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Exploring Perceptions of New Media Among the Lakota Nation


Isabelle C. Kramer



A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
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Master of Arts



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ABSTRACT

Exploring Perceptions of New Media Among the Lakota Nation

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Since its inception, the worldwide web has fundamentally altered our understanding of communications. With the rapid adoption of new media around the globe, individuals are increasingly able to communicate with people on the other side of the planet in real-time—traditional boundaries like time and space are no longer relevant barriers to intercultural communication. As such, scholars are scrambling to recognize and understand the broader implications of social media, videoconferencing, blogging, etc on more traditional definitions of culture. Additionally, researchers are beginning to study the ways in which minority cultures are utilizing new media, and the way that new media impacts their own cultural perceptions. However, there are still many gaps in the literature, and more work needs to be done to put forth minority perspectives on new media, especially from the point of view of indigenous groups in the United States. Through in-depth, qualitative interviews conducted with members of the Lakota Nation, this research explores the ways in which the Lakota experience social media, and how that media influences cultural perceptions. Findings indicate that social media (and media in general) have been positive in a myriad of ways, including but not limited to: strengthening minority perspectives, allowing for preservation of culture, and creating a place of belonging despite migration and other factors, like Covid-19, which interfered with traditional Lakota modes of communication.

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**Introduction**

The advent of the internet has revolutionized cross-cultural communications, dramatically increasing contact between individuals and groups of varying backgrounds (Shuter, 2012). Advances in new media[1] technology have allowed people to transcend the boundaries of space and time—messages that once took months to cross the Atlantic on an ocean liner can be instantaneously sent and received. Individuals in drastically different time zones can converse in real-time, unencumbered by traditional, single-point definitions of culture (Johnson & Callahan, 2013). In some cases, even language ceases to be a barrier to communication. These breakthroughs demonstrate the power of new media to extend cultural perspectives and create new social contexts (Johnson & Callahan, 2012).

As technology continues to evolve, more and more scholars recognize new media as a primary catalyst for rapid globalization (Chen, 2012). A considerable amount of literature focuses on new media usage in different cultures (Kidd, 2020; Bruin & Mane, 2018; Lindgren & Cocq, 2017; Barker & Ota, 2011; Baron & Segerstad, 2010; Koc, 2006) and cultural perceptions of said media (Aydin et. al, 2010; Fitch, 2009; Leonardi, 2003; Fulk & Boyd, 1991). However, many of these studies largely ignore the impacts of new media on intercultural communication (Shuter, 2012).

In 2012, Robert Shuter (considered to be a pioneer in the field of intercultural communications) published his landmark paper *Intercultural New Media Studies: The Next Frontier in Intercultural Communication* (2012). Drawing on an extensive range of sources, Shuter (2012) conducted a comprehensive analysis of existing intercultural communications

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[1] There seems to be a general consensus that "the term 'New Media' is old and misleading, since any latest technology is always new" (Rafaeli & Ariel, 2007, p.81). For the purposes of this research, the term 'New Media' refers to any Internet-related developments which facilitate user to user communication (Wu & Li, 2016).

research that explored new media and culture. Following his review, Shuter (2012) concluded that there was significant need for more systematic research into the intercultural ramifications of new media across cultures and co-cultures. Based on these findings, Shuter (2012) proposed a new field of study: Intercultural New Media Studies (INMS) (Shuter, 2012; Wu & Li, 2016).

Intercultural New Media Studies has two foci—first, the impacts of new media on intercultural communication theories and second, the ways in which an individual's cultural background influences new media use, and conversely, how that usage can influence an individual's cultural identity (Shuter, 2012). Shuter (2012) maintains that this new field of study is "truly the next frontier in intercultural communication" research.

In the last 10 years, studies have investigated the impact of culture on the evolution of new media (Karg, 2022; McMullan, 2020; Pronina, 2018; Owen, 2017; Woo et al., 2014), the impact of new media on individual and cultural identity (Oikonomakou & Franzis, 2022; Wu, Li, & Wang, 2019; Kozachenko, 2017; Tita et. al., 2016; Johnson & Callahan, 2013; Dahlgren, 2013), and the impact of new media on intercultural communications (Hendrickson & Rosen, 2017; Vujović & Obradović, 2017; Seyfi & Güven, 2016; Johnson & Callahan, 2015; Walotek-Ściańska, Szyszka, & Wąsiński, 2014). Much of the recent research has centered around minority populations; however, a majority of these studies tend to focus on hegemonic influences on minority cultures (Bagdikian, 2004), including the digital divide and marginalization (Singh, Lenhert, & Bostick, 2010).

Johnson & Callahan (2012) argue that as minority media consumption and participation increases worldwide, "the conversation needs to shift from a discussion of the digital divide to the new cultural digital construction…with more work being done to understand the process of social media integration of global minority perspectives". This echoes Shuter's (2012)

conclusion that "there needs to be significantly more emphasis on intercultural new media research that takes a socio-cultural perspective… explor[ing] topics such as indigenous cultural patterns of new media use, critical analyses of new media and society, and the impact of culture on the social uses of new media". Lindgran and Cocq (2017) concur, noting that "indigenous voices may provide counter-narratives to discourses articulated from a majority's perspective, and social media might facilitate minority self-representation" in new and unexpected ways.

This thesis aims to address these gaps in the existing literature by examining Indigenous culture and patterns of media use. Specifically, this research focuses on Lakota perspectives and experiences with new media, utilizing semi-structured, in-depth interviews to illuminate the process of minority media use. The current study contributes to this growing body of work by providing new insights into the ways in which minority cultures are utilizing new media to augment their own cultural identities.

## Literature Review

To build a clear framework for this research, the following literature begins with a brief overview of the evolution of interpersonal communications. Following that, a historical assessment of the field of intercultural communications is presented, elucidating the ways in which intercultural communication research has evolved following the advent of new media. Other related topics will be discussed, including minority and indigenous identity management, third culture, and the relationship between culture and new media. Finally, this literature review will examine Indigenous history in the United States, with an emphasis on Lakota experiences.

**A (Very Brief) History of Communication**

Since the dawn of recorded human history, interpersonal communication has been a vastly complex and ever-changing phenomenon. At first, the only way the human species knew to communicate was the spoken word, but as history has progressed, so too has human communication. More than 64,000 years ago, groups of nomadic individuals began tracing or painting their histories on cave walls, inadvertently communicating with any tribe to pass through after them, engaging in the first known record of intercultural (albeit unintentional) communication (History, 2021). Around 3500 BC, ancient Sumerians in Mesopotamia developed Cuneiform, as system of wedge-shaped writing in clay (World History, 2018). In the 8th century BC, the Phoenicians created what many scholars credit to be the first "true" alphabet—one that allowed texts to be read and spoken without ambiguity, kickstarting worldwide communication (History, 2018). In 800 AD, the Tang and Song dynasties invented woodblock printing, and in 1450, Johannes Gutenberg invented the moveable-type printing press—an invention which allowed for more than 3,500 pages to be printed in a single day (History, 2018). Knowledge and news could be spread faster than ever before.

It is not for another 400 plus years that the telegraph was invented. In 1844, Samuel Morse sent the first telegraph, profoundly changing the face of communications and laying the groundwork for the interconnected world we see today (Council of Foreign Relations). The telegraph made it possible to messages across longer distances almost instantaneously (Council of Foreign Relations). Less than 20 years later, the first transatlantic telegraph was sent, arriving in just under 16 hours (Council of Foreign Relations). In 1927, the first international phone call took place, allowing for immediate communication despite geographic barriers, and fundamentally changing intercultural communications. And yet, it's not for another 60 years that

British engineer and computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee pioneers the World Wide Web, transforming global communication (Council of Foreign Relations). The internet has since become so integral to human life that in 2016, the United Nations passed a resolution that named access to the internet as a human right. It's been universally acknowledged that he advent of the internet was perhaps the single most impactful invention in modern human history, at least in terms of interpersonal communication (and our understanding of it). Chen (2012) asserts that:

> The greatest change in message dissemination in recent history occurred with the introduction of computers and the Internet in the early 1990s. Since then, this drastic change of communication medium has significantly affected humans' perception of the media, the usage of time and space, and the reachability and control of the media.

### New Media

First coined by Rice in 1984, the term 'new media' has historically been utilized to refer to any technology which facilitates "user-to-user interactivity" and "interactivity between user and information" (1984). Ironically, the media that Rice was surrounded in 1984 were a far cry from the omnipresent technology detailed in Orwell's dystopian novel by the same name. The World Wide Web would not appear for another 10 years. Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Meta (formerly Facebook), was born. Steve Jobs debuted his Macintosh PC, and Bill Gates appeared on the cover of Time magazine for his latest invention—the floppy disk.

As such, it comes as no surprise that our understanding of new media is constantly evolving. Newer definitions assert that new media are any Internet-related developments which facilitate user to user communication (Wu & Li, 2016). Research has established that new media

have five distinct characteristics: digitality, convergency, interactivity, hypertextuality, and virtuality (Chen & Zhang, 2010; Lister et. al, 2009; Flew, 2005).

First, digitalization refers to the ability of new media to convert data from analog into digital form, allowing for "large amounts of information to be retrieved, manipulated, and stored in a very limited space" (Chen, 2012). Second, convergency refers to the ability of new media to converge information, media, and communication (Chen, 2012). Third, new media is interactive, allowing users to produce, reproduce, and consume new content and media. Additionally, new media makes digital interaction quick, convenient, and most importantly, available (Chen, 2012). Fourth, new media provides a hypertextuality, creating a network in which information can freely move, and individuals can "spontaneously interconnect" (Chen, 2012). This new network transforms human behavior, including but not limited to economic enterprises, cultural systems, interpersonal expression (Chen, 2012; Castells, 2000). Lastly, new media create a cyberspace, allowing for individuals to both construct and experience virtual experiences (Chen, 2012). Individuals are able to present themselves however they like. These rapid advances in technology have ushered in scores of new ways to communicate—methods that were not imaginable to scholars when they first created the field of intercultural communications.

**Intercultural Communication Research**

It's generally agreed upon that communication studies began after World War II, becoming an academic field of study in the 1950s. However, it's not until the 1960s that intercultural communications emerged as a field, following the publication of Edward T. Hall's (1959) landmark book *The Silent Language*. Considered by many to be the "founding document of the new field of intercultural communication," Hall's publication presented the main elements of his paradigm for intercultural communication, listed below (Rogers et. al, 2002; Kuhn, 1972).

1. A focus on intercultural communications versus macrolevel monocultural studies,

2. Empirical study and classification of nonverbal communication,

3. Emphasis on out-of-awareness information-exchange, especially in relation to nonverbal communication,

4. An accepting and nonjudgmental approach to cultural differences,

5. Participatory training in intercultural communication (Hall, 1992).

Following the publication of Hall's work, Alfred Smith (1977) presented new research that looked at culture as a code that's learned and shared. This new perspective rendered culture and communication inseparable (Kitao, 1985). It's not until the 1970s that communication scholars begin to attempt to define culture, with Kim (1984) arguing that culture has three dimensions when seen in action or studied—first, the level of membership in a cultural group, second, the social context of the communication taking place, and third, the channel through which communication is taking place (Kitao, 1985). Samovar and Porter (1972) elucidated on this definition, adding that intercultural communications occurs whenever two individuals or groups with differing backgrounds (be that in their experiences, knowledge, values, socio-economic status, etc) communicate with one another. Rich (1974) posited that intercultural communications occurs whenever any individuals or groups from differing cultures communicate. Many scholars have come to assume that the field of intercultural communications as a whole incorporate cross-cultural communication studies (Gudykunst and Kim, 1984).

In 1978, Prosser proffered six critical components in studying cross-cultural and intercultural communications:

1. The importance of similarities and differences,

2. The inherent nature of conflict in human communication,

3. The control of communication and culture,

4. The impact of technology on communication and culture,

5. The importance of cultural stability versus change

6. The question of cultural imperialism versus dependency (Kitao, 1985).

This literature review does not contain a full catalog of all research conducted in intercultural communication; however, several full-length bibliographies have been published which catalog the vast amount of research published in this field. Hoopes has published several volumes dedicated to the developing constructs of intercultural communications and current research, entitled *Readings in Intercultural Communications* (Hoopes, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974; Kitao, 1985).

## Intercultural New Media Studies

Historically, research has dictated that cultural identity is fixed in time and space—variable in salience, but only affected by group contacts and social identity (Shuter, 2012). For more than 50 years, intercultural communications scholarship was rooted in the assumption that face-to-face communication was the only way for an individual to develop a cultural identity, because cultural identity was understood to be derived from membership in social groups (Shuter, 2012; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Recent research challenges these assumptions, posing the question of whether a new reality of perpetual contact (made possible through new media, and unencumbered by geographical boundaries) alters our understanding "traditional organic communities" that are bound by physical space and reliant upon face-to-face communication (Shuter, 2012; Callahan, Robinson, & Trachmann, 2011; Singh, 2010; Katz & Aakhus, 2002; Mitchell, 1995; Beniger, 1987). According to Singh (2010), new media has allowed for the induction of individuals into

"virtual communities" that are capable of fundamentally altering already-existing cultural identities. Not only are these online communities able to transcend traditional geographic and spatial definitions of culture, but they also defy traditional ethnic, linguistic, and even religious understandings as well (Lévy, 2000).

It's in response to this ever-evolving landscape that Shuter proffered up a new field of intercultural communications research: Intercultural New Media Studies (INMS) (Johnson & Callahan, 2013). This line of research has two foci: first, the ways in which new media influence intercultural communication theories and second, the ways in which an individual's cultural background influences new media use, and the ways in which that usage can influence an individual's cultural identity (In this case, new media encompasses computer-mediated communication, social networking sites, mobile phones, video calling, text messaging, online gaming, virtual worlds, and blogs) (Shuter, 2012; Johnson & Callahan, 2013).

Intercultural new media studies assume that cultures are generalizable, and individual societies have distinct cultures (Yoon, 1996). One of the biggest reasons for this assumption can be tied back to the anthropological definition of culture first put forth by Franz Boas (243-280). Boas rejects the acultural theory of culture (different societies having varying degrees of culture and/or cultural development), arguing that culture is the distinguishing groups of beliefs, customs, lifestyle, and practices that characterize an individual group or society (Stocking, 867-870). This type of understanding generalizes unique groups—Goodenough posits that culture and cultural studies aim to produce a description of cultural standards and in some cases, patterns of events or behaviors (55). The danger, it seems, occurs when culture is utilized to predict what one is expected to do in a given situation, instead of waiting to observe what one *does* do.

Scollon and Wong-Scollon argue that the naming constructs utilized worldwide (i.e. the Lakota, the Japanese, etc) often lead to an emphasis in what these groups hold in common, while often underplaying the significance of the differences that are undoubtedly present among members of these groups (125). As a result, Scollon and Wong-Scollon assert that a majority of intercultural new media research ignores the heterogenous aspects of any given society in an effort to categorize specific facets of culture that may be noticeably affected by new media (Yoon, 1996). Yoon postulates that this in turn means that intercultural communication is really "communication with culture, not with its individual members" (1996).

A majority of intercultural new media studies works within the Shannon-Weaver framework—essentially treating communication as a cognitive process, involving both a sender and a receiver (Yoon, 1996). Yoon argues that process and model-based approaches of communicative interactions (Shannon-Weaver framework, Haworth and Savage's Channel-Ratio model, Hofstede's four value dimensions, etc) often fail to recognize intercultural interactions on the individual level (1996). Yoon points to Burnett's (Iowa State University) study as an example of the fallibility of model-based approaches to culture. In her study, Burnett discusses being surprised when her findings indicated that in Japan, some executives *do* address each other on a first name basis, contrary to notable cross-cultural studies which assert that Japanese employees do not address anyone above them hierarchically in a business context by their first names (Boiarsky, 248). This study highlights one of the issues with model-based approaches when it comes to culture—they can, if misinterpreted, misleads individuals to stereotype and overgeneralize cultures and intercultural communications in practice (Yoon, 1996; Fish, 315-318). Yoon goes further, stating that we often "cling to ready-made cultural knowledge and communication models because we have blind faith in the objectivity of the research that tells us

how 'we' and 'they' communicate, when, in fact, adjustments and modifications are always called for in applying communication models to different communicative situations" (1996).

Yoon concedes that while there are drawbacks, model-based approaches do still offer unique and important insights into intercultural communications. Take, for example, Hofstede's four value dimensions. In 1980, Geert Hofstede began to gather data from more than 60,000 International Business Machines (IBM) employees in an effort to create a standardized set of cultural value dimensions (Hofstede, 1980a). In his seminal article, Hofstede identifies four cultural dimensions intended to assign national cultural values and in turn, assess intercultural differences between countries—1) uncertainty avoidance, 2) Power distance, 3) individualism versus collectivism and 4) masculinity versus feminity (Hofstede, 1980). Eventually, Hofstede and Bond (1988) added a fifth value dimension, long-term versus short term orientation.

Various studies have explored the relationship between cultural dimensions and national cultural values. Several publications have exercised Hofstede's model to demarcate Asian and Western nations, findings that Asian nations contrasted Western nations when it comes to cultural dimensions like power distance and individualism versus collectivism (Callahan, 2020; Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede, 2011; Pheng & Yuguan, 2002; Xiumei & Jinying, 2011). Further research by Callahan et. al (2020) investigated cultural value differences on an *inter-regional* level, emphasizing the viability of a model-based approach in studying the nuances and complexities of any given culture, very much in contrast to the concerns put forth by Yoon.

### *Minority Identity Management*

Theoretically speaking, the impacts of new media on cultural identity should result in hybrid cultural identities, but as Chen and Dai note, Western cultures have somewhat significant advantages due to their inherent domination of our global online community (2012).

Linguistically speaking, many new media technologies are English based, though they are utilized globally (Chen and Dai, 2012). Western companies also remain some of the strongest leaders in software and hardware development (Shuter, 2012). While some literature indicates that minority groups may find it more difficult to both present and reinforce their cultural identities within the context of a virtual community that so strongly favors one specific culture (Chen & Dai, 2012), other research argues that new media can "empower disenfranchised groups in unique and powerful ways that are differentiated from the dynamics of face-to-face interaction" (Shuter, 2012). A key study by Hopkins (2008) found that Muslim Turks in Australia frequently utilized new media to network with Muslims worldwide, which in turn reinforced their religious and cultural identities. Oh (2012) found that second-generation Korean American teens used Korean media to enhance their bond with a Korean identity that they may have not felt as connected to, going so far as to indicate the individuals in a diaspora seemed to be successfully utilizing "new media to retain and reinforce their cultural identities" (Shuter, 2012). Grasmuck, Martina, and Shayang (2009) present evidence that minority groups in the United States utilize new media to emphasize their cultural identity. Their findings indicate that African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Vietnamese individuals utilize Facebook to reinforce their own cultural identities in "opposition...to social dynamics in the larger society that promote" harmful stereotypes (Grasmuck, Martina & Shayang, 2009).

Many of these negative stereotypes occur due to media-based associations that influence negative understandings of minority groups. Take, for example, Muslim Americans. Research indicates that American media (cable news, newspapers, television, movies, video games, etc) *frequently* links Muslims with terrorism, violence, and outright aggression, failing to clearly differentiate between an individual and an entire religion (Dixon & Williams, 205; Nacos &

Torres-Teyna, 2007; Powell, 2011; AlSultany, 2012; Sisler, 2008). These derogatory associations in turn perpetuate negative stereotypes and emotions towards Muslims (Saleem, Prot, Anderson, & Lemieux, 2015, Saleem, Yang, & Ramasubramanian, 2016; Saleem & Ramasubramanian, 2019). It's important to note that individuals who experience stereotyping and harmful stigmatization can still be affected by it even if they do not accept or believe said stereotype—research demonstrates that an individual only needs to be *aware* of the existing stereotype for it to threaten their own social identity, often times preventing or delaying the development of a sense of belonging (Saleem & Ramasubramanian, 2019; Steele, 1997). These threats can also lead individuals to avoid and reduce encounters with perceived future threats— or anyone they may see as different from themself (Miller, 2006; Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Saleem & Ramasramanian, 2019).

Tajfel & Turner (1979) found that an individual's response to a perceived threat is directly tied to the extent to which they identify with their in-group. Further research indicates that individuals who highly identify with their in-group are actually *more* likely to have their sense of identity damaged when compared to individuals who do not identify as strongly with their in-group (Riveadeneyra, Ward, & Gordon, 2007; Shmader, Block, & Lickel, 2015).

**Double Consciousness.** As individuals utilize the internet more and more frequently, it's necessary to understand whether the new virtual communities they are becoming a part of can coexist with an individual's already existing understanding of their identity. According to Frunzaru and Garbasevschi, "online identity can no longer be regarded as a separate construction, in antithesis with offline identity, but as an integral part of the individual's identity system, being influenced by and at the same time influencing the whole" (2016). These findings have forced scholars to re-examine previously held notions regarding identity management and

double consciousness. Kramer, Callahan & Zuckerman (2013) posit that one of the most stressful contexts within intercultural communication is the renegotiation of one's identity. For example, Moore (2005) found that managing more than one cultural identity created mental conflicts—in research, Moore asserted that African Americans frequently feel the need to inherit characteristics of the dominant group. Moore explained that many study participants felt that if they did not inherit the characteristics of the dominant group, they would be risking social isolation (2005). Rawls (2000) presented similar research, contending that as a direct result of racial inequality, African Americans are often forced to examine themselves through the lens of white Americans. Consequently, African Americans find themselves accountable to two distinctly different communities, creating significant internal distress.

Other groups have experienced challenges with identity management as well (Arnett, 2002; Johnson & Callahan, 2013). Jewish Russians living in Israel have shared that they feel as though they fit into to two groups, but never entirely. They explain that though they feel a strong connection to Israeli culture because of their geographic location and religious beliefs, they also see themselves as an individual separated from the majority because of their heritage (Caspi et al, 2002). Other minorities who have expressed feelings of isolation as a direct result of attempting to managing multiple cultural identities are included but not limited to the Welsh in Argentina (Laugharne, 2007), black Caribbean immigrants in the United States (Lorick-Wilmot, 2014), and Arabs in Canada (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019).

### *Indigenous Identity Management*

American advertisements are rife with inaccurate and stereotypical representations of Native Americans (for example, the Land O'Lakes maiden, the Jeep Cherokee, Amazon, the Atlanta Braves, the Redskins until 2020) (Merskin, 1998). When it comes to other media such as

television and movies, Native Americans are stereotyped in a similar manner. Even in contemporary representations, the media portrays Native Americans as "teepee dwelling, buckskin and feather wearing, horse riding people…and in the rare cases in which they are shown as contemporary people, they are negatively stereotyped as poor, uneducated and prone to addictions" (Leavitt et al., 2015; Fryberg et al, 2008).

Such sweeping generalizations of Native Americans can be traced back as far as the arrival of the European settlers to North America. Though they were sent to create a 'new world', they essentially invaded territory that was already settled by Native Americans—hundreds of years prior. Believing that they were "only doing God's will in conquering the natives and taking their land" (Hess et al., 1995; Merskin, 1998), many of the settlers created myths of a "ruthless, faithless savage" (Judd & Copley, 1971; Merskin,1998), and in reducing native people to a stereotype, allowed for "a level of hatred and disgust enough to make genocide a seemingly reasonable solution" (Merskin, 1998). "War machines have always justified their actions by dehumanizing the enemy…fraternizing with an enemy is strictly forbidden because disillusionment can open the heart" (Giago, 1991).

The genocide and subsequent oppression of Native Americans brought about unimaginable economic hardship, disease, and despair—Native American populations fell from several million to less than 250,000 people by 1900 (Thornton, 1990; Merskin, 1998). Only one-third of Native Americans reside on a reservation, and yet, the mass media still characterizes Native American life as one of poverty, suicide, family violence, and addiction (Bachman, 1992; Merskin, 1998). An individual interviewed by Merskin pointed out that

"In the media, Native Americans are portrayed as people who live in slums (where the government put them), live off your tax money (our land was taken, thank you

very much), drunks (why would they not be depressed?) and basically numbered,

labeled, canned, then shuffled on to desolate, barren, useless land to live a quiet life

out of the way of mainstream, white collar America."

By advancing finite, homogenous stereotypes of Native Americans, the media

significantly affects Native American identity and self-understanding, inadvertently promoting

de-individuation and self-stereotyping.

Threats to social identity can lead individuals to avoid and reduce encounters with

perceived future threats (Miller, 2006; Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Saleem & Ramasramanian, 2019).

Research indicates that repeated threats to individual identity can lead to dis-identification with

an individual's minority group, preventing the individual from developing a sense of belonging.

This phenomenon is recognized as Individual Mobility (Major & O'Brien, 2005).

Increasingly, we see examples of indigenous groups utilizing digital tools and platforms

to connect culturally, socially and politically as well, working to "rebuild and revitalize their

cultures" (Srinivasan, 2006; Dyson, 2011; Lindgren & Cocq, 2016). Landzelius asserts that

online indigenous communication (and minority communication in general) is two-fold—inreach

and outreach (2006).

In-reach communication centers around shared meaning and is focused on building

community. We see examples of this among Sámi, Tongan, and Inuit communities, as they work

to "solidify groups across territorial, linguistic or other cultural divides" (Lindgren & Cocq,

2016; Christensen, 2006; Morton, 2006). Dyson asserts that these technologies have helped to

draw the community *closer* by focusing on the elements that are core to their identity

management (2011).

Outreach communication focuses on connecting with individuals who are "outside" the group—primarily with the aim of increasing visibility, correcting stereotypes and pushing movements (i.e. grassroots campaigns, etc) (Landzelius, 2002).

***Culture and New Media***

According to Shuter (2012), culture influences the social utilizations of new media, and likewise, new media impacts and changes culture. This stance has been well established through a variety of studies which further investigate the impacts of new media on cultural traditions and communication. Several studies have explored the relationships between new media and the advent of electronic global culture (Ess, 2001; Jones, 2001). A number of authors have considered the effects of new media on student exchange programs and multicultural learning environments (Meagher & Castanos, 1996; Colomb & Simutis, 1996). Several researchers have attempted to understand the differences between nations when it comes to new media usage (Yoon, 1996; Ma, 1996). A great deal of the previous research within the culture and new media sphere has focused on the significance of culture as an influencing factor on social uses of new media (Baron & Segerstad, 2010; Campbell, 2007; Schroeder, 2010). Barker and Ota (2011) investigated social networking site use among Japanese and Caucasian American females. Oh (2012) explored the relationship between second-generation Korean American adolescents' use of transnational Korean media and social boundaries.

**Lakota History**

Before analyzing the results of this study, it's essential that this thesis explain how the notion of nationhood applies to the Lakota, and discuss, at some length, the history of the Lakota. First and foremost, the issue of language needs to be addressed.

The term "Sioux" is often utilized by researchers when discussing the allied peoples who form the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ (Seven Council Fires). Consisting of seven oyátes (tribes), the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ is made up of the Lakotas, Yanktons-Yanktonais, and Dakotas (Hamalainen, 17). While "Sioux" remains the most commonly utilized English term when referring to the Lakota, it is recognized as a derogatory and problematic association. Coming from a French corruption of the Ojibwe word *Nadouessioux,* "Sioux" is an exonym which quite literally means snake (and enemy). In addition, it's a term which deeply simplifies an extremely large group of individuals, who are a part of distinct and differing groups. Within the Lakota Nation alone, there are seven federally recognized tribes: Sičháŋǧu, Oglála, Itázipčho, Húŋkpapȟa, Mnikȟówožu, Sihásapa, and Oóhenuŋpa.

The Očhéthi Šakówiŋ was not formed in the way many western states and federations are formed today. No proof of citizenship was required, nor proof of blood relation necessary. Instead, the seven oyátes who made up the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ saw each other as similar spirits who could be distinguished from "other" people. Even so, the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ was not elitist in nature—belonging was "a matter of behavior rather than blood: anybody capable of proper sentiments, words, and deeds could become a relative" (Hämäläinen, 17).

Socially speaking, the primary social arrangement of the Lakotas (and Očhéthi Šakówiŋ in general) in the early sixteenth century was what is called a thióšpaye. Essentially, it consisted of a group of more than 20 households, which traveled and stayed together all year. It was understood that they would likely marry individuals from their thióšpaye (or village)—by the late seventeenth century, villages that started as a few families now consisted of hundreds of people. Though these villages were generally in designated territories, they still migrated with animals such as deer, elk and bison, moving annually through woodlands, grasslands, marshlands

and grasslands. Fascinatingly, this "constant movement stitched the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ tighter together by creating a thick lattice of kinship ties that transcended local and regional identities…they could travel anywhere within their realm and always be among kin" (Hämäläinen, 17-19).

With the European introduction of smallpox in the early seventeenth century, hundreds of thousands of indigenous individuals perished. Entire tribes were wiped out—the Five Iroquois Nations lost nearly half of their population. Desperate to regain their numbers, the Iroquois captured members of neighboring tribes, adopting them (against their will) into Iroquois tribes, forcing these individuals to "assume the social role and name of the deceased, thereby repairing fractured lineages as newly born Iroquois" (Hämäläinen, 22). Thousands of refugees fled the Iroquois, materializing on the borders of the Lakota. With threats of war, the Lakota were forced west, into the high plains of Wisconsin, Iowa and the Dakotas. "By the mid-eighteenth century, the Lakota Nation was expanding, contracting, and loosening at its seams all at once, coming on the verge of disintegration, only to find cohesion in its collective traditions, shared history, and age-old commitment to the idea of a single kindred community" (Hämäläinen, 84). Their ability to adapt was what saved them when so many other tribes were all but gone—by the start of the eighteenth century, the Lakota became the first Indigenous nation on the continent to fight on horseback with guns and firepower.

In 1804, the Lewis and Clark expedition careened into rapidly expanding Lakota territory. Sent by Jefferson to inspect flora and fauna of the west, their mission soon took on new importance with Jefferson's rumination on removing all indigenous populations and moving them to the west to orchestrate an expansive trading empire. This vision centered around friendly relations with the indigenous populations already established in the west, and consequently, the

expeditions of Lewis and Clark became exponentially more important. Most important to Jefferson was establishing relationships with the Lakota—in an excerpt of a letter to Lewis and Clark, he wrote "On that nation we wish most particularly to make a friendly impression, because of their immense power" (Hämäläinen, 128).

One of the biggest issues with a host of expeditions and attempts to forge relationships with the Lakotas was a lack of nuanced understandings of cultures that were, at the time, considered "un-American". Oglala chief Luther Standing Bear remembers "Our home life began in the tipi" (Hämäläinen, 180). Foreigners could not understand this—even more difficult for them to grasp was the role of the Lakota woman. Lakota women were the matriarchs—they owned the tipis Chief Standing Bear was speaking of. They owned the horses that hauled the tipi whenever they moved, they decided how the interior of a tipi was arranged and decorated. They raised children, taught them, cared for elders, and above all else were deeply respected in their culture. Women could expel an unruly husband from her tipi and even had the power to divorce him, if she wished. Men, who foreigners assumed were the decision-makers, consulted their wives and mothers before making any big decision, understanding that women "knew intimately the material, psychological, and spiritual needs of their families and relatives"—the Lakota men trusted the women to know the best course of action in any situation and greatly valued their input and direction. Foreigners, who viewed women as property, could not understand such an advanced way of understanding women.

It's due, in large part, to this inability to understand cultures 'different' than his own that Secretary of War John C. Calhoun created a new division—the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Hämäläinen, 209). By 1830, this department was helping with the implementation of Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal act—a "brutal, sustained campaign of ethnic cleansing" (Hämäläinen,

210). It's after this act is passed that the Plains Indian Wars erupt. It's estimated that more than 20,000 indigenous individuals were killed, although research indicates that the figure is based on U.S. Army records and is almost certainly nearly double that (Treuer, 93). However, in many ways, this terror campaign against indigenous nations led to a deepening of cultural values and bonds both within the Lakota Nation, and between neighboring nations. Hämäläinen explains this phenomenon:

> Entire bands shifted into the Lakota orbit, pushed by the horrific conditions in the central plains and pulled by the promise of a better life among the Lakotas…Lakotas had to find ways to manage the growing diversity within their borders, but unlike most empires, they did not rely on force or codified hierarchization. There was no social ladder for allied people, only social niches into which they could slide….while retaining their traditional creeds and customer, [newcomers] participated in Lakota feasts, ceremonies, and councils and used Lakota as a trading language. They were not nations within a nation; they were individuals, families, and bands residing among Lakotas who dealt with diversity by simply accepting it. What mattered to Lakotas most was loyalty, not likeness, and they were comfortable with a realm that bubbled with different habits, ideas, and languages for that also meant new bodies, new skills, and new connections…(243-244).

The Lakota continued to be a force the U.S. Army had not expected to have to reckon with. Red Cloud, an Ogala Lakota war chief planned brilliantly staged attacks, forcing the U.S. Army back from territories they'd infringed on (Treuer, 94). Recognizing they were in a losing war, the United States Congress established an "Indian Peace Commission" to negotiate with the

Lakotas, discussing grievances, treaties, and reservations (Hämäläinen, 287). Perhaps one of the most pivotal treaties to come from these discussions was the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. The treaty guaranteed "exclusive tribal occupation of extensive reservation lands, including the Black Hills" barring white settlers from "tribal hunting rights on adjoining unceded territories" (Cutlip, 2018). Additionally, this treaty prohibited the future cessation of land unless 75% of the male adult tribal members agreed, something that was unheard of. And yet, greed would once again be the catalyst to another broken treaty. In 1874, U.S. general George Custer led an expedition in search of gold—right into the heart of the Black Hills, and in direct violation of the 1868 treaty. Rightfully angered, the Lakota launched an attack against Custer and his band, and in retaliation, the U.S. passed a decree confining all Lakotas to the reservation lands outlined in the treaty under threat of military action (Cutlip, 2018). This conflict led to the Battle of the Little Bighorn—the last military victory of the Lakota. The next year, congress would pass new acts that redrew the boundaries put forth in the Laramie treaty, seizing the Black Hills. And yet, the United States was still not placated, continuing to pass laws and regulations about what could and could not take place on reservations. One such ban was on Ghost Dancing, a ritual centered around hope, rebirth, and deliverance. In the Ghost Dance, Lakotas held hands in a circle while turning clockwise around a tree, dancing and singing, dressed in special shirts to protect themselves against bullets (Hämäläinen, 377). Army officers began to refuse to issue food rations as long as the dancing continued, and on Pine Ridge reservation, a new agent sent the following wire to Washington, DC:

> Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy. I have fully informed you
> that employees and government property at this agency have no protection and are
> at the mercy of these dancers. Why delay by further investigation. We need

protection, and we need it now. The leaders should be arrested and confined in some military post until the matter is quieted and this should be done at once (Koster, 2012).

Soon after, James McLaughlin, an agent at Standing Rock Reservation ordered the arrest of Sitting Bull, alleging that this was in part due to Sitting Bull's failure to curtail Ghost Dances at his camp. In a squarish that broke out during Sitting Bull's arrest, he was shot in the back and then the head. Following this incident, Sitting Bull's followers sought refuge at the camp of Spotted Elk. Army officers ordered everyone in the camp arrested, disarmed, and detained (Hämäläinen, 378). The Seventh Cavalry escorted the camp to Wounded Knee Creek and began to search them for weapons. One Lakota man resisted when an officer tried to take his weapon, simply insisting that he be paid for his gun, and in the struggle, the weapon was inadvertently discharged. The Seventh Cavalry began shooting everyone in the camp, executing more than 270 Lakota, 170 of which were women and children. Twenty of the soldiers were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Says Hämäläinen:

The Wounded Knee Massacre was an atrocity, a betrayal, and a human catastrophe…the past and the present had been torn violently apart, and history itself seemed to have ended. With the Lakota men, women, and children, America's Indigenous civilization seemed to have died at Wounded Knee, turning more than two hundred thousand Indians into relics…yet Lakotas would survive as a people. The sacred hoop would be mended and the Lakota nation would rise again. Not all was lost and buried at Wounded knee (379)…The Lakotas will prevail. They will

always find a place in the world because they know how to be fully in it, adapting

to its shape while remaking it, again and again, after their own image (392).

A small number of studies have examined indigenous cultural patterns of new media use

in recent years. Molyneaux et. al (2014) utilized a survey-based approach to explore the link

between social networking sites and platforms and the levels of community connectedness

individuals felt with their communities (in this instance, they were studying Ojibway, Oji-Cree,

and Cree communities). Lindgren & Cocq (2017) analyzed tweets by members of the Sàmi

nation to examine what happens on twitter when an issue gains traction and begins to pick up in

popularity among non-Sàmi individuals. In 2008, Bruin and Mane conducted in-depth interviews

with Ngāpuhi audiences about their engagement with Tautoko FM radio. Their findings

indicated that many individuals in the Ngāpuhi nation have "adapted new media technologies to

re-centre notions of national identity". Johnson & Callahan (2012) held qualitative interviews to

examine social media use by the Garifuna people, exploring the ways in which they utilize new

media (specifically, social media) to create a "supraterritorial cyberscape".

And yet, after a systematic literature review of all studies published in *New Media and

Society* (NMS) and the *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* (JCMC) between 2005

and 2011, Shuter concluded that "the overwhelming majority of international new media

investigations (240:82%) are theory validation studies that primarily attempt to refine new media

or mass media theories, with limited analysis of socio-cultural implications of new media"

(2012). Research by Cheong, Martin & MacFadyen (2012) confirms this assessment, reporting

that there are limited intercultural studies surrounding new media and society. Commenting on

the need for further research with a socio-cultural skew, Shuter argues for more studies which

"explore topics such as indigenous cultural patterns of new media use, critical analyses of new

media and society, and the impact of culture on the social uses of new media" (2012). Johnson & Callahan (2012) echo this call, stating that

> More work needs to be done to understand the process of social media integration of global minority perspectives. This study only looked at one minority culture. Future research should be done on how other groups are utilizing social media, how they are using it, different creations of cultural cyberscapes, and if these cultural usages are sustainable… Cultures are influenced by media, just as they influence the media they use.

This study seeks to answer these calls for more research into indigenous perspectives & uses of new media. Specifically, this research attempts to understand how individuals who identify as members of the Lakota Nation manage their identity through social media. Based on the prior research, the following research questions influence this study:

RQ1: How do individuals who identify as Lakota manage their identity through social media, particularly in relation to larger cultural influences?

RQ2: How are minority cultures using new media to extend the reach of their culture?

## Method

**Research Design Overview**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between Lakota perspectives and experiences with new media and their cultural perceptions. An in-depth, qualitative interview method was adopted as it allows for deeper insights and perspectives to come to light. The focus of this study was to proffer up insights from individuals within the Lakota community

on new media and its implications. This study augments existing research by adding a unique perspective that has not yet been studied in intercultural communications specifically.

The use of qualitative interviews is a well-established approach in intercultural research, as it ensures that rich and detailed narratives can be collected, providing researchers the opportunity to explore different experiences and opinions at great length. As noted by Hammersley and Atkinson, "the expressive power of language provides the most important resource for accounts. A crucial feature of language is its capacity to present descriptions, explanations, and evaluations of almost infinite variety about any aspect of the world, including itself" (1995). Milena et. al came to the same conclusion, asserting that the in-depth interview offers "an opportunity to gain insight into how people interpret and order the world" (1279). Rubin & Rubin share that in their experiences, a qualitative, in-depth interview approach "brings out new information, often of startling candor, and often suggests unanticipated interpretations" (2012). Qualitative interviews allow multiple (and often varying) perspectives about a given issue or topic to come to light, so that more nuanced observations can be drawn (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

### *Responsive Interview Model*

More specifically, the researcher chose to follow the responsive interview model as put forth by Rubin & Rubin (2012). While there are a lot of similarities between general in-depth interviews and the responsive interview model, this model has four distinct characteristics (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, pg. 38).

First, the responsive interview model places a strong emphasis on the significance of context and richness, while also recognizing that the complexities and nuances of "real life" are likely to impact findings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, pg. 38).

Second, responsive interviewing assumes that questioning, and thus, findings, are impacted by the distinct personalities of the researcher and interviewee. Due in large part to the two-way, conversational approach responsive interviewing takes, it's crucial that researchers be aware of the ways in which their own experiences, cultural understandings, and opinions can impact what they ask, how they ask it, and how they interpret the responses they receive (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, pg. 38).

Third, the Responsive Interview Model recognizes that interviews are an exchange that are brought about in large part due to a relationship of respect between the researcher and interviewee. When working within the Responsive Interview Model, the researcher makes a concerted effort to ensure their interviews are conducted in a supportive and nonconfrontational manner (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, pg. 38).

Fourth, and perhaps most important, is a clear dichotomy between structure and flexibility—though the researcher has particular topics they'd like to discuss with their interviewee, they are also flexible enough to allow for the order of the conversation to follow whatever is best for the subject. By allowing for such an ebb and flow, the researcher becomes a more responsive listener, asking questions to any of the relevant issues mentioned by the interviewee, even if they might be "out of order" (Legard et. al, 141). The structure of the interview is entirely dependent on the responses of the interviewee—after the researcher asks a question, and hears from their respondent, their next question will most often be determined by the specifics of the answer they just got (Legard et. al, 141). Often, the first response a participant gives to a question is somewhat superficial. This necessitates follow up questions from the researcher, allowing for the interviewer to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the participant's viewpoint (Legard et. al, 141).

The responsive interview model also assumes that the opinions, ideas, and views shared by the participants are true for them, and thus, the researcher is able to enter the interviewee's world for the duration of the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 7). Additionally, it can be assumed that the researcher's role is two-pronged—first, to gather descriptions, narratives, and interpretations from a variety of participants and second, to compile these findings in a way that re-creates a culture, process, or series of events in a way that participants would certify as accurate (Rubin & Rubin, 7-8).

*Approach to Inquiry*

The responsive interviewing model also distances itself from the traditional, more positivist (and postpositivist) structures that exist, instead leaning towards a naturalist paradigm. While postpositivists presuppose that all data collection is impacted to some extent by preexisting and unavoidable social and political theories, they are still more absolute in their conclusions than interpretive constructionists (Willis et al., 2007, p. 73). Interpretive constructionists fall within the naturalist paradigm, emphasizing the significance of context and situational complexity. Interpretive constructionist researchers assume that individuals look at any given issue through distinct lenses and will naturally reach varying conclusions due to these diverse perspectives. Additionally, researchers working within the interpretive constructionist paradigm emphasize their own assumptions (particularly within cultural and intercultural research), making them clear to both themselves and the readers of their work. In this model, researchers do not need to be neutral, but it is crucial they are aware of their biases and the ways in which they may influence research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, pg. 19). Gergen (1999) maintains that researchers must be able to suspend their own cultural assumptions long enough to recognize and understand a subject's own personal assumptions (pg. 50).

This research is shaped by a critical variant of the naturalist paradigm, in that it aims, in some part, to bring to light societal problems (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). The researcher selected individuals who identify as Lakota specifically because they are a minority, whose oppression is frequently ignored. As aforementioned, research (and especially communications research) centered around Lakota perspectives and experiences is severely lacking, and as such, this research seeks to, in part, serve as a call to action for more research that gives voice to groups that are often under and misrepresented. However, it's important to note that the researcher does not believe that research should *only* be conducted to highlight minority groups.

**Study Participants**

*Researcher Description*

The researcher worked closely with Dr. Clark Callahan, Professor and Director for Graduate Studies in the School of Communications at Brigham Young University. Dr. Callahan's research centers on theories of intercultural adaption, historical diffusion of innovations, and media ecology. Dr. Callahan has extensive experience in conducting qualitative in-depth interviews (see Callahan, 2010; Callahan, 2011; Callahan & Hess, 2012; Johnson & Callahan, 2013; Callahan et. al, 2018; Callahan et. al, 2020) and provided guidance to the researcher as the methods for this study were developed. Prior understandings of intercultural adaption and intercultural new media studies aided in enhancing the line of questioning for this study, as well as structuring data collection and analysis.

Particularly in the case of cultural or intercultural research, Rubin & Rubin suggest that "show[ing] that you [as the researcher] are willing to accept the culture and want to learn about it" is the best way to build rapport with participants in a study (pg. 75). There are several ways a researcher can do this, for example, spending ample time "prior to the interviews learning the

specialized vocabulary of the group you are studying" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, pg. 75). Take, for example, William Whyte (1955). Conducting research on a working-class Italian community, he moved to the town he was researching and even began Italian lessons (Whyte, 1955). Whyte later stated: "My effort to learn the language…establish[ed] the sincerity of my interest" (Whyte, 1955, pg. 296; Rubin & Rubin, 2012, pg. 75). In an effort to cross the cultural divide, the author studied Lakota history in depth before conducting any interviews, to ensure that mentions of specific cultural phenomena or significant cultural events in Lakota history would be understood and recognized if mentioned. Finally, the researcher met with Ben Rhodd, the historic preservation officer of the Sicangu Lakota Oyate to discuss Lakota history, terminology, and culture.

It is important to note that the researcher *is not* a member of any Lakota tribe and is neither a representative nor spokesperson for any Lakota tribe or individual.

*Participants*

Purposeful sampling is one of the most common methods for maximizing the "depth and richness of the data to address the research question" (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Kuzel, 1999). A subject pool criteria was developed to ensure proper recruitment and selection of study participants (Johnson & Callahan, 2013). First, the participant needed to identify as Lakota. Second, the participant had to willing and able to consent to an interview either in-person or over the phone. While the author planned to investigate media usage among participants, no subjects were excluded based on their access to and general usage of new media (Johnson & Callahan, 2013). All participants were domestic and had to be able to affirm that they were permanently located in the United States of America. Participants were not required to be living on a

reservation at the time of interview, nor did they *ever* need to have lived on a reservation to be eligible.

Lakota participants were selected for several reasons. First, there is a significant gap in literature focusing on Lakota people and their media use. A comprehensive search of the EBSCO (Communications and Mass Media Complete) database for peer-reviewed journals yielded only 19 studies in the last 95 years. Second, despite strong and unavoidable cultural pressures other groups, many Lakota people have successfully maintained their cultural identity. Third, Lakota people certainly fit into the definition of a cultural minority group as put forth by communications researchers today (the author is utilizing the term "minority group" to describe a "population subgroup with ethnic, racial, social, religious, or other characteristics different from those of the majority of the population" (APA, 2015a). To reflect a degree of randomness, no effort was made to prioritize participants based on their current use or non-use of media (Johnson & Callahan, 2013).

In all, 9 members of the Lakota Nation participated. Of this sample, 2 (22%) identified as male and 7 (77%) identified as female. All participants were domestic, located permanently in the United States of America.

### *Researcher-Participant Relationship*

There was not a relationship between the researcher and any participants prior to the start of this research.

### **Participant Recruitment**

The contact information for potential participants in this study were obtained through a shared connection of the author, Linda Kramer. Researchers that concentrate on cultural or intercultural studies often adopt this method of recruiting participants, as it is one of the most

effective ways of establishing rapport with interviewees (see Padilla, 1992; Whyte, 1955; Liebow, 1967; Duneier, 1999). Linda resides in the Black Hills of South Dakota and has strong relationships with many of the individuals interviewed over the course of this study. Working with Linda had multiple benefits, namely, participants felt more eager in participating in the research, as the mutual connection helped to build trust in the author. The author worked with Linda to create a recruitment letter for potential participants, which contained a link to a more detailed introductory letter on the researcher's website. Prior to commencing the study, ethical approval was obtained from Brigham Young University's Institutional Review Board (10/27/2020). This study did not require an annual continuing review.

Once the contact information for prospective participants was obtained, an email was sent to interested parties thanking them for their interest, detailing the purpose of the study, providing them with information on the time commitment that could be expected, and requesting a time that worked best for an interview to take place.

Participants were not compensated for their participation in this research, however, they did receive copies of their transcribed interviews for their records.

**Data Collection**

This data was collected via semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Participants took part in a Zoom, telephone or in-person interview with the researcher. In-person interviews were conducted in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Interviews were collected 9 times. On average, interviews took 70 minutes, with the shortest interview lasting 47 minutes and the longest interview lasting 134 minutes. All interviews were recorded, with the express permission of the interviewee. Multiple recording devices were utilized to ensure redundancies were in place. The researcher also took handwritten notes during interviews, in an effort to clarify any muddled

passages once the transcription process began. Audio files were stored on the researcher's computer and, additionally, cloud-based storage, with access to both being password-protected. At the completion of an interview, the researcher transcribed the recording, referencing interview notes in any cases of uncertainty. The researcher had previous training and experience in interview transcription. At the completion of each transcription, interviews were sent to participants to review for mistakes or ambiguities in need of clarification These transcriptions were utilized in the creation of the discussion & conclusion sections of this study.

For each interview, the researcher referenced a set list of open-ended interview questions to allow for a more holistic and comprehensive perspective. Open-ended interview questions also allow for more diversity in the data then would be available with a closed-question approach (Allen, 2017). Utilizing interview questions ensured that the researcher was able to gather all necessary data while also remaining responsive and engaged with participants. It is important to note that because these were semi-structured interviews, the researcher did ask follow up questions when opportunities presented themselves for further lines of questioning. These questions were created to shed light on personal experiences with the following media areas, and these areas of focus were derived from a study conducted by Johnson & Callahan (2013):

1. What types of media are the most important to Lakota individuals,

2. Whether or not the participants had access to and used the indicated types of media,

3. The ways in which various types of media were used—particularly social media,

4. The ways in which Lakota individuals used media to maintain ties with friends and families across large distances,

5. The ways in which Lakota individuals used media to maintain ties with friends and families nearby,

6. The differences in perceived connectedness when using various types of media,

7. The struggles in maintaining cultural ties to culture when not on the reservation,

8. The feelings of the participant about the use of social media in strengthening or weakening her/his culture.

**Analysis**

***Data-Analytic Strategies***

This research worked within Grounded Theory, utilizing Constant Comparative Analysis to approach the findings without an *a priori* scheme (Johnson & Callahan, 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constant comparative analysis is a well-established approach in cultural studies.

***Methodological Integrity***

While it's been established that semi-structured interviews are incredibly valuable in exploratory research, there are some challenges that arise in gauging the validity and rigor of any qualitative research (Morse et. al, 2002). As Morse et. al assert, "without rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility" (2002). As such, great care was taken to adhere to verification strategies throughout this study. Within qualitative research, it is imperative that researchers follow these strategies *throughout* the research process, keeping a keen eye out for any subversions to the validity and rigor of a study. In doing so, the researcher is able to create and maintain a "solid product" (Morse et. al, 2002; Crewell, 1997; Kvale, 1989) by essentially identifying and rectifying errors *before* they are incorporated into the developing research and consequently, subverting the analysis and conclusions of the study (Morse et. al, 2002). As Morse et. al note, qualitative research is "iterative rather than linear" with successful qualitative researchers working to ensure they are moving parallel between design and implementation,

ensuring "congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis" (2002).

*Methodological Coherence.* Methodological coherence essentially ensures that there is clear congruence between the questions of the research in question and the components of the methodology. The inherent interdependent nature of qualitative research dictates that questions must match the method, and the method must match the data and analytic procedures (Morse et. al, 2002).

*Appropriate Sample.* The sample must be appropriate—subsisting of individuals who are clearly good representatives of the research topic at hand (Morse et. al, 2002). Doing so ensures "efficient and effective saturation of categories, with optimal quality data and minimum dross" (Morse et. al, 2002). Additionally, interviews must continue to be conducted until the researcher can confidently assert that saturation and replication have been reached (Morse, 1991).

**Findings**

After a thorough analysis of the interviews conducted, four themes emerged from the data. First, Lakota individuals felt that social media was in large part, a tool that they felt a responsibility to utilize as a vessel for change. Second, participants felt a sort of struggle in balancing social media with deeply rooted, in-person traditions, though, in large part, felt sure that in some ways, social media could augment their culture and strengthen it. This leads to the third finding—the ability of social media to preserve Lakota culture for posterities sake, and in many instances, allow for greater cultural use and access among members of Lakota tribes despite historical (and still present) marginalization. Lastly, this research affirms a theory of supraterritorial cultural spaces put forth by Johnson & Callahan (2012). The findings in this

study indicated that Lakota individuals have created online cultural spaces to transcend the more traditional understandings of culture as a byproduct of geographical positioning.

**Media as a Vessel for Change**

The first theme to emerge from the data collected was that Lakota individuals view media (in most cases, social media) as a tool to participate in political discourse. In fact, many respondents expressed a sense of duty to utilize their own personal social media accounts as a voice to issues that are incredibly important, both politically and socially. Many of the individuals interviewed expressed hesitation when they first began to post content that could be deemed "political" in nature. One participant summarized this well.

*Excerpt 1*

It's like an extension of the gift that Creator gave us. He gave us a voice and we determine how we're going to use that voice…we have that capable ability now with social media to extend our voice, to extend our message to create a bigger circle—a bigger hoop. And that's how the following starts, maybe your post will not get a like from someone, but they're following you because they like what you're saying and it makes sense to them, but they do not yet have the courage to get up and say "You know what, what you said absolutely made sense. I'm really glad you said that. Can I share that?" Putting it out there is just an extension of what Creator gave us, it's our voice and how we use it to help other people. That's probably the best thing that social media has for us to offer.

Participants felt they were able to move past these hesitations because they view themselves as stewards of the earth, and as such, feel it's their responsibility to do everything in their power to keep indigenous concerns at the forefront of the public conversation as much as possible, despite

how uncomfortable it may sometimes be. Several interviewees spoke to the connection they have with the earth, noting that another reason they are devoted to being environmental activists in their community is due to the intrinsic tie they have with land that was taken from them. One participant elaborated a bit more on this.

*Excerpt 2*

> We're connected to our land. Not by law, or decree but by Creator. By choice…He chose people to be wherever they began and taught them how to live on that land and revere it and save it, protect it, do all of these things. We're here for a reason and enriching ourselves means first enriching the land and remembering the stories that brought us here.

Interviewees agreed that media has played a central (and crucial) role in every modern activist campaign they've encountered. Participants expressed that initially, they were stunned at the rapid dissemination of information surrounding politically charged environmental issues, noting that they now recognize that many of these movements were *only* able to gain the traction they did *because* of social media.

Almost every participant brought up Standing Rock as a clear example of the power of social media in an activist setting. Several interviewees expressed that it was still incredible to think that a largely cyber-dedicated campaign could result in a gathering of more than 20,000 indigenous and non-indigenous supporters protesting the Dakota Access Oil Pipeline (DAPL). A few participants posited that the success and engagement with the #StandingRock campaign could be largely attributed to necessity. Often, indigenous groups and other minority populations experience difficulty gaining any sort of traction in news media. One participant aptly noted this.

*Excerpt 3*

> We can post all we want on Facebook about indigenous issues and civil rights. But it only goes so far in Indian Country. Or a lot of the times it'll reach white allies. But across national borders? It's an immediate black out.

This rings true even when analyzing the Standing Rock protests. News media were slow to pick up the story, forcing individuals to rely on social media for information sharing, network and community building, and options for providing general support for those at the site of the DAPL. Several individuals stated that they often watched Facebook Live for information they felt they could trust, coming right from the source. Still other interviewees remembered frequenting the Facebook pages of individuals they knew were at the protest, desperate for any updates they could find. One individual commented on this dependence on social media that a lack of national coverage created.

*Excerpt 4*

> The only time I can say I really depended on it [social media] was during Standing Rock. I really depended on social media because it was a message and everyone needed to know. It was like another livewire, it started this response on a whole other level that I was never used to being a part of…it had a huge impact. I'm pretty sure those live feeds that the youth were posting…they went everywhere. *Everywhere.* And if you knew someone that was there on Facebook, you were on their Facebook account to see what they were doing and what was happening because we did not get the media. We did not get TV stations, they did not go down there. The Rapid City Journal was not down there. None of the local media was there. So in the absence of local media, social media has an opportunity, and I think a responsibility to put the truth out there.

Several individuals theorized that perhaps, another reason there was such a slow start to the Standing Rock campaign gaining traction was due to Facebook's current policies. Several expressed dismay that quite often, their posts will be removed by Facebook for violation of community guidelines. It seems unanimous that the ways in which Facebook is implementing these guidelines is murky at best. One participant shared a specific experience.

*Excerpt 3*

A lot of our people, when they post, their posts get reported, and they'll end up in Facebook jail…the truth hurts and the truth wants to be hidden…. It's like social media is good until you start telling the truth…I was trying to post a petition to the Environmental Protection Agency on the uranium mining—how they gave water permits [to those companies]… and apparently it was too political. They would not allow it to get posted.

**Balancing Social Media with Deep Tradition**

The second theme to emerge from the data collected was the sometimes difficult juxtaposition of deep tradition with social media, and how they balance the two. Individuals interviewed unanimously spoke to the power of the spoken word and oral tradition—emphasizing the importance of storytelling within their culture. One participant summarized it aptly, stating that:

*Excerpt 4:*

Our history is largely an oral history… for our culture, especially our spirituality, everything is word of mouth.

Several individuals noted that they see social media as a way to extend that already deeply rooted tradition. There was a common trend in the data that correlated with an increased interest and

excitement in social media as a way to transmit stories of their people. One participant

commented that social media mirrors the traditions of storytelling they grew up with.

*Excerpt 5:*

> So the written word is important, but on my dad's side – oral historians. So, I like
> the written word, I like newspapers, I like social media to a certain extent…I
> appreciate those platforms because there's an ability to provide a spoken story. And
> so you can hear people talk and tell these stories.

However, there was certainly a melancholy aspect to the opinions and perspectives expressed.

Several participants noted that while social media certainly allows for storytelling, there are

aspects of their tradition that can get lost when it comes to social media. Several participants

expressed worry that social media could, in some ways, impact the sacredness of certain rituals.

It's created a whole new area for individuals to need to navigate and has forced many

participants to think about certain traditions in ways they never really had to before.

Traditionally speaking, Lakota culture has generally been fairly removed from new media

technology, with an emphasis on in-person, person to person communication. The digital divide

certainly plays a role in this. In 2018, new estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau found that just

over half (53%) of Indigenous peoples in the United States living on reservations or other tribal

lands have access to high-speed internet (NPR, 2018). Interestingly, the topic of infrastructure

and access to high-speed internet is not one that came up with any of the participants during the

course of this research. Though interviews via phone call were proffered up as an interview

option, a majority of interviewees opted for a Zoom-based interview set up. Even still, it's

evident that social media usage among the Lakota is viewed as a double-edged sword—positive

in that it can allow for individual members of the culture to have increased access to cultural

artifacts, and negative in that it can oftentimes, in the eyes of those interviewed, degrade the sacredness of a given ritual. One participant succinctly summarized this feeling of wariness and uncertainty around the sacredness of ceremonies:

*Excerpt 6:*

> I think nowadays it seems to have transitioned. Back when I was learning about our ways, they used to say, only share this information with your close circle. If other people outside that circle hear this, and they have ill will, it could have negative consequences. So when I see people sharing very sacred information, I kind of cringe, but you know, my grandma used to say, nothing is right or wrong. And it's how that person feels about it, and if it's right for them, then so be it.

Numerous participants echoed this sentiment, with a majority of those interviewed expressing in one way or another that they recognize that the choice to share or consume cultural artifacts via social media as a personal one, noting that they refrain from judging anyone else's use of social media. However, despite the negatives, there was a general consensus that the ability to share stories and have those stories saved is still an incredible opportunity. Not only that, but many individuals felt that social media has allowed them to learn more about *other* indigenous cultures through the oral histories shared on apps like TikTok. One respondent spoke to this phenomenon.

*Excerpt 7:*

> With the advent of Tik Tok and those short videos and things that people put out, I have never learned so much about indigenous culture throughout the United States, as I do right now, in all my years of study. I'm 51. I feel like in the last year and a half, my mind has just been blown. I have learned so much. I'm somehow on like

Alaska Native Tik Tok, which I just love because I literally do not know anything

about Native people from that area

While almost all participants recognized that their culture was, for the large part, a very

marginalized and minority perspective in terms of the larger media milieu, many expressed

excitement and hope in the ability of social media to bring their culture, and other indigenous

cultures to the forefront of conversation.

**Social Media Usage to Preserve Culture**

With a culture deeply rooted in oral tradition and storytelling, it's not surprising that one

of the most agreed upon positive impacts of social media among participants was its ability to

preserve culture. Every participant interviewed articulated that they utilize social media to look

at and read about their culture online. Several participants indicated that they utilize social media

to stay in the know about cultural events. Perhaps one of the biggest trends that emerged was the

general consensus that social media provides new ways to preserve the Lakota language. Several

individuals spoke to the rapid decline in native speakers—and this is a perspective that has been

echoed by the Lakota Language Consortium (LLC). In 2016, they announced that only 2,000

first-language Lakota speakers remained—a startling decline of 66% in the last ten years (Lakota

Language Consortium, 2016). This rapid loss of first-language speakers averages out to more

than 400 speakers lost *each year*. In a news release, the LLC stated that according to new

findings "Ethnologue, a catalogue of world languages, will now redesignate the Lakota language

from "Threatened" to "Moribund", with the special status of "Reawakening" – reflecting the

community's commitment to bringing back the language into every day use" (Lakota Language

Consortium, 2016). One participant expressed frustration about this loss of language, aptly

noting that in large part, this threat to the Lakota language is due to the brutal history of

indigenous boarding schools set up in the United States in the 1800s, whose sole intent was to forcibly assimilate Indigenous children. Brandi Morin summarizes the horrific experiences of these Indigenous children: "Upon arrival at boarding school, the Indian children's long hair was cut short, their traditional clothing was burned and replaced with school uniforms, and they were forbidden to speak their Indigenous language" (National Geographic, 2021). It's estimated that more than 10,000 children went to Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, many of whom were from the rosebud reservation. With more than 367 known Indian boarding schools in the 1900s, it's unimaginable the number of Indigenous youth subjected to years of trauma. Several participants in this study noted that it's no surprise that a language that was forcibly removed from the hundreds of Lakota youth is dwindling, though it's an unspeakable tragedy.

And yet, of the participants interviewed, every single individual was a testament to this interest and downright devotion to learning the Lakota language. Many individuals demonstrated a firm resolve to overcome years of intergenerational trauma brought on by the forcible removal of their native language, sharing messages of hope about the future of the Lakota language. One participant indicated that they see social media as a means to restore the Lakota language, especially among Lakota youth.

*Excerpt 8*

> I think social media is helping us to restore and revitalize our Lakota language. You can watch videos, learn how to say the word, get the guttural sounds and that type…I think immersion in Lakota language is needed, and social media is a great tool to do that.

It's interesting to note that several participants echoed this sentiment, also recognizing that in some instances, social media may even be a *better* tool for learning their native language,

because individuals are able to look up videos on TikTok for example, and rewatch them over

and over, hearing the influxes and intonations in someone's voice in a way that in-person

learning does not cater to. Additionally, several participants noted that the ability to record a

language that is in many areas considered moribund is important, as it imparts the option to

record the spoken language for posterity's sake.

**Supraterritorial Cultural Spaces Through Social Media**

Perhaps one of the most fascinating findings in this study was the Lakota creation and

adaption of a supraterritorial space. This finding aligned with conclusions put forth by Johnson

& Callahan (2012)—that despite more traditional understandings of culture and how it relates to

geography, cultures are beginning to create "supraterritorial space inside social media

for…social expression" (Johnson & Callahan, 2012). Lakota individuals interviewed

unanimously indicated that they view social media outlets as a means for cultural connection

among other members of their tribe who may not be in the same geo-physical space as them.

Among those interviewed, every single participant had, at one point or another, utilized

Facebook. Almost all participants agreed that Facebook was a very important means to staying in

contact, especially once Covid hit. One participant had to delete their Facebook account due to

the nature of their work; and later noted that there was a significant decline in the connection

they felt to their community as a result.

*Excerpt 9*

> I really miss Facebook just for that aspect of it. I feel like our community here is so
>
> heavily reliant on Facebook. Especially during the height of the pandemic, we lost
>
> so many people to COVID, that there was a point where I had no idea people had
>
> passed away because people were posting about it on Facebook and I do not have

it and so I did not have the same access. So, anyway, here at least [Facebook] is really important. That is a source of information passing and caring for people here on the reservation.

This trend was one the researchers noted as well as they attempted to reach individuals for participation in their study. A majority of participants were best contacted through Facebook—response rate was actually highest on Facebook when compared to email and phone calls. Several participants noted that tribal use of Facebook has further solidified their dependence on Facebook as a key means for connection among their group. One participant mentioned their tribe's usage of a Facebook page to notify others of public events, and more generally, what is going on back home.

*Excerpt 10*

Our tribe, the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe does have a Facebook page. I think everybody else's tribe has a Facebook page too that you can go on to and get public notices and things like that. So it's helping to keep us informed on what's going on back home.

The creation of these supraterritioral spaces has seemed to increase as individuals move further away from each other. In many ways, it seems that social media has, in large part, led to a strengthening of culture as individuals are able to use online cultural spaces to lessen feelings of marginalization. One respondent noted that for individuals who live further away or are older and struggle a bit more with travel to tribal events, Facebook and Facebook Live have provided an opportunity for greater community engagement when they might otherwise have missed out.

*Excerpt 11*

You know, we're scattered. For example, I have to drive three hours to get to my

sister's… a lot of our communities too are a bit out of the way. On our reservation,

we have 13 communities, many of which are down by the rivers and when they are

so far away…how can they even connect? I see a lot of my older friends and stuff

who are on Facebook Live out and in some of the smaller communities and as long

as they have Wi-Fi then they can still connect.

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has perhaps expedited the creation of these online

(supraterritorial) cultural spaces, which dramatically impacts our understandings of culture as it

pertains to geography. More research needs to be done not only examining the impacts of social

media on supraterritorial cultural spaces, but the impacts of Covid-19 on culture as well.

## Conclusion

Despite overwhelming claims that global media is pushing minority cultures to the

margins of society, this research demonstrates that the true impacts of social media among

indigenous (and potentially other minority) populations are largely positive. In fact, many of the

findings put forth in this study indicate that social media is allowing for the rapid creation of

virtual cultural spaces which in turn allow for the magnification of minority cultures. The Lakota

responses to social media recorded in the course of this research are indicative of the positive

influence of social media in the lives of those who identify as a cultural minority. This is

significant—much of the research into indigenous perceptions emphasizes the negative impacts

of media on indigenous populations, inadvertently painting a group of individuals as helpless to

the consequences media usage. In reality, this research indicates that the truth is a far cry from

that. The Lakota nation has intentionally utilized social media as a tool to extend their cultural

spaces, while simultaneously preserving their culture for future generations.

Four key themes emerged from this study of Lakota social media usage. First, Lakota view social media as a tool they have a duty to utilize for good, and this in turn has led to a rapid adaption of social media platforms as a tool for change and a way to give voice to the marginalized. Second, participants unanimously spoke to the challenge of balancing social media with a deeply interpersonal culture, noting that in many ways, they still felt social media was strengthening their culture. The third finding was that social media has been utilized as a means for preserving Lakota culture and in many instances has made way for greater cultural use and access among members of Lakota tribes. Lastly, this research affirms a theory of supraterritorial cultural spaces put forth by Johnson & Callahan (2012), indicating that Lakota individuals have in large part utilized social media to create online cultural spaces, transcending more traditional understandings of culture as it relates to geo-physical spaces.

The implications of this research are far-reaching. Shuter indicated that more research was needed on the influence of socio-cultural forces on the social uses of new media within and across cultures (2012). Johnson & Callahan (2012) called for more research to be conducted in an effort to "understand the process of social media integration of global minority perspectives….focused on how other groups are utilizing social media to create cultural cyberscapes, and if these cultural usages are sustainable". This study indicated that the Lakota are utilizing social media to create cultural cyberscapes, while also taking control of the narratives about their own culture, using social media as a tool to have their own voices heard and to set the agenda. Additionally, this research demonstrates that Lakota cultural uses of social media are indeed sustainable, and in fact, are likely contributing to a stronger sense of community while also preserving key aspects of Lakota culture, for example, language.

**Directions for Future Research**

  More research needs to be done to examine the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic of indigenous culture as a whole, but also on minority social media usage as a whole. The data put forth in this study indicates that the Covid-19 pandemic may have dramatically sped up the adoption of social media among cultures that, for the most part, have been hesitant to assume. Additionally, this study demonstrates a need for further research into the ways in which the Lakota culture may utilize social media to learn about and engage with other cultures.

  This research was exploratory in nature, meaning that none of the findings can be generalized as a broad minority or social media model. As such, more studies need to examine the adoption of social media by minority groups. Further research should analyze the ways in which other minority indigenous populations in the United States have adapted social media to fit their needs.

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