Long-Distance Intimacy

How Intimacy in Long-Distance Relationships Changes over Erasmus+ Exchange

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I. ABSTRACT

Abstract

In recent years technology has developed significantly and rapidly become an intricate part of people’s daily life in the globalised world. There is a growing recognition that within intimate relationships, technology usage has many functions which can create both negative and positive impacts on intimacy. Yet research on intimacy in online social relationships is still underdeveloped. This paper maps the literature on long-distance relationships and how its participants use information and communication technologies to overcome the physical detachment. The purpose of this study is to examine whether intimacy changes over Erasmus+ exchange studies in long-distance romantic and parental relationships. Data from an online survey of 100 Erasmus+ exchange students residing in Budapest, Hungary were analysed to see whether the quality of their relationship worsens during the exchange period. Based on the data collected it can be concluded that the majority of respondents do not experience critical decay in neither of their relationships and that preparation for distance communication with ICTs is not strongly connected to preventing a decay in intimacy.

Keywords

ICT, long-distance relationship, uses and gratifications, communication, Erasmus+, exchange student, intimacy
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IV. INTRODUCTION

Identifying and Presenting the Research Agenda

In recent years, information and communication technologies (also known as ITCs) have gained substantial importance and wide popularity owing to their ability to engage consumers with a range of communication options readily available anywhere, anytime, and in any form. A majority of people from developed countries have become solely dependent on ICTs nowadays: mankind has reached a state where most people are constantly online and always available (Licoppe, 2004). Many researchers and scholars have investigated how users adopt new technologies into their life. Although there is not a great divide between traditional and new media as researchers have expected for a very long time, they are actively combined by users which forms complex and various usage patterns (Yuan, 2011). In fact, traditional and new media supplement each other, which results in more time spent with overall media usage. For instance, research investigating mobile news consumption has showed that engaging in mobile news actually raises users’ overall news consumption and political partaking; moreover, consumers are turning into multi-platform users who enjoy the benefits of all suitable devices (Martin, 2015).

Liberalism, and then capitalism have brought about changes that encourage values such as individualism. The capitalised employment requires mobile, disconnected people; therefore, many people make their career a priority instead of settling down or starting a family (Holmes, 2014). Holmes argues this is the main reason why there are so many individuals who live in a long-distance relationship (LDR). Previous studies show that 1/3rd of unmarried European couples under 35 are non-cohabiting (Haskey, 2005; Ermisch, 2000; Kiernan, 1999 as cited in Holmes). According to Haskey (2005 as cited in Holmes, p. 4) there were approximately two million people in Britain “seriously living apart together” in 2005, while this number grew to more than six million by 2010 (Duncan & Phillips, 2010 as cited in Holmes; The Statistics Portal, 2017). The growing number of LDRs urges researchers to pay more attention to and examine such relationships. In addition, since the Erasmus Programme institutionalised the peregrination of students in Europe, many international students became involved. This is why the topic of LDRs is examined through Erasmus+ students. Besides the global relevance, there is also personal motivation and experience behind choosing such topic, which is explained later in the Introduction chapter.
Erasmus+ international students use ICTs in many ways to maintain their long-distance relationships with their loved ones from home. As they intend to go back within maximum one year, they keep a strong bond with them, and maybe even use ICTs more during their exchange. To find out whether this is true, and see if exchange studies have a negative effect on LDRs is the aim of this research. For this purpose, the research is based on the original and re-visited, modernised versions of uses and gratifications theory by Blumler and Katz (1974), because it proved to be significantly helpful to examine new media usage. The approach is supplemented by theories and ideas of Maslow (1943), Giddens (1976), Turkle (1995, 2011), Illouz (2007) and Holmes (2014) to mention a few. In this paper, the potential problem of the impact of partaking in foreign studies for college and university students on their LDRs will be discussed. It is proven that geographically distant relationships are more difficult to keep, as there are many issues that have to be faced owing to the physical detachment. Nevertheless, ICTs always bring about a new perspective to staying in touch even across distance and help people be there for each other, even when they are physically remote.

To answer the questions this paper raises, the author chooses the following research method: after introducing the literature on the topic of mediatization, ICT usage, LDRs and technology and intimacy, a quantitative research is presented. The quantitative, online survey method has been chosen because this is what researchers examining the issue used beforehand (Off, 2016; Campbell & Murray, 2015b), and because it is the method applied by uses and gratification theory. The survey was circulated among Erasmus+ students aged between 19 and 26 residing in Budapest during their exchange. Budapest was chosen as the focus, because it is the capital city of Hungary, congregating the best universities and highest number of exchange students in the country. Moreover, the author of the present study is Hungarian and moved back home just before starting to work on this paper. Therefore, she considered data on Budapest’s Erasmus students relatively more easily accessible to acquire. However, it is believed that a sample from most EU capitals would give similar results, as there are no extra-ordinary differences in fixed broadband (except for France, Italy and Greece) and LTE (except for Bulgaria and Cyprus) coverage, hence students could use their ICT devices (Noack, 2015). However, since the survey is not representative, generalisations for the population cannot be made. Statements can only be made concerning the sample. Additionally, in various searches nothing has been found on Budapest’s Erasmus+ exchange students’ ICT usage, hence with this project, new discussions within the field of communication and media studies could be opened up. Implementing this research could also trigger more similar ones in the future within the field which may contribute
to a deeper insight to the effects of the Erasmus+ programme, ICTs, and long-distance relationships.

In order to better understand students’ communication choices and gain a deeper insight to their motives, the framework of the uses and gratifications theory by Blumler and Katz (1974) will be applied. This topic is particularly intriguing, as the above mentioned theory states that people actively select media types according to their own needs and not the opposite way around. For example, it can be assumed then that students on exchange use Skype with their loved ones more often than when they are at home and can actually meet each other in person anytime. Moreover, students on exchange might use ICTs in dissimilar ways due to the different time and place manners they are engaged in, not to mention the discomfort of being in different time-zones. Opposed to the conscious and active audience of the uses and gratification theory, McGuire (1974) argues that even though personal needs have an impact on choosing certain media types, initially it is external situations, circumstances and chance that decide most cases. For example, it is easier to listen to the radio in the car, than to read a book. Projecting this to exchange students means that at home the student might have initiated a mobile phone call after a busy school day while commuting, but that option must be given up due to time-zone differences, for instance.

The thesis begins with a literature review, based on the most interesting and highly reputed books and articles of the topic, then having conducted a quantitative research, the results will be analysed. This paper solely focuses on Erasmus+ students' LDRs with their parents and romantic partners. To examine this the following research question is addressed: Does participating in Erasmus+ exchange have a negative impact on relationship intimacy? This overarching research question is answered by three sub-questions which are the following:

1. Does participating in Erasmus+ exchange have a negative impact on romantic relationships?
2. Are parental relationships also concerned?
3. Does preparing in advance for the exchange period help prevent a possible decay in relationship intimacy?

Conceptualisation

To begin with, some of the key concepts of this paper need to be introduced. First of all, what do people mean by international students? United Nations define foreign students as “[p]ersons
admitted by a country other than their own, usually under specific permits or visas, for the specific purpose of following a particular course of study in an accredited institution of the receiving country” (1998, p. 93.). This way students are awarded with the chance of spending a few months in the host country’s institution which provides them with many great opportunities and life-changing experiences. Exchange programmes enhance students’ knowledge and understanding of other cultures and broadens and encourages their language and communication skills. These cross-cultural experiences will surely benefit them at their future workplace. There are many exchange programmes that help students open their worlds and experience the history and culture of other countries, such as Erasmus+.

The Erasmus+ Programme is the successor of the original Erasmus Programme that joins together several European Union funding schemes for education, training, youth, and sport. The seven-year programme has a budget of almost 16 billion euros to increase the skills and employability of students, trainees, staff, and volunteers and to fund actions with EU partner countries (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2017). It has been created to promote and improve higher education and the transnational co-operation within the European Union by providing the opportunity for students and teachers in tertiary education to experience studying, teaching, and working in a foreign country, and it has become the most successful and well-known mobility incentive of the European Commission. Since its launch in 1987, Erasmus has provided help and opportunity for more than 3.3 million students and 470,000 staff members and equipped them with social, civic and intercultural skills required by the globalised world (European Commission, 2013).

This paper focuses deliberately on students enrolled in higher education, therefore the age group is set from 19 to 26. This is base on the fact that students generally get accepted to higher education around 18 years of age, however, they are not allowed to go on Erasmus+ in their first semester. And because they should attain at least one Bachelor’s degree by the age of 26 with optimal circumstances. Furthermore, this paper targets this particular age group, as they are the first ones to have grown up with instant, always accessible and readily available technology around them. From a very young age they were playing with computational objects, such as SimLife or Tamagotchi. This paper focuses on Budapest, as it is the capital of Hungary, the most central country of Europe, and part of the European Union with many well-recognised and historical institutions in higher education. In the academic year of 2011/2012 there were more than 3,700 Erasmus+ students in Budapest, a year later more than 4,200, and more than 4,700 in 2013/2014 in 34 Budapest universities, out of which two are in the Top 100 higher
education institutions receiving Erasmus students (Erasmusu.com, 2017; Brux Info, 2016; European Commission, 2013).

Another important aspect of this paper is LDRs. There are several books and articles dealing with long-distance relationships, and how its participants deal with the physical distance across them through the usage of ICTs. Billedo, Kerkhof, and Finkenauer (2015, based on Pistole & Roberts, 2011) define long-distance romantic relationships (LDRRs) “as relationships in which geographic distance limits daily physical togetherness between partners and prevents them from being with each other as much as they would like” (p. 152). Taking only the United States into account, there were one million people reportedly taking part in a LDRR in 1994 (Dainton & Aylor, 2002), out of which approximately 25-40 % were college students. This number grew to 14 million by 2005 and from then on stagnates, however, the distribution of college students’ participation did not change significantly (Long Distance Relationship Statistics, 2017). Additionally, establishing and maintaining intimate relationships are important milestones in the life of emerging adults, which promote health and well-being (Arnett, 2000, 2004 as cited in Off, 2016). Scientists believe that long-distance relationships often require more maintenance than the geographically close ones, as the physical distance challenges connectedness in many ways. Based on the above mentioned, one may automatically assume that LDRs mean romantic relationships where the partners are geographically detached and lack face-to-face physical contact. However, not all LDRS are romantic: being separate from friends and family members are also a form of LDR (Long Distance Relationship Statistics).

The notion of migration and transnationality question the original definition of family, which interprets the noun as “parents and their children living together as a unit” (Oxford Dictionary). Owing to the transformations and innovations of communication technologies, family nowadays is rather an action or process than something tied to a particular place. It is now understood more like doing family (Morgan, 1996 as cited in Madianou, 2016), as the members can only be together through computer mediated communication (CMC) environments. That is why many scholars introduce new labels for naming this unique form of connectedness. First of all, Licoppe (2004) uses the expression connected presence, which emphasises that the opportunity of being connected with others through ICTs resulted in continuously being online and available. Secondly, ICT-based co-presence refers to the ways in which humans create a feeling of being there for each other, fighting off the distance across them (Brownlie, 2011 as cited in Baldassar, 2016). Madianou (2016) proposes the concept of ambient co-presence,
which is “the increased awareness of the everyday lives and activities of significant others through the background presence of ubiquitous media environments” (p. 183).

Intimacy is also a key concept in this paper. When it first appeared in the Western dictionary in 1632 it was explained as ‘inmost or innermost thoughts and feelings’ (Plummer, 2003, p. 11). Since then mediated intimacy became an important discussion in sociology and cultural and media studies with two different meanings. The first one originates from Rosalind Gill, who linked it to women’s magazines and their advice on sex and relationships. The second meaning was developed by Deborah Chambers who links personal connections to digital platforms dedicated to connect people online. Traditional views mean physical contact and love, however in newer discussions non-romantic relationships are also included. All in all, intimacy involves “personal care, physical closeness, or familiarity and private knowledge (Bernstein, 2007; Boris & Parrenas, 2010; Constable, 2009; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Wolkowitz, 2006; Zelizer, 2005 as cited in Attwood, Hakim & Winch, 2017, p. 2). In this paper intimacy is examined through whether the respondents’ overall relationship quality has become worse. If the relationship has worsened, it is concluded that the relationship is also less intimate. This is believed because the two expressions correlate.

Lastly the relevance of ICTs needs to be expressed. In a knowledge based society well-resourced and -implemented ICTs help people interactively create, store and exchange information (European Commission, 2002). They also empower those with access and changes their lifestyles creating a global village (McLuhan, 1962). This means that ICTs are now so embedded in people’s lifestyle that sometimes they are unaware of their presence and effects. However, it is people who use them, and should always be able to carefully differentiate between proper and inappropriate usage, as well as opportunities and threats (Schwanen, Dijst & Kwan, 2008; Turkle, 2011). In this research the term ICT will be used in general for e-mailing, instant messaging, online video calling apps, programmes and sites, as well as mobile phone calls, because previous research has also mostly examined these.

Summary Discussion of the Theoretical Scope of the Thesis and Preliminary Literature to Be Used

Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz presented the idea of the uses and gratifications theory in their 1974 book titled The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research. The theory takes a user-centric approach to understand mass communication. According to this model each person’s media consumption is unique and varied: each consumer
has its own needs and expectations which they actively gratify while using the divergent media types available. In other words: not media uses or affects consumers in a passive way, but on the contrary, people use the media to satisfy themselves. Accordingly, it is not the media that shapes public opinion, but the audience actively transforms the media to its own needs. For example, people are browsing through the channels looking for the one that best fits their needs, and if a channel cannot keep their attention they move on. Additionally, the writers state that people use media to satisfy their own psychological, social, and socio-cultural needs. The main aim of media consumption is satisfaction that is gratification, which is represented by the following. Learning and information gathering: people learn about the world through media usage. Social interaction: different people formulate different opinions about the same thing in the media, but they can exchange and discuss their views. Additionally, through media usage they can escape from the stress of daily life, as it is a form of recreation (Blumler & Katz).

The uses and gratifications theory was a real break-through in the history of mass communication research, as from then on scientists started examining what consumers used the media for and what circumstances affected them; and not what effects the media had on consumers. They have realised that media consumption strongly depends on an individual’s needs, roles, attitudes, values, and social situations. The questions Blumler and Katz (1974) have raised are very similar to the questions of this research: why do people use media and what do they use them for? The scholars show that even though non-media outlets are more satisfying than media outlets, media’s role becomes more important with physical distance. Investigation by Dainton and Aylor (2002) also supports that the role of mediated communication is intensified by physical separation. When investigating mood management and relational maintenance behaviours, researchers (Leung, 2007; Johnston, 2002) have found that social relationships and ICTs can release stress and reduce anxiety. These imply that CMC can increase well-being. CMC, nowadays, is crucial for maintaining relationships, especially in the life of exchange students. In the light of this, it will be very exciting to map the field of former and current exchange students to see how they reach gratification when it comes to maintaining their relationship intimacy with loved ones from home.

Migration nowadays is a well-known phenomenon; all human beings have heard of and know at least one person who has participated in such process. According to the Oxford Dictionary, migration is the “[m]ovement of people to a new area or country in order to find work or better living conditions” and transnational means “[e]xtending or operating across national boundaries”. Furthermore, the fact that it includes managing across cultures needs to be
highlighted. Many scholars argue that nowadays globalization brings about an even more intense wave of migration, some go as far as calling our time “the age of migration” (Castles & Miller, 2009 as cited in Hunter, 2015). Nevertheless, this does not state that migration did not exist in the past, but rather it lays an emphasis on the larger extent of migration flows that affect more and more places of the Earth, and that the diversity of the flows is becoming more and more divergent, for example, student migration, retirement migration, high-skilled migration, or the feminization of migration, just to mention a few. Researchers generally agree on the fact that improvements in transfer and communication technologies are key drivers of migration and transnationalism, which is nowadays available to almost everyone, and not only to the elites of the society, reducing the anxiety of leaving.

Besides the one in Oxford Dictionary, migration has many other definitions, as well, but it is most often associated with “ethnic or religious minorities or asylum seekers” (Anderson & Blinder, 2017; Saggar & Drean 2001; Crawley 2009; Beutin, Canoy, Horvath, Hubert, Lerais, Smith & Sochacki 2006; Baker, Gabrielatos, Khosravinik, Krzyzanowski, McEnery & Wodak, 2008). Some define them as foreign-born people with the purpose of entering a foreign country and living, settling down there. Some use the term for citizens of a certain country, when their parents were foreignnationals. One can differentiate between migrants based on nationality, country of birth, or length of stay, for example. However, the latest one is rather hard to measure, as one might stay longer or depart sooner than originally intended.

According to the definition by the United Nations a short-term migrant is “[a] person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least 3 months but less than a year (12 months) except in cases where the movement to that country is for purposes of recreation, holiday, visits to friends and relatives, business, medical treatment, or religious pilgrimage” (1998, p. 10). A long-term migrant is “[a] person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence” (1998, p. 10). The Erasmus+ programme offers placement from three to 12 months, therefore participating in it is a form of migration. Students however, – and also high-skilled workers – are more welcome and not so much concerns of public opinion (Anderson & Blinder, 2017). Even though, according to the definitions, exchange students could be considered migrants, to prevent associations of this paper to the migrant crisis ongoing from 2015, this paper does not intend to call international or Erasmus+ exchange students migrants. However, since migration is a well-known phenomenon in the globalised world, it is important to consider how migrants
and transnational families overcome the physical detachment using ICTs. Literature on this is presented later on in the paper, since the issue is related to Erasmus+ students, because they also use ICTs to connect with their home.

For so long, migration meant an extreme detachment from a person’s original community and culture (Faist, 2000 as cited in Dekker & Engbersen, 2014), however new media and its fresh ways of communication have changed this situation for good. Before this shift, early migrants did not have many opportunities to keep in touch with family members or friends left behind in the home country, but with the spread of information and communication technologies, a new colourful range of communication forms have emerged that make transnational families work properly through boarders, worlds and cultures. What is more, migrants – if they possess the financial and human capitals – are usually the earliest adopters of new ICTs. Today, as technoscape develops, people are becoming more and more connected to each other and to the outside world, as well. With the help of the continuous spread of new ICTs, the younger a generation is, the more connected its members are (Rantanen, 2005), and as technoscape is evolving, connectedness is also growing (Licoppe, 2004). Based on this, Prensky (2001) identifies a division between the different groups of technology consumers: he labels the older users of technology as digital immigrants, while he calls the younger born-into-technology generation the digital natives. In summary, younger age cohorts are generally earlier adopters of any kind of new technologies (Chan, 2015), as these new technologies attract them more easily (Fortunati, Deuze & de Luca, 2014). Moreover, analysts have examined differences due to income, habits, generational belonging (Westlund & Weibull, 2013), or gender and educational level as well (Westlund & Weibull, 2013; Wolf & Schnauber, 2014).

It is clear that older migrants tend to use less online media than younger ones, notwithstanding this is not the single difference that has to be noted. Not only does the usage of communication tools differ due to age, but also due to social class, as better educated migrants use more social media than the less well-educated labour migrants. The digital divide is an enormous limitation both in migration and in ICT usage. In previous research, scholars mostly focused on the part of the digital divide that has to do with “[t]he gulf between those who have ready access to computers and the Internet, and those who do not” (Oxford Dictionary). However, the digital divide means far more than just ready access nowadays. It can arise in the form of having human capital that is knowledge to be able to work with such technologies. Both of these are more observable in third-world countries. Furthermore, another problem and form of digital divide is raised by Dekker and Engbersen (2014), which is in connection with the notion of using the
internet as information source for collecting information about the process of migration itself and the destination country, as well, and this is the sometimes low trustworthiness of the virtual sources that can give false information or even deceive the potential migrant.

As the previous paragraphs have shown globalisation has brought about many changes to the world, such as migration. The one that concerns this paper the most is the internalisation of education. This means that nowadays many students have the opportunity to study abroad, outside their country of birth or citizenship. The advantages for the students are undeniable: experiencing a foreign culture provides an exceptionally efficient way to the growth of their social, language and communication skills. However, pursuing international studies is also beneficial for the host country, as foreign students contribute highly to their economies both in cultural and financial ways. Therefore, countries are constantly initiating new forms on how to integrate foreign students by facilitating visa and permit policies, for instance. The European Commission (2007) suggests eight reasons why it is good to choose to study in Europe. Number one is based on the QS 2011 Global Employer Survey, which highlights that over 60% of employers actively seek or highly value foreign educational background and the skills, knowledge, and experience that come with it. The second reason is that Europe has blooming business, creative and research sectors with an inspirational international community, top facilities, and world-leading universities, where one is able to reach their full potential. Reason number three is that there is an active seek for researchers. The fourth reason is that Europeans are welcoming and friendly towards international students and they offer help and social support to make them feel at home. The fifth reason emphasises the life-changing adventure Erasmus+ offers: to discover new cultures, and one’s own self more in depth. The next reason is that educational costs are very low in most European countries, some are even free of charge (especially for EU students), while students still attain a valuable knowledge by high quality standards. Reason number seven is that universities and programmes within the EU are so divergent that everyone should find what they are looking for. And lastly, the eighth reason is that many courses are taught in English or in other world-leading languages, such as German, Spanish, or Arabic, just to mention a few (European Commission, 2017). In addition, Erasmus+ brings people together. In 2010 94% of students became more tolerant, 88% increased their social skills, 85% became more aware of common European values, and 83% feel more European (European Commission, 2013).
A Brief Account of the Methodological Framework to Be Adopted in the Project

The uses and gratifications theory suggests that users are self-aware of their behaviour and can report it when confronted with it. Based on this aspect in order to carry out this research and fully examine whether exchange studies have a negative impact on relationship intimacy, a quantitative research have been conducted. With the help of the uses and gratification theory it can be seen whether the students are self-aware and conscious while selecting media. With the help of Maslow (1943), Giddens (1976), Turkle (1995, 2011), Illouz (2007) and Holmes the paper tries to understand why the number of LDRs and technology usage in intimate relationships are growing.

Having considered several methods, the author believes that employing an online questionnaire survey method is the most suitable for the purpose of this research. The reason of this is that surveys are fast and cheap method, hence they are especially recommended for non-funded university students writing their final thesis during a limited time frame (Babbie, 2003). Additionally, survey research is more suitable for intimate topics, such as intimate relationships (Babbie, 2003). First, questions generally asked the respondents’ age, gender, nationality, and educational background. Then questions were directed towards their ICT usage habits and perceptions of relationship quality during their exchange. The questionnaire was created using Karlstad University’s online available survey forms. With the help of this it is easy to make and analyse surveys for free, hence it is highly popular among students writing their theses at the University.

This questionnaire was circulated among Erasmus+ students based in Budapest, using the Facebook and Whatsapp groups of Erasmus Budapest, Erasmus Life Budapest, and the like. Since such groups have been created to help and guide foreign students many of them regularly check and follow them, and therefore the researcher believes it is believed this is the best way to reach them. Universities based in Budapest have also been contacted and asked directly to raise their international students’ awareness to filling out this questionnaire and by doing so help this research progress. Additionally, it was hoped that many people would share this questionnaire outside the aforementioned groups, as well, and it would easily reach the required 100 number of answers. The size of the sample was set to 100, because it is an easy number to calculate with, and also because with optimal circumstances each answer would get 20 responses. This is because (except for year of birth) the maximum number of answers for the questions was five. This way 100 answers could potentially be divided equally. This way all answer options would get enough responses to be able to analyse the survey. After gaining
enough information from the completed questionnaires, the given answers analysed about Erasmus+ students’ situation and thoughts on how the exchange semester has – if at all – changed the way they perceive intimacy and use ICTs to maintain connectivity with their romantic partners and parents from home.

**Personal Experience**

During my senior year of university, I have decided to do my Master’s Degree in Sweden hoping that in the competitive market of fresh-graduates, I could be more successful with a diploma from a foreign country. Back then gaining professional knowledge was my main goal, however now I see that building international relationships is just as much important in our globalised world. Although I have never been on Erasmus+ exchange, I was indeed an international student for more than 1.5 years in Sweden, and spent most of my time socialising with Erasmus+ students besides local people.

During this period, I have gained first-hand experience of what it is like for a young adult to be away from their families and loved ones for a long time. No matter the physical distance, for me, family was always by my side and communication with them helped me through these months. Of course, our communication process went through several stages and altered as I became more independent and self-assured while abroad. I have also noticed that the type of ICT I used varied based on the different people I talked to and also based on the purpose of our discussion.

I have also had the chance to experience long-distance romantic relationships during my time in Sweden. Not only me, but a bigger amount of my foreign friends had troubles maintaining that type of relationship. Studying, socialising, going on trips and all the adventures couples would usually experience together had to be done alone with new friends, which led to jealousy, fights and break-ups sooner or later. I personally believe that parents are happy whenever their child has time to talk to them, but a romantic partner expects a certain amount every day and if that cannot be achieved the quality of the relationship automatically starts to decline.

Based on the aforementioned observations, I find the uses and gratifications theory by Blumler and Katz (1974) particularly appealing to analyse how Erasmus+ exchange students use ICTs to maintain their relationships with their parents and romantic partners from home. Counting on their self-awareness I expect to discover whether my experiences can be seen on a globalised level as well.
The introduction chapter is followed by nine overarching chapters, each of them discussing a different aspect. The background chapter (IV) places the research into context by providing information about the Erasmus+ Programme, the characteristics of education in Hungary, and how ICT usage has changed over history. The chapter also discusses the meaning and effects of mediatization, especially the mediatization of communication, and what effects it has had on community and individuals. These changes are essential to study as they provide the base of this research; without them exchange studies and communication in LDRs would not be possible. The next big chapter (V) is about the theoretical perspectives of the paper. Here the traditional and modernised versions of the uses and gratifications theory, the hierarchy of needs and the duality of structure approaches are presented. The theories are linked together and also with ideas of authors such as Turkle (1995, 2011), Holmes (2014) and Illouz (2007) to explain the changes in more detail and the growing number of LDRs. In the chapter following (VI), previous literature on the topic of technology and intimate relationships are presented. These subchapters include presenting motivations for ICT usage, LDRs, ICTs in LDRs and the meaning of ICT usage in LDRs. The next main chapter introduces the research questions of the paper (VII), followed by the presentation and explanation of the methodology (VIII), and the presentation and analysis of the results (IX). The paper ends with a concluding discussion and future implications (X). After that the reference list (XI) and the appendix (XII) can be found. The latter one contains the subscription of the questionnaire survey.
V. BACKGROUND

This chapter begins with information on the Erasmus+ Programme and its relevance in the globalised world. This is followed by a description of the main characteristics of Hungarian education, while numbers regarding Erasmus+ students in Hungary are also discussed. After that the history of distance communication is presented. Even though it has been explained earlier that it would not be fortunate to label exchange students as migrants in the times of the migrant crises, one of the key aspects of this paper is communication through distance, which can be well illustrated by transnational families. In that chapter – through the example of transnational families – how distance communication changed is shown. This chapter clearly demonstrates how media, and especially ICT devices appeared to help distance communication. Having presented the literature on transnational families’ communication, mediatization follows. This chapter explains the meaning of mediatization and discusses in detail how communication has become mediatized. The next two chapters reveal how the perception of community and self alters due to mediatization.

About the Erasmus+ Programme

In a society based on knowledge, Europe must secure the needed education, skills, and creativity for its citizens. In today’s rapidly changing world, there is a need for a sustainable educational system that is able to conform to the newest learning and teaching techniques, while also making the best out of the new opportunities and novelties. Education, training, and non-formal learning all contribute to opening new workplaces and enhancing Europe’s competitiveness, as well. In order to achieve this, the European Commission established the Erasmus+ Programme. The Erasmus+ Programme aims at improving key competencies and skills, especially those needed for the cohesion of society and workforce by primarily educational mobility and by helping the co-operation of educational and training institutions with firms. It also focuses on strengthening the quality, innovation, and transnationalism of educational and training institutions, mostly by helping the collaboration between such institutions and third parties. The Programme also wants to support the modernisation of policy reforms and of the systems of educational and training institutions, primarily with the help of policy reform co-operation, the clearer usage of practices that make the EU transparent, and the exchange of good practices. And lastly, it also reinforces linguistic variegation and intercultural awareness by highlighting language teaching and language learning. The Erasmus+ Programme
also hopes to raise awareness of the new viewpoint for the notion of an EU citizen (Tempus Közalapítvány, 2017).

The Erasmus+ Programme is the successor of the original Erasmus Programme between 2014 and 2020 that joins together several EU funding schemes for education, training, youth, and sport. The seven-year programme has a total budget of 14.7 billion euros to increase the skills and employability of students, trainees, staff, and volunteers; and an additional 1.68 billion euros for funding actions with EU partner countries (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2017). It is the most successful and well-known mobility incentive of the European Commission to promote and improve higher education and the transnational cooperation within the European Union by providing the opportunity for students and teachers in tertiary education to go abroad and change their lives. During the seven years there are mobility opportunities available for more than four million people, out of which two million are students of higher education. The Programme is offered in all 28 member countries of the European Union, however, nowadays it reaches way beyond the European Union’s borders. Students and teachers can now apply in Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway, Turkey, or the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as well, just to mention a few. Furthermore, Erasmus World allows the partaking of non-European countries, such as Egypt, Jordan, or Russia, for instance (ErasmusPlus, 2017).

Erasmus+ exchange provides its participants with several benefits. It has been shown that employers highly value foreign educational background, and often give promotions and more complex jobs to those who have such experience. Erasmus+ also helps discover one’s self and helps building personality skills that are remarkably beneficial when looking for a job in the future. Many European universities are among the world’s top institutions, some of them are free of tuition-fees, where students can gain valuable knowledge by high standards. Furthermore, there are many fields and languages available to choose from.

The original Programme was established exactly 30 years ago, in 1987, and it provides financial support for students to ease living, travel, and registration costs, not to mention the different costs at the universities. The Erasmus+ Programme has three key actions, which are the “learning mobility of individuals”, “the co-operation for innovation and the exchange of good practices”, and the “support for policy reform” (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2017). In a short time, Erasmus+ changes people’s attitudes towards other people, other countries, and cultures, as well as it alters the participants’ personalities. The Programme enhances language and communication skills, adaptability, and self-confidence by
taking responsibility for one’s own decisions and actions in the ‘adult world’. It also provides a chance to meet people from different cultures and to discover new ideas (Erasmus Student Network, 2017). The new Erasmus+ gives more support to people from disadvantageous backgrounds or with fewer opportunities, than its predecessor (European Commission, 2017).

This paper focuses on the aspect of the Erasmus+ Programme, which offers university students the chance to study or to do an internship in a foreign country for at least three (one academic term or a trimester), but maximum 12 months (one academic year). The Programme has no age limitation; anyone can apply after completing their first academic year leading to a degree in tertiary education. Participants receive an Erasmus+ grant that helps cover the travel and subsistence costs of the semester abroad, however the amount of money depends on many factors, such as the sending and host countries and institutions. Another important feature of the Erasmus+ Programme is that students do not have to pay tuition fee during their exchange semester, only the same amount of money they would pay at their home institution. Before leaving, exchange students sign the learning agreement, which lists the study programme and the courses they are about to take at the host institution. The sending institution is obliged to accept the successfully completed courses, which can be tracked after having received a document called ‘transcript of records’. What is more, very often the host universities offer language courses for their exchange students, as well. Each student is allowed to do one study and one traineeship exchange in each academic study level, namely Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral. In one-cycle studies, such as medicine, students may go abroad with Erasmus+ for 24 months (two academic years) (Erasmus Student Network, 2017; We Love Budapest, 2011; Erasmus+, 2017).

In the introduction chapter the reader can find the European Commission’s eight reasons why it is so beneficial for students to exploit the possibilities Erasmus+ exchange offers. An article by Eduline (2014 September) reports a survey conducted by the European Commission with 80,000 people gives validity to those previously mentioned advantages. The survey has found that those who have participated in Erasmus+ are 50 % less likely to become unemployed for a longer period of time, than those who have only studied at their home institution. Another study reveals that five years after graduation, former Erasmus+ participants are 23 % less likely to be unemployed. Ninety-two percent of the employers agree that tolerance, self-confidence, conflict-solving ability, curiosity, self-assertiveness, and being able to tell one’s strengths and weaknesses are highly valued characteristics. Erasmus+ enhances all of these. Moreover, those who partake in Erasmus+ traineeship abroad are more likely to be successful and promoted at
their workplace later on, as 64 % of the employers give more trust and more complex tasks to them. Erasmus+ also broadens students’ horizons and builds their social capital. After completing tertiary education 40 % of former Erasmus+ participants have gone to live and work abroad at least once, which is twice as much as of those studying at home institutions only. Thirty-three percent of former Erasmus+ students choose a partner from another country, while only 13 % of those who has never studied abroad. Twenty-seven percent start a serious relationship while on exchange and since 1987 more than one million Erasmus+ babies have been born (Eduline, 2014 September). There are more women partaking in Erasmus+ exchange than men, and the average age of the participants is around 22-23 years (Eduline, 2014 October).

The success of the Erasmus+ Programme can be seen by looking at the numerous co-operations the initiative has with different companies worldwide. The most recent partnership has been created with one of Europe’s largest low-cost airline, the Irish RyanAir Ltd. which is “the No. 1 airline for the lowest fares and the best coverage” (RyanAir, 2017). Based on the agreement, members of the Erasmus Student Network get a 15 % discount on up to four return flights per academic year and a free 15 kilogram checked-in baggage with each flight. They are planning to establish a community forum for sharing tips and hints and a booking portal specifically dedicated for Erasmus students the upcoming summer. What is more, students will receive weekly offers, and tailored in-journey offers via the RyanAir App (RyanAir).

The latest official statistics available considering the number of students in higher education in Hungary are reflecting the school year of 2012/13. These researches show that there were 338,467 students enrolled in Hungary out of which 20,694 were foreigners (Oktatási Hivatal, 2017b; 2017c). Almost half of these students – 14,375 respectively – come from other European countries, mostly from Ukraine (1,269), Serbia (1,465), Romania (2,308), and Slovakia (2,436), which is not surprising considering that big parts of these countries belonged to Hungary before the peace treaty of Trianon and are still populated by Hungarian speaking locals. However, the biggest number of international students arrive from Germany (2,528) (Oktatási Hivatal, 2017c). Even though these data do not consider Erasmus+ students, one can still see that Hungary is becoming a popular destination among international students. This is also shown in a report stating that there was a 100 % growth in inbound student mobility in Hungary since 2007. Another good example can be recognised by looking at the Erasmus+ country factsheet from 2014, which shows that the number of incoming students in Hungary has grown 2.5 times since 2007/2008. Back then 2150 students came to this country, however in 2013/2014 their number reached 4764. The Erasmus+ Programme 2015 annual report shows
there were 291,383 Erasmus+ participants in 2014, out of which 5,403 chose Hungary as their exchange destination (European Commission, 2017). That year most students arrived from Germany, Romania, France, Turkey, and Spain: 773, 695, 672, 522, 486 respectively. Looking back in history the sending countries do not change, only their ranking, due to the different number of students who come to Hungary. These numbers make the country an ordinary destination, but the growth rates indicate it is becoming more and more known and popular. It is important to acknowledge however that Hungary is a relatively small country, hence it will never be able to compete with the leading countries, such as Spain, France, Great Britain or Germany.

**About Hungarian Education**

This paper focuses on Erasmus+ students based in Budapest, because even though there are highly valued universities all across the territory of Hungary, four out of the top five receiving institutions are located in this city. These universities are Eötvös Lóránd Tudományegyetem (Eötvös Lóránd University), Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem (Corvinus University of Budapest), Budapesti Műszaki és Gazdaságtudományi Egyetem (Budapest University of Technology and Economics), and Budapesti Gazdasági Egyetem (Budapest Business School) (Erasmus+ Country Factsheet, 2014).

Education in Hungary is mostly public and compulsory until the age of 16. Most institutions do not require tuition fee, not even universities. English and German are taught as first foreign languages, and many universities offer programmes and courses in these languages, which is appealing for Erasmus+ exchange students, as well. Reflecting the knowledge based society, Hungary has a long tradition in post-secondary education: some of its universities are among the oldest in the world, established as early as in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century. Some of the historical universities still have high prestige: Eötvös Lóránd University, founded in 1635, is still considered the best university in Hungary; Budapest University of Technology and Economics, when founded in 1872, was the first technological institute with university rank and structure; and Budapest Business School was founded in 1857 as the first public business school in the world (Eötvös Lóránd University, 2017; Budapest University of Technology and Economics, 2017; Budapest Business School, 2017). There are 29 public universities in the country, out of which 15 are located in the capital (Oktatási Hivtal, 2017a). One can find nine non-state funded that is private universities in Hungary, out of which eight are situated in the capital (Oktatási Hivtal, 2017a).
Hungary, with 48 European countries along, is part of the Bologna Process. The Bologna Process has existed since 1999. It is a series of ministerial agreements aiming to modernise the education and training systems in Europe to harmonise the countries and make international studies more easily available to their citizens. It includes novelties such as the three-cycle study system or the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), to provide easier recognition of qualifications (European Commission, March 2017; Felvi.hu, March, 2017). This makes the country eligible to participate in the Erasmus+ Programme both as sender and host. Based on the same system, the available fields of education are the same in Europe, however they are categorised in different ways in different countries. The fields of Hungarian tertiary education are categorised in 12 groups, which are the following: agricultural sciences, humanities, business and related studies, informatics (that is information technology and computer science), law and public administration, engineering and technology, arts, art mediation, security services, medical and health sciences, education science, sports, and social sciences (Felvi.hu, May, 2017).

A Historical Overview of Migration and Communication in the Past

Examples from history show that student migration has always existed. Architects, poets, or politicians went abroad to study at a more prestigious university, such as in the cultural centres of Europe like Paris or Vienna. Influential figures such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Karl Marx or Alfons Mucha all studied abroad for shorter or longer periods, just to mention a few. Even though communication and transportation was very limited in those times, sustaining relationships has always been a central issue for individuals, therefore migrants always found the way to communicate with their home. This section reveals how transnational families communicated in the past making use of the technologies available.

Up until the 1990s letters, tape-recorded messages and sending packages by postal service were the most common forms of communication in transnational families (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014; Hunter, 2015). It was a low-cost way of maintaining communication with left-behind family members, however it involved some difficulties. For instance, it only enabled contact with pauses of long periods; migrants usually sent one letter every two weeks (Wilding, 2006), and of course it took weeks for the letter to arrive, which made the information it contained already old. Therefore, immediate help or action in case of emergency – such as lack of money or someone’s illness – was extremely difficult. Also, due to the lack of education, even if migrants wrote a letter, the addressee had to find someone literate enough to read it and write a reply.
Nevertheless, traditional post was still the most preferred way of communication as international calls were prohibitively expensive, not to mention the fact that telephone facilities were not widely installed. Furthermore, the service was not reliable and worth the expenses and difficulties for only a few-minute chat, hence migrants only allowed themselves calls on special occasions, such as Christmas, New Year, or birthdays. What is more, even if they permitted a call every once in a while, it was not at all sure that the person they wanted to talk to, or at least someone was at home, available at the other end of the line. Regarding politically questionable times, such as the World Wars, there was another factor that made telephone calls more complicated; they had to be very conscious and self-censoring of what they said as ideologically inappropriate messages hung up the calls. Therefore, instead of using the official postal service, they rather passed letters or gifts through the network of friends, acquaintances, or researchers travelling to the region (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016).

By the mid-1990s and 2000s the price of international calls dropped significantly and became the social glue between the members of migrants and their families, owing to the modernization of infrastructure and telephone cables with higher carrying capacity (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014). Between 2000 and 2002 the use of low-cost phone cards doubled, while half of this call traffic was international (Hunter, 2015; Wilding, 2006). These novelties enabled migrants to make longer and more frequent calls to their home country. Furthermore, by this time it was also more likely for the left-behind family members to own a landline telephone. This led to a new routine and communication pattern: some migrants stayed with only calling a few times a year, however most of them made a call every week usually on Sunday evenings to their families. This call was about thirty minutes long and did not contain any information with particular importance, but rather it was only a casual chat (Wilding). By 2008 and 2009 mobile phone communication arose as the new form of social glue. These devices suddenly became increasingly popular in target countries among migrants, as well, and fortunately could spread quickly to overseas home countries, too, as top-up call-time was really easy to purchase even in small village kiosks (Hunter).

Since then, transnational family members have been able to engage in daily or nearly daily communication with one another. Not only are mobile phones a very good choice to call friends and kin members, but to send text messages, as well. In the past, calling was also troublesome, because of the different time zones the transnational family had members in; but with the appearance of mobile phones this problem can be overcome, since a text message can be sent anywhere, anytime. Thus migrants are able to engage in two types of co-presence: an
active participation in making an overseas phone call; or a selective way of when to read and reply to text messages and e-mails. They agree that both forms give the feeling of “being there” for each other (Brown, 2016). Additionally, “texting has a phatic function, an emotional reminder of the distant significant other” (Madianou, 2012, p. 289).

At the late 1990s, the internet has emerged and become, as well as a social medium, as a tool for personal communication, which of course has a particular significance for migrant and transnational families who live geographically remote, but remain connected through ICT networks (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014). According to Cairncross (1997, as cited in ibid.) internet has brought the “death of distance” about. Back then migrants sent e-mails several times a day, sometimes quite long ones often about nothing in particular, just for the sake of chatting, such as jokes, comments on sport events, or discussions on the weather. In these exchanges the act of participating is more important than what is being said, as “the moment of exchange itself […] reinforces a sense of the relationship between sender and receiver” (Wilding, 2016, p. 132).

One might think that when new forms of ICTs appear, the old ones are replaced, however, what usually happens is the opposite of this: people adopt the new technology as a new layer to their repertoire and choose to use the type that best fits their needs and gratifications at the particular time of use, increasing the overall regularity of communication. For instance, with the emergence of e-mails, they did not forget about letters, on the contrary, they started to give it another function. By post people sent more complex and serious things, such as a diagnosis of a terminal sickness, romantic love letters, or birthday cards (Wilding, 2016). E-mails often generated more communication between transnational family members. With a quick e-mail of “are you available for a chat?” it was instantly known whether someone was free for a talk or the timing was inappropriate. Wilding shows the example of several transnational families and their use of the internet. He explains that some families have made a website that they post information or photographs on. A couple of families have created and used chat rooms for sharing information. However, the most popular form of communication is sending e-mails in most families. The short and frequent e-mail conversations are mostly between individuals, they are spontaneous and considered fun, without paying precise attention to spelling or grammar; while the longer, detailed, full-of-information “newsletters” and “long letters” are sent to several recipients with closer attention to correctness. These families described how communication through e-mails brought them closer to each other, despite the physical distance between them (ibid.).
In recent years, the social function of internet has gained an even more significant role than ever before through migration. Not only does social media enable its users to send free letters, but also to virtually meet each other. This meeting can be, to begin with, maintaining the relationships with friends and family ties, as I have mentioned above. Secondly, it can revive the relationships with weaker ties, and help broadening one’s social capital, as potential migrants get a hold of their acquaintances in the destination country. Thirdly, internet can activate new ties, for example when total strangers contact people in the target country through Facebook to find out information about the migration process, et cetera. And lastly, social media serves the function of an open access information source for migration, as practical information for migrants is available on official websites, while backside knowledge can be acquired from illegal underground ones (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014). In addition, with the help of social media parents can follow their children’s social life.

However, there is one more important thing that internet enables its users to do: computer and smartphone mediated communication, such as Skype or FaceTime. These have many advantages: they are low or no cost, offer the chance to see each other, compensate for real face-to-face communication when organising family events in a group chat, which strengthens the feeling of being co-present. It can function as a big family reunion, as it provides a more accurate sense of reality, than a phone call where interlocutors cannot see each other (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016). Living at a distance can encourage families to stay more in touch and can bring the members even closer together, than if they lived in the same city, as they put more effort in communication. Although virtual co-presence is not the same as physical co-presence, it is just as much real and important.

As for a summary, it can be seen that computer mediated communication is affecting daily life in many ways, and it has also changed the ways of migration. ICTs allow for new environments that prove physical proximity is not at all necessary for socializing or communicating culture or family values. Travelling has also become more affordable, however it is ICTs, such as the Internet, smart phones, or social networking sites that are all contributing to a new, always connected environment. Transnationality and sustaining relationships that lack face-to-face interactions nowadays are completely dependent on these new environments, where ICTs and mobility are the key characteristics. Being part of a family means receiving and providing care, intimacy, and generally being there for the other. These values do not change, and it is computer mediated communication (CMC) that allows for transnational families to function as a real family even over boarders (Nedelcu, 2012). ICTs represent a
wonderful new form of expressing care-giving and emotional support by giving a sense of being there for one’s loved ones in spite of the physical distance in between. What is more, how individuals consciously select and use the most suitable device for communication is a great representation of the uses and gratifications theory, as well.

**Mediatization**

Krotz (2007) lays an emphasis on how the world and history are constantly changing driven by economic or political systems, power, or money. He adds that the future can also be studied only if one takes these into account. He highlights how stability is only a moment, because everything is based on change and development. Therefore, he suggests to look at everything as processes. However, such a concept is still not good enough, because a process has a definite starting and ending point and a certain direction, which is not applicable for developments such as globalisation or Enlightenment. The most relevant metaprocess that concerns the field of media and communication research is mediatization. “By this we mean the historical developments that took and take place as a change of (communication) media and its consequences, […] not only with the rise of new forms of media but also with changes in the meaning of media in general” (ibid., p. 258). The reason for this is that the newly emerged media forms are not substitutes for traditional media, on the contrary, the make the media environment even more differentiated. This, nevertheless, does not exclude the power of humans, as even though technology offers the new possibilities, it is the individuals consumer who decides what to use and how and therefore constructing the change in the world.

Mediatization is “the broad consequences for everyday life and practical organization (social, political, cultural, economic) of media, and more particularly of the pervasive spread of media contents and platforms through all types of context and practice” (Couldry & Hepp, 2013, p. 191). Up until the mid-2000s media research had three branches namely, textual analysis, political economy of production, and audience or reception studies. However, as media’s role has become stronger in everyday life (Internet access, spread of mobile phones, and then later the appearance of YouTube and Facebook) new focus points have emerged in media research outside of the original production-text-audience triangle. Another motivator for this change was the internalization of media and media and communication research, with topics such as mediatization outside the western world or power relations and mediatization. In general, mediatization is not one theory but a more general approach within media and communications research: “mediatization is a concept used to analyze critically the interrelation between changes in media and communications on the one hand, and changes in culture and society on
the other” both on quantitative and qualitative levels (ibid., p. 197). It examines how media constructs the meaning of life on the micro (individuals’ identities), meso (organisations, institutions), and macro (culture, society) levels, as well (Krotz, 2006).

**Computer Mediated Communication and the Change in Perceiving Community**

Computer mediated communication (CMC) that is “electronically distributed, almost instantaneous written communication has for many people supplanted the postal service, telephone, and even the fax machine” (Jones, 1995, p. 1). By nature, CMC, allows its users to “share thoughts and information instantaneously across vast distances” (ibid., p. 2). Jones argues that CMC has changed society. He has named this new form of community: *cybersociety* (based on William Gibson’s *cyberspace*). Myths, however, including the myth of *cyberspace* and virtual realities, are not new-fangled, rather they originate from ancient, now long-forgotten myths. The story of myths originates from ancient worlds, such as the *Bible* or the *Odyssey*. Back in their times, these myths were supposed to be believed and they were a part of everyday life, because they appeared on walls and vases, for example. Then imaginary literature has appeared which was never intended to be believed. Nowadays, one can find these myths in virtual worlds, which are rooted in the mythical spaces of the pre-internet era, however completed by the imagination of the players (Bittarello, 2008). Indeed, the mythic place of *cyberspace* is not a new notion: history repeats itself again and again: when technological novelties are introduced they are all myths believed to be changing the world, people just tend to forget that this has been the case with previous inventions, as well. Contemporary myths concerning new technologies are not new, at all, on the contrary, they just re-emerge from the unfulfilled myths of the previous technological novelties, because humans live in a continuous “historical amnesia” (Mosco, 2004, p. 8; Carey, 1989).

Another term that is used to describe society nowadays is Castells’s (1996) and Van Dijk’s (2006) *network society*. They both base their concept on the information age, which has started around the 1970s when the creation, exchange, and storage of information and knowledge became the driving force of development in economic, political, and cultural life, as well (Castells & Cardoso, 2005). The writers, however, apply different logics: for Castells the basic unit is information networks which manage society, while for Van Dijk it remains social networks but linked by information networks. Nevertheless, they agree that ICTs allow for more diverse and more frequent relationships through time and space. McLuhan (1962) coined the term *global village* while examining mass media’s effects on culture referring to how information connects the whole world by being available to anyone, anywhere, anytime.
Back then though, information was limited compared to how much it is available nowadays with the use of the Internet. Today consumers are online 24 hours a day and push notifications make sure they do not miss anything that is happening online or somewhere in the world to which they can mentally connect with their ICT devices. This even more demolishes time-space boundaries and allows for a constantly connected *global village* where the individual can choose their own neighbours according to their instantaneous emotions. This allows for an increased communication and makes people more aware of what is going on in the world on the global level: the consumption of global news and reaction to them makes the individual more involved.

What links the previous concepts and CMC is that nowadays they are all based on the Internet. Internet was created in the 1960-70s when the United States Department of Defence and other research institutions linked computers together to be able to share information with each other. This is also how e-mails and later bulletin boards and mailing lists have emerged (Jones, 1995). The Internet later on has become the backbone of many networks that are tied together. Internet started to be generally available by the end of the 1990s. In only about 20 years the usage grew radically: 43.9% of the world’s total inhabitants, 79.6% of the citizens of the European Union and 72.8% of the Hungarian society are Internet users in 2015 (World Bank).

Jones argues that the problem of geography was solved by transportation and communication, and that CMC has brought about a new community that is “global, local, and everything in between” (1995, p. 13). The writer also mentions how CMC allows efficient social contact by enabling users to customize their social contacts, and he believes it is the focus point of a post-modern world. What is more, CMC acts as a tool for its users to overcome space and time related difficulties. As he puts it:

CMC, of course, is not just a tool; it is at once technology, medium, and engine of social relations. It not only structures social relations, it is the space within which the relations occur and the tool that individuals use to enter that space. It is more than the context within which social relations occur [...] for it is commented on and imaginatively constructed by symbolic processes initiated and maintained by individuals and groups. (ibid., p. 16)

The importance of CMC however, he adds, is within its power to mobilize its consumers. This mobility is, on the one hand, moving within place without actual physical movement. And on the other hand, a movement within society due to gaining power owing to
the fact that one can create and control space (for example hackers). An emphasis is also laid on how people will form communities based on general interests and goals, and not on accidental proximity, therefore online life will be happier (Licklider & Taylor, 1968 as cited in Jones, 1995). The literature on CMC believes that CMC will eventually (a) “create opportunities for education and learning”, (b) “create new opportunities for participatory democracy”, (c) “establish countercultures on an unprecedented scale”, (d) “ensnarl already difficult legal matters concerning privacy, copyright, and ethics”, and (e) “restructure man/machine interaction” (ibid., p. 26). Jones moreover adds that “the computer’s functionality lies in its power to make us organise our desires about the spaces we visit and stay in” (p. 32).

A more recent term to express how constant connectedness is an ongoing process of today’s world is Licoppe’s (2004) connected presence or Elliott and Urry’s (2010, as cited in Baldassar, Nedelcu, Merla & Wilding, 2016) ‘mobile lives’ which refers to how people are always on the go without losing being in connection with significant others. Ling’s (2008, as cited in Baldassar et al, 2016) idea of bounded solidarity emphasises that even though mobile phone rituals strengthen the relationship with those who are not physically close, it indeed weakens the relationship with those who are actually present. ICT-based co-presence also refers to ‘being there’ for each other even across distance.

These concepts help understanding that socialising nowadays is not only happening tied to a place or time, but on the contrary, it involves distance owing to the transformation of communication technologies, which allow being connected even through territorial boundaries. Not only does CMC enhance relationships, but also it provides cultural, emotional, economic, and social help (Madianou & Miller, 2012).

**Computer Mediated Communication and the Change in Perceiving the Self**

Turkle (2012) compares technology use now and approximately 20 years ago. She mentions how she celebrated technology back then, as she believed it was usefully contributing to learning about one’s self in virtual realities, which one could use in real life after unplugging. She then draws the listeners’ attention to how nowadays technology is taking consumers into places they do not intend to go. She emphasises how these technological devices are psychologically powerful, as they not only change what users do, but also who they are and how they relate to themselves and others in their “plugged in life” (2’28”). According to Turkle, people want to be together, but at the same time they want to be in many other places, doing many other things that they find more interesting. This creates a sense of being “together, while
not being together” (3’49”). However, developing face-to-face relationships are essential parts of human well-being, as the reader will see from the chapter on recent uses and gratifications research. Nevertheless, people find face-to-face interactions scary, as they cannot control their real-time behaviour. That is why they rather turn to technology where they can edit, retouch, and delete posts and present their best self. Maintaining human relations is messy and demanding, and what people are trying to do is clean this up with the use of technology. She adds “across the generations, I see that people can’t get enough of each other. If, and only if they can have each other at a distance, in amounts they can control” (5’40”). This is how one gets to connection from conversation.

Turkle (2012) identifies three gratifying fantasies closely linked to technology use. Firstly, it makes the user believe that they are in control. Secondly, it makes the user believe they are always heard. And thirdly and most importantly, technology makes the user believe they are never alone. However, being alone is necessary, as “solitude is where people find themselves, so that they can reach out to other people and form real attachments” (14’40”). Nowadays, being alone makes people anxious. That is why they reach out for their phones the second they have some spare time: they connect to feel like themselves, to feel alive. However, this way the other person becomes an object to comfort them and “support our fragile sensitive selves” (15’10”). This is how one gets from connection to loneliness. Turkle raises the listeners’ attention to live a more self-aware life with more consciously listening to the other and drawing the boundaries of technology use. Nowadays the self is created through and with the help and usage of technological social interactions (Turkle, 1995). Humans are indeed lonely, but they are frightened of real face-to-face interactions (Turkle, 2011).

Besides face-to-face communication, today there are three different types of mediated communication according to Krotz (2006, p. 258):

- Mediated interpersonal communication, as in the case of writing or reading letters, emails or speaking by phone to another person.
- Communication of a person with media – both media production, where a person writes a book or makes a film, and media reception, where a person watches TV, reads a book or any other standardized media product addressed to everybody.
- Interactive communication, which takes place inside computer games, with robots like the AIBO, tamagotchis, speaking navigation systems and others. Here, one of the acting ‘alter egos’ is a computer system.
This paper examines the first type: mediated interpersonal communication with romantic partners and parents.

The Background chapter introduced the Erasmus+ Programme, and also shown and explained how communication has changed due to technological advancements, which facilitates communication across distance. The relevance of the changes CMC has brought about in community and self is shown in the next chapter, which introduces the theoretical perspective of the thesis and searches for the reason of the growing number of LDRs.
VI. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This chapter discusses the theoretical scope of the thesis. It starts from the traditional uses and gratifications theory followed by its modernised version, highlighting an aspect that has been overlooked by previous scholars. A solution is proposed by the supplementary usage of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, and Giddens’s duality of structure. Using these theories helps understanding the growing number of LDRs which is discussed in the final parts of this chapter.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory

The uses and gratifications theory was introduced in 1974 by editors Jay G. Blumler and Elihu Katz in their book: The Uses of Mass Communication. One can get to know more about the theory itself in chapter one: Utilization of Mass Communication by the Individual written by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch. They mention how in the past the focus was on media as a cultural institution with its own social and psychological functions and long-run effects, however the uses and gratifications theory brought about a change in the attitude and new forms of social control. They begin by critiquing what has been done by previous research, then continue by explaining the five elements of the uses and gratifications model. The first one is an active, goal directed audience, whose media usage is not a pastime activity by chance circumstances, but a purposeful activity, where of course the actual media exposure can be casual. However, patterns of usage “are shaped by more or less definite expectations of what certain kinds of content have to offer the audience member” (ibid., p. 21). The second element highlights that “linking need gratification and media choice lies within the audience member” (Parker, 1961 as cited in Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Based on that the writers suggest that one looks behind the meaning of the word ‘effect’, as it already implies that the media does something to the audience and not the other way around. The third element of the uses and gratifications theory is that naturally there are many forms with which one is able to satisfy their needs, and media has to compete with these other, more conventional, or older forms to fulfil the audience’s needs; mass communication is only one segment of them. The next element describes that “people are sufficiently self-aware to be able to report their interests and motives in particular cases, or at least recognise them when confronted with them” (ibid. p. 22). And finally the last element is about the suspensions of value judgements and the individual examination of audience orientations.

Functionalism dominates gratification research, where the needs are derived from the users’ social situations and experiences: if the consumer cannot find the natural satisfaction,
they will appeal to the functional (supplementary) one. The uni-functional view emphasises that “the basic motivation for media use is just an unarticulated need for social contact” (Stephenson, 1967 as cited in Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 23). There are many other interpretations: bi- and four-functional conceptions for example, but according to the editors there are a full range of functions behind such motivations. These are diversion, personal relationships, personal identity, and surveillance (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972 as cited in ibid.), where of course to connect or disconnect themselves is the central notion “ – via instrumental, affective, or integrative relations – with different kinds of others (self, family, friends, nation, etc.)” (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, p. 23).

The writers mention that audience gratification has at least three different sources, which are the following: “media content, exposure to the media per se, and the social context that typifies the situation of exposure to the different media” (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 24). They also add how “each medium seems to offer a unique combination of (a) characteristic contents […]; (b) typical attributes […]; (c) typical exposure situations […] (ibid., p. 25). The question is then what kind of attributes decide whether a medium is perceived as satisfactory. Consequently, whether one medium with these specific technological and aesthetic attributes is able to satisfy gratification needs is based on the requirements of each audience member. This can be viewed in two ways. Version number one is when the starting point is the medium itself: take two similar or dissimilar type of medium, they are equally assumed to serve similar or dissimilar needs. The centre of the other version is the need: it is believed that similar/dissimilar psychological needs will be served by similar/dissimilar media types. However, this implies that the same media can satisfy many needs at the same time, and also that different people have different needs and one man’s entertainment is another man’s torment.

Specific conditions require specific uses based on which hypotheses about the relationship of the user and medium can be made. However, in general, there are five ways in which social factors contribute to need gratifications. These are the following: (1) social situations can cause problems and therefore tension, where media can be the relief; (2) social situations can raise the attention to conflicts that one looks up in the media; (3) social situations provide real-life gratifications, however a supplementary one can be sought in the media; (4) social situations decide certain values which are enhanced in the media; (5) social situations may require a certain familiarity with media types and in order to keep that membership one has to keep being up to date with that medium (Katz & Foulkes, 1962; Edelstein, 1973;
As for the implications for research policy and media policy it is the duty of media researchers to examine human needs and find out which kind of media are capable of creating and satisfying these particular needs and which are the ones that are not. It is also an important task of the researchers in the field of media to disprove the over-generalisation that each medium can be used to fulfil any kind of need. The issue of what kind of need gratification is supported by what kind of medium has to be sorted, adequately. Additionally, gratification research questions whether media to some extent creates the needs that it actually satisfies. And consequently, whether media at all satisfy consumer needs is questioned. The uses and gratifications theory also implies that human needs function as a source of challenge for media creation, as producers have to appeal in a more excellent way to the many divergent requirements of the audience members (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974).

Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas in their 1973 essay *On the Use of the Mass Media for Important Things* argue that consumers have more power over the media, than the media have over consumers. They also emphasise that media are “at least as much agents of diversion and entertainment as of information and influence” (ibid., p. 4), nevertheless, the choice of media content and their usage depends on the social and psychological predetermination of the individual. The writers have chosen this approach as it not only makes it possible to analyse the gratifications and influences of the media on towards the consumer, but also shows why certain types of media have a different position in social institutions. Additionally, they wanted to analyse the relationship between media attributions and the social and psychological functions they fulfil, as well as look into whether people of divergent social groups satisfy the same needs, but with different methods. They have investigated the areas of institutions (politics, family, religion, and education) and self (self-identity, self-growth, self-gratification). They have listed 35 needs, which are categorised in the following way:

1. Needs related to strengthening information, knowledge, and understanding—these can be called cognitive needs;
2. Needs related to strengthening aesthetic, pleasurable and emotional experience—or affective needs;
3. Needs related to strengthening credibility, confidence, stability, and status—these combine both cognitive and affective elements and can be labeled integrative needs;
4. Needs related to strengthening contact with family, friends, and the world. These can also be seen as performing an integrative function;

5. Needs related to escape or tension-release which we define in terms of the weakening of contact with self and one's social roles. (ibid., p. 5).

What concerns this paper the most is category number four regarding the connection with family, friends, and the world. Seventy percent of the 1,500 Israeli respondents emphasised the importance of “collectivity-oriented” needs, such as belonging to the state, the nation, and the family. The researchers have also found that educational level has an effect on how many items the respondents rate as “very important”. Twenty-seven items out of 35 were endorsed more by people with middle or higher educational background; similarly, younger people rate the socialising attribution of the media more important. Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973) found it surprising that the rank of how much consumers thought media was helpful considering their relationship with the state and society was the same by every respondent regardless of educational level. They have also found that there are many ways in which media overlap, but can be categorised by mode of transmission, mode of reception, range of content, and the needs they serve. The writers lay a special emphasis on the fact that media-related needs must be viewed within the larger context of human needs, as they are only a small component of it (see Maslow below). In addition, they have found that socio-politically-related needs are the most fulfilled by media usage, both on the cognitive and incognitive levels. Moreover, they have realised an undeniable importance of media helpfulness in overcoming distance, both as spiritual (belonging) and physical (detachment).

The research of Katz, Gurevitch and Haas (1973) was made bearing in mind that users are aware of their personal needs based on which they choose media types to achieve gratification. These needs are derived from social and psychological expectations and consumers consciously make use of the different media based on each medium’s specific attributes. The overall conclusions which are important to mention regarding this thesis are the following: (1) non-media sources are more gratifying than media outlets, especially the role of friends is enormous; (2) media’s role becomes more important with – social, physical, or psychological – distance; (3) the different kinds of media are interchangeable and can be arranged in a circle, where the two nearest are the most similar in attributes, content, or social context. And lastly, media is not the one creating social and psychological needs, for human needs have always existed. However, they have to be satisfied in one way or another, therefore it is important to notice the media’s growing presence in reaching gratifications.
Modernisation and Critique of the Uses and Gratifications Theory

Even though the uses and gratifications theory is an older one, it is important to know older theories to be able to understand newer ones. Theories are flexible, dynamic and ever evolving. The uses and gratifications theory for example was found significantly useful in examining new media and their employment for relationship maintenance (Boneva, Kraut & Frohlich as cited in Baran & Davis, 2015). This modernisation of the original theory happened because of the emergence of Internet applications and their power to encourage interactivity. Baran and Davis identify three characteristics of computer mediated mass communication (CMMC), which are the following: interactivity, demassification, asynchronicity. Interactivity in CMMC strengthens the active audience notion of the traditional uses and gratifications approach. Demassification refers to the wide range of selection opportunities new media, such as the Internet, provide to consumers, which they can tailor to their own needs. And asynchronicity “means the ability of an individual to send, receive, save, or retrieve messages at her or his convenience and […] has the potential to store, duplicate, or print graphics and text, or transfer them to an online Web page or the e-mail of another individual. Once messages are digitized, manipulation of media becomes infinite, allowing the individual much more control than traditional means” (Ruggiero, 2000 as cited in ibid., p. 207). As well as being “staggered in time” by being able to control when to read and answer messages without permanently stopping the interaction (Baran & Davis, p. 208).

Rubin and Rubin (1985) state that media consumption is goal-directed and active. Rubin (2002) looks at the uses and gratifications theory as a shift from the traditional mechanistic view of the audience by applying the psychological communication perspective. This approach highlights that individuals reach gratification by interpersonal communication and the use of mass media. Kayahara and Wellmann (2007) identifies two kinds of gratifications closely linked to media usage. These are process and content gratification. On the one hand, process gratification is fulfilled when the activity takes place. Here the focus is on the activity itself, such as browsing through channels or websites. Content gratification, on the other hand, is when the person actually gains some information from the media, so the focus is on the outcome. Baran and Davis (1995) state that “the person follows his or her interests, choosing media content according to his or her needs and synthesizes that content to satisfy those needs” (p. 219). As for media gratification behaviour Stafford and Gonier (2004) list socialization, interpersonal communication, and collecting information as motives. It is important to mention that these are alternatives to face-to-face conversations, which long-distance relationships are
also very often missing. Westmyer, DiCioccio and Rubin (1998) have found that the telephone functions as an alternative to face-to-face communication and is more suitable and effective for expressing interpersonal needs, such as providing companionships, than e-mails, for instance (Dimmick, Kline and Stafford, 2000).

To summarize the recent thoughts on the uses and gratifications research “an individual will be motivated to use the Internet if he or she believes it will help serve his or her objectives to socialize with other people” (Urista, Dong & Day, 2009, p. 219). This assumption of an active audience that chooses media according to their own needs to fulfil a certain gratification is particularly well suited for studying motivations and behaviours in long-distance relationships through the usage of ICTs, which provide opportunity for interactive interpersonal communication even from distance. Moreover, while “traditional media offers only a limited array of content to which the consumer has to conform, new media offer greater choice, more control over content, or both” (Dimmick & Wallschlaeger, 1986, p. 9). A new form of media can only be accepted by the users if they see it fills old gratification needs, or raise new ones. For instance, landline phones are good for socialising and expressing emotions, giving advice, exchanging information, and providing companionship; also, they are inexpensive, they provide the users with the other’s familiar human voice and it is real time. Meanwhile, with e-mail time zone differences can be overcome and they fit to people’s schedules.

A critique towards the approach can be that it focuses on an active and conscious, goal-directed audience without taking social situations created by mass media into account, and that these social situations, again, create new needs. Such as discussing the new features of Facebook’s Messenger with friends. Moreover, needs created by these social situations can be most efficiently satisfied by the media that has created the social situation. This can be linked to technological trajectories. An example to demonstrate technological trajectories is the invention of cars. Cars were created to be able to travel long-distances in a fast and convenient form. However, cars needed roads to go on, therefore new roads had to be built as well.

This can be linked to the ideas of Giddens (1976), who focuses on individuals. He states that the needs of society reflect the needs of individuals. He, furthermore, claims that it is the actions of individuals that generate changes in society, and their main goals are self-fulfilment and self-actualisation. Still individuals can only exist within the constraints of society. This is the duality of structure. However, he also acknowledges that law and public opinion nowadays are flexible, hence people have more available choices, which requires more conscious and careful actions. Nevertheless by employing Giddens’s view which emphasises the duality of
structure and agency, the limitations of the traditional views of uses and gratifications theory are highlighted.

In the next section the reader can find an overview of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943), where the psychologist names the basic human needs and explains how they work together. His theory can be closely linked to Giddens’s (1976) ideas of self-actualisation.

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

In *A Theory of Human Motivation* Maslow (1943) names the basic needs every man has. These basic needs are namely “psychological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization” (p. 394), in this particular order, as they usually flow in this way with the basic needs being at the end/bottom. According to the writer basic needs can be grouped into five. He also states that each and every person is motivated to achieve these and the conditions they rest on. He also believes these needs are dependent on each other, but arranged in a hierarchical way, where the most influential dominates the others. He uses a pyramid to demonstrate his views (see picture 1), where self-actualisation is at the top of the formation. However, the needs can change place and the one that has to be satisfied the most gets on top, and the ones that are already satisfied go down in the configuration, as fulfilled goals are not active motivators. Additionally, the researcher believes most people have both relatively satisfied and relatively unsatisfied needs, as well.

![Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](image)

1. Figure: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, 2007)

Psychological needs are the ones essential for keeping the human body alive, the ones dominating the organism, for instance, hunger, thirst, or sexual desire. These are at the bottom
of the pyramid as they can be satisfied the most easily, but they are also the most basic ones. Once bodily needs are satisfied other higher needs emerge. The next one is safety needs. In a peaceful environment and society a man’s safety needs are easily satisfied, it can only dominate in emergency situations, such as warfare, a natural disaster, loss of a job, or an injury. Then come love needs, which are giving and receiving love, affection, and belongingness; a relationship with others. If these are fulfilled, the next one is esteem needs, which are basically a desire for a stable and high confidence in one’s self and respect from others, a feeling of worth and strength that one is useful in the world. And finally, on the top of the pyramid, there are self-actualisation needs. As Maslow puts it “what a man can be, he must be” (ibid. p. 382). This states that one must do what they were made for and truly be themselves in order to actualise themselves and become and remain happy and content.

One can see that belongingness and love needs rank third in Maslow’s pyramid. The existence of these are proof that people cannot live without being in regular contact with others and that they have a need for belonging to a certain bigger – such as the unit of a religious group, or sports’ club – or smaller group – such as family, an intimate partner, or a group of friends. Therefore it is clear that maintaining relationships are essential for a human to feel good. Maslow writes that the lack of love can eventually result in clinical depression, social anxiety, and loneliness. He also draws the reader’s attention to the fact that to love and being love and affection can also be expressed sexually, nevertheless, they are not the same, as “sex may be studied as purely psychological need” (ibid., p. 381). The Rieleys (1951 as cited in Johnstone, 1974) have investigated that children who belongs to a social group use media differently than those kids who do not belong to a group. For the previous media means a source of peer-group interaction, while for the latter it functiones as producing fantasies. They have also found that more social children are less likely to be engaged in action and violence, than their less well-integrated peers.

Projecting these findings to an Erasmus+ student this paper supposes some interesting things. Getting around in a whole new environment; trying to make themselves understood in a country the language of which they probably do not speak; manage their own living quarters; meeting new expectations at the host university; making new social connections; while also maintaining relationships from home are the basic tasks of an Erasmus+ student. In the first couple of days it is assumed that it is very important to have their loved ones’ support, to keep in touch with them through ICTs, and feel loved, motivated and ensured that going abroad alone was indeed the right decision to make. So basically satisfying the top three needs is made
through the usage of ICTs and CMC. And after a while, having made many new friendships, and got used to the environment, the Erasmus+ students might not require that much support from their home anymore, because they can manage that on the spot, in the host country. Hence, their online relationship with their home might become less important and sufficient for fulfilling needs. This can also be linked to the research questions, as the romantic partners at home might feel neglected and left out, however talking less to parents ensures them their child has fit in and doing fine.

From Theory to Long-Distance Relationships

LDR research and intimacy has been researched since the 1970s, however it is still underdeveloped. This chapter explains why the number of LDRs are growing nowadays and why it is crucial to research them based on the explained theories.

As the previous section shows the main aim of individuals is to achieve self-fulfilment and self-actualisation, and modernity is about individuals. In the context of LDRs this is also what Holmes (2014) claims. The globalised economic environment and the values of the capitalist employment require mobile and disconnected people, because they promote individualism. She sees this the main reason why the number of LDRs are growing. People find it more important to first have a reliable job, and they settle down only after reaching a financially secure career. More and more women decide to have a job rather than stay at home. People have made their career priority, relationships come only after that. This is also the reason why there are so many couples living apart together: couples voluntarily choose separation for personal career satisfaction. This tendency can be seen by the growing number of Erasmus+ students as well. Even though students are yet to establish careers, one of the key aspects of participating in exchange studies is to enhance potential career opportunities. They take on the challenges of LDRs to achieve self-actualisation.

Illouz (2007) disagrees to emotions being opposed to self-interest and that capitalism has created an anti-emotional world. To explain her views she created the term emotional capitalism. “Emotional capitalism is a culture in which emotional and economic discourses and practices mutually shape each other, thus producing what I view as a broad, sweeping movement in which affect is made an essential aspect of economic behavior and in which emotional life – especially that of the middle classes – follows the logic of economic relations and exchange” (ibid., p. 5). She sees it as a dual process where emotions and economy shape each other. This is represented in self-help books, talk shows, or women’s magazines, for
example, which made people primarily concerned with and defined by their emotions. However, with a closer look it can be seen that even if individuals in capitalism are emotional, they are not connected. Not being able to connect to each other is a result of CMC usage as the previous chapter shows.

In this chapter the theoretical scope of the paper was presented. Based on the uses and gratifications theory the author is using a quantitative questionnaire survey method to find out whether exchange studies have a negative effect on relationships and see whether consumers are self-reflective and that their communication choices are consciously made. The ideas of Maslow (1943), Giddens (1976) and Holmes (2014) are used to understand the growing number of LDRs, while Illouz’s and Turkle’s help in understanding changes in the world and the self. In the following section – Previous Research – the literature on recent implications of the uses and gratification theory in relation to LDRs, intimacy and ICT usage is presented.
VII. Previous Research

This section is divided into four main parts, and reviews previous literature applying the uses and gratifications theory. First,Motivations for ICT usage discusses why consumers select certain types of media. The main reasons are to socialise, manage moods, release stress and maintain (intimate) relationships. Second, Long-Distance Relationships explains the differences between long-distance and proximal relationships, shows maintenance strategies individuals in LDRs apply, and offers a possible explanation for why research focusing on student-parent LDRs are underdeveloped. Third, Technology Usage in Long-Distance Relationships reviews the literature on what types of ICTs individuals in LDRs use the most. These are instant messaging, social networking sites, online video calls and e-mails. And lastly, Meanings of Technology Usage in Long-Distance Relationships identifies the background meaning of ICT usage, which are distant parenting and communicating culture.

Motivations for ICT usage

Socialisation

Anderson’s (2001) research on American college students shows that young adults spend at least 100 minutes online every day. Leung (2007) stresses that “the Internet serves interpersonal utility functions (such as relationship building, social maintenance, and social recognition) as much as entertainment and information utility functions” (p. 205), whereas Starkman (2007 as cited in Urista, Dong & Day, 2009) argues that the motivation for such behaviour can be derived from “relaxation, fun, encouragement, and status” (p. 211). At the same time Ho Cho (2007) about online self-image building and relationship maintenance says that “motivations for Internet usage [include] interpersonal relations, information, and entertainment” (p. 341). Matsuba (2006) uses the Wollfradt and Doll Internet Motivation Scale to identify motivations for Internet usage. These are: information, interpersonal communication, and entertainment. He also states there are individuals who are more likely to use the Internet for mood management and social compensation, or to establish and maintain relationships, and to find aid to young adults looking for adult identities. Kaye in 1998 identified “six motivational categories: entertainment, social interaction, passing the time, escape, information, and Web site preference” (p. 34). Wimmer and Dominick (1994 as cited in Urista, Dong & Day, 2009) also strengthen the views on an active audience, when saying that media selection comes from an inner drive within the consumer, of course altered by the social context they are placed in. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) draw attention to the fact that interpersonal
communication and socialisation need gratifications can be fulfilled via ICTs such as e-mail or chat rooms.

**Mood Management**

Leung (2007) mentions mood management as an important motivation for media usage. Even though his paper is based on children, there are many points that can be altered to this research. The writer mentions how previous literature on stress has emphasised adolescents might turn to cigarettes, drugs, or a self-abusing lifestyle, when confronted with problems within the family, or school, however, it lacks detailed investigation on the relationship between stress and Internet usage. Not only can Internet and many other ICTs be used for communication, or entertainment, but also for social support and mood management. Mood management can be described as an action dedicated to enhance one’s mood and when the individual has achieved that better mood he or she tries to keep it and remain on that level.

Zillmann proposed his mood management theory in 1982, which is explained by Knobloch (2003 as cited in Leung, 2007) as follows: “the aim of mood management is to alter disagreeable moods, enhance mediocre feelings, and maintain pleasant moods. Leung argues that ICTs are particularly good for mood management: “with the ubiquitous nature of many new media technologies and a wide assortment of entertainment available on the Internet via mobile devices, this mood-regulating content is becoming more and more accessible and convenient” (p. 206). Mood management is achieved through social support, which is defined by Cobb as “information leading the subject to believe that he or she is cared for and loved, that he/she is esteemed and valued, and he/she belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation” (1976, p. 305). Abbey (1993) added interpersonal transactions involving affect, affirmation, aid, encouragement, and validation of feelings, as well, while House describes it as “the flow between people of emotional concern, instrumental aid, information, or appraisal” (1986, p. 267).

Leung (2007, p. 206) however takes the functional approach which has many types, for example providing (1) emotional support (e.g. caring, love, sympathy), (2) instrumental support (e.g. financial help), (3) tangible support (e.g. behavioural assistance), (4) information support (e.g. aid in problem solution), (5) affectionate support (e.g. expression of emotions), (6) social companionship (e.g. spending time with others). This is a clear explanation for why it is so important for Erasmus+ students to keep in regular touch with their parents and romantic partners through ICTs, as well. The research of Leung has even showed that “social relationships and social support are potent variables that can reduce exposure to stress, promote
health, and buffer the impact of stress on health, thus contributing to increases in both the quality and length of life” (p. 206). He adds that this can be viewed as children becoming more confident in using the Internet for mood management when they are feeling lonely, the more they are realising that social support is always available, therefore they are simultaneously becoming more relaxed, and less tense. He believes, moreover, that people adopt a behaviour of what they need to change and manage their feelings. What is more, only the ones who are feeling confident and positive will use the Internet for the various other activities available.

**Stress**

Yamamoto (1993) states there are two things that can cause stress: when one’s sense of (1) security, and (2) dignity and respectability is in danger, because these events lower self-esteem and lead to psychological malfunctioning. Zillmann (1982) proposed that television is good for releasing stress, as it substitutes negative thoughts with positive ones, which alters the consumers’ mood. Leung (2007) proposes that the Internet functions well as a tool for gratifying social deficiency needs, interpersonal utility functions, entertainment, and information source. He, moreover, states that all motivations for Internet usage can be derived from social compensation, and that CMC technologies, such as instant texting, or mobile phones enhance this function, which he relates to the uses and gratification framework on Internet usage motivations.

In the life of an Erasmus+ student there are many things that can cause stress. First of all, the new environment and the lack of the familiar places and faces, such as one’s home and family, friends, romantic partner, or even pets. Erasmus+ students moreover face new challenges and have to adapt to the expectations of their host institution, as well as create reports for their home university or take exams for both. They have day-to-day responsibilities like attending classes, preparing homework, or managing their living quarters. Not to mention the many events they are recommended to attend in order to meet new people, socialise, and feel a little less lonely. What is more, missing important events at home, such as a birthday, or an illness of a close relative, might cause the feeling of being left out or envy, jealousy, which all can result in frustration and stress.

Many scholars have examined the transition college freshmen have to adapt to after leaving secondary school and going to college far away from their family home. Even though Erasmus+ students have to successfully complete an academic year before applying and participating in the Erasmus+ Programme, this research finds it substantial to demonstrate some of the previous literature on the aforementioned topic later in the paper. Johnson, Staton and
Jorgensen-Earp (1995) argue that the most important change college students face is the transition in ecology. Bronfenbrenner defines ecology as follows:

The scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life span, between a growing human organism and the changing immediate environments in which it lives, as this process is affected by relations obtaining within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger social contexts, both formal and informal, in which the settings are embedded. (as cited in Johnson et al. 1995, p. 338)

Jorgensen-Earp and Staton (1993) indicate how college freshmen experience a change in responsibilities and how they are becoming more autonomous. Not only does transition affect the identity of college freshmen, their parents, peer group network, and other various systems; but also, their relationships and ways of communication. This thesis aims at finding these changes in the behaviour and relationship of Budapest Erasmus+ students.

**Relationship Maintenance**

In studying interpersonal communication for relationship maintenance, scholars have also examined relational maintenance behaviours (RMB). RMB is an action directed towards the deepening of “a relationship in a specified state or condition” (Dindia & Canary, 1993, p. 164). There have been many typologies of RMBs due to the divergent relationship types people partake in, however some scholars have grouped them and synthesised the literature. Dindia’s (1989 as cited in Canary, House, Stafford & Wallace, 1993) view of RMB strategies has three aspects, which are the following: romantic that is being affectionate; prosocial that is being cooperative; and antisocial that is applying coercion. Stafford and Canary (1991) identifies five elements: positivity that is being optimistic; openness that is being direct; assurances that is talking about the future; social networks that is applying common knowledge; and sharing tasks that is taking one’s responsibilities. These scholars have achieved a finite set of RMB typologies, nevertheless, they only considered romantic relationships. Whereas Canary et al (1993) have created a framework on RMB techniques which is the expanded form of the previous typologies of Dindia (1989 as cited in Canary et al) and Stafford and Canary. Their hypothesis predicts that RMBs vary according to the type of the relationship, which means that some are more used in romantic relationships, less in non-romantic ones, and vice versa. This framework integrates 10 elements altogether: “(1) openness; (2) assurances; (3) (sharing) joint activities; (4) positivity; (5) cards/letters/calls; (6) avoidance; (7) sharing tasks; (8) anti-social behaviors; (9) social networks; and (10) humor” (Canary et al, p. 12). The most recent approach
on RMB typologies has been established by Stafford, Dainton, and Haas (2000). These researchers have lengthened the previous works with advice and conflict management. Not only are RMB typologies differ due to the divergent types of relationships (romantic versus non-romantic), but also they vary due to geographical proximity and distance. This means that some are more often used in face-to-face communication, but others are more common in mediated communication (Walther, 1996; Rabby, 1999; Dimmick, Kline & Stafford, 2000; Gunn & Gunn, 2000).

**Intimacy**

As shown previously, forming relationships is an important milestone in people’s life, and is related to identity formation and well-being. The widespread integration of ICTs to everyday life help people meaningfully engage with distant others, experience and actualise intimacy in an individualising world (Valentine, 2008). Distance does not necessarily end relationship intimacy, as it can be overcome by the usage of technology. Communication, which is a key aspect of relationships maintenance (Epstein, Warfel, Johnson, Smith & McKinney, 2013 as cited in Off, 2016) is done by the usage of ICTs in LDRs. “The individual experience of interpersonal intimacy in the digital age involves a unique combination of media use based on applications, platforms and modalities (including both online and offline) that suit the particular needs of specific interactions and relationships” (Lomanowska & Guitton, 2016, p. 140)

The relationship between technology and relationship intimacy has been a research topic since the 1970s, however is still underdeveloped. As conceptualised in the Introduction, intimacy means a kind of closeness between people, and is often associated with feelings such as love, care, confidence, familiarity, or understanding, and the sharing of private information. However, it is important to note that intimacy is not only significant in romantic relationships, but in many personal relationships, such as friendships, communities, or families (Valentine, 2008). The relationship between technology and intimacy is rather difficult, as it is not an either/or thing, but a both/and as Campbell and Murray (2015) highlight. This means that not only has the usage of technology, such as ICTs, many advantageous, but also disadvantageous effects on relationship intimacy. In the following section these are presented. First, the advantages, followed by the disadvantages.

ICTs become a tool for intimacy as soon as they are used to unite individuals. ICT usage is positively related to relationship intimacy when conjoint usage occurs (Campbell & Murray, 2015a). This happens when both partners intend to use technology to connect with each other
which results in quality time spent together. This can be a pre-planned Skype dates or engaging in the same activity, which creates intimate moments (ibid.). ICTs can negatively affect relationships if they are used excessively instead of socialising with one’s partner. This can potentially lead to enhanced jealousy and mistrust. Relationship intimacy is also negatively impacted when there is too much interactivity with the partner, which decreases meaningful conversations. Comparing one’s relationships to others’ is also a potential threat to relationship intimacy.

**Long-Distance Relationships**

The fact that there are so many sayings about long-distance relationships prove that LDRs were always part of people’s life. However, in the past separation meant total detachment, but nowadays, ICTs and easy travelling opportunities certainly make life easier for people participating in LDRs. Nevertheless, it is still the participants who decide how they experience their LDR and whether it is easy and satisfactory for them or not. Sahlstein begins his research paper with two quotes: *Absence makes the heart go fonder* and *Out of sight, out of mind* (2004, p. 689). These two sayings imply that being separated can turn out in two ways. In the first case scenario, distance is like adding fuel to fire, as it enhances love and affection. Meanwhile, the second option is when physical absence destroys the feelings. These implications lead to the research questions of this thesis: do exchange studies have a negative impact on LDRS?

Previous research on long-distance relationships generally examine long-distance romantic relationships and compare them to proximal romantic relationships (PRR, relationships with no geographical distance: “[g]eographically close relationships are defined as any couple that live in the same city, town or area that does not require travel plans, expenses that are out of the ordinary from their daily routine and can physically visit with each other regularly and frequently” [Peterson, 2014, p. 2]). The most interesting finding is that people in LDRR and PRR feel a similar level of relationship satisfaction. This is intriguing, as scientists believe that individuals in LDRR are likely to idealise their partner and their relationship, and tend to overlook negative aspects due to restricted communication and limited co-presence (Stafford & Reske, 1990). Another reason for the similar level of satisfaction in both long-distance and close proximity relationships is the fact that what might be frustrating in one type, can be irrelevant in the other, and vice versa. Sigman (1991) argues that there are many ways in which relationships are formed and maintained, not only during face-to-face interactions. He
emphasises that the in-between time is just as much important, and draws attention to the
dangers of examining relationship maintenance only when the participants are co-present, as
relationships are not only formed through interaction, but outside place and time manners as
well. Pistole, Roberts and Mosko (2010) suggest that people in geographically close
relationships experience lower levels of relationship commitment, as they put less time and
effort in seeing each other, whereas in long-distance relationships partners have to invest in the
relationship a lot to make it last. Jacobs and Lyubomirsky (2013) propose that in LDRs
individuals have more time to dream about the time together and relive the memories, which
increases the perceived quality of the relationship. Mietzner and Lin (2005) argue that being
apart from each other helps develop the personality alone with improving autonomy and
independence, which results in a better relationship. Stafford (2010) has found that the level of
intimacy is higher in LDRs; also Kelmer, Rhoades, Stanley and Markman (2013) state that
psychological aggression is lower and communication is clearer in LDRs. On the contrary,
Merolla (2012) argues that distance enhances stress within the relationship, while face-to-face
interactions magnify intimacy and happiness. Peterson’s (2014) research shows that intimacy
and the level of commitment and the feeling of togetherness are not higher in LDRs than in
PRR. The perceived relationship satisfaction is about the same in both LDRs and PRRs
according to his research, based on which Peterson concludes that these measures are more
dependent on the individuals than the type of relationship they are in.

**Relationship Maintenance in Long-Distance Relationships**

Johnston (2002) suggests that some RMBs are more difficult to practice in LDRs due to
the geographical separation. This hypothesis implies that LDRs are more troublesome to
maintain, and they cannot be as satisfying as proximal relationships. Johnston however finds
that LDRs are not at all less satisfying, which means that geographic closeness has no
significant impact on RMBs or relationship satisfaction. Dainton and Aylor (2002) also
highlight the maintenance function of mediated communication and how its importance is
heightened in LDRs, as face-to-face communication is generally less available to their
participants, than to the ones in geographically close relationships. The writers moreover take
a uses and gratifications perspective to examine RMBs in LDRs. They state that their “current
study provides support for a uses and gratifications framework in that variations in channel use
are associated with the gratification of relational maintenance in long-distance relationships”
RMB perspective which they call small talk. This involves sharing daily tasks and events in the
form of superficial chatting. They have also discovered that RMB strategies deploy based on social context and situations in order to adjust to new ones.

Considering LDRs Wright (2004) differentiates between primarily Internet-based and exclusively Internet-based relationships. He describes the previous one as “acquaintances, friends, and family members who find it more convenient to communicate via the Internet, or people who may have initially met on-line but who now communicate by other means” (pp. 239-240); and the latter one as “[r]elationships that are developed without any face-to-face interaction or interaction through traditional media, such as the telephone, letters, etc.” (p. 239). His ideas support the hypothesis that relationships can be maintained through mediated communication. What is more, several researchers (O’Sullivan, 2000; Walsh, White & Young, 2009) suggest that people actually prefer CMC as opposed to face-to-face interactions. The reason of this comes from the limited nature of CMC: it is found to be less risky. During a face-to-face interaction non-verbal codes can threaten one’s positive self-image, whereas over CMC such situations can be avoided. In an instant message or an e-mail one is able to rephrase a sentence many times until it perfectly represents what one wants to deliver. During face-to-face communication the messages cannot be censored in such ways, and also non-verbal cues can lighten some information the interlocutor might originally wanted to hide. CMC is often used for flirting or making initial contact (Walsh et al). Researchers link such behaviour to LDRs:

People in long-distance relationships typically choose to interact with each other at times when they feel like communicating, when they are on their best behavior, and they may avoid sensitive topics due to feeling uncomfortable about discussing such issues when they cannot be with their partner in a face-to-face context (avoiding potentially negative topics), and this can lead to idealized perceptions of one’s relational partner (Van Horn, Arnone, Nesbitt, Diselets, Sears, Giffin & Brudi, 1997, p. 249)

Turkle (2012) also talks about how people are becoming more and more afraid of real time face-to-face conversations and interactions due to the fact that they cannot control and edit their behaviour. She identifies this fear with turning to technology and mediated communication, where the interlocutors can manage and retouch their messages until they reach the perfect self-image they want to transfer.

Using CMC in such ways, however; can be misleading and dangerous, as the individual can deceive his/her communication partner by creating a perfect person hiding his/her faults. McQuillen (2003) studies how people interact over CMC and identifies four key characteristics,
which are the following: idealized perceptions, selective self-perception, reduced cues, and asynchronous benefits. The first one is what has been explained above. The second means presenting only advantageous information or even manipulating messages to seem likeable. The first two are made possible with the third characteristic which allows the interlocutor with the environments, in which he/she is able to manipulate the messages. The fourth element of McQuillen’s framework concerns the time individuals have for thinking and composing the message before replying.

**Age as a Form of the Digital Divide**

There has been much research done on romantic partners in LDRs, nevertheless, research on student-parent LDRs have been majorly overlooked. This paper suggests several reasons why this could be the case scenario, but believes they all ground from the phenomenon of the digital divide. There are many books examining the topic of the digital divide that is – according to the United States Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration’s department’s entry – “an economic and social inequality with regard to access to, use of, or impact of [ICTs]”. The digital divide is an enormous limitation both in migration and in ICT usage. In previous research, scholars mostly focused on the part of the digital divide that has to do with “[t]he gulf between those who have ready access to computers and the Internet, and those who do not” (Oxford Dictionary). However, the digital divide means far more than just ready access nowadays.

It can arise in the form of having human capital that is knowledge to be able to work with such technologies. Furthermore, another problem and form of digital divide is raised by Dekker and Engbersen (2014), which is in connection with the notion of using the Internet as information source for collecting information about the process of migration itself and the destination country, as well, and this is the sometimes low trustworthiness of the virtual sources that can give false information or even deceive the potential migrant. Literature on the topic agrees that age is also a strong division in technology use, precisely in CMC usage, and that the elderly, as much as they try to catch up with the younger generations, are less motivated, and therefore less successful, as personal willingness and social expectations are essential contributors of learning to use ICTs effectively. In order to adopt the use of certain devices people should perceive it as useful, enjoyable, and social, otherwise, it will be rejected (Fernández-Ardèvol & Prieto, 2012; Ling, 2008). The issue of age as a form of digital divide is discussed by Rantanen (2005) who tries to show the process of globalization by investigating four generations of three families, including her own. She comes to the conclusion that “[t]he
youngest generation is by any standard the most connected generation of the three families. No generation has ever before had as much access to media and communications as they do” (p. 117).

**Age-Related Differences in ICT Usage: The Older Generations**

One of the reasons of this is that ICT devices are not designed with having the elderly in mind. Companies care way too much about profit and about the younger generations, who change their devices regularly and create phones to be the thinnest or the most lightweight (Ling, 2008). Youngsters keep their mobile phones for 11.8 months according to Ling’s findings, however, considering old people this time frame is almost six years. Nevertheless, the elderly are in the need of user-friendly software, big screens, and big buttons which give a sound when pressed. Otherwise, they cannot adapt this relatively new technology, unless both their eyesight and hearing is perfect, or at least as good as youngsters’ (Ling; Gradis, 2003). Ling also indicates that society’s expectations towards older people shape the way they consume new technological devices, as well. This means that younger communication partners might adopt a certain style for interacting with the elderly based on stereotypical assumptions. It is like a self-fulfilling prophecy, which results in seniors actually believing this supposition and acting as less competent. Additionally, older people are often viewed as less social, pessimistic and depressed, which makes younger people not willing to communicate with them, but rather to turn away from them. What is more, if someone does not know how to answer a phone call or send a text message, it makes them problematic for others. These people exclude themselves from these kinds of interactions, as they will not receive any calls or text messages after a while. Statistics show that 12.5 % would text a 60-year-old and less than 3 % would text an 80-year-old. Research also shows that it is easier for elder people to learn new technologies and adopt them, when they live in proximity with youngsters, or when they have had previous exposure to information and communication technologies in their life (Fernández-Ardèvol & Prieto, 2012; Ling, 2008).

**Age-Related Differences in ICT Usage: The Younger Generations**

Not only is maintaining and improving relationships with family members a key aspect for older people, but also for the younger generations. However, for them, keeping in touch with friends is more important, than with kin, what is more, making new friends through ICTs is also preferable. Besides, teenagers experience telephoning as fun (Williams et al, 1985 as cited in Wei & Lo, 2006), and they identify devices to be a symbol of status and fashion, which expresses a feeling of being cool (Leung & Wei, 1998 as cited in Wei & Lo). Wei and Lo also
show that ICTs are important in youngsters’ lives as a tool to avoid boredom, and to relax by chatting for example, with the primary reason of socializing and that it is a device to facilitate maintaining social life. Researchers (Aledavood, López, Roberts, Reed-Tsochas, Moro, Dunbar & Saramäki, 2015) have also discovered that younger individuals make phone calls in particular patterns. For instance, they prefer to make calls during the evenings, and the later it is the longer the call lasts. In addition, women are more likely to make a phone call, than men, and their calls are usually longer than the ones males make. Especially, younger women are more pro-active than men. This shows that women are generally more social than men. Young adults, moreover, usually call those individuals that they have the most face-to-face contact with, or with whom their emotional ties are the closest and strongest. It has also been shown that during the evening these young people tend to call special individuals, for example, best friends or boy/girlfriends, but not family members. The reason of this is that kin relationships are taken for granted, therefore need less managing. However, the quality of friendships can decline fast if there is not enough contact, hence these relationships get special serving: long calls during the evenings. This assumption by Aladevood et al triggered the second hypothesis of this research paper, which states that Erasmus+ students put more effort in communicating with their romantic partners than with their parents through ICTs while on exchange. It can be seen that this is a really firm difference between older and younger generations: elderly make phone calls to family members and caregivers mostly, and calling family members also rank top for adults, but it is only on the second spot for youngsters.

It is a basic human need to have strong and permanent relationships that people can rely on. This is called belongingness, and leads to improved self-esteem and better psychological condition. Belongingness, according to Walsh, White and Young (2009) is one of the primary reasons why the youth uses mobile phones: they want to connect to a certain group and feel a part of that particular group. They have found that those individuals who do not possess or use a mobile device regularly are excluded from such communities. In addition, youngsters use mobile phones to initiate and maintain relationships, too. It has also been pointed out that adolescents feel comfortable knowing that with their mobile phones they can contact anyone in a blink of an eye. Nevertheless, their need to feel connected raises some concerns, as well: they are now at the point to desire to remain connected all the time, so they do not even switch off their mobiles. Moreover, with the appearance of smartphones “face to face communication is more and more often replaced with writing in social networks; and for the new generation, born
in the digital era, communication through social networks is more preferable than speech” (Walsh et al, p. 12).

Sending pictures is also important for younger generations. Results explicitly show that using camera phones is a tool for the youth to record their memories, express themselves, and maintain their social relationships, as well. It has also been found that camera phones are mostly used to capture images of special events, people, or interests. Photographs are usually sent, on the one hand, with the intention to show off or amuse the recipient, but on the other hand, also with romantic purposes to support heterosexual relationships (Colley, Todd, White & Turner-Moore, 2010). For some people having a camera on their mobile is very important that is why firms create phones with higher and higher camera resolution and sensitivity. There are even phones made for taking almost professional-like photographs and videos. In the first half of 2006 camera phone sells grew with 40% in Asia and almost 4.5 million pictures were sent in the first quarter of 2008 in the United Kingdom (Colley et al). Nowadays, for a mobile phone device to be able to take, send, and receive photographs is a standard feature, which extends communication to a higher level, as it creates co-presence with sharing pictures with the ones who are physically absent at the moment. This way people are able to share their experiences immediately.

As for a conclusion it is clear that maintaining social relationships, especially strengthening close ties with family, is a key aspect of ICT usage to the older generation, as well as it is for adults and youngsters. These social bonds are also helpful when people are in the need of emotional or material support, which is also a similarity for all age groups. The younger the generation is, however, the more they use ICTs to establish new relationships. Chan’s 2013 findings (2015) reveal data that adults tend to use ICTs differently when the aim of the use is divergent, as other forms of use might be more suitable for other purposes. Not only does the adult generation use ICTs to maintain relationships, but also to form new ones. For instance, on the one hand, adults use mobile phone voice calls to sustain and reinforce relationships, but on the other hand, they use online mobile communication to establish new ones. The name of the first type is bonding (Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll & Rosson, 2005), and it is an extension of face-to-face communication, as synchronous voice calls can make up for not being co-present at the same time and place, hence serve as an alternative, which encourages bigger social and emotional support. It is stated that having only strong ties that is bonds, is not enough, since if a person has weaker ties that is bridges, as well, that person has more social capital. Social capital, in turn, has an extremely important role in human life, because people with higher social capital experience a certain kind of well-being, a better quality of life: a feeling that their life has a purpose and therefore they are more optimistic and balanced (Chan).
Therefore we call the second type of social relationships bridges: adults’ usage of mobile phones can be associated with bridging social capital with colleagues, acquaintances, and other types of weaker relationships, too (Kavanaugh et al). In summary, having strong and weak ties at the same time can be equally important, as they both can serve with new information, ideas, or opportunities for the individual (Kavanaugh et al). Not to mention, empirical evidence shows that ICTs are “related to greater self-esteem and lower levels of loneliness and depression” also owing to the increased social capital because of such devices (Chan, p. 101).

The reason this paper focuses on the age group 19-26 is only partly based on what has been also mentioned in the introduction chapter; that they are the first generation to have grown up with technology by their side and this is the age people usually take part in Erasmus+ exchange. They have also been chosen as it is assumed that their parents are also relatively younger and are familiar with ICTs at least as much to be able to use them for communication with their far away child. Based on data collected by Internet World Stats (2017; Internet usage has grown with 933.8 % since 2000) it is believed that the digital gap is shrinking, therefore ICTs are more and more available and easier to use with consumer-friendly designs.

**Technology Usage in Long-Distance Relationships**

**Instant Messaging**

One way to maintain relationships through ICTs is using “over-the-top” that is OTT messaging, such as WhatsApp. OTT is basically just another name for instant messaging, where – with the use of IM/OTT apps – the user can send text messages, photos, videos or make voice calls using Internet access, hence can overcome the limitations of service fees, for example. Furthermore, OTT/IM also helps reducing time costs, and escaping the communication limiting time zone related problems, so they are useful for bridging relationships, even on an international level. Additionally, bridges may contribute to a more in depth exploration of the users’ worlds, which also leads to greater life satisfaction (Chan, 2015). Having both weak and strong ties cultivated with the usage of ICTs, therefore, enhances higher social engagement, for instance attending more events, exchanging more information, and supports more face-to-face communication (Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll & Rosson, 2005). As for college students in LDRs, mostly e-mail and instant messaging RMB techniques have been studied so far that have applied the uses and gratification framework. The International Data Corporation (as cited in Leverett, 2007) predicted there would have been 500 million users of IM by 2005. With the appearance of smartphones, texting is clearly declining. In 2010 53 text messages were sent monthly, this number has become only 19 by 2013 (Chan). Chan’s research shows that only a limited amount
of Hong Kong based adult participants have mentioned that they use text messaging. However, OTT/IM, which, to be honest, is like texting for almost no financial cost is used by almost all of them (Chan). Nielsen’s study reveals that youngsters sent approximately 3,000 text messages a month in 2010 (as cited in Turkle, 2011).

Hwang (2005) applies the uses and gratifications theory while studying IM usage. He proposes that if maintaining a relationship fulfils needs, then the individual will be motivated to use the available technologies, such as IM, to maintain the relationship and reach gratification. Putting this into the current research suggests that Erasmus+ students will be more and more motivated to use ICTs to maintain their relationships with their parents and romantic partners, once they see that ICTs lead to satisfaction in relationship maintenance. Hwang, moreover, identifies five elements that motivate people to use IM. These are social utility, interpersonal utility, convenience, entertainment/relaxation, and information. The writer also mentions the social presence theory which emphasises the feeling of ‘togetherness’ and ‘being there’ for each other in LDR through CMC. Lombard, Reich, Grabe, Bracken and Ditton (2000) points to the fact that people ignore the medium itself while communicating through the usage of ICTs, therefore they have the feeling like they are physically and socially present despite the distance. Not only do college students use IM, but as Nardi, Whittaker, and Bradner (2003 as cited in Leverett, 2007) show that it is a new way for establishing brief interactions with family members and friends for adults, as well. Gender differences in IM usage are discussed by Ramirez and Broneck (2003). Their research suggests that women usually communicate more, but both women and men appreciate interaction with the opposite sex higher.

**Social Networking Sites**

Recent research has also dealt with the uses and gratifications theory while investigating social networking sites (SNS) and motivations for using them, for example (Urista, Dong & Day, 2009). SNS are online platforms that allow users to create a profile and establish relationships with others, by sharing content and communicating with them. The researchers argue that SNS sites are very practical for keeping in touch with family, friends, and acquaintances, as well (ibid.). They also emphasize that with their usage the consumers’ needs are being fulfilled in a continuous manner. In the past, audience needs had to wait for satisfaction, such as a certain mass communication programme on television, or a face-to-face interaction. While in the past gratification was delayed “due to factors including inaccessibility, unresponsiveness, programming and scheduling” (ibid, p. 217), nowadays media like SNS sites allow the users to even more actively take part in reaching their gratification goals. According
to the writers these new media are altering the results of traditional mass media because “individuals can be instantly gratified by their use of SNS through both mediated social contact and through selective and on-demand access to other media content provided as part of SNS services” (ibid, 217.).

**Online Video Calls**

Relationships happen in physical and audio-visual manners; therefore, it is important for its participants to see each other, besides hearing the other’s voice on the phone. Online video calls make up for the lack of visual connection, as they have similar features to face-to-face settings; hence, video calling is associated with the feeling of ‘being there’ for each other. Some families use such programmes to overcome the distance by sharing everyday life. This means that the interlocutors leave the video call open, but follow their everyday duties. Still, they can hear and see each other which brings them closer. While hanging out like this partners can engage in parallel activities, when they are doing different things, but also in shared activities, when they are doing the same thing, such as eating or watching television together. Studies also show that it is not easy to initiate a video call, individuals usually text or call each other beforehand to see the other person’s availability and willingness to talk. This way they can pre-plan video calls, such as Skype-dates. Some use Skype only because it is easier to make a call, than type a message and also because Skype calls are free (Judge & Neustaedter, 2010).

However, for the majority of people video calls are important because they provide a live picture of the other and the interlocutors can see each other. They agree that video calls provide a deeper level of engagement, which results in a stronger emotional attachment. Moreover, seeing the instant reaction of the other, such as body language and facial expressions like a smile, can also help overcoming misunderstandings due to miscommunication. Video calls also let the other person see the environment their partner is in by seeing the background, or purposely showing around the other in the area (Neustaedter & Greenberg, 2011). This is very helpful for Erasmus+ students as well, because they can show that they are in a safe place and their loved ones do not have to worry about them.

Partners usually initiate Skype calls by using IM, however, for many key times of the day are fixed times for video calling, such as early morning, and after work or school. Nevertheless, they struggle to overcome time zone differences. The less the difference is, the more time the individuals can spend together online, however the more the difference is, the less time they can spend together, as one has to go to bed when the other arrives home. This forces the interlocutor to negotiate and schedule their day around the video calls. These couples
usually schedule video calls for the weekend, when everybody has more time usually (Neustaedter & Greenberg, 2011).

E-mails

E-mails provide an excellent way to overcome time zone differences and they fit to people’s schedules. A study done at Bellcore shows that e-mails are superior to phone calls when the interlocutors live far away from each other, and when they do not have time for seeing each other in person (Baldwin, McVoy & Steinfield, 1996 as cited in Kline & Stafford, 2000). E-mails are used to send funny items, talk about the relationship, share stories, or solve everyday tasks, such as paying bills, reviewing documents, or planning trips as well. The survey also reveals that e-mails provide solution for the contemporary problem of keeping in touch besides a busy schedule. Especially with kin relatives e-mails are used to overcome time zone differences and work schedules, even though the expression of deeper feelings is often neglected (Kline and Stafford).

Meanings of Technology Usage in Long-Distance Relationships

Distant Care-Giving

In the past migrants had to rely on the only available technology, however ICTs have peremptorily changed that. Nowadays a certain type of medium is not the one that shapes peoples’ lives and interactions, rather humans alter which one to use and when according to their own interests and needs. One of the most crucial functions transnational families use ICTs for is to provide care for one another by being there for each other, in spite of the physical distance between them. Hence, migrant families tend to adopt the newest kinds of ICTs as soon as they become aware of them, when they feel that they better meet their distant care needs than the previously used ones. The family members constantly share the knowledge about new ICT types with each other and decide about which, when, how, and how often to use for distance communication, expressions of care and doing family (Baldassar, 2016; Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016). ICTs are therefore fundamental and revolutionary in the transfer of distant care. Two types of distant care can be distinguished: routine and crisis. The former follows a regular pattern, while the latter involves an increase in communication and sometimes even means a visit. Some families agree that they get on better not living together, but relying on ICT communication, however they do visit each other sometimes. Baldassar highlights that “[t]he degree of agency and choice over which, when, how and how often to employ ICTs to deliver distant care creates a strong moral element to the human uses and selection of technologies to be employed to deliver distant care in the form of co-presence” (p. 155). This means that when
ICTs are available people feel a moral urge to apply them and be there for each other, and therefore they put more effort in communication expressing their emotions and feelings more openly. Studies also show that the closer people are to each other emotionally, the more they rely on ICT usage, when physical contact is not an available option.

Mothers with older children rather call by landlines to talk about money or family issues. When it comes to discussing their children’s feelings more in depth, they prefer mobile phones, even if they are confident internet users. Also, mothers usually have difficulties making plans in advance due to the uncertainty of their schedules, so they are more likely to make mobile phone calls, which are more spontaneous. For them texting has a special connotation filled with emotions, such as a reminder to prepare homework. An interesting fact is that migrants are very conscious about the prices of international calls and texts. For this reason many have several SIM cards and vary them depending on the type of call they are about to make according to what the most cost efficient choice at the time is (Thompson, 2009). Although it results in less frequent Skype calls, mothers like to follow their kids on social media sites, as these allow them to constantly keep track of their children’s activities (Madianou, 2012). This makes their news feed filled with pictures of scanned school reports, new clothes, and family meals (Madianou, 2016). Also they can see what their children post, what their status updates are, what pictures they are tagged in on, or what they hit the like button for. This form of indirect communication gives a lot of information for the mothers, and when they do not see their kids online for a while, they get worried and call them to reassure that everything is all right. Consequently, for them ICTs provide a chance to feel like real mothers again.

Moreover, mothers carefully micro-manage their left-behind households by bringing their kids up providing emotional support and health advice for them, revising what the remittances are spent on, and in some cases even deciding on a weekly cooking plan (Madianou, 2012; Parreñas, 2005). Migrants also use their smart phones regularly as these small devices easily fit into their tiny rooms, not taking much of the space. What is more they can always carry them by themselves and make a quick call when their schedule lets them. With the help of these portable devices they can be online and available all the time, checking for updates, new messages every hour, even if they do not have the time to make an actual phone call. Surprisingly, even though migrants usually move abroad to work and provide remittances for their families, work is only a background activity for them, as their primary focus is on being there for their children. Nedelcu and Wyss (2016) argue that migrants generally call for urgent matters, send texts for arranging Skype calls, and use the internet for longer conversations with
deeper meaning. Traditional postal service is used for sending clothes, toiletries, and goods once in every month; and with the help of internet banking they can co-manage their bank accounts and control what the transferred remittances are spent on (Parreñas).

**Communicating Culture**

Another important aspect of using ICTs in transnational families can be noticed when one looks at the asymmetrical power relations between migrants and members of the host country: to achieve gratification through communicating culture in a multicultural environment.

Of course there are more welcoming countries towards migrants, especially well-educated ones, it is always hard trying to fit in in the beginnings. After suffering the first cultural shock, “ICT becomes a potential space for coping, self-expression, mutual support, and community-building and contestation” (Franklin 2004 as cited in Brown, 2016, p. 238). This way ICTs are not only means to maintain family relations, but also to self-expression, coping with the ambivalent feelings of migration, and community activism. Migrants, with the use of ICTs, help each other to survive in an asymmetrical relationship with their host country. For instance, they share practical information, exchange tips, discuss hardships, politics, citizenship and labour law on Facebook. For them ICTs mean way more than a tool to maintain relationships across boarders: it involves expressing one’s views and cultural identities. ICTs include a motivation to go on, and a relief from boredom, as well (Brown). In addition, Erasmus+ students often organise programmes, such as sport tournaments, board game nights, karaoke contests, picnics and road trips with the help of ICTs.

Liu, Volcic and Gallois (2015) stress that multiculturalism can promote multi-ethnic co-existence, but also include a threat to social cohesion. In the previously mentioned scenario both can be observed. According to the ideological asymmetry hypothesis (Sidanius & Pratto, 1997 in Liu et al) on the one hand, it is very beneficial for migrants, as multiculturalism offers the chance to keep their own ethnic culture even in the destination country. While on the other hand, the host country sees the immigrants who would like to maintain their own culture as a threat to their mainstream (high-)cultural identity and ethnic heritage, which obviously very easily leads to disagreement and tension, sometimes even to wars between nations.

This chapter summarized the previous literature on ICT usage motivations and meanings in LDRs, and also identified a possible reason why research on student-parent LDRs is underdeveloped. The next section introduces the thesis’s research questions in detail.
VIII. THEORETICALLY DEVELOPED RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper addresses the following research question: **Does participating in Erasmus+ exchange have a negative impact on relationship intimacy?**

It is a general belief that once the children become young adults, their relationship with their parents becomes more balanced when the children move out of the family home and start their own separate lives. This means they have less arguments, as the children grow adults. Their parents let them go by their own choices and do not impose them, even if they make mistakes they can assert their identity and right to be free. A balanced relationship, hence lies on mutual understanding and respect towards each other. Therefore, it is hypothesised that being on Erasmus+ exchange, far away from one’s parents, makes the relationship more balanced. However, Erasmus+ is about making new human connections, which can prove helpful later on in life. Making new connections requires socialization, and therefore time away both from parents and romantic partners, which may become a cause for tension with their romantic partners, ultimately making the relationship less balanced and less intimate. Moreover, it is assumed that kin relationships are always taken for granted and therefore they are believed to need less maintenance and managing (Aledavood, López, Roberts, Reed-Tsochas, Moro, Dunbar and Saramäki, 2015). Based on this, the researcher would like to see whether putting more effort to relationship maintenance that is preparing for the exchange semester can help prevent a possible setback in relationship intimacy. In this context effort can be conceptualised as an act directed towards the achievement of a certain goal, in this case to maintain the relationship.

This overarching research question is answered by three sub-questions which are the following:

1. Does participating in Erasmus+ exchange have a negative impact on romantic relationships?

2. Are parental relationships also concerned?

3. Does preparing in advance for the exchange period help prevent a possible decay in relationship intimacy?

Having discussed the research questions, the next chapter presents the methodology this paper employs in order to answer them.
IX. Methodology and Outline of Empirical Work

This chapter explains why the author decided to conduct a quantitative questionnaire survey and why she believes it is a good method to employ to this research. The chapter also discusses how the research has been done demonstrating validity, reliability and ethics as well.

Methodology and Outline

The empirical data of this research was collected via online surveys, using – with the help of Karlstad University’s licence – Artologik’s Survey and Report programme between May 6 and May 21, 2017. When the questionnaire was ready it was shared on the social media site Facebook by the author and many of her family members, friends, and acquaintances asking for answers and additional shares on their personal “walls” as well as in groups specifically dedicated to Erasmus+ students in Budapest. Potential respondents were provided with a link to the website of the questionnaire with a few words emphasising that their participation is completely voluntary, but it would help a fellow student graduate. Before deciding on applying the self-administered online survey method, the researcher considered its strength and weaknesses and other methodologies as well to make sure she chooses the right one.

Surveys are a very old form of research. They can be used for descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory purposes (Babbie, 2003). Surveys are especially useful when the population is too large for direct observations, such as 3,500-4,500 Erasmus students. The gathered data is provided in the same form from all respondents, and the characteristics of the sample reflect the larger population (ibid.). Even large samples are feasible with the usage of surveys, while no other method is applicable for this. Surveys are also flexible: operationalisation can be developed from actual observations, while employing other research forms does not allow this. Lastly, the most important strength of surveys compared to other research methods is that researchers using surveys are asking the exact same questions from every respondent, and they are bound to impute the same intent for the same answers for each respondent. Surveys, of course, have weaknesses as well. They can seem superficial by constructing questions that are appropriate for every respondent. Surveys are also inflexible in the sense that once the questionnaire has been circulated it cannot be changed, whereas it can be during field research. Neither can surveys provide a deeper insight into the social life context of the respondents as opposed to a participant observer, therefore surveys are subject to artificiality (ibid.). Furthermore, survey research is generally strong on reliability, but weak on validity (ibid.). However, these weaknesses can be overcome if the researcher pays attention to the emerging
problems. Having discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the survey method, it is also sufficient to consider why it is better for this research’s topic and purpose than other methods.

Surveys include the use of questionnaires. The researcher decided to use self-administered online questionnaires. Using the Internet for survey research is increasingly popular nowadays, as it is a cheap method for non-funded researchers, such as university students. Additionally, they are also quicker than face-to-face interviews, which is important to consider when the student has a limited time frame to prepare the research paper. These considerations are useful for students preparing their home exam or final thesis (Babbie, 2003). Furthermore, self-administered surveys are more suitable for examining intimate topics, such as relationship intimacy. Respondents are more helpful if the questionnaire is self-administered and anonymous, than when they are required to answer questions on sensitive issues to an interviewer in person (ibid.). Moreover, they are more likely to show a stronger opinion, such as selecting “strongly agree” from a likert scale (ibid.). These statements all support the argument that employing an online survey method is good to investigate the research question.

Blumler, Katz, and Gurevitch (1974) highlight that the consumers’ active motivation to seek gratification through media usage has been neglected in previous research, and the audience was perceived as passive, upon which the media acts and affects. However, they have proven that the audience is active and is fully aware of their media-related needs and actions. That is why studies applying the uses and gratifications theory are asking respondents in a direct way using questionnaires (ibid.). They believe that the audience members can give reliable and valid answers (like a report of one’s own self) concerning their own needs. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch state that users “are sufficiently self-aware to be able to depict the type and extent of their needs as well as the relative contribution of various media towards their gratification” (p. 115). Kline, Miller, and Morrison (1974), however, have proven that this is more of an unconscious process that is also influenced by the social context of the consumer. Still – based on the assumptions of being self-aware – this thesis takes a quantitative approach by conducting a questionnaire survey.

The researcher believes questionnaires provide an efficient way to collect the sufficient data, analyse the results, and answer the research questions. This way the sampling was voluntary and everyone had equal chances to answer the survey. Nevertheless, to avoid unnecessary data, only individuals of the examined group filled it out. Since voluntary response sampling was applied, the survey cannot be considered representative, and because the survey is not representative generalisations for the population cannot be made. A non-response/failure
analysis is not needed, because all respondents provided adequate answers to all questions, except for one respondent who did not give an answer to nationality, but that is not in connection with the research questions, therefore the results are not biased. The survey was constructed online in an anonymous way, hence the data collected is completely anonymous and the information gathered will not be used after this specific research, therefore the privacy of the respondents is thoroughly secured.

The questionnaire can be separated into two sets of questions: demographic and those directed towards answering the research questions. Demographic questions ask for information on gender, year of birth, nationality, and field of education. Since a sincere effort was made to include various types of questions in the questionnaire, both open- and close- ended (dichotomous, nominal-polytomous, ordinal-polytomous, and continuous) questions were asked. Using likert scale (continuous scales) number 1 meant “very important” or “strongly disagree” and 5 meant “not important” or “strongly agree”. The uneven numbered scale was chosen, because it is believed that this way it is easier for the respondents to allocate the most adequate value, than on an even numbered or higher scale. Moreover, Hungarian education uses the same scale to grade students, therefore individuals who are in this country on their Erasmus+ exchange should be used to it by the time they answered this survey, which was after or close to or the end of their semesters. The reason why the same questions were asked in different ways was to ensure that the responses become consistent and that the questions do not already include a suspected or suggested answer.

The collected data was processed online – just like the collection. Artologik’s Survey and Report collected the data in tables, which could easily be exported to IBM’s SPSS Statistics programme. Furthermore, Survey and Report has created its own diagrams, charts, and graphs, but the author rather used the ones she created in SPSS and Microsoft Excel to demonstrate the findings. While analysing the answers, percentages were calculated and used. Since 100 people answered the survey, the number of people equals the number of percentages.

The size of the sample was set to 100, because it is an easy number to calculate with, and also because with optimal circumstances each answer would get 20 responses. This is because (except for year of birth) the maximum number of answers for the questions was five. This way 100 answers could potentially be divided equally. This way all answer options would get enough responses to be able to analyse the survey.
Population and Selection of Respondents

The research requires to select observations that will allow to generalise to people not observed (Babbie, 2003). This paper examines Erasmus+ students, more can be read about them on page 23, but the key characteristics are discussed here as well. The average age of Erasmus+ students is between 22 and 23. Most of them are from Germany, France, Spain, Romania and Turkey. The estimated numbers of Erasmus+ students residing in Budapest are 3,500 during the autumn and 4,500 during the spring semester. Why these are only estimations is discussed in the Limitations part. The researcher decided to examine students aged between 19 and 26, residing in Budapest during their exchange. The reasons for these can be read in detail in the Introduction, but the most important is that this is what the researcher had previous information about and relatively easy access to as she is also from Budapest. The researcher used probability sampling by sharing the questionnaire’s link on Facebook to different Erasmus groups and directly to friends and acquaintances. Probability sampling is the most preferred sampling according to Babbie (ibid.). Why it is the most preferred way has two reasons. The first one is that probability sampling prevents biases of the researcher. The second one is that it permits the researcher to estimate errors.

Validity and Reliability

Validity means that a measurement tool – in this case the questionnaire – measures what it is supposed to measure. Regarding the results, it means whether the results correlate with reality, evidence, and theory (Babbie, 2003). Reliability means that a measurement tool and the results it measures are consistent (ibid.). In other words, if the same people answer the same questionnaire again, the responses will give the same results, and the results correlate with previous research done in the same field. Survey research makes this possible by distributing the same questions to all potential respondents. This way the unreliability of both the researcher and the respondents can be prevented. As it can be seen in the chapters, Presentation of Results and Analysis and Concluding Discussion, the results do support previous literature, research, and data. Therefore, both the questionnaire and the results are valid and reliable. Hence, it can be concluded that using an online questionnaire survey was the most suitable method to conduct this research, and that the right people answered the survey that is those who had long-distance relationship experience while on Erasmus+ exchange in Budapest.
Ethical Considerations

Ethics require to protect subjects and have to be treated with the utmost care. Based on Babbie (2003), ethical considerations were taken into account before circulating the survey. Respondents were asked to give out personal information about their relationships to a stranger, therefore they were assured about anonymity and that the collected data would only be used for this specific research and deleted after the thesis has been finished. Since the research was anonymous, the researcher cannot identify responses with respondents, hence confidentiality is also secured. Participation in the survey was voluntary, no one was forced to participate. Participants were not promised to get special rewards or benefits from this co-operation. Again, since the survey was anonymous the researcher does not consider her questions to be a cause of injury, or make the participants feel unpleasant or uncomfortable in any way, because they will not be able to locate themselves in the various indexes and tables. Voluntary participation and no harm to participants are formalised in the notion of informed consent. This means that participants decide on their possible voluntary participation after having been informed about the potential risks involved (ibid.). The participants were informed, but did not sign any statement acknowledging this.

Operationalisation

Two concepts were subject to measurement in this research. These are intimacy and preparation. Intimacy was measured by asking whether the respondents’ perceived overall relationship quality has worsened during the exchange period. If the relationship has worsened, it is concluded that the relationship is also less intimate. This is believed because the two expressions correlate: if an intimate relationship decays, it becomes less intimate. Preparation was measured by asking about pre-planned Skype dates, whether the students and/or their romantic partners and/or their parents have purchased a new device or downloaded a new app in order to prepare for the long-distance communication and ensure relationship maintenance during the exchange period. Based on this, new variables were created and crosstabulations were done to answer the research questions.

This section summarised the methodology this research employs. The next chapter presents the results and the analysis of the collected data.
X. Presentation of Results and Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of the data collected and shows the results of the survey to answer the research questions. It begins with demonstrating the demographic characteristics of the sample. This is important to be able to show whether the sample reflects to population. After the demographics, data directed towards answering the research questions is presented. (The questionnaire is transcribed in the Appendix.)

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Even though it is not directly linked to the research questions, the author believes it is important to discuss the demographic characteristics of the sample to be able to locate whether the sample reflects the population described by previous research and available data.

One hundred people answered the survey, the majority of the respondents – 73 % – are female. Twenty-six percent were male, and 1 % reported other as gender. All respondents answered the question, there were no missing, invalid or incorrect answers. The age of the respondents is relatively varied: the highest percentage (20 %) of students were born in 1995, but the mode falls to 4 which is 1994. All respondents answered the question correctly, there were no missing or invalid answers.
With regards to the nationality, most of the respondents were from Germany (33%) followed by France (16%). These two nationalities account for 49% of the overall distribution of the survey’s respondents. Other nationalities represented were Spanish, Finnish, Dutch, and Hungarian. This however, does not mean that the respondents’ host academic institutions are also located in these particular countries that is how it is possible to also find Hungarians on Erasmus+ exchange in Budapest, for example. There was only one invalid answer, as the respondent did not write anything.

2. Figure: Nationalities of the Sample

With regards to education, most respondents are studying Business, followed by those in Humanities. All respondents answered the questions, there were no missing or invalid answers. See the frequencies of educational fields in table two below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of education:</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid Agricultural Sciences and related</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3,0</td>
<td>3,0</td>
<td>3,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>related studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15,0</td>
<td>15,0</td>
<td>18,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and related studies</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61,0</td>
<td>61,0</td>
<td>79,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informatics (Information Technology and</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4,0</td>
<td>4,0</td>
<td>83,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The answers gathered by this survey verify the previously mentioned general data about the Erasmus+ Programme (Eduline, 2014 October). It has shown that there are more women part taking in the Programme than men – 73 % and 26 % respectively – and that the average age of the Erasmus+ students are between 22 and 23, which can be seen by the fact that while examining the respondents’ age the mode is 4, which is 1994 and those who were born in 1994 are turning 23 in 2017. The nationalities of the Erasmus+ students in Budapest are also very similar to nationalities from the data of the 2015 Erasmus+ Programme annual report (European Commission, 2017). The report presents that most participants were German, Romanian, French, Turkish, and Spanish. Similarly, this survey shows that most students are German and French – 33 % and 16 % respectively. The most popular educational fields in 2013 were Social sciences, Business, Law and Humanities (European Commission, 2013). The gathered answers therefore reflect the field of education as well. However, since the survey is not representative, generalisations for the population cannot be made. Statements can only be made concerning the sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of Education</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and Technology</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical and Health Sciences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Psychology Sciences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1. Table: Field of Education of the Sample*
Research Questions

To examine whether Erasmus+ exchange has a negative effect on LDR intimacy the following research question was addressed: Does participating in Erasmus+ exchange have a negative impact on relationship intimacy? This overarching research question is answered by three sub-questions which are the following:

1. Does participating in Erasmus+ exchange have a negative impact on romantic relationships?
2. Are parental relationships also concerned?
3. Does preparing in advance for the exchange period help prevent a possible decay in relationship intimacy?

Considering the questions in the survey required to examine the research questions, no answers were invalid or missing.

Research Question 1

Does participating in Erasmus+ exchange have a negative impact on romantic relationships? The first sub-research question examines whether intimacy that is the perceived overall relationship quality changes during the exchange semester(s) with romantic partners. According to the data 51 % of Budapest’s Erasmus+ exchange students do not agree that the quality of their relationship with their romantic partner has worsened since they are on exchange, but 29 % believe it has. The mean value is 2.6, where 1 stands for “strongly disagree” and 5 means “strongly agree” to the fact that since they began their exchange semester(s), the overall quality of their relationship has worsened.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>agrees</th>
<th>29</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>disagrees</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither/nor</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Table: Decay, romantic partner

It was also calculated how many of these students lived with their romantic partners before the exchange. The table below shows that 41 % of those who lived with their romantic partner before their exchange semester(s) rather disagree to the fact that the overall quality of their relationship with their partner is worse, while 24 % rather agree, and 35 % neither agree, not disagree.
It was also calculated whether the length of the exchange has an impact of intimacy decay. How the length of the exchange relates to the perceived relationship quality is summarized in the table below. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents came to Budapest with Erasmus+ for only one academic semester, and 31 % came for two. The table below shows that 30 % of those who are staying for one semester lean towards agreeing that the overall quality of their romantic relationship is worse, while 48 % lean towards disagreeing to the same statement. Out of those who are on Erasmus+ exchange in Budapest for two semesters, 26 % gravitated towards agreeing that the overall quality of their romantic relationship is worse, however, 58 % relatively do not agree. The number of those who neither agrees, nor disagrees is relatively smaller among those who are staying for two semesters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Semester</th>
<th>69</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agrees</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagrees</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither/nor</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 Semesters</th>
<th>31</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agrees</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagrees</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither/nor</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, almost 30 % (1/3) of the respondents (29 people / % out of 100 people / %) rather agree to the fact that their romantic relationship has worsened during their exchange semester(s). Out of those who lived with their romantic partners before the exchange semester(s) almost 25 % (¼) agree (24 people / % out of 100 people / %). The impact of the length of the exchange gives similar results: almost 30 % (1/3) of those who stayed for only one semester agree, and slightly more than 25 % (¼) of those who stayed for two semesters agree. The researcher believes that considering a sample of 100 people, these are big differences. To answer the research question, it can be concluded that almost 30 % (1/3) of the sample experiences that Erasmus+ exchange has had a negative impact on the intimacy of their
romantic relationship. This is affected by whether the partners lived together before the exchange and whether the student stayed for two semesters, because only 25% (¼) of these students experienced a decay.

**Research Question 2**

Are parental relationships also concerned? The second sub-research question examines whether intimacy changes during the exchange semester(s) with parents. Data shows that 83% of the sample do not agree that their relationship with their parents are worse, but nine percent do. The mean value is 1.6, where 1 stands for “strongly disagree” and 5 means “strongly agree” to the fact that since they began their exchange semester(s), the overall quality of their relationship is worse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>agrees</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>disagrees</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither/nor</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Table: Decay, parents

It was also calculated how many of these students lived with their parents before the exchange. As for those who lived with their parents at home, 16% rather agree that the overall quality of their relationship with their parents are worse, while 72% rather disagree, and 4% neither agree, nor disagree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>agrees</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>disagrees</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither/nor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Table: Decay, lived with parents

It was also calculated whether the length of the exchange has an impact of intimacy decay. How the length of the exchange relates to the perceived relationship quality is summarized in the table below. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents came to Budapest with Erasmus+ for only one academic semester, and 31% came for two. The table below shows that 7% of those who stayed for one semester rather agree that it has become worse since they began their exchange, and 84% rather do not agree. Considering those who stayed for two semesters, 13% relatively agree that it has become worse, but 81% relatively disagree. The number of those who neither agrees, nor disagrees is relatively smaller among those who are staying for two semesters.
In summary, almost 10% of the respondents (9 out of 100) rather agree to the fact that their parental relationship has worsened during their exchange semester(s). Out of those who lived with their parents before the exchange semester(s) more than 15% agree (16 people / % out of 100 people / %). The impact of the length of the exchange gives the following results: 7% of those who stayed for only one semester agree, and almost 15% (13% to be precise) of those who stayed for two semesters agree. The researcher believes that considering a sample of 100 people, these are big differences. To answer the research question, it can be concluded that approximately 10% of the sample experiences that Erasmus+ exchange has had a negative impact on the intimacy of their parental relationship. This is affected by whether the students and their parents lived together before the exchange and whether the students stayed for two semesters, because approximately 15% (13% and 16% respectively) of these students experienced a decay.

### Research Question 3

Does preparing in advance for the exchange period help prevent a possible decay in relationship intimacy? This question aims at finding out whether conscious ICT usage helps preventing setbacks in relationship intimacy. A new variable was created based on how well the students and their romantic partners and/or parents were prepared for the exchange, then crosstabulations were done to see how preparation relates to age and perceived relationship quality.

Sixty-five percent have reported that their decision to come to Budapest was made easier by the availability of communication technologies for maintaining relationships. Buying new devices in order to ensure communication with each other is prevalent neither with parents (84% did not) nor with romantic partners (86% did not). However, significantly more people have

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Semester</th>
<th>69</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agrees</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagrees</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither/nor</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 Semesters</th>
<th>31</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agrees</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagrees</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neither/nor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Table: Decay, length and parents
downloaded new apps to maintain communication with each other: 40 % with romantic partners and 52 % with parents. Sixty-four percent set up appointments and have pre-planned online video calls, such as ‘Skype-dates’ with their romantic partner, and 62 % with their parents. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents consider spending time with their romantic partner relatively important, while with parents this is true for 58 %. Comparing which ICTs’ usage Erasmus+ exchange students in Budapest plan in advance the least shows the following order: instant messaging, e-mailing, mobile phone calls, and online video calls.

As for how often they use ICTs, on the one hand with their romantic partners, the answers give the following order: e-mails never, online video calls and mobile phone calls more times a week, and instant messaging daily. On the other hand, with their parents: e-mails never, online video calls once every two weeks, mobile phone calls weekly, and instant messaging more times a week. Examining how much certain ICTs help Erasmus+ exchange students to communicate with their romantic partner and parents gives the same pattern. Instant messaging apps are considered the most helpful, the second most helpful are online video calls, mobile phone calls ranked third, and sending e-mails is perceived as the least important. E-mails are not considered helpful by the majority of the respondents; however, the other three ICTs are believed to be relatively helpful.

Sixty-eight percent of the respondents agree that they use ICTs, such as instant messaging apps, online video calls, and e-mails more with their romantic partner, since they began their Erasmus+ exchange, and 55 % use such ICTs more with their parents as well. Furthermore 47 % of the respondents rather agree that they put more effort and energy in maintaining their relationship with their romantic partner, and 32 % rather agree that they put more effort and energy in maintaining their relationship with their parents. The mean values are 3.41 with romantic partners and 2.93 with parents, where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 5 is “strongly agree” to the fact that the students put more effort and energy in maintaining their relationship since they began their Erasmus+ exchange in Budapest.

The prepared for long-distance variable was created by combining three variables, which are whether or not the student or their romantic partner or their parents have bought a new ICT device or downloaded a new app preparing for the exchange semester to ensure communication with each other, and whether or not the student sets up appointments for online video calling, such as pre-planned Skype-dates’.
With Romantic Partners

Based on how age correlates with how well the student was prepared for the exchange semester, pupils can be grouped into five clusters. Cluster 1, 2, and 3 are the relatively older ones, and cluster 4 and 5 are the relatively younger ones. Cluster 1 is named spontaneous older, students who belong here are relatively older and not well-prepared. Cluster 2 is older planners, these students are relatively older, but better prepared. Cluster 3 is easy-going older; they are relatively older and their preparation is on medium level. Cluster 4 is younger planner; they are better prepared and relatively younger. Cluster 5 is spontaneous younger, students who are here are relatively younger and not well-prepared.

In the figure below the green columns represent age. The smaller the column is, the older the members of the cluster are, because the questionnaire asked “year of birth”, therefore the shorter column means a lower number. The blue columns stand for the variable “prepared for long-distance”, if it is positive the members of the cluster were prepared, however, if it is negative, the members of the cluster were not well-prepared.

3. Figure: Cluster, romantic partner
The table below shows how much students in each cluster agree that their romantic relationship has worsened. 1 means “strongly disagree” 5 means “strongly agree” to the fact that the quality of their overall relationship has worsened since they began their exchange. The spontaneous older and younger clusters were the most prepared, however, they are not the ones experiencing a setback in intimacy the least. Hence preparation is not in connection to the change in intimacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster based on the year of birth and how much students are prepared for long-distance relationships (VAR01, prepforlongdist)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 spontaneous older</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 older planner</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 easy-going older</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 younger planner</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 spontaneous younger</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Table: Cluster, romantic partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster based on the year of birth and how much students are prepared for long-distance relationships (VAR01, prepforlongdist)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 spontaneous older</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 older planner</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 easy-going older</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 younger planner</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 spontaneous younger</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Table: Cluster, romantic partner

The table below shows how much students in each cluster agree that their romantic relationship has worsened. 1 means “strongly disagree” 5 means “strongly agree” to the fact that the quality of their overall relationship has worsened since they began their exchange. The spontaneous older and younger clusters were the most prepared, however, they are not the ones experiencing a setback in intimacy the least. Hence preparation is not in connection to the change in intimacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report</th>
<th>How much do you agree with the following statements? (1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>based on the year of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spontaneous older</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>older planning</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,42</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easy-going older</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,00</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>younger planning</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,57</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spontaneous younger</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,89</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1,764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,60</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,491</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Table: Cluster, decay and romantic partner

79
With Parents

Based on how age correlates with how well the student was prepared for the exchange semester, pupils can be grouped into four clusters. Cluster 1, and 4 are the relatively younger ones, and cluster 2 and 3 are the relatively older ones. Cluster 1 is named independent younger, students who belong here are relatively younger and not well-prepared. Cluster 2 is independent older, these students are relatively older, and not well-prepared. Cluster 3 is dependent older; they are relatively older and their preparation is slightly better. Cluster 4 is dependent younger; they are better prepared and relatively younger.

In the figure below the green columns represent age. The smaller the column is, the older the members of the cluster are, because the questionnaire asked “year of birth”, therefore the shorter column means a lower number. The blue columns stand for the variable “prepared for long-distance”, if it is positive the members of the cluster were prepared, however, if it is negative, the members of the cluster were not well-prepared.

Cluster based on the year of birth and how much students are prepared for keeping in touch with parents during exchange (VAR01, prepforlongdist)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>independent younger</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25,0</td>
<td>25,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>independent older</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27,0</td>
<td>52,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Figure: Cluster, parents
In the table below shows how much students in each cluster agree that their parental relationship has worsened since they began their exchange. 1 means “strongly disagree” 5 means “strongly agree” to the fact that the quality of their overall relationship has worsened since they began their exchange. Dependent youngers were the most prepared, however, they experienced intimacy decay the most, while independent youngers were the least prepared and they experienced the least decay in intimacy. Looking at the table below, it can be concluded that preparation with parents affects intimacy in a negative way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dependent older</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dependent younger</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In conclusion, the previous data show that preparation for the exchange was not in connection with experiencing a decay in intimacy with romantic partners, and that a decay in intimacy was negatively impacted by preparation with parents.
XI. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

This chapter concludes the analysed results supplemented with possible explanations and future implications to the findings. Having analysed the collected data, the results answered all research questions. Forming intimate relationships is an important milestone in young adults’ life, which increases health and overall well-being. However, mediatization has brought about many changes, especially in how people perceive community, the self and how they communicate with each other. CMC is now built into socialising and forming, maintaining relationships and has both advantages and dangers. Nevertheless, the relationship between technology and relationship intimacy is still rather underdeveloped. The number of LDRs are growing, as the modern world requires mobile individuals. Because of this less and less people decide to stay at home prioritising their relationships, but rather they focus on self-actualisation and their jobs. This tendency can also be seen by Erasmus+ students, who go abroad to pursue their goals. Still, they are not anti-emotional, keeping in touch with their home is important for most of the respondents of the sample.

The main purpose of this study was to contribute to the growing literature and research within the field of communication and media, especially considering the relationship between technology and communication, which is still underdeveloped. Besides the global relevance and contribution to the emerging field, the motivations for choosing such topic are also derived from personal experience. The author wanted to see whether her experiences can be seen on a globalised level, as well. More precisely, whether her beliefs about how studying abroad affects social relations are true. The research was conducted in a quantitative way, using anonymous questionnaire surveys. The sample is a voluntary response sample. Even though the sample reflects the demographic characteristics of the population and support previous research, it is not representative, hence cannot be generalised. The respondents used an online platform to fill out the questions, and the collected 100 answers were analysed using IMB SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

The results answered all research questions adequately. The overarching research question was whether Erasmus+ exchange studies have a negative impact on relationship intimacy. Overall there are not many people who agree to the fact that the quality of their relationship has become worse since they began their exchange, which is surprising, since personal experience showed the opposite with romantic partners, though it supports previous research. The research questions, were directed towards exploring two types of LDRs, namely
romantic and parental. Approximately 30% of the sample agreed to experience a setback in their romantic relationship, and 10% in their parental relationship. In general, romantic relationships are more likely to worsen in the first semester, while parental relationships are more likely to worsen in the second semester. It can also be said that those living with romantic partners or parents before the exchange are more likely to experience decay in intimacy.

The fact that the relationships are not significantly worse during the exchange semester could be linked to the conscious ICT usage proposed by the uses and gratifications theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974). However, the research question directed towards finding out whether conscious preparation for the exchange semester and distance communication is not in direct connection with, therefore, does not prevent setbacks in intimacy. This can be explained by previous research stating that as romantic relationships persevere, partners may use less technology as they become more secure in their relationship (Campbell & Murray, 2015a). And with the findings that kin relations are taken for granted and considered to need less managing (Aledavood, López, Roberts, Reed-Tsochas, Moro, Dunbar & Saramäki, 2015). It is also important to emphasise that it is not distance communication or technology that characterises a relationship, but individuals’ perceptions (Peterson, 2014). It is not distance that causes break-ups, but it can enlighten the already existing problems (Holmes, 2014). Being conscious and paying attention to ICT usage was expected. Even though 65% of the sample consider the availability of ICTs to maintain LDRs motivating in going on exchange, it is approximately 50% only who actually put more effort in communicating using technology. These findings were unexpected, and again could be explained by the previously mentioned as well as to McGuire (1974) who argues that even though personal needs have an impact on choosing certain media types, initially it is external situations, circumstances and chance that decide most cases. This could mean that Erasmus+ students would like to keep in touch more, but their busy schedule will not let them. The findings could also be linked to some of the limitations of this paper, such as that uses and gratifications theory does not examine social context or that new media are interactive, but this research only investigated one view: the Erasmus+ students’. The results also support the idea that the relationship between technology and intimate relationships is rather complex and not an either/or, but a both/and view should be applied in further research (Campbell & Murray).

How Erasmus+ students use ICTs to maintain their long-distance relationships could be explored more in depth by further research. Implementing this research could also trigger more similar ones in the future within the field, which may contribute to formulating the best deals
for exchange students for many companies, such as the agreement with RyanAir, as well, or telecommunication companies and event organisers. Moreover, in the long-run maybe app-developers could benefit from such researches, by developing apps designed specifically for exchange students. Furthermore, a deeper research into the life of Erasmus+ exchange students could also highlight their contribution to both the economic and cultural growth of the countries, and therefore may further foster and facilitate international co-operation in the world.
XII. LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations to this paper that the author finds important to share with her readers. First of all, it should be taken into account that students before going on exchange might not live with their parents anymore, therefore communicating with them using ICTs mainly is nothing new to them. Questions directed to finding this out, did not show much discrepancy. Secondly, the desired period to be examined is only a couple years’ scope, as ICTs surely not have been developed enough before that (for instance, Skype was founded in 2003 [Skype.com]). However, the researcher would like to do a historical overview of ICT usage of transnational families, but this typically means detachment of parents going away to financially help their families. Furthermore, when the author tried to find official data on how many Erasmus+ students chose to study in Budapest, the website of the European Commission denied access, therefore their number is only an estimation based on several Erasmus+ groups, organisers, and universities. Another limitation is that the research was based on the uses and gratification theory, which does not take social context into account, hence some of the findings and their reasoning might not be caused by separation due to Erasmus+ exchange. Additionally, the survey was answered by individuals only. Their parents or partners might have a different opinion, which would result in different findings. It would also be beneficial for future research to investigate their views, because new media are interactive. Hence examining only one view gives a limited perspective and understanding. Furthermore, the survey examined college students who use ICTs in an increased way. Moreover, they were residing in the EU, which is economically, financially and infrastructurally well-developed. Data from less developed regions examining less socially connected people would, again, give different results. Lastly, conducting a qualitative research might have provided a richer understanding, as that way participants could have been asked for clarifications.
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XIV. APPENDIX

Questionnaire

Hi and welcome,

Thank you in advance for participating in my survey and giving your support in obtaining data for my master's thesis within the field of Communication and Media at Karlstad University in Sweden. For your privacy, the data collected is completely anonymous and information gathered will not be used after this specific research. It should also be noted that the data collected will be deleted after completion of this specific research. The estimated time of the survey is 5 minutes. This questionnaire aims at providing data for the master’s thesis entitled *How Erasmus+ Students in Budapest Use Information and Communication Technologies to Maintain Long-Distance Relationships: Comparing Romantic and Parental Relationships* which examines how the students’ relationship changes with their romantic partner and parents while on Erasmus+ exchange in Budapest. Therefore, when answering this questionnaire, it is important that you are in a long-distance relationship with your romantic partner and parents. Please answer all questions according to your exchange experience. 😊

1. gender
   a. male
   b. female
   c. other

2. year of birth
   a. 1991
   b. 1992
   c. 1993
   d. 1994
   e. 1995
   f. 1996
   g. 1997
   h. 1998

3. field of education
   a. agricultural sciences and related studies
   b. humanities
c. business and related studies  
d. informatics (information technology and computer science)  
e. law and public administration  
f. engineering and technology  
g. arts  
h. art mediation  
i. security services  
j. medical and health sciences  
k. education and psychology science  
l. sports  
m. social sciences  
n. natural and physical sciences

4. **Who do you live with at home?**  
a. I live alone  
b. I live with my parents  
c. I live with my romantic partner  
d. I live with another family member(s)  
e. I live in a shared accommodation

5. **Who do you live with in Budapest?**  
a. I live alone  
b. I live with another family member(s)  
c. I live in a shared accommodation

6. **For how long have you been on exchange?**  
a. 1 semester  
b. 2 semesters

7. **Was your decision to come to Budapest made easier because of the availability of communication technologies for maintaining relationships?**  
a. yes  
b. no

8. **Please select the one you agree with** (yes/no)  
a. I or my romantic partner have bought a new device(s) during (/preparing for) my exchange to ensure communication with each other  
b. I or my parents have bought a new device(s) during (/preparing for) my exchange to ensure communication with each other
c. I or my romantic partner have downloaded an app(s) during (/preparing for) my exchange to ensure communication with each other
d. I or my parents have downloaded an app(s) during (/preparing for) my exchange to ensure communication with each other
e. I and my romantic partner set up appointments and have pre-planned online video calls, such as ‘Skype-dates’ during my exchange
f. I and my parents set up appointments and have pre-planned online video calls, such as ‘Skype-dates’ during my exchange

9. Which one is the most random for you (meaning: you do not plan it in advance)?
   a. e-mails
   b. instant messages
   c. online video calls
   d. mobile phone calls

10. How important it is for you to spend time with your romantic partner? (scale: 1: very important - 5: not important)

11. How important it is for you to spend time with your parents? (scale: 1: very important - 5: not important)

12. How much does using … help you in spending time with your romantic partner? (scale: 1: very much – 5: not at all)
   a. e-mails
   b. instant messaging
   c. online video calls
   d. mobile phone calls

13. How much does using … help you in spending time with your romantic partner? (scale: 1: very much – 5: not at all)
   a. e-mails
   b. instant messaging
   c. online video calls
   d. mobile phone calls

14. How often do you use the following ICTs with your romantic partner? (scale: daily, more times a week, weekly, once every 2 weeks, monthly, less regularly than every 2 months)
   a. e-mails:
   b. instant messaging:
c. online video calls:

d. mobile phone calls:

15. **How often do you use the following ICTs with your parents?** (scale: daily, more times a week, weekly, once every 2 weeks, monthly, less regularly than every 2 months)

   a. e-mails:
   b. instant messaging:
   c. online video calls:
   d. mobile phone calls:

16. **How much do you agree with the following statements?** (scale: 1: strongly disagree - 5: strongly agree) Since I began my exchange in Budapest…

   a. I use e-mails/video calls/instant messaging apps more often with my romantic partner

   b. I use e-mails/video calls/instant messaging apps more often with my parents

   c. I think the overall quality of my relationship with my romantic partner is worse

   d. I think the overall quality of my relationship with my parents is worse

   e. I put more effort and energy in maintaining my relationship with my romantic partner

   f. I put more effort and energy in maintaining my relationship with my parents