

**EJ**

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School of Communications  
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## Joining the World of Journals

Welcome to the nation's first and, to our knowledge, only undergraduate research journal in communications.

We discovered this fact while perusing the Web site of the Council on Undergraduate Research, which lists and links to the 60 or so undergraduate research journals nationwide (<http://www.cur.org/ugjournal.html>).

Some of these journals focus on a discipline (e.g., Journal of Undergraduate Research in Physics), some are university-based and multidisciplinary (e.g., MIT Undergraduate Research Journal), and some are university-based and disciplinary (e.g., Furman University Electronic Journal in Undergraduate Mathematics).

The Elon Journal is the first to focus on undergraduate research in journalism, media and communications.

The School of Communications at Elon University is the creator and publisher of the online journal. The first issue was published in Spring 2010 under the editorship of Dr. Byung Lee, associate professor in the School of Communications.

The three purposes of the journal are:

- To publish the best undergraduate research in Elon's School of Communications each term,
- To serve as a repository for quality work to benefit future students seeking models for how to do undergraduate research well, and
- To advance the university's priority to emphasize undergraduate student research.

The Elon Journal is published twice a year, with spring and fall issues.

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## Celebrating Student Research

This journal reflects what we enjoy seeing in our students -- intellectual maturing.

As 18 year olds, some students enter college wanting to earn a degree, but unsure if they want an education. They may question whether communication theory has anything to do with real life. Ready to start their media careers, many would rather focus on workplace skills than analyze issues and concepts.

In Elon's School of Communications, we strive for a balance among concepts, writing and production. All are important.

Student media and organizations are terrific venues for the practice of journalism, broadcasting, public relations, advertising and cinema.

In turn, this journal celebrates the life of the intellect through undergraduate research. It represents the intellectual maturing that occurs by the senior year.

These published articles make us aware of the solitary hours that students spend in research and the untold hours in which student and teacher-mentor work together to revise a paper for public consumption. It's exciting to see students conducting research in such arenas as social media and press freedom.

By focusing attention on undergraduate research, this journal helps reinforce all that we think a university should be.

Dr. Paul Parsons, Dean  
School of Communications

## Editorial Board

Twenty faculty members in Elon's School of Communications served as the Editorial Board that selected the seven undergraduate research papers appearing in the 2014 fall issue.

From more than 100 research papers written in advanced School of Communications classes, 23 papers were submitted to the journal by Elon communications students through the encouragement and mentoring of capstone teachers and other professors in the school.

Professors who served as the Editorial Board were Janna Anderson, Lucinda Austin, Vanessa Bravo, Naeemah Clark, Vic Costello, Michael Frontani, Kenn Gaither, Jessica Gisclair, Jonathan Jones, Derek Lackaff, Julie Lellis, Harlen Makemson, William Moner, Phillip Motley, Thomas Nelson, George Padgett, Michael Skube, Jessalynn Strauss, Amanda Sturgil, Qian Xu.

Thanks should also go to Bryan Baker, who videotaped student introductions to their projects, Colin Donohue, who uploaded the PDF version of this issue and student videos, and Associate Dean Don A. Grady, who reviewed articles to help ensure the quality of the Journal.

## Editor's Note

This edition of the journal provides studies on contemporary media topics ranging from identity and brand preference to culture in food advertising to stereotypes of poverty-stricken communities. Four articles are on marketing and advertisements; three articles are based on content analysis of magazines, newspapers and Twitter.

In her study on the influence of consumer identity on brand preference, Ilaw found that individuals prefer brands with images congruent to their own self-image and members of their in-group.

Calabro wrote an article on brand loyalty. To test the relationship between anthropomorphism and ideal traits, the researcher developed a survey for 211 Elon students to compare their preference for four brands from two industries. The results of the survey found that the use of a spokescharacter created significant brand preference.

Based on an analysis of 54 advertisements in nine women's magazines, Van Drie found that the ads emphasized different themes depending on which of the three groups were targeted: mainstream, African-American or Latino females.

After analyzing Interactive Graphic Novels (IGNs), Ayer found IGNs to be a sustainable tactic for advertising and marketing professionals because of their ability to appeal to multiple human senses. IGNs are also able to harness the power of persuading through storytelling, making them a powerful tool to communicate messages.

The purpose of Gemberling's research was to identify trends and themes that reflect feminist values in American women's magazines throughout history. Relying on secondary sources, her research showed that feminism was represented in women's magazines, highlighted the role of media, and reflected America's ever-changing political and cultural landscape.

Horner explored the relationship between Christian leaders and Twitter. He found that Christian leaders have embraced Twitter for a number of different purposes, but sought first and foremost to challenge and inspire their followers through their Twitter accounts.

So's research examined how *The New York Times*, and a local Kentucky newspaper covered poverty in Appalachia in 1964 and 2014. The research found national media primarily focused on economic issues and used more negative language in 1964, in comparison with the local newspaper. The study found that the two newspapers switched their coverage pattern 50 years later.

These studies reflect hard work of students and their mentors in answering significant communication questions of our time. I hope these articles in this issue will inspire students in the next semester to commit to examining important research questions and submit their papers to this journal.

Dr. Byung Lee  
Journal Editor

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# Who You Are Affects What You Buy: The Influence of Consumer Identity on Brand Preference

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## Abstract

*This study examined the extent to which individuals used their self-concepts to determine brand preference. It was predicted that individuals would prefer brands with images congruent with their own self-image more than brands' images inconsistent with their self-image. The study also predicted that others would influence consumers' brand preference, and participants would prefer brands consonant with their in-group associations. A total of 65 participants completed a survey inquiring about their self-image congruity, social identity and brand preferences. Linear regression analyses showed significant support for both hypotheses. Additional analyses among subgroups showed a statistically significant relationship between the self-image congruity and brand preference relationship among whites, minority group, males and females. But the statistically significant relationship did not exist between social identity and brand preference among whites and females.*

## I. Introduction

Walking down the street, one may observe an individual sporting a Yankee sweatshirt, carrying a Starbucks coffee mug, and wearing a pair of Levis jeans. The onlooker may deduce that the walker is a baseball fan, enjoys high-quality coffee, and appreciates the authenticity and heritage associated with a historical brand. Whether or not that Yankee fan was aware, the brands he chose to consume made a statement about who he was, what he was like, and what he enjoyed. The products people buy can act as signals of identity, allowing consumers to construct, express and communicate useful information about their self-image to themselves and to others. Consumers not only purchase products, but lifestyles. As a result, consumption becomes a vehicle for exhibition of their identity construct.

Over time, consumer researchers have acknowledged the important interplay between the self-concept and the purchasing behaviors of consumers, showing that consumer purchase brands or products that were consistent with their self-image. This current research aims to investigate the extent to which consumers search for brands with symbolic images similar to their self-identity as a way to enhance and display who they are to the world. Further, this study will examine how consumers prefer certain brands based on their individual self-concepts.

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**Keywords:** self-concept, self-image congruity, social identity, brand preference

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## II. Literature review

The author reviewed literature regarding the various aspects of the self, identity and symbolic brand meaning to provide a foundational background necessary to understand these associations.

### ***The self***

According to researchers, the self – a psychological construct that denotes who and what we are – represented the totality of one's attitudes, perceptions and beliefs of oneself that influenced behavior (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar & Sen, 2012). As one develops, the individual further defines a principal value of self that regulates one's life. The more valued the self, the more organized and consistent the individual's behavior. The structure of the self was organized as a result of the interaction with the environment, such as interactions with parents, families and significant others. As the individual received reactions from his environment, his self-concept formed, which was a component of the self-system influenced by contextual factors (Grubb, Harrison & Grathwohl, 1967). A definition created by Sirgy (1982) that many scholars used, referred to the self-concept as "the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object." Basically self-concept is how people understand, think about and represent themselves (Leary & Tangney, 2003).

As psychological and sociological research increased, the complexity of the construct did as well. Numerous investigators have explained self-concept as a single variable of the actual self-concept. Others have construed the self-concept as a multi-dimensional construct comprising of two or more components including the actual self-concept and the ideal self-concept. Despite the various terminologies, this paper will refer to the self-concept as a single construct, referring to all ideas one has about himself; the "totality." This avoids the risk of the concept losing its meaning, and allows it to continue to be a well-organized and consistent construct that guides behavior (Mehta, 1999).

While the current study will define self-concept as a single construct, an important perspective on self-concept is social identity theory, which has received support from consumer research and is worth mentioning. Scholars have defined social identity theory as a subset of the self-concept that is derived from group membership of social groups. In other words, social identity refers to the individual's subjective perception of what defined the "us" in the internalized group membership with which one belonged. It is the sense of belonging one felt to that group or organization (Han, Kim & Park, 2001). Previous research indicated that consumers were likely to accept meanings from brands associated or consistent with their own group (an in-group), and reject meanings associated or consistent with a group to which they did not belong (an out-group). For example, if one considered herself to be an athlete, and her member group of athletes wore Asics running shoes, she may have chosen to wear Asics as a symbol of her affiliation. Additionally, consumers avoided out-group brands, because they did not want that meaning to be attributed to themselves, such as a "preppy" individual not wanting to be associated with the "Etnies" shoe brand that skaters may wear. This research examines the effects of self-concept and social identity theory on consumer brand preference.

Increasing consumer research literature has explored the self-concept as a useful construct to understand consumer choice. In earlier works, self-concept has been used to investigate product perception, implicit behavioral patterns, and specific behavior; however, the bulk of the current research is devoted to understanding brand/product preference, purchase intention and usage (Malhotra, 1987). Because this paper will also focus on consumer brand preference, understanding how individuals perceive brands as a way to enhance their self-image is important. Following these findings by Levy (1959), a series of self-concept theories were created to predict the role of consumer self-concept in purchasing behaviors, such as Sirgy's self-image congruity theory.

### ***Self-concept and self-image/product-image congruity***

Previous studies have emphasized the significance of self-concept and consumer preference, as purchases made by consumers were directly influenced by the image individuals had of themselves (Onkivist & Shaw, 1987). Sirgy (1982) defined self-image congruity (also often referred to as product-image congruity) as the process of consumers purchasing products/brands that they perceived as possessing symbolic images similar to the image they hold of themselves. This theory postulated that products and brands have symbolic meanings and display certain images. Consumers' choices to purchase, display, and use the products or

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brands helped them communicate the symbolic meaning to themselves as well as to others. Thus, the greater the congruity between human characteristics that exhibit consumers' senses of self and the characteristics that depicted a brand, the greater the consumers' preferences were for the brand (Sung, Choi & Tinkman, 2012).

Support for this theory has been found through numerous studies, suggesting that congruity can influence consumers' product preferences and their purchase intentions (Jamal & Goode, 2001). Belk (1988) determined that consumers preferred products that matched their self-concept because the purchases acted as forms of self-expression. Ericksen's (1996) study indicated that a relationship between self-image congruity and purchase intention existed among European consumers who most related to the American car, the Ford Escort. Those with more congruence to the Ford Escort were more likely to purchase the automobile. Other researchers concluded that purchase was not likely to occur when there was a lack of congruency between a product-image and self-concept (Onkivist & Shaw, 1987), suggesting that "any product information that isn't consistent with a consumer's self-concept is unlikely to gain their attention, acceptance or retention" (Heath & Scott, 1993).

Due to this paper's concentration on the self-image congruity, it is crucial to examine the process through which brands become symbols. This next section emphasizes how brands achieve meaning through associations, and the process that consumers undergo to attribute the brand's characteristics to their own identity.

### ***Brands as symbols***

The terms "brand" and "product" have been used frequently throughout this paper, though proper distinction has not been attributed to each term. Product refers to the single, tangible item or entity a company creates (Kaufman, 2010), while a brand is the "promise, the big idea, and expectations that reside in each consumer's mind about a product, service or company." Thus, as the use of brands to express and validate consumer identity becomes a central tenet through consumer research, exploring the process through which brands achieve symbolic promise has become increasingly interesting; particularly how it achieves enough recognition to serve as a communicative representation of one's identity.

In order for a symbol to serve as a communicative device, the brand must achieve social recognition, and its meaning must be clearly understood in society (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). A symbol refers to anything that stands for or represents something else. People have learned to react to symbols by associating the symbol with other things. A red light has not always compelled people to hit the brake pedal, but after pairing the color red and the stopping behavior long enough, they naturally became accustomed to the symbol. Once the symbol develops and becomes known, it influences consumers on its own, evoking common reactions. It's no longer necessary to know the origin or how the reactions to the symbol came about once the symbol is learned, as the meaning of the symbol remains potent in the mind of consumers. For example, consumers use bottled water because it began as a symbolic statement about our identification with a healthy, active lifestyle learned in the late 1970s, which continues to propel consumer behavior today (Sutherland, 2008).

Brands are often viewed as marketing tools developed to differentiate the company from its competition as well as provide value to consumers. Brands are valued because they reaffirm people's principles or beliefs. They may also be used to display consumers' knowledge of culture, taste or style, exhibit income or wealth or communicate membership to particular social or professional groups. Additionally, research has shown that brands conveyed buried aspects of one's self-image, as consumers often chose products that were considered appropriate images of themselves (Chernev, Hamilton & Gal, 2011). Therefore, "the brands we buy and the brands we associate with often make powerful statements about us to ourselves as well as to others" (Sutherland, 2008).

Much research has supported the notion that brands are emblems of identity, and viewed as vehicles for expression for consumers. Through the development of self-concept and social identity, consumers search for goods and symbols to represent externally how they feel internally. Scholars have defined the extent to which the perceived image matches the individual's self-image as self-image congruity, which as a theory, has received much support from studies over the years. However, the majority of the research conducted about consumer self-concept and brand preference was performed decades ago, some as late as the 1950s and 60s. Therefore, revisiting studies examining the influence of the self on brand preference is warranted.

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### ***The current study***

This current study aims to reproduce previous findings concerning the self-concept and brand preference by investigating the extent to which individuals' internal identity impacts brand choice among a set of given brands. Expanding upon the aforementioned research, this current study intends to identify relationships between self-concept, social identity and brand preference, particularly by examining whether self-image congruity positively affects consumer brand preference. A survey methodology was employed to evaluate participants' self-concepts, social identities, and brand preferences. Applying the self-image congruity theory, consumers will prefer brands that are more consistent with their self-concept more than brands that are not consistent with their self-concept. Additionally, to account for the influence of others on the self-concept, the second hypothesis is based on the social identity theory, and predicts that consumers will prefer brands consonant with their in-group associations.

## **III. Method**

### ***Participants***

Participants included 65 people, 17 males and 48 females, who were recruited through online posts to social media sites and through email. They were asked to complete the short survey by clicking the link in the message. Participants consisted of students from a southern liberal arts university as well as a graduate student from another institution, and non-students familiar to the researcher. There were five freshmen (7%); eight sophomores (12.3%); nine juniors (13.8%); 34 seniors (52.3%); one graduate student (1.5%); and eight non-students (11.6%). There were 43 whites (66.2%); 11 blacks (16.9%); one Asian (1.5%), seven Hispanics (10.8%) and three who did not indicate their race (4.6%). Compensation for completion of the questionnaire was not provided.

### ***Measures***

A total of 18 items were adapted from previous studies so that they can operationalize self-image congruity, social identity and brand preference. Refer to Appendix A, especially questions 4, 5 and 6, for a complete list of the items used in the study.

The first question asked participants to choose one of the five brands offered and then use that brand to answer the following questions. The list of brands included Lululemon, Heineken, Mac, Pampers and TOMS shoes. The researcher arbitrarily chose these brands to reflect the different personalities and traits the sample may embody. Most of these brands were prevalent on the college campus as well, as most students consumed these brands or were aware of them, with the exception of Pampers. Pampers was chosen to test a brand that was typically inconsistent with participants' social identities that influenced brand preference. Furthermore, the researchers coded each brand with five to seven adjectives, which were devised from brand positioning statements and consumer profiles, as shown in Appendix B. For example, a few characteristics that described Lululemon included "Athletic," "Healthy," and "Relaxing." Participants were shown the adjectives listed in Appendix B in questions 2 and 3, to prime them into thinking about the brand's personality traits and perceived images. These questions were also used to bring awareness to participants' traits associated with themselves and the brand, transferring the brand's perceived image from their subconscious to their consciousness. This allowed them to consider these adjectives when completing the rest of the survey, which focused on self-image congruity, social identity and brand preference.

Self-image congruity was assessed using items that asked about participants' brand consumption and their self-image. A set of six items asked participants to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding their self-image congruity with the brand. Several of these items were adapted from Hohenstein, Sirgy, Herrmann and Heitmann (2007) or developed using similar guidelines. Using a Likert-type scale, participants rated each question on the scale of *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *agree* or *strongly agree*. These items can be found in question 4 under Appendix A.

Brand preference was operationalized with a set of six items also adapted from the work of Hohenstein et al. (2007). Participants also rated the degree to which they agreed/disagreed with each statement using the same rank-order assessment. The response options ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

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These items can be found in question 5 under Appendix A.

Finally, six items were used to measure social identity, of which the same rank-order used in the previous questions was used for this question. Response options ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The operationalized social identity items can be found in question 6 under Appendix A.

Question 7 asked individuals to indicate how familiar they were with the particular brand they chose. Response options were *very familiar*, *familiar* or *never heard of it*. This was used to gauge how well participants were aware of the brand's images, and whether this influenced the relationship between the self-concept and brand preference.

Demographic information was gathered about their gender, grade level, and racial origin. These questions were optional; however, all respondents who completed the questionnaire offered their demographic information.

## **Procedure**

The survey questionnaire on Survey Monkey was tested on a few participants for comments and edits before final release. Once revisions were completed, the link to the survey was sent out via social media websites (Facebook and Twitter) as well as through email. Participants in a convenience sample completed the survey. The survey took no longer than five minutes to complete.

## **IV. Results**

Among 69 participants who began the survey, only 65 completed it properly. Each item under Question 4 measuring self-image congruity was assigned a numerical value, for example, 1 for strongly disagree; 2 for disagree; 3 for Neither A/D; 4 for agree; and 5 for strongly agree. All item scores were added to create a total score for this variable of self-image congruity. All items under Question 5 were treated in the same way to calculate a total score of brand preference. All items under Question 6 were used to calculate a total score of social identity. The brand preference total score was used as the dependent variable in all analyses, whereas the self-image congruity score and social identity score served as the independent variables.

Descriptive statistics regarding brand name were computed to determine the percentage-breakdown for each of the five brands listed. Of the 65 participants, eight chose Lululemon (12.3%); 11 for Heineken (16.9%); 27 for Mac (41.5%); three for Pampers (4.6%); and 16 for TOMS Shoes (24.6%). The majority of the respondents were either very familiar ( $n = 38$ , 58.5%) or familiar ( $n = 27$ , 41.5%) with the brand they chose. Of the brands provided, the majority of males chose Heineken ( $n = 9$ , 52.9%) and Mac ( $n = 6$ , 35.3%), while the majority of females chose Mac ( $n = 21$ , 43.8%), TOMS Shoes ( $n = 15$ , 31.3%) and Lululemon ( $n = 7$ , 14.6%).

### **Self-image congruity**

A simple linear regression was conducted to predict the extent to which the self-image congruity score predicted the brand preference score among all participants. Similar to previous research, results found that self-image congruity strongly predicted brand preference,  $F(1, 63) = 20.74$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .24$ ,  $\beta = .50$ . To further examine this relationship, supplementary linear regressions were performed to examine how sex and racial group influenced the relationship between the self-image congruity and brand preference.

To examine whether race has any impact, participants were divided into two groups. Those who identified as "Black," "Hispanic," "Asian," "American Indian," or "Other" were classified as one group called "Minority." To examine the extent to which the Minority group accounted for the self-image congruity and brand preference relationship, a linear regression was conducted. Results indicated a statistically significant relationship between the two variables among the minority group:  $F(1, 20) = 18.54$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .46$ ,  $\beta = .69$ . A second linear regression analysis examining those who identified as white also yielded a significant relationship, suggesting that this subset also accounts for a statistically significant relationship between self-image congruity and brand preference as well,  $F(1, 41) = 6.04$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .13$ ,  $\beta = .36$ .

Another set of regression analyses was conducted to examine differences between males and females' influences on the self-image congruity and brand preference relationship. Results found for males:  $F(1, 15) = 6.16$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .24$ ,  $\beta = .54$ , and females:  $F(1, 46) = 8.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .13$ ,  $\beta = .39$ . This sug-

gested a statistically significant relationship between the self-image congruity and brand preference relationship for males and females each.

### ***Social identity***

To test the second hypothesis, which predicted that consumers would prefer brands consonant to their in-group associations, a linear regression analysis was conducted. Results indicated that social identity significantly predicted brand preference,  $F(1,63) = 13.79$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .17$ ,  $\beta = .42$ , indicating that those with higher social identity scores also had higher brand preference scores. To further examine this association when accounting for racial and sex differences, supplementary simple regressions were run on subgroups, such as whites, minorities, males and females.

Scholars have mentioned the disparity between social identity influences on white and minority individuals, suggesting that black, Hispanic and Asian individuals tend to be more influenced by their in-group than white individuals and their in-group (Mihalcea & Catoi, 2008). This current study sought to find support for this claim by conducting a second linear regression analysis by separating the Minority group ( $n = 22$ ). Results indicated that this subgroup shows a statistically significant relationship between social identity and brand preference  $F(1, 20) = 13.34$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .37$ ,  $\beta = .63$ . A linear regression analysis on whites, however, did not yield significant results,  $F(1,41) = 3.02$ ,  $p > .05$ .

To examine whether sex made a difference in the relationship between the social identity and brand preference, a linear regression analysis was run on males ( $n = 17$ ) and females ( $n = 48$ ) separately. A statistically significant relationship was found between these two variables among males:  $F(1, 15) = 6.69$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .26$ ,  $\beta = .56$ , but not females:  $F(1, 46) = 3.39$ ,  $p > .05$ .

## **V. Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to reexamine the extent to which individuals rely on their self-concepts when they determine their brand preference. Consistent with previous research, the two hypotheses regarding self-image congruity and social identity were fully supported, suggesting that both variables strongly influenced brand preference. Significant differences between minority and non-minority participants were not found for self-image congruity, but were found for social identity. Gender differences were also not found for self-image congruity, but for social identity, as males accounted for more of the relationship between social identity and brand preference than females.

### ***Self-image congruity***

As described by the self-congruity theory, the congruence between one's self-concept and the product/brand's image significantly influenced consumer behavior, particularly brand preferences. Support for the self-image congruity theory was found in this study, as the self-image congruity score strongly predicted brand preference score. Consistent with previous research, these findings suggested that these participants perceived the cues offered by the brands as images similar to their own self-concept more than not, and used that information to determine whether they preferred that brand more than any other brand of the same product (Schneck & Holman, 1980).

This supports the conclusion Okivist and Shaw (1987) made: purchase or preference was not likely to occur when there was a lack of congruency. This relationship exists because any information inconsistent with a consumer's self-concept was unlikely to gain their attention, acceptance or retention, thus not impacting their desire to choose that brand over the next (Heath & Scott, 1993). They also may have not viewed the brand's attributes as being similar to their own, therefore, not influencing their brand preference scores.

The statistically significant relationship between self-image and brand preference among all genders and all races/ethnicities should not be too surprising because the process of expressing and reinforcing one's self through the use of brands is not a discriminatory practice: All men and women of all races desire to convey their internal values and beliefs to the external world. Thus, brand preferences based on congruency between brand images and individuals' self-concepts should be equally strong as every individual undergoes identity formation, and searches for symbols whose meaning can further create or define his or her self-concept (Mihalcea & Catoi, 2008).

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A set of four studies conducted by Chaplin & John (2005) sought to examine the age at which individuals began using brands to create and communicate their self-concepts. Results found that self-brand connections formed between middle school and early adolescence, and these connections increased as the individuals' experiences and conceptual understanding of brands increases. But this study cannot run a regression analysis based on age because the number of participants was too small ( $n = 5$ ).

### ***Social identity theory***

Previous research highlighted that consumers were more likely to accept brand meanings that are associated with their own group (the in-group) versus brands that were associated with groups to which they don't belong (the out-group). Although not as strong as a predictor as self-image congruity, as hypothesized, those with higher social identities (i.e. higher in-group associations) had higher brand preference scores. Further support by previous research indicated that those with high group identification were more likely to "see and think of themselves as in-group members, to feel close and similar to in-group members . . . and to behave in ways that benefit the in-group" (Tropp & Wright, 2001).

Scholars have noted that the social categories that individuals placed themselves into were parts of a structured society that only existed relative to contrasting categories (i.e. men vs. women). They gained their sense of self largely from these social categories which they belonged to, and developed a unique self-concept from belonging to a variety of different groups. Having a particular social identity means "being at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group's perspective." (Stets & Burke, 2000). To further understand how individuals used their group identification to make decisions about brand preference, additional analyses examined whether race or sex affected the relationship.

The current study found a statistically significant relationship between social identity and brand preference. This finding is consistent with past research, which suggested that members of minority groups valued the "distinctive qualities of their group . . . more than do majority group members." Additionally, members of the minority group tended to identify more with their group than the majority group members (Dovidio, Gaertner & Saguy, 2007). Other research concluded that compared to whites, Asian-Americans and Hispanic-Americans tended to be more interdependent and less independent in their self-construal, meaning the minority group focused more on the social self and how the self related to others than their subjective opinions of themselves when determining their self-concepts (Mihalcea & Catoiu, 2008). Relating to this previous research, the results from this study are relevant, as minority individuals relied more on the social feedback from their in-group associations to guide their behavior than the non-minority individuals, which influenced their brand preferences.

Although previous research has not highlighted significant sex differences on the relationship between social identity and brand preference, this study found a statistically significant relationship between the two variables among males, not among females. This surprisingly suggested that males relied more on the feedback from their friends and membership of their group than females to make decisions about their brand preferences. Contrary to previous research, men were more likely than not to "participate in the group's culture, to distinguish themselves from the out-group and to show attraction to group in their behavior" (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001; Stets & Burke, 2000).

A possible explanation for this may be because the brands chosen were more salient for males than females, meaning that the brands increased the influence of the male's membership to the "men" gender social identity and in-group. According to Stets and Burke (2000), salience is determined by accessibility, or the readiness of a given category to become activated in a person. Of five the brands accessible, the majority of the males chose either Heineken or Mac, with the exception of two who chose Lululemon or TOMS. In summary, male's social identities may have been triggered more so than female's based on the brand choices available. While males may have perceived Heineken and Mac as the only brands consistent and acceptable to their social group (i.e. men), triggering a salient social identity, female participants may have found that all brands available were consistent to their in-group, as it was acceptable to consume all five brands as a "woman." Since the options weren't as clear-cut in triggering an identity as it was for the males, a less "women" identity may have been activated, and instead an identity such as "athlete" "service-oriented" may have been stimulated, allowing the females to think of this subgroup when completing their responses. Support for these inferences were noted by Stets and Burke (2000), who stated that when an identity was salient, responses were "deliberate and self-regulated" and group members behaved in a manner "to match their behavior to the standards relevant to the social identity, so as to confirm and enhance their social identification with the

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group.” The prominence of the male’s social identity and in-group association to the group “men” could explain why the relation between social identity and brand preference was stronger for males than females.

Lastly, an interesting relationships worth noting is the influence of social identity threat and consumer preference. As mentioned previously, according to White and Argo (2008), when an aspect of a consumer’s identity was threatened in a specific situation, consumers were motivated to avoid products associated with that threatened identity and instead preferred products associated with an alternative identity. To test this finding, the Pampers brand was included in the list of brands for participants to choose from with the understanding that many would not choose this brand, for fear that it was not congruent with their social identity. Only three participants chose the brand in the first question, suggesting that the majority chose only the brand that was consistent with a protected aspect of their identity.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Despite the limitations, the current study reaffirms insights into the relationship between the self-concept and social identity on the one hand and brand preference on the other. Marketers and advertisers interested in developing brands or campaigns could benefit most from this information. By understanding how brands are consumed as symbols of identities, marketing and advertising companies must ensure they understand the main attributes that constitute their target audiences’ self-concepts to develop distinctive and attractive brands that match those same traits. To ensure that a brand is preferred in untapped markets, marketers must develop brand images closely matching the self-perceptions of potential consumers, and should design advertising messages to target their self-concepts. Additionally, campaigns focused on attracting minority groups should focus on characteristics consistent with minority cultural identity. Although self-image congruity and social identity do not guarantee brand preference, crafting messages that are directed to consumer’s self-concepts streamlines marketing plans to be most effective.

### ***Limitations***

While the present research had strengths, several limitations of the study should be noted. The results of the study may not be generalizable to other populations, as the majority of the sample were females from a small southern liberal arts school, self-identified as white, and were seniors in college. Additionally, the brand choices were limited so they may have not been reflective of the personalities the participants believed they embodied, thus resulting in less congruence with self-image and the perceived image of the brand. A third limitation of the current study was the use of only the actual self-concept. The findings obtained could have yielded different, stronger results if the ideal and social self-concept had been examined as well. Finally, the use of “Mac” as a brand could have confused participants, as Mac is a product, whereas Apple is overarching brand. However, respondents who completed the survey did not seem to be discouraged by using the response option to answer questions, suggesting that they thought of the Apple brand when completing the questions anyway.

Factors other than self-image congruity and social identity influenced their brand preferences, such as brand advertising, brand affordability, or brand availability (Ayanwale, Allimi & Ayanbimipe, 2005). Future studies can incorporate these factors.

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## Appendix A: Questionnaire

1. Please choose one of the following 5 brands and then use this brand to complete questions 3 through 7.

- Lululemon
- Heineken
- Mac
- Pampers
- TOMS Shoes

2. I am ...

[List of 30 adjectives that would describe yourself]

3. Brand X (the one you chose above is)...

[List of 30 adjectives that describe the product you chose in question 1]

4. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to the product you chose in question 1 (below is called brand X):

*Strongly Disagree*      *Disagree*      *Neither A/D*      *Agree*      *Strongly Agree*

Wearing/carrying/consuming brand X is consistent with how I see myself.

Wearing/carrying/consuming brand X reflects who I am.

I can completely identify with brand X.

If I were a brand, I would be brand X.

The brand X image corresponds to my self-image in many respects.

Through brand X, I can express what I find important in life.

5. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

*Strongly Disagree*      *Disagree*      *Neither A/D*      *Agree*      *Strongly Agree*

Brand X is my preferred brand over any other brand of the same product.

I would use brand X more than I would use any other brand of the same product.

When comparing similar products, I would be inclined to buy brand X over any other brand.

I value brand X more than other brands of the same product.

Brand X's products meet my expectations.

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Overall, I am satisfied with brand X.

6. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

*Strongly Disagree*      *Disagree*      *Neither A/D*      *Agree*      *Strongly Agree*

Brand X helps me feel a part of a bigger group.

I use brand X to feel a part of a larger group.

My friends use brand X.

I use brand X to be like my friends.

I receive positive feedback from people while using brand X.

I feel connected to my friends while using brand X.

7. How familiar are you with the brand you chose?

Very familiar

Familiar

Never heard of it

8. Sex

Male

Female

9. Racial background

White

Black

Asian

Hispanic

American Indian

Other

10. Year

First-year

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

Grad student

Non-student

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## **Appendix B: Words used to assess participants' brand and self-identities**

### ***Lululemon***

Healthy  
Athletic  
Enjoyable  
Warm  
Positive  
Relaxing  
Energetic

### **Heineken**

Innovative  
Ambitious  
Assured  
Dynamic  
Witty  
Worldly  
Friend-oriented

### ***Mac***

Intelligent  
Sophisticated  
Chic  
Liberal  
Unique  
Creative  
Mature

### ***Pampers***

Youthful  
Family-oriented  
Trustworthy  
Happy  
Practical

### ***TOMS Shoes***

Simple  
Environmentally-friendly  
Collaborative  
Caring  
Inspiring  
Honest

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# Humanizing Brand Personalities: Analysis of Consumer-Brand Relationships through an Anthropomorphism Lens

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## Abstract

*Brand loyalty develops as an intermixing of self-image and brand image, and anthropomorphized brands succeed when their ideal traits are utilized as brand personality components. To test the relationship between anthropomorphism and ideal traits, the researcher surveyed 211 Elon students and compared their preference for four brands from two industries. One brand from each industry utilized anthropomorphism techniques in the form of a spokescharacter, while the other brand did not. The results of the survey found that the use of a spokescharacter affected brand preference: It created significant brand preference when compared to a similar brand without a spokescharacter.*

## I. Introduction

When Apple first came on the scene, it was the odd one out. Microsoft and IBM were the corporate giants with a firm and seemingly unshakable grip on the personal computer market. Apple computers were peculiar looking, expensive, and had a completely different type of user interface. So, how did Apple go from being a nobody in the shadows of successful traditional PC companies, to becoming an icon of the millennial generation and an integral part of many people's identity? The answer lies in branding.

Apple knew it had a great product. The marketing department just had to figure out how to communicate that to consumers. In one of its longest running advertising campaigns, Apple personified itself in the form of "Mac," a character played by Justin Long, and it personified the competition through "PC," played by John Hodgman. The two could not have been more different. Mac was the charming, kind of quirky hipster who was smart and full of clever remarks. PC was frumpy, awkward, and not too bright (Jaffe, 2014). By personifying its brand through a likeable spokescharacter, Apple provided its customers with someone to connect to, identify with, or aspire to be. Not only did consumers know who Mac was, perhaps most importantly, they also wanted to be that person.

The purpose of this study is to provide insight into the nature of successful brand strategies that utilize spokescharacters as a personification technique through an extensive literature review and survey analysis. It will explore the development of brand loyalty as an intermingling of self-image and brand-image, and the level of success brands enjoy when employing personified traits popularly viewed as desirable.

**Keywords:** branding, spokescharacter, brand loyalty, brand personality, identity

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## II. Background

While Apple is a marketing innovator in the technology sector, many companies have favored personification techniques for many years, granted, with varying degrees of success. Geico has its gecko, Progressive has Flo, and Pillsbury has the doughboy. However, while brand personification strategies may offer more success in relation to non-personification, they do not guarantee market leadership or strong brand loyalty. Starbucks and Nike, for instance, have incredibly loyal consumers and have both achieved the rank of a Fortune 500 company. Instead of creating brand characters, they personified their brands through strong brand personalities.

In today's marketplace, more products, more services, and more advertising are bombarding consumers than ever before. The abundance of options is great for consumers given that they can have their pick of the lot, but for companies, the competition can be overwhelming. Loyal customers are important to understand, because they tend to be behind the majority of brands' sales (Sutikno, 2011). The Pareto principle, also known as the 80/20 rule, states that 80 percent of a company's profit comes from 20 percent of its customers. This 20 percent is often the most loyal segment of consumers as well (Kaufman, 2012). In order for business owners and marketing executives to create or grow a loyal following, they have to understand how to form brand loyalty and what type of marketing techniques garner the strongest impact.

## III. Literature Review

Researchers have been studying the relationships that brands have with their customers for many years. In an attempt to understand the secret to successful marketing and brand building, almost every aspect of the brand-consumer dichotomy has been picked apart and analyzed. Several major themes have arisen from all of this research, the most prevalent theme being the nature of brand loyalty. Researchers have also found that the price consumers are willing to pay for a product or service is a strong indicator of their relationship with a brand.

The literature also paints a picture of the development of consumer-brand relationships. Looking at how these relationships grow and the factors that affect them will help marketers and business owners to better understand how their product or service is connecting to consumers.

### **What are Brands?**

Brands are the connection between the consumer and the product, and arguably "the most valuable intangible asset for a company" (Sutikno, 2011). Consumers use brands to organize and store the information they gather regarding a product or service. Brand experience, the culmination of the consumer's interactions and exposure to a brand, creates this cognitive structure (Jones & Runyan, 2013). Four dimensions of the brand experience, set forth by branding scholars Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, assert that encounters with the brand are qualified as sensory, emotional, intellectual, or behavioral (as cited in Jones & Runyan, 2013).

The brand experience has a strong impact on cognitive attitudes for brands. If the consumer is having a consistently positive brand experience, he or she will most likely be satisfied with the brand and its associated products as an extension. The feelings of favorability and satisfaction that stem from the brand experience are the catalyst to brand identification (Jones & Runyan, 2013).

### **Brand Identification**

Every person has his or her own personally perceived identity. Known as the *self-concept* in psychology, it is based on a personal evaluation of unique attributes and traits (Sigelman and Rider, 2009). Brand identification is "a social construction that involves the integration of perceived brand identity (or brand image) into self-identity" (Lin & Sung, 2014). This occurs when a consumer has a consistently positive experience with a brand and finds a similarity in their personal image and the brand's image (Sutikno, 2011). Once brand identification takes place, the brand becomes a representation of the consumer's self-concept. This leads to strong attachment to the symbolic brand, as well as its associated products. Attachment is important because it reflects the consumer and brand's shared attitudes and beliefs (Jones & Runyan, 2013).

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We also have a social identity, which is how we identify as members of a group. Social identity provides a sense of belonging to the social world (McLeod, 2008). People are drawn to others they perceive to be like them, and brands have evolved into a way of recognizing those similarities. Individuals see brands they have identified with as external symbols of their self-concept, so when an individual finds another consumer with the same brand preference, they take it as a sign of deeper similarities. Consumers use the symbols to identify with others who share similar attitudes and beliefs.

Based on the social identity theory, we seek those who are similar to us to establish an “in-group.” Conversely, people can use external symbols that mark dissimilarities to establish an “out-group.” Once a person identifies as a part of an in-group, he or she tends to “discriminate against the out-group to enhance their self-image” (McLeod, 2008). The social nature of today’s society has led to greater fluidity of self-identity, making brands attractive as sources of identity stability (Jones & Runyan, 2013). Another method of enhancing self-image is to act as a brand ambassador by adopting aspects of the brand’s identity in behavior and personality, which is the antecedent of brand loyalty (Sutikno, 2011).

### **Brand Loyalty**

Although many scholars have differing definitions of brand loyalty, the strongest defining element is always behavior. Brand loyalty is most commonly defined as an attitudinal and behavioral construct determined by prolonged repurchase actions and favorable feelings for the brand. Consumers gain favorable feelings during the positive brand experience and consistent satisfaction that caused brand identification (Sutikno, 2011). Loyalty is established when consumers makes a commitment to the brand (Kim, Morris, & Swait, 2008), in that they intend to continue purchasing the brand in the future, speak positively about the brand to others, and disregard negative brand information (Sutikno, 2011).

Jones and Runyan (2013) uses a construct Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) conceived for brand loyalty. The concept includes six elements: “First, the consumers’ actions must be non-random or biased toward an outcome. Second, there must be a behavioral response which can be measured in purchases.

Third, those behavioral responses must be exhibited over time. Fourth, the solution set must relate to some consistency when engaged for a similarly defined purchase target. Fifth, the behavioral response from the decision must relate to one or more brand(s), relative to an acceptable solution set, and sixth the exhibited behavior must result from the engagement of an evaluative decision-making process.”

As in brand identification, brand loyalty is rooted in the consumer’s self-concept. Those who construe themselves as independent (vs. interdependent) are less influenced by situational factors and are likely to remain strong in their stance with a brand. Consumers who construe themselves in relation to other tend to have weaker attitudes and are more susceptible to situational and social influences (Sung, Choi, & Tinkham, 2012).

### **“Brand Love”**

Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi (2012) took a slightly different approach to understanding brand loyalty. In their study “Brand Love,” the researchers make the argument that consumers can experience a type of love for brands. This *brand love* exists based on the presence of ten major components. First, the brand has to be of superior quality (or qualities). Second, the brand must hold values and beliefs consumers can identify with. The researchers found that “brands were more likely to be loved when they also connected to something the respondent believed was deeper, such as self-actualization, close interpersonal relationships, existential meaning, or religious or cultural identities.” Third, loved brands hold intrinsic rewards (provides feeling of personal satisfaction and/or achievement) because they create desirable psychological states that blend with the brand experience. The difference between brands that consumers use vs. brands that consumers use and love is the dual presence of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (tangible). Consumers do not claim to love a brand if it provides extrinsic rewards, but lacks intrinsic ones. Fourth, brand personalities must express “existing identities and enact desired identities” for consumers to identify with them as something they love. Fifth, consumers need to have positive feelings toward the brand. The sixth component, passion, sometimes referred to as the first dimension, indicates a sense of natural fit between the consumer and the brand. Seventh is the presence of an emotional bond between consumer and brand. Consumers can identify this type of bond if they anticipate being upset when the brand is lost or made unavailable. Eighth is willingness to invest. If the consumer loves the brand, he or she is likely to put more time, money, and energy into it. The ninth compo-

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ment is “frequent thought and use.” Consumers must interact with the brand frequently to form a relationship as strong as brand love. The final component is prolonged length of use. Consumers must engage with a brand over a length of time so that not only brand identification takes place, but also the brand becomes a part of the consumer’s personal narrative.

### ***Outcomes of Brand Loyalty***

As previously stated, brand loyalty results in willingness to pay premium prices, engagement in positive word of mouth promotion (Sutikno, 2011), and resistance to negative brand-related information (Folse, Burton, & Netemeyer, 2013). According to Sutikno (2011), willingness to pay premium is the “consumer’s intention to pay more for specific brand of product and service than competitor brands of products and services unless in the same quality.” Willingness to pay premium is one of the reasons loyal customers are a highly profitable group.

Consumers are constantly seeking ways to better their lives (e.g. make them easier), and maintaining a long-term relationship with a brand they have identified as having all of the qualities they are seeking motivates consumers to pay a premium (Sutikno, 2011).

### ***Anthropomorphism***

The reason people are able to adopt brands as part of their self-concept is due to the natural tendency to humanize non-human objects. *Anthropomorphism* is the term for this tendency to give human traits to non-human objects, and it is responsible for the personification of brands. Human traits are those naturally found in living beings (e.g. beliefs, desires, values, etc.) (Lin & Sung, 2014). Since consumers identify more strongly with brands that share similar values, anthropomorphism has been an obvious tactic for marketers.

The most apparent tactic of anthropomorphism is the spokescharacter, or advertising icon. Spokescharacters are the embodiment of the human traits tied to a brand through a visual image (cartoon or human). Originally developed for promotional purposes, marketers quickly realized their effectiveness in communicating brand personality and connecting with consumers. Some of the most famous spokescharacters include the Geico Gecko, Mr. Clean, and the Michelin Man. To be a successful spokescharacter, he or she has to have both likeable traits and traits associated with expertise in the brand-relevant industry or category.

Research has also found that spokescharacters may provide brand-equity protection. Consumers can more easily identify with spokescharacters than an abstract idea of a brand, thus accelerating brand identification and resistance to negative information. In previous studies, researchers found that the presence of characters can lead to increased brand and advertisement recall. Regarding product promotion, research ascribes improved brand claim recognition and positive brand attitude to the presence of a spokescharacter, as well. For services, spokescharacters are especially effective in promoting pleasure-related brands (Folse, Burton, & Netemeyer, 2012).

### ***Brand Communication***

With all of the brands and companies today, humanizing a brand is not always enough. Marketers need to be able to effectively communicate the brand personality to the consumers, or they will never make that connection to brand identification. María Ángeles Navarro-Bailón (2012) conducted a communication study to shed light on the “synergistic effects derived from an *integrated marketing communication* (IMC) strategy following strategic consistency,” meaning IMC campaigns based around one message spoken in one voice to achieve a single goal. For IMC to be effective, consistency is key. It enables the brand image to maintain cohesiveness, providing the stability that consumers crave in long-term brand relationships (brand love).

It is a commonly held belief that repetition facilitates memorization and learning. In advertising, researchers have examined the effects of repeated exposure to an advertisement and found that at first, the repetition did as expected and had a positive impact on learning. Once the consumer was over-exposed to the same advertisement though, he or she became bored with it and had a negative reaction. Thus, to effectively communicate a single message, researchers concluded the communication of a message should occur through a variety of executions that provided consumers with novel and diverse stimuli (Navarro-Bailón, 2012).

The existing literature provides a strong and in-depth understanding of how consumers form a relationship with brands. According to the existing research, repeated exposures to a brand allow the consumer

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to have a brand experience. During the brand experience, consumers anthropomorphize the brand and identify similar traits and values they hold in their own self-concept. Once brand identification has occurred, the brand-image and self-image intermingle, and as the consumer continues to engage with the brand and purchase its associated goods or services, brand loyalty develops.

Brands start this process through integrated marketing communication (e.g. advertising) to reach the consumer. Effective IMC shares the brand's message in a unique voice through a variety of executions. Thus, we understand how brands are supposed to communicate and how, in turn, the relationship to the consumer is formed. Little research, however, exists on *what* the brand should be communicating and on what type of brand personalities companies should strive for in order to build a strong following of brand loyalists. It is important to understand how these traits are determined and how to best fuse them to the brand. This paper will argue that ideal brand traits target consumers who popularly associate with their perception of an ideal self, and that anthropomorphism in the form of spokescharacters strengthens the consumer's awareness of the brand's traits.

### ***Thesis statements***

When a business develops its brand, it usually attaches human characteristics. The one-for-one shoe brand TOMS, for instance, committed itself to the human experience of helping others. By purchasing a pair of TOMS shoes, the consumer is not only fulfilling a personal want, but they are also aware that somewhere in the world a person in need will benefit from their purchase as well. Thus, buying TOMS is not an extension or by-product of our consumerism culture, it is a good deed. It helped buyers overcome the guilt of buying *another* pair of shoes in a recession-ridden economy and gave action a greater purpose by allowing consumers to incorporate philanthropy into their self-concepts. Through identifying with self-concepts, brands open up a channel for consumers to create a personal connection. However, when forming a brand identity, does it matter which trait, or traits, consumers can relate and connect to? Are some traits more desirable than others are? How overt should a brand be in communicating its personality? By humanizing itself with a spokescharacter, does the brand create a stronger bond? Based on the findings in the literature review, using a combination of a spokescharacter and personality traits that are associated with an ideal self-concept will result in stronger brand loyalty than brands that use non-ideal traits and other identification techniques.

## **IV. Methodology**

This study sought to discover the relationship between brand personality traits, the use of spokescharacters and brand preference by conducting an online survey. Elon University students, 211 students between the ages of 18 and 22 years old, were selected as a convenience sample group, and the brand variables were selected from body wash and beer brands given the high frequency of use and purchase by the survey's sample demographic. Old Spice and Dove Men+Care represented the body wash category, and Corona and Dos Equis represented the beer category. These brands were coded for two major personality traits through extensive reviews of their major marketing campaigns and brand literature, such as mission statements, vision statements, and positioning. Once created, the survey was posted on the researcher's personal Twitter and Facebook accounts, as well as shared in Elon University class group. The survey was also distributed via class email rosters to reach individuals more directly. Sixty-nine respondents submitted completed surveys (Appendix B) during the three days that the survey was open to collecting responses. Given the demographics of Elon University, it can be assumed that women were the slight majority of respondents.

### ***Old Spice (Confident & Sexy)***

According to a Forbes analysis of spokescharacters used in American advertising, the Old Spice Man (Isaiah Mustafa) appeals to 66% of consumers. The article describes him as an "impossible debonair heartthrob" and upon his commercial debut, sales increased notably (Bercovici, 2011). "The Man Your Man Can Smell Like" campaign implied that by using Old Spice, you would smell like the Old Spice Man, ergo an impossible debonair heartthrob. Thus, the traits assigned to Old Spice were *confident* and *sexy*.

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### ***Dove Men+Care (Caring & Protective)***

The personality traits *caring* and *protective* were chosen for Dove Men+Care based on analysis of commercial copy and the parent brand Dove. In the television commercial spot, the following copy is used in a voiceover: “Warning: standard body wash can cause damage to man’s skin. Maintain it properly with Dove Men+Care body wash. It cleans man and protects skin from dryness” (Benim, 2009). Copy on the product’s website frequently refers to the care it provides your skin with.

### ***Dos Equis (Mysterious & Interesting)***

“The World’s Most Interesting Man” campaign has launched Dos Equis into being the fastest growing import beer brand in the United States. Jonathan Goldstein, the journeyman actor who plays the Most Interesting Man, has a well-developed mystique that intrigues viewers and leaves them wanting to learn more about him. The tidbits of life experiences he relates during his commercials are always unexpected and, as his name would suggest, interesting (Carr, 2010). The Forbes analysis revealed that Dos Equis’ spokesperson has a 62% appeal rate and 46% found him intriguing. *Mysterious* and *interesting* were suited for Dos Equis’ personality traits (Benim, 2009).

### ***Corona (Laid back & Fun)***

The most popular imported beer in the county; Corona is a firmly established brand. Set to Pocket Submarine’s bohemian track “Drifting Days,” Corona’s latest TV spot, “Shoes,” features a slew of young, attractive adults kicking off their shoes as they enjoy a Corona and walk on to the beach (SpotTV, 2014). Corona has used the beach and its associated mentality of a fun place to go to relax and unwind, to market its product for the past several years. The messaging for Corona centers on the idea that “Corona transports you to a beach state of mind” (Corona, 2013). Given its close association to the beach mentality, *fun* and *laid back* were chosen as its associated personality traits.

### ***Survey Format***

The survey (Appendix A) begins by having respondents identify three traits they believed to be apart of an ideal personality. They had to choose from a list of the eight traits associated with the four brands being tested: laid back, protective, confident, mysterious, fun, interesting, caring and sexy. The inherent ambiguity of the question was intentional to replicate the ambiguity that exists in real-life points of contacts with brands, as marketers are not able to control how consumers receive, or interpret, their messaging.

Next, the survey asked respondents to view 30-second commercial spots for Old Spice and Dove Men+Care. The Old Spice commercial featured their spokesperson, the Old Spice Man, and the Dove Men+Care was a computer-generated graphic with a voiceover reading the benefits of Dove Men+Care body wash over other brands’ products. Once they watch the commercials, respondents selected which brand they prefer. Since these products are for men, a note was included under the question asking female respondents to select the brand they would prefer men to use.

The next section asked respondents to watch a 30-second commercial for Corona and a 30-second commercial for Dos Equis. The Corona commercial was its previously described “Shoes” spot, and the Dos Equis commercial was one of the first Most Interesting Man spots that introduced the spokesperson and set the tone for his character. Then respondents selected which of the two imported beers they preferred. The survey did not call attention to the use of spokespersons in either the Old Spice commercial or the Dos Equis commercial in order to preserve the authenticity of the spokesperson’s effect and to prevent biases from forming. The target sample received the survey through social media sharing and direct emails.

## **V. Results**

### ***Ideal Personality Traits***

The top three traits that respondents identified as being a part of an ideal personality were caring (24%), fun (23%), and confident (21%) interesting (16%), laid-back (10%), protective (3%), sexy (1%) and

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mysterious (1%). Corona's traits cumulatively accounted for the majority of the responses at 33% (23% for fun and 10% for laid-back), followed by Dove Men+Care's traits at 27% (24% for caring and 3% for protective). When sorted and compared by brand association, there is a five-percentage point gap between the body wash brands' preferred traits (22% for Old Spice vs. 27% for Dove Men+Care), and a 16-percentage point gap between the beer brands' preferred traits (33% for Corona vs. 17% for Dos Equis).

### **Brand Preferences**

Brand preference results showed an unexpected split. For the body wash category, Old Spice (64%) was the clear majority over Dove (36%), while Dos Equis (51%) and Corona (49%) were neck and neck for the imported beer category. A Chi-Square test revealed the body wash category's results are statistically significant. The respondents showed preference when choosing between Old Spice and Dove Men+Care,  $X^2(1, n=69) = 5.23, p < .05$ . A Chi-Square test of the beer brands resulted in  $X^2(1, n=69) = .014, p > .05$ , thus proving that there is no statistically significant difference in preference for these two brands.

## **VI. Discussion**

Initial analysis of the trait preference results would suggest that Dove Men+Care body wash (the preference rate of 27%) would be preferred over Old Spice (22%); and Corona (33%) over Dos Equis (17%). However, the opposite proved to be true in the survey. Old Spice garnered significant preference over Dove. The same phenomenon was seen between their preference for Corona or Dos Equis. This reinforces the findings of the literature review that anthropomorphizing brands into spokescharacters is effective at creating positive brand attitudes. Even though respondents chose one kind of traits as ideal, the presence of a spokescharacter allowed the consumers to more easily identify with the brand with different kinds of traits. The ease of identification of the brand's personality through the spokescharacter let Old Spice significantly overcome the five-percentage point lead Dove Men+Care's personality traits had. Dos Equis was 16-percentage points behind Corona in preferred traits, yet The Most Interesting Man was able to make up for what the brand personality lacked.

Marketing expert Susan Fournier analyzed consumer-brand relationships through her study "Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research." While her research supported the effectiveness of complete brand anthropomorphism through spokescharacters, she suggested brands "need not engage in such blatant strategies" for a relationship to develop (1998). However, personifying your brand by associating it with ideal traits like caring and fun, were not powerful enough to beat out the competition. As long as a comparable brand has at least one trait that consumers associate with their ideal self-concept, the use of a spokescharacter is powerful enough to overshadow non-anthropomorphized brands' ideal traits, including those that consumers have a stronger connection to.

**The Man Your Man Could Smell Like.** When the marketing team at Old Spice saw that their category was filling up with competitors and their product was losing ground to them, they realized the need for a new advertising campaign. Based on the insight that women make more than half of all body wash purchases, "The Man Your Man Could Smell Like" campaign is meant to spark conversation between men and women about body wash. Old Spice wanted to tell consumers that by purchasing its manly-scented body wash, a man could become the perfect man (Grant, 2010). Dove Men+Care also wanted to play on the idea of what being a man means: "Dove is a brand that understands real men and provides real care through the products in the region" ("Dove men+care," n.d.).

Though Dove Men+Care identified the right traits, caring and protective, the messaging strategy failed to communicate how they are a part of its brand image. Dove Men+Care lacks a clear attitude that consumers would be able to incorporate into their self-concept or social identity. Old Spice chose slightly weaker traits than Dove Men+Care, yet "The Man Your Man Could Smell Like" campaign created the perfect opportunity for brand identification to occur by demonstrating its beliefs and values in an easily relatable way.

**How Dos Equis Closed the Gap.** Corona is the number-one imported beer in the country (Cramer Krasselt, 2012). Its brand personality traits are significantly preferred over Dos Equis' traits. Yet, Dos Equis closed the gap in brand preference. Like Dove Men+Care, Corona failed to communicate its idea of "find your beach" so that its brand personality traits could be easily transferred onto a consumer's self-concept or social

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identity. It is a call to action focused on finding a state of mind, which is not the same as a call to action to adopt a behavior. The Most Interesting Man represents a philosophy. He embodies living life to its fullest in the classiest way possible: “Stay thirsty, my friends” (Arnold, 2012). The rules he sets forth give consumers clear behavior parameters, giving Dos Equis the power of a lifestyle.

**Earning Brand Love and Loyalty.** When compared to the criteria for brand love set forth by Ahuvia, Batra, and Bagozzi, the shortcomings of Corona and Dove Men+Care’s marketing communication become obvious. All of the brands are of comparable, superior quality and they all hold values with which consumers can identify. The four brands each have intrinsic and extrinsic rewards; however, Old Spice and Dos Equis communicate the intrinsic rewards more effectively by demonstrating, firsthand, how the product can positively affect the consumer’s life. Where Old Spice and Dos Equis shine the brightest is their expression of “existing identities and [enactment of] desired identities.” Old Spice does this by calling attention to the man’s current self-concept and showing him, and his lady friend, what his ideal self could be (in the form of Isaiah Mustafa’s character). Dos Equis gives consumers an aspirational character to identify with. The Most Interesting Man is not a young, hotshot athlete or celebrity, like most beer commercials use. He is someone with real experience who has gained his wisdom through a full life. By making him older than Dos Equis’ target demographic, it is easier to create a desired identity that the consumers feel like they can aspire to be.

The success of the four brands is a statement to the fifth component of brand love – positive feelings. Passion for the brands exists across the board but is stronger for Old Spice and Dos Equis as their brands’ personification techniques enhance the feeling of natural fit. The emotional bond needed for brand love, again, is present more in Dos Equis and Old Spice. Spokescharacters give the consumer a direct line to form a relationship. They do not have to take the extra step of unpacking an abstract brand to pull out the shared attitudes and personality traits. This study did not measure the willingness to purchase but was based on the brand preference. Although the study did not look at frequency of use and thought for the products, it can be inferred that the sample group has had experience with both as common household items (Ahuvia, Batra & Bagozzi, 2012).

## VII. Conclusion

Though they may not be right for every brand, this study shows that spokescharacters have an undeniably positive effect on brand personalities. The results indicated that having personality traits that the target demographic associates with an ideal self-concept or social identity is not always enough to guarantee the brand’s success. Intelligent and clever use of spokescharacters can personify a brand so effectively that consumers will develop a real relationship with the brand, perhaps one that results in brand love. Spokescharacters support the abilities of consumers to interact with, identify to, and aspire to be what the brand chooses to represent. Marketing professionals should not underestimate the power of spokescharacters and the integration of ideal traits in their own communication strategies or in the strategies of their competitors. Future research will permit the advertising industry to better understand how this personification technique can help elevate brands’ success.

### ***Suggestions for Future Research***

While current research proves that the anthropomorphism of brands through spokescharacters strengthens the consumers’ resistance to negative information about brands, little research exists that directly supports the enhancing effect of spokescharacters on brand identification this study examined. Possible follow-up studies could include research that quantifies this effect spokescharacters seem to have on brand identification, as well as further examine the role that specific personality traits play in the brand experience.

### ***Limitations***

Due to the limited scope of this study, its results are subject to dispute. The process of selecting the brands and their traits was subjective. Gender may have played a role in respondents’ brand preference due to the masculine associations of beer and the classification of the body washes as a men’s product. Subjectivity of the traits is also a culpable limitation. Synonyms of the words may have elicited a different response; for instance, being mysterious versus and enigmatic may have differing effects, even though in essence both

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words share the same definition. The traits chosen for each brand do not have the support of quantitative data; other traits may have been a stronger representation of the brand's personality depending on constituent's perceptions. Lack of demographic information was also a limitation, which did not allow me to account for gender bias, among other demographic related factors. Since women are already making more than half of all body wash purchases, gender may not have been a factor in the Old Spice and Dove Men+Care comparison, but it may have played a larger role in beer brand appeal ("Old Spice," n.d.).

Watching the commercials embedded in the survey was also not mandatory and it was impossible to determine how many respondents viewed them. If not all of the respondents viewed the same commercials, their brand experience will vary, along with their relationship with the brand and their perception of the brand.

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## Appendix A: Survey

Title: Capstone Survey

Description: The purpose of this survey is to identify which traits should be incorporated into brand identity to build brand loyalty.

- I. **Select three characteristics that you believe are apart of an ideal personality.**
    - a. Laid back
    - b. Protective
    - c. Confident
    - d. Mysterious
    - e. Fun
    - f. Interesting
    - g. Caring
    - h. Sexy
  - II. *Section Header:* Please watch the 30-second commercial spots before selecting your brand preference.
  - III. Embedded Video: “The Man Your Man Could Smell Like” Old Spice Commercial (Old Spice, 2010).
  - IV. Embedded Video: “Outer Layer Care” Dove Men+Care Commercial (Benim, 2013).
    - a. **Select your preferred body wash brand.**
    - b. *Help Text: Ladies – select which brand you would prefer men to use.*
      - i. Dove Men
      - ii. Old Spice
  - V. Embedded Video: “Shoes” Corona TV Commercial (SpotTV, 2014).
  - VI. Embedded Video: “The World’s Most Interesting Man” Dos Equis TV Commercial (LovePinkCouture, 2010).
    - a. **Select your preferred imported beer.**
      - i. Dos Equis
      - ii. Corona
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## Appendix B: Survey Results

Select three characteristics that you believe are apart of an ideal personality.	Select your preferred body wash brand.	Select your preferred imported beer.
Laid back, Confident, Fun	Old Spice	Corona
Confident, Interesting, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Fun, Interesting, Caring	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Laid back, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Laid back, Protective, Confident, Fun, Interesting, Caring	Dove Men	Corona
Laid back, Confident, Fun	Dove Men	Corona
Confident, Fun, Sexy	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Confident, Fun, Caring	Dove Men	Dos Equis
Laid back, Confident, Fun	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Confident, Fun, Interesting	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Confident, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Laid back, Protective, Caring	Dove Men	Corona
Confident, Interesting, Sexy	Old Spice	Corona
Confident, Fun, Caring	Dove Men	Dos Equis
Confident, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Fun, Interesting, Caring	Dove Men	Corona
Protective, Confident, Caring	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Laid back, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Laid back, Protective, Confident, Mysterious, Fun, Interesting, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Confident, Interesting, Caring	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Laid back, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Fun, Interesting, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Laid back, Confident, Fun	Old Spice	Corona
Confident, Interesting, Caring	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Confident, Fun, Caring	Dove Men	Dos Equis
Fun, Interesting, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Laid back, Fun, Interesting	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Confident, Fun, Interesting, Caring	Dove Men	Corona
Laid back, Interesting, Caring	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Confident, Interesting, Caring	Dove Men	Corona
Confident, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Confident, Fun, Caring	Dove Men	Corona
Fun, Interesting, Caring	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Confident, Fun, Caring	Dove Men	Dos Equis
Confident, Interesting, Caring	Dove Men	Corona
Confident, Interesting, Caring	Dove Men	Dos Equis
Confident, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Laid back, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Confident, Fun, Interesting	Old Spice	Corona
Confident, Fun, Caring	Dove Men	Dos Equis
Confident, Interesting, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Confident, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Confident, Interesting, Caring	Dove Men	Dos Equis
Confident, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Laid back, Confident, Fun	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Laid back, Confident, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Laid back, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Dos Equis

Confident, Interesting, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Confident	Dove Men	Corona
Fun, Interesting, Caring	Dove Men	Dos Equis
Protective, Confident, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Protective, Fun, Caring	Dove Men	Corona
Protective, Interesting, Caring	Dove Men	Dos Equis
Confident, Fun, Sexy	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Confident, Fun, Interesting	Dove Men	Corona
Fun, Interesting, Caring	Dove Men	Dos Equis
Mysterious, Interesting, Caring	Dove Men	Corona
Confident, Fun, Interesting	Old Spice	Corona
Fun, Interesting, Caring	Dove Men	Corona
Laid back, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Laid back, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Confident, Fun, Interesting	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Laid back, Confident, Interesting	Old Spice	Corona
Confident, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Fun, Interesting, Caring	Dove Men	Dos Equis
Laid back, Fun, Interesting	Old Spice	Dos Equis
Laid back, Interesting, Caring	Dove Men	Dos Equis
Confident, Fun, Caring	Old Spice	Corona
Laid back	Old Spice	Dos Equis

# Representations of American Culture in Food Advertisements in Mainstream, Latina, and African-American Magazines

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## Abstract

*This study analyzed 54 advertisements for food products, grocery stores and restaurants in nine major women's magazines in order to gain understanding of the values of American ethnic groups. The author divided the magazines by audience (mainstream, African-American, and Latina), and then coded the advertisements for themes like family, community, and nutrition. Food advertisements in mainstream magazines frequently emphasized that nutritious, delicious food could be part of a busy lifestyle, whereas ads in Latina magazines associated food with family, and advertisements in African-American magazines contained mostly taste-related claims. As America's ethnic population continues to grow, it becomes increasingly important for advertisers to understand which messages will resonate with different racial and ethnic groups.*

## I. Introduction

The relationship between media and society is cyclical – media seek to understand and reflect society, but societal trends are also influenced by the media. Since effective media represent and contribute to society, the development of an advertising or public relations campaign always begins with research, and the insights gathered from this research are used to shape the campaign's messaging. Advertisers can also target their audience with the demographic and psychographic information of a magazine's readership, which is available in the magazine's media kit. So the messages in an advertisement are not just creative musings from a copywriter at an ad agency – they are highly strategic and carefully crafted to resonate with the target audience.

Because of all of the research that goes into advertisements, ads themselves contain deep insights into the mindset of the target audience. This research seeks to understand different American subcultures' attitudes about food and wellness, using print advertisements as a lens. Understanding these attitudes may shed light on other broader values and beliefs of these subcultures. As America's population becomes increasingly diverse, it is important to understand that not all Americans will respond to the same advertising messages, and advertisers must stay aware of cultural differences in their audiences. Because of the role food often plays in traditions, societies, and cultures, food advertisements can be especially telling about a culture's values. This research seeks to understand the cultural values apparent in food advertisements aimed at various ethnicities.

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**Keywords:** food, advertising, culture, women's magazines, health

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## II. Literature Review

For American women, popular magazines are an important source of health information (Hoffman-Goetz et al. 262). Alongside editorial content in these magazines are ads, many of which also have strong messages about food and health. Previous literature found that advertisements are most effective when the reader can identify with the race or ethnicity of the models. Food is also “strongly connected to psychological, cultural, and socioeconomic factors, and thus with race and ethnicity” (Tashiro 161). Though previous studies have not focused particularly on food and health advertisements for different minority groups, many studies have been done on multicultural and ethnic advertising, food advertising, and cultural values surrounding food.

### *Multicultural/Ethnic Advertising*

Looking at advertising through a multicultural lens is important for several reasons. Knobloch-West-erwick and Coates (2006) assumed that ads in media popular with minorities conveyed a different message than ads in mainstream media (569). Members of ethnic minorities are “likely to select media outlets and messages that relate to their ethnicity, whereas members of the white mainstream are unlikely to take that aspect into consideration” (597). Advertising in these outlets is also more effective when models represented have an ethnic background similar to that of the reader (605). So, onlookers are more likely to adopt behaviors, like using certain products, if they’re of the same race as the model represented in the advertisement (607).

A study by Ahmad (2003) found that ethnicity might be more complicated than Knobloch-Westerwick and Coates suggested. Ahmad found that ethnicity is “not just who one is, but also how one feels in and about a particular situation” (1603). Minorities may be “expected to have multiple selves whereby they act differently in different situations and with different individuals” (1603). This suggests that a member of a minority group may have a different response to an advertisement depending on the product or service being advertised, the type of media outlet it is in, and a variety of other factors.

Much previous research on multicultural health advertising has focused on cigarette and tobacco advertising. Fernandez et al. (2005) conducted a content analysis of magazines for Latinas, white women, and men. They looked at issues of *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *Playboy*, *Cosmopolitan en Español* and *Glamour en Español* published between January 1998 and August 2002 (144). They found that there were more cigarette ads per issue in magazines for white women (an average of 2.96) than in magazines for Latina women (an average of 1.0), suggesting a greater targeting of white women than Latina women by the tobacco industry (148-9). Over the years, the ads in white women’s magazines decreased, but they remained stable for Latina women (150). They also found that the cigarette brands most frequently advertised to white women were not “women’s brands” but instead were “white brands” like Marlboro, but Latinas were usually advertised “women’s brands.” This suggests that “the industry may view white women as less traditional in gender roles than Latinas” (150). This also may suggest that white women are perceived as more health-conscious than Latina women, since the cigarette advertisements decreased over time for white women but stayed steady for Latinas.

Cigarette advertising for African-American women also decreased over time. Hoffman-Goetz et al. (1997) did further research on cigarette advertising when they looked at the correlation between cancer articles and tobacco advertisements in African-American magazines *Jet*, *Ebony*, and *Essence* published between January 1987 and December 1994. Though they found magazines to be an important source of health information for American women, they also found that “health messages and models in ‘traditional’ women’s magazines may have limited impact for African-American women” (262) and therefore these women may need to turn to magazines more targeted towards their race. The authors found a decrease in density of tobacco advertising in these African-American magazines throughout the years, but this was not accompanied by an increase in editorial coverage of cancers. This shows that the decrease in cigarette advertising may not have been related to an increase in health-consciousness among African-Americans.

### *Food Advertisements in Mainstream Women’s Magazines*

Studies examining nutritional claims in food advertising have found that food low in nutritional value tends to be the most heavily advertised. Lohmann and Kant (2000) studied the advertising frequency of dif-

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ferent food groups in women's magazines published in 1997. The researchers looked at two health-oriented food magazines (*Cooking Light* and *Eating Well*), two general women's magazines (*Ladies Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*), and two health and wellness magazines (*Prevention* and *Health*). They found that foods with little nutritional content were most likely to be advertised – fats, oils, sweets, and beverages were advertised the most, but fruits and vegetables accounted for only about 5% of food advertisements in the magazines (1397). The most common claim made in the advertisements was good taste, which was present in 39 percent of all advertisements. The second most common claim was about modifications in fat, energy, sodium, or sugar, which accounted for nearly a third of all the ads. The number of claims actually dealing with health or nutrition was very low (1398).

Parker's 2003 study on food and health advertising noted that "the marketing of food continues to evolve from its promotion as a tasty necessity for life to a potentially health-enhancing experience." The study cited a 2000 survey that found that 50 percent of respondents felt they were more likely to eat foods that reported to reduce the risk of heart disease and cancer (47). Parker looked at HNR (human nutrition research) claims in food advertisements based on recent FDA guidelines, the incidence and types of HNR claims, and the incorporation of regulation guidelines into the advertising of food products (48). Food ads from 108 issues of three popular consumer magazines between 1998 and 2000 were collected and analyzed to draw conclusions about advertising content and industry practices. Since the majority of women, ages 25 to 64, are primary food shoppers, the author looked at magazines with a high circulation and majority female readership, including *American Health*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Modern Maturity*, and *Prevention*. The ads were sorted systematically by publication, date, food group, food type, brand, and claim. The author provided HNR training to three content judges, two undergraduate students and one graduate student. The judges then worked independently to analyze all ads (50).

Parker found that 41% of all ads contained at least one type of HNR claim, most commonly being a nutrient content claim. She also found that specific nutrient content claims, like information about calories or fat, were used more frequently than nutrition claims like "wholesome," "nutritious," or "healthy" (51). Like Lohmann and Kant, Parker found that the highest number of ads in the magazines was for the fats and sweets food group, which accounted for 22.7 percent of all ads. Fruits accounted for 5.9 percent of ads, and vegetables, 4 percent. The health claims were most often made in ads for breads/cereals, fruit juice, combination foods, and dairy. Parker's study "reveals that food marketers continue to take a cautious approach with regard to the use of health claims in print advertisements and that they prefer to use nutrient content or structure/function claims" (52). Overall, the study found that health claims are found infrequently in print advertising.

### *American Cultural Values and Food Values*

Advertisements are laden with cultural values. To better understand how and why food advertising differs across ethnic groups, one must first understand what each ethnicity and subculture values. Since magazines' media kits provide easily accessible information about the readership's household income, education level, age, and other demographic information, advertisers can use this knowledge to create advertisements that will appeal to the values of a magazine's audience.

Doran and Littrell (2013) aimed to measure mainstream American cultural values using the Schwartz Values Survey. They conducted a web-based survey and collected responses from a pool of potential subjects provided by four online retailers who sell teas, coffee beans, crafts, toys, scarves, purses, and jewelry. The retailers sent email invitations to potential subjects and asked them to participate. Internet users tend to be younger, more highly educated, white, and wealthier than non-users, and this group, according to the authors, is made up of "the makers and carriers of mainstream American culture" (268). The sample collected was nearly 80% white and 12.85% African-American (269) and the median age in the sample was 36.9 years. Though there were slight differences between states, genders, and urban/rural living settings, the authors found universalism, benevolence and self-direction to be strong motivating values for Americans. Power was the least motivating value (273). The authors also found that age has a significant positive correlation with conformity, tradition, and security, and a significant negative correlation with stimulation and hedonism. Education has a significant positive correlation with universalism and a significant negative correlation with conformity, tradition, hedonism, and security. Income has a significant positive correlation with power and achievement and a significant negative correlation with universalism and self-direction (272). Food and health may be associated with tradition, since so many events revolve around mealtimes and food. American culture

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also glorifies certain body types, which could create an association between power and a certain body type. Further research would be needed to understand how these values are portrayed in food advertisements.

While Doran and Littrell focused on “mainstream” American cultural values, Gomel and Zamora (2007) sought to understand food and health values among a smaller subculture: Latina mothers. They conducted a series of eight focus groups among English-speaking and Spanish-speaking low-income Latina mothers of preschoolers to understand how they feel food is related to their children’s health and their roles as mothers. They took a convenience sample of participants from community resource centers and churches in Latino communities in Southern California (360). They asked participants questions like “How do you think food is related to a person’s health?” and “How important are mealtimes, like dinner, for your family?” (361). Both Spanish- and English-speaking mothers had similar beliefs about which foods are healthy and which are unhealthy, but only Spanish-speaking mothers felt that beans were a healthy diet staple. English-speaking mothers were also more likely to talk about eating in moderation than Spanish-speaking mothers were. Both groups also commented on the link between food and weight, cognition, and general wellness (362).

Main differences in attitudes and beliefs involved wellness and weight. Three Spanish-speaking groups, but only one English-speaking group of mothers, felt that eating unhealthy foods over time was linked to issues such as diabetes, high cholesterol, and heart problems. Interestingly, only English-speaking mothers expressed concern or worry about their children being overweight (364). This suggests that food advertisements in American magazines written in Spanish may focus more on health and less on weight than advertisements in magazines written in English.

A 2009 study also found differences in food preparation by race and ethnicity. The study was conducted under belief that food selection is determined by taste, nutrition, health, cost, and convenience, and is also strongly tied to psychological, cultural, and socioeconomic factors, and therefore race and ethnicity (Tashiro 161). The study uses data from the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) for the year 2005. The data contains 13,038 respondents, including household members aged 15 and older. Among them, 8,616 respondents were white; 1,235, African-American; 313, Asian; and 1,365, Hispanic. Tashiro found that whites and Hispanics reduce time spent on food preparation as their education increases, but highly educated Hispanics are more likely to spend time preparing food at home, “indicating that education increases health awareness and encourages healthier food consumption” (178). Whites, Hispanics, and particularly African-Americans increase time spent on food preparation when they devote more time to family care (178). Whites and Hispanics spend more time purchasing prepared food when their leisure time increases, but African-Americans increase time spent purchasing prepared-food when their working hours increase. This may cause a difference in the way convenience food is advertised to whites and Hispanics versus African-Americans. Overall, whites and Hispanics were more likely than African-Americans and Asians to spend time purchasing prepared-food.

Previous research on multicultural advertising, food and health advertising, and cultural values all provides framework for understanding how food ads target different ethnic groups. This research aims to understand how food and health advertisements embody and appeal to values, attitudes, and beliefs of different cultural groups. This research can help advertisers effectively target and resonate with Americans from ethnic backgrounds that may differ from the “mainstream.”

### III. Methodology

The author collected magazines with a majority female readership that were published in 2014 and divided them into different groups based on the race/ethnicity they targeted. There were three groups: White/mainstream, African-American, and Latina.

The mainstream/white group contained issues of *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *Self* and *Women’s Health*. These magazines all feature primarily white models, though they are by no means intended for an exclusively white audience. Both *Self* and *Women’s Health* have a strong focus on health and fitness, but *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour* focus much more on health, beauty, and general women’s interests. The African-American group contained issues of *Essence* and *Ebony*. The Latina group contained issues of *Cosmopolitan for Latinas* (which is written in English), *Cosmopolitan en Español* (written in Spanish) and *People en Español*. It is important to note that though *Cosmopolitan for Latinas* is written in English, many of its ads were in Spanish. These magazines were selected because their readerships were primarily made up of females of the racial/

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ethnic category they were grouped into. There were more magazines used in the “mainstream” category than the other two because they are more abundant and therefore were more easily accessible.

The author looked at 14 magazines total and counted the number of food advertisements in each. Advertisements for vitamins, gum and alcoholic beverages were not counted, but advertisements for grocery stores and restaurants were. The sample included six magazines in the mainstream/white group (two issues of *Women’s Health*, two issues of *Self*, one issue of *Cosmopolitan*, and one issue of *Glamour*), four magazines in the African-American group (two issues of *Ebony* and two issues of *Essence*), and four magazines in the Latina group (two issues of *Cosmopolitan en Español*, one issue of *Cosmopolitan for Latinas* and one issue of *People en Español*).

Afterward, the author coded for various themes in advertisements. The themes selected had been previously observed by the author in advertisements or were discussed in the literature reviewed. The coding scheme was based on the following definitions:

**Convenience:** If advertisements contained phrases like “on-the-go” or mentioned how the food could fit into a “busy lifestyle,” they were coded as showing convenience.

**Taste:** Advertisements that contained phrases like “delicious” or “great-tasting” or similar claims were coded as showing taste.

**Nutrition facts:** If an advertisement contained details about calories, fat, carbohydrates, protein, or other nutrients, it was coded as containing nutrition facts.

**Nutrition claims:** If an advertisement made a claim about nutrition such as “wholesome,” “all-natural” or “nutritious,” it was coded as containing a nutrition claim.

**Family:** If an advertisement mentioned family or pictured families spending time together, it was coded as showing family.

**Community:** If an advertisement contained messages or photographs about friendship, communities, or connecting with others, it was coded as showing community.

**Willpower:** Advertisements that included messages about weight loss, “wiping your slate clean,” starting over, or other general messages about sticking to a diet, it was coded as showing willpower.

**Motivation:** If advertisements had motivational messages about achievement or phrases like “go get ‘em” they were coded as showing motivation.

The total number of food advertisements among each racial/ethnic group was then added up, as were the number of food advertisements that displayed each theme listed above.

## IV. Findings

There were striking differences in the themes found in magazines for each group. The most common themes among ads in the mainstream/white group were nutrition facts and nutrition claims. The most common themes among ads in the African-American group were taste and nutrition facts as shown in Table 1. And the most common theme in the Latina group was, by far, family.

This suggests that mainstream America values nutrition in their food, whereas African-Americans value taste and Latinas strongly associate food with family. This is illustrated in the following McDonald’s ad, which was printed in the May 2014 issue of *People en Español* in *Figure 1*.

**Table 1. Themes found in magazine ads for three groups**

	African-American	Latina	Mainstream/ white
Total Number of Food Ads	12	7	35
Convenience	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (17.1%)
Taste	6 (50%)	1 (14.3%)	17 (48.6%)
Nutrition Facts	4 (33.3%)	0 (0%)	19 (54.3%)
Nutrition Claims	2 (16.7%)	1 (14.3%)	22 (62.9%)
Family	2 (16.7%)	5 (71.4%)	3 (8.6%)
Community	3 (25%)	1 (14.3%)	3 (8.6%)
Willpower	2 (16.7%)	0 (0%)	3 (8.6%)
Motivation	1 (8.3%)	0 (0%)	7 (20%)



Figure 1. This McDonalds advertisement, which focuses on family rather than food, health, or taste, was published in the May 2014 issue of *People en Español*.

Ads in African-American and Latina magazines were much more likely to display community values than ads in mainstream magazines were. Convenience was emphasized in 17.1% of mainstream magazine ads, whereas it was nonexistent in ads for African-Americans and Latinas. Motivation was also displayed in 20% of mainstream magazine ads, but it wasn't present in any Latina ads and only in one African-American ad. Nutrition claims, like "wholesome" or "all-natural" weren't too common in the African-American and Latina groups (16.7% and 14.3% of ads, respectively), but they were ubiquitous in mainstream magazine advertisements – over half (62.9%) of ads included nutritional claims.

It was also interesting to note that advertisements for the same product appeared in multiple magazines, but the messaging differed between magazines. For example, both *Women's Health* and *People en Español* contained the same advertisement for Quaker Real Medleys snacks. In the *Women's Health* ad, the copy read:

"Sweet apples. Crunchy walnuts. Yummy multigrains. Quaker Real Medleys has all the real, delicious fruit and nut combos a go-getter like you wants, in a cup that's just as on-the-go as you are. With good energy, it's how we're fighting the human energy crisis one cup at a time. #QuakerUp" (5)

Like many other advertisements in the mainstream magazines, this ad copy emphasizes the product's convenience, taste and natu-

ral ingredients (“real, delicious fruit and nut combos”). The same advertisement in *People en Español* also focused on energy, but instead of just suggesting that the product is fuel for a busy day, it suggests that it can help keep moms going. The Spanish copy reads:

“Quaker Real Medleys, una deliciosa combinacion de frutas, nueces y multigranos que tiene lo que quiere una mama como tu para hacer render el dia. Es asi como combatimos la crisis de energia humana: una taza, un tazon y una barra a la vez. En sus Marcas, listos... #QuakerUp.” (57)

This roughly translates to:

“Quaker Real Medleys, a delicious combination of fruit, nuts and multigrains, is what you want as a mom to stretch your day. This is how you fight the crisis of human energy: a cup, a bowl and a loaf at a time. On your Marks, get set... #QuakerUp.”

This supports the findings that mainstream advertisements focus mostly on nutrition, taste, and convenience, while ads for Latinas focus mostly on family.

Another significant finding was the number of food advertisements in each magazine. Mainstream magazines contained an average of 5.8 food advertisements per issue, followed by African-American magazines (3.0 ads per issue) and Latina magazines (1.8 ads per issue). In the case of Latina magazines, only one out of the four magazines in the sample contained any food advertisements.

## V. Discussion

Since advertisements are powerful symbols of culture, the differences in messages across the racial/ethnic groups suggest that mainstream (mostly white) Americans, African-Americans, and Latinas all value different things in their food products and associate food and mealtimes with different values. The findings suggest that mainstream America sees food as something that should be nutritious and healthy, since the majority of ads in mainstream magazines were centered on nutrition facts and claims. Taste was also mentioned in nearly half of mainstream ads, but it was often used in conjunction with a nutrition claim, perhaps to show that nutritious food can also taste good (Refer to *Figure 2*).

There were significantly more food advertisements in the mainstream magazines than in others (5.8 compared to 3.0 and 1.8 in African-American and Latina magazines, respectively). Since the content analysis suggests that mainstream America values nutrition, this could cause food companies to create more ads in an effort to stand out in a nutrient-conscious market.

Family and community were only highlighted in a few mainstream ads, but messages about convenience were included in 17.1 percent of mainstream ads and in 0 percent of African-American and Latina ads. This could suggest that mainstream America views food as a necessity for health and energy rather than something that can bring families and communities together. Since motivation was apparent in many more mainstream ads than African-American or Latina ads, this suggests that mainstream America associates food with power and energy more than Latina and African-American subcultures do.

Though there were few food advertisements found in the Latina magazines, nearly all of them centered on family values. The difference in the copy in the Quaker Real Medley advertisement was especially striking – copy in both English and Spanish ads focused on energy and fuel, but the Spanish ad mentioned motherhood and the English one did not. This suggests that

*Figure 2.* This information-packed advertorial for SmartOnes prepackaged meals was published in the February 2014 issue of *Women’s Health*.

Latina culture is family-focused and food is an important part of bringing the family together.

Half of the advertisements in African-American magazines centered on taste, which is unsurprising in food advertisements. There were no other themes apparent in the majority of advertisements. This could suggest that African-American culture views food as a basic part of life – something that may be tasty, nutritious, or enjoyable to share with others – but does not strongly correlate it with other values or emotions. Community was shown in 25 percent of African-American magazine ads, compared to only 14.3 percent in Latina magazine ads and 8.6 percent in mainstream magazine ads, which could suggest that African-Americans are more likely than other ethnic groups to associate food with socializing and community building (Refer to *Figure 3*.)



*Figure 3.* This taste-centric M&M'S ad appeared in the April 2014 issue of *Ebony*.

## VI. Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First of all, media kits for the magazines did not contain information about the racial or ethnic makeup of its readers. Though the overwhelming majority of the women pictured in the magazines categorized as “mainstream” were white, it is hard to know what percentage of the magazines’ audience is white. The magazines categorized as African-American or Latina made it obvious that they were targeting those groups, though it’s possible that some of their readers were from different ethnic or racial backgrounds.

Though all of the magazines in this study had a majority female readership, some had a higher male readership than others. For example, *Ebony*’s readership was about 35 percent male (Barnett), whereas *Self*’s readership was only 5 percent male (“Self Circulation Demographics”). This could change the types of messages and types of advertisements in magazines.

Future research could compare advertisements in the same publication in different languages. For example, a future study could directly compare themes in ads in *Cosmopolitan*, *Cosmopolitan en Español* and in *Cosmopolitan for Latinas*. This would control for differences in gender and interests in audiences. There may have been many lurking variables that were not accounted for in this study. For example, the audiences of *Ebony* and *Women’s Health* do not just differ in race – they also differ in gender makeup, interests, and possibly age and household income. These are all demographic data that may influence advertisers’ messages.

## VII. Conclusion

A larger, more systematic study will need to be conducted before any conclusions can be drawn about how the values of America’s major ethnic groups compare to its “mainstream” group. However, this study suggests that African-Americans and Latinas may view food differently than the mainstream American group does. Advertisers should understand that the same messages will not resonate with all groups, so a nutrition-focused advertisement in a mainstream magazine like *Glamour* may not be as persuasive to a Latina reader as it is to a white reader. As America’s racial and ethnic makeup changes, this may change the “mainstream” culture and advertisers will need to take into account a variety of different attitudes, values, and beliefs when constructing advertisements. Advertisers also must take into account the wide array of factors that affect an individual’s values – as Tashiro’s research found, people of different ethnic backgrounds can react differently to life changes, like having children or accumulating wealth.

Previous research also suggested that ethnicity is more than just racial identity – it is also how an individual “feels in and about a particular situation” (Knoblock-Westerwick and Coates 1603). Therefore, a minority woman may have different reactions to – and expectations of – content in mainstream magazines than she does in ethnicity-specific magazines. The type of magazine a minority woman chooses to read may depend on how she identifies herself and which culture she feels closest to, so judging the values of different

ethnic groups based on magazine audiences may not take into account a whole cohort of women who identify as minorities but still feel that their values align with the mainstream. Modern American advertisers undoubtedly face a complicated market full of diverse races, ethnic backgrounds, ethnic identities, and cultural values.

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## Appendix A: Content Analysis Notes

*Cosmopolitan en Español*, May 2014 – 0 food ads

*Cosmopolitan en Español*, April 2014 – 0 food ads

*Ebony*, May 2014 – 4 food ads

Convenience

Taste - 3

Nutrition Facts - 2

Nutrition Phrases/Claims - 1

Family

Community

Willpower

Motivation

*Women's Health*, March 2014 – 8 food ads

Convenience - 3

Taste - 4

Nutrition Facts - 4

Nutrition Phrases/Claims - 8

Family - 1

Community

Willpower

Motivation – 2

*Essence*, April 2014 – 2 food ads

Convenience

Taste

Nutrition Facts - 1

Nutrition Phrases/Claims

Family - 1

Community

Willpower

Motivation – 1

*Women's Health*, April 2014 – 6 food ads

Convenience

Taste - 4

Nutrition Facts - 2

Nutrition Phrases/Claims - 2

Family - 1

Community - 1

Willpower

Motivation - 1

*Self*, February 2014 – 8 food ads

Convenience  
Taste - 3  
Nutrition Facts - 4  
Nutrition Phrases/Claims - 4  
Family  
Community  
Willpower  
Motivation – 3

*Ebony*, April 2014 –5 food ads

Convenience  
Taste - 3  
Nutrition Facts - 1  
Nutrition Phrases/Claims - 1  
Family - 1  
Community - 2  
Willpower - 1  
Motivation

*Self*, March 2014 – 4 food ads

Convenience - 2  
Taste - 1  
Nutrition Facts - 3  
Nutrition Phrases/Claims - 3  
Family - 1  
Community  
Willpower - 1  
Motivation

*Cosmopolitan for Latinas*, Spring 2014 – 0 food ads

*Essence*, May 2014 – 1 food ad

Convenience  
Taste  
Nutrition Facts  
Nutrition Phrases/Claims  
Family  
Community – 1  
Willpower  
Motivation

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*People en Español*, May 2014 – 7 food ads \*\*Quaker p. 138

Convenience  
Taste - 1  
Nutrition Facts  
Nutrition Phrases/Claims - 1  
Family - 5  
Community - 1  
Willpower  
Motivation

*Cosmopolitan*, May 2014 – 5 food ads

Convenience - 1  
Taste - 3  
Nutrition Facts - 4  
Nutrition Phrases/Claims - 3  
Family  
Community - 1  
Willpower - 1  
Motivation

*Glamour*, April 2014 – 4 food ads

Convenience  
Taste - 2  
Nutrition Facts - 2  
Nutrition Phrases/Claims - 2  
Family  
Community - 1  
Willpower - 1  
Motivation - 1

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# Interactive Graphic Novels: A Hybrid Advertising Technique

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## Abstract

*As web-based technologies continue to advance, marketers and advertisers are pairing up traditional advertising with new web-based techniques to create innovative ways to communicate messages. This study analyzed Interactive Graphic Novels (IGNs)-- animated, graphically illustrated or hybrid real life animation stories typically in video game format in which users are given some level of interaction with events or control over the outcome of a story. This study sought to find out if IGNs were an effective tactic for marketers and advertisers to use today. This study found that IGNs are an effective tactic for advertising and marketing professionals with the means to create them. If anything, IGNs' ability to appeal to multiple human senses makes these productions a powerful tool to communicate messages. IGNs are also able to harness the power of persuading through storytelling. At the present time, IGNs are a rather new concept, so online users have repeatedly favored them.*

## I. Introduction

Comics and graphic novels have a rich history in American culture for their ability to entertain, inform, and even educate a reader. From an information design perspective, comics have the ability to fuse graphical and informational content in a unique way that traditional works of literature do not. From an advertising perspective, comics and graphic novels offer artists and information designers a unique way to present accumulated content and information to create meaning for a specified audience. Together, they serve as a powerful tools to communicate messages.

As web technologies advance, developers, artists, and marketing professionals are experimenting with new ways to engage target audiences and advertise products. Interactive Graphic Novels (IGNs) act as a means of storytelling where developers and designers can use animation, vivid graphics, rich multimedia, and other web-based features to communicate information to online users. Advertising professionals are using these products to create visually appealing stories that aim to grab online attention and better promote brands, products, and ideas. IGNs are new, visually stimulating, and has become quite popular in the design and advertising community. For this reason, marketers and advertisers would be interested in further research regarding IGNs and their ability to communicate direct, as well as subliminal messages to those who interact with them.

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**Keywords:** IGNs, web-based techniques, interactivity, advertising, rich-media

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## II. Literature Review

### *Interactive Media and Advertising*

As web technologies continue to evolve, interactive media, and advertising have begun to build a strong relationship. Interactive media allows advertisers to establish a two-way interaction with an audience by using new web-based formats and techniques to enhance persuasive appeal and user engagement (Sundar and Kim, 2005). Weber and Rall (2012) define interactivity as “a dialogue between the user and the artifact, and the artifact can be viewed as a partner who invites the user to communicate and act.” Interactive advertising goes beyond simple animated banners and click-through techniques that were once considered a new and innovative way to push advertising content. By using social media, branded polls and games, and other methods to engage target audiences in a continuous dialogue, ads can now send stronger messages that keep user’s attention for longer durations and motivate them to share content with others.

Through a process called *hybridization*, advertisers have the ability to pair up traditional advertising techniques with new, interactive techniques to uniquely communicate information and market products. An example of hybridization include advergames, which are interactive games played online that attempt to instill brand messages in users (King, 2012).

Studies on interactive websites suggest that users show increased feelings of telepresence, higher interest, and a more positive attitude overall toward the site (Coyle and Thorson, 2001). Early studies indicate that interactivity in web advertisements increases the persuasive function of online ads as well (Sundar et al., 1997). Fogg (2003) adds that increased interactivity positively correlates with a user’s opinion of site credibility.

Interactive media has also been found to increase arousal in users. Heo and Sundar (2000) found that as levels of arousal increased, so did cognitive performance. Increased cognitive performance leads to better information processing and retention. In addition, researchers have found that increased interactivity led to both more recall and recognition of information associated with the content directly affected by interactive features (Sundar and Kalyanaraman, 2004). Advertisers have been using sex appeal, shock-appeal, and other controversial methods to evoke emotional responses in people for years. Recent research proves that interactive media can be an effective method to evoke an emotional response in a less controversial way.

### *Comics and Information Design*

Comics and graphic novels have the ability to easily tell stories where single images and static graphics do not. Both comics and information design can create meaning from fragments of content by organizing selected pieces of content in a sequential way. Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm (Fisher, 1984) highlights the value of persuading through narration. Figueiredo (2011) states, “Traditional comics rely on readers to fill in the gaps between the panels, compelling the reader to construct the part of the story not shown, thus enhancing engagement and cognitive function.” Figueiredo (2011) goes on to say, “If a narrative is engaging, truthful, and congruent with an audience’s experiences, then it can convince them of good reason to engage in a particular action or belief.” This is a fundamental concept of advertising.

McCloud (2006) states that comics and graphic novels give readers a rare chance to “listen with their eyes.” This is accomplished by including speech balloons that link images and text simultaneously. This conveys the impression of sound in a textual medium. Eisner (1985) points out that since this process is repeated over and over by a reader, it simulates sound effects in the brain and gives off the impression that the audience has become an active participant in the comic. By becoming a participant in the framework of where the content exists, audiences become compelled to finish the story and are more likely to further engage with the content at the maximum level (Brown and Duguid, 2000).

David Carrier (2001) writes, “Reading comic narratives is to look into the minds of fictional characters as if their inner worlds had become transparent.” McCloud (1994) stresses that since “we see ourselves in everything, we assign identities and emotions where none exist. And we make the world over in our image.”

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How an audience relates to the fictional characters and the fictional environments seen in the comic form determines how the audience enters into the narrative and how it engages with the information.

### *Rich-Media*

Rich-media allows developers to further immerse users in online content. Rich-media is a term for a variety of highly interactive, visually influential Internet formats (Li & Leckenby 2004). Rich-media uses vector-based graphics, streaming audio and video, Java-powered interactivity, and other forms of multimedia to deliver enhanced messages, which aims to improve user response. Rich-media operates under the assumption that messages that appeal to multiple perceptual systems are better perceived than those that call on a single or fewer perceptual system, and that high quality messages are more effective than low quality messages (Reeves & Nass, 1996).

### *Interactive Graphic Novels*

As of late, IGNs have become a popular medium for designers and developers to communicate stories, ideas, and content to online users. IGNs are unique because they give users the ability to control the pace of the story through the use of parallax scrolling techniques or simple click-through features. Research has found that users are more accurate in recalling controlled information than those not given control (George-Palilonis & Spillman, 2013).

IGNs are also a very new concept and continue to evolve as creativity and web technologies advance. IGNs rely on movement and visual appeal to tell stories. Sears and Jacko (2007) found that “emotional design seeks to make interactive products not only more efficient, but also more pleasant.” It has been demonstrated that high levels of visual appeal creates positive emotions in users (Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006). Comics and graphic novels also rely on visual appeal to make narratives more appealing.

IGNs draw users to sites because they are considered a novel way to present information on a website. Radford and Bloch (2011) found that people exhibited more positive responses to novel products. Frederick (2013) states that when an individual interacts with something unknown, speaking directly at web layouts and websites, it creates pleasure and that, in turn positively influences the user experience online. Biederman and Vessel (2006) state that humans take pleasure in acquiring new information and interacting with unfamiliar objects such as hybrid advertising techniques and new user friendly web-based technologies.

### *Interactive Graphic Novels as an Advertising Tactic*

Only recently have marketers used IGNs to attract and engage online users. IGNs, considered a hybrid advertising technique, use rich-media, user-based interactivity, and traditional narrative elements to tell stories and communicate messages. IGNs used as an advertising tactic can be described as a form of branded entertainment; a popular advertising strategy that imbeds branded messages in entertainment-oriented media content (Wise et al., 2008). When dealing with IGNs, developers can control through sequencing when and how messages are experienced. Partial control through navigation and pacing is left to users. This allows users to interact with the content at their own pace, rather than simply sitting back and observing something like a commercial.

Traditional comics and graphic novels have always relied on vivid and emotionally appealing artwork and content. Many advertising and marketing professionals believe that increasing the vividness of a message can enhance its persuasiveness. Appiah (2006) states that “information may be described as vivid, that is, as likely to attract and hold our attention and to excite the imagination, to the extent that it is: (a) emotionally interesting, (b) concrete and imagery provoking, and (c) proximate in a sensory, temporal or special way” (p. 45). Prensky (2001) states that consumers and Internet users engage in more media multi-tasking, and are easily distracted and prone to navigate and interact with stimulating sites. This gives advertisers the ability to attract online users with vivid and emotionally appealing content.

Due to visual appeal, novelty in design, and a generally higher level of interactivity, IGNs can be used as a tool to help advertisers differentiate themselves from the competition and possibly gain an advantage in the marketplace. This researcher found that IGNs are heavily spread and shared through social media sites like Twitter and Reddit and are praised for their individuality. Advertisers and developers who create popular

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IGNs will most likely see their content passed around to thousands of users on popular social networks. Past research indicates that online word-of-mouth is more effective when it comes from independent sources, such as Reddit and Twitter (Hill & Moran, 2011).

However, rich-media and the development of IGNs for advertising purposes are expensive to produce and require a long time to develop. Many professionals do not believe that interactive media tools such as IGNs are sustainable for advertising and marketing campaigns.

### *Uses And Gratification Theory*

The uses and gratification theory is central to this research. This theory assumes that people actively seek out media to gratify a wide range of personal needs (LaRose, et al., 2001). This theory has been applied to examine consumer experiences associated with websites and online media, such as web advertisements and the overall user/consumer experience. The uses and gratification theory has multiple underlying constructs relating to entertainment, *informativeness*, and irritation. These underlying constructs directly apply to the current research.

The entertainment construct refers to the extent to which web media is fun and entertaining to users (Eighmey & McCord, 1998). Previous research on this construct has shown that the “value of media and entertainment lies in its ability to satisfy a user’s need for escapism, hedonistic pleasure, aesthetic enjoyment, and/or emotional release” (McQuail, 1983). This leads to a longer duration interacting with the entertaining media, a higher probability in communicating it to others, such as through social networking or word-of-mouth, and a higher probability that the user will return to the media or type of media at a later time. Stern and Zaichowsky (1991) state that users who perceive a banner ad on the web as entertaining leads to more brand loyalty and a higher chance of purchasing products associated with the brand. In a related study, Chen and Wells (1999) found that ad entertainment is positively related to ad value and a user’s attitude toward the site where the advertisement actually exists.

The informativeness construct in relation to the uses and gratification theory refers to how the Internet, and more specifically web pages, can provide users with resourceful and helpful information. Bauer and Greyser (1968) suggest that media users consider advertising’s ability to provide audience with information the fundamental reason for accepting an ad in the first place. Hulu.com gives users the ability to select whether or not an advertisement is relevant to them. Therefore Hulu.com can regulate content seen by users based on their personal preference and information they want to experience or information they don’t want to experience, thus increasing the value per advertisement. Ducoffe (1995) found that there is a positive correlation between *informativeness* and advertising value, and attitude toward advertising.

Irritation refers to the extent in which web pages and online ad layouts appear messy and irritating to users. Ducoffe (1995) found that irritating banner ads may exploit human anxiety, distract consumers’ attention, and dilute human experiences. Bauer and Greyser (1968) found that people criticize advertising and marketing mostly due to the annoyance or irritation that advertising can cause. Ducoffe (1996) further states that irritation and ad value are negatively correlated.

This research seeks to understand IGNs and their potential to communicate information. Overall, this research seeks to check if IGNs can be used as a viable marketing/advertising tactic today.

RQ1: How does rich-media and interactive media impact the narrative structure of IGNs?

RQ2: Are IGNs a viable marketing/advertising tactic?

RQ3: Are IGNs appealing to users?

## **III. Methodology**

A content analysis was used to determine implications regarding the above research questions. Since IGNs are new and relatively unstudied, this research took an exploratory approach.

Five interactive graphic novels were selected for the content analysis. Each IGN was found by searching “interactive graphic novel” via Twitter. The pool found through the Twitter search was narrowed to include IGNs that related to a particular brand or concept. The first five located were used in the present study. The researcher coded the IGNs for six categories. They are type of message and the following five

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categories.

### *Narrative Structure*

It was necessary to record the narrative structure to bring to light Fisher's Narrative Paradigm and to note whether persuading through storytelling can be applied to this research. In the current study, IGNs can either be linear or non-linear. Linear stories consist of a fixed plot that cannot be altered, while non-linear refers to a plot that can be altered.

### *Level of Interactivity*

This researcher recorded the level of interactivity to see if different levels of interactivity impacted popularity, length, or other aspects of IGNs. Three levels of interactivity were considered:

- A low level of interactivity requires a user to simply click through or scroll through content like turning a page in a book.
- A medium level of interactivity is classified as having the ability to zoom, parallax-scrolling features, the ability to interact with the content in some way, sound effects, videos, etc.
- A high level of interactivity is classified as giving the users the ability to change the outcome of the narrative structure (non-linear).

### *Rich-Media Features*

Rich-media features refer to the way in which various media is presented. Examples include:

- Pop-ups: content that automatically appears at a certain point in the story
- Animation: moving graphics
- Audio: background audio and pre-timed audio
- Videos: clickable videos that offers more content
- Illustrations

### *Twitter posts*

Many web developers and content designers regularly share content that they find interesting with their social networks. For this reason Twitter posts were recorded to gauge online popularity for each IGN used in this study. The number of positive posts was recorded.

### *Length*

Each IGN is measured as short, medium, or long, depending on its total length. A short IGN generally takes less than one minute to complete; less than two minutes for a medium IGN, and more than two minutes for a long IGN.

## **IV. Findings and Discussion**

### *Appealing to Multiple Perceptual Systems*

New web technologies give developers and marketers the power to add sound and interactivity to static and moving visuals like never before. It is evident through this research that appealing to multiple perceptual systems increases the effectiveness of a communicated message. IGNs have the ability to better immerse users into storylines on a deeper level than traditional narratives and literary devices. Eisner (1985) states that pictorial writings give readers a chance to become *active participants* in stories by presenting content in graphically appealing and stimulating ways, such as through the use of speech bubbles or comic book like scenes. The IGNs used in this research paper commonly used sound, touch and feel through interactivity, and visuals so that they can appeal to different human senses and make a narrative more interesting and engaging. Wurman (2000) states that "Interaction with information is what enables possession." One can

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conclude that the more senses targeted through IGNs, the more likely an audience member will absorb the information.

### *Using Sound To Create Mood*

Sound was present in a number of the IGNs used in this research. In many cases, background sound was used to set the mood. In the case of *The Walking Dead - Zombiefied*, developers incorporated the show's opening title audio sequence to help users further connect to the show. This music was played throughout. *Peugeot HYbrid4* played timed audio arrangements as users scrolled through the narrative. Each scene would trigger and repeatedly play audio relevant to the activated scene. *Ryse Digital Interactive Graphic Novel Issue 1* used audio on specific interactive elements. Users clicked on a character and relevant audio would play.

### *Pacing and Visuals*

Primary research uncovered that visuals were enhanced mainly by user-controlled movement. Similar to traditional video, images within IGNs have the ability to move around screen in pre-determined ways to create a more aesthetically pleasing experience. Unlike traditional video, however, IGNs give users the ability to control the pace. In *America: Elect!* graphics are enhanced by using the parallax scrolling technique. George-Palilonis and Spillman (2013) stated that people could more accurately remember content when they were in control of the rate at which information was consumed. This phenomenon can be used to create more memorable messages in online and mobile advertisements where the user has the ability to impact the pace of information consumption without disrupting the narrative.

Advertising and marketers can use the findings on interactivity and pacing to develop tactics that could potentially replace traditional online commercials. Adding interactive elements to web commercials, like those seen on Hulu.com, could potentially have a huge impact on message communication and online advertising.

### *IGNs and Social Sharing*

Twitter posts were recorded to cross-examine IGNs and their online popularity. This cross analysis was important to gain insights on how social media can increase ad value. Two occurrences were observed:

1. The level of interactivity and Twitter posts were positively correlated.
2. Length and Twitter posts were negatively correlated.

The positive correlation between the level of interactivity and Twitter posts is most likely due to their novelty aspect. Radford and Bloch (2011) found that people showed positive responses to novel products when compared to products that they were familiar with. IGNs with a high level of interactivity suggest that people were more excited to interact with the advanced technology and less excited about IGNs categorized as having a low level of interactivity. *The Walking Dead - Zombiefied*, which had the most rich-media features in the selected sample, had the most number of tweets.

The negative correlation between length and Twitter posts may be explained by online users' short attention span. According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information, the average attention span for an online user is only eight seconds ("Attention Span Statistics"). *Ryse Digital Interactive Graphic Novel Issue 1*, the longest IGN included in this study, also had the least number of Twitter posts. *The Walking Dead - Zombiefied*, considered a short IGN, had the most.

### *IGNs And the Uses and Gratification Theory*

In a previous section, this research outlined and described the three underlying constructs of the Uses and Gratification Theory: entertainment, informativeness, and irritation. It was stated earlier that the "value of media and entertainment lies in its ability to satisfy a user's need for escapism, hedonistic pleasure, aesthetic enjoyment, and/or emotional release" (McQuail, 1983). The IGNs studied in this paper show that the inclusion of narrative aspects can enhance a user's attempt at escapism. By using the traditional comic and graphic novel framework, IGNs allow users to enhance their ability to become active participants in the content. By pairing traditional comic and graphic novel techniques with interactive and rich-media features, developers can add to the overall experience and immerse the user into the content on a deeper level where

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he/she can have a deeper emotional response.

### *Recommendations For Future Research*

This researcher found it interesting that the short attention spans of online users could have an impact on the popularity of online content and the message retention of an advertisement. The attention span of online users was not a key element to this research. However, studying the effect that rich-media and interactivity has on the average attention span of online users would possibly yield important results for crafting online ad content.

It would also be beneficial for future research to focus on interactive advertising in an attempt to find value in replacing traditional online advertising such as web commercials and online banners with interactive content, while focusing on how interactive elements impact ad effectiveness and user response.

## **V. Conclusion**

In summation, the present study supports the notion that IGNs are a sustainable tactic for advertising and marketing professionals with the means to create them. If anything, IGNs ability to appeal to multiple human senses makes it a powerful tool to communicate messages. IGNs are also able to harness the power of persuading through storytelling. At the present time, IGNs are a rather new concept, so online users have repeatedly praised them. Attempting to harness the power of social media will continue to serve as a challenge to advertising and marketing professionals.

It should be noted that some IGNs had a social media feature, so users can automatically post a tweet about the IGN. Also, future research can include more IGNs to gain more generalizable insights.

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# Feminine Agendas: The historical evolution of feminism as reflected in the content of American women's magazines

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this research is to identify trends and themes that reflect feminist values in American women's magazines throughout history. The goal is to show that feminism was an frequently discussed topic in American media as it gained prominence and validity over time. This research draws primarily upon secondary sources, such as scholarly journal articles. Most research on this topic was conducted by analyzing magazines published during various time periods and by discovering general themes. By showing how feminism was represented in women's magazines, this research highlights the role of media in reflecting America's ever-changing political and cultural landscape.*

## I. Introduction

Magazine journalism in the United States has undergone a significant transformation from its early origins to present day, especially for women's magazines. From the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with the publication of the first women's magazine, *The Lady's Magazine*, to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century with the publication of the first feminist magazine — Gloria Steinem's *Ms.* magazine — and onward, women's magazines have made gradual yet impactful changes over the years to better reflect an ever-changing society. Specifically, women's magazines have served over time as a strong indicator of feminism in the United States. For example, women's magazines of the late 1700s often included embroidery patterns to make clothes, reflecting a focus on female domesticity in 18<sup>th</sup> century society. But the 1970s brought on a wave of female independence at home and in the workplace, and magazines began publishing articles on such topics as how to balance a full-time career while starting a family. By examining these changes in content themes, it is possible to trace the values that women's magazines provided for their audience to reflect the new cultural and political landscape women faced in America. American women's magazines echoed the evolution of feminism in the United States from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to present day, and appealed to a progressing female society.

The American magazine industry has a rich history nearly as unique and eventful as the history of the United States itself. Benjamin Franklin intended to publish the first magazine in the country, *General Magazine*, in 1741, but he was beaten when *American Magazine* was published a mere three days earlier. The first women's magazine, *The Lady's Magazine*, which was published in 1770, contained literary and fashion content as well as embroidery patterns. The mid-1800s saw such popular magazine titles as *The Economist* and *The Atlantic* (both are still around today), and in 1902, *McClure's Magazine* began the famous muckraking era with the article "Tweed Days in St. Louis" by C.H. Wetmore and Lincoln Steffens. Henry Luce started *Time*,

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the first American newsmagazine, in 1923, and *Seventeen* became the first magazine devoted to adolescents in 1944. The debut of *Rolling Stone* in 1967 demonstrated the popularity of special-interest magazines, and in 1993, *Wired* magazine arrived on the scene, publishing content dealing with all sorts of topics to appeal to an audience of varied interests. In recent years, magazines of all types have been geared towards all sorts of audiences, but the transformation of American women's magazines in particular has likely been one of the most visible and memorable historical evolutions in the print news industry.

A major goal of this research is analyzing whether it was only magazine authors who set the feminist agenda throughout U.S. history. The major trends that resonated in women's magazines can be divided into three distinct time periods based on notable changes in feminist-minded — or, in some cases, non-feminist-minded — magazine content.

The first period, the early 1770s to roughly the late 1860s, which marks the early beginnings of women's magazines in the United States, saw these periodicals either succeed or fail at making a lasting impact in society. Studying this period reveals the notion of female civic participation, which was done specifically when women expressed their voices in society by directly authoring the magazines or indirectly through these authors. The authors' ideas and the female readers' voices interacted: Female authors determined a certain agenda for their audience, while the contributions of audience members guided what they want the agenda to be.

The second period, the early 1870s to the late 1970s, witnessed huge changes in the political and cultural landscape of the nation. It was the responsibility of women's magazines to keep up with these changes in order to help readers adjust to and prepare for new lifestyles. Household and marriage-focused content in the 1940s and 1950s shifted to academic and career-oriented content in the 1960s and 1970s. The magazines saw a gradual shift from female domesticity to female independence.

The third period covering the 1980s to present day characterizes a modern era in which women have many more options in society and in media consumption. Women now can read more feminist-minded content and support the ideas of feminism, but do not necessarily have to identify themselves as feminists, thus giving rise to the "I'm-Not-A-Feminist-But" generation. By focusing on the major themes that characterize each period, the author can more easily identify the ways American women's magazines reflected feminine ideals during these periods.

This research attempts to answer the questions proposed in the introduction by reviewing scholarly articles on this topic, ranging from American feminist movement, to the history of women's magazine journalism, to feminism as reflected in media, to overall trends in the history of feminism and the history of women's magazines. The author creates a rough timeline for women's magazines to categorize their reflection of feminist movement.

## II. Period I: Female Civic Participation in the 1770s to 1860s

During the time when the United States was just beginning to gain its footing as a nation, women's magazines were also slowly beginning to find a place in early American society. It is widely known that the mindset of society at this time was largely male-dominated, and women were often viewed as the "second sex" and deemed biologically second in importance. This hierarchy of genders based on what society saw as natural differences between men and women resulted in a male hierarchy in nearly every aspect of life, such as politics, religion and the workplace. Because of this, some modern scholars of feminism assert that, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, American society had not yet begun to progress towards female independence. These scholars also believe that the domestic ideology associated with women was largely produced by men and received by women — particularly women readers of popular literature and women's magazines.

Aronson argued the opposite, however, saying that the 19<sup>th</sup> century was much more progressive in women's rights than many give it credit for. Specifically, Aronson said the publication of women's magazines was one of the first major outlets for women's voice in American society, and that "early women's magazine readers left behind plenty of evidence that they operated in some creative, sophisticated, and self-authorizing ways."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Aronson stated that women, not men, predominately authored and edited early successful magazines and were actively involved in the editorial process. It was through the perseverance of these

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1 Amy Beth Aronson, "Domesticity and Women's Collective Agency: Contribution and Collaboration in America's First Successful Women's Magazine," *American Periodicals* 11 (2001): 1.

early women's magazine editors, such as famous magazine editor Sarah Josepha Hale, that they were able to capitalize on the possibilities of a magazine for both women's public participation and gender construction. For instance, "Hale's Boston-based (*American Ladies Magazine* (1828-36), a \$2.00-per-year monthly, was the first American women's magazine to survive more than five years."<sup>2</sup> Hale made her motives for the magazine clear from the beginning, specifically by stating in her introduction to the magazine that she did not intend to "weaken parental authority,"<sup>3</sup> but she intended to teach women to improve on their moral and intellectual character in the company of other women within their social sphere.<sup>3</sup> Though it seems that Hale may be covertly supporting conventional masculine privilege, she actually undercuts male authority by speaking to women from within a feminist-minded context, thus establishing an overall theme of female support in *Ladies Magazine* that women could turn to for encouragement.

In addition to the overall feminist tone in *Ladies Magazine*, women's independence was furthered by the way Hale structured her magazine's editorial content. For example, in her self-written book reviews, Hale "gave visible endorsements to women authors . . . [and] structured her book reviews in ways that validated women readers' personal judgment of the virtues of literary texts."<sup>4</sup> Also, she often encouraged other women to speak out about their own lives in addition to frequently contributing to the magazine herself. When a male writer with the initials "U.R." submitted a letter to the magazine in 1829 asserting that physically attractive women are more noticeable to men than ones with kind personalities, Hale recruited female readers to respond to the letter in the next edition. Many did, and one of them wrote to Hale, saying "Mrs. Hale — had you not so kindly invited me . . . in your last Magazine . . . I do not think I ever should have summoned resolution to appear in print,"<sup>5</sup> indicating that Hale's tenacity encouraged female readers to voice their opinions in spite of potential consequences.<sup>5</sup> Hale's revolutionary vision was essential in starting a long line of women's magazines geared towards what we know now as the feminist ideology.

In contrast to the types of news and feature content published in magazines today, early women's magazines often published fiction and non-fiction literature/essays written by staff members or audience members. This was another method that enabled women to voice their opinions, whether they were the editors of a magazine or simply a contributing reader/writer who wished to take part in a feminine-minded conversation, thus allowing women to better dictate the female agenda of the time. In addition to the aforementioned book reviews and letters-to-the-editor published by Sarah Josepha Hale, Aronson discusses a non-fiction essay submitted to *Ladies Magazine and Repository* that also reflected feminist themes and values. The 1792 contribution, "Thoughts on Old Maids," questioned the judgmental cultural readings of unmarried women that had been carried over from the Old World into the new one without being transformed. This particular piece was "the first piece in American women's magazine history to talk about the unheard-of possibility that a woman might live respectably on her own — but it would not be the last."<sup>6</sup> The writer asserts that female autonomy may result from adherence to society's gender rules, but she still nevertheless moved to change the way in which woman must achieve this autonomy. This indicates that it was not only magazine editors in positions of power who wrote feminist-minded content, but contributing writers also wished to join the conversation in challenging female stereotypes and conventional attitudes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Laura McCall also wrote about the feminist values expressed in early women's magazine literature. Like Aronson, McCall challenged the idea that women were frail and dependent on men in 19<sup>th</sup> century society. She cited *Godey's Lady's Book*, published by Louis A. Godey in Philadelphia from 1830 to 1878, as a publication that should be sharply scrutinized for allegedly preaching domesticity and submissiveness to 19<sup>th</sup> century female readers. But McCall admitted that this dismissal of *Godey's Lady's Book* may not have been entirely fair because, like *Ladies Magazine and Repository*, the magazine frequently published fictional stories that reflected feminist values, such as female independence and involvement in society. Much of available 19<sup>th</sup> century literature played a critical role in reinforcing the woman's domestic role by celebrating the joys of marriage and motherhood and providing models of the ideal woman that female readers were encouraged to emulate. But in *Godey's*, there were a number of fictional stories that depicted marriage in an unfavorable light, such as a story in which the heroine "pined in the beautiful seclusion of her husband's home" and one could "scarcely recognize . . . the discontented wife who now moved languidly through the apartment. . . .

2 Ibid., 3.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 5.

5 Ibid., 6.

6 Amy Beth Aronson, *Taking Liberties: Early American Women's Magazines and Their Readers* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002): 78.

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She despised the simple pleasures and homely duties she was now called upon to fulfill.’”<sup>7</sup>

In addition to these anti-marriage stories, McCall asserted that *Godey’s* did not often publish content that compared women to men or portrayed women as inferior. For example, when men and women were compared on the basis of their mental abilities, 22.8 percent of the female characters were depicted as intellectually equal, but in 73.3 percent of the cases, there was simply no discussion of this issue.<sup>8</sup> Among women, 18.4 percent of them were depicted as equal or superior to men in their ability to take independent action, yet in 76.5 percent of cases, no comparison was made.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, women were marked as superior in the areas of moral strength and caring for the home, but they also scored high in their knowledge and understanding of business and politics, “qualities generally regarded as bastions of the male sphere.”<sup>10</sup> These characteristics of the magazine’s content indicate that *Godey’s* may have been in support of an early feminist agenda, as were many of the early successful magazines published in 19<sup>th</sup> century America.

### III. Period II: Feminine Independence v. Domesticity in the 1870s to 1970s

Despite the increase in female civic participation throughout the early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the first major developments in the overall American feminist movement did not occur until the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Coming on the heels of urban industrialism and the emergence of more liberal, socialist politics, the first wave of feminism set its goal of opening up opportunities for women, mainly through suffrage. “Women’s rights pioneers first identified 1848 and 1920 as the critical turning points in women’s struggle to achieve sexual equality.” Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were instrumental in organizing the Seneca Falls Convention, where 300 men and women rallied to the cause of equality for women.<sup>11</sup> The onslaught of World War II (1939-1945) was a unique period in the history of the United States, and was one of the biggest changes in lifestyles to average American citizens. Now more than ever, women were relied upon to take care of their homes and children while men were responsible for protecting the country. This emphasis on female domesticity lasted through the 1940s and continued into the 1950s as the picturesque American Dream lifestyle became popular, and the content of women’s magazines during this time mirrored this shift in gender roles.

According to Waller-Zuckerman, the number of magazine consumers expanded enormously between 1890 and World War I, which roughly coincides with the first wave of the feminist movement. She asserted that the economic and demographic changes during this time period caused women to “search for reliable prescriptive manuals that would tell them how to lead a proper feminine life,” indicating that magazines were expected to set a specific agenda for how women should live their lives.<sup>12</sup> Waller-Zuckerman also wrote that, as women’s roles shifted from producer to consumer during World War II and into the 1950s, “reading and learning about new products in the marketplace became part of the housewife’s job,” indicating there were a variety of ways magazines promoted a certain agenda that wasn’t quite on par with the feminist ideology at this time.<sup>13</sup> Walker compiles an extensive volume of content taken from popular women’s magazines from 1940 to 1960 dealing with such topics ranging from women at the workplace to marriage and motherhood. She also includes a section that delves into criticism aimed at American women’s magazines during this time period. In her introduction, Walker writes that many “criticized the magazines for being repetitious, for condescending to readers by assuming that women were responsible for correcting all flaws in both household and marriage, or by creating within their pages worlds far removed from the realities of women’s lives,” asserting that American women were not entirely pleased with the domesticity-based agenda they found during this

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7 Laura McCall, “‘The Reign of Brute Force Is Now over’: A Content Analysis of ‘Godey’s Lady’s Book,’ 1830-1860,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 228.

8 *Ibid.*, 231.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*

11 Nancy A. Hewitt, “From Seneca Falls to Suffrage? Reimagining a ‘Master’ Narrative in U.S. Women’s History,” in *No Permanent Waves*, ed. Nancy A. Hewitt (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010): 15.

12 Mary Ellen Waller-Zuckerman, “‘Old Homes, in a City of Perpetual Change’: Women’s Magazines, 1890-1916,” *The Business History Review* 63, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 747.

13 *Ibid.*, 750.

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specific time period.<sup>14</sup>

Pierce responded to Waller-Zuckerman's and Walker's claims by saying there were still ways in which women's magazines in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century led to a more female-empowering society. In the context of Progressive Era reform work, suffrage and World War I, "arguments for change gained prominence and broader acceptability, in part through the way women's magazines represented social issues for their readers and represented readers themselves."<sup>15</sup> She wrote that many magazines published a continuous flow of information about women's expanded sphere of activities and commentary about the effects of these transformations. Several magazines even began to link a woman's responsibilities as a mother with her rights as a citizen, turning motherhood into a subject of public significance rather than private sentiment. This showed that many women's periodicals sought to influence public opinion rather than simply advise homemakers, according to Pierce, indicating that some early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century magazines did indeed have the feminist agenda in mind.

Due to the abundance of domestically-focused magazines published throughout the 1920s to 1950s as well as the drastic political changes occurring in the country during the Vietnam War (1959-1975), women's magazines of the 1960s and 1970s strived to reflect these societal changes by presenting women with an agenda more focused on independence, namely through the presentation of women in the workplace and in higher education. Additionally, the second wave of the feminist movement began in the 1960s and went on well until the 1990s. This wave unfolded in the context of the anti-war and civil rights movements and the growing self-consciousness of a variety of minority groups around the world. In this phase, sexuality and reproductive rights were dominant issues, as well as equal rights in the workplace. Magazines began to pick up on these changes, showing women working instead of residing in their homes as housewives and portraying women being successful.

Flora mirrored McCall's insight into the way that women were presented in 19<sup>th</sup> century women's magazine fiction when she methodically examined women's status in magazine fiction in the 1970s. Magazine fiction of this decade was varied in its presentation of women as passive and dependent, especially depending on whether the fiction was geared towards working class or middle class women. Flora asserts that, overall, "intelligence is a quality in women that counters the image of passivity" in this type of content.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, women's intelligence was mentioned increasingly between 1970 and 1975 and usually presented positively. Middle-class women's occupational statuses were presented more positively by magazine fiction, which made a "shift away from defining the worth of women through unpaid domestic functions."<sup>17</sup> Flora's analysis takes a unique perspective by examining how women's magazines presented feminism based on class differences, which is something that largely defines feminism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Starr wrote about a few women's magazines founded in the 1970s that combated the traditional notions of feminine identity by presenting more independent ideals. Whereas traditional women's magazines catered to women at home (*Good Housekeeping*) or young women (*Mademoiselle*), "working women" were seen to have a different mix of interests: more interested in news about progressive changes in gender roles and in workplace success, and less interested in cooking, housekeeping, home décor, fashion, and dating.<sup>18</sup> Two prime examples of these magazines were *Working Woman* and *Working Mother*, both of which had rapidly growing circulation in the 1970s and early 1980s, at a time when women were eager to think and read more about how to revise their identities. These magazines borrowed an abundance of ideas from academics, activists, business consultants and/or successful role models about how women could form new identities. "Yet the magazines were not simply *relaying* information that was obvious in content and accuracy . . . they were *creating* ideas and suggestions that were grounded in existing knowledge and that they thought readers would find valuable and effective."<sup>19</sup> These magazines and their overall themes indicate a switch in emphasis from domesticated housewives to career-driven women. Thus, Starr's analysis is notable for examining

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14 Nancy A. Walker, "Critiques of the Women's Magazines, 1946-1960," in *Women's Magazines 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*, ed. Nancy A. Walker (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998): 228.

15 Jennifer Burek Pierce, "Science, Advocacy, and 'The Sacred and Intimate Things of Life': Representing Motherhood as a Progressive Era Cause in Women's Magazines," *American Periodicals* 18, no. 1 (2008): 71.

16 Cornelia Butler Flora, "Changes in Women's Status in Women's Magazine Fiction: Differences by Social Class," *Social Problems* 26, no. 5 (June 1979): 563.

17 *Ibid.*, 567.

18 Martha A. Starr, "Consumption, Identity, and the Sociocultural Constitution of 'Preferences': Reading Women's Magazines," *Review of Social Economy* 62, no. 3 (September 2004): 296.

19 *Ibid.*, 297.

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changes in how magazines were presenting feminism at this crucial time in the United States.

#### IV. Period III: The “I’m-Not-A-Feminist-But” Generation in the 1980s to Present

The 20<sup>th</sup> century had brought about a number of radical changes in the perception of women in American society. By the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, women found themselves in a much more equal position to men than they had in previous decades. The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, however, led the national public agenda to shift markedly toward the Right. This gave rise to the third wave of feminism, commonly called the New Feminist Movement, in which “the major challenges of the 1980s included maintaining public approval for positions that a popular president and the federal government no longer supported,” such as defending feminist organizations and their members from direct, sometimes violent, attack.<sup>20</sup> At this time, the term ‘feminist’ began to gain a bad connotation due to the controversy surrounding the intensity of the new movement. Even many women felt they had gained enough in terms of equality and that the feminist movement was becoming rather exhaustive, so women’s interests were no longer focused on one singular goal, such as workplace equality. As their interests became much broader, magazines responded by offering as much diverse content as possible. Specifically, popular women’s magazines, which focus on topics like pop culture, fashion and beauty—they continue to be popular today—became the main source of information and entertainment for many women.

Taylor took a unique look at these popular women’s magazines in her analysis of their support of the “I’m-Not-a-Feminist-But” generation, which she described as individuals who support the core principles of existing feminism, but do not identify themselves as a feminist. Despite their ambiguity, Taylor says these individuals became the main readers of popular women’s magazines who, like their readers, “have benefited from more than forty years of feminism, but they do not consider themselves feminist.”<sup>21</sup> She said that these types of magazines, with some of the leading titles including *Redbook*, *Family Circle* and *Better Homes & Gardens*, provided an important place for feminism and popular culture to cohabit. In *Forever Feminine*, Ferguson argued that women’s magazines had become “‘about more than women and womanly things, they are about femininity itself — as a state, a condition, a craft, and an art form which comprises a set of practices and beliefs.’”<sup>22</sup> Though third-wave feminists condemned these periodicals for supporting an image of women that was too “fluffy” and “almost childlike,”<sup>23</sup> the magazines continued to boast impressive circulation numbers to this day: *Redbook* averaged a circulation of well over 2 million in 2007.<sup>24</sup> According to Taylor, popular women’s magazines aim to encourage their readers to bring about their own personal transformations, “even as the magazines cultivate more traditional messages of femininity and domesticity” — a contradiction felt by those women who claim “I’m not a feminist but,” as well as by third-wave feminists.<sup>25</sup> Taking all this into consideration, it would appear that Taylor’s research could support the idea that modern magazines support feminism without forcing readers to accept a strict feminist agenda, which may be what modern women prefer in their reading.

Winship’s novel, *Inside Women’s Magazines*, gave a great deal of information on how feminism has been represented throughout the entire history of women’s magazines in the United States, with special consideration to how magazines of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century transitioned to the magazines we know today. Specifically, she connects with Taylor’s ideas on magazines not declaring themselves as feminist, but supporting feminine ideals for readers instead. She then transitions into discussing women’s magazines that became popular in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that are still around today, such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Woman’s Own*. Though these magazines are often praised for being more progressive in the way they present women’s issues, Winship

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20 Myra Marx Ferree and Beth B. Hess, *Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement Across Four Decades of Change*, (New York: Routledge, 2000): 159.

21 Natalie Fuehrer Taylor, “The Personal Is Political: Women’s Magazines for the ‘I’m-Not-a-Feminist-But’ Generation,” in *You’ve Come A Long Way, Baby: Women, Politics, and Popular Culture*, ed. Lilly J. Goren (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009): 216.

22 *Ibid.*, 217.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*, 220.

25 *Ibid.*, 221.

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argued, however, that “commercial magazines are not and do not wish to be part of the women’s movement,” but they “constantly hold out something that is possible for individual women to achieve. As one *Woman’s Own* article put it, ‘I am my own woman’ . . . It is on that unspoken assumption that magazines are premised; it is a knowledge intimately shared between women.”<sup>26</sup> This idea implies that women no longer felt they needed to read a magazine that specifically set out to tell them how to live a feminist life — feminist ideals were now much more firmly engrained into the daily lives and mindsets of modern women. But Winship also says that this attitude allowed many magazines to start gradually falling away from feminist values altogether. Specifically discussing *Cosmo’s* ideas of feminism, she opined that there are problems with its presentation of feminism, one of which being that the magazine “gives unusual prominence to men’s views — about feminism, their contributions are barbed.”<sup>27</sup> Though popular magazines gave female readers a variety of different ideas that they could choose to accept, some scholars of mass media seem to suggest that female readers tend to share a feeling of ambivalent pleasure about these publications. “They *enjoy* the magazines, and may at times learn bits and pieces — ideas for how to look or behave, as well as more straightforward information about health, popular culture or social issues. At the same time, these readers would not really argue that the magazines are ‘perfect’ or ‘ideal’ in terms of how they address women.”<sup>28</sup> This presents an interesting view of women’s magazines during this time period as something that women could choose whether or not to indulge in, but no longer something they relied upon for guidance, as they were viewed in previous decades.

On the other hand, Winship wrote that the rise of magazines like *Everywoman* and *Women’s Review* was a more authentically feminist response to magazines like *Cosmo* in the 1980s. She wrote, “*Everywoman*, focusing on news and current affairs and largely steering clear of ‘the personal,’ pitches itself towards women who might not think of themselves as feminists but who are interested in a wider range of issues than the women’s glossies deal in.”<sup>29</sup> This idea largely reflects how women’s magazines continue to function today. Though there are lots of periodicals that are criticized for their unfair representation of women and feminist values, there are just as many, if not more, magazines that strive to address these issues by presenting female values in an empowering light. In general, women’s magazines today offer “a confusing and contradictory set of ideas,”<sup>30</sup> but many scholars argue that the public should work on accepting and merging the values presented in popular women’s magazines — “to be assertive, confident, sexual, ‘true to yourself,’ demanding rights and pleasures” — and the more “traditional” feminist view.<sup>31</sup> It is a debate that will likely continue for quite some time, but despite any controversy that may linger on, women’s magazines have come a long way in terms of positively presenting feminist values as feminism has evolved over the course of American history.

## V. Conclusion

Despite some general inconsistencies and variations, the majority of American women’s magazines from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to present day show a steady increase in support of feminist ideals based on several researchers that the author reviewed. By reading the articles published in these magazines, female readers were able to gain knowledge about the feminine agenda of their time. Over the course of three distinct periods studied, women’s magazines from the early 1770s to the late 1860s served as early advocates of female civic participation when female subservience was a cultural norm. Women’s magazines from the 1870s to 1970s encouraged female independence through involvement in academia and the workplace, mirroring the huge cultural and political changes in the United States during times of war. Finally, women’s magazines from the 1980s to the present day provide empowering content that allows women to form their own, unique feminine identity in an age when a better variety of lifestyle choices are available. Furthermore, this research found that magazine authors over time were not the sole determinant of what ideas would be presented in the content their audience read. Female readers also had set the public agenda by providing commentary on the content of women’s magazines, and by writing content themselves. Women’s magazines have served as a reflection of America’s changing political and cultural landscape over the years, and they can be credited with delivering

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26 *Ibid.*, 80-1.

27 *Ibid.*, 116.

28 David Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2008): 206.

29 Winship, *Inside Women’s Magazines*, 158.

30 Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity*, 215.

31 *Ibid.*, 217.

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feminist ideals to an ever-developing, progressive female society.

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# How Christian Leaders Interact with the Twitter

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## Abstract

*This paper explores the relationship between Christian leaders and Twitter. Twitter's founding resulted in an outburst in the use of the social media platform. Christian leaders quickly caught on, and today they use Twitter for a number of different purposes, seeking first and foremost to challenge and inspire their followers. Through the study of 30 different leaders' tweets, as well as different blog posts, articles and interviews outlining different approaches to Twitter and other social media, the study concluded that pastors were most concerned with getting across the basic message of Christianity while adapting their methods to include the new medium of Twitter.*

## I. Introduction

Since its launch in 2006, Twitter has been a leader in the Internet socialization of the world, greatly fulfilling its mission: "To give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers." With 500 million Tweets sent per day by 241 million monthly active users, it has penetrated modern society to a degree once known only by MySpace and Facebook.<sup>1</sup>

Christian pastors, to a degree, are no different. And some of them get more interaction on Twitter than pop star Justin Bieber. In June 2012, Amy O'Leary published a story in *The New York Times* titled "Christian Leaders Are Powerhouses on Twitter," writing about how influential pastors and Christian speakers such as Joyce Meyer, Joel Osteen and Max Lucado were generating more reactions on Twitter than Bieber. Even though Meyer had just 993,000 followers as compared to Bieber's 22.6 million followers at the time, Meyer generated 170 reactions per 50,000 followers, while Bieber had just 59. This discovery resulted in Twitter executives encouraging more religious leaders to join the platform.

The company executive Claire Diaz-Ortiz ". . . spends half of her time on the road, offering training, analytics and help to swat away impostor accounts, as well as encouraging leaders to be less promotional and more personal in their posts," O'Leary wrote. "Pastors tell me," Diaz-Ortiz said, "Twitter is just made for the Bible."<sup>2</sup>

So if Twitter is "just made" for pastors' main source material, and some Christian speakers are gener-

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**Keywords:** Twitter, Christianity, pastors, communication, social media

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<sup>1</sup> "Company," Twitter, accessed April 12, 2014, <https://about.twitter.com/company>.

<sup>2</sup> Amy O'Leary, "Christian Leaders Are Powerhouses on Twitter," *The New York Times*, June 2, 2012, accessed March 15, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/02/technology/christian-leaders-are-powerhouses-on-twitter.html?\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/02/technology/christian-leaders-are-powerhouses-on-twitter.html?_r=1&).

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ating more reaction from followers than pop stars, a study into the impact Christian pastors have on the social media platform would be worthwhile along with investigation into the collision of religion and culture in today's society. How involved Christians should be in "secular culture" is an on-going debate in the evangelical world. For some, Twitter is worthy of their time. In a blog post on *DesiringGod.org*, John Piper wrote, "In spite of all the dangers, Twitter seems like a risk worth taking. 'All things were created through Christ and for Christ' (Colossians 1:16). The world does not know it, but that is why Twitter exists, and that's why I tweet."<sup>3</sup>

The most important question this paper examined was how and why pastors and other Christian leaders used Twitter? It will also examine individual stories of pastors and Twitter and what Twitter means for the Christian community.

## II. Literature Review

Christians pastors/theologians/other leaders use Twitter, but there are not many concrete resources on this topic. The majority of information come from blog posts and other Internet-based sources, evidence of how religious thoughts are communicated in this current age.

Many resources were pulled from the evangelical Christian websites *The Gospel Coalition* and *Desiring God*. Members of *The Gospel Coalition* describes themselves this way: "We are a fellowship of evangelical churches in the Reformed tradition deeply committed to renewing our faith in the gospel of Christ and to reforming our ministry practices to conform fully to the Scriptures. . . . We have committed ourselves to invigorating churches with new hope and compelling joy based on the promises received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone."<sup>4</sup> The website has several regular bloggers, plus many guest posts. In the list of sources from *The Gospel Coalition* used for this paper are blog posts from Trevin Wax, Kevin DeYoung, Joe Carter and Dustin Neeley, among others. *Desiring God* is a ministry started by John Piper, the former pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. There are a couple articles from that website that will be used. Since Piper is one of the most prominent sources on the tweeting side of things, a couple interviews with him about his social media use, and posts and interviews from others, are vital.

Big-time newspapers have also contributed to the research. Amy O'Leary wrote a story for *The New York Times* titled "Christian Leaders Are Powerhouses on Twitter." O'Leary writes about the popularity of accounts like Joyce Meyer and Joel Osteen, who averaged more reactions per 50,000 followers than Justin Bieber. She also quotes pastors and other Christian authors and speakers whose quotes are helpful. The *Los Angeles Times* also published a story on popular preacher Rick Warren and his use of Twitter and Facebook last year to share a sermon about loss in the week following the suicide of his son Matthew back in April 2013. The articles gives an overview of how Warren used Twitter and Facebook to thank those who offered words of consolation and express moments of sorrow to his followers. Likewise, *Christianity Today* has contributed several articles, including Sarah Pulliam Bailey's report from the 2011 Catalyst Conference, at which Twitter executive Claire Diaz Ortiz reached out to pastors and other attendees to try to help them use the social media network better.

Ed Stetzer's "The Exchange" blog on *Christianity Today* is also a popular source of information for the author's paper. Guest posts from Clark Campbell ("Social Ecclesia: Spirit-Led Digital Presence") and Justin Wise ("Social Media and Christian Ministry: Reaching the World for the Kingdom of God") are two sources of good insight from pastors on how the Christian church should and is using Twitter to reach their congregants and others. Stetzer frequently writes and speaks on Christianity and social media. Wise wrote a book entitled *The Social Church*, a look at how the church should approach new opportunities the social media growth has provided. Stetzer also has written and commented extensively on the subject.

## III. Methodology

The first series of resources will be Twitter pages themselves. I have decided on 30 Twitter users

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3 John Piper, "Why and How I Am Tweeting," *Desiring God*, June 3, 2009, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-and-how-i-am-tweeting>.

4 "About," *The Gospel Coalition*, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/about/who>.

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from which I will draw information (Refer to Table 1).

**Table 1. Twitter accounts for church/ministry**

Name	Twitter Handle	Church/Ministry	Location	Followers as of March 24
<b>Albert Mohler</b>	@albertmohler	Southern Baptist Theological Seminary	Louisville, Ky.	77,578
<b>Andy Stanley</b>	@AndyStanley	North Point Community Church	Alpharetta, Ga.	367,329
<b>Beth Moore</b>	@BethMooreLPM	Living Proof Ministries	Houston, Texas	471,552
<b>Brian Houston</b>	@BrianCHouston	Hillsong Church	Sydney, Australia	335,571
<b>C.J. Mahaney</b>	@CJMahaney	Sovereign Grace Church	Louisville, Ky.	40,467
<b>Chuck Swindoll</b>	@chuckswindoll	Stonebriar Community Church	Frisco, Texas	71,429
<b>Craig Groeschel</b>	@craiggroeschel	Lifechurch.tv	Oklahoma City, Okla.	198,152
<b>David Platt</b>	@plattdavid	The Church at Brook Hills	Birmingham, Ala.	245,016
<b>Greg Laurie</b>	@greglaurie	Harvest Christian Fellowship	Riverside, Calif.	80,326
<b>J.D. Greear</b>	@jdgrear	The Summit Church	Raleigh, N.C.	42,250
<b>James MacDonald</b>	@jamesmacdonald	Harvest Bible Chapel	Chicago, Ill.	90,374
<b>Jefferson Bethke</b>	@jeffersonbethke	Author, YouTube star for spoken word	Tacoma, Wash.	134,205
<b>Joel Osteen</b>	@JoelOsteen	Lakewood Church	Houston, Texas	2,490,596
<b>John Piper</b>	@JohnPiper	Bethlehem Baptist Church	Minneapolis, Minn.	604,201
<b>Joshua Harris</b>	@HarrisJosh	Covenant Life Church	Gaithersburg, Md.	80,217
<b>Joyce Meyer</b>	@JoyceMeyer	Joyce Meyer Ministries	St. Louis, Mo.	2,692,271
<b>Judah Smith</b>	@judahsmith	The City Church	Seattle, Wash.	291,227
<b>Kevin DeYoung</b>	@RevKevDeYoung	University Reformed Church	East Lansing, Mich.	42,872
<b>Louie Giglio</b>	@louiegiglio	Passion City Church	Atlanta, Ga.	434,402
<b>Mark Dever</b>	@MarkDever	Capitol Hill Baptist Church	Washington, D.C.	47,336
<b>Mark Driscoll</b>	@PastorMark	Mars Hill Church	Seattle, Wash.	467,843
<b>Matt Chandler</b>	@MattChandler74	The Village Church	Dallas-Ft. Worth, Texas	263,053
<b>Max Lucado</b>	@MaxLucado	Oak Hills Church	San Antonio, Texas	935,375
<b>Perry Noble</b>	@perrynoble	Newspring Church	Anderson, S.C.	110,844
<b>Ravi Zacharias</b>	@RaviZacharias	Ravi Zacharias International Ministries	Norcross, Ga.	134,904
<b>Rick Warren</b>	@RickWarren	Saddleback Church	Lake Forest, Calif.	1,340,512

Name	Twitter Handle	Church/Ministry	Location	Followers as of March 24
Russell Moore	@drmoore	President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission	Washington, D.C.	44,025
Steven Furtick	@stevenfurtick	Elevation Church	Charlotte, N.C.	198,399
T.D. Jakes	@BishopJakes	The Potter's House	Dallas, Texas	1,410,267
Tullian Tchividjian	@PastorTullian	Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church	Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.	82,074

These are some of the most popular Twitter accounts in all Christianity. Meyer, Osteen, Jakes and Warren have all eclipsed one million followers; Piper, Driscoll and Chandler are popular names in evangelical Christian circles; and Bethke, Mohler and Moore provide different perspectives as non-pastors. Tabulating tweet types and follower counts are the primary pieces of information from these accounts, and there will be interpretations about leaders' tweeting from these numbers.

## IV. Findings and Analysis

Jefferson Bethke is one of current Christendom's most popular young faces. His popular spoken word YouTube video, "Why I Hate Religion, But Love Jesus," has over 26 million views since it was released in January 2012<sup>5</sup>, and the following book, *Jesus > Religion: Why He Is So Much Better Than Trying Harder, Doing More, and Being Good Enough*, is listed as a New York Times Bestseller<sup>6</sup>. He also has an extremely popular Twitter account, with over 134,000 followers.

Being a younger guy - he's in his 20s - Bethke admittedly has a pulse on the current generation, a generation that has flocked to one thing in droves: social media, particularly Twitter. "It's just how we communicate," he said in an interview, "so similar to how older generations used the phone. Just a tool."<sup>7</sup> For a fair number of Christian leaders, Twitter being a popular communication tool seems to be one of the main reasons they utilize it. Speaking from a secular perspective, Twitter executive Claire Diaz-Ortiz said, "(Religion is) about relationships and social media is about relationships. A lot of companies don't understand that. They think it's a new way to market themselves. In contrast, religious organizations have been relying on word-of-mouth marketing and relational marketing forever, so they take to social media well."<sup>8</sup> Writing on a blog post on *The Gospel Coalition*, Trevin Wax, an author and former associate pastor, said, "Missionaries learn the language of the people around them so they can communicate the gospel and connect with the people they are trying to reach. In the same way, pastors should engage social media as part of their overall communication and connection strategy."<sup>9</sup> According to Buzzplant, a Christian-based advertising agency, "45 percent of church staff use Facebook every day . . . (and) 56 percent allowed or encouraged staff members to update their personal social media pages while at work." But perhaps the most revealing number is that 46 percent of churches claim social media as "their most effective outreach method."<sup>10</sup>

5 Jefferson Bethke, "Why I Hate Religion, But Love Jesus," *You Tube*, January 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IAhDGYlpqY#!>.

6 amazon.com, "Jesus > Religion: Why He Is So Much Better Than Trying Harder, Doing More, and Being Good Enough," Accessed April 12, 2014, <http://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Religion-Better-Trying-Harder/dp/1400205395>.

7 Jefferson Bethke, e-mail message to the author, March 15, 2014.

8 Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Twitter Reaches Out to Christian Leaders at Catalyst's 'Be Present' Conference," *Christianity Today*, October 7, 2011, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/octoberweb-only/twittercatalyst.html>.

9 Trevin Wax, "4 Things a Pastor Should Consider Before Engaging Social Media," *Kingdom People*, February 3, 2014, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2014/02/03/4-things-a-pastor-should-consider-before-engaging-social-media/>.

10 Joe Carter, "9 Things You Should Know About Social Media," *TGC Voices*, July 17, 2013, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2013/07/17/9-things-you-should-know-about-social-media/>.

Gospel outreach seems to be one of the main uses of Twitter for a lot of Christian leaders. “It’s how people communicate, share, learn, etc, so I enjoy it personally for that and also think it’s a great tool to communicate things about Jesus,” Bethke said. “It’s how people communicate and you want to be in the world and place where people communicate. It’s a digital coffee shop.”<sup>11</sup> In a post on the *Christianity Today* website, Clark Campbell, a member of Social Ecclesia, an organization committed to helping churches adjust to the social age, wrote, “(Social media) is a tool for interaction and connection, not merely a megaphone to announce the next church program and party. Social media opens doors and opportunities to engage with people who rarely, if ever, step foot in a church building.”<sup>12</sup> Making a comparison to the parable of the sower found in the New Testament passage Mark 4:1-9, Ray Ortlund said, “The media we now have offer us a tremendous advantage for getting the gospel out. I think of the parable of the sower in Mark 4. He was not dropping one seed at a time along a little row, the way we do in a modern garden. He was throwing handfuls of gospel seed out there. Lots of waste. But also growth. And only God knows how it will turn out.”<sup>13</sup>

Ed Stezer, a blogger on ChristianityToday.com and president of LifeWay Research, went as far to say that pastors who weren’t on social media should “repent. You should get on Twitter and Facebook right away. If you don’t, you’re missing a great opportunity. These micro blogging platforms give you the ability to have short conversations to communicate helpful things to your people and beyond.”<sup>14</sup> The consensus for most seems to be an emphasis on meeting the culture where they’re at.

Gary Hendrix, the lead pastor at Grace Reformed Baptist Church in Mebane, N.C., has just 179 followers, much less than the leaders studied for this research, but he has a unique perspective on using Twitter. His tweets usually revolve around three things: Jesus, Wake Forest University sports and music. He says that he doesn’t have an overriding Twitter philosophy, but he does see a use for Twitter as a ministry tool. “We need to say more not less sometimes if we’re really going to speak into the culture. There’s a lot we need to say. You can’t say very much on Twitter,” he said. “But that being said, C.S. Lewis, most of his most memorable statements were very brief, cogent. It’s a good opportunity to sharpen that skill, and for that reason I think it could be a good tool of ministry.”<sup>15</sup>

The following table is an analysis of tweets from the week of March 17-23, except for Mark Driscoll<sup>16</sup>, whose tweets from March 6-12 are shown:

There are a few interesting points to take from these numbers.

First, most leaders in the study do not take advantage of Diaz-Ortiz’s suggestion that Twitter is “perfect” for the Bible. T.D. Jakes, John Piper and Perry Noble led the 30 with just four Bible verse tweets each, and only six total leaders tweeted a total of 23 verses, just over two percent of the total tweets. Some leaders, Piper in particular, will sometimes tweet verses, parts of verses or the reference to a verse and add a piece of commentary or a thought of their own in addition. During the week the study was conducted, 15 of Piper’s 41 tweets were in this vein. For instance, on March 19 Piper tweeted, “‘Whatever was written in former days was written that . . . we might have hope.’ Rom. 15:4 All of it. Find hope every morning.”<sup>17</sup> Speaking in an interview on his Twitter use, Piper said, “Basically, I just want to put in a sentence three times a day something that seems to me would be provocative concerning the character of God or the Lord Jesus or upbuilding for peoples’ faith or helpful in our understanding of what’s going on in the world.”<sup>18</sup> His tweets reveal that he does exactly that.

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11 Bethke, e-mail interview.

12 Clark Campbell, “Social Ecclesia: Spirit-Led Digital Presence,” *The Exchange*, January 24, 2014, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/january/social-ecclesia-spirit-led-digital-presence.html>.

13 Tony Reinke, “Serving Up Tweets: An Interview with Ray Ortlund on Social Media,” *Desiring God*, March 9, 2012, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/serving-up-tweets-an-interview-with-ray-ortlund-on-social-media>.

14 Drew Dyck and Kyle Rohane, “Not Tweeting? Repent!,” *Leadership Journal*, Summer 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2013/summer/not-tweeting-repent.html>.

15 Gary Hendrix, interview with Zachary Horner, Burlington, N.C., April 11, 2014.

16 Driscoll abandoned use of his Twitter account temporarily on March 15, so a different week was used. For more information on that abandonment: <http://www.religionnews.com/2014/03/17/pastor-mark-driscoll-apologizes-missteps-quits-social-media/>.

17 John Piper, Twitter post, March 19, 2014, 1:03 p.m., <http://twitter.com/johnpiper>.

18 John Piper, “Who Is In Charge of Your @JohnPiper Twitter Account?,” *Desiring God*, January 2, 2010, <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/who-is-in-charge-of-your-johnpiper-twitter-account>.

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**Table 2. Analysis of church/ministry tweets over a week**

Name	Twitter account	Bible Verses	Self-promotion	Others-promotion	Inspirational Messages	Personal Statements	Total tweets	Tweets/day
Albert Mohler	@albertmohler	0	7	6	6	22	41	5.86
Andy Stanley	@AndyStanley	0	2	3	0	27	32	4.57
Beth Moore	@BethMooreLPM	0	0	0	0	5	5	0.71
Brian Houston	@BrianCHouston	0	0	0	7	2	9	1.29
C.J. Mahaney	@CJMahaney	0	4	20	28	12	64	9.14
Chuck Swindoll	@chuckswindoll	0	12	6	5	0	23	3.29
Craig Groeschel	@craiggroeschel	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
David Platt	@plattdavid	0	7	1	0	1	9	1.29
Greg Laurie	@greglaurie	0	13	0	3	8	24	3.43
J.D. Greear	@jdgrear	0	6	2	3	11	22	3.14
James MacDonald	@jamesmacdonald	0	8	2	7	4	21	3
Jefferson Bethke	@jeffersonbethke	0	3	1	3	14	21	3
Joel Osteen	@JoelOsteen	0	0	0	14	0	14	2
John Piper	@JohnPiper	4	8	12	16	1	41	5.86
Joshua Harris	@HarrisJosh	0	0	4	0	2	6	0.86
Joyce Meyer	@JoyceMeyer	2	31	0	20	3	56	8
Judah Smith	@judahsmith	0	0	1	1	3	5	0.71
Kevin DeYoung	@RevKevDeYoung	0	3	1	12	21	37	5.29
Louie Giglio	@louiegiglio	0	0	1	4	17	22	3.14
Mark Dever	@MarkDever	0	0	1	5	6	12	1.71
Mark Driscoll	@PastorMark	6	5	2	20	0	33	4.71
Matt Chandler	@MattChandler74	0	0	11	1	12	24	3.43



Name	Twitter account	Bible Verses	Self-promotion	Others-promotion	Inspirational Messages	Personal Statements	Total tweets	Tweets/day
Max Lucado	@MaxLucado	0	0	2	10	0	12	1.71
Perry Noble	@perrynoble	4	2	6	8	29	49	7
Ravi Zacharias	@RaviZacharias	1	17	8	26	53	105	15
Rick Warren	@RickWarren	0	0	1	3	1	5	0.71
Russell Moore	@drmoore	2	15	26	5	58	106	15.14
Steven Furtick	@stevenfurtick	0	6	2	0	2	10	1.43
T.D. Jakes	@BishopJakes	4	27	5	69	31	136	19.43
Tullian Tchividjian	@PastorTullian	0	11	2	25	6	44	6.29

About 30 percent of the tweets (301 of 988) sent out by these leaders come in the form of these “inspirational messages” tweets with statements meant to encourage or challenge their followers, often connected to spiritual things. On March 23, Tullian Tchividjian tweeted, “People who know that they are weak are much more intimate with God’s grace than people who think that they are strong.”<sup>19</sup> Another example is Joyce Meyer’s tweet on March 17: “We may not always get what we want, but God will always provide what we need.”<sup>20</sup>

Like any other hashtags that you’ll usually find in the Trending Bar with “Promoted” beside it, leaders will use tweets with hashtags to promote things they’re up to. During the week studied, T.D. Jakes (#IN-STINCT - 64 tweets) and Mark Driscoll (#BoldJames - 11 tweets) used hashtags related to sermon series they were in the middle of, usually coupling it with an inspirational message or video from the sermons. Perry Noble (#OverwhelmedBook) and Max Lucado (#GRACEthebook) helped promote books they’ve written. Joyce Meyer used the hashtag #3030Challenge as part of an effort to encourage her audience to read their Bibles more. In this vein, many of the leaders used Twitter for “self-promotion,” tweeting links to articles they’ve written or sermons they’ve preached.

In total, 187 of the 988 tweets (18.9%) were “self-promotion.” This took a few different forms. David Platt, who tweeted just nine times the entire week of study, posted the link to register for his “Secret Church” event taking place on Good Friday in seven of his tweets. In several tweets, Joyce Meyer linked to her Facebook page (5.5 million likes) to point her followers (about 2.7 million) to more content. In total, Meyer had 31 tweets that were classified as “self-promotion,” the most of any of the leaders. Ravi Zacharias had 17 tweets of “self-promotion,” often related to his trip to Texas A&M University and his speaking engagements there that week.

The fourth category considered was “others-promotion.” These were tweets that linked to articles or sermons or events that they were not responsible for. “Others-promotion” tweets accounted for 126 of the tweets from the leaders. Examples include Russell Moore tweeting a link to a story about Kenya legalizing polygamy without consent from the wife<sup>21</sup> and Andy Stanley posting a link to an article by Jonathan Merritt on *Religious News Service*.<sup>22</sup>

The final category to determine tweets was the most-used one, called “personal statements.” “Personal statements” are tweets that reflect a personal, more informal statement made by the leader. It can sim-

19 Tullian Tchividjian, Twitter post, March 23, 2014, 2:46 p.m., <http://twitter.com/pastortullian>.

20 Joyce Meyer, Twitter post, March 17, 2014, 1:30 p.m., <http://twitter.com/joycemeyer>.

21 Russell Moore, Twitter post, March 22, 2014, 7:21 p.m., <http://twitter.com/drmoore>.

22 Andy Stanley, Twitter post, March 20, 2014, 3:31 p.m., <http://twitter.com/andystanley>.

ply be a picture of the weather, a happy birthday to a child or a sports reference. On March 20, Matt Chandler simply posted, “0-1 #MadnessBegins,” in reference to the start of the NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament.<sup>23</sup> On the same day, also in reference to college basketball, Kevin DeYoung tweeted, “It is impossible for me to watch (Michigan State basketball player) Travis Trice and not think of Hector Zeroni,” the latter name a character from the book *Holes* by Louis Sachar.<sup>24</sup> In terms of numbers, this was the most popular category, with 351 of 988 tweets (35.6 percent).

Hendrix sees a great benefit to tweeting personal statements. He often tweets analysis of Wake Forest basketball. But he said it’s important for pastors to realize who they are when they tweet. “I believe that it’s important for a pastor to realize that he’s a pastor on Twitter, and if you’re going to tweet about basketball, football, I think it’s good,” he said. “Sometimes people need to see a different side of pastors, their humanity. But you’ve still got to be mindful that you are a pastor, you represent Christ.”<sup>25</sup>

Leaders have found different ways to utilize their Twitter profiles in this personal statement vein. Nearly every Sunday, you can count on a tweet from Noble regarding the number of salvations that took place at his church. During the week of study, Chuck Swindoll posted five tweets regarding his trip to Israel with the hashtag #Israel2014, with updates on what the group he lead was doing. Eleven of the tweets C.J. Mahaney posted were retweets, all NCAA tournament brackets, from the @MahaneySports Twitter handle, a sports-related account used to “bring a unique gospel-driven discernment to sports.”<sup>26</sup> Hendrix has used his Twitter to reach out to some Wake Forest athletes and coaches as well as other Christian sports figures. He shared a story about exchanging private messages on Twitter with Paul Tesori, who’s a Christian and the caddy of Webb Simpson, a professing Christian and professional golfer. “I know that often I’ll quote a text, just print the text, or make a statement relevant to the gospel or truth, I know at least there’s a possibility it’s going to some of these athletes, coaches,” he said. “I wouldn’t have access to these guys (without Twitter).”<sup>27</sup>

The plurality of the tweets being in the “personal statement” vein is indeed interesting because pastors and other leaders are seeming to say, “We’re people too.” Whether it’s sports or music or their kids, these leaders saw fit for whatever reason to dedicate the plurality of their tweets to displaying who they are. Thirteen of the 30 leaders had a plurality of their tweets in the “personal statement” category, with a mix of younger leaders like J.D. Greear and Jefferson Bethke and some of the older guard like Ravi Zacharias and Dr. Albert Mohler.

Hendrix’s use of Twitter is just one method of using Twitter that just might be considered appropriate for pastors. There aren’t bookstore shelves full of volume on “Twitter theology” or social media Christianity. Christian author Jon Acuff said, “Social media’s like a brick — you can use it to build an orphanage or throw it through somebody’s car window. . . . There’s no precedent. We can’t go, ‘Here’s how C. S. Lewis handled Twitter.’”<sup>28</sup> There are different ways Christian leaders approach Twitter, and perhaps that’s because it’s such a relatively new tool of ministry that they haven’t quite figured out how to do it properly yet.

Many leaders advise caution. DeYoung writes, “Assume that everyone, everywhere will read what you write and see what you post. . . . the Internet is like God and like the devil. It sees all and forgives nothing.”<sup>29</sup> In a blog post on *The Gospel Coalition*, Dustin Neeley, a pastor who runs the church planting blog cp4us.org, wrote, “The developing technology of social media (blogging, Facebook, Twitter, and so on) can and should be used for the glory of God and the advancement of the gospel in every possible way. But natural-born idolaters like you and me are no more than a few clicks away from making this good thing a god.”<sup>30</sup>

Some leaders have used Twitter to do ministry directly like Hendrix. A prime example is Rick Warren, who shared a “sermon” through his Facebook and Twitter pages a week after the death of his son Matthew

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23 Matt Chandler, Twitter post, March 20, 2014, 2:21 p.m., <http://twitter.com/mattchandler74>.

24 Kevin DeYoung, Twitter post, March 20, 2014, 6:30 p.m., <http://twitter.com/revkevdeyoung>

25 Hendrix, interview, April 11, 2014.

26 <https://twitter.com/mahaneysports>

27 Hendrix, interview, April 11, 2014.

28 O’Leary, “Christian Leaders Are Powerhouses on Twitter.”

29 Kevin DeYoung, “The One Indispensable Rule for Using Social Media,” *DeYoung, Restless, and Reformed*, June 13, 2012, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindyoung/2012/06/13/the-one-indispensable-rule-for-using-social-media/>.

30 Dustin Neeley, “Justification by Twitter,” *TGC Voices*, May 9, 2012, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/05/09/justification-by-twitter/>.

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in April 2013.<sup>31</sup> Reporters Kurt Streeter and Joseph Serna wrote, “Over the last seven days, Warren has written about his son’s struggles with mental illness, talked about forgiving the person who gave his son an unregistered gun, cited Bible verses that give him comfort and even taken on Internet ‘haters’ who said they ‘celebrate your pain.’” The article cited several tweets from Warren’s stream, including this: “Someone on the Internet sold Matthew an unregistered gun. I pray he seeks God’s forgiveness. I forgive him. #MATTHEW 6:15.” Speaking about the tweeting, Greg Laurie, the pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, Ca., said Warren was “modeling how faith works in the real world.”

In January 2014, *Christianity Today* reported that Leonart Barroso, a Cuban pastor who says he drew inspiration from German theologian/pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was put under house arrest as “part of a larger crackdown on political dissidents across the country,” the article reports. Barroso used social media such as Twitter to share his experiences with followers. Melissa Kimiadi, the author of the article, wrote, “Utilizing social media, (Barroso) communicates with his supporters as well as further drumming up awareness for a pro-democracy Cuba. His Twitter account is regularly updated with up to 10 tweets a day. He has also blogged his experiences (sometimes translated into English) since 2010. His wife Yoaxis is also active on Twitter.”<sup>32</sup>

Even though this spiritual good can be done on Twitter, the concern remains on the part of some Christian leaders. “Social media, I think, has a lot of traps for Christians,” Hendrix said. “We have to be thoughtful and purposeful in everything we do, and even though I don’t have a philosophy for using Twitter, I hope that I’m thinking. I think it’s important for Christians to think about the gospel in everything they say, everything they put on Facebook or Twitter.”<sup>33</sup> There’s an emphasis from the pastoral community for caution to be exercised. Speaking about himself, Piper expresses, “(Twitter)’s just fraught with dangers, especially ego dangers of people saying, ‘O yeah, I’ll get an account. How many followers can I get? Woohoo! I’m up to 100 followers!’ or whatever. I just think it’s so unbelievably dangerous, so I want to be checking myself all the time about why I do this. Do I really love the church and want to bless the church? Or do I just like having people listen to me?”<sup>34</sup>

Wax wrote, “In the heat of the moment, it is easy to say things you wish you could take back. Never has it been easier to have your words broadcast to the world. I’ve seen pastors embarrass themselves through comments they’ve made on a blog, a rant they posted on Facebook, or an insensitive remark on Twitter.”<sup>35</sup> Ortlund conveys the advantage of using new media for spreading the message of the Christian faith, but has a warning. “The book of Proverbs speaks clearly about the impact of our words,” he wrote. “With our media, we can now harm and embarrass and stigmatize people with greater force than ever before in human history. We don’t have to be political heavyweights to wield that power. Any blogger will do. Self-restraint has never been more important.”<sup>36</sup> Christians who seek to live “above reproach” (a phrase from Philippians 2:15 meaning to be without reason to be accused of wrongdoing) seem to seek caution in how they use their Twitter accounts, because, as Ortlund said, harm can be done with social media outlets.

In his post on *The Exchange*, Justin Wise cites Gateway Church in Austin, Texas, as an example of how what he calls the “New Media era” can influence a church. He writes that the church “weaves social media into their cultural fabric. Whether it’s volunteering on the church’s digital street team or participating in a real-time church-wide chat on Gateway’s mobile app, they have placed a clear priority on being a social church.”<sup>37</sup> He goes on to say that Christian churches need to “understand a fundamental truth of the New Media era: You cannot control the online conversation surrounding your church. You can only take steps to

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31 Kurt Streeter and Joseph Serna, “Rick Warren uses Facebook, Twitter to share sermon about loss,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 2013, accessed March 15, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/apr/12/local/la-me-ln-rick-warren-leads-sermon-in-loss-using-facebook-twitter-20130412>.

32 Melissa Kimiadi, “Cuba Case Study: Bonhoeffer-Inspired Pastor Arrested After Blogs, Tweets, and D.C. Trip,” *Christianity Today*, January 20, 2014, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/january/cuba-case-study-pastor-mario-leonart-arrested-csw.html>.

33 Hendrix, interview, April 9, 2014.

34 Piper, “Who Is In Charge of the @JohnPiper Twitter Account?”

35 Wax, “4 Things a Pastor Should Consider Before Engaging Social Media.”

36 Reinke, “Serving Up Tweets: An Interview with Ray Ortlund on Social Media.”

37 Justin Wise, “Social Media and Christian Ministry: Reaching the World for the Kingdom of God,” *The Exchange*, February 21, 2014, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/february/social-media-and-christian-ministry-reaching-world-for-king.html>.

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influence it. . . . The question remains--a question which demands an answer from all of us--what will the church do next?" In his book *The Social Church*, Wise answers that question, by saying that Christian leaders need to adjust how they approach social media, maybe even do things differently than some Christians might expect. He writes, "We need men and women who are willing to challenge long-standing and widely-beloved methods of communicating the gospel message. People who are willing to bring some sacred cows to the barbecue and butcher them in front of everyone."<sup>38</sup>

Pastors and other Christian leaders seem to be reluctant to change their message, but as shown by the 30 leaders researched as part of this study, they are more than willing to adapt to the growth of social media in order to reach people with their beliefs. As of July 2013, there were 9,100 tweets per second from the 241 million monthly active users, while 222 million users don't tweet but watch others tweet<sup>39</sup>. The emphasis on reaching those people has been a constant in Christian leadership recently. Looking at the dates these 30 leaders joined Twitter, they were not too far behind the times. Rick Warren was the earliest (April 2007), Kevin DeYoung was the latest (May 2012), while 23 of them joined from May 2008 to June 2009.

This also might be considered a reflection of the progress of the relationship between religion and communications. Along with musicians, actors and athletes, Christian leaders are able to reach their followers with their messages of encouragement and challenge. Hendrix says there's great potential in Twitter being a really solid ministry tool, speaking to its accessibility, and saying that for the current college generation specifically that pastors "probably . . . should use it"<sup>40</sup>. Religion has become something that is more and more accessible to the current generation through Twitter, just like their favorite athletes and movie stars. In fact, Wise postulates about the impact social media would have had on famous church reformer Martin Luther: "Would social media be his (Martin Luther's) new printing press? What might his Twitter feed look like? Would he have turned the Ninety-Five Theses into a flashy infographic? Blogged about the merits of infant baptism? Would his job title on LinkedIn be 'Pastor, Reformer, Beer Drinker'? Maybe he would have configured a way to live-stream his classes, giving access to all who wanted it. Either way, Luther would have been all over social media"<sup>41</sup>.

These thoughts come out of an on-going discussion in Christian circles about "engaging the culture." In a blog post, Ed Stetzer wrote, "Engaging culture, contextualization, and relevance are common issues in missiological discussion. They tend to be assumed as we are engage in God's global mission. As I see it, it is both necessary and dangerous to engage culture. I believe (and have often said) that the church must be a biblically faithful, culturally relevant, counterculture community for the kingdom of God."<sup>42</sup> The comment about "necessary and dangerous" plays itself out in the discussion about the dangers of using tools such as social media. But some Christians-- particularly those who have Twitter accounts-- might argue the necessary part simply by their presence, and ever-growing presence at that, on social media networks.

## V. Conclusion

Twitter has dominated the social landscape, as one might see that little bird stuck to buildings, business cards and at the end of blog posts nowadays. Pastors have taken advantage of that in a big way, and they're reaching many with their messages of hope. Wise adds on *The Exchange*: "The 21st-century church has an unimaginable opportunity in social media to extend the borders of God's Kingdom online. The methods have changed, but the message remains the same."<sup>43</sup>

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38 Justin Wise, *The Social Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 26.

39 Carter, "9 Things You Should Know About Social Media."

40 Hendrix, interview, April 9, 2014.

41 Wise, *The Social Church*, 30.

42 Ed Stetzer, "How Should We Engage Culture?," *The Exchange*, April 16, 2010, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2010/april/how-should-we-engage-culture.html>.

43 Justin Wise, "Social Media and Christian Ministry."

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# From “Pockets of Poverty” to Potential Prosperity in Appalachia: Examining Mass Media Narratives of Poverty Stereotypes in Appalachia

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## Abstract

*This research examined poverty stereotypes in Appalachia that were portrayed in a national newspaper, The New York Times, and a local newspaper, The Mountain Eagle in Whitesburg, Kentucky. The study looks at framing through narrative and content analysis for January 2014, the period in which the media revisited the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty. The research also compared these findings with the coverage of these papers in January 1964, when Lyndon Johnson declared the War on Poverty in Eastern Kentucky. The research found national media primarily focused on economic issues and used more negative language in 1964, in comparison with the local newspaper. The study found that the two newspapers switched their coverage pattern 50 years later.*

## I. Introduction

Three years ago, the researcher drove through green hills into the town of Whitesburg, Kentucky, population 2,078 (2012 census), although the old Royal Crown Cola-sponsored welcome sign will tell you, “1,534 friendly people plus 2 grouches.” Inside Appalshop, a local media, arts, and education center, a man sat cross-legged on a simple wooden stage. Introducing himself as Derek Mullins, he told the story that inspired this research: “I never knew I was poor until outsiders came in and told me I was poor; it was only then that I became ashamed of my roots and identity.”

This version of self-othering—of not only allowing external definitions to isolate a particular group, but also influencing a sort of internal exploitation by the groups themselves—can affect how these levels of truths can blur the lines between who holds and produces knowledge. This research asks, who has the power to tell the stories of communities, and what are the responsibilities of the storyteller? How have regions such as Appalachia been misrepresented by the circulation of stereotypes in visual culture?

General public discourse suggests Appalachian people are often trapped in an ideological construct of a hillbilly stereotype in American culture. This research examines media narratives of poverty stereotypes in Eastern Kentucky and asks, how do local media frame issues of poverty in Appalachia compared to national media?

The research compares the framing of the media coverage through narrative analysis and content

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analysis of a national newspaper, *The New York Times*, and a local Appalachian newspaper, *The Mountain Eagle*, in Whitesburg, Kentucky for January 2014, the period in which the media revisited the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty. For comparison, the research also analyzes the framing of the media coverage for January 1964, the month Lyndon Johnson declared the War on Poverty in Eastern Kentucky.

This research asks, how do local media visualize and frame topics of poverty and the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty in Eastern Kentucky compared to national media? The study examines the factors in national and local newspaper coverage that may influence poverty stereotypes of Appalachian people. Local media are more likely to use positive language and visuals than national media when reporting on the War on Poverty. In addition, national media are more likely to focus on the economics of poverty than local media, who are more likely to focus on social and cultural aspects of poverty.

## II. Literature Review

The 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty that was celebrated in January 2014 garnered much media attention and brought Appalachia's economic standing into the national spotlight as did President Lyndon Johnson's declaration on an "unconditional" War on Poverty on the footsteps of a home in Eastern Kentucky in January 1964. The anniversary prompted a wide-ranging debate on whether the war has succeeded or failed, or is even ongoing. The Heritage Foundation's Robert Rector called it a "catastrophe," while the White House claimed the war "lived up to our best hopes as a people who value the dignity and potential of every human being" (Matthews, 2014, p. 1). As scholars study the changing values of the U.S. official poverty line since its definition in the 1960s, there is renewed debate about whether Appalachia is still considered the face of poverty in America.

### ***Context on the War on Poverty and the Culture of Poverty***

When Johnson promised to "bring rural America into the mainstream of American prosperity" in 1964, it also meant drawing Appalachia into the mainstream of American media (Bowler, 1985, p. 239). According to March (1966), "The 'war on poverty' is a landmark in the focusing of public concern on the broad range of social problems and programs which affect people, and in developing new and more effective approaches for concerting resources and action to strike at the root causes of poverty" (p. 115). Prior to the War on Poverty, there was little media attention about poverty in America; in fact, there was not a poverty heading in the index of *The New York Times* until the declaration (Bowler, 1985).

Furthermore, the War on Poverty led to the construction of Oscar Lewis' concept of the culture of poverty, which explains the persistence of poverty in terms of presumed negative qualities within a culture: family disorganization, group disintegration, personal disorganization, resignation, and fatalism (Harvey & Reed, 1996). Appalachia has been used as a prime example of the systematic construct of the culture of poverty, facing lingering images of poverty-stricken "hillbillies" (Bowler, 1985; Price et al., 2000; Sarnoff, 2003). Consequently, an outside-inside dichotomy emerged, and the idea of blaming mountain people and viewing them as separate from the rest of American culture predominated in popular media culture. For instance, in a Fox News program on February 13, 2009, conservative commentator Bill O'Reilly criticized the "culture of poverty" and "culture of ignorance" in Appalachia by saying that Appalachian culture harmed children because of alcoholic parents and the widespread drug influences among other "irresponsibility" (Cooper, Knotts & Livingston, 2010, p. 26).

### ***Appalachian Stereotypes in Media***

In a 1976 Appalachian case study, Seltzer noted that among minority groups commonly excluded from journalist news networks, such as women, racial minorities, ethnic groups, low-income people, and groups challenging powerful interests, "hillbillies" received the worst media treatment (Speer, 1993). Academics have observed that while most Appalachians do not want to separate themselves from their regional link because of geographical identifiers, they are often superficially and externally assigned to stereotyped limitations of the region through media characterizations of Appalachians in American visual culture. It is only when these stereotypes are discarded that Appalachians feel authentically Appalachian (Snyder, 1982; Massey, 2007; Ferrence, 2012).

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Maggard (1983-84) observes two general frames that characterize images of Appalachia in the national media: (1) Misleading reporting and a lack of in-depth analysis dominate media, and (2) Reporters often fail to grasp the historical context, the economic context, and the motives of key actors on opposing sides. Because of their limited contact with the region, national journalists often overlook the mountain middle class and rich. Instead they search for images that fit their preconceived notions about rural poverty (Bowler, 1985; Ferrence, 2012). In the same sense, former Congressman William C. Cramer from Florida said, “By selecting certain pockets of poverty and eliminating other parts of the country, [federal aid to Appalachia] can be used in a discriminatory manner for political expediency, executive favoritism, and vote buying on a grand scale” (in Bowler, 1985, p. 246). These portrayals create gross generalizations of Appalachia in which selected images by mass media do not represent the whole.

Some of the most popular media images of Appalachian people include people living without electricity or children without shoes. Other general representations of Appalachian differences often refer to physical traits that signify “otherness,” including illnesses, deformities, ragged clothing, unkempt appearances, poor dental hygiene, and prematurely aged men and women with sluggish postures and blank stares (Sarnoff, 2003; Scott, 2009). In *The New York Times*, the Consultant to the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission, Benjamin Chinitz, wrote, “The immigrants from Appalachia do not assimilate very readily to modern urban industrial society in northern metropolitan areas” (Chinitz, 1964, p. A1).

While images of desolation can attract public interest and catalyze actions to tackle poverty, they can also reaffirm the marginalization that allows the exploitation of marginalized communities (Snyder, 1982; Scott, 2009). In a television review in *The New York Times*, journalist Jack Gould wrote about CBS’s Charles Kuralt, who showed an Appalachian Christmas segment juxtaposing the celebration of Christmas in other parts of America with an abandoned coal mining community in Eastern Kentucky:

The camera showed the worn faces and discouragement in the eyes of the adults, the children who have scant prospects of gaining any education, the broken remnants of buildings that serve as homes and the cold and dirt of the ever-gray surroundings. (Gould, 1964, p. A1)

Scholars have linked images and individuals’ perceptions of them directly to the construction of internal identities and senses of self (Snyder, 1982; Lacan 2004; Massey, 2007). When scholars consider how images contribute to the definitions, relations, and perceptions of how people connect to their environment and interpret the lessons of an image, they ask the crucial questions: What can a disempowered people do if they do not want their pictures taken? What does it do to people when they are made the objects of the nation’s pity? (Wang, 1999; Price et al., 2000).

### **Main Goals**

The purpose of this research is to examine how media narratives of poverty stereotypes from the 1960s can affect Appalachian people today through emic and etic perspectives. An emic approach includes accounts expressed by the research participants or the native members of the culture being studied, and an etic approach includes accounts expressed by scientific observers who apply existing theories and cultural frameworks to the setting (Lett, 1990). The research compares the framing of the two newspapers through narrative analysis and content analysis for January 2014, the period in which many media organizations revisited the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty. The study then connects research on the framing of the media coverage through media analysis for January 1964, the month Lyndon Johnson declared the War on Poverty in Eastern Kentucky.

## **III. Methods**

The research employs quantitative and qualitative research methods, including a content analysis to compare local and national media coverage during January 1964 and January 2014. An underlying hypothesis is that local community members and media are more likely to use positive language and visuals than national media when reporting on the War on Poverty. In addition, national media are more likely to focus on the economics of poverty than local community members and media, who are more likely to focus on social and cultural aspects of poverty than on the economics of poverty.

Framing theory suggests that the presentation of a topic, or the frame by which information is stra-

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telegically organized to structure social meanings, influences the perception, beliefs, and ideas of the audience (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996). Frames are used as an interpretive device to help people make sense of a topic by emphasizing specific features rather than trying to process all available information. Examples of framing techniques that are particularly relevant to this research include stories, or the framing of subjects through memorable anecdotes; and spin, or the discussion of an idea with a positive or negative connotation (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996). Framing is a beneficial analysis tool because understanding the frames employed by particular organizations or groups distinguishes what they consider important, so researchers can achieve a better understanding of how and why people interpret situations and ideas. This research seeks to understand the ways different types of mass media focus on various issues in Appalachia, which will shed light on how the poverty stereotypes of Appalachia have developed, and more importantly, how these general perceptions affect the identity, discrimination, and marginalization of Appalachian people.

Framing theory is helpful in studying media narratives because the media can influence public opinion by focusing on salient aspects of a news story. These frames help viewers decide who or what is responsible for the cause or solution of an issue, whether it can be looked at from broader social factors and institutional accountability or personal responsibility (Entman, 1993). This research focuses on thematic news frames, or frames that place public issues in a broader context by focusing on general conditions or outcomes (Inyengar, 1991). For example, the way a news organization might frame a person living in an impoverished community in Appalachia could affect whether the public sees the individual as “lazy” or as a victim of a larger, problematic societal system.

While journalists generally attempt to follow fair and balanced reporting practices, there may still be a dominant framing of news that the media use to influence public opinion. Developed by scholars Max McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) in a study of the 1968 presidential election to understand the degree to which the media determines public opinion, agenda-setting theory describes the ability of the news media to influence the salience of public agenda topics. Agenda setting theory suggests the media can not only reflect reality but also determine reality by presenting topics in a manner designed to attract the public and policy makers (Miller & Krosnick, 1996). Agenda setting theory focuses on the idea that the media does not tell the public what to think, but rather, what to think about. Consequently, the news media are primary agenda-setting agents because of their ability to set the agenda for how the public reacts and how policy makers respond through legislation (Entman, 1993; Miller & Krosnick, 1996).

In this research, two news outlets are examined to compare the media coverage and framing of the coverage on Appalachian poverty stereotypes: a national outlet, *The New York Times*; and a local Appalachian newspaper, *The Mountain Eagle* in Whitesburg, Kentucky, near where Johnson launched the War on Poverty in January 1964. The research observes how each outlet portrayed people in Eastern Kentucky by analyzing articles and visuals from the media coverage and developing categories through emergent coding to identify themes associated with Appalachian people.

*The Mountain Eagle* was selected as the local newspaper because it is based in Eastern Kentucky and was one of the only local newspapers in the area at the time to cover Johnson’s tour of Appalachia. *The New York Times* was selected as the national newspaper because it was one of the first newspapers to cover Johnson’s War on Poverty. The keywords “Johnson” and “Poverty” were used to search archives of *The Mountain Eagle* for January 1964, yielding 12 relevant articles; the keyword “Appalachia” was used to search the archives of *The New York Times*, during the same period, yielding 11 relevant articles. The month of January 1964 was selected because it is the month in which President Johnson officially declared the War on Poverty in his State of the Union address to the Congress. From there, he toured Appalachia to promote awareness of poverty, and emphasized Eastern Kentucky as an area in which poverty was particularly prevalent. After reading through the newspaper articles and recognizing patterns, I coded for tone and rhetoric, characteristics in reference to Appalachian people, functions, and visuals. This process was repeated, with a few additional categories developed through emergent coding, for the comparison between the two newspapers in their coverage of the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty in January 2014, when Appalachia was once again brought into national media spotlight.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe open coding as the “process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (p. 61). The coding sheet developed in this research followed a protocol by Creswell (1998) for recording information from data and identifying key categories related to the ideas and concepts based on the research questions. The content analyses were conducted according to the constant comparative method, or the process of comparing information from data collection to previously iden-

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tified categories (Creswell, 1998). The coding sheets were based on an eight-step guide by Tesch (1990): (1) Read through all of the data carefully, recording ideas as they come to mind; (2) Pick one document and ask what the underlying meaning is, writing thoughts in the margin; (3) Make a list of all topics, or cluster similar topics, and form them into columns that might be grounded as major topics, unique topics, and leftovers; (4) Take this list and return to the data, abbreviating topics as codes and writing the codes next to corresponding segments in the data, trying out the preliminary organizing scheme to check for emerging categories/domains and codes; (5) Refine the organizing system; (6) Make a final decision on the abbreviations and alphabetize these codes; (7) Assemble the data material belonging to each category together and perform a preliminary analysis; and, (8) Recode the existing data if necessary.

## IV. Findings

### ***January 1964: War on Poverty Media Analysis***

The coverage included a total of 12 articles from *The Mountain Eagle* and 11 articles from *The New York Times* related to the War on Poverty. All five of *The Mountain Eagle's* weekly publications in the month of January contained the keywords "Poverty" and "Johnson," indicating that Johnson's War on Poverty was a significant event in the region. On the other hand, only a small portion of *The New York Times* articles mentioned the keyword, "Appalachia," and every keyword for Appalachia was linked to poverty.

The research found that the local newspaper used more positive language toward Appalachian people than the national newspaper; the national newspaper used more unfavorable characteristics than the local newspaper, and the local newspaper was more likely to criticize federal efforts than encourage action in the Appalachian region, while the national newspaper mostly encouraged action. The following categories discuss the findings for the codes: tone and rhetoric, characteristics in reference to Appalachian people, functions, visuals, and themes (See Appendix C for a full table of results).

### ***Tone and Rhetoric***

Each newspaper had 16 words or phrases coded for tone and rhetoric in *The Mountain Eagle* and *The New York Times*. Sixty-three percent of the codes in *The Mountain Eagle* identified positive language, and 38 percent identified negative language; conversely, 14 percent of the codes in *The New York Times* identified positive language, and 89 percent identified negative language (See Appendix C for more detail).

The articles in *The Mountain Eagle* primarily used positive language because they focused on the progress in the region and its future potential for economic and social growth. One editorial listed the significant accomplishments of the previous seven years: the doubling of teachers' salaries; the construction of new buildings, stores, and restaurants; the remodeling of older buildings; and the increase in business and merchandising communities (Gish & Gish, 1964, p. A4). Examples of keywords and/or phrases coded as positive language in an editorial are italicized below:

We feel that at long last the long-heralded new day is *dawning* for the area. (Gish & Gish, 1964, p. A4)

The closing decades of the Twentieth Century can still be *a period of glory* for the area if we, the people of Eastern Kentucky, will *take our future into our own hands*, chart our course and recognize no barriers. (Gish & Gish, 1964, p. A6)

Negative language in the local news articles was mostly used to express some of the frustrations from Appalachian people, including a dependence on welfare funds for survival and a lack of effort from President Johnson in planning development programs for Appalachia, which was described in news articles as "the nation's worst pocket of poverty" and in "chronic depression" in *The New York Times* (Bigart, 1964, p. 2A).

Appalachia was cited as the standard comparison for areas that had "grinding poverty" and "blighted villages" or was a "swath of deprivation containing some rural slums" (Bigart, 1964, p. 2A). Examples of keywords and/or phrases coded as negative language in an editorial in *The Mountain Eagle* and a news article in *The New York Times*, respectively, are italicized below:

At other times as we watch when those words and promises are translated into action we feel

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totally both *hopeless* and *helpless*. (Gish & Gish, 1964, p. A6)

One new legislative proposal, planned by Mr. Kennedy, was that Mr. Johnson called 'a special effort in the chronically distressed areas of Appalachia.' This referred to the Appalachian Mountain areas like Eastern Kentucky and some parts of West Virginia where *pockets of poverty and depression have defied all efforts to eliminate them*. (Wicker, 1964, p. 17A)

### **Characteristics**

*The Mountain Eagle* used only favorable characteristics to describe the Appalachian region and people, whereas *The New York Times* used only unfavorable characteristics (See the second table in Appendix C for more detail). The word "potential" in an editorial in *The Mountain Eagle* is italicized to show the positive language used in describing the construction of a new economy in Eastern Kentucky and stressing the vast potential of the area's resources: "the mineral resources, water resources, the resource of our outdoor recreation *potential*, the resource of our electric power *potential*, and the resource of our land and its many possible uses aside from those agricultural in nature" (1964, p. A3). Some of the unfavorable characteristics used to describe people in Appalachia included poor or uneducated. For example, in a letter to the editor in *The New York Times*, Benjamin Chinitz, the President's Appalachian Regional Commission Consultant and Chairman of the Department of Economics at the University of Pittsburgh, mentioned phrases that related to unfavorable characteristics: "The *low average income* of Appalachians reflects their *low average educational attainment* more than it does the low productivity of the region's resources" (Chinitz, 1964, p. A1).

### **Functions**

The articles in the newspapers were coded for the functions of "encourage action" or "criticize." *The Mountain Eagle* was more likely to criticize (79 percent of total functions) federal efforts in Appalachia than to encourage action (21 percent of total functions) from organizations and people outside of Appalachia. On the other hand, *The New York Times* printed only "encourage action" items (See the third table in Appendix C).

The "encourage action" function includes urging public mobilization for the amelioration of social and economic injustices in the region. Examples of phrases coded as "encourage action" in an editorial by editors Tom and Pat Gish are italicized below:

The march of 100,000 Negroes in Washington demanding civil rights has made civil rights the No. 1 domestic issue in the nation. The contagious poverty of Eastern Kentucky and the Appalachians threatens to infect many other areas of the nation and is no less a national problem. *Couldn't we organize such a march?* (Gish & Gish, 1964, p. A4)

The job of rescuing Eastern Kentucky from its seemingly certain fate rests largely upon the shoulders of Eastern Kentuckians. We must insist that Frankfort and Washington permit Eastern Kentuckians themselves *a voice in the planning of their own future*. (Gish & Gish, 1964, p. A4)

One of the biggest criticisms against government efforts was that those in office could not grasp the realities of Eastern Kentucky, and that the aid that people were receiving was insufficient to their needs. For instance, in a news article in *The Mountain Eagle*, reporter Tom Wicker points out the President's budget appropriation to start a special Appalachian Area Development Program was only "enough to build a couple miles of road in each county, but no more" (Wicker, 1964, p. 4A). Examples of keywords or phrases coded for the function of "criticize" in an editorial in *The Mountain Eagle* by Tom and Pat Gish are italicized below:

We also foresee many more glowing plans and promises of action to be forthcoming from Frankfort and Washington during the next seven years, but the *total inadequacy* of the President's winter relief program, the *extreme weakness* of the Roosevelt-Appalachia area development program, *indicate clearly very little* in the way of effective action will come our way. (Gish & Gish, 1964, p. A6)

The burning question of the moment is whether we will do so [take future into own hands] or whether we will *leave our fate in the hands of incompetents in Frankfort and Washington*. (Gish & Gish, 1964, p. A6)

### **Visuals**

While no visuals were found in the January 1964 edition of *The Mountain Eagle*, five visuals were

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found in *The New York Times*. Visuals from relevant articles in the December 1964 edition of *The Mountain Eagle* were used instead to compare the use of photographs in both media outlets. *The Mountain Eagle* showed people smiling and looking directly into the camera, which indicates a level of comfort and confidence in Appalachian people according to the body language of the subjects in the images. In an image in *The New York Times*, the children were seen with their eyes downcast and turned in a profile view, indicating a sense of hopelessness. Some of the images also included Johnson smiling, shaking hands with officials, giving a speech, or engaging in another activity that showed his level of influence and power. Likewise, in an image of Mrs. Johnson's visit to Appalachia in *The New York Times*, she is shown at a higher angle than the children, smiling and holding her arms out to small Appalachian children, whose mouths are turned downwards, implying that they could be unhappy or helpless (Robertson, 1964, p. 1A).

### **Themes**

Several themes emerged from the narratives in the newspapers regarding the culture of poverty and stereotypes of people in Appalachia. First, there was a sense of "us versus them," in which media narratives marginalized Appalachian people from the rest of America. In an editorial in *The Mountain Eagle*, the editors asked, "Will the area continue to fall into an abyss of total poverty, or will it begin the long hard climb toward equality with the rest of the United States?" (Gish & Gish, 1964, p. A6). Patterns of feeling powerless in the planning of the future of the research and sensing an increased urgency to gain status also emerged.

Second, there was a theme of an "other" within an "other" in that the local newspaper had to clarify the distinction between Eastern Kentucky and Kentucky, whereas the national newspaper tended to group both regions into "Appalachia." In one instance in *The Mountain Eagle*, a reporter commented on Kentucky's Department of Commerce and Department of Public Information's proposal to rename Eastern Kentucky as a development area instead of a depressed area:

Eastern Kentucky has had enough of such foolishness. We have suffered too long already because the rest of Kentucky has refused to recognize that our problems exist ... Until the state lives up to its obligations to the third of its people and begins as an effective program of help for them, the Department of Commerce and the Department of Public Information can pretend all they want to that what they smell in Eastern Kentucky is the perfume of roses, but another sniff will show them it is the stench of poverty, neglect and indifferent politicians. (Wicker, 1964, p. 2A)

Third, there was a dichotomy between insiders and outsiders in the misunderstanding of the local culture. In an editorial in *The Mountain Eagle*, an anonymous writer said:

Well-meaning efforts on the part of President Johnson's administration in Washington as well as those of numerous state and private organizations to build a new economy in Eastern Kentucky and thus to wipe out one of the nation's 'pockets of poverty' are severely handicapped by a fundamental misunderstanding of the way of life in the mountains. (1964, p. A4)

A false label is bringing about a false cure. In other words, President Johnson is being led into a false cure for our ills because no one has explained to him the exact nature of our illness. (1964, p. A4)

This sense of separation between federal and state administrations and local community members in identifying key issues in the region suggests a need for increased collaboration and greater efforts to understand the different cultures and respond accordingly.

### **January 2014: 50th Anniversary of the War on Poverty Media Analysis in comparison with January 1964**

The 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty coverage included one article from *The Mountain Eagle* and nine articles from *The New York Times*. The articles in the month of January 2014 were found using the keywords, "War on Poverty" and "Poverty," from archives. The month was chosen to stay consistent with the previous January 1964 coding.

The research found that *The New York Times* used more positive language than *The Mountain Eagle*, and was more likely to encourage action than express frustration. Political, economic, and social issues received equal weight in the coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Mountain Eagle*. The top three identified themes in *The Mountain Eagle* were children/youth, education, and family, while the top three identified themes in *The New York Times* were children/youth, education, and unemployment. Overall, *The Mountain*

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*Eagle* declared the War on Poverty a failure because of the persistence of poverty and the rising economic inequality, while *The New York Times* focused on the success and progress of the War on Poverty since the 1960s. The following categories discuss the findings for the codes: language, narrative, characteristics, functions, topics, themes, and the success or failure of the War on Poverty (See Appendix D for a full table of results).

### **Language**

While the results from the media analysis of the War on Poverty coverage from January 1964 showed *The New York Times* was more likely to focus on negative language than *The Mountain Eagle*, the media analysis of the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty coverage showed the opposite. A hypothesis was that local media was more likely to use positive language than national media, but *The New York Times* articles paid more attention to the progress made through initiatives created as a result of the declaration. *Times* op-ed columnist Nicholas Kristof wrote, "In fact, the first lesson of the war on poverty is that we can make progress against poverty, but that it's an uphill slog" (2014, p. A1). The single article in *The Mountain Eagle* used negative language, while 67 percent of the articles in *The New York Times* used positive language, and 33 percent of the total codes for language included negative language.

Some examples of progress include a decrease in infant mortality rates, an increase in college completion rates, an increase in the number of women who enter the work force, and a decrease in malnutrition (Lowrey, 2014, p. 2A).

### **Narrative**

There were three narratives identified in both newspapers in the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty media coverage. The narratives were coded for personal narratives, meaning the narrative related to the speaker's personal experiences with the subjects of poverty and stereotypes; and other narratives, meaning the speaker included a description of a narrative he or she had heard elsewhere, whether it was through a family, friend, or acquaintance. The narratives that did appear in the media coverage were narratives of others, meaning the participants recounted experiences of their friends and families. For example, a narrative that appeared in *The New York Times* was related to the "Cadillac-driving welfare queen," a tale used to illustrate cases of excessive welfare fraud as coined by Ronald Reagan in his 1976 presidential campaign (Krugman, 2014, p. A3). Another narrative that appeared in a news article in *The Mountain Eagle* was the story of community member Rosanna Troyer, who was coping with a drop in monthly federal food assistance by purchasing cheaper foods at the grocery store (Barrouquere, 2014, p. 1A). Troyer said there was not a day she did not see someone pushing strollers or a cart down the street, trying to find soda cans to take in to get change, focusing on the larger picture that poverty is still prevalent in many Appalachian communities (Barrouquere, 2014, p. 1A).

### **Characteristics**

There were no stereotypical characteristics of Appalachian people mentioned in the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty media coverage in *The New York Times*, which was notable compared to the high number of unfavorable characteristics found in the January 1964 coverage of *The Times*. Most of the January 2014 articles, about 75 percent, focused on the overall progress of the region as a whole, rather than specifically observing the plight of the Appalachian region. On the other hand, *The Mountain Eagle* mentioned how the programs created in response to the War on Poverty were created for parts of Appalachia that had been described as "third-world conditions" (Barrouquere, 2014, p. 2A). The same article discussed how the dependence caused by food stamps and other assistance also led to the devaluing of education among some recipients and contributed to drug abuse in the region. Likewise, in a news article in *The New York Times*, journalist Jared Bernstein mentioned a widely known counterargument: "Don't blame the economy; the poor themselves have made life choices that consigned them to poverty, like not getting enough schooling, single parenthood, or having children out of wedlock" (Bernstein, 2014, p. 3A). This argument directs the problem of poverty at the level of the impoverished individual, rather than the underlying structural and economic issues. In a news article in *The Mountain Eagle*, Jason Bailey, the Director of the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy in Frankfort noted the myriad narratives that discuss the magnitude of this issue: "The gap between central Appalachia and the rest of the country has not closed. In a relative sense, it's just as big" (Barrouquere, 2014, p. 2A).

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## Functions

In the January 1964 coding, a low percentage of *The New York Times* articles encouraged readers to take action (18 percent), while more than half of the articles (67 percent) from January 2014 encouraged public participation to decrease, or eliminate, the rate of poverty. In his assessment of the shortfalls of the War on Poverty, Ron Haskins of the Brookings Institution said, in a news article in *The New York Times* encouraging people to mount an effective war against poverty, “we need changes in the personal decisions of more young Americans” (Lowrey, 2014, p. 2A). Perhaps one of the factors affecting the increase in economic upward mobility is the convenience in speaking up as a result of technology advancements, especially with the advent of social media. In a letter to the editor in *The New York Times*, Willie Dickerson from Snohomish, Washington wrote, “Speak up, citizens: call, write, text, tweet, Facebook or visit your elected representatives and tell them that it is time to successfully end the war on poverty” (2014, p. A4).

## Topics

Based on the emphasis on economics of poverty in the media coverage of the War on Poverty in January 1964, a hypothesis was that national media were more likely to focus on the economics of poverty than local media, which were more likely to focus on social and cultural aspects of poverty when covering the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty. However, the findings revealed a different proportion in the four categories in both newspapers. In *The Mountain Eagle*, each of political, economic, social, and health topics accounted for 25 percent of the total topics coded. In *The New York Times*, each of political, economic, and social topics accounted for 32 percent of the total topics coded, while the topic of health accounted for four percent of the total topics coded.

The 1964 media articles in both newspapers primarily focused on politics when referencing President Johnson and his influence in the War on Poverty. Conversely, the media articles from the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty focused on acknowledging the need to fight poverty. They also underscored a political divide in the differing solutions for tackling poverty between the Republican and Democratic parties. President Obama called this inequality the “defining challenge of our time” and urged states to expand their Medicaid programs to poor, childless adults, and stressed an increase in minimum wage, but conservatives such as Representative Paul Ryan of Wisconsin said the government misspent its safety-net money and should focus less on support, and more on economic and job opportunities (Lowrey, 2014, p. 1A). Reporter Jeremy Peters, pointing out problems within each side’s argument, said, “Democrats could push the rich-versus-poor theme too far, alienating middle-class voters and wealthy donors. Republicans may find themselves painted in the same box as Mitt Romney was in 2012, when many voters saw him as indifferent to the concerns of working Americans” (Peters, 2014, p. 1A). He explained that most of the Republicans are suggesting adding work requirements to safety-net programs, streamlining federal offices, improving training and education initiatives, and offering tax breaks to the needy, while most of the Democrats are urging an extension of unemployment benefits and an increase in the federal minimum wage (Peters, 2014, p. 1A).

A prevalent economic issue in media narratives was food assistance programs, which, according to Republican State Sen. Robert Stivers, “helped some people break the cycle of poverty, but left others ‘accustomed to it and created a cycle of dependence’” (Barrouquere, 2014, p. 3A). In a news article in *The Mountain Eagle*, Barrouquere referenced the cuts in food assistance programs: “Nearly 900,000 people who need food stamps saw a proposed cut of \$40 billion from [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program] SNAP” (2014, p. 3A). An article in *The New York Times* also acknowledged that although the American labor force has become better educated and more skilled, there are still high poverty rates; some of the reasons for the causes of persistent poverty include technological changes, globalization, the decline of labor unions, the high inequality of market income, and the falling value of minimum wage (Lowrey, 2014, p. 2A-3A).

While there was little to no coverage on social topics in the January 1964 coding in *The New York Times*, 32 percent of the total topics coded in January 2014 related to social issues. Narratives suggested the War on Poverty had failed because antipoverty programs did not reduce poverty; therefore, poverty in America was a social disintegration problem—“a problem of broken families, crime and culture of dependence that was only reinforced by government aid. And because this narrative was so widely accepted, bashing the poor was good politics, enthusiastically embraced by Republicans and some Democrats, too” (Krugman, 2014, p. A1-A2). Thus, poverty was a problem of values and social cohesion rather than money. In an opinion piece in *The New York Times*, Krugman commented on the lack of economic opportunity:

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If progress against poverty has been disappointing over the past half century, the reason is not the decline of the family but the rise of extreme inequality. We're a much richer nation than we were in 1964, but little if any of that increased wealth has trickled down to workers in the bottom half of the income distribution. (2014, p. 2A)

However, when Lowrey looked at economical and sociological trends to help explain why people face poverty, she listed factors such as high incarceration rates, more infants born out of wedlock, and single parenthood (Lowrey, 2014, p. 2A-3A). Kristof agreed, saying that programs that encourage jobs, especially for most at-risk groups, and earned-income tax credit are the most successful efforts to help the working poor; he said one of the most basic successful social programs is family planning assistance programs for at-risk teenage girls, citing that the "teenage birthrate has fallen by half over roughly the last 20 years" (2014, p. A2). Other programs he mentioned included parent coaching to get pregnant women to drink and smoke less and encouraging at-risk moms to talk to their children more through programs such as Healthy Families America and Nurse-Family Partnership (Kristof, 2014, p. A3).

Increased focus on education also strengthened the need for funding social programs. An op-ed columnist for *The New York Times* listed organizations, such as Playworks, that work to create safe and inclusive play opportunities in public schools nationwide: "When researchers from Mathematica Policy Research and Stanford University examined the program . . . they found something that many educators overlook: children's emotional and physical well being is immediately connected with their cognitive development" (Bornstein, 2014, p. 2A). Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Michigan, Martha Bailey said in a discussion board in *The New York Times* that the War on Poverty also offered lessons for increasing opportunities to racial minorities through the federal funds that encouraged desegregation in schools and hospitals (2014, p. A1). She also said improvements in black infant health led to better test scores for black teenagers through the 1980s; joined with other initiatives, these policies have decreased the black/white poverty gaps, and consequently, had vast benefits for society (Bailey, 2014).

For the topic of health, there was only one article in each of the newspapers related to health in the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty coverage. In *The Mountain Eagle*, community member Rosanna Troyer said senior citizens are forced to decide between buying medication and paying for food, and that "a lot of them do without medicines because they can't afford them" (Barrouquere, 2014, p. 3A). In *The New York Times*, op-ed columnist Paul Krugman argued that the success of the War on Poverty can be seen in the improvements of lives of the American poor and that lower-income Americans are healthier and better-nourished than they were in the 1960s (2014, p. A2).

## Themes

The coded themes included children/youth, education, media, unemployment, environmental issues, and family. Beginning with children/youth, images from *The New York Times'* 1964 War on Poverty coverage showed children with downcast eyes and mouths turned down at corners, ostensibly to evoke a sense of sympathy from the reading public. The mention of children/youth was also one of the top three themes coded in the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty coverage, accounting for 33 percent of the total themes coded in *The Mountain Eagle* and 24 percent of the total themes coded in *The New York Times*. Nicholas Kristof of *The Times* commented on this use of children in poverty:

In contrast, children are voiceless, so they are the age group most likely to be poor today. That's a practical and moral failure. In part, that's because when kids are deprived of opportunities, the consequences can include a lifetime of educational failure, crime, and underemployment. (2014, p. A2)

Associate Professor of Economics at University of Michigan Martha Bailey added the troubling statistic that 1 in 5 children are poor and increasingly falling behind their peers due to the neighborhood location (2014, p. A1). In the same article, she argued that the early childhood programs from the War on Poverty helped combat trends in children and youth from the cyclical nature of poverty.

Children and youth were also commonly referenced with education, which was one of the top three themes mentioned in the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty media coverage results, accounting for 33 percent of the total themes coded in *The Mountain Eagle* and 24 percent of the total themes coded in *The New York Times*. In an article in *The New York Times*, Representative Eric Cantor of Virginia, the House majority leader, spoke at Brookings to argue that education reform was the surest way to break "the vicious cycle

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of poverty” (2014, p. 2A). Although the share of adults with higher education attainment had risen significantly, there was also a need for a higher emphasis on education programs, specifically early education programs (Bernstein, 2014, p. 3A). For example, programs such as Head Start have linked higher high school graduation and college attendance rates with higher chances of employment (Kristof, 2014, p. A3).

Although there were only four references of information channel in the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty coverage in *The New York Times* and no references in *The Mountain Eagle*, it is worth noting the subtle ways information channels have influenced poverty dialogues. For instance, in his article in *The New York Times* on the progress in the War on Poverty, Kristof mentioned a comment by “a reader named Frank” on his Facebook page, and used Frank’s argument that government aid was wasted because it did not focus on parent education to set the foundation for the rest of his article (2014, p. A3). In 1964, the primary way to gauge public opinion standing on Johnson’s visit was to read published letters to the editor. Since then, media platforms have evolved and there has been a rise in social media and other online networks as discursive forums that exist outside print media. For instance, in the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty coverage, one of the many communication outlets included a “Room for Debate” discussion on *The New York Times* website, in which Martha Bailey set the tone by writing a recap of the War on Poverty today, and encouraged people to post directly on the online forum. Other influences included attack ads on television related to poverty by the Democratic and Republican parties and blogs (Kristof, 2014, p. A3).

Ideas from these virtual channels for discourse can also be incorporated into classroom discussions. Instructional coach and teacher mentor at The Learning Network, a blog that uses content from *The Times* to create educational lesson plans, Michael Gonchar created a lesson plan for teachers to incorporate poverty and economic inequality in America, as well as research as many possible solutions as the students propose a new war on poverty for 2014 (2014, p. 1A-7A). Some of the lesson plan options included interactive maps showing the distribution of poverty in neighborhoods, participatory videos on YouTube about wealth inequality, and articles on minimum wage and social mobility.

Another popular theme that emerged in *The New York Times* that related to topics of poverty was unemployment, which accounted for 24 percent of the total themes coded. In an op-ed piece on fighting the War on Poverty, Krugman summarized the shift in narratives about unemployment between 1964 and 2014:

The trouble is that the American right is still living in the 1970s, or actually a Reaganite fantasy of the 1970s; its notion of an anti-poverty agenda is still all about getting those layabouts to go to work and stop living off welfare. The reality is that lower-end jobs, even if you can get one, don’t pay enough to lift you out of poverty just hasn’t sunk in. And the idea of helping the poor by actually helping them remain anathema. (2014, p. A2)

Lowrey cited the poverty rate for full-time workers as three percent, and 33 percent for those who are unemployed (Lowrey, 2014, p. 4A). Other arguments included considering not only the absence of employment, but also low wage jobs, and a greater need to examine the underlying structural problems in the economy that affect poverty (Bernstein, 2014, p. 4A; Krugman, 2014, p. A3).

*The Mountain Eagle* and *The New York Times* shared two popular themes, children/youth and education, but differed in their third most prevalent theme: “unemployment” was prevalent in *The New York Times*, while “family” was in *The Mountain Eagle*.

Finally, it is worth noting that although “environmental issues” was included in the coding because of research predictions, there was no mention of environmental issues in either phases of the media coverage.

### **War on Poverty – Success or Failure?**

The majority of the opinions in *The New York Times*, about 75 percent, would consider the War on Poverty a success because of the progress that has been made since 1964, while the article in *The Mountain Eagle* called it a failure. Mark Updegrove, the director of the Lyndon B. Johnson Library summarized the popular sentiment in a news article in *The New York Times*:

Ultimately the War on Poverty was just the first in a roll call of achievements – civil rights, education, health care, immigration, the arts and humanities, the environment – that, taken together, equaled nothing less than a new American revolution of opportunity and equality. (2014, p. 1A)

Looking at the overall rates of poverty, in 1967, about 26 percent were poor compared to 15 percent in 2014 (Bernstein, 2014, p. 2A). Likewise, Social Security, a New Deal program that was expanded in the 1960s,

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reduced the elderly poverty rate from 44 percent without counting Social Security benefits to nine percent (Bernstein, 2014, p. 2A).

In the articles, there was broad consensus by authors that social welfare programs created since the War on Poverty have improved living conditions for low-income Americans (Lowrey, 2014, p. 1A). A Columbia University study suggested that without government benefits, the poverty rate would have soared to 31 percent by 2012 (Kristof, 2014, p. A2).

Other successes are in the shift of the victim-blaming. For a long period, people considered the War on Poverty a failure, saying, "It was the fault of the poor themselves. But what everyone knew wasn't true, and the public seems to have caught on" (Krugman, 2014, p. A3).

One of the reservations about the success on the War on Poverty is that people had to work harder in the face of increasing economic challenges facing low-income families. On the other hand, other authors focused on the success stories, such as the effectiveness of food stamps, Medicaid, and earned-income tax credit. In the Room for Debate Discussion on *The New York Times* website, Bailey wrote that a renewed commitment to the War on Poverty would increase opportunities for people and strengthen the economy (2014). While the content in the online discussion board was not coded among the other articles, it was included in this dialogue to gauge public opinion on the evolution of the War on Poverty. A commenter on the discussion board, Michael O'Neill replied, saying:

The thing we must remember is that a rising tide lifts all boats. It isn't the masts that are floating in the water, it is the keel. If we wish our economy to do well we need to make sure the bottom quintile does well.

Six of *The Times* articles, or 75 percent, focused on the overall small victories in the War on Poverty, rather than the failures. The few that did consider the War on Poverty a failure cited the famous words of Ronald Reagan, "We fought a war on poverty, and poverty won" (Lowrey, 2014, p. 1A), and argued the alternate narrative that America needs a war on inequality, rather than on poverty (Bailey, 2014).

## V. Discussion and Conclusions

To address the research question of how local media visualize and frame issues of poverty in Appalachia compared to national media, in the January 1964 coverage, the national media were more likely to focus on economic issues, which also meant the national media used primarily negative language when describing conditions in Appalachia, while the local media used primarily positive language. In this regard, the hypothesis that local media and community members are more likely to use positive language and visuals than national media was partially correct. However, there was a shift in the January 2014 media coverage where the local media used negative language and the national media used mostly positive language, focusing on the progress in the Appalachian region. This change correlated with the findings that the national media provided equal coverage of political, economic, and social issues in the January 2014 media coding, which did not support the hypothesis that national media would focus primarily on economic issues rather than social and cultural topics.

In the January 2014 media analysis, the top three themes identified in *The Mountain Eagle* were children/youth, education, and family, and the top three themes identified in *The New York Times* were children/youth, education, and unemployment. It is interesting to note that the national media articles that focused on social or cultural topics were more likely to use positive language, while those focused solely on structural or economic topics were more likely to use negative language to depict poverty.

There was only one article related to the War on Poverty in *The Mountain Eagle* in January 2014 and one article in February 2014. The single comment issued by the newspaper in February mentioned this year marked the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty, and reposted an editorial that appeared in 1964 as nations and reporters turned their cameras toward Eastern Kentucky (2014, p. A1). The editorial encouraged community members to welcome assistance and publicity from outsiders to show the necessity for the War on Poverty and increase federal aid, citing the Tennessee Valley Authority, which was brought in response to the attention from magazines and newspapers, as an example of how other organizations can help Whitesburg (2014, p. A1).

The editorial said the reaction against outsiders reached a climax when two county officials threat-

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ened to put a group of British television reporters and photographers in jail if they took more pictures of what they considered to be poverty. However, it countered popular opinion by saying:

We have seen hardened reporters and photographers, those who have seen conditions all over the world, with tears in their eyes as they told us of some of the living conditions they had seen in Letcher County. Without exception, the ones to whom we have talked have been fired with desire to do something to help. And they do the thing they know how to best—they show in words and pictures the disgraceful and heartbreaking way many Letcher County residents have to live. This they do in an effort to convince other Americans who live in far better circumstances that their duty is to see that things are bettered here. (2014, p. A1)

Although the editorial was a rare voice in 1964 because it encouraged outside journalists to cover topics of poverty in the area and criticized the negative reactions from Letcher County to the War on Poverty, which varied “only in the intensity of their condemnation,” it seems its opinion is a narrative that is becoming increasingly popular in Appalachia today. *The Mountain Eagle’s* decision to repost this editorial attests to the potential changing nature of using community voices to discuss why previous federal and state efforts have failed, and how better moral and ethical efforts can be made in the future through a change in the language and framing of the region.

The observations suggest recommendations that national journalists use findings from local organizations that gather information on attitudes and practices around the target issues so that they can understand the issues identified directly by citizens from local areas. The difference in the representations of Appalachia by the local media and the national media suggests a potential need for greater communication between the people and the organizations representing the people.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation in the local and national media analysis is that only two specific newspapers were analyzed, which do not represent the differences in overall local and national perspectives. This research would have also benefited from incorporating data from a longer period of time so that the patterns observed in a higher number of articles coded in the media analysis could represent a larger perspective. Additionally, many of the articles in the media analysis were editorials, which can be considered a limitation because the view of the author does not fully represent the overall stance of *The New York Times* or *The Mountain Eagle*. However, because of the limited number of available, relevant articles, it was important to include the content from the editorials and opinion pages.

Likewise, there was only one article in *The Mountain Eagle* for the January 2014 coding, compared to nine articles in *The New York Times*. While this proportion is less balanced than the January 1964, which had 11 articles from *The New York Times* and 12 articles from *The Mountain Eagle*, the lack of coverage on the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty, perhaps, echoes the local media’s being fatigued from the extensive national media attention to the region.

For the media analysis, another coder was not employed, so the article is vulnerable to the subjectivity. For the coding, two separate coding sheets were used rather than one consistent coding sheet—while the basic coding categories were the same, separate coding sheets were adapted to accommodate the emergent themes that appeared in the separate media narratives.

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**Appendix A: Coding Sheet – War on Poverty (1964)**

<p><b>Text</b>  <b>War on Poverty</b>  WOP: Success  WOP: Failure  <b>Function</b>  FN: Encourage Action  FN: Criticize  <b>Narrative</b>  NAR: Esoteric: Personal Experience of Speaker  NAR: Exoteric: Description of Other  <b>Tone and Rhetoric</b>  TE: Positive Language  TE: Negative Language  <b>Characteristics</b>  CA: Favorable  CA: Unfavorable  <b>Themes</b>  XTM: Us vs. Them  XTM: Other within Other  XTM: Discrimination/Stereotyping  XTM: Culture of Poverty</p>	<p><b>Visuals</b>  Body Language  BOD: Open  BOD: Closed  <b>Facial Expressions</b>  FAC: Open  FAC: Closed  <b>Mood and Tone:</b>  TE: Positive  TE: Negative  <b>Topics</b>  TOP: Political  TOP: Economic  TOP: Social</p>
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**Appendix B: Coding Sheet – 50th Anniversary of the War on Poverty (2014)**

<p><b>War on Poverty</b>  WOP: Success  WOP: Failure  <b>Function</b>  FN: Encourage Action  FN: Express Frustration  <b>Mass Media</b>  MM: Films  MM: General Media  MM: Images  MM: Online  MM: Print  MM: Radio  MM: Social Media  MM: Television  <b>Narrative</b>  NAR: Esoteric: Personal Experience of Speaker  NAR: Exoteric: Description of Other</p>	<p><b>Tone and Rhetoric</b>  TE: Positive Language  TE: Negative Language  <b>Characteristics</b>  CA: Favorable  CA: Unfavorable  <b>Themes</b>  XTM: Children/ Youth  XTM: Education  XTM: Environmental Issues  XTM: Family  XTM: Mention of Media  XTM: Unemployment  <b>Topics</b>  TOP: Economic  TOP: Political  TOP: Social  TOP: Health</p>
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## Appendix C: Coding Results – War on Poverty (1964)

### *Tone and Rhetoric*

Newspaper	The Mountain Eagle (12)	The New York Times (11)
Positive Language	10 (63%)	2 (14%)
Negative Language	6 (38%)	14 (89%)
Total Coded in Tone and Rhetoric	16	16

### *Characteristics*

Newspaper	The Mountain Eagle (12)	The New York Times (11)
Favorable	5 (100%)	0 (0%)
Unfavorable	0 (0%)	10 (100%)
Total Coded in Characteristics	5	10

### *Functions*

Newspaper	The Mountain Eagle (12)	The New York Times (11)
Encourage Action	3 (21%)	2 (100%)
Criticize	11 (79%)	0 (0%)
Total Coded in Function	14	2

### *Visuals*

Newspaper	The Mountain Eagle (0)	The New York Times: Johnson (4)	The New York Times: Appalachian People (1)
Body Language: Open	0 (0%)	4 (100%)	1 (100%)
Body Language: Closed	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Facial Expressions: Open	0 (0%)	3 (75%)	0 (0%)
Facial Expressions: Closed	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
Mood and Tone: Positive	0 (0%)	4 (100%)	0 (0%)
Mood and Tone: Negative	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)

## Appendix D: Coding Results – 50th Anniversary of the War on Poverty (2014)

### *Language*

Category	The Mountain Eagle (1)	The New York Times (9)
Language: Positive	0 (0%)	8 (67%)
Language: Negative	1 (100%)	4 (33%)
Total Coded in Language	1	12

### *Narrative*

Category	The Mountain Eagle (1)	The New York Times (9)
Narrative: Personal	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Narrative: Other	1 (100%)	2
Total Coded in Narrative	1	2

**Characteristics**

Category	The Mountain Eagle (1)	The New York Times (9)
Characteristics: Favorable	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Characteristics: Unfavorable	1 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total Coded in Characteristics	1	0

**Function**

Category	The Mountain Eagle (1)	The New York Times (9)
Function: Encourage Action	0 (0%)	6 (67%)
Function: Express Frustration	1 (100%)	3 (33%)
Total Coded in Function	1	9

**Topics**

Category	The Mountain Eagle (1)	The New York Times (9)
Topic: Political	1 (25%)	8 (32%)
Topic: Economic	1 (25%)	8 (32%)
Topic: Social	1 (25%)	8 (32%)
Topic: Health	1 (25%)	1 (4%)
Total Coded in Topic	4	25

**Themes**

Theme	The Mountain Eagle (1)	The New York Times (9)
Children/Youth	1 (33%)	6 (24%)
Education	1 (33%)	6 (24%)
Environmental Issues	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Family	1 (33%)	3 (12%)
Mention of Info Channels	0 (0%)	4 (16%)
Unemployment	0 (0%)	6 (24%)
Total Coded in Themes	3	25

**War on Poverty – Success or Failure?**

Category	The Mountain Eagle (1)	The New York Times (9)
War on Poverty: Success	0 (0%)	6 (75%)
War on Poverty: Failure	1 (100%)	2 (25%)
Total Coded in War on Poverty	1	8