning in a broader fashion and narrowing to details as the analysis continues towards further discussion and possible implementation of findings. In summary, this study indicates an insignificant relationship between new media and sense of community. As can be seen in the following paragraphs, participants' sense of community seems to remain essentially unaffected by the presence or prominence of new media technology.

Descriptive Statistics

In total, the survey collected 186 responses from students. As far as the breakdown of results among classification, the percentages are moderately similar, with the sophomore class representing the most frequent participation. According to the students' gender identification, the responses were divided identically in half between male and female. No participants selected to withhold their gender identity. Additionally, all responses for students' current residence hall aligned with the two single-gender halls

chosen for this study, so this factor was excluded from further analysis. Results from the

quantitative assessment are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Survey Response—Correlation Table

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. My wing/floor supports me.	186	3.34	0.96	–							
2. I identify myself as connected to my wing/floor.	186	3.21	1.11	.756**	–						
3. My peers would say that I am engaged on my wing/floor.	186	3.12	1.13	.680**	.875**	–					
4. I consider the internet to be integral to my life.	186	3.07	0.92	.159*	.181*	.179*	–				
5. The internet and internet-connected devices have been a present in my life for as long as I can remember.	186	2.58	1.22	.204**	.191**	.213**	.226**	–			
6. My private living space features internet-connected devices.	186	3.52	0.93	.066	.095	.096	.317**	.116	–		
7. Using internet-connected devices to engage with people currently living on my wing/floor is a normal part of my daily life.	186	2.79	1.21	.282**	.331**	.376**	.306**	.156*	.284**	–	
8. Using internet-connected devices to engage with people who do not typically live on campus is a normal part of my daily life.	186	2.9	1.09	.168*	.107	.125	.241**	.159	.225**	.285**	–

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Results

The purpose of the research was to investigate if new media impacts students'

sense of community within their residence halls. Based on the correlational analysis (see

Table 1), students' engagement with new media technology has no significant

relationship with their sense of community. This is most strongly represented in the

relationship between variables 2 and 4, which have a statistically negligible relationship

(r = .181). Recognizing that these two factors—new media and sense of community—are

not correlated, implies that students are developing substantial communities regardless of

how present internet-connected technology is in their lives.

Research Conclusion

With the survey responses collected and analyzed, there is a clearer understanding

of the statistical correlation between new media technology and college students' sense of

community in their residence halls. What these findings seem to be showing—at least, for

the participants of this particular study—is a negligible relationship between the two

research constructs. Regardless of new media's prominence or presence in these college

students' lives, their sense of community remains largely unchanged. For professionals

and practitioners in the field of higher education, these findings begin to highlight just

how nuanced the living experience is of current students.

Chapter Five

Discussion

By and large, college students today seek meaningful connection in their residential living areas just as the generations of students before them sought community. The reality, though, is that today's undergrads experience nearly all aspects of their lives through the lens of new media, community included. As the world continues to develop and adopt new communication technologies, it can be certain that students will continue to reflect these developments. To be effective professionals in the field of higher education, there must be an evolving awareness of how new media technology impacts students' sense of community in their residence halls.

Understanding Community

In the development of the questionnaire items, the first three questions were specifically phrased using terminology from previous research on college student attachment, belonging, and involvement (Astin, 1984; Ingram, 2012; Robey, 2019). When assessing themselves, individual students reported highly comparable responses to each of the three community-based questions. This pattern serves to reinforce the existing higher education literature on the importance of these constructs for a sense of community.

Presence of Technology

Students most strongly identified themselves as having private living spaces featuring internet-connected devices. What this suggests is that concepts of media

ecology (Postman, 1980) and the Internet of Things (Meola, 2022) can be seen presently in the residence halls. With that stated, it is noteworthy that the correlation between this factor and the "my wing/floor supports me" factor had the lowest correlation out of all overall relationships ($r = .066$). Of all the ways that this research indicates a non-existent correlation between new media and community, this specific finding emphasizes how peer support and technology presence occur regardless of each other.

As far as the magnitude of responses is considered, the overall population of students identified the least with having internet-connected devices present throughout their lives. Despite observations of modern college students, like Prensky's (2001) statement that "today's students—K through college—represent the first generations to grow up with this new technology"(p. 1), there may still be some disconnect between external observation and internal recognition.

Recommendations for Practice

This research also found relative similarity in students' usage of internet communications to connect with peers both on-campus and off-campus. For higher education practitioners, an implication is that students' systems of support may extend far beyond the perimeters of the campus. Specifically for departments such as residence life, professionals must consider how the students in their buildings may be as much influenced by peers living across the hallways as they are their peers living across the globe.

For the sake of students' wellbeing, staff and faculty should have an informed understanding of how college students are using their devices. But this understanding needs to stay up-to-date, evolving just as new media technologies evolve. Without a

comprehension of current internet usage or capabilities, practitioners alienate themselves from their students. Although it may be true that students seek and create community regardless of new media influences, overlooking digital factors means ignoring a critical element of today's college student experience.

Likewise, it would be wise for student development professionals to reflect on their perceptions and biases of new media technology, especially compared to the actual experiences of students. Most current professionals do not share the internet's influence on childhood upbringing in the way that students experience, let alone the college experience marked by new media prominence. Since the study of new media is still a relatively emerging field, there may be a temptation to operate under assumptions. As student development professionals make program decisions or mentor undergraduates, they should compare their own perceptions to current data on students' experiences.

Limitations

A major limitation of this study was the scope and setting at which it was conducted—a small, liberal arts institution. Though this research does offer insight into the student experience at this institution, it is uncertain how universal these findings are for students at other institutions. The participants of this study represent a small portion of the larger campus population; the culture of the halls selected for this study are notably different from other residence halls on campus, which may influence the results.

Moreover, the culture of this institution may also impact the perspective of students. This particular campus is known, among both professional and student populations, for promoting community. Due to this shared institutional experience,

participants' understanding of some terminology may be different from college students attending other institutions.

An additional limitation to this study is the platform on which the assessment was delivered. The use of an online-only survey inherently disqualifies participation from any students who may not have regular access to internet-connected devices. Although the current research literature suggests near-total usage of digital technology, this study is limited to only represent individuals who regularly access their devices.

Furthermore, this research instrument relied on students self-reporting on their own perceptions of their peers as well as on their own media engagement and consumption. An individual's understanding of new media's impact on them may not be an accurate measure of new media's actual impact. Two participants, for example, may have different interpretations of terms such as "internet-connected devices" or "support," which would influence the how they self-report.

Future Research

Similar research should be conducted on comparable campuses to test the repeatability and validity of these findings. The type of housing options should be considered, as this study primarily focused on traditional-style housing. Research should also be done regarding alternate styles of campus living, which would expand higher education knowledge on the nuances of campus living.

Further research is recommended to investigate this study's findings and themes over time. This assessment focused on a single population of college students; future assessments would produce findings that illustrate possible trends in experience that could inform best practice. Further studies could also research the significance of various

demographic factors, exploring the diverse experiences of students' identities and backgrounds.

During the course of this research an additional gap in the existing literature was illuminated—what could be considered "media proxemics." With this study's findings regarding the physical presence of media devices in students' living spaces, it could be a boon to higher education professionals to specifically investigate the ways that campus life is being influenced by the integration of internet technology.

Conclusion

History has shown that college and university residence halls offer much more than simply a place to sleep and shower; these buildings are the venue for earnest interpersonal connection. Just as students occupy these spaces today, so do their devices. As leaders of colleges and universities continue to develop best practices for supporting students, continued study on the dynamic between these powerful factors is crucial. New media technologies have become integral components for the lives of many people, though not at the expense of connection—college students' sense of community simply looks different than it might have for previous generations, but it is not any less meaningful. Media and technology continue to evolve, just as university campuses continue to evolve. Future students will engage with new methods of connection and collaboration, an integral part of their community living and developing sense of community.

References

American Psychological Association. (2020). *APA resolution on violent video games*.

www.apa.org/about/policy/resolution-violent-video-games.pdf

Astin, A. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education.

Journal of College Student Development.

Clark, J. (2016). What is the internet of things? *IBM Business Operations Blog.*

www.ibm.com/blogs/internet-of-things/what-is-the-iot/

Dumford, A. D., Ribera, A. K., & Miller, A. L. (2019). Where and with whom students

live: Impacts on peer belonging and institutional acceptance. *Journal of College*

and University Student Housing, *46*(1), 10–29.

Ecology. (2021, October 1). In *Wikipedia*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ecology&oldid=1116967189

Gray, P. (2018). Benefits of play revealed in research of video gaming. *Psychology*

Today. www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/freedom-learn/201803/benefits-play-

revealed-in-research-video-gaming

Gray, R., Vitak, J., Easton, E. W., & Ellison, N. B. (2013). Examining social adjustment

to college in the age of social media: Factors influencing successful transitions

and persistence. *Computers & Education, 67,* 193–207.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2013.02.021

Hall, E. T., Birdwhistell, R. L., Bock, B., Bohannan, P., Diebold, Jr., A. R., Durbin, M.,

Edmonson, M. S., Fischer, J. L., Hymes, D., Kimball, S. T., & La Barre, W.

(1968). Proxemics. *Current Anthropology*, *9*(2/3), 83–108.

Ingram, D. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: Dimensions and correlates*.

[Doctoral Dissertation, Stanford University]. Stanford Digital Repository.

https://purl.stanford.edu/rd771tq2209

Jones, S. (2003). Gaming comes of age. *Pew Research Center*.

www.pewresearch.org/internet/2003/07/06/gaming-comes-of-age/

Kowert, R., & Kaye, L. K. (2018). Video games are not socially isolating. In C. J.

Ferguson, *Video Game Influences on Aggression, Cognition, and Attention* (pp.

185–195). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95495-0_15

Manovich, L. (2007). What is new media. *The language of new media*, *6*, 1–15.

Meola, A. (2022). What is the internet of things & how does IoT work? *Business Insider*.

www.businessinsider.com/internet-of-things-definition

Postman, N. (1980). The reformed English curriculum. In A. C. Eurich (Ed.), *High*

School 1980: The Shape of the Future in American Secondary Education (1970)

(pp. 160–168.)

Postman, N. (1998). Five things we need to know about technological change.

web.cs.ucdavis.edu/~rogaway/classes/188/materials/postman.pdf

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon*, *9*(5), 1–6.

https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816

Robey, E. A. (2019). *Attachment in higher education and the workplace: A literature review*. [University Honors Theses, Portland State University]. PDXScholar. http://doi.org/10.15760/honors.819

Scott-Webber, L. (2004). *In sync: Environmental behavior research and the design of learning spaces*. Society for College and University Planning.

Socha, B., & Eber-Schmid, B. (2014). Defining new media isn't easy. *New Media Institute.* www.cteonline.org/cabinet/file/22c5f33a-c40c-4bc5-a788-01545f5675f5/Preview-of-%E2%80%9CWHAT-IS-NEW-MEDIA_%E2%80%9D.pdf

Strayhorn, T. (2018). College students' sense of belonging. Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315297293

Worley, D. (2020). Community in retrospect: Exploration and evolution of communities in residence halls. *Journal of College and University Student Housing*, *46*(2), 96–108.

Appendix A

Questionnaire

Questionnaire Instructions

Thank you for taking a quick moment to complete this questionnaire! After entering some basic details about yourself, please indicate your level of agreement with the statements presented. Your identity will remain anonymous throughout the entire survey process, so please answer each question candidly. *Please note that your final submission of the survey serves as your consent for participation in this research project.*

Attitudinal Questionnaire Design

Participants will submit basic demographic details:
1.   Gender [Options: Male, Female, Prefer not to respond]
2.   Class [Options: Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior]
3.   Residence Hall [Short Answer]

Using a Likert scale of 0 (Do Not Agree) – 4 (Absolutely Agree), participants will indicate their level of agreement to each of the following statements:
1.   My wing/floor supports me.
2.   I identify myself as connected to my wing/floor
3.   My peers would say that I am engaged on my wing/floor.
4.   I consider the internet to be integral to my life.
5.   The internet and internet-connected devices have been a present in my life for as long as I can remember.
6.   My private living space features internet-connected devices.
7.   Using internet-connected devices to engage with people currently living on my wing/floor is a normal part of my daily life.
8.   Using internet-connected devices to engage with people who do not typically live on campus is a normal part of my daily life.

Appendix B

IRB Informed Consent

Study title: An Internet-Connected Community: How College Students Experience Residential Living in the Age of New Media

Researcher[s]:
You're invited to take a survey for research. This survey is completely voluntary. There are no negative consequences if you don't want to take it. If you start the survey, you can always change your mind and stop at any time. The study is being conducted by Jared Hobson, graduate student (MAHE).

What is the purpose of this study?
The research goal is to further understand the relationship between internet-connected devices and college students as they live in community within the residence halls.

What will I do?
This survey will ask you questions about your sense of community and about the presence of internet-connected devices in your daily life. It also includes basic, anonymous demographic questions. The survey will take about 3-5 minutes.

Risks
- Some questions may be personal or mildly upsetting. You can quit the survey at any time.
- Online data being hacked or intercepted: Anytime you share information online there are risks. We're using a secure system to collect this data, but we can't eliminate this risk.

Possible benefits: There are no benefits to participation that are reasonable to expect, although you would be helping to expand the currently limited knowledge about the impact of new media on college students' sense of community.

Estimated number of participants: 150 college students

How long will it take? 3-5 minutes.

Costs: None.

Compensation: None.

Confidentiality and Data Security
We'll collect the following identifying information for the research: Gender Identity, Classification, and current Residence Hall. This information is necessary to further understand the variables that may impact students.

Where will data be stored? On the researcher's computer.

How long will it be kept? Only for as long as the duration of data analysis.

Who can see my data?
- The researcher will have access to submitted survey responses. This is so we can analyze the data and conduct the study.
- Agencies that enforce legal and ethical guidelines, such as
o The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UWM
o The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP)
- We may share our findings in publications or presentations. If we do, the results will be aggregate, with no individual results

Questions about the research, complaints, or problems: Please contact Jared Hobson at jared_hobson@taylor.edu.

Questions about your rights as a research participant, complaints, or problems:
Contact the UWM IRB (Institutional Review Board) at 414-662-3544 / irbinfo@uwm.edu.

Please print or save this screen if you want to be able to access the information later.
IRB #: --
IRB Approval Date: **April 10, 2022**

Agreement to Participate
Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time.
To take this survey, you must be:
- At least 18 years old
- An enrolled student of [University]

If you meet these criteria and would like to take the survey, click the button below to start.

Appendix C

Survey Introduction Email

Hello all,

If I haven't gotten to introduce myself to you yet, my name is Jared Hobson, and I'm a second year [graduate student at University]. Like my peers [at University], I've been hard at work on my master's thesis this year. My thesis is a study on how new media technology impacts college students' sense of community in their living spaces, and I would love your help in the research process. Could you please take a short, anonymous, online survey for me? **You'll find a link to it at the bottom of this email.**

You may be asking, "Wait, why am I getting an email from this dude? Does he really need *my* help with his thesis?" Fantastic questions! One of the best that I've learned during my [University] career is that *college students are the real experts on what it's like being college students*. This is why I find it so valuable to get your input.

Important Notes:

This study isn't just about social media. And there's no ulterior motive here to convince you to delete Instagram. I don't care how many followers you have, if your latest TikTok went viral, or if your LinkedIn page was viewed in the last 24 hours. Instead, I'm way more interested in your overall usage of internet-connected devices, which goes way beyond social media.

This survey is anonymous. Your name and email won't be attached to your survey, and the questions are designed to protect your identity. I promise there's no hidden agenda here for Student Development to target certain responses to questions about community.

The survey should take you about 2-5 minutes.

Other notes: Once you hit the "submit" button, your answers will be locked in and you won't be able to change anything, so make sure to take a quick look over your selections to ensure they best represent you. Results from the survey will be incorporated into my thesis defense later this semester. (Keep an eye on the student announcements for that date!)

Here's the survey link: bit.ly/hobson-survey

Thank you in advance for your help with my thesis, and please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions at all!