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# INSTAFRENCH: INVESTIGATING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND STUDENT- SELECTED IMAGES TO SUPPORT L2 WRITING

Julie Whiddon  
*[jwhiddon1@student.gsu.edu](mailto:jwhiddon1@student.gsu.edu)*

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INSTAFRENCH: INVESTIGATING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND  
STUDENT-SELECTED IMAGES TO SUPPORT L2 WRITING

by

JULIE WHIDDON

Under the Direction of Paula Garrett-Rucks, PhD

ABSTRACT

Social media has quickly become an integral part of day-to-day interaction for many university students. By infusing usage of the popular social networking site Instagram into the curriculum of three French 1002 classes, this exploratory study aimed to investigate the role of image as a tool to support learning writing in the L2 in a lower division French class. Data showed that student perception on the effect of images on their comprehension of their classmate's writing as well as their classmate's understanding of their own writing were positive.

INDEX WORDS: computer-mediated communication, social media, French, L2 identity, willingness to communicate

INSTAFRENCH: INVESTIGATING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO INCREASE  
MOTIVATION AND WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN THE FRENCH  
CLASSROOM

by

JULIE WHIDDON

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Art

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2016

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2016

INSTAFRENCH: INVESTIGATING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO INCREASE  
MOTIVATION AND WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN THE FRENCH  
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JULIE WHIDDON

Committee Chair: Paula Garrett-Rucks

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2016

## **DEDICATION**

To Steven- for your kindness, patience, and support throughout the pursuit of this degree.

I could not have done it without you!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I must thank my family and friends, who have relentlessly encouraged me to continue my education and have supported me through all of the difficulties that a master's degree entails. Along with my family, I am thankful for a long line of wonderful teachers who have provided me with endless valuable learning opportunities which led me to where I am today. Thank you for helping me along this path, showing me where my strengths are, as well as areas where I still have much to learn. On that same token, a big thank you is owed to Paula Garrett-Rucks for taking my initial ideas and thoughts and shaping and developing them with me. Your assistance was indispensable and much appreciated! Finally, thank you to Juliette, my partner and colleague, for implementing this project in your classrooms and embarking on yet another teaching adventure with me. Here's to many more collaborations.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Social media has quickly become an integral part of day-to-day interactions for many university students. By infusing new and popular technologies into three French 1002 classes, the pedagogical intervention under investigation in this exploratory study aimed to gauge learner perception and the role of student-selected images to support L2 writing. Many college students willingly and consistently write online posts and upload photos concerning their daily lives, and this intrinsic motivation to share real-world experiences could prove useful in helping students begin to have meaningful interactions in the target language, in this case, French. Using the online social media site Instagram, learners were provided with an informal space to communicate among peers in the target language.

In this particular university setting, most students within the College of Arts and Sciences are required to complete a minimum of two semesters of foreign language study. The second semester of study is crucial and especially challenging for instructors, given that the motivation of some students is waning, and that this is the last opportunity for students to have positive experiences in the target language before exiting the program. Employing social networking sites that many students frequently use could be one way of rendering beginning language courses more accessible for those students who are merely filling foreign language requirements.

This exploratory study investigated whether online interactions- in the target language centering on shared personal images via Instagram- might be positively perceived by students. In previous research investigating motivational factors on students' decisions to continue or discontinue language study, MacIntyre and Blackie (2012) found that willingness to communicate "showed significant correlations with nearly all motivational variables" (p.540). MacIntyre and

Blackie further suggested that “CMC forums might also be beneficial to hesitant learners: (p.540). The present study aimed to explore the usefulness of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the form of social media sites (SNSs) on learner L2 writing and willingness to communicate in a lower-division French course. This study extends prior research findings which have reported that CMC use in the classroom can encourage students to interact with each other and reduce effects of shyness (Kern, Warschauer, & Ware, 2004) and increase participation, motivation, and attitudes towards writing (Meunier, 1994; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996) by investigating CMC use outside of classroom instruction time with the use of student-selected images to supplement their target language use.

## **2 REVIEW OF CURRENT LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Computer-Mediated Communication**

In her book chapter *Computer-mediated discourse in instructed environments*, Dorothy Chun refers to the use of computers and the internet to communicate online as Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC) (Chun, 2008). Chun goes on to state:

Although the term was not coined specifically for language learning, the use of CMC to foster L2 acquisition has grown and expanded rapidly during the last two decades, in part because the technology has evolved so quickly and in part because more and more language instructors are integrating the use of technology into their classrooms. In addition text-based CMC has become part of everyday life and is widely used outside the classroom (e.g., email, bulletin boards, forums, blogs, wikis, instant messaging, chats, etc.) (Chun, 2008, p. 15-16).

When discussing CMC, there are two modes of which one must be aware: asynchronous (ACMC) and synchronous (SCMC). Asynchronous CMC features interaction that does not occur in real time, such as blogs or wikis, whereas synchronous CMC include modes of communication like text-based instant messaging, audioconferencing, or videoconferencing, where users can interact with each other simultaneously. Within these two modes are several sub-groupings. Both asynchronous and synchronous CMC can be either text-based or audio-visual based.

There are several purported benefits to CMC, including reduced anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1996), increased motivation (Warschauer, 1996), and the production of more lengthy and complex language than SCMC (Kitade, 2006; Sotillo, 2000), and more recently with the advent of emoticons, or emojis, the availability of symbols to compensate for the lack of paralinguistic features that are present in face-to-face communication. An important advantage to ACMC in particular is the fact that learners have more time to prepare and compose their responses. Beauvois (1998) refers to this phenomenon as “conversation in slow motion”. The reduced stress could encourage students to interact with one another more freely, increasing the likelihood that soft-spoken learners will participate (Beauvois, 1995; Chun, 1994; Kern, 1995; Warschauer 1996). While a number of studies have investigated the use of SCMC for more linguistically advanced students, the aforementioned advantages of ACMC for use in lower-level classrooms is worth exploring. The presence of images as a tool to support learner writing is also missing from the literature. Thus the chosen site for the current study, Instagram could prove useful, given that it combines both text-based and audio-visual based modes through the use of images and captions.

## 2.2 Web 2.0 and Intracultural Exploration: A Precursor to ICC Development

The term Web 2.0, first used in 2004 by O'Reilly Media, is meant to describe a “second generation of web-based communities and hosted services that let people collaborate and share information online in perceived new ways, such as social networking sites, wikis, and other communication tools” (Chun, 2008). This new generation of web culture is characterized by “user-generated content, ... looking for ways to get users involved and feeling like co-developers in what is known as the “architecture of participation” (Chun 2008). The significance of this “architecture of participation” is well-characterized in Paily’s 2013 article outlining the role of Web 2.0 technology. Paily states that the concept of Web 2.0 applications developed out of the idea that online users and consumers desired to be active participants who contributed to the creation of content on the Web, therefore cultivating a more socially driven and connected environment (Paily, 2013). With regard to Web 2.0 technology in the classroom, Mitchell (2016), posits that “Not only does a pedagogically sound use of digital technologies make learning more relevant and interesting, but it also develops 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, increases global competence, and provides opportunities for meaningful interaction with authentic cultural content” (Mitchell, 2016). Thus, the use of Web 2.0 can encourage student collaboration and communication, the emphasis being “the construction of knowledge with the others for the others” (Paily, 2013, p. 44), where a community of practice is created. The result is that students, through interactions with their peers, are actively engaging in productive, collaborative environments, using the target language to create new information (Paily, 2013). When discussing the pedagogical implications for her 2016 study, Mitchell refers to increased learner motivation and engagement, suggesting that student content be made public, so that their contributions are created not only for themselves and the instructor, but for an audience.

Although the majority of Web 2.0 studies which have explored intercultural communicative competence (ICC) are geared toward higher-proficiency learners, there are several connections between the current study and the development of ICC. Students at the beginning levels of French are developing their language proficiency as well as strategies for overcoming communication breakdowns in online ACMC communication, which could result in being better equipped to interacting with native speakers of the L2 using this same medium.

In their introduction to a special issue of *Dimension*, Garrett-Rucks and Fantini (2016) reference what they call a collective end goal, stating that this should be “to develop positive and meaningful relationships within and across cultures”. Although the current exploratory study is largely intracultural, that is, lacking a L2 culture piece and rather fitting “within” the L1 culture. It could be argued that one must understand their own cultures and customs before being able to successfully make comparisons with that of another culture. Thus, this study, centering on beginning level learners, could be considered as a starting point which could lead to developing students’ ICC, given that the learners are become accustomed to interacting in the L2 and comparing and contrasting ideas and beliefs within their own cultures (American culture, southeastern US culture, and classroom culture). The university environment in which the present study takes place boasts a large and diverse student population, thus interactions in this manner could serve as a preparatory measure for encountering members of the L2. It could very well be that students who have already engaged in a similar introspective process with regard to their own culture would be more apt to make insightful observations about an L2 culture when given the opportunity.

Johnson (2015) suggests that a good language teacher should promote interest in linguaculture by providing exciting experiences so that learners become more intrinsically motivated. By interacting with peers in French on Instagram, learners may develop a curiosity and motivation to graduate from peer interaction to interaction with members of the L2community. One area in which social media and web 2.0 sites show promise is the ability to connect people with common interests. Should students find a L2 community member with whom they can relate, a more genuine and authentic conversation can take place, rather than the sometimes contrived interactions between students who have no other motivation than commenting in order to receive a grade (McBride, 2009). Perhaps these conversations with classmates could serve as a catalyst for students to find L2 speakers on their own.

### **2.3 Social Media: Learner Perception and Motivation**

This notion of Web 2.0 serving as motivation for students to seek out L2 community members is supported by McBride (2009), who suggests that “if students gain skills in communicating and connecting with others through SNSs in the second language (L2) through a class, they will be well poised to establish relationships with other speakers of the L2 via SNSs in the future and to become autonomous, lifelong learners” (McBride, 2009).

When considering motivation and learner perception there are many factors to take into account. Echoing Gardner’s Construct of the Integrative Motive, Dörnyei (1994) showed that one factor leading to language learning motivation is the student attitude towards the learning situation, including their evaluation of the L2 course, suggesting that the student’s appraisal of course materials and methods can have a positive or negative influence on student motivation to learn the L2. In a pilot study conducted by Moskovsky, Alrabai, Paolini, & Ratcheva (2013), learners indicated that among their top ten most important motivational strategies were “making



learning tasks more attractive by adding new and humorous elements,” as well as “relating the subject content and learning tasks to the everyday experiences and backgrounds of the students” (p. 42). Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994) had similar results, stating “[...] the task of the foreign language teacher and researcher is also to curb and use influences which extend beyond the school context” (p. 443). Thus, it is necessary for instructors to identify these outside influences to maximize student learning. Additionally, Schmidt & Watanabe (2001) called for research investigating student reception of specific types of pedagogical activities. With the need to identify links between motivation, foreign language pedagogy, as well as external sources of motivation for students, instructors must consider how students spend their time outside of the classroom. It is then the task of the instructor to isolate and judiciously incorporate relevant activities into the foreign language curriculum.

In an age where the use of Web 2.0 technologies is becoming increasingly widespread, those “influences beyond the school context” could now include social media and internet use (Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994). In her study, Mitchell (2016) supports this assessment, stating, “Considering that these digital natives spend thousands of hours in the digital realm, it seems natural to tap into this interest in the foreign language classroom as well” (p.3). Although studies investigating the usefulness of computer-mediated communication (CMC) have been taking place for the better part of twenty years (Kern, 1995; Kern, Warschauer, & Ware, 2004; Magnan, 2007; Magnan 2009), studies concerning Web 2.0 technologies and social media are fairly new (Borau et al., 2009; Chartrand, 2012; Mitchell, 2015). McBride (2009) shares another rationale for the use of social-networking sites (SNSs) in the foreign language classroom: the creation of one’s L2 identity. In her book chapter *Social-Networking Sites on Foreign Language Classes*, she states:

Acquiring an L2 is another experience that involves experimentation with and the development of new identities. This process often involves a stage where the learner experiences a loss, leaving behind one (L1) context and feeling forced to leave behind the sense of self that corresponded to that context (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). The virtual worlds of CMC, however, allow one to occupy multiple environments and experiment with multiple identities more safely because the experimentation takes place somewhere other than a single, monolithic real world (Sykes et al., 2008). (McBride, 2009, p.39)

McBride continues by asserting that this compartmentalization to create outlets for different areas of one's life (posting on both professional and personal accounts, for example), is healthy (McBride, 2009). In this respect, the platform Instagram lends itself particularly well to the sort of social experimentation to which McBride (2009) is referring. Social networking platforms could prove useful in promoting the exploration of a new identity as an L2 user. This exploration of multiple identities on SNSs could also aid in the mental projection of one's ideal L2 self, which has been shown to result in increased motivation (Dörnyei 2015). Similarly to previous research completed on Web 2.0, social media studies have tended to focus on intermediate and advanced learners (Lomicka, L & Lord, G. 2012; Borau et al., 2009).

However McBride (2009) also brings to light several challenges in the implementation of social media, questioning whether interactions online are truly meaningful, and pointing out some potential pitfalls with respect to ethics and privacy on the part of both teacher and students. As an instructor maintaining a social media account for the benefit of students, it is imperative that images and words are chosen with the utmost care. She also notes that the presence of the teacher on social media could lead to conversations and interactions between teacher and student that may feel forced, or otherwise would not have taken place. However, the important role of

the instructor as a guide and facilitator of communication is not to be dismissed. Instructor-maintained social media accounts could potentially serve as a means of encouragement and further scaffolding, supporting student language production outside of the classroom by showing them what a successful interaction can look like, and leaving words of encouragement from a job well-done in the form of comments. Further research is needed to explore the complexities of student and teacher interactions in an online environment.

#### **2.4 Sociocultural Theory and the Role of Image**

Another area where social media shows promise is in social interactions between users. Outlining Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the concept of mediation and the use of psychological tools, providing students with an added means of mediation alters the way they think within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky cited van Compernelle, 2013). Indeed, one of the most important assumptions within sociocultural theory is that the mind is mediated. Kozulin (2003) notes two distinct types of mediation, mediation through the use of "psychological tools" and "human mediation" in the form of developmentally appropriate help from an instructor or expert. Image, when considered as a psychological tool, could be yet another weapon in the student's arsenal, allowing them to produce language with less assistance from an instructor. This idea is supported in the MLA ad hoc report which, in 2007, called for the use of images to make language more meaningful (Geisler, Kramsch, McGinnis, Patrikis, Pratt, Ryding, & Saussy; 2007). In communicative classrooms, the use of images to scaffold and support learner understanding is quite common (Omaggio-Hadley, 2001). However, the use of student-selected images to support learners in their L2 writing has yet to be explored in depth. Building on previous findings regarding chatrooms and language use, the current study will add a third variable: images

(Meunier, 1998; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996). While there has been some interest in Web 2.0 technologies and the development of intercultural competence (IC), investigation into the influence of Web 2.0 technology with respect to student writing in the lower-division classroom are missing from the literature. Specifically, to the researcher's knowledge, to date there have been no previous studies involving Instagram and the potential for pairing other aspects of popular social media sites such as Pinterest or Twitter with images and student writing in the target language.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Platform**

The chosen social media platform for this exploratory study was Instagram, a mobile social networking site that allows users to post images accompanied with a short caption. Users download the Instagram application to their mobile phones and can then post photos either by taking a new picture or by choosing an existing image already saved on their device. After selecting and editing their image, users can write a short caption, no longer than 2200 characters, describing their photo. The chosen image, paired with their brief explanation then appears as a "post" on their profile. When a user makes a post, it is disseminated among their followers, appearing in a news feed similar to that which is found on Facebook. Users can scroll through their news feed to see what their friends or accounts that they are following have posted. Users may choose to interact with each other by "liking" or commenting on each other's posts. Users are made aware that someone has "liked" or commented on their posts in their notifications section. Typically, a user will either respond to the comment, or return the favor by commenting or liking a post on the interlocutor's own profile.

On Instagram, there are two primary methods of categorization that can be used. Similar to the website Twitter, users employ “hashtags” to categorize their posts so that they may be easily found by others who share a similar interest. Solmaz, in his review of *Discourse of Twitter and Social Media* (2014), refers to this categorization of posts as “searchable text”, defined as “discourse tagging on the web and how people mark their discourse in order to be found by others which results in bonding around particular values” (p.412). A hashtag consists of the pound sign (#) followed by a word or string of words which are not separated by spaces. In this study, the hashtag employed, #gsu16french1002, was one shared by all three participating French sections, allowing students in different classes to easily read and comment on each other’s work. The second form of categorization used is “tagging”. Instagram users may draw the attention of a specific person to their post or comment by tagging them. A tag is formed by using the ‘at’ sign (@) followed by a person’s user name.

### **3.2 Rationale of Present Study**

The main purpose of this exploratory study is to investigate CMC use outside of classroom instruction time with the use of student-selected images to supplement their target language use, based on comparisons and analyses of their posts and comments during a ten week project, culminating with a reflective analysis of their own work. While there has been much interest in Web 2.0 technologies and their applications in higher level classrooms, investigation into the influence of Web 2.0 technologies with respect to lower level classes are largely missing from the literature. Specifically, to the researcher’s knowledge there have been no previous studies involving Instagram or the potential for pairing other aspects of popular social media sites such as Pinterest or Twitter with images and student writing in the target language. The following research questions will be addressed in an attempt to fill this gap in the literature:

Research Question 1: What is the relationship, if any between student-selected images, reported student language production, and actual assignment completion as evidenced in the instructor's gradebook?

1.1. Does image play a role in which topics learners preferred to write about?

1.2. Does image play a role in which of their classmate's postings learners chose to comment on?

1.3. How do these self-reported data compare with actual assignment completion?

### **3.3 Participants**

The participants included 83 learners enrolled in second-semester French at a large urban university in the southeastern United States during the spring semester of 2016. The students were enrolled in three sections of the same French 1002 class which met twice a week for 75 minutes. One class was taught by the researcher, a graduate student in her last semester of study. The other two classes were taught by a colleague, a recent graduate of the program, working as a full-time French instructor. All three classes met at varying times on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with all online posts being due on Mondays. These students participated in weekly online posts correlating with subjects covered in the curriculum for course credit. Each post was counted as a homework grade, which paired with other online assignments, comprised 20% of the students' overall average in the class. This was a communicative language class, with the majority of class-time conducted in the target language. The main pedagogical materials were the instructor created PowerPoint presentations, the textbook, and corresponding online homework program.

### **3.4 The Pedagogical Task**

During the second week of classes, students were provide with detailed instructions for posting. A schedule of assignments was posted to the university's online platform Desire to

Learn/Brightspace for easy access (See Table 1). Although an English translation is provided in this document, students were only provided with the prompt in French. Students were required to download the Instagram application onto their phones and make an account, if they did not have one already. Roughly 50% of students already maintained accounts with varying privacy settings, some set to public and some set to private. For the purposes of the project, students' Instagram accounts were required to be set to public. Otherwise the instructor would not have been able to access the student's posts. In order to protect privacy, students were given the option to create a dummy account for the purposes of the course if they were not comfortable with their instructor and classmates having access to their personal images. Once this initial account creation step was finished, the instructor collected a list of the student's user names, as many were not reflective of their identities. This list was used to pair student's Instagram user names with their names on the class roster for ease of grading. The two instructors then set up administrative accounts in Instagram in order to monitor progress and interact with students. One administrative account was created for each section, resulting in three total administrative accounts. The instructors used these accounts to post examples of responses to the weekly prompt. For each posts, students were required to choose an image relevant to the prompt, write a minimum of two complete sentences, use the common hashtag (#gsu16french1002), and tag the instructor's respective administrative account. Students were then asked to comment on at least two of their classmate's posts, although they were encouraged to spark conversations, rather than making single, closed remarks. Of the 10 total assignments, the first three were post only, allowing students time to adjust and become more comfortable with the site. Next, the comment requirement began with post four and continued throughout the duration of the project. The hashtag allowed for stu-

dents and instructors across sections to see each other's posts. Tagging the administrative account resulted in a notification for each post and comment, allowing the instructors an easier way to access their student's posts for grading. Posts were due on Monday nights at 11:59 p.m. Timeliness of posts was relatively simple to monitor given that all posts on Instagram are time stamped. Students were even able to receive retroactive credit for assignments in which they had not followed instructions. For example, if a student forgot to tag the instructor, resulting in a zero, the instructor could go back and verify that the assignment had been completed within the required time frame and award credit accordingly.

**Table 1. Assignment Schedule**

Date	Prompt	English Translation
1	Post Que mangez-vous ce soir ?	What are you eating tonight ?
2	Post Décrivez votre plat préféré. Quels sont les ingrédients ?	Describe your favorite meal. What are the ingredients?
3	Post Quel est votre magasin préféré ? (type de magasin, qu'achetez-vous, combien ça coûte ?)	What is your favorite store? (type of store, what you buy, how much it costs...)
4	Post Qu'avez-vous fait ce weekend ?	What did you do this weekend?
5	Post Qu'avez-vous révisé en priorité pour l'examen ?	What did you study most for the test?
6	Post Quel sport avez-vous fait ce weekend ?	What sport did you play this weekend?
7	Post A quelle heure avez-vous dormi samedi ? Etes-vous sorti ?	Until what time did you sleep on Saturday? Did you go out?
8	Post Qu'avez-vous fait pendant les vacances de printemps ?	What did you do during spring break?
9	Post Que faut-il faire pour s'amuser en français ? (restaurant, film, activité, culture...)	What is necessary to have fun in French? (restaurant, film, activity, culture...)
10	Post Parlez d'un pays francophone que vous voulez visiter.	Talk about a francophone country you would like to visit.



### **3.5 Data Collection & Analysis**

Overall, there were four sets of data collected from students: (1) a background information questionnaire, (2) an open-ended question survey, (3) a Likert-type questionnaire. The first questionnaire sought to gather background information. Students shared their major, year in school, motivations for taking the course, previous experiences with foreign language instruction (if any), and how they believed those experiences might affect their performance in class. Although both instructors asked that students not delete any of their posts until the project was over, several students disregarded this request, resulting in an incomplete data set for online Instagram postings. At the end of the project, students looked back on their postings, reflecting on their language production, choice to participate in some prompts rather than others, and growth throughout the semester in the open-ended question survey. Finally a Likert-type questionnaire was administered.

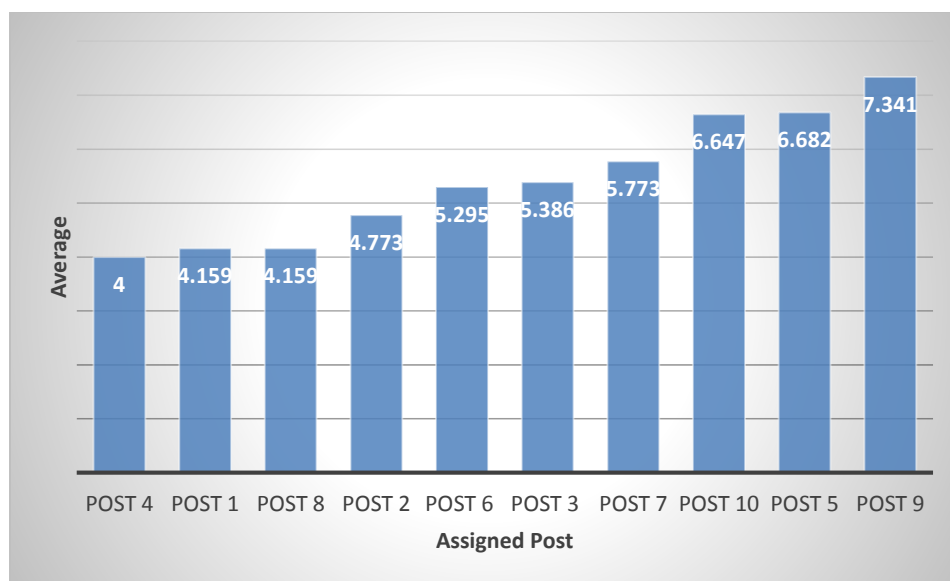
Of the four sets of data that were collected for this study, three were qualitative and one was quantitative. All were analyzed to better understand learner perception of the project and the role of student-selected images in supporting L2 language production. The researcher collected the questionnaires and evaluated the most frequent answers for each question. The researcher also read and analyzed student responses to the open-ended question survey to gain a richer idea of their perspectives on the project and their target language use.

## **4 FINDINGS & DATA ANALYSIS**

In order to respond to the first research question, students first ranked each post on a scale of 1-10, 1 being their favorite and 10 being their least favorite. Table 2 shows the rankings for all 10 posts in order from most popular to least popular. Students tended to favor topics that did not

have to do with school, such as Post 4 (What did you do this weekend?), Post 1 (What are you eating tonight?), and Post 8 (What did you do during spring break?). Students were least receptive to prompts 10, 5, and 9. Given the popularity of posts not relating to school it is somewhat surprising that students did not show much interest in Post 10, which dealt with travelling to a francophone country. Post 5 and 9 were more closely linked to school, with Post 5 having to do with studying for the upcoming test and Post 9 discussing what was necessary to have fun in French class. For the following analyses, only the top three and bottom three posts are considered.

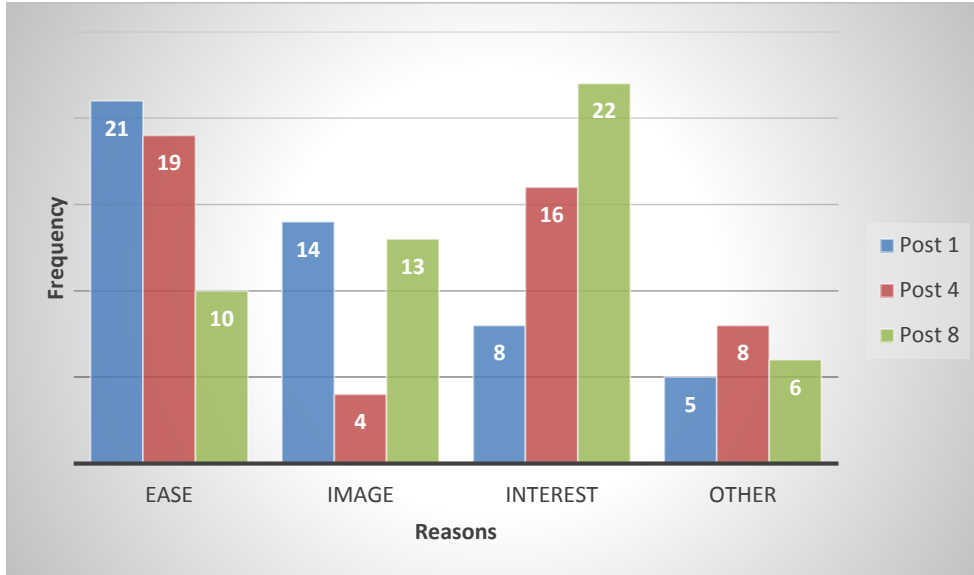
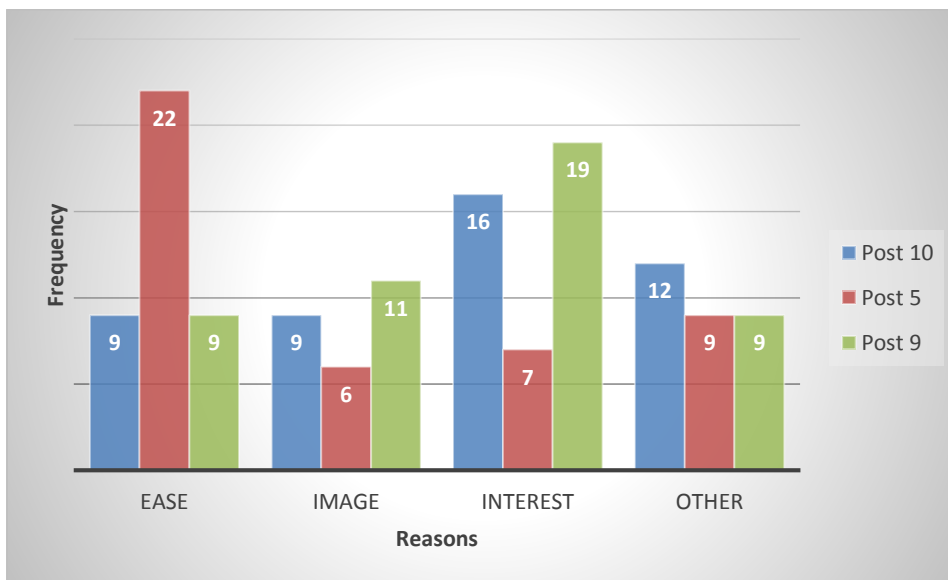
**Table 2. Posts Ranked in Order of Popularity**



Tables 3 shows student-reported reasons for liking the top 3 ranked assignments. For the two most popular topics, Post 4 and Post 1, the most widely cited reason for their popularity was the overall ease in writing about this topic in French. For Post 8, which was tied with Post 1 for second place, students most commonly stated their level of interest in the topic. While it appears

that image did play a role in the popularity of Posts 1 and 8, the influence of pictures was not as significant as expected. Given that two of the most popular types of postings on Instagram are of food and travel, it is not unsurprising that students perceived that they had the most interesting pictures to share for these two prompts, whereas on the particular weekend of Post 4, many students stated in the open-ended question survey that they were either working, studying or didn't have an interesting photo to share.

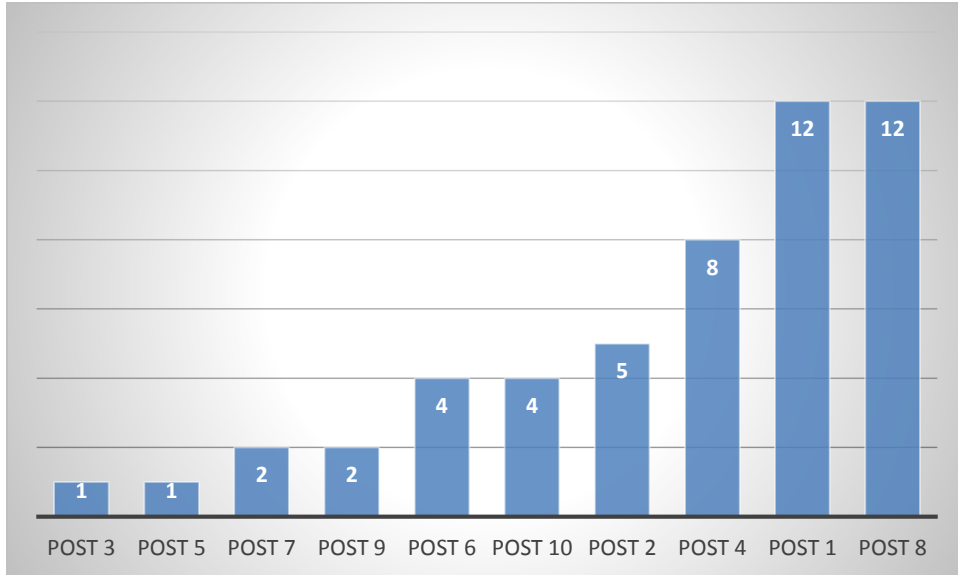
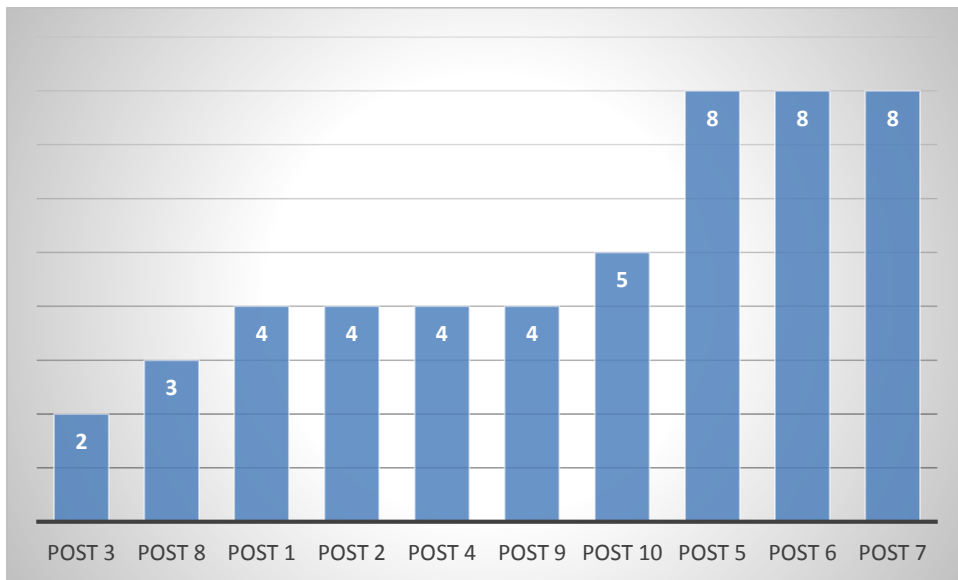
In Table 4, student-reported reasons for disliking the bottom 3 ranked assignments are displayed. For Post 9, the least popular topic, learners indicated that their level of interesting in the topic affected their decision. Learners most often chose this same reason for disliking Post 10 as well. For Post 5, students stated that they did not perceive this topic as easy to discuss, resulting in a low popularity ranking. Again, image does not appear to play any significant role in the lack of popularity of these topics, with perceived assignment difficulty and level of interest in the topic being the most frequent reasons. For these assignments, some students stated that they did not have an interesting photo to share. One student explained that for Post 5, which centered on studying for the upcoming test, the lack of diversity in photos caused the assignment to be less interesting than others.

**Table 3. Reasons for Top Post Ranking****Table 4. Reasons for Bottom Post Ranking**

Next, students were asked to explain which prompts they wrote the most and least about, followed with an explanation to investigate whether there was a link between students' ranking of the posts and their language production. Posts that were not completed were excluded from

the data. Table 5 displays student reported language production for all prompts. Students reported that they wrote the most for Post 8, Post 1, and Post 4, which students ranked as their favorite prompts to write about. Thus, in this instance, students wrote more about the prompts that they preferred. While it is difficult to appeal to the interests of each student for every prompt, perhaps broader topics would provide students with more leeway to write about their own interests, rather than focusing on grammatical concepts specific to the class.

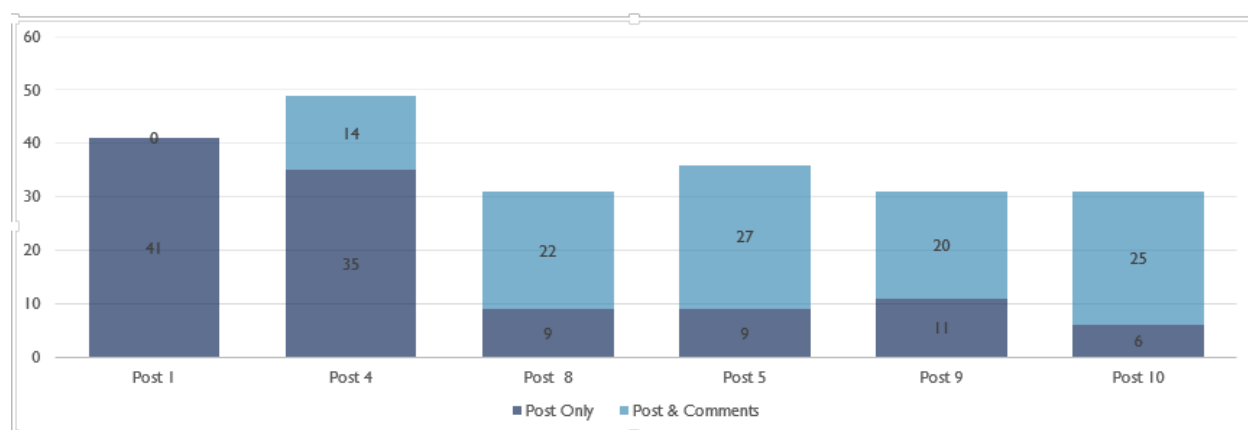
Conversely, topics for which students reported the lowest amount of language production did not match with the topics voted as their least favorite. Rather, the least amount of writing was reported for Posts 5, 6, and 7. Students reported that for Post 5, they felt there was a lack of diversity in the responses, with most students posting pictures of their notes or of themselves completing the online homework, which led to an uninteresting exchange. Although Posts 6 and 7 were not among the least popular, when comparing the topics, and data from the open-ended question surveys, a trend emerges. For these particular subjects, many students wrote that they did not personally relate to the topic, or felt that they had nothing interesting to share. A large amount of students wrote that they did not engage in any sports or physical activities and therefore did not have much to say for Post 6. For Post 7, many students said that they were working that weekend, and had not done anything interesting. Again, broader topics, not restricted to a one or two day period may be more inclusive, ensuring that a maximal number of students feel that they can relate to the topic on a personal level, which in turn, may increase participation.

**Table 5. Highest Reported Language Production****Table 6. Lowest Reported Language Production**

Although student reported data is valuable, it can sometimes be unreliable, resulting in students providing answers that they feel their instructor wants to see. It is also important to

compare student perception with a teacher's reality. Both instructors compared the actual assignment completion for the top and bottom posts, as displayed in Table 7. Although students reported that they preferred to write about Posts 1, 4, and 8, the number of completed posts which met all requirements for these postings is the same as Post 9 and Post 10, two of the least-popular topics. Given that Post 8 was due on the first day after the university's Spring Break, students in the researcher's class stated that they simply "forgot" about their homework, which could explain the low completion rate as compared to Posts 1 and 4.

**Table 7. Student Assignment Completion for Top and Bottom Topics**



Although image did not play as large a role as predicted in the reasons why students preferred some tasks over others, when asked what attracted them to comment on other student's posts, 31% of students stated that image was the main reason why they chose to interact with certain individuals. The two second-most important reasons for choosing to comment on another student's post were that the other person wrote something similar, or that the other person was their friend in class. Although students could comment on any post, even across class sections, it appears they still chose to interact with students with which they already felt comfortable.

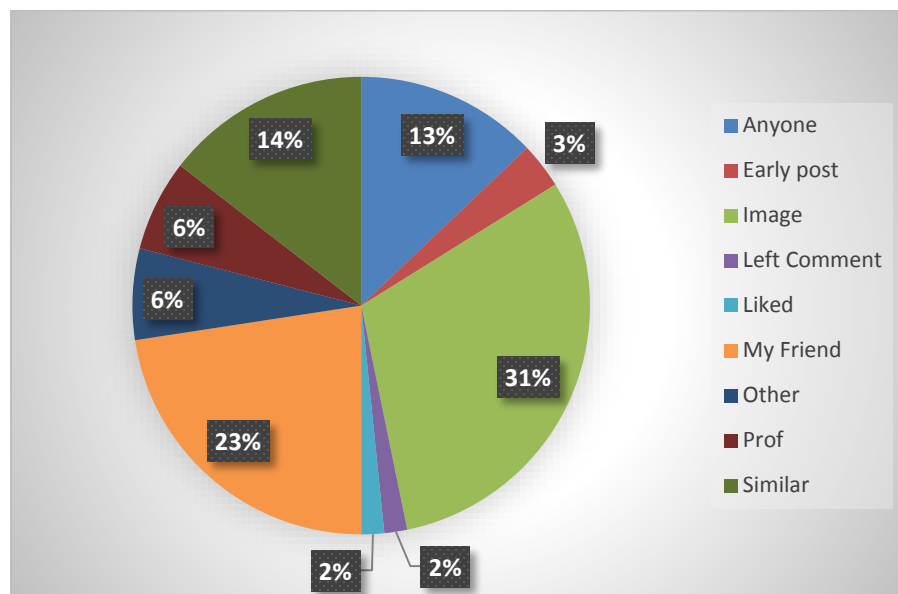
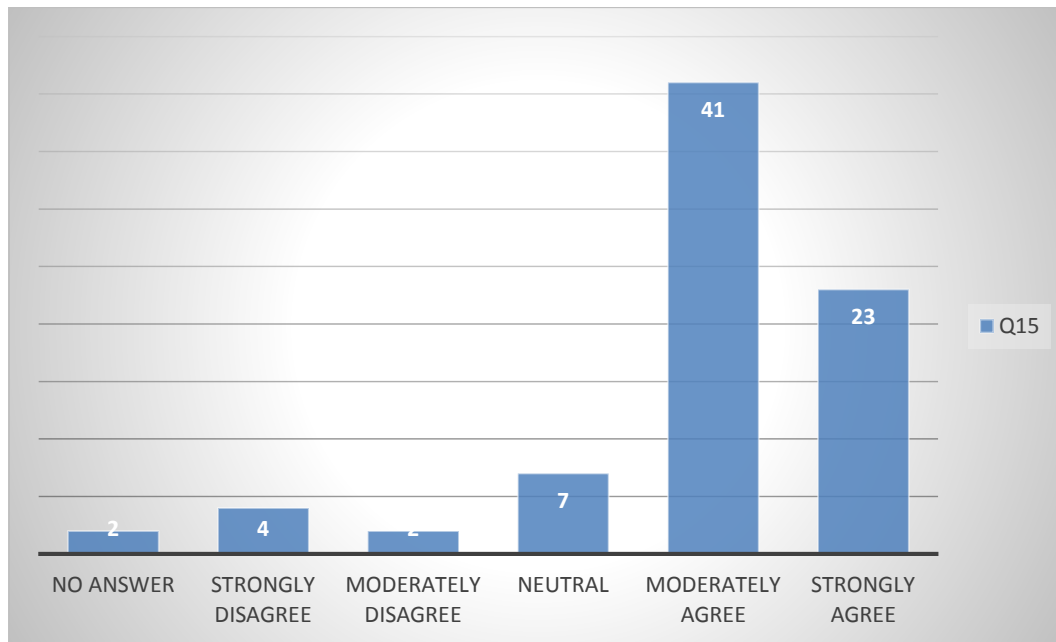
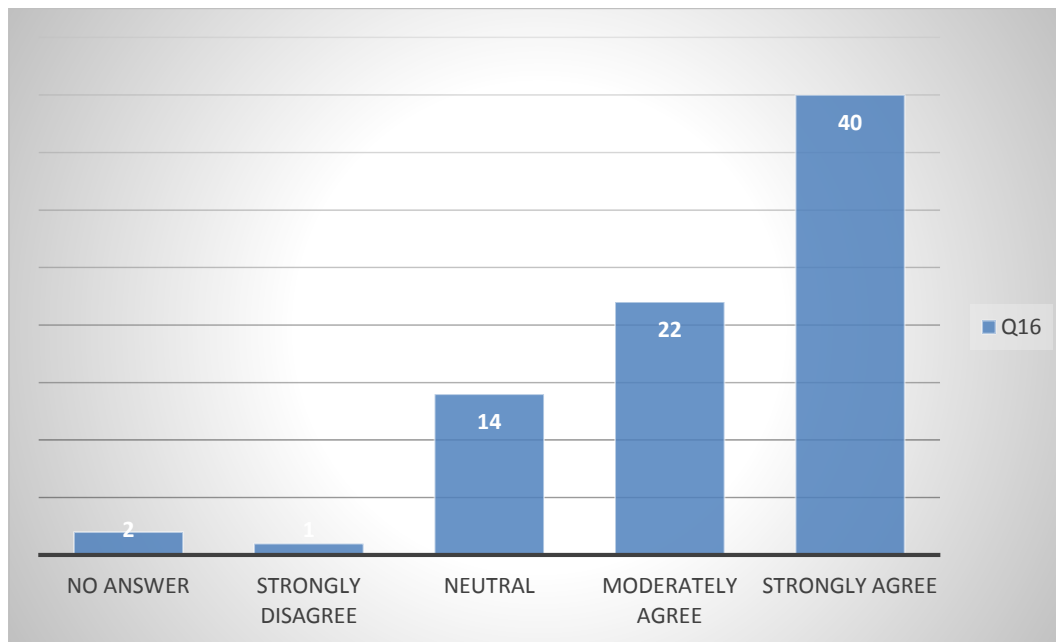
**Table 8. Reasons for Commenting**

Table 9 shows student reported answers to question number 15, on the Likert survey: “The images in Instagram helped me to understand what my classmates were saying, even if I didn’t understand every word.” The majority of students, regardless of their feelings about social media, the foreign language class as a whole, or the prompts themselves, marked either moderately agree or strongly agree for this question, indicating a belief that the added image paired with their classmates short posts helped them understand the overall message, even if there were problems with vocabulary or grammar. The same was applicable for question number 16 “Including a picture or video in my post helped me to get my point across, even if I made mistakes in my writing or vocabulary.” Again, this suggests a belief that when their writing is accompanied by an image, their readers, in this case, their classmates are more likely to understand their message. When considering the use of artifacts or tools to empower learner language production, this is a particularly exciting finding.



**Table 9. Perceived Effect of Images on Comprehension****Table 10. Perceived Effect of Images on Language Production**

## 5 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Discussion

**Research Question:** What is the relationship, if any between student-selected images, reported student language production, and actual assignment completion as evidenced in the instructor's gradebook?

#### 1.1 Does image play a role in which topics learners preferred to write about?

Data show that although image did have an effect on the topics that students said that they liked to write about, this effect was not the most significant factor. Above image were the students' level of interest and perceived ease in writing about the topic in French. It appears that image played a role in whether or not students perceived their own posts as interesting. Open-ended survey data show that students who felt they did not have an interesting photo to share were more likely to choose level of interest as a reason why they disliked certain topics. On the same token, students who felt that they had done something interesting or had an aesthetically pleasing picture were more likely to choose level of interest as a reason why they preferred certain topics. This could be due to the wording of the questionnaire, and lack of delineation between a person's interest and the image, which will be explored in future studies.

#### 1.2 Does image play a role in which of their classmate's postings learners chose to comment on?

Overall, 31% of students indicated that image played a part in choosing which classmates to interact with via comments. Most commonly cited reasons included interesting picture, similar picture to my own, or picture that I could relate to. After image, students cited the second and third most important reasons for choosing to interact

with someone had to do with their choice of topic and whether it was similar to their own, and whether or not they already knew that person and were comfortable with them during the classroom setting. This finding supports McBride's (2009) assertion that social media users generally use the platform to learn more about people that they have already met in real life, rather than interacting with total strangers.

### **1.3** How do these self-reported data compare with actual assignment completion?

Assignment completion as evidenced in the two instructor's gradebooks generally mirrors which topics students reported that they liked and disliked, with the exception of Post 8, which was due the day after spring break. Although many students stated that they found this topic interesting, they also said that they "forgot" to complete it because of the break.

In response to the main research question, it does appear that there is a positive relationship between student-selected images, reported language production, and overall assignment completion. When students felt that they had an interesting image to share, they also reported higher language production. The opposite was also true for students who felt that they did not have an interesting image to show their classmates. These individuals reported lower language production for the topics in question. Despite the clear relationship between image and language production, assignment completion, even for topics that were ranked as the least popular among students, was fairly steady. It may be possible that had the length of comments been factored in, a larger difference between the overall quality of assignment could have been identified. Although the assignment completion does not vary drastically, it is possible that these students were simply writing the minimum in order to achieve their desired grade, and that the more they were

interested in a topic or image, their comment length and likelihood of engaging in conversation with classmates would have increased.

## **5.2 Limitations**

Based on student surveys, overall reception to the project was positive. However, some limitations must be mentioned. First, without a pre-assignment survey to match the Likert survey administered at the end of the project, it was not possible to ascertain whether any affective factors such as motivation anxiety, or L2 identity were statistically significant. Another limitation of the study dealt with students' personal Instagram accounts. Some students would make their post on the due date, but delete their posts shortly after, before it could be graded by the instructor. Had all students been required to create a separate account for the purposes of the project, rather than being allowed to use their personal accounts, perhaps this could have been avoided. Open-ended survey data showed that some students did not like posting homework on their personal accounts, with some saying that the postings resulted in a loss of followers, or that their followers "got annoyed" with the posts in French. Another related limitation is that several students deleted all of their homework postings merely days after the last homework assignment was due, giving the researchers little time to grade assignments and accumulate data for the study. Again, this may be remedied by requiring that all students create a new account, separating their personal online identities, which may already be well-established, from their identities as language learners.

Although this did not occur during the current study, it must be noted that the Instagram application is not compatible with Windows telephones, thus it is imperative that instructors contemplating the use of Instagram in their curriculum must ensure that all students have access to

either an Android smartphone or an iPhone. With respect to due dates, the postings and commenting could be separated into two phases, allowing students first to compose their own postings, then allowing for extra time to comment, possibly facilitating deeper, more meaningful interaction. Comments on the open-ended survey showed that although students reached out to their peers and asked questions via comments, many were frustrated that they did not receive a response after the deadline had passed.

### **5.3 Pedagogical Implications**

To conclude, the use of Instagram as a means of using images to support student writing at beginning levels shows promise. Data show that there is a relationship between student-selected images and language production, although student level of interest and perceived ease of topic also hold importance. Students perceive image to play an important role in aiding not only their comprehension of written posts, but classmate comprehension of their own posts as well. This could be useful in beginning language classrooms as students build confidence in their writing and develop skills for interacting and sharing opinions with others that may in turn, contributed to ease in developing intercultural communicative competence at higher levels.

### **5.4 Suggestions for Future Studies**

Future studies could investigate affective factors such as motivation and anxiety, as well as learner agency and the development of L2 identity (McBride, 2009). While the pedagogical focus for prompts in the current study were centered on grammatical structures, future studies will reduce the number of required postings, operating on thematic units to examine whether this results in higher amounts of language production and a more even student reception to the writing topics themselves. Prompts will also contain more guiding questions in order to further scaffold

student language production. These changes could result in a more equitable rating of student interest in the topics, allowing for exploration on the influence of the images and the medium itself with regard to student motivation and willingness to communicate with peers.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Background Information and Needs Assessment

1. What is your name? Do you have another name that you prefer to be called?
2. What is your major? Minor? What is your year in school?
3. Do you have any hobbies or extracurricular activities that you take part in?
4. Why did you choose to sign up for French class? (Be honest!)
5. Have you had any prior experience learning a foreign language? If so, what was it? Was it a positive or negative experience? Will that experience affect your learning in this class? Please Explain.
6. How do you think you could benefit personally from learning a foreign language?
7. Do you believe that you could use information learned in this class in your career field?  
How?
8. What do you think your greatest strength in this class might be? Why?
9. What do you think the biggest challenge in this class might be? Why?
10. How do you normally prepare for a test or quiz? (In a group, making flashcards, reading your notes over and over, etc.)
11. What grade do you hope to earn in this class?
12. Is there anything else I need to know about you specifically that might make me more effective in my interactions with you?

## Appendix B

### Student Reflection Questions

1. Which post did you like best and WHY? Please number the posts below in the order in which you liked it . (#1= favorite , #10= least favorite). Next, circle the reason why you liked it on the right.

	<b>Date</b>	<b>Prompt</b>	<b>Reason</b>
#____	January 25 <sup>th</sup>	Que mangez-vous ce soir?	a. Picture b. Interest in the topic c. Easy to write about topic in French d. Other? Explain:
#____	February 1 <sup>st</sup>	Décrivez votre plat préféré. Quels sont les ingrédients?	a. Picture b. Interest in the topic c. Easy to write about topic in French d. Other? Explain:
#____	February 8 <sup>th</sup>	Quel est votre magasin préféré? (Type de magasin, qu'achetez-vous, combien ça coûte?)	a. Picture b. Interest in the topic c. Easy to write about topic in French d. Other? Explain:
#____	February 15 <sup>th</sup>	Qu'avez-vous fait ce weekend ?	a. Picture b. Interest in the topic c. Easy to write about topic in French d. Other? Explain:
#____	February 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Qu'avez-vous révisé en priorité pour l'examen ?	a. Picture b. Interest in the topic c. Easy to write about topic in French d. Other? Explain:
#____	February 29 <sup>th</sup>	Quel sport avec vous fait ce weekend ?	a. Picture b. Interest in the topic c. Easy to write about topic in French d. Other? Explain:
#____	March 7 <sup>th</sup>	A quelle heure avez-vous dormi samedi ? Etes-vous sorti ?	a. Picture b. Interest in the topic c. Easy to write about topic in French

			d. Other? Explain:
# ____	March 21 <sup>st</sup>	Qu'avez-vous fait pendant les vacances de printemps ?	a. Picture b. Interest in the topic c. Easy to write about topic in French d. Other? Explain:
# ____	March 28 <sup>th</sup>	Que faut-il faire pour s'amuser en français ? (restaurant, film, activité, culture...)	a. Picture b. Interest in the topic c. Easy to write about topic in French d. Other? Explain:
# ____	April 4 <sup>th</sup>	Parlez d'un pays francophone que vous voulez visiter.	a. Picture b. Interest in the topic c. Easy to write about topic in French d. Other? Explain:

2. Out of the 10 assignments, how many did you complete? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Out of the 14 required comments (minimum 2 comments for posts #4-9), how many did you write? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Which posting did you write the most about? Why?
5. Which posting did you write the least about? Why? (Exclude posts that were not done at all)
6. Who did you find yourself writing comments to? What attracted you to that person's post? (Was it a friend, was their picture interesting, did they write something similar to you, did they use a funny hashtag, etc.?)
7. About how many minutes did you spend composing each post? Each comment?
8. What materials did you use to help you write your posts? (Textbook, notes, translation software) If so, which ones? What did you mainly use them for?
9. If given the opportunity to do the Instagram posts over again, would you do anything differently? Why or why not?

10. Did you maintain an Instagram account before starting this project? Why or why not?
11. Overall, how did you like the project? What did you like? What didn't you like?
12. Should I use this project in future semesters? Why or why not?
13. Are you continuing your French studies next semester? Yes or No.
14. Please circle all influences on your decision to continue French study that apply
  - a. Language requirement
  - b. Interesting in learning the language
  - c. Participation in a study abroad program
  - d. A teacher inspired me to continue studying. Please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. A project or homework assignment sparked my interest. Please specify  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Likert-type Questionnaire

1. How often do you use social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, etc.)?

Never (unless required)	1-2 hours per week	3-5 hours per week	6+ hours week
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2. My classmates' posts gave me ideas on different ways to prepare for tests and quizzes.

Strongly agree	Moderately agree	Neutral	Moderately disagree	Strongly disagree
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3. The Instagram posts help me practice the things we are learning in class.

Strongly agree	Moderately agree	Neutral	Moderately disagree	Strongly disagree
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4. Seeing my classmates' online posts has helped me to get to know them better.

Strongly agree	Moderately agree	Neutral	Moderately disagree	Strongly disagree
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5. I had at least one successful conversation with a classmate.

Strongly agree	Moderately agree	Neutral	Moderately disagree	Strongly disagree
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6. It is less stressful for me to interact in French with my peers on Instagram than during class activities.

Strongly agree	Moderately agree	Neutral	Moderately disagree	Strongly disagree
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7. I felt comfortable responding to my classmates and my teacher when they made a comment on my post.

Strongly agree	Moderately agree	Neutral	Moderately disagree	Strongly disagree
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8. If someone commented on one of my social media accounts in French, I would try to answer back.

Very likely	Somewhat likely	Neutral	Somewhat unlikely	Not likely at all
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9. I asked a lot of questions when commenting on my classmates' posts.

Strongly agree	Moderately agree	Neutral	Moderately disagree	Strongly disagree
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10. I will continue to make posts in French even after the class is over.

Definitely	Maybe	Absolutely Not
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11. I have started to use French in my posts even when it's not required.

Yes	No	No, but I might in the future
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12. I have begun following some French-speaker's accounts.

Yes	No	No, but I might in the future
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13. If I saw a French-speaking person's post that interested me, I would try to leave a comment.

Very likely	Somewhat likely	Neutral	Somewhat unlikely	Not likely at all
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14. One or more of my friends commented about my use of French on Instagram and this

Strongly agree	Moderately agree	Neutral	Moderately disagree	Strongly disagree
----------------	------------------	---------	---------------------	-------------------

made me want to post in French more often.

15. The images in Instagram helped me to understand what my classmates were saying, even if I didn't understand every word.

Strongly agree	Moderately agree	Neutral	Moderately disagree	Strongly disagree
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16. Including a picture or video in my post helped me to get my point across, even if I made mistakes in my writing or vocabulary.

Strongly agree	Moderately agree	Neutral	Moderately disagree	Strongly disagree
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