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CULTURES AND COMMUNITIES IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD: BEGINNING THE EXPLORATION

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ABSTRACT

Most of today's college students grew up as part of the Net Generation (Cooke-Plagwitz, 2009), and pedagogues may assume that motivated students use technologies outside of class to improve their target language skills. However, little research has been conducted to see how students actually use technology to engage with foreign cultures and communities beyond the classroom setting. This exploratory study draws from both quantitative and qualitative data sets to reveal the ways first-semester students use technology to learn about German-speaking cultures and communities, and using Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (2005 & 2009), also shows how students' out-of-class learning via technology relates to their diverse motivations as language learners. Discussion includes suggestions for exploring cultures and communities through digital tools both within and beyond the classroom setting.

INTRODUCTION

Since most of today's college students grew up with home computers and instant access to information and entertainment on the Internet, educators may assume that learners are skilled at online social networking and exploring the World Wide Web. Implicit in that assumption is the belief that these students will also use digital technologies to enhance their coursework, including the learning of languages and cultures. Although extensive research has been done to explore how

technologies can be used toward linguistic gains, the extent to which students use these resources for engaging with target language (TL) communities remains untested. The aim of this paper is to provide a foundation for addressing that gap.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

When one discusses cultures and communities, one is referring to two of the five goal areas set forth by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in their National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (NSFLEP, 1996). These Five Cs (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities) encompass eleven Standards that exemplify what students should know about and be able to do with foreign languages. The Cultures and Communities Standards are outlined in Table 1.

Cultures: <i>Gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures</i>	Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied. Standard 2.2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.
Communities: <i>Participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world</i>	Standard 5.1: Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting. Standard 5.2: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

Table 1. ACTFL's Cultures and Communities Standards (NSFLEP, 1996)

Since the implementation of the Standards in 1996, much research has been conducted to investigate their impact, particularly in the K-12 context, but increasingly at the college level (Wood, 1999). According to Glisan (2012), most of this research fits into one of three categories: 1) Recommendations for teaching with the Standards, which may or may not have a basis in empirical data; 2) Explorations of teachers' pedagogical beliefs and how they compare with the Standards; and 3) White Papers that show how the Standards impact curricula and policies. Obviously lacking from the bulk of this work is a learner perspective.

A study by Magnan, Murphy, Sahakyan, and Kim (2012) was one of the first to investigate the extent to which the Standards align with students' goals and expectations for their own language learning. In their survey of 1,467 learners across 30 different languages, they found that the goal area valued by most students (83%) was Communities, followed by Communication (79%) and Cultures (76%). Some researchers also consider the Communities Standards to be particularly fundamental because addressing that goal area may elicit the other four (Magnan,

2008). However, in research on the teacher perspective, Communication and Cultures received the most emphasis in class, whereas Communities was seldom discussed (ACTFL, 2011; Magnan et al., 2012). Glisan even went so far as to refer to Communities as the "lost C" because it receives little attention in both research and praxis (Glisan, 2012, p. 518; Glisan, Phillips, Allen, Abbot, & Sauer, 2010). When asked why they do not teach about Communities, teachers responded with a variety of reasons (from ACTFL, 2011 and Willis Alley & Dupuy, 2012):

- This Standard is the hardest to teach.
- Teachers have a lack of training and professional development to help them teach about Communities.
- Engaging with communities who speak the TL is too nebulous and out of their control.
- Taking students into the local community or abroad is not feasible.

Very few of the instructors acknowledged technology's role in the curriculum or its potential as a tool for addressing the Communities Standard. Therefore, if students wish to engage with TL groups via technology, they are essentially left to their own devices.

In order to evaluate how the desire to affiliate with TL communities leads to the use of digital tools for doing so, I use Dörnyei's (2005 & 2009) L2 Motivational Self System, which is a theoretical framework that links an individual's motivations and potential identities with his or her behavior. This system is a process-oriented approach that accounts for changes in motivation over time and builds on work by Markus and Nurius (1986) and Markus and Ruvolo (1989) on *possible selves*. Dörnyei states that learners have dynamic, future-oriented selves based on the following:

- who they might become (*likely* or *expected selves*),
- who they would like to become (*ideal selves*),
- images of themselves held by others (*ought* or *ought-to selves*), and
- who they are afraid of becoming (*feared selves*).

Drawing from Self Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1998), these images of future selves provide students with a direction and impetus for reducing the discrepancy between current and future selves. In other words, students may engage in certain behaviors to reduce the gap between who they are now and who they envision themselves becoming.

With this framework in mind, I return to my overarching question: Are motivated learners actually engaging with target cultures¹ and communities on their own? More specifically, my research questions are the following:

1. How do college students in first-semester German classes describe their motivations for learning this language?
2. Which aspect(s) of the L2 Motivational Self System are the best predictors of overall motivation to learn German at the beginning level?
3. What similarities or differences are there in the ways that highly motivated students use technology to explore German-speaking cultures and communities as compared to their less motivated counterparts?
4. Are any of the technologies that students use in their everyday lives underutilized for learning about German-speaking cultures and communities?

PROCEDURES

There were two types of instruments used to address these research questions, namely, questionnaires and interviews. During the fourth week of the semester, I visited classes (described below under Participants) to distribute the questionnaires and consent forms. All of the recruited students were given candy as an incentive to participate, regardless of whether they actually chose to do so. I returned one week after the materials were distributed to collect them; they were at no time seen by the instructors. Twenty-three questionnaires were fully completed outside of class² and returned on a voluntary basis. The instrument provided information about students' demographics; language learning history, goals, and expectations; and the ways they use technology in their everyday lives. The two classes with the highest return rate for the questionnaire were awarded a bagel or pizza party. From these two classes, focal students were solicited to participate in additional data collection. The three focal participants for this study were interviewed individually and in groups between weeks nine and 15.

¹ Although Communities was the Standard with the biggest gap between what students want to learn and what is addressed in class, it is difficult to separate integration into a culture from entering into a community (Magnan, 2008). Therefore I have chosen to look at both goal areas, though the focus will be on Communities.

² The questionnaire was completed outside of class due to its lengthiness. It took approximately one hour to complete and it would have been impossible to attain approval from the Institutional Review Board to use class time for this purpose.

PARTICIPANTS

I recruited students from five intact first-semester German³ classes at a large research university in the American Midwest to complete the questionnaire. Each of the five classes had 18-24 students, so approximately 110 students were recruited. As mentioned above, three of the 23 participants took part in interviews, in addition to completing the questionnaires. Profiles of the three interviewees are displayed in Table 2.

	Gender	Age	Native language(s)
Student 1	Male	18	English
Student 2	Female	20	Malay, Mandarin, English
Student 3	Female	19	English

Table 2. Focal Student Profiles

A previous study by other researchers (Chavez & Svare, 2010) has given insight to why students at this institution choose to take German. 69 beginning-level learners of German described potential motivators for learning languages (German, Spanish, French, or Japanese) in an open-ended question; some participants provided more than one response. 37.68% cited ancestry as a reason why to take German, which may be particular to this region of the country, where German heritage is prevalent. Additionally, 27.54% of participants noted its usefulness in business, technology, and other professions. However, Japanese was rated as more useful for career applications, which implies that job opportunities may be an important, but not isolated consideration when choosing a foreign language. The other top reasons to learn German were travel and study abroad opportunities (24.64%) and an interest in the culture (23.19%). Of the 19 motivators that surfaced, having contemporary German-speaking relatives was sixth most-frequently mentioned (by 14.49% of participants) and a desire to meet native speakers was ninth (10.14%). These results indicate that approximately 15% of the students taking German at this university already have a connection to a TL community (i.e., living family members), and at least one out of 10 students would like to establish a relationship with native speakers.

At this institution, students seeking a Bachelor of Science degree must complete (or test out of) three semesters of a foreign language; students seeking a Bachelor of Arts degree must complete (or test out of) four semesters. This course was the first

³ Learners of German were chosen as a convenience sample, since the researcher is employed in a German Department.

in the sequence of German classes. Beginning level learners were chosen for this investigation because they have had little formal exposure to using technology for language learning, and the goal is to determine what these learners do on their own (i.e., without instruction or supervision) to engage with German-speaking communities.

METHODS AND RESULTS

Research Question 1 - How do college students in first-semester German classes describe their motivations for learning this language?

To answer the first research question, I used three types of data from the questionnaire. First, students were asked to write their reasons for choosing German and also their reasons they will continue to learn German. Additionally, I adapted quantitative items from the Language Institute Survey used by Magnan et al. (2012). This portion of my questionnaire consisted of 29 possible goals (e.g., to use German for a career, to reinforce knowledge of other disciplines through German, etc.). For each goal, participants had to rate (from 0-100%) how much they would like for this to happen by the end of their language studies. The full list of goals is available in Appendix A.

The five goals that received the highest average ratings are displayed in Table 3. Although a wide variety was given (including items that pertained to each of the five goal areas in ACTFL's National Standards), the goals that surfaced as most important were all related to Communication and learning the mechanics of the language.

Goal	Average Rating (0-100%)	Standard Deviation
To understand and interpret written and spoken German on a variety of topics	98.7	6.26
To engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions in German	93.48	13.69
To know about German vocabulary	93.04	14.6
To know about social uses of German (e.g., what is polite; in which contexts words or phrases are used)	92.17	13.8
To know about German grammar	90.87	17.03

Table 3. Top Five Goals that Students Wish to Achieve During their German Language Studies

However, the item that received the sixth-highest rating corresponds to an aspect of the Communities Standard, namely, "to be able to communicate with

native-speaking German friends or family" ($M = 89.5$, $SD = 24.17$). All three of the interviewees indicated, with a rating of 100%, that this was a goal that they want to achieve by the end of their language studies.

Before ranking the quantitative items, participants also described their primary motivations for learning German in their own words. Table 4 displays the types of responses that participants provided, as well as the number of participants who reported each type of reason. The responses are ranked from highest to lowest frequency.

Reasons for Choosing German	# of Participants	Reasons for Continuing with German	# of Participants
Interest in the German language	8	To become fluent in another language	6
Travel/tourism opportunities	4	Study abroad opportunities	5
Useful for major/career	3	Useful for major/career	5
General interest in language learning	3	Travel/tourism opportunities	3
Family and/or heritage	2	Interest in the German language	3
Interest in German culture/history	2	To communicate with German-speaking friends	3
Liked the teacher	2	Family and/or heritage	2
To fulfill a requirement	2	To fulfill a requirement	2
Study abroad opportunities	1	Interest in German culture/history	2
To communicate with German-speaking friends	1	To fit in better in Germany	1
To become fluent in another language	1	It's an easy class.	1

Note: This was an open-ended question; responses were later coded by the researcher. Some participants provided more than one response.

Table 4. Participants' Motivations for Learning German

Focal Student 1 reported that he has German family and heritage, which was both his reason for choosing and for continuing with German. Student 2 said that she had signed up for German because she wants to travel there someday, and she continues to study German because of the study abroad opportunities. Focal Student 3 reported that she chose German because of a general interest in the language, and she continues to learn it because she hopes to be able to speak it fluently someday.

When considering the whole sample, the most common responses for why students chose to start learning German were a specific interest in the German language, a general interest in language learning, for travel opportunities, and because they believed it would be useful for their studies or careers. The reasons why students continued or planned to continue learning German were similar: They wished to become fluent in another language, they wanted to take advantage of study abroad opportunities, and they believed it would help them in academic or professional settings. In their explanations as to why they will continue learning

German, three students mentioned that they would like to be able to communicate with German-speaking friends, two reported that they had developed an interest in German culture and history, and one student said that he would "not want to stick out like a tourist" when he someday travels abroad. These data support findings from Chavez and Svare (2010) and indicate that some students do indeed have a desire to gain membership in a German-speaking culture or community, even at the beginning of their language studies.

Research Question 2 - Which aspect(s) of the L2 Motivational Self System are the best predictors of overall motivation to learn German at the beginning level?

To respond to this research question, I compared two sets of data from the questionnaire: 1) Likert-scale items designed to test overall motivation for learning German, and 2) items designed to measure motivation across the different facets of L2 selves. For expected selves items, students rated their perceived likelihood of achieving certain goals by the end of their language studies on a scale from 0-100%. These questions were adapted from the same Language Institute Survey used by Magnan et al. (2012; as described in Research Question 1 and shown in Appendix A). The ideal, ought, and feared selves measures, as well as measures of overall motivation, were five-point Likert-scale items adapted from the English Learner Questionnaire (Papi, 2010; shown in Appendix B). I then used Pearson correlations to examine the relationships between overall motivation and ideal selves, ought selves, and expected selves⁴. Figures 1, 2, and 3, show the correlations between overall motivation and each of these aspects of L2 selves, respectively.

⁴ The relationship between overall motivation and feared selves was not examined because the items designed to test feared selves did not score well on tests of construct validity. The other three aspects of L2 selves were found to be valid.

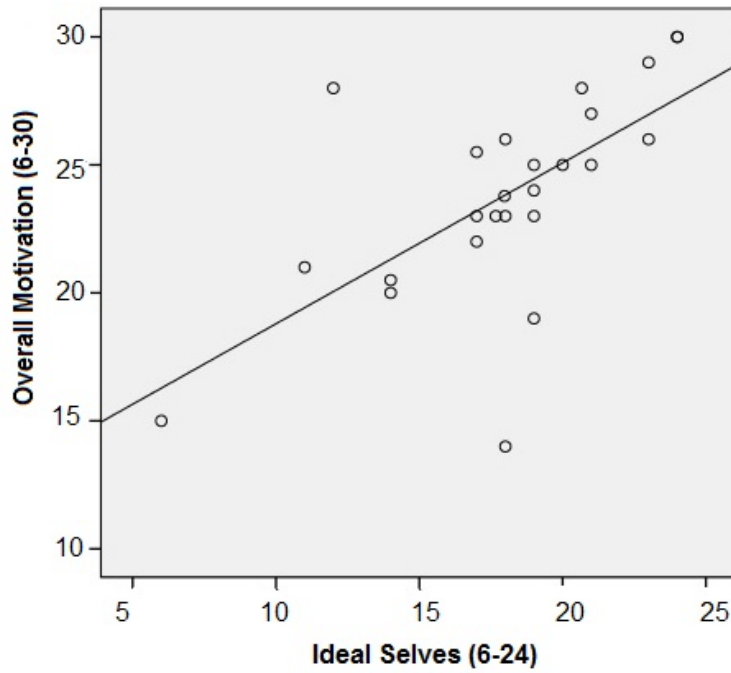


Figure 1. Correlation between Ideal Selves and Overall Motivation; $r = 0.642$. $p = 0.001$

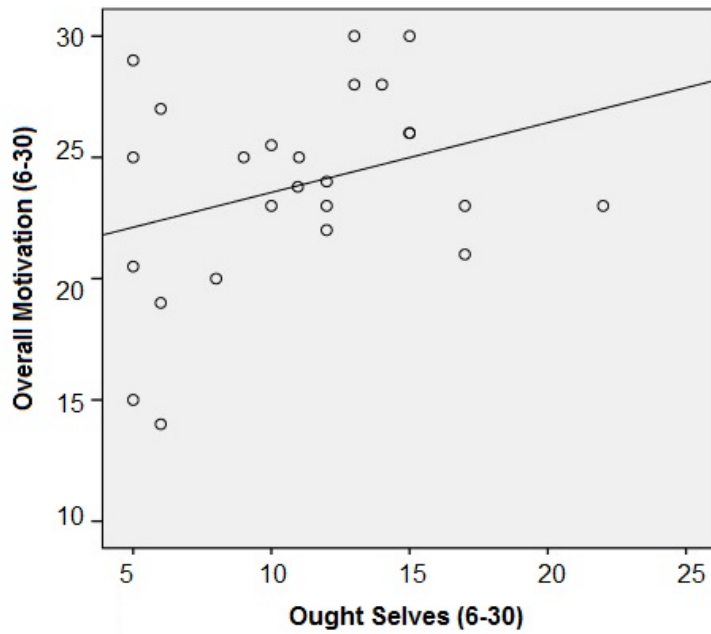


Figure 2. Correlation between Ought Selves and Overall Motivation; $r = 0.319$, $p = 0.12$

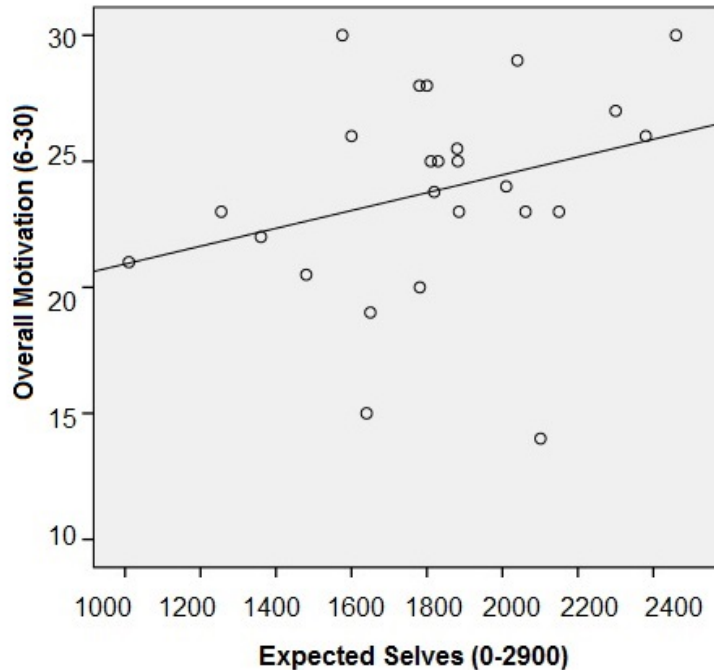


Figure 3. Correlation between Expected Selves and Overall Motivation; $r = 0.293$, $p = 0.154$

Of these three constructs, only the correlation between ideal selves and overall motivation was statistically significant at $p < 0.1$, showing a moderate to strong positive relationship. Therefore, who students want to become (ideal selves) is a better predictor of their overall motivation (and likely behaviors) than who they think they should become based on others' opinions (ought selves) or who they think they will become (expected selves).

Research Question 3 - What similarities or differences are there in the ways that highly motivated students use technology to explore German-speaking cultures and communities as compared to their less motivated counterparts?

To respond to this research question, I first needed a means of categorizing learners as having high or low motivation for learning German. To best capture students' motivations that would be a likely impetus for behavior, I took into consideration both their scores on overall motivation items as well as ideal selves items. For the overall motivation items, possible scores ranged from six to 30; the participants' mean score was 23.78 ($SD = 4.27$). For the ideal selves items, possible scores ranged from six to 24; actual scores had a mean of 17.97 ($SD = 4.34$). Based on their scores as compared to these averages (i.e., whether they scored above/below

23.78 on the construct for overall motivation and whether they scored above/below 17.97 on the ideal selves construct), students were placed into one of three groups:

- high motivation (by scoring above the average on both constructs);
- low motivation (by scoring below the average on both constructs);
- or high/low border (by scoring high on one measure and low on the other, or by scoring values within one point of the average on both constructs).

This method yielded 10 participants in the high motivation group, eight participants in the low motivation group, and five participants at the high/low border. Moving forward with this research question, the two former groups were the main focus.

To determine which technologies students were using in German, the questionnaire included a list of 22 different common uses of digital resources (provided in Table 5 below) and asked students to indicate whether they use these technologies, and if so, in which language(s). For the whole group, the mean number of technologies they reported using in English or another first language (L1) was 14 ($SD = 3.09$). For the high motivation group, the mean was 14.3 ($SD = 3.77$); for the low motivation group, the mean was 13.13 ($SD = 2.23$). This difference in means is not statistically significant at $p < 0.1$; therefore, my null hypothesis is that neither group uses technology significantly more than the other in German.

The mean number of technologies that students reported using in German was 2.35 ($SD = 3.58$) for the sample. When considering only the students in the high motivation group, that average dropped to 1.9 ($SD = 1.79$), compared with an average of 2.71 ($SD = 4.68$) for the low motivation group. At first glance, it appears that the less motivated students were actually using more technologies in German than the highly motivated students; however, this difference in means was not statistically significant at $p < 0.1$, which is to say, there was essentially no difference in the average number of technologies used in German between the two groups. Because these numbers reflect technologies used in German, but were not specific to exploring cultures and communities, I used excerpts from the three focal participants' interviews to provide a fuller picture.

Student 1 was highly motivated to learn German, he was a heavy technology user⁵, and an experienced language learner. He made the following comments⁶:

⁵ On average, students reported using 14 of the 22 ($SD = 3.09$) listed technologies regularly or frequently in English or their L1. Anyone who used 15 or more technologies was

Interviewer) Has the use of the Internet or technology in general helped you with your language studies?

S1) Yeah, I'd say, because I also took Spanish before this, so I've been studying language for four years now or something. But it used to be where if you didn't know a word you had to look it up in the dictionary and take two minutes to find it in there, and then you just got the word, not how it's used, not conjugations of it. But now you can go on to Word Reference or whatever, and look up the word, look up conjugations and the different forms and stuff like that, so... Yeah, it's helpful for stuff like that, or if you don't quite understand something you can quickly look up conjugating of this word and the past participle or whatever, stuff like that.

I) Do you also check anything related with the culture of the language you're studying? Or mainly grammar?

S1) Um, yeah back in Spanish I did that more, because we did study the culture a lot more. We haven't really done much culture studies in German so far, so...

I) Okay, is there anything that could be done in class, or that you are doing in class AND on the Internet?

S1) Mmhhh. Um, well I think it'd be... we haven't done it yet, but I think it'd be cool to learn more about the culture of Germany. So far we've pretty much only done language and a little bit about, you know, what they eat, stuff like that, but I think it'd be cool to get more in depth with stuff like that; learn a lot more about what an average German is like, or kind of what the culture is over there.

I) What things would be interesting for you related to culture?

S1) I think it'd just be cool to see what an average day for a German is like, because it could be pretty much the same as it is here, but it could also be really different. Or their history, also, that'd be cool to learn about too.

therefore considered a heavy tech user; anyone who used 14 or fewer was considered a light tech user.

⁶ Participants' quotes have been slightly edited to remove filler words (e.g., "or whatever", "you know", etc.).

From this conversation, it is evident that this student is familiar with certain online grammar resources and that he does have some experience exploring foreign culture in his past Spanish classes; however, despite being highly motivated, having a professed interest in German culture and history, and a desire to communicate with native speakers of German, he has not taken any steps to explore these interests either in or outside of class.

Student 2 was in the high/low border group in terms of motivation for learning German. She was placed into this group due to her high score on overall motivation for learning German combined with a low score on measures of ideal selves. She was a heavy technology user in general, but when asked about her uses of technology for learning in or about German, she said the following:

Interviewer) Have you used the Internet to help you learn foreign languages?

S2) Um, no. (laughs)

I) Have you checked music in another language, or have you checked...

S2) Um, yeah, I go, like when I want to hear a song that I've never heard before or something, I will go to YouTube, and I will just type in a song and listen to it.

I) Okay. Have you used the Internet to help you with your German learning?

S2) Uh, we're using the iLrn website⁷ right now, so yeah, I go to that.

I) Good. Do you think there are things online that, related to German, that you can use, that will help you learn things?

S2) Yeah, I'm sure there are lots of websites that will help you in German, but I haven't really looked at that. (laughs)

Although this student said that she has not used the Internet for foreign language learning, she did admit that she has used YouTube for listening to music in other languages (though not explicitly for educational purposes). She was also aware that some online resources for helping with German do exist, but she has not sought them out. Even when she was asked if there was anything she could do on the Internet to learn more, regardless of whether she has actually done it, she did not mention communicating with speakers of German, even though she did indicate a strong interest in doing this on the questionnaire.

⁷ ilrn.heinle.com is the textbook publisher's website, which includes the online student activities manual used for homework in this course.

Lastly, Student 3 belonged to the low motivation group and was also a light technology user in her L1. She was also asked about using the Internet for learning about both language and culture.

Interviewer) Are there ways you can think of using the Internet to improve your learning? Your language learning in German?

S3) Um, I know that for some other languages they have like, online flashcards, and then word games. I really like doing that for my other language classes. So if there was something like that for German out there, I would love to use it. Because it's a lot easier for me to grasp things when I can play with it, [rather] than just sit there and try and like memorize or remember words.

I) Yeah. Okay. Is there any Internet use that you think would help you with the culture of German-speaking countries?

S3) Um, probably just finding articles or even just searching Wikipedia for things. I've done that a couple of times for both German and just other stuff. Because I've been to Germany, so I have pictures of places but I can't always remember where they were. So I'll ask my parents for the name and then I'll go search it to look up more information, which is nice.

I) Yeah, it is. Do you think, are there things on the Internet that you can do, that you cannot do in class?

S3) Um, I don't think so. Not really. I feel like whatever is on the Internet was first in the classroom and then they translated it to the Internet to do things.

Student 3 mentioned that she likes using grammar resources and word games for learning other languages, but she was not yet familiar with any for German. She felt that there was nothing on the Internet that could not already be achieved in the classroom. Of the three participants, this student, who was less motivated to learn German and who also generally used less technology in her day-to-day life, is the only one who mentioned using the Internet to explore German culture. However, her use of technology (i.e., reading Wikipedia) was non-interactive; she, like the other two interviewees, did not use technology at all for communicating with other speakers of German.

In sum, the interviewees all mentioned an interest in exploring the culture of German-speaking countries, and in Research Question 1, they unanimously indicated that they absolutely want to be able to communicate with friends and family in German. All of the participants in this study were taught by non-native

speakers of German, so technology could be an ideal way for these students to establish and maintain contact with native speakers. However, only the interviewee with the lowest motivation for learning German, and who also does not use as much technology in her day-to-day life as the other two interviewees, stated that she had used technology to learn more about the target culture. None of them talked about using technology for interacting with German-speaking communities. Furthermore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected based on the quantitative data: Beginning-level students who are highly motivated to learn about German language and culture are not using technology outside of class to do so more than their less motivated counterparts.

Research Question 4) Are any of the technologies that students use in their everyday lives underutilized for learning about German-speaking cultures and communities?

To respond to the fourth research question, I tabulated the total number of students in the sample ($n = 23$)⁸ who used each listed technology in general, and also specifically in German. I included only the activities that were more common (i.e., that were reported by at least seven, or approximately 1/3, of participants). Then, I classified a technology as "underutilized" if it was being used in German by one third or fewer of the students who reported using it in any language (for a difference of 66.7% or less). Table 5 shows the different uses of technology that were reported by at least 1/3 participants, the number of students who used each tool in any language and in German, and the discrepancy in use between languages.

⁸ I included all participants in this analysis, since Research Question 2 showed that there is no difference between students with high or low motivation for learning German in terms of reported technology-use behaviors, either in German or the L1.

Technology Use	Any Language	German	Difference
Reading blogs	14/23	1/23	92.86%
Searching for websites (which you may or may not then read)	20/23	3/23	85%
Starting (text) chats	19/23	4/23	79.95%
Responding to (text) chats	19/23	3/23	84.21%
Reading chats or forums without participating	10/23	1/23	90%
Posting to social media	20/23	4/23	80%
Reading social media	19/23	4/23	75%
Reading e-mail	23/23	5/23	76.26%
Writing e-mail	23/23	4/23	82.61%
Reading other websites	17/23	1/23	94.12%
Watching videos made by others you know personally	9/23	1/23	88.89%
Watching videos made by people you do not know personally	17/23	4/23	76.47%
Watching movies	22/23	3/23	86.36%
<i>Listening to music or watching music videos</i>	<i>23/23</i>	<i>8/23</i>	<i>65.22%</i>
Listening to talk radio or podcasts	7/23	1/23	85.71%
<i>Video chatting</i>	<i>17/23</i>	<i>6/23</i>	<i>64.71%</i>
Playing video games	11/23	0/23	100%
Talking on the phone	21/23	2/23	90.48%

Note: The activities appear in the order in which they are listed on the questionnaire.

Table 5. Reported Uses of Technology, in General and in German

Of the 22 items that were listed, less than 1/3 students reported doing four of the activities in any language, including writing blogs (6/23); creating or adding to websites, forums, or wikis (1/23); creating videos (3/23); and watching videos made by oneself (1/23). The rest of the activities were reported more commonly for general use, but using the aforementioned definition of "underutilized", we see that nearly all of the technologies are indeed underutilized for learning in or about German. There were only two exceptions, which are italicized Table 5. The first was listening to music or watching music videos, which was done by all 23 participants in any language, and eight specifically in German. Although one could potentially learn about the target culture from this activity, it could not be considered a way of interacting with a German-speaking community. The other exception was video chatting, which was used in German by six out of the 17 learners who use it in general. Although this is certainly a means of interacting with members of German-speaking communities, qualitative comments show that all six of these participants used Skype for communicating with people whom they already knew (e.g., family members and significant others who were native speakers of German or friends and family who had learned German in a school setting), rather than for establishing new connections.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the quantitative data in Research Question 3 show, beginning-level students who are highly motivated to learn about German language and culture are not using technology outside of class to do so more than their less motivated counterparts. Furthermore, none of the interviewees (who have varying degrees of overall motivation for learning German) said that they had used technology to engage with German-speaking communities, despite claiming that they have a strong desire to do so. This implies that both highly- and less-motivated learners at the beginning level could benefit if more community-building resources were provided as part of the regular curriculum. The following will provide a list of resources to help teachers better address the Communities Standards by incorporating technologies with which learners are already familiar, based on reports from participants in this study.

More than half (14/23) of the participants reported that they read blogs; however, only one student had attempted to do so in German. These raw, authentic materials may be intimidating to beginning learners. I therefore recommend that students create their own blogs in the TL. Using a site such as Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com/home>), students can change the interface to the TL, write several entries throughout the course, and read and comment on their classmates' posts. Not only can this type of project⁹ help address the Communities Standards, but it could also lead to an increased sense of belonging in the classroom. Another possibility is Tumblr (<https://www.tumblr.com/>). With this site, members can follow others' blogs and leave comments to interact with the author, or they can write their own. Group blogs can be valuable for entire classes, so students can write their own entries and take part in editing their classmates' posts. To get practice reading all types of websites, (which was done by 17/23 students in any language, but only one student in German), I recommend Lingro (<http://lingro.com/>). Lingro is a tool that allows you to embed any website, including blogs, into an interactive dictionary. As you read, you can click on any word for a translation (and sometimes other information, e.g., parts of speech and pronunciation). Furthermore, Lingro shows vocabulary in context, keeps tracks of the words that a user looks up, and gives the option of creating flashcards from those words, which the user can organize for later review.

For those learners who are particularly interested in communicating with other speakers of the TL, there are many tools available. Most students are already

⁹ Interested parties may contact the author for an example of writing blogs for a long-term writing project with examples from students.

familiar with social networking tools (used by 20/23 students in this study in any language, but only 4/23 in German). Both Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/>) and Twitter (<https://twitter.com/>) allow you to search for topics using hashtags and to join groups that would be relevant for language learners. There are also communities of learners looking for language partners on Google Hangouts (<https://plus.google.com/communities/117021348126795052161>), which can be used by individuals or groups of up to 10 learners. Since students' privacy can sometimes be a concern when using these social networking sites, I also recommend Livemocha (<http://livemocha.com/>), which is a free online language community serving many TLs. Learners can complete lessons, connect with native speakers, and also provide feedback for people who are learning their L1. Tutoring and online classes are available for a fee.

In the same realm as social networking, there are also tools that can help students stay connected with their classroom community once they leave school. For example, on Edmodo (<https://www.edmodo.com/>), teachers can continue classroom discussions online, give polls to their students to check for understanding or opinions, and join groups for tandem language practice and sharing cultural information. Students and teachers can use Audioboo (<http://audioboo.fm/>) on their smartphones to upload an audioscript up to three minutes long, which can be accompanied by a picture. Listeners can then provide responses to the podcast in both text and audio formats. With Voicethread (<http://voicethread.com/>), users upload and share documents, presentations, audio clips, and videos. Students and teachers can use microphones, webcams, or their phones to record comments for discussion. With both Audioboo and Voicethread, if the class has partners in a target country, students could work together to record questions for the other class to answer, in the form of a cultural exchange. Similarly, on Linguae Live (<http://www.linguaealive.ca/>), instructors may find complementary classes for their students to communicate with via videos, voice or text chat, and also e-mail.

E-mail was a resource that all of the participants in this study reported using. However, only 4/23 reported that they had written e-mails in German and 5/23 had read e-mails in German. A resource that could help bridge this gap is My Language Exchange (<http://www.mylanguageexchange.com/>), which allows users to find e-mail penpals or chat synchronously in text and voice formats in a wide variety of languages. The site also provides lesson plans and word games. Additionally, although video chatting was one of the two activities that was not underutilized by participants (done by 17/23 in any language and 6/23 in German), the learners in this study indicated that they used this resource for maintaining existing relationships rather than for establishing new ones. Those who wish to find new

partners with whom they can practice oral skills could find tandem language partners through a Skype community (<http://community.skype.com/t5/Language-learning/bd-p/Languages>). For adult learners in larger cities, Meetup (<http://www.meetup.com/find/>) is also be useful for finding other local people to join a conversation table.

For learners who are interested in gaming (as reported by 11/23 participants in this study even though none were playing in German), I recommend that they join a server in their TL on a massive multiplayer online game with which they are already familiar (e.g., World of Warcraft, Everquest, Minecraft, or Second Life). This will allow them to learn vocabulary and also chat in the TL. For other types of games (which may not be interactive but still can be entertaining), students can do a search on Google or in any app store.

The aforementioned resources are important for community building, but it should be noted that some of the activities that most students in this study reported lack an interactive component. However, despite the lack of interaction, these activities are still valuable, since students can gain cultural insights from authentic materials. One way classes can collect resources for learning about the target culture is with a virtual bulletin board, such as Pinterest (<http://www.pinterest.com/>). Here, the teacher can create a class board, where all students can "pin" images or websites that could later be used to spur discussion.

Another way gaining insight to the target culture is by watching movies (reported by 22/23 in this study in any language but only 3/23 in German) and shorter videos (17/23 in any language but only 4/23 in German). If your campus is lucky enough to have a foreign language video library, my first recommendation is to provide students with a list of what is available. This might seem obvious; however, many students may not even know where to begin their search for authentic materials, so providing this information is an important first step. Although it requires a subscription, Netflix is also an outlet for students and teachers to find movies in the target language (http://dvd.netflix.com/SubGenreList/Foreign_Languages/2620). To find shorter videos or clips from movies, users can search YouTube channels. Although watching music videos or listening to music was one of the two activities in this study that were not underutilized (reported by all students in any language and 8/23 in German), more still could be doing this to increase exposure to the TL and culture. Of course, YouTube is also a great resource for finding these materials. One can simply search for a playlist of music in the TL or a class can create their own.

Additionally, students who have access to tablets or smartphones can download apps to play radio stations from countries where the TL is spoken.

For educators who are looking for resources specific to German, I recommend the following:

- Slow German Podcasts (<http://www.slowgerman.com>) for reading blogs or listening to podcasts
 - This website was created for learners of German and provides audio clips with transcripts. Podcasts are sorted by level from beginning to advanced and primarily address cultural topics. In addition, readers can leave comments and instructors can pay to download supplemental teaching materials.
- Deutsche Welle (<http://www.dw.de/>) for reading other websites and finding language partners.
 - This site provides news in German (and 30 other languages), including videos and materials designed for learners at various levels. In their online community (<http://www.communityd.de/>), students can access documents, podcasts, and videos for learning German, and also use the friend finder to communicate with others via videos and audio or text messages.
- jetzt-Chat from the Goethe Institute (<http://www.goethe.de/z/jetzt/dejchat/dejchat1.htm>)
 - These chatrooms allow students to practice their German with other learners and native speaker tutors.
- Example lists of films available in German:
 - In general: <http://imp.lss.wisc.edu/lss/mediacat/gerfilm.pdf>
 - On Netflix:
http://dvd.netflix.com/SubGenreList/German_Language/2555
- Examples of video series on YouTube to learn about cultural topics:
 - "Germany vs. USA" by AlexandJim
 - "Die Wahrheit über Deutschland" or "The Truth about Germany" by euromaxx/Deutsche Welle
- Examples of German music resources:
 - A YouTube playlist:
 - https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqBLSqHukwLZPWMTelG_R90b-GHfHuyLo
 - Apps such as "Radio Austria" for Apple devices and "German Radio LIVE" for Android

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has laid the foundation for an exploration of how students use digital resources to engage with foreign cultures and communities. There are, however, some limitations. First, the participant group was small, and therefore only limited statistical analysis can be done to determine whether these high- and low-motivation groups differ in terms of their likelihood to use technologies for exploring target cultures and communities beyond the classroom setting. Furthermore, although the focal participants were given monetary compensation for their time, the students who completed only questionnaires did not receive compensation beyond food treats. Therefore, it is possible that there is a sampling bias because the students who self-selected for participation were highly motivated and interested in studying languages, and may not be representative of all the individuals in their classes. If this is the case, it may be that students with the overall lowest motivation were not represented in this sample, and that there may indeed be differences between the technology-use behaviors of students with the lowest motivation and those who participated in this study.

Additionally, the participant group was fairly homogenous, so results from this investigation cannot be extended to other populations. Only beginning learners of German at the university level were represented in this sample. This institution offers approximately 40 languages each semester, so given the variety of options, it can be assumed that most of the participants had some personal reason for choosing German. Thus they may have been more motivated than learners in other settings where there are fewer choices. Future studies need to be done to explore how more advanced learners, learners in other educational settings, and learners of other languages use technology to establish and maintain relationships with members of target cultures and communities. This analysis also relied on self-report data rather than actual observations, so we cannot be certain that participants always provided accurate assessments of their own behaviors. I therefore recommend that future research incorporate more observational data to enhance our understanding of this issue.

It is important to note that this study is a preliminary investigation that draws on a small portion of a very robust data set. Continued analysis of the questionnaire data will explore how different motivational factors (i.e., certain goals or expectations), past or present relationships with speakers of the TL, and language learning history may impact technology use for engaging with German-speaking cultures and communities. Additionally, focal participants kept bi-weekly technology use logs between weeks seven and 15, showing what technologies they

used, for how long, in which language(s), with whom, for what purpose, and how well they achieved their purpose. I plan to more closely analyze relationships between motivations (as revealed in questionnaires and interviews) with the technology use behaviors (as described in the logs). It is possible that our understanding of learners' motivations and behaviors will change as we continue to uncover the bigger picture.

CONCLUSION

Although this is only a preliminary investigation, this study has shed some light on how beginning learners of German do and - perhaps more importantly - do not use digital technologies to explore target cultures and communities. From a first glance at these data, it seems that even highly motivated students are not addressing the Communities Standards beyond the classroom, even when they express an interest in doing so. It is therefore imperative that educators and researchers alike continue working to foster lifelong learning and to help students engage with multilingual communities both within and beyond the school setting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire - Students' Alignment with ACTFL's National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (adapted from The Language Institute Survey, Magnan et al., 2012)

What are your objectives for learning German? Indicate the percentages in increments of 10 (0, 10, 20, 30,...100%) that best express how much you would like for these things to happen (0% = do not care at all; 100% = would absolutely love for this to happen).

Outcome	How much would you like for this to happen (0-100%)?	How likely do you think this is to happen (0-100%)?
a. To understand and interpret written and spoken German on a variety of topics		
b. To understand the relationship between the practices (patterns of social interactions) and perspectives (meanings, attitudes, values, and ideas) of German culture		
c. To reinforce and further my knowledge of other disciplines through German		
d. To engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions in German		
e. To understand the relationship between the products (books, tools, foods, laws, music, games, etc.) and perspectives (meanings, attitudes, values, and ideas) of German culture		
f. To understand the concept of culture through comparisons of the German culture with my own		
g. To understand the nature of language through comparisons of German and my own language		
h. To use German for my career		
i. To acquire information and recognize the distinct viewpoints that are only available through the German language and its culture		
j. To become a life-long learner by using German for personal enjoyment and enrichment		
k. To present information, concepts, and ideas in German to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics		
l. To study in a German-speaking country		
m. To be able to communicate with native German-speaking friends or family		
n. To become a part of the German culture		
o. To know about German vocabulary		
p. To know about German grammar		

Outcome	How much would you like for this to happen (0-100%)?	How likely do you think this is to happen (0-100%)?
q. To know about the sounds or sentence melody of German		
r. To know about social uses of German (e.g., what is polite; in which contexts words or phrases are used)		
s. To know about specific (e.g., famous) people who live or lived in a German-speaking country		
t. To know about German speakers who resemble me in some way (age, student status, interests, etc.)		
u. To know about German speakers, German companies, or German cultural events in [the city where the institution is located]		
v. To know about German speakers, German companies, or German cultural events in [the state where the institution is located], (other than in [the city where the institution is located])		
w. To know about German speakers, German companies, or German cultural events in the US (other than [the state in which the institution is located])		
x. To know about the politics or economics of German-speaking countries		
y. To know about the history or geography of German-speaking countries		
z. To know about the literature or art of German-speaking countries		
aa. To know about professional or study- or work-abroad opportunities in German-speaking countries		
ab. To know about customs, holidays, the daily lives, etc. of people in German-speaking countries		
ac. To know about political or social views or artistic preferences held by people in German-speaking countries		

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire - Measures of Different Types of Motivation for Learning German (adapted from the English Learner Questionnaire, Papi, 2010)

Note: This has been reformatted to save space. In the original questionnaire, the scale was provided after each question for participants to circle their responses

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling a number from 1 to 6.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6

1. I study German because close friends of mine think it is important.
2. Studying German is important to me because I think it will someday be useful in getting a good job and/or making money.
3. I have to spend a lot of time studying German because I don't want to get bad grades in it.
4. Learning German is important to me because I would like to travel internationally.
5. I would be happy if other cultures were more similar to American culture.
6. I would like to spend lots of time studying German.
7. I can imagine myself speaking German as if I were a native speaker of German.
8. If I fail to learn German well, I'll be letting other people down.
9. Studying German is important to me to make my family happy.
10. I have to learn German because without passing the German courses I can not get my degree.
11. I think the relationship between the German and English languages is interesting.
12. Most other cultures are strange compared to my culture.
13. I am prepared to put in a lot of effort in learning German.
14. I can imagine myself speaking German with international friends or colleagues.
15. Studying German can be important to me because I think I'll need it for further studies.
16. Because of the influence of English-speaking countries, I think the German culture is being ruined.
17. It would be a better world if everybody lived like Americans.
18. I would like to concentrate on studying German more than any other topic.

19. Studying German is important to me in order to achieve a special goal (e.g., to get a degree or scholarship).
20. Studying German is important to me because if I don't have knowledge of a foreign language, I'll be considered a weak student.
21. Studying German is important to me because without it I won't be able to travel to the places I want to see.
22. I want to take more German courses in the future.
23. I can imagine myself studying in a university where all my courses are taught in German.
24. Learning German is necessary because people I'm close to expect me to do so.
25. My parents encourage me to practice my German as much as possible.
26. I study German in order to stay updated and informed of recent news of the world.
27. I highly value the artistic and cultural contributions of many people from German-speaking countries.
28. It is hard to tolerate the behavior of people from other cultures.
29. If my teacher would give the class an optional assignment, I would certainly volunteer to do it.
30. I can imagine myself writing German e-mails fluently.
31. I am learning German because I think all Americans should learn a language other than English.
32. Studying German is important to me because other people will respect me more if I have knowledge of German.
33. Studying German is important to me because I am planning to study abroad.
34. I think that when people from other cultures are in America, they should follow our American rules (e.g., in dressing style and their relationship with opposite sex).
35. Studying German is important to me, because I would feel ashamed if I got bad grades in German.
36. I think that the American/English culture will eventually take over other cultures because of globalization.
37. I would study German even if it were not required to learn a foreign language.
38. I can imagine myself living abroad and using German effectively for communicating with the locals.

Please indicate your assessment of the following items, using the scale below.

Not at all.	Not a lot.	Not really.	A little bit.	Quite a lot.	Totally.
1	2	3	4	5	6

39. Do you like the atmosphere of your German class?
40. How tense would you get if a foreigner asked you for directions in German?
41. How much would you like to become similar to people who speak German natively?
42. Do you like the music of German-speaking countries (e.g., techno, pop music, rap, folk music)?
43. Do you like the people who live in German-speaking countries?
44. Do you find learning German really interesting?
45. How uneasy would you feel speaking German with a native speaker?
46. Do you like German movies?
47. Do you like meeting people from German-speaking countries?
48. Do you think time passes faster while in your German class, as compared to your other classes?
49. How nervous and confused do you get when you are speaking in your German class?
50. Do you look forward to German class?
51. How afraid are you of sounding stupid in German because of the mistakes you make?
52. How important do you think learning German is in order to learn more about the culture and art of its speakers?
53. Would you like to know more about people from German-speaking countries?
54. How worried are you that other speakers of German would find your German strange?
55. How much do you like German?
56. Do you like any particular German magazines, newspapers, or books?
57. Do you really enjoy learning German?
58. How afraid are you that other students will laugh at you when you speak German?
59. Do you wish you could take more German classes at school?