



UNCOVERING CMU STUDENT OPINIONS ABOUT STUDY ABROAD

CMU STUDY ABROAD | MOALA AGENCY



CENTRAL
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Agenda

- **Executive Summary**
- **Research Goals and Objectives**
- **Qualitative Research**
 - Strategies
 - Findings
 - Insights
- **Quantitative Research**
 - Strategies
 - Findings
 - Insights
- **Limitations**
- **Appendices**

Executive Summary

MOALA Agency: Maddie VanAlstine, Odessa Watson, Ava, Liv (Olivia) Henry and Ally Meske

- Our client, CMU Study Abroad, asked us questions to understand why more CMU students aren't studying abroad. They also asked what could be done to make the program more appealing and eliminate common misperceptions
- Students' interest in studying abroad and participation in CMU Study Abroad are the topics we aim to investigate. We will look at how study abroad is advertised, how students feel about studying abroad and ways to get them more engaged
- We used qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative component included a focus group and 12 interviews. A survey was included in the quantitative component. We asked freshmen and sophomore SCJM students their opinions on studying abroad regarding attitudes, behaviors, concerns and interactions with CMU's Study Abroad program
- Students revealed they don't know much about CMU Study Abroad. Reach more students and provide more information through campus activities and fairs

RESEARCH Q'S AND GOALS

- 1 What impacts students' decisions to study abroad?
- 2 How do we interest more students to study abroad?
- 3 What makes students follow campus organizations on social media?
- 4 What other ways can we reach students?
- 5 Why are more students not studying abroad?



Qualitative RESEARCH

Strategies, Findings, Insights

STRATEGIES

12 Interviews

- Conducted in Mt. Pleasant and in-person
- **Convenience:** gathered participants through reaching out to our peers.
- **Purposive:** We sought out CMU students with an SCJM major/minor
- Participants predominantly female, generally second- or third-year undergrad students at CMU

Focus Group

- Conducted March 17, 2024, at 12:10 p.m. in the Park Library at CMU
- combination of **convenience** and **purposive** methods
- All SCJM majors, all female, third year undergrad students at CMU

FINDINGS

- 1 **Students don't know a lot about CMU Study Abroad**
- 2 Students want personable content
- 3 Students are excited but nervous about studying abroad

1

Students don't know a lot about CMU Study Abroad

Students Don't Know About the Opportunities

- Most students have a vague, baseline knowledge of CMU Study Abroad
- They only know what they remember from posters around campus or what they heard their friend mention in passing
- Due to lack of information about opportunities, students couldn't elaborate on the university's program
- “[I know] very little, just that it exists, and some people do it for a semester. Or it can be shorter I think”
- “I don't know much. I know a few people that have done it but haven't really looked into it myself”

1

Students don't know a lot about CMU Study Abroad

Students are Misinformed

We noticed that students shared false information about CMU Study Abroad. Students are generally misinformed by assumptions or false information shared with them...

- “I guess I know they have a lot of Italy trips; I would like to see more diversity for places”
- “I guess my perception of [CMU Study Abroad] is that there’s not really any broadcasting opportunities in other countries for college age students, just based on not really hearing much about it”

FINDINGS

- 1 Students don't know a lot about CMU Study Abroad
- 2 **Students want personable content**
- 3 Students are excited but nervous about studying abroad

2

Students want personable content

Student Perspective is Crucial

- Every participant highlighted the influence of their peers on their perspectives and decisions. Peers are extremely influential for college students. The best content is from someone they trust, such as a professor or especially a fellow student
- A student suggested that CMU Study Abroad ask students who studied abroad to discuss their experiences

2

Students want personable content

Personalized Explanations & Opportunities

- Students want a more personalized explanation of Study Abroad
- SCJM students would be interested in opportunities tailored to their educational path
- The required internship for SCJM undergraduates makes them more likely to reject a study abroad opportunity if it interferes with their internship time
- Catered information would increase engagement with the Study Abroad program, regardless of where it comes from

2

Students want personable content

Website Frustration

Some students suggested adding more information to the study abroad website and making it easier to navigate. CMU Study Abroad's website turns away many students, with some even forgoing the opportunity.

- "I went to the CMU [Study Abroad] website, but it was hard to navigate so I gave up"
- "Since the website is hard to navigate and no one promotes their experience, that scares me. They should improve that."

FINDINGS

- 1 Students don't know a lot about CMU Study Abroad
- 2 Students want personable content
- 3 **Students are excited but nervous about studying abroad**

3

Students are excited but nervous about studying abroad

Homesickness

“Being away from friends and family for that long of time in a country that isn’t primarily english speaking is scary. I think that’s what has stopped me from pursuing it at all”

Language Barrier

“I was worried about having a language barrier while I was [abroad]” and “I’m definitely more drawn to places that speak English”
Students are often pushed away by the thought of language barriers

Finances

“The only thing holding me back from studying abroad is the financial aspect of matters. There are a lot of uncertainties I can’t answer at this point in my study abroad process” 100% of participants are concerned about finances

INSIGHTS

- 1 **Offer more scholarship opportunities**
- 2 Fix website functionality
- 3 Make information & experience sharing more personable

1

Offer more scholarship opportunities

Scholarships are available, but not guaranteed

It's highly encouraged to create more opportunities for students to receive financial aid.

Students need to feel secure that they can afford the opportunity before pursuing the idea further

Make easier to find on website home page

Scholarships on CMU Study Abroad's website are hard to find and rare. This discourages students from pursuing the opportunity

INSIGHTS

- 1 Offer more scholarship opportunities
- 2 **Fix website functionality**
- 3 Make information & experience sharing more personable

Students have trouble navigating the website content

- This causes some students to leave without the information they were looking for, others frustrated and some students giving up on potentially studying abroad altogether
- More information should be on the homepage
- There should be a different way to showcase potential programs. Students don't always know what they are looking for in their ideal program, so it's recommended that CMU Study Abroad figures out a way for students to view every program on one page and then filter down the programs to fit their needs
- Students want more student experiences showcased on the website. The lack of this, as well as the poor website functionality, pushes students away

INSIGHTS

- 1 Offer more scholarship opportunities
- 2 Fix website functionality
- 3 **Make information & experience sharing more personable**

3

Make information & experience sharing more personable

In-Class Presentations

- Builds trust between study abroad faculty and students. The intentionality of the visit will encourage students to think more about the program
- Classroom presentations will give CMU Study Abroad the opportunity to squash misinformation and share accurate information. Students can also use this time to ask questions about different opportunities and programs
- Study Abroad should offer more catered programs to students. Students in SCJM are unaware of any programs relevant to their studies

3

Make information & experience sharing more personable

Student Testimonies

Our suggestion for CMU Study Abroad is to have students who have been abroad before prepare a slideshow presentation and present it to their classes. Our research suggests peer experiences and opinions are highly influential, which would greatly impact student opinions about experiences abroad. It helps brings information to students rather than them finding it themselves

3

Make information & experience sharing more personable

Increase Number of Study Abroad Fairs

- Study abroad fairs were unknown to many students interviewed, and others were unable to attend
- Seeing all the programs available would encourage students to apply and study abroad
- As a result, students would have the opportunity to communicate directly with different program coordinators, decreasing uncertainty and relieving some anxiety



Quantitative RESEARCH

Strategies, Findings, Insights

STRATEGIES

Sampling Frame

MOALA Agency obtained a list from the Registrar's Office. The list contained 400 randomly selected freshmen and sophomore undergrad students living on campus and enrolled in Spring 2024 courses. International students were not included

Research Method

- Before developing our survey, each agency member created a list of 20 potential survey questions. After, we met and decided which questions we wanted to include in our final product, created on **Qualtrics**
- Three email reminders sent
- Opened April 16 at 11 a.m. & closed April 22 at 10 a.m.
- 26 responses total

FINDINGS

- 1 Demographics
- 2 Awareness
- 3 Perception
- 4 Decision Making
- 5 Promotion

1

Demographics

5 Male and 21 Female Survey Takers

- Mostly 19 years old; the average age for freshman/sophomores. Our survey takers' age ranged from 18 to 41. The average age of the respondents was 20.2, rounding to about 20
- Out of 26 survey takers, 14 were freshman, 10 sophomores and 2 juniors
- Our survey demographic was nearly completely white, except for 1 Hispanic/Latino individual
- Most students live on-campus, with 5 off-campus and two outliers. One student is a Grand Rapids resident who attends CMU via online global campus, whereas the other is currently abroad. However, the abroad student will live off-campus for their fall semester

FINDINGS

- 1 Demographics
- 2 Awareness
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2

Awareness

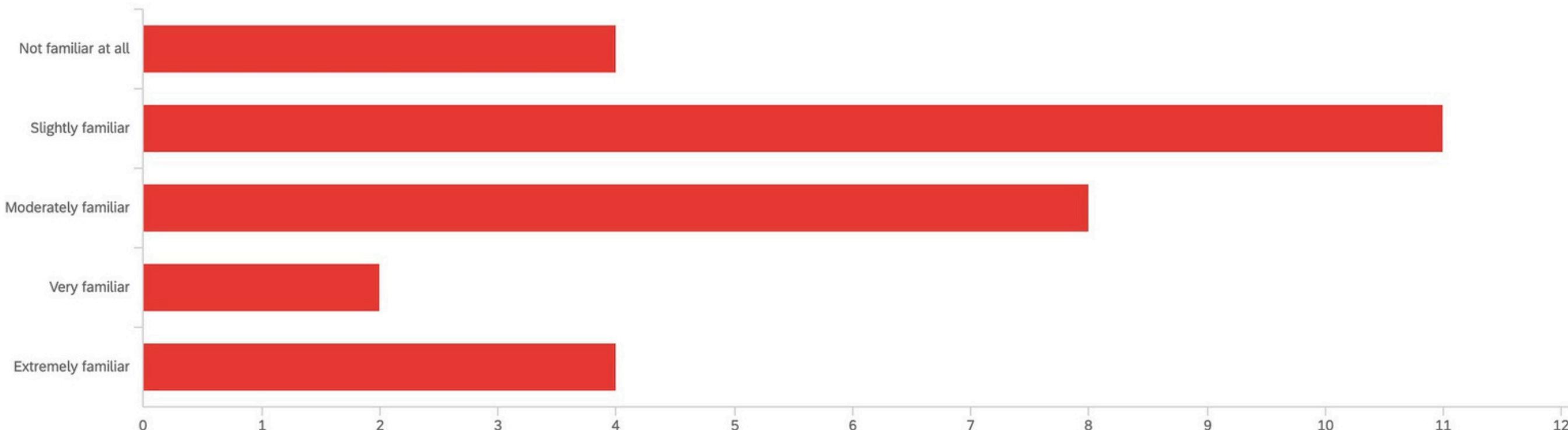
Students Have Vague Knowledge

Students, on average, have a very moderate knowledge of CMU Study Abroad, with most of their knowledge coming from resources physically on campus via avenues such as classroom talks, posters, and television monitors around campus in educational buildings.

Students Have Vague Knowledge

Q2 - How familiar are you with CMU Study Abroad?

Page Options ▾



FINDINGS

- 1 Demographics
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3

Perception

Discouraging Factors

- Students were asked to agree on different factors that could persuade them to study abroad. Statements included things like funding, cultural barriers, academic qualities, credit transfer and graduation dates, personal safety and familial separation anxiety. This segmented questionnaire shows a moderate level of concern
- However, some stand-out questions that elicited high levels of concern include limited scholarship availability and credit transferring policies

3 Perception

Lack of Funding

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How concerned are you about funding your study abroad experience?	1.00	5.00	3.15	1.49	2.21	26
2	How concerned are you regarding lack of familiarity with the host country's culture and language?	1.00	5.00	2.81	1.11	1.23	26
3	How concerned are you regarding academics, such as potential graduation timeline or major requirements?	1.00	5.00	2.85	1.23	1.51	26
4	How concerned are you regarding personal obligations or commitments, such as family responsibilities or working?	1.00	5.00	2.85	1.10	1.21	26
5	How concerned are you regarding uncertainty about credit transfer policies and academic recognition of courses taken abroad?	1.00	5.00	2.73	1.26	1.58	26

FINDINGS

- 1 Demographics
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- 4 **Decision Making**
- 5 Promotion

4

Decision Making

Effective Promotional Avenues

MOALA selected three specific promotional avenues for CMU Study Abroad: in-class speakers, posters and flyers around campus and peer-to-peer communication. The effectiveness rating of these avenues is as follows: flyers, in-class speakers, then word-of-mouth from peers. In this order, the SCJM student body prefers to receive information in a genuine and inestimable way.

4 Decision Making

What Influences Student Decision Making?

#	Field	Not effective at all	Slightly effective	Moderately effective	Very effective	Extremely effective	Total
1	In-class speakers who discuss study abroad information in lectures	15.38% 4	15.38% 4	23.08% 6	38.46% 10	7.69% 2	26
2	Study abroad flyers posted around the university	23.08% 6	30.77% 8	23.08% 6	15.38% 4	7.69% 2	26
3	Hearing about study abroad experiences from peers influences my decision to study abroad.	0.00% 0	3.85% 1	19.23% 5	46.15% 12	30.77% 8	26

Showing rows 1 - 3 of 3

FINDINGS

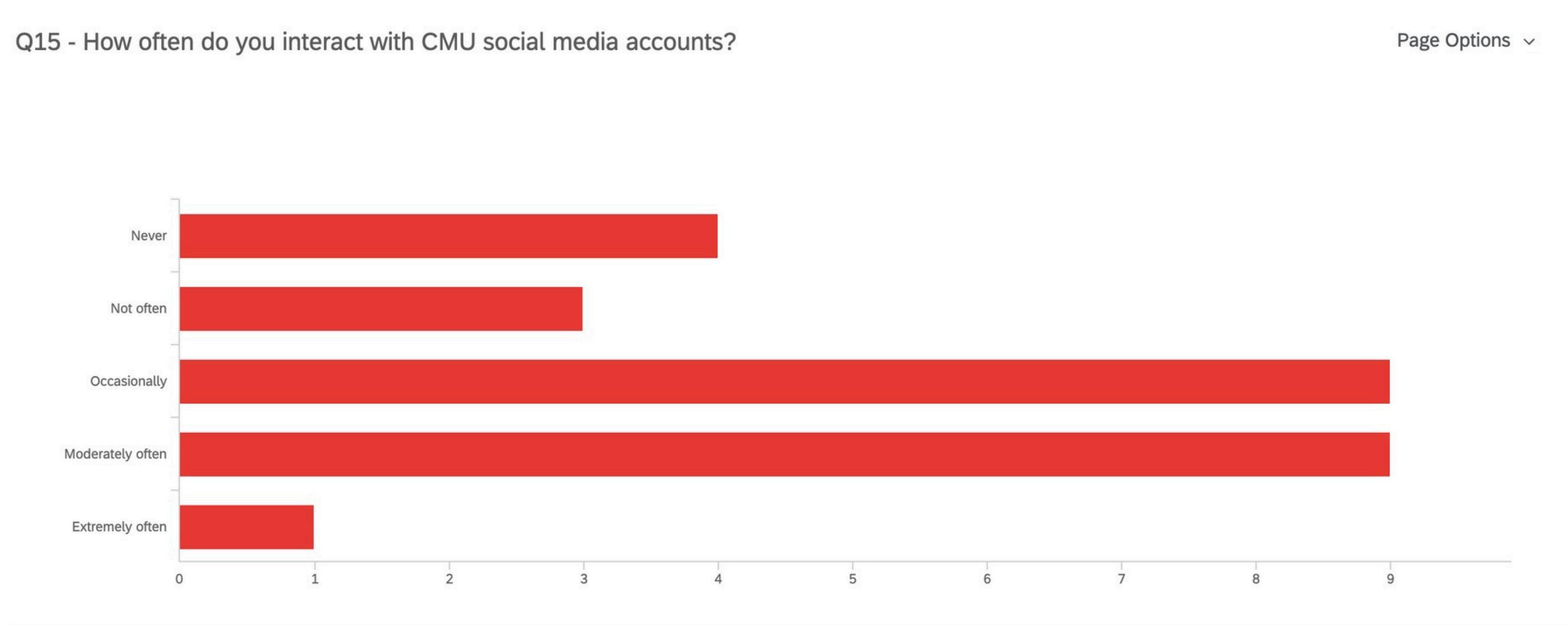
- 1 Demographics
- 2 Awareness
- 3 Perception
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5 Promotion

What Platforms are Most Effective

- Among social media platforms, Instagram is the highest-ranking platform and Facebook is the lowest-ranking platform to receive information
- This information was pulled from six platforms, including; Instagram, Facebook, the CMU Website, Email, Bulletin boards/TV screens/Postings on campus (such as flyers/posters), Engage Central, with an option to elaborate on other platforms via drop box text fill-in
- Students ranked the platforms as follows, highest to lowest: Instagram, Email, Bulletin boards/TV screens/Postings on campus and the CMU website evenly ranking 3rd and 4th, Engage Central, then Facebook

Moderate to High Social Media Interaction



INSIGHTS

- 1 Exploring your avenues
- 2 Bringing in personality
- 3 Focusing on Academia

1

Exploring your avenues

Relevancy

Students take content more seriously in specific avenues that are relevant to them. Putting more focus on Instagram and other higher-ranking platforms will increase the productivity of the message CMU Study Abroad is conveying. Make posts and advertisements more program and location specific and less generalized

INSIGHTS

- 1 Exploring your avenues
- 2 **Bringing in personality**
- 3 Focusing on Academia

2

Bringing in personality

Students Admire Personality

Students want to know and see how this information presents itself in real life. The inclusion of real experiences of students who have been through the study abroad program leads to a greater level of understanding and trust

Adds Chronological Relevancy

The platform aids in choosing and/or prioritizing a relevant platform, as well as highlighting student experiences from prior semesters. Deemed trustworthy and raise more awareness for the program

INSIGHTS

- 1 Exploring your avenues
- 2 Bringing in personality
- 3 **Focusing on Academia**

3

Focusing on Academia

Credit/Grad Interference

- Fear of credit transfer, pushback of graduation date and missing an established academic environment are the factors that most concern students about studying abroad
- Media platforms and presentations focusing on the misconceptions of academia may assist in alleviating those fears, or at least encourage students to do their own research or ask questions

Advertisements

- Flyers have the advantage of being frequently noticed by students
- By using a poster to introduce study abroad and how it is related to academia, you will not only calm student fears, but also boost productivity through flyers



Research **LIMITATIONS**

Qualitative, Quantitative

QUANTITATIVE LIMITATIONS

Survey

- Our survey response rate was particularly low, even though it was sent out multiple times encouraging students to participate
- Responses from people not a part of our target audience. While there weren't many, this could still give us incorrect and misleading information

QUALITATIVE LIMITATIONS

Interviews

- As we were nearing the start of our research, we had trouble finding participants, but we managed to overcome this in time
- Responses from some interviewees were short, and less detailed than others, which doesn't help us improve the program or fully gather student feedback

Focus Group

- The focus group was conducted slightly later due to participation issues, which caused us a time crunch
- To get participants, we reached out to students on social media who might be interested, which facilitated the focus group creation process



Thank you
Questions?