No Room for Pack Rats
Media Consumption and the College Dorm

Sam Ford
with Rachel Shearer
and Parmesh Shahani, Dr. Joshua Green and Dr. Henry Jenkins
Executive Summary

The college dorm is a unique environment in which students, often limited in their financial resources, may nonetheless begin to rethink their previous media choices after being exposed to the viewing, listening, and reading habits of others. This social environment is, in fact, a key setting in which young people are exposed to brands that may influence their consumption choices for the rest of their lives.

To understand the consumption choices made in a dorm setting, cultural producers, advertisers, and scholars alike must understand the driving forces behind many of the decisions made at this pivotal point in students’ lives. This study identifies some of those trends through a focused, small-scale ethnography of one college dormitory in Boston, Massachusetts.

Observing shared cultural practices in the dorm setting and conducting in-depth interviews with a small sample of students from this dorm provides an opportunity to explore the impact shared living experiences make on the media consumption choices of college students. We are aware that each dormitory at every college around the world has its own unique culture and personality and that some of the trends identified here might be unique to American culture, Boston culture, or the particular university or dorm culture. Nevertheless, we feel that such a focused study will enhance our understanding of larger patterns in both dormitory media consumption and the media consumption of college undergraduates. Specifically, both the C3 quantitative study of media consumption and the partner study by GSD&M researchers provide additional relevant data that complements and broadens the perspectives gathered from this qualitative study.

In this study, we focus on ten students with whom we conducted in-depth interviews in their Boston dorms in the spring 2006 semester. Because we wanted to specifically analyze the transition into dormitory life and how that transition might affect media consumption, our ten selected subjects were all freshmen and sophomores, students still aware of that transition even while already assimilated in the dorm’s culture. Each of these student’s media profiles is presented in the list that follows, with an analysis of some of the major trends within this dorm setting:

1. While students often use their media exposure to connect to new ideas and learn about the world, a reverse trend is also prevalent: dorm students use their media consumption to retain ties to their past and their own cultures. For international students, this may include continued consumption of material in their native languages. For American students, media consumption may be a means of retaining common points of discussion with family and friends back home.

2. Students identify particular media platforms they are more likely to consume in a dorm setting, heavily influenced by the limited resources available to them both in terms of funds and space (for watching, listening, and reading). This study found that music is the most prevalent media form within this particular dorm, followed by television and films available through an extensive library available at the front desk.

3. In a communal setting with a lack of substantial private space for most students, peer influence becomes an essential factor influencing media consumption patterns. Many students actively or passively engage in what we call media proselytizing. These people use their fervor for favorite bands, television shows or film genres to influence others. In this study, we examine both the enjoyment students get from becoming what we call grassroots advocates for their favorite media brands, and the struggle students have defining their own identities through the media they consume while simultaneously trying to
convince others of the merits of particular properties.

4. Due to the small amount of space made available for media archiving, we look at the limits placed on collecting content. The massive popularity of DVD, CD, and bookstores suggest we live in a culture of media archivists, yet the dorm setting only allows for limited resources for archiving, especially given the lack of physical space. How do students balance this desire for media consumption and collection within the limits of a dorm setting? Specifically, we look at the way students pool resources in this dorm to better understand the way this potentially affects lifelong media consumption trends among this target demographic.

5. Finally, almost all the students we interviewed identified ways in which their media consumption has changed due to peer influence in the dormitory. Students are exposed to new cultures, new genres, and sometimes even new media platforms through the close quarters of this social setting, and almost every student noted substantial changes in their media consumption patterns.

Teenage viewers are already a targeted demographic, which led to our choosing to research this age group in the first place. Considering the vast number of young people living in dorms, understanding the changes that take place during this pivotal time in consumers’ lives is essential, not only for studying teen consumers but also for studying the development of ongoing brand loyalty and how to reach and retain consumers for media companies and advertisers alike.

In addition to these five trends, we also examine an important activity in the dorm setting: communal television viewing. In particular, we look at two very different scheduled viewing activities in the common spaces of this dorm. The social setting and viewer relationship during a communal viewing of FOX’s *House* differs drastically from the environment surrounding the regularly scheduled communal viewings of syndicated game show *Jeopardy*. Contrasting the social dynamics and relationship with the content in both viewing situations illuminates two very different modes of group media consumption. In particular, the social nature of interaction with the content of *Jeopardy* versus the hushed reverence shown toward *House* demonstrates two different modes of communication in the group setting and potentially two different reasons for gathering to watch communally.

Finally, we examine the downloading behaviors of students in the dorm setting, where media sharing is a fact of life. Students discuss in detail their relationship with media, their attitude towards copyright, and their own downloading behaviors.
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Created for MIT Convergence Culture Consortium
in partnership with Turner Broadcasting, GSD&M and MTV

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Methodology

This study examines the specific nature of media consumption in a particular Boston university’s dormitory in spring 2006. After considering dorms at multiple Boston locations, this dormitory was selected because of the willingness of the student government in the dorm to participate in the study and the open nature of its students during an initial walk-through. Researchers with the Convergence Culture Consortium visited the dormitory, observing behavior in communal settings and conducting in-depth interviews throughout the semester within the constraints of MIT’s Committee On the Use of Humans as Experimental Subjects (COUHES) requirements for studies of human subjects, and within the guidelines set by student-based government. All questions were approved by COUHES’ board before interviews began. Also, all the requests of the dormitory in question were incorporated in the study. In particular, students were concerned about revealing their own names or the name of the dormitory and even the university due to the candor of their discussion about downloading behaviors, and also due to the current prohibition environment in which individual students have been singled out in dormitory settings for violating copyrights through peer sharing and downloading.

Students living in the dorm were informed of the study through hall leaders and an e-mail list administered by the dorm’s elected leadership. Most of the students interviewed either approached the researchers with interest or were contacted through word-of-mouth. The ten students selected to be profiled in-depth came through the students’ own willingness to share their media consumption history. Participation in the study was voluntary, and no rewards were offered to those who took part. The students chosen were all freshmen and sophomores, given the study’s focus on the transition into dormitory life and its effects on media consumption.

Interviews were scheduled in the dorm and all took place in one extended sitting. Some of the interviews were audio recorded, while others were transcribed during the interview process. One graduate student, Sam
Ford, and an undergraduate assistant, Rachel Shearer, conducted the interviews and the observation sessions. While both interviewers had a common list of potential questions to guide the conversation, the questions, and their order, were not used verbatim. The questions and subsequent analysis were planned alongside the quantitative study prepared by a C3 team of researchers from MIT’s Sloan School of Management. It was distributed through GSD&M and the GSD&M ethnography conducted in Austin, Texas.
Introduction to the Dorm

The dormitory selected for this study is one of the oldest at its university, with a capacity of 358 students. The students often joke about the need for major renovations in the building, and rumors have been circulating that an overhaul is planned by the university. In the meantime, the building has certain characteristics that have remained through several generations of students. For instance, in the main lobby of the dorm, to the side of the front desk, sits a series of “old-school” arcade games: Street Fighter, Lethal Enforcers II: Gun Fighters, and Rai Den. According to the workers at the front desk, they have only seen one or two people play the games during the past few years but the constant noise of the games has become a distinctive part of the dorm’s culture.

The main lobby of the dorm is a setting people pass through to check mail but not a particular hangout, unless someone is talking with one of the fifteen students who take shifts at the front desk or who are selecting from the large selection of DVDs and VHS films behind the main desk counter. The VHS selection is bigger, built up over a number of years, and can be watched in VCRs available in many of the hall lobby television lounge areas. Most of the titles available on VHS are from the 1980s and early 1990s, as well as two-tape sets of older films such as The Godfather and Lawrence of Arabia. The smaller DVD collection includes both classic films like Bringing Up Baby and more recent popular releases such as Zoolander. VHS rentals are free to students, while DVD rentals cost $1. The basement of the main lobby area provides students with a workout area, a ping-pong table, a darkroom, work areas, and washers and dryers. Aside from use of the laundry areas, however, the rooms are not frequently used, and most time is spent in common areas in halls across the dorm.

Most of the students who approached our study with an interest in participating were male. The ten students presented here include three female and seven male students. Conversely, the quantitative study had a 71 percent female response rate, All sophomores, juniors, and seniors in the dorm have single rooms, but two-thirds of the freshmen have roommates. Students discussed the importance of having all four undergraduate levels living in the dorm, which created a more consistent history and distinctive personality for the building.
Hallways are adorned with murals painted by students, many of them depicting students’ favorite media personalities and brands, such as *The Simpsons* or *Adult Swim*. The wall murals featured in various halls are the students’ chance to put their lasting mark on the walls of the dorm, although discussion of renovation makes the students question whether the new dorms will bear any resemblance to the culture that used to inhabit their building.

What follows is a media profile for the ten students focused on in the study. Each will be listed using a pseudonym, but the names of media preferences and backgrounds have not been altered. The categories identified in each profile are listed in order of most discussed media products.
Mei-Ling

Gender: Female

From: Lexington, Mass. Family is from Malaysia.

Status: Sophomore

Print Media: I grew up on Reader’s Digest and like to flip through National Geographic, but if I can get my hands on The New York Times, I like to read that. When I go home on the weekends, I will usually flip through the Times. I usually read the front page, the op-ed, the sports page and then do the crossword puzzle. I like to go to the Times Web site to look for content, too. I don’t have a lot of books with me here. I was kind of sad the other day when I wanted to pull out a book for pleasure to read, and the best book I have for this situation is a math book. I used to read Agatha Christie all the time in middle school, but reading her that much ruined mystery novels for me. Now, I like Jane Austen.

Film: I watch two movies a week, usually from a friend’s library or the front desk here. I go to the theater to see one or two movies a year, if I really have an interest in seeing it or my friends are going. All the stars have to align first because I have to travel to go to the theater, and it’s expensive. Last year’s project on my hall was to get me exposed to lots of movies. One of my hallmates made a Web site of a movie database, and it has all the movies from Top 250 or Top 500 lists and all the movies that people who live on the hall or that the front desk owns. Last year, I had seen 88 movies out of this list of 3,000. Now, I’m up to 200 movies or so. I also liked I Not Stupid, a film about surviving the Singapore school system.

Music: My friends have started a project now to educate me about music because I was in a bubble for a long time except for a brief stint in eighth grade when I listened to late 90s pop. My friend has burned me a lot of CDs that I listen to now, and another friend gave me a lot of music to download onto my computer.

Television: I don’t watch TV much unless I’m in my friend’s room. I stay pretty on top of America’s Next Top Model and Survivor right now, so I watch reality television. Some people on my floor own Futurama and Family Guy on DVD, so I’ve watched a lot of those. One of my friends has Frasier on DVD, so I watch that in her room. I watch football, college basketball and the baseball playoffs when they are on. It’s hard to grow up in New England and not care at all about sports. (Others in the dorm) think it’s hilarious when I put a football game on in the lounge and bring my knitting. That’s how I grew up, though.

DVDs Owned: Finding Nemo and March of the Penguins, both of which are back home.

Video Games: I’ve played video games like three or four times in my life.
James

Gender: Male

From: Lexington, Ky.

Status: Freshman

Music: Music in general is (the media form) I am identified with. The post-grunge group Soul Coughing and the trip hop group Massive Attack are my favorites, and I like Radiohead as well. Radiohead is prolific, the forerunners to a lot of the modern alternative avant-garde music. I first heard Soul Coughing when they had a song on The X-Files. I’ve been a fan of Massive Attack for three or four years now, and Soul Coughing for about six years. I also like the Beatles and Jim Croce, who conjure up my childhood, and Twopenny Hangover, a local band from West Lafayette, Ind., where I grew up. I also like Thievery Corporation, a group that does world fusion.

CDs: I have somewhere around fifty purchased CDs and brought less than ten here with me. Those ten are either so sufficiently rare that it was hard to find the music elsewhere or else I enjoyed it so much that I was willing to give up the extra money for a perfect audio copy. The most recent album I bought was from a band who was at a campus event, which was not available elsewhere, as far as I can tell.

The Internet: I listen to a lot of music and read a lot of text on the Internet. I BitTorrent television shows about once a month, usually a whole series at a time. I don’t generally watch movies or listen to the radio or read the newspaper. I like digital music and digital text. I read Wikipedia a lot, and the site Everything Too for the lighter things. And I go to Slashdot and Google News regularly.

Books: I do like books, the physical book. I like the way they feel. I read technical books online, but as for novels, I either check them out of the library or I buy them. I buy the novels that I like the most or that interest me more, and the other stuff I get from the library. I have 50 to 100 books in my room here. I slimmed down a lot of the fictional material since I don’t generally re-read things, but I bought all my favorite novels that I might want to read again.

Television: I followed Lost pretty closely but caught up to real time and didn’t want to have to grab them as they come out, so I’m going to let them pool up for a while, and then I’ll grab them all. I downloaded all the Freakazoid animated cartoon from the Kids WB, which they don’t even sell DVDs for, and I downloaded Clone High, an animated series from MTV that was cancelled.

Movies: I don’t generally purchase DVDs. I go to the movies once every couple of months, if it’s something that I think will be particularly good on the big screen or something that I want to go see with other people. Donnie Darko is the only DVD I have, but it’s one of my favorite movies.
Luis

Gender: Male

From: Loredo, Texas

Status: Sophomore

**Apple and iPod:** I’m a Mac person, so if I was gonna get a music player, it would be an iPod. The first iPod I bought was a Shuffle. I hated the wire headphones, so wireless headphones seemed really awesome. That’s when I switched to the Mini. My freshman year of high school, I talked my dad into getting me my first Mac, an iBook. I really loved it, and I’ve been a Mac person ever since. When I’m talking on AIM and someone says their file won’t go through, I’ll ask them what compute they’re using. “Windows.” “Okay…I see why.” And then I talk about the goodness of Macs. But a lot of people are using Macs these days.

**Anime:** I started watching *Howl’s Moving Castle* the other day in the lounge between classes. Within ten minutes, I had five people watching the movie with me. I used to watch a lot of anime, but my consumption has declined exponentially because of theater productions. I used to watch *Bleach* and *Naruto* religiously every week, but I don’t think I’ve downloaded any episodes in the last six months. I get my anime from BitTorrent. It’s not licensed in the United States. I started watching anime when my friends back home introduced me to it. They were big on *Love Hina* and *His and Her Circumstances*. I’d have parties, and they’d come over and bring all the anime they had. And we’d just watch it. I started out with *InuYasha*, which is a good introduction to anime because it’s on the Cartoon Network.

**The Internet:** AIM is my primary tool of communication, but I didn’t use it at all until I got here. I only used to use MSN and Yahoo, but now I only use AIM. Facebook only recognizes AIM, and the Facebook community is so huge. I needed to get in contact with someone, sadly enough, I would either e-mail them or check their Facebook and then see if they had an AIM screen name.

**Books:** I’m a big *Harry Potter* fan and collect Slytherin paraphernalia. I knitted a sock for my iPod in Slytherin colors and made a Quidditch costume that I wore to the last book premiere.

**Television:** I watched a lot more television in high school than I have in college. I watch *House* regularly. I try to watch it when it’s on, but I had a meeting when it aired this week, and my friend has a TV/VCR recorder combo. She recorded it, and we all watched it after the fact. We old-fashioned, old-school recorded it.

**Movies:** I love Don Hertzfeldt’s *Rejected.*
Shawn

Gender: Male

From: Jamestown, N.Y.

Status: Sophomore

Music: I am a ska fan. Someone suggested Less Than Jake and Rancid to me when I was in eighth grade. It started there, and just through finding out what labels they were on and the other bands that were on that label, I discovered a lot of stuff. I got some of my friends into it after a while, and that’s how we ended up having a band. Neil Diamond and ABBA are the two things I’m listening to most now, and I don’t know if there’s a lot of people here who are into that. I like oldies because I used to listen to them on the radio when I was a kid. I mean like the golden oldies, 50s and 60s stuff. Some do-wop. On my hall, we have a music server that you can queue up songs with, and it plays in the lounges and all the bathrooms. That’s a group music type thing. I like to use Pandora, which is like a database where you can build radio stations starting with a band as a search, and it will play some songs by them and then songs by similar bands. Then you can, within those, add songs to a favorites list or tell it to play more songs like it or not to play songs like it in the future. I don’t know any other people who use it, but it could be used as a place for other people to see what music I like. But I went there primarily to find oldies, so it’s not the stuff I always listen to.

Movies: I made every effort to see all the Star Wars movies on their opening night, but I don’t do that for any other movies. If they are playing a movie in the hall and send an e-mail out, if I have time, and it’s not a movie I’ve seen a million times, I’ll go and watch it. I took a film class my first semester here, and it had been my first exposure to film as anything more than just entertainment. Since I was in that class, I watch a lot of older stuff, like Robert Altman films and Taxi Driver. I like the Seventies “anti-hero” type thing. I also like Wes Anderson films and Lord of the Rings. I also like a lot of the comic book films that have been coming out over the past few years. My favorite of them was Sin City. The whole aesthetic was totally like a comic book.

The X-Men: I liked the X-Men movies. I had a few comic books when I was younger, but I was never a collector or an avid reader. I watched the X-Men cartoon when I was younger. I actually downloaded the first three seasons this semester, and then I ordered a subscription to a new X-Men comic called The Astonishing X-Men since then. And I went on eBay and got all of the old issues. I don’t think anyone else on my hall, or anyone that I know of here, reads comic books.

Television: I used to watch Gilmore Girls when I was in high school. But then I missed a lot of episodes in a row. I tried starting to watch 24 because a lot of people said it was really good, but I always forget to watch it. I could see myself watching the DVDs more because then you could just watch five episodes in a row.

Print Media: I just started getting Rolling Stone a month ago, and I’ve been reading about bands in there and then going to the bands’ Web sites.
Nikolai

Gender: Male

From: Baltimore, Md.

Status: Sophomore

Internet: I'm pretty heavily reliant on the Internet. I like to use MyTunes and Redux and things like that. I like going to the CNN and MSNBC Web pages.

Music: I listen to The Strokes, Led Zeppelin, The Beatles, The Pixies, Portishead, The Rolling Stones, Blonde Redhead, but The Who is part of my identity. Everyone who knows me knows I am a Who fan. Before I came to [college], I was the classic rock guy. Now my music tastes have diversified. I listen to music through my laptop or use my guitar amp.

CDs: 60 percent of the music on my laptop I also have on CD, but everything has been transferred to my computer. I brought my CDs with me as well.

Television: There were summers where I was a TV junkie, but that has died off. I watch 24. My girlfriend records it on VHS. I used to follow House as well. While I feel compelled to watch 24 because every episode ties in strongly, House is not tied in as strong, so I am not as compelled to keep up with it. I started watching these show when I came here. I still like to watch things I used to watch at home, but I don't get some of the programming here, for instance Comedy Central. Most of the viewing is determined by what most of the other people want to watch in the lounge.

Print Media: I have a small book collection here. I am a big fan of Kurt Vonnegut and J.D. Salinger, but most of my books are technical reading right now. I like to read for fun and prefer reading to watching movies. I think it gives a lot more freedom to the imagination. In my youth, I was a big fan of Garfield and Calvin and Hobbes. I have read every single Calvin and Hobbes book. I also get Home Power Magazine, Scientific American, Chemical and Engineering News, and I used to read Newsweek on a regular basis. And I like The Economist.

DVDs owned: The Indiana Jones trilogy, Back to the Future, Yellow Submarine, and Crash. I have a very small DVD collection with 10 or 11 DVDs, but I took it back home over the summer and forgot to bring it back. I also have The Who concerts on DVD.

Movies: I go a maximum of once a month to the theater but probably only five or six times a year. I am pretty picky about movies, and I only want to see things that either make me think or offer a new perspective. I don't want to commit my time to something and then not come out of it with anything substantial. I liked The Constant Gardener, and I like Fight Club and Dogma, too.

Video Games: I used to play a lot of Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. I was kind of a junkie, but it faded out. I just got bored with it.
Anna

Gender: Female

From: Chicago, Ill.  Originally from Russia

Status: Freshman

Television: I watch 24, Prison Break, Gilmore Girls, and ER. I watch House on occasion in the lounge, but I don’t catch it every week. If I forget to record something, I will BitTorrent it. I BitTorrent video about twice a week. Otherwise, I record it because I don’t have time to watch it when it’s on, and I don’t like to watch commercials. That’s the nice thing about downloading, because it is usually edited, but I prefer to record it and watch it on my television. I have a combo VCR/DVD player in my room. We also watch Law and Order as a group. Generally, if nothing else is on, we flip to Law and Order. I also like to watch Russian television.

DVDs: There are a lot of movies in the lounge that we watch. I don’t own any on VHS and have a few DVDs, but I usually rent movies from the desk. I have about 20 DVDs, but most of them are at home. Here, I have 10 Things I Hate About You, Shrek 2, and Napoleon Dynamite that I brought with me, and I have purchased Love Actually and Pride and Prejudice since I’ve been here. I have the first two seasons of Family Guy here, and I have 24 on DVD at home. When my financial situation improves a little more, I plan to collect more DVDs.

Music: I listen to a lot of music, but most of it is through my Dell laptop. About once every two weeks, I will download five or six discographies off BitTorrent. I like having complete collections of artists. I have about 50 or 60 CDs, but they are all older. I stopped buying CDs about two years ago, and I have about 30 gigs of music on my computer now, including everything from all my CDs. I got a new iPod at the beginning of this year. I like to listen to The Strokes, Barenaked Ladies, The Beatles, Third Eye Blind, Eve Six, and The Red Hot Chili Peppers. I was born in Russia, and I speak Russian, so I also listen to 70s and 80s Russian rock music. I listen to Russian music a couple of days a month or so. I listen to it more when I’m home because my parents also listen to it.

Movies: I go to the on-campus theater a few times a month. During the summer, I go to the movies a lot. I generally see Hollywood mainstream movies in the theater more than anyone else. I don’t have a favorite genre. It just depends on who I am going with. I saw V for Vendetta in the theater recently.

Books: Most of my books are at home, but I have a lot of John Grisham books here, as well as my favorite Ernest Hemingway novel and J.D. Salinger’s Catcher in the Rye. I like to buy books I’ve already read because I like them a lot. I also own a couple of Calvin and Hobbes books.
Mahamati

Gender: Male

From: Pune, India

Status: Freshman

Music: I brought about my entire music collection with me on five or six CDs and two or three DVDs. I also store music on my MP3 player. But I don't need to download music usually because the dorm has a network that gives us access to each other's music. I listen to a decent amount of streamed music online as well from sites like raga.com. I am a big fan of Bollywood music and Indian classical music. One of the artists I am definitely a fan of is A.R. Rahman. Almost anyone who is Indian is a fan of his. I play a type of Indian drum called tabla, so I am a fan of some particular tabla artists who are pretty well known in India, such as Zakir Hussain and (Ahmedjan) Thirakwa. I am a big fan of Indian music used for theater and musicals. I have recently become a fan of Machine Supremacy, and I like the music of U2 and some punk rock bands like Yellow Card. I also like Afro Celt Sound System.

Print Media: I read campus magazines and like to get my hands on The New York Times and read it every once in a while. I have a pretty big book collection at home, but I only brought a couple with me, such as Richard Bach's One. I've read five or six books since I've been here, like Dorian Gray and some math and political science books.

Internet: I like reading a lot about new or politics. I visit a lot of newspaper sites. I'm also interested in journals like India Review online, as well as Slashdot and CNN's Web site or The New York Times Web site. I also usually visit The Times of India.

Television: I probably watch less than the average person here. At home in India, I would mostly watch sports like cricket, but I can't watch it here because they don't air it. There weren't any particular shows that I followed before, but that's changed since I came here. I watch The Daily Show with Jon Stewart at least three or four times a week, and I used to watch The Colbert Report, too. I watch some group viewings of anime and The Family Guy.

Movies: Since I've been here, I've been twice to the actual cinema. I went to see Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire and a Bollywood film called Rang de Basanti. The first was a group outing, and I tagged along because I was bored of doing work. The second was actually a pretty well-planned outing with my sister, who goes to school here too. We went with some of my friends from back home. Usually, if I see a cool movie is playing on the hall, I sit down and watch it. I have rented from the front desk as well, and lots of people come here with their DVD collections, so I borrow some. I have a pretty good collection at home, but I don't have any here. I probably watch a movie about once a week.
Adam

Gender: Male

From: Bronx, N.Y.

Status: Freshman

Movies: I like large Hollywood films. I understand that they are not very artistic, but I like to be entertained. I like a lot of action or good comedy. As far as older films go, I really liked Some Like It Hot and His Girl Friday. And I think Charlie Chaplin is funny. My favorite films are The Matrix, The Big Lebowski, Boondock Saints, Gladiator, and stupid comedies.

What I Look for in Movies: I guess I like good action, so if something looks like it has good action and is well done, I would like to see it. I don’t see movies just because of a director or an actor, but I guess there are directors that do specifically good movies...like, [Steven] Spielberg is very good and [James] Cameron is very good. It’s more that I trust that they would pick a good movie to do rather than just seeing it for them. I try to find out about movies beforehand and see if they sound interesting. I don’t care about media hype. I usually don’t care what critics say because I usually disagree with them. But I just basically read about the films before and watch the trailers, and I guess that’s really what makes me want to see them.

Television: That thing is evil. I rarely work without the TV on. My favorite shows are Entourage and Off Centre. Off Centre was only on for a year and a half, but it’s from the guys who made American Pie. It stars Finch. It was on the WB in 2002, when I was in high school. They actually had a good show, it was weird. I found [downloaded] the first season in French, but that doesn’t help me. So I only have the second season. They cancelled it halfway into the second season. I think it was like number two on the list of “Worst Shows for Families” or something...” Also, my friends and I watched both seasons of Dark Angel earlier this year.

Current Television Favorites: I guess I stick to FOX, but they upset me a lot. I watch it because they have some of the best shows, but they upset me because they always cancel them and put on reality shows. They pick up really good shows, but then a lot of the time they get rid of them and then just put on reality crap instead. I don’t really like reality shows. I kill myself if I miss an episode of 24. I’ve never missed an episode. There’s really nothing on Monday nights that would keep me from it. Even if I have a test the next day, it’s just an hour. I was considering scheduling my classes around it. I felt bad admitting that, but it’s true.
Emily

From: Perry, Ohio

Status: Sophomore

Television: I watch House. We constantly have Law and Order on in the lounge. It’s the only thing on campus cable that’s on all the time that’s worth watching. 24 is also consistently popular. I tried to get into 24, but I missed like two episodes, and I’m like, “I’m so out of the loop, it’s not worth catching up.” House is not a show that you have to watch every episode. It’s pretty easy to figure out what angst happened in the last episode because it’s always like maybe ten minutes max of that stuff.

Movies: We rent mostly from the desk, actually. We watched a lot of movies last year. We exhausted most of the desk. I think desk is a little bit behind with getting new movies, because it’s kind of hard to keep up with the volume that comes out. But it’s pretty current. I also work at the campus theater and get in free. In high school I didn’t really keep current. But I’ve been trying much harder to actually watch movies that come out. I saw V for Vendetta two or three times right after it came out because it was so good. If it’s something that’s been hyped up a lot, like X-Men, we go out into the city to the movies. Usually, it’s a large group that does that. I went to a midnight showing of the Chronicles of Narnia and to the sneak preview of Harry Potter. I like comic book movies and weird stuff like Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.

Music: I like indie music and ambient electronic. I’m not too good at keeping track of what genre is what except for indie. All of my CDs from home had been transferred into electronic form, ‘cause I had a lot from early high school before I had good Internet.

Anime: In high school, my friends were really into it. I like Chobits and Lain. The rest, I don’t consume that much. I have a lot sitting on my computer but I haven’t watched it. Compared to most people who have anything to do with anime, I’m not very into it. For most people, you’re either really into it or just kind of “meh.”

Video Games: We kind of go in phases. Katamari was huge last year and at the beginning of this year because the new one came out. We ended up getting a million roses at the end of the game, which was kind of crazy. The other one is Star Wars, but I don’t play that. The only video game that I’ve ever really played is Soul Calibur. Occasionally people play old stuff, like really old Zelda stuff. Soul Calibur is the game I’ve played most ever.

DVDs: I have about five DVDs and that’s it. At home, I did not have a DVD player until my junior year of high school, and it’s kind of an expensive thing to accumulate DVDs so I never did. I bought Garden State because I was completely obsessed with the movie. I watched it in theaters a bunch of times, and I was like “I might as well buy it.” And I bought Spirited Away and Princess Mononoke just because I thought they were amazing and I knew I’d want to watch them in the future.
Rick

Gender: Male

From: South Bristol, Maine

Status: Sophomore

Music: I listen to music frequently, but I don’t listen to a wide variety of music. I generally listen to music on my computer, although I sometimes play CDs in the lounge stereo. The main four bands that I listen to are ZOX, The Grift, Iron Maiden, and a Swedish group called Machine Supremacy. I also like Dispatch. The Grift and ZOX would best be described as funk, while Iron Maiden and Machine Supremacy are metal or hard rock. ZOX, The Grift, and Dispatch all played at my high school, and I continue to follow them. Seeing a band in concert definitely deepens your relationship, cements your relationship with them, or at least is very significant. I have liked Green Day for a long time. I’m not particularly a fan, but I like them. Never gone out of my way to listen to their music but saw them in concert last year and really enjoyed the concert. Surprisingly, I didn’t purchase their music and don’t listen to it, and I don’t even have it downloaded. But I do advocate for them occasionally.

Internet: Most of my media engagement is online, especially in terms of news. I don’t generally use BitTorrent, but I do use the collective media storage program we have here. I also follow about five Web comics that are all updated weekly or three times a week, like Penny Arcade, Ctrl+Alt+Del, and MacHall.com. I also like to visit BBC News and Wired.com.

Television: Usually, I watch Jeopardy every day in a group setting. I went to private boarding school for high school, so I have lived in a dorm for six years. I watched more TV in high school than I do now, though.

Books: I always try to have one book that I’m reading. I always like to have the physical book. Historically, I generally owned books because my mother was a librarian, and I was able to acquire books easily. That’s still the case sometimes, but I will take books out of the library here now if I’m looking for something in particular. I generally read science fiction.

DVDs: I do have a few DVDs here. Most of the DVDs I have were gifts, but I did buy a couple in high school. The DVDs are all movies I would watch again—Lord of the Rings, Platoon, and The Shawshank Redemption, for instance. I don’t see myself wanting to buy a movie and watch it one time. Most of the movies I watch are stuff rented from the front desk. Or something someone else might have a DVD of every once in a while. Pretty much everything that I own is here.
Transplanted Roots: Using Media to Connect with the Past

Students use media consumption to help retain a connection to their high school lives and to the people they had to leave behind to attend college. For the majority of these students, entering the dorm environment is also the first time they have lived away from home. While students may pick up new media during their time at college, they also hold even more tightly to some of the media that represents the culture and the people they are leaving.

Family Connections

Several of the students we interviewed demonstrated a strong desire to maintain practices they began with their family. Take, for instance, Mei-Ling’s reading of The New York Times. While she mentioned her desire to stay well-informed, her primary interest in reading the Times seemed to be that it was a family tradition. In her interview, Mei-Ling said, “Our family had a brief stint of switching to The Boston Globe, but that made my siblings and me unhappy, so our family switched back promptly. We have been subscribing to The Times since I was in the fifth or sixth grade.” Similarly, James continues to watch Lost and discuss it with his sister, who got him hooked on the show during a family vacation. Emily described her love for House developing after she came home for Thanksgiving break her freshman year and her mom introduced her to the medical program. “She knows that I’m into medicine and that kind of thing and I’m sarcastic all the time, so she’s like, ‘You’ll totally love this!’” Meanwhile, Shawn continues following The Gilmore Girls because he watched the show with his sisters, and they continue watching it now that he’s moved to the Boston area. “I wanted to keep up on it so I could keep talking about what’s going on with the Gilmores in conversations with my sisters,” he said.

Anna was most pronounced about this strong connection to her family in describing her dedicated taping of both 24 and The Gilmore Girls, as well as her musical tastes. She said that her parents first got her involved in 24, that she has been hooked ever since and that she now has her boyfriend watching the program with her. Watching The Gilmore Girls provided a particularly bonding experience with her mother - “My mother
said it was garbage and then watched it one time and liked the show, so we started watching it as a family.” Her love of The Beatles was cultivated by her grandmother, and her continued interest in the Barenaked Ladies is helped, in part, by her sister’s love of the group. For Anna, cut off from her life in Chicago, these properties are important tools for communicating with her family.

Using Music to Stay Connected to the Past

Two students identified their love of certain music with the fact the performers were from their past, whether they were actually from the town they grew up in or had performed in the area. James, for instance, continues to follow the band Two Penny Hangover, a local group from West Lafayette, Ind., where he grew up. Rick’s love for independent bands like ZOX, The Grift, and Dispatch are all tied to his memories from high school, where all three bands came to perform. “All those shows were small, and I spoke to the band members personally after them,” he said. Meanwhile, Mei-Ling cherishes CDs of a cappella groups from her high school that she listens to regularly.

Several students also mentioned their media consumption alongside relationships with friends they grew up with and who are, since high school graduation, absent from their lives. Nikolai was in a band with a friend in high school who has now formed a new band. He said they still get together and discuss music when he goes back home for breaks. Similarly, Shawn’s relationship with ska music developed because of his recruiting several other friends from high school to start listening to the music and then to develop a band. He said one of those friends still forms a powerful influence on his media consumption. “My one friend, in his AIM profile, has a thing that displays what song he’s currently listening to. And I just take stuff from there, sometimes, as recommendations because I trust what he likes.”

The Diaspora

Most of the international students interviewed said they also continue to consume properties that remind them of either the country they left or, for the second-generation members of diasporas, of their family’s heritage. Mei-Ling, who grew up in nearby Lexington, Mass., said that she continues to watch Malaysian films to stay connected with the culture her family came from. “If I brought it to the hall and had other people watch it, they wouldn’t get it. They wouldn’t appreciate it, not even as much as I do, and I don’t understand it as much as my parents do,” she said. Similarly, Anna, who grew up in Chicago, said that her love of 1970s and 1980s Russian rock music comes from the fact that she was born in Russia and that her family are members of a Russian diaspora. She said that her consumption of Russian music and television increases on her visits home, where this genre is a staple in her parents’ lives.

Most pronounced in the importance of media to stay connected to one’s home culture was Mahamati, the only student interviewed who recently relocated to America from another country. Mahamati discussed his love of classical Indian music and Bollywood music in great detail, driven by his lifelong experience playing the music. Mahamati said Indian classical music leaves a ‘residue’ with him that outlives the short-term enjoyment of most modern pop music. “If I were to not go back to India, I believe that I would probably end up even more attached to this music because it’s one of the things that reminds me of home.”

Pop Cosmopolitanism

In his essay in Globalization: Culture and Education in the New Millennium, Henry Jenkins writes about the concept of pop cosmopolitanism. Jenkins uses the concept to examine two cultural forces that influence
the movement of international media products into the American market — the fan (which Jenkins calls
*otaku*, after American fans of Japanese anime) and the immigrant (which Jenkins calls *desi*, after South Asian
immigrants who helped popularize Bollywood and forms of Asian music in American culture). The concept
most aptly describes the *otaku*: pop cosmopolitanism describes the exposure of these fans to new cultures
and a greater diversity of content. For instance, Rick’s love of Swedish band Machine Supremacy, James’s
listening to Thievery Corporation, and the viewing of anime mentioned by five subjects, are all examples of
the way that fans incorporate content from other cultures. In other words, Jenkins rejects the notion that
globalization is the Americanizing of the world but instead finds that “the trans-cultural flows of popular
culture inspire new forms of global consciousness and cultural competency” (117).

This use of staying connected to one’s past through media content helps facilitate pop cosmopolitanism, even
if the process seems to run counter to the idea of ‘cosmopolitanism.’ In other words, this process of staying
connected to one’s past when students enter a dorm environment makes pop cosmopolitanism possible
because the *desi*, whether international or not, must share content from their culture for others to become
fans of it. In other words, there can be no *otaku* without many of these same people acting as grassroots
advocates for culture from their past. Their relationship with this content connects them with their past, but
sharing the content with other people helps develop new relationships with these media products.

This is implied in Mahamati’s discussion of the relationship with his music. He feels he is known within
the dorm for the Indian music he consumes but is also simultaneously sharing with others. This experience
personifies the relationship between *desi* and *otaku*. The *otaku* may be the “pop cosmopolitans,” but they
cannot be exposed to these products from other cultures without the *desi*, acting as proselytizers — an activity
expanded in a later section of this paper. Simultaneously, *desi* act as *otaku* themselves when encountering
products brought by other students, whether international or from various parts of America. As the trends
noted here imply, pop cosmopolitanism works well as a concept for understanding not only the spread of
global culture but also the interaction of American students from across the country in the dorm setting.
Music and Television: A Media Hierarchy in the Dorm Setting

All the students interviewed indicated particular types of media were more suited to the dorm setting, a fact that affected the platforms they used most often. Personal media like music were the most widespread use of media in the dorm because the resources to consume them were the easiest to attain or most frequently at hand (namely an MP3 player or computer). Music is also popular in dorms because it is particularly suited to a phenomenon identified in the GSD&M partner study: multitasking. For students in this age group with busy college schedules, any media able to be consumed in tandem alongside other (often several) activities, gains favor; students are often downloading, listening to music, and doing homework simultaneously.

Since personal televisions are not the norm in this dormitory, television and film viewing are shaped by what is readily available at the dorm and the shared viewing interests of the hall when only public resources are made available. Due to the availability of high-speed Internet, many students identified the growing importance of downloading and online consumption as well, especially for some students who had not had access to a high-speed connection prior to moving to college. Some students demonstrated holding onto their love of the physical book and other print media, but much of this consumption has shifted to the library or other means of acquiring books because of the lack of archive space available in dorm rooms for book collections. The quantitative study identifies the increasing importance of reading on the Web as compared to physical reading materials, with subjects in that study identifying online text as the most important type of reading in their lives.

One thing to keep in mind, though, is that this report of consumption is based on students’ own self-reporting. As the GSD&M partner study reveals with cellular phones, students often do not even think about some of the media platforms that have become central to their lives because their use has become so transparent. Also, the quantitative study being released by C3 finds four categories of viewers: untethered viewers (who want all content to be available at any time in multiple platforms), Internet techies, traditional
sports fans, and special events watchers (who want to watch particular programs when they are broadcast). In the dorm setting, only one of the ten subjects of this study identified themselves as a sports fan, and both sports fans and special events watchers are much less likely to be active consumer types in a dorm because of the constraints put on television viewing. It is not surprising, then, that the majority of the students in this dormitory environment would fall into the categories of ‘untethered viewers’ and especially ‘Internet techies,’ considering the great restraints placed on traditional platform consumption and the ready availability of high-speed Internet on most college campuses. As discussed in the quantitative study, untethered viewers and Internet techies are the most prevalent media consumers among this age group, with the idea of content freed from temporality being a recent concept with the advent of widespread timeshifting in the 1980s that has only continued to grow.

**Music**

About half of the students interviewed said that they would be most identified by others in the dorm by the types of music they listen to. Music was clearly identified as the most important type of media consumption in the dorm setting, and people most often identified their favorite media types as their favorite bands. Mahamati said his continued consumption of various types of Indian music is noticed by anyone around his room and has helped establish his identity and the connection he has with his native culture. According to Mahamati, downloading some of his favorite artists is not possible due to a lack of high-speed Internet in India, so he relies on digital streaming to listen to his music. James likewise claimed his favorite eclectic bands, such as Soul Coughing and Massive Attack, have helped establish his identity within the dormitory. Likewise, Rick’s love of Swedish-based Machine Supremacy popped up not only in his interview but various others’ as well, some of whom had been convinced by Rick to start listening to the music as well.

Nikolai pointed out that listening to music is the easiest type of media interaction to fit in to a hectic college schedule. “Music is much more passive, so you don’t have to devote attention to it,” he said. “I can listen to music while I am doing work and surfing the Internet, so it doesn’t require that much attention.” This ease of use helps to explain the strong reliance on music consumption and the intense focus on shared music networks or a love for the iPod, as demonstrated by Luis in his media profile above. Further, Adam’s mention of Pandora and Shawn’s discussion of his hall’s server are further demonstrations of how the dorm environment is uniquely equipped to facilitate music sharing and the dominance of music consumption. In comparison with the quantitative study, it seems that the particular dorm environment studied here finds a more pronounced interest in music, largely because the restraints of a dorm room makes listening to music easier than watching television, as many students do not have televisions in their rooms and must watch the consensus programming in common areas.

**Television and Film**

Communal use of the television area helps influence media consumption considerably. Regular scheduled viewings of favorite television programs—such as *24*, *House*, *Law and Order*, and *Jeopardy*—shape preferences throughout the dorm. Also, the films and television programs available to students through the front desk or from fellow students greatly affect what these people watch, considering that most students do not have the funds or means of transportation to visit the movie theater often. As the corresponding quantitative study indicates, theater viewing is far more important to the age group at large than to those particularly living in the dorm setting because of the limited resources and travel abilities of many students. Downloading television is also pronounced in the college dorm setting, as indicated by the quantitative study, which identifies the importance of broadcasting to the majority of viewers and the large disparity
between watching video content online versus when it is broadcast. Again, students in the dorm setting have to alter their behavior both because of the limits of most campus cable networks and the required social negotiation of communal televisions.

For instance, Mei-Ling discussed her love of sports and her struggle to fit in sports viewing on the hall television. She said that she usually watched games on Sunday afternoons, when other students were generally sleeping in after late nights on Saturday or else involved in other activities. Nikolai said that his entire viewing preference changed because of the limited availability of some programming and the need to negotiate for anything to be watched in the common areas. “Most of my viewing is decided by what most of the other people want to watch in the lounge,” he said.

Anna and Emily were most outspoken about the media consumption relationship in the communal viewing areas. Anna owns her own television and combination DVD/VCR player in her room, which is where she keeps up with the shows she follows regularly. She is set apart from almost every other student interviewed by her ability to have complete control over what she watches. Several of her friends take advantage of her VCR, having her tape programs for them. Meanwhile, Emily said that she had a friend who loved The O.C. but could only watch it in her own room because the majority of the people in the hall were opposed to the program. Conversely, she described a female student in the dorm who insisted on watching professional wrestling regularly and was not willing to compromise if she had gotten to the television first and had already started viewing the program.

The Internet

Almost every student detailed the importance the Internet has had in profoundly changing his or her relationship with the media. For instance, the prevalence of discussion of musical tastes in most of the interviews was most shaped by the fact that music is the most easily consumed and shared media platform in a dormitory setting, especially based on the internal sharing network available to students. Nikolai said he was a television junkie before coming to school but that he’s now reliant on the Internet instead. “I like having a wireless connection around or finding a hotspot somewhere to read the news, check some of my favorite sites or to be able to use the shared networks,” he said. The majority of students described some history with downloading, and several students discussed the internal network that allows for sharing within the dorm.

The capacity of digital storing and downloading has led to a declining emphasis on the physical collecting of CDs and DVDs by the majority of dorm residents. Many, such as Anna, discussed their desire to collect and archive material at some point in the future when their budget and their physical space would allow for maintaining such collections. Also, although the only instances where discussion of online social networking tools occurred in this study focused on continuing relationships within the dormitory through sites like Facebook. GSD&M’s discussions with subjects in the company’s partner ethnography indicates a social paradox in which online tools helps students stay more socially connected while conversely keeping them from forming personal connections to those in the same physical space. Their study also demonstrates the widespread influence of user-generated content on both the consumption and creative processes of being a fan and a consumer.
Proselytizing: Media Missionary Work in the Dorm

The dorm setting provides a particularly strong place for the work of grassroots advocates, the fans who become willing marketers for their favorite brands and media content. Because of the tightly enclosed social setting, peer influence is widespread in the dorm room. Human beings have an inherent desire to share pleasures and knowledge, and this sometimes drives a fervor to promote one’s favorite media content, stretching beyond occasional advocacy to become proselytizing. This proselytizing can be accomplished either through direct address or, as with religious practice, by allowing one’s own life to serve as an example of consuming and enjoying media, with the hope that this consumption will attract the attention of others.

Peer Influence: Follow the Leader

While these students do not have the desire to preach the superiority of their favorite bands or films to others, they let their own enjoyment of the media do the talking. For instance, Mahamati said that he does not listen to his music in hopes of recruiting others but doesn’t mind if others join in. “Usually, I don’t talk about music with people except occasionally when they ask me what I am listening to, or if I hear or come across a new type of music I haven’t heard before,” he said. For Mahamati, one of the benefits of consumption in the dorm environment is the educational experience it provides, along with the opportunity to learn about other music; he sees it as his role to provide further information to those who want to learn more about traditional Indian music. This passive role of sharing media is most prevalent in the music culture, where the tight quarters of the dormitory cause people to have no choice on many occasions but to listen to other people’s media choices.

The Conversion Experience

Not all examples of proselytizing rely on such passive methods, however. Others engage very directly in a recruitment process. When Emily’s mother convinced her to become a House fan over Thanksgiving break, she returned prepared to convert others as well. “I was like, ‘We have to start watching this,’ and everyone started,” she recalled. “I’ll tell people about stuff if I know they are interested in similar genres or things like
that. A lot of people come in my room, and I’m playing music pretty much constantly, so they are like, ‘Oh, this is awesome! What are you playing?’”

Luis recounts what happens when he and a friend break out in random lines from Donald Hertzfeld’s Rejected: “We’ll say, ‘I’m the queen of France!’ and people will be like, ‘What the hell are you talking about?’ And we’ll be like, ‘Have you not seen Rejected?’ And so we immediately begin to show it to them, and they’ll think it’s amusing. They have to see it. They’re missing out.” Luis said he often has the same impulses regarding his love of the Apple brand as well.

Recruitment

Adam said he is known for introducing new media content to his circle of friends, particularly in asking them to “sit and watch” something he’s already seen. He is particularly active in proselytizing for the television programs such as Entourage and Off Centre. Shawn said that his success recruiting people to listen to ska in high school has carried over to college as well, where he likes introducing other people to his favorite music.

James said his love of Radiohead and Massive Attack came through the recruitment efforts of friends. Now, he gets enjoyment out of recruiting others: “I really like sharing my music recommendations with people or giving them music and telling them that I think they should listen to. I get to hear it for the first time again, vicariously, through them.” Although he denies having any direct interest in “spreading the good word,” to use his phrase, James said he never hesitates to offer someone a chance to know Massive Attack or Soul Coughing if the opportunity presents itself.

Losing One’s Status as “The Chosen People”

James is a convert himself, influenced by Rick’s recruitment efforts, and is now listening to Machine Supremacy. “He has gotten half our hall to enjoy them right now,” James said. But that sometimes leads to personal conflicts as well.

Rick first became acquainted with Machine Supremacy through an online chat. The group released all its music online for free download and he “fell in love” with it. He began playing their music in the dorms to “help convert others” to the artistry of the Swedish band. “A few people on this hall who I have shown Machine Supremacy to have really liked it, and a couple have even ordered CDs, which is kind of exciting,” he said. He said the desire to proselytize is most prevalent when he can “be a prophet” for a band or genre with which most people are unfamiliar.

However, with “half the hall” now listening to Machine Supremacy, Rick faces the conflict of any proselytizer who believes they are in the minority. One’s personal identity is often tied up with the brand or media product he or she is promoting, and a high degree of success in the recruiting effort can often lead to a subsequent loss of identity for the person doing the recruiting. Rick said he doesn’t want to convince everyone to become strong fans of Machine Supremacy because “I like it when people listen to music I don’t listen to.” According to Rick, “it’s kind of nice to have a band that I listen to that no one knows who they really are. For some reason, I enjoy that.”

What Rick realizes here, though, is a widespread phenomenon of fan proselytizing: fans want to be successful in exposing others to their favorite media products, but not so successful that they lose their identity in the
community. In cases when others become recruits, it is often important for fans who first became their “prophet” to define themselves in a continued “mentor” capacity toward those who have become converts. As GSD&M finds in its partner study, students may be using physical and online social networks to show new content to others, but they are also using those spaces to define themselves. These media properties are one favored way fans identify their sense of self to others.
No Room for Pack Rats: Sharing Resources in the Dorm

Many residents in the dormitory may have the desire to become media archivists, a trend that has helped drive the market for VCRs, DVRs, and digital hard drives over the past 25 years in the home video, DVD, and music album market as well. However, in the dormitory setting, with extremely limited personal space, most of these students must put their emphasis on pooling resources rather than creating personal collections. For some students, this is a begrudging experience but one that reflects the realities of dorm living and the reason for much of the file-sharing that draws attention in the national media and in campaigns against copyright violation.

Using Others’ Resources

Mei-Ling owns very few DVDs herself, but she said there are a few media archivists on her hall who have large DVD and VHS collections. “There’s one girl here who has 200 VHS and DVDs combined with her here,” she said. “I borrow things from [those with large collections] and usually watch them in the lounge in our common area.” She said several people on her hall also collect shows like Futurama and Family Guy on DVD, and she has a friend she watches Frasier with. Mei-Ling said she is able to watch a movie a week despite having a very small collection. She is able to consume all of these products without engaging in any downloading or renting movies, simply by taking advantage of the resources of those around her. To expand her musical interests, Mei-Ling said that her friends have transferred many songs to her computer, and burned various CD’s for her.

Other students rely heavily on the tools available within the community. For instance, Anna’s VCR is used by various friends, and some of the others interviewed mentioned knowing Anna owns a VCR if they ever need content recorded. Even though VCRs are becoming an outmoded technology, and most of these students refer to recording on a VHS as “old school” now, they are also aware that VCRs are readily available
in the dorm and that the device can be used as a sufficient timeshifting tool for them if downloading a particular program is not feasible.

**The Need for Minimalism**

While the excesses of American life are well-documented, there is a strong push for minimalism in college dorms because of the lack of space, especially in shared rooms. Mei-Ling noted she didn’t bring many of her books to campus with her. “I have been trying to keep the stuff in my room and in my life to a minimum in general.” She admits that this causes problems, especially when she has the desire to read a book and can’t find anything more pleasurable than her math text, so she relies on friends or the library for reading material. Mahamati chose not to bring his DVD collection to campus with him; he instead takes advantage of the collection at the front desk, watching about a movie a week in the common areas. Similarly, he only brought a couple of books from his collection with him, instead relying on the campus library.

**Using Shared Resources**

In addition to the front desk collection and the library, the campus movie series has also been an important resource for students not able to afford to travel to a movie theater or spend money on a personal DVD collection. According to Emily, working with the campus film group has led to great interest among her friends, who come along hoping that Emily can get them in free.

Video game consumption in the dorm is mostly a shared experience. Students make use of video game consoles in the common areas. As Emily explained, “I know one guy who does have a PlayStation, and someone who lived here last year had an N64 in her room, but most of the stuff is just lounge-shared.”

Some students also use their computers to play content on lounge televisions. And students throughout the dorm use the network sharing system regularly. Emily also described various workgroups and networks within the dorm, “I think the reason it’s so popular is that you can look at your friends’ stuff on their computer and see what they like.”

CD collections have been the easiest to minimize, and only Nikolai indicated he had brought all his CDs with him. No one left his music collection at home, but almost everyone else had completely transferred to digital collections. Nikolai had done so as well but still kept his CDs for use in the car. Rick emphasized the importance of making the shared collective media storage program available in the dorm, with all the resources available electronically for common usage.

**Splurging—Minimalist Not By Choice**

While most students emphasized the need for minimalism, there was also some degree of reveling in excess. As Mei-Ling mentioned, some students cared so much about their DVD and/or VHS collections that they brought them along, despite their cramped rooms. James brought his book collection, totaling somewhere between fifty and a hundred books, with him. “I like the physical books for things that are meant to be in book form,” he said. “I like how they feel.” He justifies splurging on books by emphasizing his restrictions on DVDs, only bringing his favorite movie, *Donnie Darko*, with him.

Anna records television regularly, but she said she doesn’t have room to archive it and always records over her tapes once they are finished. She emphasized her need to restrict her media collection now, but she made
clear on more than one occasion that she would consider herself an archivist otherwise, and that she has a substantial book collection (up to 300 books) at home in Chicago. She has a strong desire to build a DVD collection in the future when she has the room and funds for it.
The Great Change: How the Dorm Alters Consumption

So far, we have reviewed many of the substantial factors influencing media consumption in the conversion to dormitory life. Students use media to stay in touch with the people and culture they have left behind, even as they use new media content to participate in pop cosmopolitanism, learning about new cultures and new ways of life through consumption of popular culture. Students have seen shifts in the media platforms they use, based on the resources available to them within the dormitory. Students have become both exposed to and participators in proselytizing activities, trying to interest others in their favorite media properties, even as they are being introduced to new content by someone else. These students are doing so in an environment where they must pool their resources and share both platform and content. As Aleigh Payne writes in the GSD&M partner study, “(Interviewees) seem to find the communal environment of college more conductive than any other setting to exposing them to new media devices, programs, artists, habits, etc.” As Payne points out, however, it is sometimes difficult for students to self-identify influences within the dorm setting because they are often not conscious of these influences; the influences of the dorm are likely to be even more pronounced than these students realize.

These substantial changes lead to significant alterations in the media preferences of students after they complete their first year or two within the college dorm. All the students interviewed in this study are college freshmen and sophomores, already now enmeshed in dormitory culture while still aware of the culture they came from and their life in high school. These students were very articulate about the ways in which their media consumption has changed in the past year or two.

The Project: Being Exposed to New Media Forms

In the media profile above, Mei-Ling alludes to a series of projects her peers undertook to educate her about various media forms. At home, Mei-Ling’s media exposure revolved around print media and particularly The New York Times. Her peers pooled their resources and the dorm’s extensive movie collection to educate her about film and, this year, music. “I have more than doubled my movie count off their list of must-see films after one-and-a-half years of being here,” she said.
Similarly, Mahamati said he had not been an avid television watcher before coming to campus, where he has started watching shows like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* on a regular basis. He also said he’s been exposed to a lot of American and Japanese animation and many new genres of American music. “Someone who lives across the hall from me has introduced me to a lot of new types of music. I think it’s been very productive and has had a positive impact on my music interests.”

**Expanding One’s Horizons**

Several of the participants indicated they felt they were learning quite a bit in the dorm setting. “I’ve been thinking about some way we can share more music,” James said, “like a meeting where we could get together every week and ask everyone if they have heard any good music lately.”

According to Rick, video games have been one of the casualties of the student lifestyle. Many students who used to play games regularly have not played as often during the school year because they realize how absorbing the games can be. Nikolai noted that as his coursework increased, he quit reading a lot of the blogs he used to follow. While watching less television overall, he said he feels the shows he is watching now are substantially different from those he watched at home in Maryland. This trend is echoed somewhat in the complementary quantitative study, where respondents report spending far more time consuming television and music than video games. “Without being vain, I think my media tastes have matured since coming here,” Nikolai said. “Maybe I was ready for a change from the same old, watching television and only listening to music I bought on CDs. I have started watching *24*, and I watch more late night programming here than I used to, like *Adult Swim.*” Many of the favorite groups identified in his media profile, above, came from new acts he has been exposed to since he began downloading. “Before I came to campus, I was the classic rock guy, but I came here and my musical tastes diversified. Now I listen to music that I download a lot, like The Strokes, The Pixies, and Blonde Redhead.”

Every student interviewed, even while demonstrating strong ties to media consumed before coming to campus, suggested the new social environment they’ve entered over the past year or two has led to substantial change. For brand and content producers alike, the college dormitory is an essential place to solidify former consumers and encourage them to become grassroots advocates, proselytizing products to others. For most of the students in the dorm, this act of media sharing is one of the most important parts of their college experience.

The transition period each of these students experienced has given them some sense of media “maturity,” to use Nikolai’s phrase, but also solidified some of the “lovemarks” they plan to hold onto throughout their lives. And, while these students have limited resources, many of them are developing attitudes toward various content and platforms that will likely shape their consumption patterns when they exit the dorm setting and gain more capital. Because of the pivotal nature of this time period in consumers’ lives and the unique nature of the dormitory setting, these trends should always be kept in mind when trying to reach potential consumers and when trying to recruit a continued fan base for media content or brands.
Communal Viewing: *House vs. Jeopardy*

Communal viewings are one of the staples of the dorm environment, where many people do not have televisions and must instead rely on shared viewing areas. As mentioned previously, *24* and *Law and Order* rank among dorm favorites, the former for its serial nature and the latter for its pervasiveness in network schedules and many offspring. *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* is also a favorite on some halls, generally downloaded and watched the next evening because Comedy Central is not available on the campus cable system. Adam said that he prefers watching *24* in a communal setting because “you can react at the same time if something crazy happens” and that, if he is not watching it with other friends, he often communicates with them online while it is on. The communal viewing of films also attracts a lot of attention, demonstrated by Luis’s story earlier about watching *Howl’s Moving Castle* in an impromptu viewing in the lobby and attracting several others. “If I hadn’t put in the movie, I don’t think anyone would have stopped otherwise to watch television,” he said. Shawn said that the practice on his hall is to send e-mails out ten minutes before a movie starts airing, inviting everyone to come along.

*House vs. Jeopardy*

During this dorm study, researchers attended communal viewings of both *House* and *Jeopardy*. *House* is one of the FOX Network’s most recent hits, in its second season at the time of the viewing. The medical mystery show, blending aspects of medical dramas with the crime investigation techniques of popular shows like CSI, revolves around the investigation of a medical mystery in every episode, with Dr. Gregory House and his team of doctors trying to solve a medical emergency that cannot be explained by other departments. The show has some degree of seriality, with ongoing relationships among the hospital staff, but each episode is largely self-contained; each medical mystery is presented at the beginning of the show and then resolved by the conclusion. The popularity of the show largely rides on the creativity of the Gregory House character and his portrayal by Hugh Laurie. House is a doctor reliant on a walking cane, addicted to painkillers and dosing out his signature sarcastic one-liners.
Jeopardy, meanwhile, has been a staple of American television schedules for decades. Created in 1964 by Merv Griffin for NBC, the current version, hosted by Alex Trebek, began airing in 1984 and has gained a fervent following. The syndicated game show features three contestants competing in rounds of trivia, divided into categories they select. Questions are given in the form of an answer; contestants provide their answer in the form of a question. Jeopardy is an American cultural mainstay regularly referenced in classroom academic competitions and parodied by shows like Saturday Night Live.

Relationship with the Text

Several House viewings take place across the dorm. The particular viewing discussed here was attended by about twenty residents, although some joined halfway through and others had to leave before the show concluded. The gender of the viewers was roughly an even split. The most dedicated House viewers sat on the couches and chairs closest to the television, and helped police the behavior of other viewers if conversations made it difficult to hear the dialogue.

While viewers were allowed to laugh and respond to House's one-liners and make short comments reacting to something that had just happened, off-subject or loud talk was met with a barrage of calls to “shut up.” When a technical glitch interrupted the broadcast, dedicated viewers blamed those who had continued a conversation after the end of a commercial break, telling them “This is God's punishment for you guys!” Comments pertaining directly to the program were allowed, such as catching up those who have not been present in prior weeks on relationships between characters and details they might have missed earlier in the program.

Emily helped start regular communal House viewing in her hall, and it has now become an important part of the students’ week. She said that when she misses the communal viewing, she usually doesn’t go out of her way to catch up, even though she loves the show. “It’s about the experience of sitting in the lounge and watching it with everyone; that is why I watch it. I would watch it, anyway, I guess, but I wouldn’t go out of my way.” Emily said that, while it’s not a show that must be watched every week to understand, viewers often watch House closely and ask for quiet in the common area while the show is on.

Jeopardy has a much less sacred place as a text with this audience. Whereas everyone was hushed repeatedly during the House viewing, discussion and interaction with the television was encouraged, even expected, during the Jeopardy viewing. According to Rick, who attends the Jeopardy viewings fairly regularly, “it is a social event, with an environment where people are there to talk about things, not necessarily always focused on the game show. Basically, this event is an excuse to interact.” The Jeopardy viewing began when a student on the floor passionate about quiz competitions, both as a spectator and participant, began watching it every night in the hall lobby. “He wants to watch it, and no one else complains,” Rick said. “I think that everyone in the world secretly watches Jeopardy.”

As opposed to the weekly House viewing, Jeopardy viewing took place every night. The Jeopardy expert is present before the show began, and other viewers slowly come in during the thirty minutes. In all, five students attended this particular viewing, four of them male. According to Rick, the show generally attracts from as few as two to as many as ten viewers an episode, depending on the students’ schedules for the night. The Jeopardy expert explained details about the program's history, including the mythic performance by contestant Frank Spangennberg roughly fifteen years ago, some of what takes place backstage, and the nature of the Tournament of Champions programs involving past winners.
Discussion took place throughout the game, with everyone watching weighing in on each question and making comments about the intelligence and personalities of the contestants. One of the most successful players on this particular night has earned the nickname of “Cyborg bitch” from the viewers, who cringed when she answered a question correctly and berated her opponents for not being more competitive. Later, the viewers correctly guessed a chemistry-based Final Jeopardy question as a group, proceeding to dispute the methodology of the second-place player (who bet all his money despite not knowing the answer).

**Relationship with Advertisements**

While viewers were not allowed to participate in much conversation while *House* was on, the commercial break was used largely as a time for discussion and debate. Fans drew on each other to fill in gaps in their own knowledge, especially regarding facts necessary to understand this particular episode. Viewers paid attention to the *X-Men 3* trailer during the break but started discussing how the film’s release would coincide with finals, and the conversation shifted to the impending end of the spring semester. While the sound was usually left on during commercial breaks, little attention was paid to the advertisements. During the next to last commercial break the students muted the commercials completely, with one person monitoring when the show was returning. As Aleigh Payne said in the GSD&M partner study, communal viewing may not necessarily be “a blessing to the 30-second spot [. . .] As soon as the commercial break comes on it is time to socialize.”

Conversely, when watching *Jeopardy*, student socializing ended during the commercial breaks. While the show sparked vibrant conversation from the viewers, many of them left the viewing area during commercial breaks or started using the Internet. Some students just sat in silence, waiting for the program to resume. The commercial break played with a couple of people just staring at the screen before one student finally asked where the remote was, exclaiming “I can’t take commercials!” By the time the show resumed, all of the students were back in their seats.

The second commercial break inspired some commentary on the commercials themselves, such as an Ensure advertisement and a Hallmark commercial about musical cards, which the students began to mock by questioning how appropriate musical cards might be. The students made up their own taglines for the commercials, such as, “You, too, can now feel awkward in a social setting!” and “This awkward moment brought to you by Hallmark.” The viewers then got into a discussion about how substantially different the advertising is for *Jeopardy* compared to the shows that follow on the Boston UPN affiliate when the station enters primetime network programming. Finally, the students decided not to watch the closing credits so they didn’t run the risk of having to watch any UPN programming.

The substantial differences that viewers demonstrate are illuminating. In both cases, the 30-second spots are largely ignored, except for spurring a discussion about finals during the *House* viewing and being mocked during the *Jeopardy* viewing. The relationship viewers have with the two shows seem diametrically opposed: *House* is appointment television, and the communal setting is more about having a chance to react as a group and to inform each other of important supplementary information; *Jeopardy*, conversely, is a social event, where the content is much less sacred and the interaction much more vibrant. Programmers and advertisers must recognize the importance of communal viewing of both types of programming and understand the substantial differences in the ways these programs are viewed in group settings.
Downloading Behaviors and Copyright Issues

Downloading and file sharing in a college dorm is widespread. With the in-dorm network and campus-wide use of BitTorrent and Limewire, among other services, students are able to be much more media-savvy than their budgets would allow by watching television programming that does not air on campus stations and sharing a wide array of music. Each of the students interviewed offered different perspectives about what ethical and/or legal lines exist regarding downloading behavior and about the degree to which they owe artists and record companies for the content they are downloading.

Video Content

Most student discussion centered around audio downloads, but students also regularly download television and film content as well. James said he gets a lot of his video content from the Internet, especially television, where he downloads whole series at a time if he is interested in them. Luis said he has no remorse about downloading television content because he sees no difference between downloading and using DVR services to time shift content. “If I had recorded a TV show on TiVo, it’s the same thing,” he said. “I just don’t own a TiVo.” On the other hand, Anna said she does not download video content, not because she has an ethical problem with it but because the official DVDs are important to her as an aspiring media archivist. Further, several participants in the GSD&M partner study are anime fans who feel it is ethical to download content not yet available commercially to the American market but cease downloading it if the product becomes available for purchase on DVD.

Audio Content

Students have developed complex reasons behind their downloading habits, many of which center on the unjustified nature of purchasing audio content. Anna’s is the most straightforward, as she wants to consume media and likes the pragmatism of downloading free content rather than paying for it.

Of course I would rather not pay for it. I probably wouldn’t listen to a lot of the stuff I do
now if I had to buy everything. Right now, if I download something and don’t like it, I can just delete it because I didn’t lose anything.

This echoes several subjects identified in GSD&M’s study who download because it is available to them and do not feel major ethical dilemmas regarding their downloading behavior.

Rick said his approach with music is that he has to learn to love it, and that the current pay-for-music set-up does not allow that to happen.

When music becomes personal to me, when that happens, I will more than gladly support that artist. And I don’t think there is anything companies can do that will change the way I get my media because, if I am going to support an artist, I want to hear or understand his or her music before doing so.

Aleigh Payne identifies similar trends in the GSD&M partner study, in which subjects identify a connection with the artists as crucial to their decision whether to pay or download content for free.

James said this ability to be able to decide whether he likes an artist before making purchasing decisions is key for him.

Record stores are moving in the right direction with allowing you to listen to music before you buy it. Instead of having to like the cover art or say your friend Ned recommends it, but then you pay 20 bucks and hate it, it will be like bookstores, where you can read as much as you want before you buy it.

Just as Luis argues that downloading television content is no different than using a TiVo to time shift, James points out the importance of satellite radio offering free music as well, the only difference being who decides when a listener can hear the music.

To me, when you listen to it is not a huge added value. It is immoral on their part for them to believe that they have temporal control of their music, considering that you can download off digital radio. I think we are moving to a time when distribution has been democratized.

Both James and Shawn said that bands should earn money chiefly from concerts and merchandise, with recordings being used to recruit more fans. James said he would be interested in seeing many of these groups in concert and would pay quite a bit of money to see them.

No one has gotten their act together to make it easy for me to find out when people are performing, and I don’t have the motivation to go and search out specific artists. I want to be able to drop a list of artists into a site and then get contacted by them when they are coming close to me.

Shawn said he believes there is nothing wrong with sampling tracks but that people should not download full albums.

I think that’s going too far. I like to check out a couple of songs and see if I like them. That will lead me to support the band financially eventually.
He said that he would feel much better about switching to paid download services if they did not include
digital rights management with all their content. “I figure if I’m going to pay money for something, I should
be able to use it how I want to use it,” he said. However, he does not like subscription services because he
would like to own have his own copy of the song.

## Restrained Downloading—Concerns About Ethics, Legal Repercussions

Mei-Ling is the only student who said she does not download music. But she has received downloaded
music from others and sees arguments for being able to download content, whether pay-per-song or from
file sharing, because of the cost of most whole albums. “I can see an issue where people don’t really want to
pay $15 for a CD when they only care about one song.” Conversely, GSD&M identifies a fairly even mix
in their interviews between students who pay to download and students who download for free. However,
those interviews were not conducted in a dormitory setting, which likely greatly altered the influence of
sharing and downloading on in-house networks, at least.

Nikolai said he tries to stay away from massive file sharing sites like Limewire because he is worried about
having his IP address traced and subsequent legal problems stemming from his downloads, as several
students at the university already have. He said one student there is currently writing about her experiences
being sued by the recording industry.

> That kind of stuff makes me spiteful. Because of their action and because they are coming
after these students, it makes me more motivated to download music just to spite them and
to go to concerts rather than buying, so I can support the musicians more directly.

Just as Anna said that official DVDs deter her from downloading online content, Nikolai said that he does
care about things like good cover art that makes him still want to collect certain CDs.

While Mahamati uses audio content online, he prefers streaming content because it avoids the ethical issues
involved with downloading content. In India, where he had a slow Internet connection that did not make
downloading easy, he got used to using audio streaming.

> I have put some thought into the moral debate surrounding downloading because, although
I haven’t downloaded much, I still download content sometimes. I try to use music streaming
more, but I really don’t think commercial organizations are going to be able to do anything
about he widespread sharing and distribution of music. Instead of worrying about whether it
is morally right or not, they should come up with alternatives.

Mahamati said that the world is moving to open sources that change people’s relationship to content.

> I have never thought of music as a commercial occupation or as a means of earning money. I
am sure artists can make money or use their talents to make money in spite of having music
openly available to everyone.
Recommendations

In conclusion, our journey into the dorm provided the following takeaway points:

• Students use media as an important tie to stay in touch with their friends from home and their native culture when they enter the dorm environment.

• Music is the most widely used media form in the dorm setting, with communal television watching following next. Media collecting and video gaming are both casualties of the time and space constraints of the dormitory setting.

• Student dormitories are active centers for media proselytizing, and companies need to make every effort to work with these grassroots advocates for their content and brands.

• Many aspiring media archivists do not have the space or resources to bolster their various media collections while in college and instead pool all the resources they share together, including sharing both files and physical media with one another.

• Students are at their most experimental during the few years they spend in the dorm setting, where old media tastes are either solidified or changed and where students are introduced to a wide array of new content. This is a pivotal space in which to reach out more substantially to potential consumers.

• A large degree of television and film viewing takes place in communal spaces in dorms, and the communal area drastically changes viewer relationships with content. Further, various types of programming inspires different viewer relationships. Advertisers, programmers, and content creators alike must make every effort to understand and facilitate the strengths of a program’s connection with its viewers.

• Students are sharing resources and participating in widespread digital downloading, and they often have very detailed thoughts about how the structure of media consumption should change.

What potential product extensions does this suggest?

• **Empower the Proselytizers.** Religious groups arm their recruiters with every necessary resource. While it might not be the best idea to distribute pamphlets and literature about converting fans to a particular brand’s way, companies should increasingly find methods to work with these grassroots advocates and empower them. The quantitative study finds that today’s Internet-savvy fans like referring people to new content, increasingly electronically, and companies should find new avenues to make online proselytizing more efficient, including pages that make proselytizing easier. Properties or brands that have wikis for character, plot, or brand histories, for instance, give fans a chance to communally create the official background and history of their favorite products so they can have resources available for potential recruits when they are spreading their word-of-mouth (or keystroke).

• **Fans Want Regional Marketing.** A strong trend was discovered in which fans want to stay connected to their roots and are willing for marketers to respond to that. With a niche market, products can easily be made to appeal to viewers/listeners/readers from specific geographical areas, not just internationally but within America. With the overhead for small independent films and Web-distributed products
dwindling, companies would be smart to invest in products that fulfill this need to retain some sense of community and locality in an increasingly mobile world. Finding ways to keep students connected to their ethnic and regional identities could be a lucrative market not yet fully explored by an industry with its mind still somewhat on the broadcasting concept.

- **Fans Want Personalized Marketing.** James suggests that, even though he downloads music regularly without paying for it, he would love to hear his favorite bands in concert regularly but often has no way of knowing where and when they perform. He said he would like a service that allows him to enter the names of all his favorite bands and performers and would then e-mail him when those products come to his area. In today’s world of increasingly splintered niche markets, fans want to be catered to and are willing to spend their money in return. College kids, however, want a service to be in place to make finding live events, television events, or anything else requiring a time and date to remember, to be organized for them.

- **Understand Music’s Hold.** In the dorm setting, convenience and easy availability makes music the most consumed media form. How can brands that produce more than just music learn from fans’ relationship with their musical lovemarks? By increasing digital availability of shows and conceiving of new platforms to make it easier for students living in dorms to consume a product, both content and brand managers increase the likelihood of sustained involvement after students leave the dorm setting. And most students would agree that a widespread overhaul of the concept of campus cable services would broaden their horizons as well.

- **Focus on the Long-Term.** College-age students are a target demographic, but that target often focuses on transitory content marketed specifically for that age group. The students interviewed in this study indicated the importance the dorm experience has on shaping their media consumption patterns for the rest of their lives. Most students in dorms are set to earn more after leaving the college setting than they have available while they are in the dorms, but they are forming media preferences with long-term goals in mind. Fans want bands to listen to, shows to watch, and films to eventually collect and archive that will connect with them throughout their lives, not just a product that appeals to them at a particular stage in their lives.

- **Facilitate Pooled Resources.** Students in college dorms are going to find some way to pool their media resources, no matter what prohibitionist activities are generated in their direction. Companies will gain far more by providing more platforms on which products are consumed than on trying to restrict downloading and sharing practices. New concepts should be considered and invested in within the dorm setting since its communal nature helps shape the media profiles of its inhabitants for the rest of their lives.

- **Facilitate Communal Viewings.** People in dorms watch things as groups, and content should be developed with this in mind, considering the growing number of students in college dormitories. If a product is aimed toward a college-age group, it should be agreeable to the nature of communal programming. Two potential avenues for developing a group following are listed here. In the first, House, the show’s one-liners and serial elements help keep students involved. *24* is an even richer example of this. In these types of programs, where viewers are heavily invested in the text, product placement seems to be a richer revenue stream since viewers do all their talking during the commercial breaks and even mute the commercials. In the second, *Jeopardy*, viewers have a more conversational tone with the program, and these types of reality show and game show formats allow for more blatant advertising within the program, in ways that will prompt and facilitate continued viewer discussion, since the participatory nature of these competitions seems to be what compels group viewings. In other
words, create a program and its advertising to its specific strengths, with facilitating group viewings in mind. These types of viewings are the best tools for proselytizing within a dorm setting.

- **Don't Shy Away from Transgenerational Programming.** In an age of niche demographic marketing, every show has a target age demographic. Yet, the students often indicate that the reason they keep up with a show is to sustain a personal relationship, many times with a parent they have left behind. When shows and brands are so heavily marketed toward a particular age group, they lose this transgenerational quality that may help gain and sustain viewers in meaningful lifelong relationships. In other words, students want a product they will want to continue consuming as they get older, and they want a product they can share and discuss with their family.

- **Use the College Market for Experimentation.** College kids are living in dorms in part because they want to explore and experiment different potential avenues in life. It’s no surprise that they want to do the same with their media. Find new ways to test out potential products in the dorm setting before these products are released at large. These students – potential consumers looking to develop media tastes that will be sustained throughout their lives – will be the perfect test market to know if a product may have a sustained life.

- **Listen to the Trends.** Students are widely publishing the latest trends on their college campuses through resources like MySpace and LiveJournal. As all three studies suggest, students want to share their media preferences with the world, whether it is through active proselytizing in person, through online recommendations, or through their Facebook profiles. Marketers should never cease to watch these students’ self-reported information.
Appendix: Questioner’s Guide

1.) Through which media forms are you most likely to watch media, and what machinery do you use to watch it?

a.) If you watch television, do you timeshift with BitTorrent, TiVo, VHS, or have the TV Guide memorized and schedule your school day around it? Or do you have a massive DVD collection?


2.) What media did you choose to bring with you when you entered college?

a.) What did you leave behind at home?

b.) How did you make the selection of what to bring and what to leave?

3.) Would people describe you as a fanatic or as having an obsession with any particular entertainment property?

a.) How did you first get involved with this property or properties?

b.) What was the hook for you?

c.) How long have you been interested in this property?

d.) What has sustained your interest in this property?

e.) How do you describe your obsession with this property?
4.) What sets these properties apart that you are obsessed with, as opposed to properties that you are a loyal consumer of?

   a.) How do you treat these media you are obsessed with differently than other properties you are a loyal consumer of, even if you don’t feel as passionately about them?

   b.) What is it about those few properties that makes it more capable for you to get immersed in?

   c.) How do you consume media differently for those one or two properties that you are obsessed with versus the other properties you are a loyal viewer of?

5.) For those properties that you are obsessed with, how do you consume them?

   a.) Are these properties more likely to be consumed in more media forms than other properties?

   b.) Do you follow the property across several media, if transmedia situations exist for this particular brand or property?

   c.) What do you see as distinguishing those who consume international media content from those who consume content produced in the United States?

6.) For these properties that you are obsessed with, do you see yourself being a fan in 10 or 15 years?

   a.) What about this property would make it sustain your interest, despite all the changes that will be taking place in your life?

   b.) If you don’t see yourself as still a fan of this property later on, why do you see it as an important part of who you are now but not likely to be later?

   c.) Do you see any connections among the properties you are obsessed with?

7.) For those properties that you are obsessed with, do you share this fandom with others?

   a.) If so, how do you and other fans relate to each other? (Phone, Internet, e-mail?)

   b.) Do you consume the product in a group setting?

   c.) If you are in a community of other fans of the media property or brand, where would you identify yourself as a member of a group, versus the other people in the group? Do you interact primarily with other fanatics or primarily with less devoted members who see you as an “expert” on that brand or property?

   d.) How did you meet the other members of these fan communities that you associate with?

   e.) When you consume these properties in a group setting, how do you do it? How do you manage it?
How do you shift priorities to be able to view or participate in the property as a group?

f.) Is consuming media a part of the social structure of your dorm or sorority?

8.) How has your taste in entertainment and what you watch/read/play/listen to change as you’ve entered the dorm or sorority house?

a.) Are there things you have started to consume because other people around you also like them?

b.) Are there some things that you consume that no one else around you likes?

c.) If so, how do others respond to your tastes?

d.) How do you feel about those tastes?

e.) Do you think your dorm/sorority has distinctive tastes which separate it from the rest of the college? Do you see the university itself as having some shared tastes?

9.) If you are a part of the fan community, do you think the fans sometimes know a property better than those who produce it?

a.) If you do think so, how do you feel about content produced by the fan community?

b.) Are you active in producing any content, or do you know those who are?

c.) If you produce media, in what forms?

d.) If you produce media, how much do copyright constraints constrict your creative projects?

e.) If you are interested in producing content and were freed of copyright constraints, what would you do with these brands?

f.) How responsive is the company that produces the material you are a fan of to fans using the company’s image and characters for fan sites or fan fiction?

g.) Do you feel that using these characters or brands is justified?

h.) How would you feel about your work becoming officially associated or promoted by pre-existing brands and by the company using the work to promote itself?

i.) What kinds of cooperation would you like to see from corporations in the creation of work from the fan community?

j.) What kinds of compensation would you like to see from corporations in the creation of works?
10.) Have you ever downloaded music or other media unlawfully?
   
   a.) Why?
   
   b.) Were you concerned about the legality of this action?
   
   c.) Were you concerned about the economic impact of this choice?
   
   d.) Were you concerned about the rights of the artists involved?
   
   e.) Is there content you would only consume for free? Why?
   
   f.) Is there content you would always pay for? Why?
   
   g.) What could media companies do to decrease the likelihood that you would download their materials illegally?
   
   h.) What could media companies do to increase the likelihood that you would download their materials legally?

11.) How do you feel about the people who produce the material you consume?

   a.) Do you see them as valuing or exploiting you and other consumers?
   
   b.) What obligations do media producers have to those who consume their products?
   
   c.) When do media producers cross the lines?
   
   d.) Can you think of times when you have been angry or hostile toward the people who produce the media content you are obsessed with?
   
   e.) What, if any, actions did you take in response to this case?
   
   f.) Are there times when you felt favorable toward the people who produce these media?
   
   g.) What, if any, actions did you take in response?
   
   h.) What obligations, if any, do fans have toward the people who produce the media they value?
   
   i.) What obligations, if any, do you feel to other fans of the media you consume?

12.) How important is being a part of these fan communities or being a fan of these brands in defining who you are?

   a.) Are you an open fan of these media properties outside the fan community, or are you a closet fan?
   
   b.) Do you make this brand a part of your public persona or appearance?
   
   c.) If so, why is this activity and this brand important to you?
13.) For brands and media properties that you consider yourself loyal to, how many of them are properties that appeal to you because they have a tie to where you “come from?”

a.) Conversely, how many properties you consume appeal to you because they introduced you to new experiences?

b.) How do you see the media you are a fan of and other media you consume as teaching you about the world and other cultures?

14.) Are there media that you consume which originates outside the United States?

a.) If so, what are those properties?

b.) What factors led to your interest in this content?

c.) How did you become aware of this content?

d.) How did you learn more about this content?

e.) How did you acquire this content? Did you access it through friends from that part of the world? Did you access it through a fan culture which has formed around it? Or did you discover it on your own?

f.) What efforts have you taken to access more up-to-date information or to get more timely access to this material?

g.) Have you helped to share this interest with others?

h.) Are you likely to try to help promote content to others which is already well-known or material which is less well-known? Why?

15.) What’s the coolest creative thing you’ve seen in the last year?

a.) What’s the coolest creative thing you’ve done in the last year?

b.) What’s the weirdest thing you’ve done for fun in the last year?

c.) Where do you see the entertainment industry going in the next year?

d.) Where would you like to see the entertainment industry going in the next year?
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The Convergence Culture Consortium at MIT (C3) is a partnership between thinkers and researchers from/affiliated with the Comparative Media Studies program at MIT and companies with a keen interest in deciphering convergence culture and the implications it can have for their business. Members of the consortium gain new insights and ideas about a very intractable and urgent set of questions that they are already grappling with in the current business environment. We aim to expand the role of industrial leaders by informing them of dynamic humanistic scholarship while providing them with early access to the cutting-edge ideas that emerge through the consortium. For more information, please visit www.convergenceculture.org.