

A large, green, stylized monogram of the letters 'EJ' is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the cover. The letters are thick and have a slight shadow effect, giving them a three-dimensional appearance. The 'E' and 'J' are connected, with the 'J' having a long, sweeping tail that extends towards the right.

*Elon Journal*  
of Undergraduate Research  
in Communications

**2011** Fall  
Issue  
School of Communications  
Elon University



## 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.

Articles and other materials in the journal may be freely downloaded, reproduced and redistributed without permission as long as the author and source are properly cited. Student authors retain copyright ownership of their works.

## 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-eight faculty members in Elon's School of Communications served as the Editorial Board that selected the 13 undergraduate research papers appearing in the 2011 fall issue.

From more than 100 research papers written in advanced School of Communications classes, 32 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 Amanda Sturgil, Anthony Hatcher, Barbara Miller, Brooke Barnett, Daniel Haygood, David Copeland, Derek Lackaff, Frances Ward-Johnson, George Padgett, Glenn Scott, Harlen Makemson, Janna Anderson, Jessica Gisclair, Julie Lellis, Kenn Gaither, Lee Bush, Mandy Gallagher, Michael Frontani, Michael Skube, Michelle Ferrier, Naeemah Clark, Paul Parsons, Phillip Motley, Qian Xu, Richard Landesberg, Sang Nam, Thomas Nelson, and Vic Costello.

Thanks should also go to Jason McMerty, who videotaped student introductions to their projects, and Colin Donohue, who uploaded the PDF version of this issue and student videos.

## Editor's Note

In a research course, such as the Great Ideas-Capstone course in the Elon School of Communications, students become active producers rather than passive consumers of new information and knowledge. Rather than flipping book pages or listening to lectures in a classroom, students must seek out relevant literature, solicit participation of research subjects, collect and process data, and report their findings in a manner consistent with the requirements of the discipline. Unexpected or unknown things lurk along the way, including unwieldy sources, aberrations in data, and surprising findings.

Students who have not done serious research often have a hard time understanding the dynamic nature of research. Different questions may require different approaches to the review of literature, research method and analysis. Students who have only been exposed to rigid instructions in previous courses may find it difficult to understand the general, abstract and perhaps ambiguous guidelines that support a wide-array of research topics. Some students develop anxiety on the first day of class and want to know exactly what they should write before they even begin their research projects.

As an analogy, I sometimes ask students to imagine themselves as an airplane pilot. As they begin their journey, a tug tractor pushes their plane back from the terminal to the airport taxiway, like a teacher holding each student's hand to guide them. As the plane approaches the runway, the student as pilot will notice a clearly marked runway over which they must navigate the plane during take off. Students should feel no confusion about the path they must follow to take to the air as they proceed with their research projects.

As a pilot on a runway ready for takeoff, a student may feel overwhelmed at first because of the speed with which they must advance down the runway. Literature reviews should be done quickly, but thoroughly. Students must locate and digest dozens of articles and other materials to understand their research topic, formulate important research questions, select an appropriate methodology, and digest and report their results. During the flight, students may actually enjoy the freedom that comes with a well-planned research project. At the end, most students land safely with a sigh of relief and the exhilaration of completing a difficult, but fruitful, work.

For many undergraduate students, research is a new experience and while they may be uncomfortable at first, with the help of an involved mentor, they learn fundamental research skills and successfully complete all of the elements of a well- designed study. I know how much my research mentor meant to me; so, my thanks to all professors who mentored students, often using their precious time outside of class. Also, my compliments to all students who reached this important pinnacle in college learning, especially those who were successful in producing manuscripts worthy of acceptance in this issue of the Elon Journal.

Dr. Byung Lee  
Editor, Elon Journal

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# Chirping for Charity: How U.S. Nonprofit Organizations are Using Twitter to Foster Dialogic Communication

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## Abstract

*Social media presents numerous opportunities for non-traditional interaction. For nonprofits, social media is an inexpensive outlet that offers new ways to develop relationships with publics. The present study explored the use of dialogic communication by the highest funded US nonprofit organizations, testing the hypothesis that the majority of tweets by nonprofit organizations will employ one or more dialogic principles. Through coding organizational tweets (n= 1,652) over a two-week time frame, trends emerged for both high-dialogic and low-dialogic organizations. These findings supported a strong connection between facilitating a dialogic loop and conservation of visitors as determinants for majority-dialogic organizations. The findings from this study suggested that Twitter, as a non-traditional outlet, poses ample opportunity for relationship building through dialogic communication.*

## I. Introduction

In the past five years, social media has evolved as a popular way of staying connected, voicing opinions, reaching out to others, and above all, developing both new and existing relationships. Now that organizations and corporations are using social media, it is important to evaluate how non-traditional media is being used, and with what effect. Specifically for nonprofit organizations, social media presents a myriad of opportunities for connecting with organizational publics, both internal and external. Notably, contact through social media is less expensive than traditional media, and may foster more mutually beneficial relationships as well. The present study seeks to investigate how nonprofit organizations are using Twitter to foster a dialogue between organizations and their publics, and what forms this dialogic communication takes.

Previous research has addressed topics very similar to the premise of the present study. Researchers have studied dialogic communication on the web, social media practices of nonprofit organizations in a variety of areas, and dialogic communication by for-profit corporations on Twitter. However, the use of dialogic tactics on Twitter by nonprofit organizations is a topic critical to the successful use of social media websites by nonprofits in the future. Thus, the present research investigates how nonprofits are making dialogic use of Twitter, and what the possibilities of social media can present for nonprofits in the future. Findings from this research can be used to evaluate which dialogic principles are most and least frequently used, as well as provide a basis for future research into the implications of dialogic communication on organizational publics.

## II. Literature Review

To understand dialogic communication, the author reviewed articles on this concept, importance of

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\* **Keywords:** social media, dialogic communication, nonprofit organization, Twitter, connection  
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connectivity, the power of twitters and their implication for nonprofit organizations.

### ***Understanding Dialogic Communication***

In contrast to traditional broadcast communication, which relies on a unidirectional relationship between sender and receiver, dialogic communication is based on relationship building. Before delving into the specifics of how relationships are built, it is first necessary to understand how relationships are defined. Broom, Casey and Ritchey (1997) explored this topic, and drew two major conclusions about what defines relationships:

Relationships are the dynamic results of the exchanges and reciprocity that manifest themselves as the relationships develop and evolve, but they can be described at a given point in time ... Relationship formation and maintenance represents a process of mutual adaptation and contingent responses. (p. 95)

It follows, then, that relationship building only occurs when there is some exchange between an organization and its publics. Numerous academics have defined and refined dialogic communication in recent years; however, Martin Buber is typically considered the pioneer of modern dialogic communication theory. According to Buber, dialogic communication is based on principles of reciprocity, mutuality, involvement and openness (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Meeting these principles requires recognition of an inextricable link between two bodies, and a mutual understanding of communication's purpose. Dialogue is not to be considered a means to an end; rather it is about collaboration and immediacy. Inherent in dialogic communication are skills from all parties including listening, contextualization of issues, finding common ground and consideration of long-term goals.

In its most basic form, dialogic communication is a communicative relationship based on two-way interaction. Going further, Kent and Taylor (1998) built upon relationship and dialogic communication theory by Broom, Casey, Ritchey, and Buber, and offer five principles of dialogic communication: 1. the dialogic loop, 2. usefulness of information, 3. generation of return visits, 4. ease of use/interface, and 5. conservation of visitors.

A dialogic loop is facilitated when one party involved in the communication invites the other(s) to engage, interact, act, or reply. (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001). This may be an invitation to a group chat, call to action, or question prompt. Some argue that even if all four other principles of dialogic communication are met, without facilitating a dialogic loop, there is no dialogic communication.

The second principle, usefulness of information, is evaluated by whether the content (either of the message, web page, tweet, email, etc.) is relevant to the organization, its goals, and the audience. This information can come in a variety of forms, including information about the organization itself, current news stories, annual reports, upcoming events, ways to help the organizations and more (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

Third is the generation of return visits principle. The same authors conclude that return visits are often generated through explicit invitations for users to return to the web page at a later date. Additionally, providing users with information that would deepen their knowledge about the organization is another method of generating return visits. The concept of propinquity theorizes that this is so because individuals are more likely to engage with organizations with which they share closeness and familiarity.

In previous research, the fourth principle of ease of use/interface has been used to evaluate web pages for multiple browser compatibility, speed of page loading, ease of navigability, availability of a site map, easily accessible home page (from other pages), making important links clearly identified, and having a website search box (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001). This principle is more applicable for evaluating web pages of unique origins, rather than information communicated through a single interface (as is the case with Twitter).

According to Taylor, Kent and White (2001), organizations should attempt to keep visitors on their websites as long as possible, which leads to the fifth principle, conservation of visitors. Recently, there has been a surge in organizational presence on social networking websites. These Facebook, Linked In, Twitter, etc. pages can be categorized as organizational websites, and therefore directing the audience to these social media pages conserves visitors in the same way directing them to the traditional organizational website would. The authors refer to conservation of visitors as "stickiness." Some ways of keeping visitors on organizational webpages is to have a variety of content available and linked to from other areas of the website so visitors do not need to leave the page to find relevant information. This can include embedding relevant news stories in the organizational website, including definitions, having event picture slideshows, links to video

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pages, and more.

Each of these principles contributes to the dialogic nature of organizations that use these methods in their communications. Dialogic theory, like many theories of interpersonal relations, indicates that using these principles facilitates a more meaningful connection between both parties than is created by less dynamic and interactive relationships. These principles will be operationalized based on their use in Twitter in the methods section. It's important to note that the existence of each of these elements leads to relationship development and ongoing connection between organizations and their publics, according to the theory of dialogic communication.

### ***The Importance of Connecting***

Given the connection possibilities through dialogic communication, there are numerous reasons why relationship building is becoming increasingly important. The changing face of corporate communications now allows organizations to engage by "being human through the computer," (Kanter, Fine & Zuckerberg, 2010, p. 62). This digital humanity is especially important when considering the outcomes when communication is generated from a relatable source. Research has found that individuals perceive a "conversational human voice" more from blogs than from non-blog web content (websites, etc.). Because a conversational tone is more human, and therefore more relatable than formal messages conveyed through traditional media, blogs and other social media that encourage a colloquial tone are becoming increasingly prevalent methods of communication. This finding supports blog use as a tool for organizations looking to develop meaningful relationships with their publics (Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

New non-traditional connections, such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook, etc. allow both organizations and individuals to share information, initiate conversations, express gratitude, educate and raise awareness, and ask people to donate or attend an event. According to Kanter, Fine and Zuckerberg (2010), "Social media powers social networks for social changes" (p. 9). This increased personalization of major organizations generates more support than if organizations were simply to ask for donations. Additionally, the engagement of organizations with their publics fosters a sense of reciprocity and connectedness between donors and their causes (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009). The fundamental outcome of organizations realizing and embracing this change in communication modes is an industrial shift from a broadcast paradigm to a dialogical one.

Further research has explored the main qualities that differentiate dialogic communications from traditional media modes. According to Kanter, Fine and Zuckerberg (2010), the hallmark of dialogic communication is immediate feedback. This is a quality traditional media cannot embody because it lacks channels that allow for fluid communication. However, Twitter allows ease of immediate feedback. For example, one tweet can spark a chain of reactions. First, potentially thousands of followers will see the tweet, and perhaps just a fraction of them will re-tweet the message to their followers. Maybe a few will click a link within the tweet to donate, and the more clicks the link receives, the higher it will appear on search engine result lists. These virtually instantaneous possibilities all add to the appeal of Twitter as a tool for more results-driven and instantaneous communication.

In addition to producing measurable results, Greenberg and MacAulay (2009) identified another important effect of connecting: the currency of trust. According to the authors, nonprofit organizations in particular operate under a currency of trust, that is, their worth is determined by how impactful and trustworthy their mission is. Therefore, it's important for nonprofits to shift from selective message dissemination to open conversation, resulting in increased transparency and greater attention to member engagement and dialogue. Boosting organizational transparency increases an organization's currency of trust, which is critical for relationship building between nonprofits and their publics.

### ***The Rise of the Twitter Empire***

With the surge in numerous social networking sites, what makes non-traditional media so crucial to the development of relationships? Essentially, social media is relevant now. Contrary to popular belief, the millennials (the generation born between 1978-1992) edge out the baby boomers as the highest populated generation. The millennials comprise almost the entire workforce under the age of 35. Unlike older generations, millennials have different (and arguably more volatile) habits when it comes to charity loyalty, engagement channels, media desires, and digital fluency. All of these tendencies necessitate organizational changes in communication style. To reach millennials, organizations need to be much more fluid and adaptive in their

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communication, because simply, traditional media is outdated for this generation (Kanter, Fine & Zuckerberg, 2010). Organizations have started to realize this, which has led to an increased dependence on social media as a primary communication channel for this generation.

Because of its openness as a communication forum, social networking websites like Twitter are the perfect outlet for previously unheard or ignored conversations. Whereas a private phone call to customer service can easily go unnoticed, Twitter provides a public channel for individuals to voice praises and concerns alike. Even criticism in the Twitter world is not without potential gains. Critics can be engaged so organizations become aware of opinions surrounding their image. Furthermore, when organizations refuse to acknowledge critics in public channels, they become a barrier to their own organizational growth and acceptance (Kanter, Fine & Zuckerberg, 2010).

Well before Twitter was even conceptualized, Clifford Christians explained the merits of the Internet as a whole: "It needs little specialized training to operate, is generally accessible to the public, conforms to the desires and purposes of users, and can become a true extension of human subjects," (as cited in Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 324). Christians' viewpoint provides an excellent summation for why Twitter has quickly become an extremely powerful communicative tool.

### ***Implications for Nonprofit Organizations***

A 2008 study found that more than 89% of the nation's 200 largest nonprofit organizations were using social media, higher than both academic institutions and corporations (Butcher, 2009). The explosion of Twitter use by nonprofit organizations is likely due to the realization of the value it holds, both economically and strategically (Butcher, 2009; Comm & Burge, 2009; Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009). Economist Thomas Friedman reasons that technology has made the world "flat"; accessibility to affordable technology has leveled the playing field between multi-billion dollar corporations, and organizations that rely on donors to survive (as cited in Miller, 2011). Free social networking sites like Twitter lower the transactional costs to organize and deliver information to publics. In return, followers can contribute to nonprofit growth more than just financially. By allowing dialogic exchanges, nonprofits become privy to publics' thoughts, beliefs, actions, attitudes, feedback and more (Comm & Burge, 2009).

One feature that makes Twitter a crucial tool for nonprofit organizations is transparency (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001). Through open dialogue, social media enables transparency and allows nonprofit organizations to participate in the most ethical form of public relations (Kanter, Fine & Zuckerberg, 2010). The authors describe three levels of transparency, in increasing levels of desirability: fortress, transactional, and transparent. Fortress types build strong walls that create a harsh distinction between internal and external publics. Transactional types are slightly less rigid, but these organizations make decisions based primarily on a cost-benefit analysis. Transparents have no wall between their internal and external publics. They behave like sponges; anchored with clear goals, yet easily allow information to flow in and out. By creating a "learning loop," nonprofits can develop their dialogic communication. This learning loop has the possibility to develop into engaging dialogue, return on investment, and ultimately enable actual social change.

The highest measurable goal of nonprofit organizations using Twitter is action-related results. Is Twitter effectively encouraging donations, volunteering, and other contributions? According to Comm and Burge (2009), recent statistics show that Twitter users are an ideal audience for nonprofits to communicate with. Among them, 14% are considered the "stable career" psychographic (young and ethnically diverse singles in large cities), while 12% are "young cosmopolitans" (40-somethings with a household income of greater than \$250,000). These are the precise publics nonprofit organizations need to interact with, and Twitter provides an outlet to do so. And although Twitter doesn't guarantee successful and ethical communications, it increases the likelihood that nonprofits and publics will better understand and respect each other; two qualities that build a platform for future dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Despite the apparent benefits of engaging in dialogic communication, previous research has consistently found that dialogical tools are underutilized (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009). A 2009 content analysis of environmental nonprofit organizations in Canada found less than 10% of websites in the sample included dialogic features such as live chats and discussion boards. Absent elements that foster the dialogic loop, these sites appear to be locked in a broadcast paradigm, despite the availability of new media technologies (Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2009). given as to why this may be the case. Interviews with American Red Cross employees revealed that board members are often barriers to new technology (Briones, Kuch, Liu & Jin, 2011), although statistics show that social networking website use by older adults

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nearly doubled from 22% to 42% in 2010 (Madden, 2010, as cited in Briones et al., 2011). These explanations support previous research by Taylor, Kent and White (2001), that while websites have mastered some of the five elements of dialogic communication (ease of use, providing information and conserving visitors), they continue to fail at other elements (generating return visits and enabling the dialogic loop).

Interestingly, while much of the previously discussed research was conducted before Twitter's existence, it offers predictions for future web-communications similar to the type of communication Twitter enables. Moreover, it seems that Twitter may eliminate or limit many of the barriers between traditional media channels and dialogic communications. Perhaps the dialogue-based interface of Twitter will bridge the gap between informing the public and mobilizing the public. Thus, the present research aims to explore the following research questions:

RQ1: Does Twitter alleviate the limitations of traditional websites to better foster dialogic communication?

RQ2: What tweeting practices are used by nonprofit organizations to foster dialogic communication with their audiences?

RQ3: How do the tweeting strategies of nonprofit organizations that employ high-dialogic tactics differ from those using low-dialogic approaches?

In addition to answering these questions, the present study expects to find evidence that will support the following hypothesis: the majority of tweets by US nonprofit organizations employ one or more principles of dialogic communication.

### **III. Method**

The present study conducted a content analysis to thematically catalogue tweets as they relate to the previously discussed principles of dialogic communications. Content analyses are reserved for studies investigating solely messages or channels, rather than outcomes and results.

The sample set for this study was taken from the 2010 Forbes list of the 200 largest US charities, sorted by amount of private support (in millions of dollars). The sample set (n=25) included the highest privately supported charities. From this list, Twitter accounts for the organizations were found either using the search function on Twitter, or through a link to a Twitter account found on the organization's website. Tweets were catalogued for these organizations with active accounts (n=19) from March 15-31, 2011. Twitter accounts were considered active if they had tweeted two or more times per week throughout the entire month of March. Tweets (n=1,612) were then coded based on the following definitions, as adapted from the coding schemes used by Kent, Taylor and White (2001) and Rybalko and Seltzer (2010):

#### **1. Dialogic Loop**

- a. Users are invited to respond, interact, or join a group discussion (either on Twitter or through another medium with the link to the external medium being provided through a tweet)
- b. Visitors are encouraged to contact an organizational representative
- c. Users are asked clear non-rhetorical questions or given the opportunity to fill out a survey or questionnaire
- d. Users are asked to post their own content (videos, pictures, stories, etc.)
- e. Tweets include replies to followers, specifically mention followers, or are responsive retweets of followers' tweets (e.g. "Yes, that is a great idea! RT @xyz I held a bake sale at my high school to raise money for your cause")

#### **2. Usefulness of information**

- a. Tweets include information about the organization (statements about philosophy and mission, information about how to contribute, how to become a member, information about recent events)
  - b. Information is helpful or informative for visitors
  - c. Retweets of relevant information from other Twitter users
-

### 3. Generation of return visits

- a. Users are invited to follow the organization's main Twitter account, or local affiliate Twitter accounts
- b. Visitors are explicitly asked to return to the Twitter page in the future
- c. Users are told about upcoming information that will be available either on the organizational Twitter or website

### 4. Conservation of visitors

Links are provided to the organizational webpage, or to the organization's other social media accounts (Facebook, Flickr, MySpace, Tumblr, etc.)

Note that the ease of use/interface principle has been omitted from the coding scheme as all Twitter accounts are essentially using the same platform, which eliminates the need to examine the interface, itself. In the case that tweets appeared to embody more than one dialogic principle, they were coded based on their dominant purposes/message.

## IV. Findings













Results from the content analysis yielded several interesting findings. As expected, all 19 nonprofit Twitter accounts engaged in dialogic communication in some manner, though not all accounts engaged dialogically in the majority of tweets. Of the 19 accounts coded, 13 accounts used two or more of the dialogic principles the majority of the time, while six accounts did not engage dialogically the majority of the time (regardless of how many dialogic principles were employed). Therefore, 2/3 of nonprofit organizations in the sample support the hypothesis. While there were six organizations that were low dialogic (the majority of tweets were non-dialogic), aggregate totals of all accounts do support the hypothesis. That is, of the top 25 earning U.S. nonprofit organizations that have a Twitter account, the majority of tweets from these accounts, when taken as a whole, are dialogic in nature. For clarity, organizations that tweeted dialogically the majority of the time will be referred to as high-dialogic organizations, whereas organizations that did not tweet dialogically the majority of the time will be referred to as low-dialogic organizations.

In total, the data show that 58.8% (n= 948) of all tweets met one or more dialogic principles. Of all tweets, 21.8% (n= 352) facilitated a dialogic loop, 10.0% (n= 162) communicated useful information, 3.4% (n= 55) attempted to generate return visits, and 23.5% (n= 379) conserved visitors through links to organization-affiliated websites. Therefore, based on aggregate totals, the hypothesis that the majority of tweets by nonprofit twitter organizations will employ dialogic principles is supported, although not every individual account supported the hypothesis.

The table on the next pages shows a sampling of how tweets were coded into the four different groups. The results show that use of dialogic principles tended to be very unbalanced. Organizations didn't tend to use all dialogic principles with the same frequency, but rather most organizations tended to favor one or two of the dialogic principles over the rest. Based on aggregate totals, the two most favored principles are conservation of visitors and dialogic loop. These principles combined account for 77.1% of all dialogic tweets, and 45.3% of all tweets, dialogic and non-dialogic combined.

The findings of the most frequently employed dialogic tactics both support and disprove previous research of dialogic communications. Past studies of dialogic communication on websites found that most websites failed to facilitate a dialogic loop. However, previous research also posited that both principles (conservation of visitors and dialogic loop) are necessary to build relationships. When organizations conserve visitors, they provide visitors with access to varied information through a variety of organizational channels (both traditional and non-traditional). In the current study, this included links to videos, blog entries, press releases, and accounts on various social media sites including YouTube, Facebook, Flickr, and Tumblr. Keeping visitors on the same organization's pages, even when they are through different social media, is important for conserving visitors. And similar to developing interpersonal relationships, the more information visitors can learn about nonprofit organizations, the greater the connection they can develop with that organization.

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Principle	Organization	Message
Dialogic loop	Boys and Girls Club	 <b>BGCA_Clubs</b> Boys & Girls Clubs The countdown has begun! Who else is jumping to help break the Guinness World Record for most consecutive jumping jacks? 22 Mar
	Nature Conservancy	 <b>nature_org</b> Nature Conservancy Write a review for nature! Give us feedback on our conservation work and tell us why you support our planet <a href="http://nature.ly/i2nfRD">http://nature.ly/i2nfRD</a> 31 Mar
	Care USA	 <b>CARE</b> CAREUSA (care.org) @Bippiesworld Thanks for spreading the word! 30 Mar ☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply
Useful information	Gifts in Kind	 <b>GiftsInKind</b> Gifts In Kind Now when you buy @BabyCodes you're giving diapers through the "Changing Diapers, Changing Lives" campaign! <a href="http://ow.ly/4fC87">http://ow.ly/4fC87</a> 16 Mar
	Care USA	 <b>CARE</b> CAREUSA (care.org) RT @weareFullCircle Help us raise 1 Mil 4 @CARE - purchase coffee & chocolate. Will donate 100% of purchase bk 2 @CARE <a href="http://bit.ly/etgOPg">http://bit.ly/etgOPg</a> 31 Mar
	Boys and Girls Club	 <b>BGCA_Clubs</b> Boys & Girls Clubs Celebrate #BGCWeek11 & support Clubs: @H&M shoppers can donate to @BGCA_Clubs with each purchase 'til April 13. Shop & donate! 25 Mar
Generation of return visits	Habitat for Humanity	 <b>Habitat_org</b> Habitat for Humanity TWITTER PARTY CELEBRATING VOLUNTEERISM: 3/28 @ 8:00! Follow #POLTribute hashtag & watch 'All Together Now' on NBC! #Inspiration 28 Mar ☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply
	American Heart Association	 <b>AmHeartAdvocacy</b> AHA Advocacy News RT @RWJF: Don't miss @RWJF's Twitter chat today w @Risalavizzo. Find your county's ranking the follow #healthrankings for the Q&A at 2pm ET. 30 Mar
	Map International	 <b>mapintl</b> MAP International Voting for the Community Heroes begins in two days: March 19-April 10. Follow @WashingtonCha, @InaRawati, @SusanNalepo. <a href="http://bit.ly/f8HGD6">http://bit.ly/f8HGD6</a> 17 Mar
Conservation of visitors	Nature Conservancy	 <b>nature_org</b> Nature Conservancy Nature Video of the Week: Third-grader Explains Nature's Role in Providing Clean Water <a href="http://nature.ly/hMJs13">http://nature.ly/hMJs13</a> 21 Mar
	UNICEF	 <b>UNICEF</b> UNICEF Please welcome UNICEF's newest Goodwill Ambassador...actor Liam Neeson - <a href="http://bit.ly/evWxCE">http://bit.ly/evWxCE</a> #LiamNeeson 29 Mar ☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply
	American Heart Association	 <b>AmHeartAdvocacy</b> AHA Advocacy News You don't have to be a doctor to save lives, just a You're the Cure advocate. Sign up & action! <a href="http://www.yourethecure.org">www.yourethecure.org</a> 29 Mar

Additionally, while some of these channels are traditional (such as video updates and press releases), they often still allow visitors a dialogic outlet, either through commenting on the feature, options to re-tweet the link, or share it with friends on Facebook.



Arguably the most important dialogic principle for organizations to use is facilitating a dialogic loop. Even if all of the other dialogic principles are used, without creating a dialogic loop, organizations fail to explicitly welcome interaction and engagement. While previous research found that organizations were consistently underutilizing dialogic communication, the present findings suggest otherwise. Dialogic loop tweets accounted for 37.1% of all dialogic principle tweets, and 21.8% of total tweets. While this does leave room for improvement, more than one out of every three dialogic tweets, and one out of every five tweets overall, are explicit invitations to interact, or recognition of previous interaction.

Some organizations, such as Operation Blessing, proved to be particularly vigilant about facilitating a dialogic loop, and also at facilitating dialogic communications in general. Of Operation Blessing's 154 tweets during the sampling period, 92% (n= 142) embodied one of the four dialogic principles. The dialogic loop was facilitated in 56% of all dialogic principle tweets, and in 52% of tweets overall. Within a two-day period (March 15-16), Operation Blessing tweeted 24 individual thank yous to Twitter users who had re-tweeted one of their posts about the recent earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Included were tweets such as "@Operationbless: @gangjen Thank you for RT-ing our text-to-give information to help disaster victims. Japan is in our prayers! #EQJP" and "@Operationbless: @dmquinn Thank you so much for support and sharing us with your followers! We will keep the updates coming and continue praying! #EQJP." The dialogic loop demands personalization and actual interaction, which is exactly what these tweets communicate. This connection with users, on behalf of the organization, facilitates a bond between organization and Twitter followers and strengthens their relationship. In addition to fostering a dialogic loop, the above tweet also encourages return visits ("We will keep the updates coming"), which is another dialogic tactic to build and maintain relationships.

The sample also showed numerous other practices employed by organizations in order to foster a dialogic loop. Tweets coded as facilitating a dialogic loop served many purposes, including encouraging job applications ("@WorldVisionUSA: We love our interns, hope you apply :) RT @KimmayAnn: I'm looking at internships for @WorldVisionUSA this summer. That would be a dream..."), inviting participation ("@FeedingAmerica: If you are watching webcast, send us your questions to @FeedingAmerica #MealGap"), informing users how to participate in Twitter conversations ("@FeedingAmerica: @JacksonInvolved Thanks for the mention- and just wanted you to know that there is a hashtag to follow along #MealGap"), asking users questions ("@StJude: What is your favorite @StJude program to raise funds for online? Math-A-Thon, Saddle Up, St. Jude Heroes, etc?"), prompting users to post multimedia ("@GoodwillIntl: Clean out your drawers and upload a photo for a chance to win a grand prize of \$2500. Final week!"), and more. This diverse array of tweets, which all facilitate engagement and the dialogic loop, provide support for the claim that Twitter alleviates the limitations of traditional media in terms of fostering dialogic communication. Because the Twitter interface makes engagement more accessible than traditional media, organizations are frequently using Twitter to create a dialogue with their followers, and vice versa.

Interestingly, the least-used dialogic principle is generation of return visits, which accounted for only 5.8% of dialogic tweets and 3.4% of total tweets. None of the 19 Twitter accounts in the sample dedicated more than 11% of their tweets to generating return visitors; 11 of the 19 organizations had  $\leq 2$  tweets coded as generating return visits. This is consistent with the findings of previous research, which indicated that websites failed to frequently encourage return visits. Ostensibly, this finding isn't very remarkable, because if individuals are already following the Twitter account, then they don't need to be reminded to return to the account page as it will automatically show up in their home Twitter feed. However, considering the time frame of the sample began just four days after the Japanese earthquake and tsunami (March 11, 2011), it is surprising that more of the relief organizations did not try to generate return visits at a higher frequency. Especially after a large national disaster, it seems crucial for the support of these organizations that visitors are constantly getting updates about future organizational efforts. Previous research indicates that frequent prompts of return visits are important to the development of relationships between organizations and publics, which are especially critical in times of great need. Taking this outcome into account, organizations looking to develop relationships with their publics, particularly in times of great need, should more frequently attempt to generate return visits from Twitter followers.

Regardless of type and frequency of dialogic interaction, the aggregate data demonstrates that organizations are cognizant of the need for transparency. Recalling the three levels of corporate transparency, organizations without Twitter, and that fail to start dialogue with their publics are like fortresses. These high walls don't foster relationships or closeness between an organization and its publics. Low-dialogic organizations are more transactional. This is evidence by their attempted use of communication; however, they fail to use Twit-

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ter to its full dialogic potential. High-dialogic organizations demonstrate what Kanter, Fine, and Zuckerberg (2010) deemed the highest organizational quality: transparency. By creating open and active communication channels, these transparent high-dialogic organizations are creating the closest relationship between themselves and their publics.

The present study was also guided by an attempt to understand the differences between organizations that tweet dialogically the majority of the time, compared to those that do not. An overview of the six organizations whose Twitter habits did not support the hypothesis shows no overt similarities. The organizations include medical causes, an environmental organization, and a youth nonprofit, and others. There is no trend, in which one type of nonprofit organizations tweeted dialogically less frequently than other types, or in which these organizations do employ particular dialogic principles. Notably, however, these organizations do attempt to facilitate a dialogic loop in an average of 21.6% of all tweets (when combining data from all six accounts). This is nearly identical to the frequency of facilitating a dialogic loop across all accounts in the sample (21.8%). This leads to a few preliminary conclusions about the trends of the organizations that do not employ dialogic principles in the majority of tweets. These organizations facilitate a dialogic loop nearly the same amount of time as majority dialogic organizations. Therefore, the reason some organizations do not employ dialogic principles in the majority of tweets is *not* because they fail to foster a dialogic loop, but rather that they fail to use the other three dialogic principles (usefulness of information, generation return visits, conservation visitors) at the same frequency as majority dialogic-tweeting organizations. The largest difference between majority dialogic and majority non-dialogic organizations is in the frequency of tweets coded as conserving visitors. For majority dialogic nonprofits, 31.7% of all tweets were coded for conservation of visitors, compared to only 8.0% of all tweets from majority non-dialogic organizations. Thus the reason that six of the organizations in the sample did not tweet dialogically the majority of the time is because they did not devote enough of their tweets to conservation of visitors. To improve dialogic communication these organizations don't necessarily need to invite more interaction; instead, they ought to focus on tweets that will conserve visitors.

## V. Conclusion

The research leading up to the present study provided many suggestions for organizations to become more dialogically engaged with their publics. Researchers proposed that the organizations be more vigilant about facilitating a dialogic loop, and giving the audience reason and opportunity to interact. Interestingly, the majority of the research surrounding dialogic communications was conducted prior to the availability of Twitter, which is why the present study suggested that the Twitter interface would alleviate limitations to dialogic communication that are present in traditional media. The findings from the present study support this theory, as well as the hypothesis that nonprofit organizations specifically employ dialogic principles in the majority of tweets.

Findings from this research indicate that not only do the majority of tweets from nonprofit organizations employ dialogic principles, but that two principles in particular are present the most often: facilitation of dialogic loop and conservation of visitors. These findings provide support for prior research suggestions that familiarity and closeness with an organization over time (conservation of visitors) are critical for dialogic engagement (facilitation of the dialogic loop). Additionally, these findings also explain the trend among low-dialogic organizations. While these low-dialogic organizations *do* follow majority-dialogic organization trends in frequency of facilitating the dialogic loop, the findings showed that low-dialogic organizations fail to conserve visitors at the same frequency as high-dialogic organizations.

Findings from this study can be used to encourage even greater dialogic interaction in the future among nonprofit organizations on Twitter. Earlier findings suggested that a frequent barrier to social media use is that often older organizational board members fail to see the value in social media. While the present findings do not enable any cause-effect relationship to be determined, they do add foundation to the belief that Twitter can be (and often is) used to foster non-traditional relationships. Future research into the impact of these relationships on public attitudes and behaviors would provide even greater insight into the results-oriented social media perspective. Conducting a survey of highly engaged high-dialogic organizations, as compared to non-engaged low-dialogic organizations would deepen the knowledge of how interaction through non-traditional media actually impacts publics. Additional research into this area would also shed light on whether non-traditional relationship building and maintenance has the same positive outcomes as interper-

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sonal relationship building, and whether social media results in the same outcome as traditional media communication.

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# Friends Who Give: Relationship-Building and Other Uses of Social Networking Tools by Nonprofit Organizations

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## Abstract

*Social networking is now the most popular activity on the Web (Qualman, 2009), with Facebook alone now having member numbers in excess of 500 million (Facebook, 2009). Social networking represents a major opportunity for corporations and nonprofit organizations to gain access to massive audiences with a medium that is essentially free and user-friendly. This research focused on how nonprofit organizations are currently using social networking tools, with a particular interest in how they use social networking as a relationship-building tool to create and maintain relationships and communication with volunteers, donors and other interested parties.*

## I. Introduction

Since the advent of the Internet, there has been exponential growth in the number of people using the Internet as well as uses of the Internet, including new marketing and communications uses that have arrived on the scene in unprecedented numbers and variety in a very short period of time (Ko, et al, 2005). Social networking is one of the platforms that have taken the marketing and communications world by storm.

Businesses and nonprofits are beginning to view social networking platforms as mediums to reach their key audiences and constituents in new ways because the number of users on social networking sites has been and continues to climb exponentially, especially since the founding of Facebook in February of 2004 (Facebook, 2009). In fact, social networking had already overtaken pornography as the most popular activity on the Web in 2009 (Qualman, 2009). Social networking is defined by Boyd and Ellison (2007) as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (pg. 1). Commonly used social networking platforms include Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Foursquare and LinkedIn.

The amount of brand-centered dialogue occurring on the Internet is substantial. According to current research, 34 percent of the 200 million bloggers on the Web post opinions about products and brands and 54 percent of bloggers post or tweet on a daily basis (Qualman, 2009). With large numbers of people talking at once in virtual environments, this amounts to a significant number of opinion posts that will be seen by a social network. In fact, 25 percent of search results for the World’s Top 20 largest brands are hyperlinks to user-generated content (Qualman, 2009). Companies cannot control the conversations happening on these sites, but they can influence them by getting involved and providing these people with updates and corrections or clarifications to existing information. They can also use the information as research or feedback that

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is unsolicited, honest, and comes free of charge (Safko & Brake, 2009).

Due to these statistics and the potential of reaching large audiences, nonprofit companies have jumped at the opportunity to access potential and current donors and volunteers through social networking, particularly since social networking is an efficient option for those nonprofits with low communications and marketing budgets.

This research will examine how nonprofits are currently using Facebook, Twitter and blogs for marketing and communications, with a particular emphasis on how they are using these platforms as relationship-building and dialogic tools. The results will be examined through a theoretical lens by using Grunig's (1992) two-way symmetric communications theory and Grunig's Excellence Theory.

## **II. Literature Review**

### ***Theoretical Framework***

The potential for more open lines of communication between companies and users of social networking sites follows some of the tenets of Grunig's (1992) two-way symmetric model of public relations. According to Grunig's Excellence Model, excellent public relations uses the two-way symmetric model, as opposed to Grunig's three other public relations models: the two-way asymmetric model, press agency, or public information models (Grunig, 1984). This two-way symmetric model is thought to be superior to the other three because it balances the needs of both the organizations and its publics, is based on research, and manages conflict through communication (Botan & Hazleton, 2006). Because the two-way symmetric model is balanced in its goals and uses two-way communication, it has been shown to be more effective than the other three models (Grunig, 1984).

Grunig's models have significance to this study in that "the Internet with its technical characteristics is the only medium which allows the application of all four models of public relations proposed by Grunig and Hunt" (Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009, p. 67). This specifically applies to this research in that it explores Internet usage through social networking, and therefore the research will look at some of these models.

Grunig's (1992) study of companies found that excellent organizations stay close to their customers, employees, and other constituencies. This has led to Grunig's Excellence Model, which maintains that the two-way symmetric communication model is superior to the other three. It is important to keep in mind that Grunig's Excellence Model has received scholarly criticism for leaving out important considerations (Grunig, 1992). In response to such criticism, a contingency view of Grunig's four models was developed to suggest that it cannot be assumed that the two-way symmetric model is always the best choice, and that no one approach works under all conditions. Several factors determine which model should be followed, including the type of organization, the current state of the environment, and the issues at hand (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

### ***Social Networking by Nonprofits***

Corporations have received a lot of attention recently for their use of social media, particularly companies that are considered social media superstars for their effective and creative uses of social media, such as Southwest Airlines and Zappos (Weber, 2009). However, the opportunity for social networking success is not limited to for-profit companies exclusively. Nonprofits can reap the same benefits, especially in how they can position themselves in a positive light in this new environment. Drawing on literature related to impression management (White & Peloza, 2009), social networking allows companies (both for-profit and nonprofit) the ability to create, maintain, and extend their position within these sites that connect potentially millions of people to one another at little to no cost. It is logical for nonprofits to join social networking because users may look for ways to join a cause through social networking itself. A nonprofit with a popular Facebook page or Twitter account may be the first place they look at. Similar to the effect of Web sites, social networking sites give legitimacy to the agency and the cause supported by it.

Social networking also allows individuals to be recognized by others for their good deeds. Several studies have found that recognition plays a significant role in why individuals volunteer and donate to nonprofits. Researchers have found that people are more likely to volunteer or donate to an organization when they know they will be recognized for their service (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998). Fisher and Ackerman's two-part

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experiment used a laboratory study of a random sample of college students who analyzed how effective several posters were in recruiting volunteers, while varying the amount of recognition publicized by the posters. The second part of the study was a field experiment asking for volunteers to run a soccer festival, with varying amounts of recognition available. In both experiments, recognition level and group need were manipulated, to conclude that “recognition publicly communicates the group’s respect for those who support the group, and thereby raises the recipient’s status and prestige,” thereby motivating people to volunteer or donate (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998).

However, the verdict is still out on how well nonprofits are using social networking. In a study conducted by Waters, Burnett, Lamm and Lucas (2009) using a content analysis of 275 randomly sampled nonprofit organizations’ Facebook profiles found that most Facebook profiles were not using the social networking platform to its fullest potential. Most were lacking in particular areas, including multimedia use, direct contact with “friends,” distributing organizational news and publicizing public relations efforts, and had outdated and stagnant pages (Waters, et al., 2009).

The weaknesses in making direct contact with “friends” are of particular concern for nonprofits. Creating Facebook pages gives nonprofits a way to directly connect with current and potential volunteers and donors, gives social networking users the recognition they deserve and crave, and motivates these people to continue their efforts. However, Waters, Burnett, Lamm and Lucas’ (2009) study showed that for the vast majority of nonprofits, direct contact on Facebook consisted only of providing a contact e-mail address (Waters, et al., 2009). If direct contact were increased, this potential for relationship building, including recognizing the followers of Facebook pages on the sites themselves or through wall posts on the individuals’ walls or commenting on posts, could make social networking a powerful awareness building, volunteer recruitment, and fundraising tool for nonprofits.

A similar study by Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009) found the same problem of nonprofits not using social networking sites to their full capabilities. This study looked at the Web sites of 134 Swiss nonprofit organizations. The findings showed that generally nonprofits were not using the Web to its full potential for creating dialogue. Significantly, though, the data showed that the nonprofits seemed to “acknowledge the importance of engaging publics in dialogue,” (Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009, p. 66), but had yet to find a proper way of carrying out these goals of creating dialogue, and were using their Web sites for news sharing or promotions.

A 2009 study conducted by Bortree and Seltzer looked at 50 Facebook profiles made and used by environmental advocacy groups and coded them for their use of dialogue and dialogue promotion (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009). They looked for activity on the sites, the amount of followers they had, use of applications, donation applications and other content categories to assess how well these advocacy groups were using their social networking Facebook pages to create and maintain dialogue. Similar to the Waters, Burnett, Lamm and Lucas (2009) study, Bortree and Seltzer found: “Most of the advocacy organizations in our study seem to adopt the position that the mere creation of an interactive space via a social networking profile is sufficient for facilitating dialogue ... advocacy groups are not taking advantage of the dialogic strategies afforded by social networking” (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009, p. 319). It was concluded that these advocacy groups were not seizing the opportunity to build relationships using the convenient dialogic tools available on Facebook such as discussion boards and walls used for posting information or comments (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009).

Among the first published research to look at how organizations use the Internet for dialogic purposes was an article written by Kent and Taylor (1998). They define dialogic communication as meaningful communication between publics and organizations, which goes beyond quick feedback into conversation. Their research posits that organizations are not currently using the World Wide Web to its full potential for creating and maintaining dialogue and building relationships: “For all of its public relations potential, the World Wide Web still remains underutilized by many organizations and underexamined by scholars as a tool for building organizational-public relationships” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 322). In this article, they call for research in this area, which this paper answers in part by analyzing the current uses of social networking for dialogic purposes and for relationship building.

Greenberg and MacAulay (2009) looked specifically at the use of Facebook, Twitter, RSS feeds, and blogs, as well as other Internet activities by 43 environmental nonprofit organizations in Canada in another study. Greenberg and MacAulay were interested in seeing if nonprofits were using a broadcast paradigm, which they defined as using their Internet platforms to disseminate information, or a dialogical paradigm, which they defined as using their Internet platforms to create engagement and relationships. The findings from this study reiterate the findings of the above studies but through analyses of the 43 nonprofits’ social me-

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dia sites, concluding that these nonprofits were not leveraging the full potential of these Web-based platforms to create and maintain dialogue. The researchers do note that there are some notable exceptions to this rule, and that nonprofits are increasingly starting to get creative and innovative with the new public relations technologies and finding significant success, but that the sample they used did not demonstrate this (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009).

The degree to which nonprofits are able to utilize their online platforms for dialogic purposes (meaning that the use of the sites is to create, maintain and participate in dialogue with publics), contrary to the idea that social networking is free of cost, may be affected by budgetary factors. Kang and Norton (2004) looked at public relations on the Internet, and hypothesized that the Internet would level the playing field for nonprofits with varying budgets by providing an inexpensive way of creating dialogue.

Conversely, a study done by Goatman and Lewis (2007) showed that nonprofits in the U.K. with higher fundraising rates used their Web sites more as a communication tool than did U.K. nonprofits with lower fundraising rates. Along these same lines, Greenberg and MacAulay (2009) posit that "Dialogue does not emerge from thin air, but must be created, fostered, and nurtured – dialogue is time consuming and given its indeterminate nature can also potentially undermine the strategic imperatives of organizational communication" (p. 67). This shows the time and resources necessary to reach the dialogic potential held in social networking platforms, which may be a challenge for nonprofits with limited budgets and people resources.

### III. Methodology

#### ***Multiple Case Study***

To address the research questions, a multiple case study (Stake, 1995) was conducted. This case study examined a convenience sample of nonprofits that are active in social networking. These organizations were chosen based on personal contacts with employees who work on the social networking plans for these organizations and because these contacts were necessary in order to be able to get an inside perspective on the social networking strategies they employ. The organizations examined and contacts for each examined were:

- Autism Speaks, the largest autism science and advocacy organization in the United States – Michelle Preslar, Executive Director – Greater Charlotte; and Jennifer Parsons, Social Marketing Manager
- Christel House International provides impoverished children with education, nutrition, health care and a nurturing environment through several schools around the world - Nathan Hand, Senior Development Associate
- OE Enterprises is a nonprofit that works to place disabled individuals and others facing employment barriers in to jobs – Joe Bumgarner, Program Services Manager
- UNC Health Care is a nonprofit, integrated health care system associated with the State of North Carolina – Tom Hughes, Managing Editor

In order to examine these nonprofits' use of social networking, the researcher used a multiple, two-part case study. Part one consisted of interviews with employees at the selected nonprofits who take part in or are wholly responsible for the social networking platforms used. Part two consisted of a qualitative content analysis (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009) of the social networking platforms themselves, including the nonprofits' Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, and blog pages where available.

#### **Part I: Interviews**

A series of interviews were conducted with nonprofit leaders who have created social networking plans for the nonprofit they work for. The seven stages of an interview investigation outlined by Kvale (1996) were followed as a basis for this phase of the research. These stages are: *Thematizing* - develop a purpose of the investigation and describe the topic of conversation; *Designing* - plan the study; *Interviewing* - conduct the interviews based on a prepared guide; *Transcribing* - prepare a transcription of the oral speech for analysis; *Analyzing* - use the material to draw conclusions; *Verifying* - calculate the generalizability, reliability and validity of the findings; *Reporting* - communicate your findings.

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One interview was conducted with each organization, with the exception of Autism Speaks. Two interviews were conducted with two separate employees from Autism Speaks to get both a national and a local perspective from the Charlotte, North Carolina branch from the organization. These interviews were each 30 minutes to one hour in length. An informal, but structured conversation was maintained in the interviews. Each person interviewed was initially sent a set of questions via e-mail, which included topics such as how and why the organization started using social networking, current goals and objectives for the social networking use, challenges and obstacles of social networking, and the level of interaction and use of recognition by the companies on the social networking sites. A full set of questions can be found in Appendix C. These questions were used as a starting point. It was important to have a general idea of the types of information I wanted to receive in order to give the interview a more formal direction and purpose. From there, the participants were able to discuss any issue they deemed relevant to the research and the conversation, and additional questions were asked as appropriate.

The transcribed data was then analyzed using the constant comparison method (Dye et al., 2000), as well as possible quantification of the data where possible (Kvale, 1996). The constant comparison method is used to group answers from interviews, compare answers and categories, and to analyze the data from different perspectives (Dye et al, 2000).

According to Glaser and Strauss (cited in Dye et al, 2000), there are four stages of the constant comparison method: comparing incidents applicable to each category; integrating categories and their properties; determining the theory; writing the theory.

The constant comparison method essentially says that categories emerge from looking at the data, and that categories will undergo continuous change and refinement as the data is further analyzed and categorized. A crucial element of the constant comparison method is that as data is analyzed in the context of category, it is also compared across categories for a deep analysis of the data (Dye et al, 2000).

For this research, the constant comparative method was used for the interview, and the final categories includes such topics as motivations for using social networking, how the social networking was launched, whether there was a plan for social networking, which social networking platforms were used, who maintained the sites, interaction, recognition, goals of social networking use, obstacles, effectiveness, and lessons learned.

## **Part II: Qualitative Content Analysis**

The second part of the study examined how these organizations are using social networking sites through a qualitative content analysis. Hsieh and Shannon define qualitative content analysis as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through a systematic classifications process ... identifying themes or patterns” (as cited in Zhang & Wildermuth, n.d., p. 1). Qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to hand pick subjects of study, as opposed to random sampling used in most quantitative data analysis (Zhang & Wildermuth, n.d). Mayring (2000) defines this process by saying: “Qualitative content analysis defines itself ... [as] following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification” (2000, p. 2).

According to Altheide (n.d.), the creator of qualitative content analysis, the basic steps in this process are to pursue a problem to be investigated; become familiar with the process and context of information sources, and explore sources of information; familiarize yourself with relevant documents; list several variables to guide the data collection; test the protocol created based on these variables; revise the protocol and select several additional cases to further refine the protocol (Altheide, n.d.).

Because there is currently limited research in this field and the social networking platforms are constantly changing and being updated, this research took mainly an exploratory content analysis approach. The researcher looked to gain a depth of knowledge into how nonprofits are using social networking tools through qualitative content analysis, as opposed to a breadth of knowledge of more shallow types of data that can be gained through quantitative data gathering (Altheide, n.d.).

According to Carpenter (1998), qualitative content analyses are meant to focus on meaning, and the results show subtle, thematic data. Qualitative content analyses are very interactive, with the investigator constantly interacting with the data, with concepts, with theory, and with analysis (Carpenter, 1998). In this way, the processes used to analyze the data are adjusted and manipulated throughout the analysis process as new themes emerge and become significant (Mayring, 2000).

As a follow-up to the study done by Waters, Burnett, Lamm and Lucas (2009), and in following the

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steps defined by Altheide (n.d.), the researcher looked at how the nonprofits use social networking sites to interact with volunteers and donors, how often they post, how they position themselves on these platforms, and the participation they receive from users in return.

For this content analysis, the social networking platforms of Facebook, Twitter and blogs were used from each organization, where available.\*\* Two non-consecutive weeks were chosen at random, and were used to collect data from each of the three social networking platforms from all four nonprofits. The weeks chosen were December 1 (12:00 a.m.) to December 7 (11:59 p.m.), 2010, and January 12 (starting at 12:00 a.m.) to January 18 (11:59 p.m.), 2011. All posts made by the organization were collected, as well as comments made by other users. For each platform, an effort was made to collect comments by those who “follow” or “like” the pages, which is possible for Facebook and the blog because the comments are collected and grouped together by the platforms themselves. Twitter, on the other hand, is a bit more complicated in this manner. On Twitter, users comment to the nonprofit by making a post on their personal pages using the @ symbol (i.e. @UNC\_Health\_Care). These messages go directly to the nonprofits, but only the nonprofits’ social media employees have access to these pages. As a result, the only comments that could be collected accurately that were made to the nonprofits were the ones they responded to, as those show up on the nonprofit public twitter feed page. This missing data is a weakness in this research and also of the platform of Twitter itself. When new tools are created to remedy this problem, future research will be able to look at all comments made by users on Twitter.

Categories for analyzing the collected data were made using a mix of both inductive category development and deductive category application, as defined by Mayring (2000). Inductive category development “has few answers to the question from where the categories come, how the system of categories is developed” (Mayring, 2000, p. 3). The categories are developed by those who are closest to the material, in this case researchers, who have been able to look at the data and decide what categories should be used in order to analyze it. Then, as the data is being analyzed, the categories are further developed and changed as more themes emerge or categories are deemed irrelevant to the research questions, using feedback loops (Mayring, 2000).

## **IV. Findings**

### ***Part I: Interviews***

The five interviews conducted over the course of this study shed light on the inner working and strategies of those in charge of the social networking for each of the four nonprofits: Autism Speaks, Christel House International, OE Enterprises, and UNC Healthcare. These nonprofits varied in size, scope, mission, and social networking uses, which made for varied answers and perspectives to the interview questions. Still, despite the variety, themes did emerge from the interviews.

The interviews showed that the main motivation for using social networking among the nonprofits was the desire to not be left behind, and they saw that their competitors were taking part in social networking. Autism Speaks had a more specific reason in that most of their donations from supporters were received online, so moving into the social networking world was a natural step.

The varying amounts of social networking use, found in the content analysis, can be linked to the different resources used by each company. Autism Speaks, for instance, has an entire department devoted to its social networking efforts. OE Enterprises stood on the other end of the spectrum by relying solely on local university student volunteers to maintain its Facebook page.

Another theme that emerged was a lack of a plan on the outset of social networking. All of the organization responded that initially they did not have a strategic communication plan, and had simply jumped in. Eventually, they have created goals, which include garnering awareness for their causes and raising money. Autism Speaks said, “We raise both money and awareness through our social marketing channels, [so we are] always aiming to raise more money and increase engagement” (personal communications, 2010).

#### **Interaction and Dialogue**

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\*\* OE Enterprises only has a Facebook; the other three organizations participate in some manner using all three platforms listed.



A major section of social networking that this project addresses is interaction with users. As previously addressed, it was expressed that the organization work to respond to complaints or issues brought up on Facebook, but some of the nonprofits go beyond that. Parsons of Autism Speaks reported interaction with donors “on a daily basis. We are always looking to re-post what they post and conversely, to see what they re-post of ours” (personal communication, 2010). Her colleague, Preslar, added “with Autism, families and volunteers and contributors are very passionate. We use [our social networking platforms] as open forums for people to discuss, and put info out there” (personal communication, 2010).

Christel House International suggested that they do interact with users, but on a much less active level. “We don’t respond to every comment, unless it needs it. I try to encourage or go around the back end and message the person and say ‘Hey, I do social networking for Christel House, thanks for commenting on our site.’ We’ve only had a couple instances where we’ve really started a conversation” (personal communication, 2010). UNC Health Care, on the other hand, said that they mostly use their social networking platforms for news sharing, and therefore have little to no interaction with users. OE Enterprises said, “We haven’t yet [interacted with users on Facebook], but we plan to start doing that. For now it’s mostly a news and update center, but it is in the plans” (personal communication, 2010).

Along the same lines, the nonprofits also discussed if and how they use their social networking platforms to recognize donors and volunteers. Preslar says she uses social networking in “as many ways as I can recognize people, because obviously that’s the cheapest way to communicate for us” (personal communication, 2010). Parsons added, “We share donors stories and volunteer stories on our blog. In turn, these blog posts are promoted on Facebook and Twitter. I think it offers recognition to those who respond to that type of reinforcement. It also shows people who have not yet gotten involved, the many ways they can be” (personal communication, 2010).

Just as Christel House International interacted on a less active level, they also recognize less. “We try to [recognize donors] once in a while, we’re starting to do more, or at least I want to” (personal communication, 2010). UNC Health Care does not use social networking for recognizing volunteers and donors; OE Enterprises said they also do not, but that they would like to in the future.

## ***Part II: Qualitative Content Analysis***

The content analysis analyzed two weeks of data from the social networking sites of each of the four organizations over the course of two nonconsecutive weeks. The data coded for categories related both related to interaction and not related to interaction, and coded both posts by the organization and posts by the users. The final categories can be found in Appendix A.

### **Overall Social Networking Use**

The overall use of social networking by the organizations is reflected in tables A, B, C, and D (found in Appendix B). As these tables demonstrate, the organizations had varying amounts of activity throughout the two weeks examined. Autism Speaks had far more activity by both users and the organizations than the other nonprofits examined, which is likely a reflection of the fact that they have the most people resources working on social networking compared to the other nonprofits. On the other end of the spectrum, OE Enterprises did not have any activity throughout the two weeks, which is significant in that it reflects their lack of resources and perhaps familiarity with and knowledge of social networking.

When looking at the posts by organizations, Table A shows that the most common category used was respond to other user followed by promotion/sweepstakes/events. The least common category was response to problem followed by tips/advice/words of wisdom and retweet. The reason retweet, which happens when an organization reposts a tweet by another user on its own page, is not common may be because it is only possible on the Twitter platform, not on Facebook or the blogs, which means this data is diluted when totaled with the data from Facebook and the blogs.

Table C shows the posts made by the users of the social networking sites. The most commonly used category was tips/advice/words of wisdom followed by share story/personal information and praise/agreement with organization. The fact that praise/agreement with organization falls in the top three categories shows that the users of these social networking pages appreciate the work and uses of social networking by the nonprofits examined. The other two categories, tips/advice/words of wisdom and share story/personal information shows that the users like to use these sites to talk about their personal experiences and the reasons that they feel personally close to the issues addressed by the nonprofits.

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The least common categories were criticize other users and report problems/resolutions of problems. The fact that these were the least common categories was a positive reflection on the nonprofits' use of social media, showing that negative feedback was uncommon.

### **Autism Speaks**

Autism Speaks had far more activity than the other nonprofits. Overall, the top category for posts fell into the respond to other user as shown on tables E and F in Appendix B. This is significant in that this category involves interaction and dialogue with other users. The fact that it is the top category shows that Autism Speaks interacts with users more often than they post information themselves, which makes the Autism Speaks social networking sites sources of dialogue and interaction instead of news sharing sites. Autism Speaks shows that they are listening to users and monitoring the sites frequently, and are able to spend the time to respond to users.

Users of the Autism Speaks sites were very interactive, with users commenting or posting on Facebook 2,327 times over the two weeks, and 32 times on the blog. Comments and posts on Twitter cannot be monitored. Users also "liked" posts by the organization 2,313 times. This activity is quite high in comparison with the other organizations. The most common posts made by the users fell into the categories of share story/personal information and praise/agreement with organization. This shows that the users tend to use the sites to discuss their personal connection to the issues addressed by Autism Speaks, and also shows that they appreciate the way that Autism Speaks is using social networking.

### **UNC Health Care**

The data shows that UNC Health Care, overall, mainly used social networking as a news sharing service. It was the most common category for all three social networking platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and the blog). Categories that reflect interaction, such as respond to other user, request feedback/solicit information, and retweet are far less common, as shown in tables G and H.

Similarly, there are not many comments and posts made by other users – six over the two weeks in all of the social networking platforms. However, it is significant to note that the majority of these posts fall into the category of praise/agreement with organization, which is evidence that the users of the sites appreciate the news sharing services provided by the organization. No posts or comments by users fell into the criticism of organization category. Thirteen users "liked" a post by the organization over the two weeks, which shows there are users listening and appreciating the posts, but not posting or commenting themselves.

### **Christel House International**

Tables I and J show that Christel House International mainly used the social networking sites as news sharing sites for Twitter and the blog, but on Facebook, predominantly used it for promotion/sweepstakes/events. The only other category represented was the thank users/volunteers/donors. This data shows that the main focus of the use of social networking sites was not interaction, but that they did use it for that purpose on occasion. Overall, the sites are used to share news and events or promotions that support the cause. This makes sense in that the audience or public for the Christel House International social networking sites are not likely to be the parents or children directly affected by Christel House International, who are living in extreme poverty. Instead they are donors or interested parties in the cause, but have less of a personal connection to the issues addressed by Christel House International, and therefore may be less interested in participating in dialogue and conversation, and may be looking for updates on the organization without actually discussing the issues. Christel House International used Facebook most often for posts, and Twitter the least often.

Like UNC Health Care, the Christel House International pages received only six comments and posts by users over the two weeks analyzed. The categories these posts fell into were distributed throughout the praise/agreement with organization, request information/ask for advice/ask a question, promotion, and not in English. It is important to note that there were no criticism of organization posts or comments by users, which implies that the users appreciate the social networking usage by the organization. On Facebook, users "liked" posts by the organization 20 times, which shows that there are people reading and listening to the organization without posting themselves.

### **OE Enterprises**

There was no data available for OE Enterprises. This nonprofit does not have a Twitter account or a blog, and made no posts on Facebook in the two weeks examined. This may be a reflection of the lack of resources allocated to social networking.

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## **V. Discussion**

### ***Interviews and Content Analysis***

Interviews demonstrated that the motivations behind using social networking, while varying between organizations, were mainly based on the idea that it was important to be present in social networking, even if there was not a real plan or goal in mind through using social networking. The organizations felt that other nonprofits, including other organizations working for the same cause, were going to be using social networking and therefore they needed to be out there as well. Autism Speaks did have more of a plan in mind in that they already were using online tools for fundraising, so complementing this with social networking was a natural maneuver for them to reach their target audience and meet their organizational goals.

Like motivations, the goals and intentions of the nonprofits' use of social networking were also varied, but overall they were characterized by having undefined goals and objectives. All of the organizations reported that they started using social networking without making a formal communications or marketing plan. For the most part, this meant that they did not have measurable goals or objectives from which to evaluate their efforts. Instead, the planning was vague. Autism Speaks and Christel House International wanted to be involved and familiar with conversations going on about their nonprofits and their causes in general. Autism Speaks argued that social networking could be used to raise funds as the bottom line goal. OE Enterprises also expressed an interest in having an informal way of communicating with clients, while UNC Health Care said they were mainly interested in the platforms as a news sharing service. Overall, the nonprofits started out by mainly experimenting with some, like Autism Speaks, working on more concrete goals as they became more familiar and accustomed to using Facebook, Twitter and blogs.

As with any experimental use of a new communications tool, the nonprofits ran into obstacles and learned important lessons, which can be applied to other nonprofits' use of social networking. The most commonly identified obstacle was monitoring, both for content and for evaluation purposes. They had trouble with monitoring for inappropriate content or responding to posts that were not in line with organizational beliefs in a timely manner because social networking is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For all organizations studied, it would be impossible and impractical for the nonprofits to have someone monitoring the platforms at all times. The nonprofits have also not yet found a way to measure the effectiveness of their social networking efforts, particularly in dollars raised for the organization. At the time of interviewing, the respondents were not able to measure the direct impact that social networking was having on fundraising, but could only speculate that it was a contributor, but not a main factor in contributions.

This obstacle is a sign that there is a need for tools to be created for better evaluation of data. While there are currently no tools available for these purposes, the nonprofits could find some creative ways of gauging impact if fundraising is the goal behind an organization's use of social networking. For instance, when a donation is made, the nonprofits could ask the donor why they are donating, including what information they used in making their decision, such as Internet research and social networking use. While social networking may not be the sole reason for a donation, it is likely a contributing factor, and this type of measurement would help prove that to upper management and to the social media practitioners themselves that social networking has value in fundraising and awareness initiatives.

The interviews also addressed the interaction and recognition purposes of using social networking. Autism Speaks, Christel House International, and OE Enterprises stated that they intend, in varying levels, to use social networking as a way of creating dialogue and interaction with their constituents. Autism Speaks also mentioned that they intend to use social networking as a way of recognizing volunteers, donors and users of the social networking sites for their efforts. Christel House International and OE Enterprises said that they would like to interact on the sites, but that they had not managed to do much with interaction yet. UNC Health Care reiterated that they mainly use social networking for news sharing, so recognition and interaction are not top of mind in their uses of social networking.

While the interviews gave insight into the intentions of the social networking by the nonprofits, the content analysis of the sites showed what was really occurring online. The data showed that Autism Speaks had far more posts, users, and comments than the other three organizations. OE Enterprises actually did not have any posts over the two-week period, and therefore no interaction occurred in social networking.

The data from the content analysis showed that, overall, the most common use of postings on the

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social networking sites was to respond to other users, followed by promotion of a sweepstakes or event and news sharing. The most common categories for posts and comments made by other users on these sites was to share tips, advice, or words of wisdom, followed closely by sharing a story or person information and praising the organization.

With this data, it is important to note that it is heavily skewed by the Autism Speaks data because there were many more posts by them as well as posts and comments by the users to their sites than the other three organizations. Therefore, the data for the other three organizations was overshadowed by the data from Autism Speaks.

For UNC Health Care's Facebook, the most popular category for posts made by the organization was news sharing. This finding is in line with the motivations outlined in the interviews, during which Hughes identified the main purpose of social networking as news sharing. The top use of Twitter and the blog was also news sharing. Only on Twitter did UNC Health Care show any posts in the respond to other user category, and on the blog the only interaction was to respond to a problem.

Similarly, Facebook use by Christel House International fell mostly into the promotion/sweepstakes/events category, followed by news sharing. The top uses of Twitter and the blog was news sharing for both. However, they did sometimes use both the blog and Facebook for thanking volunteers and donors, which may reflect the intention of adding more recognition and interaction as expressed in the interviews. Posts made by users to these pages fell into the categories of praising or agreeing with the organization, promotion, and requesting information, advice or asking a question.

Autism Speaks, therefore, had much more interaction on their pages, as demonstrated in the findings section of this paper. The top use of both Facebook and Twitter was to respond to users. There was also evidence of the organization thanking users, donors and volunteers on Twitter and the blog. All three platforms (Twitter, Facebook and the blogs) were used to request feedback or solicit information, and Twitter and Facebook were both used as tools for the call to action category. Still, the number one use of the blog was news sharing. Similarly, users made many posts to these pages to further interaction, mainly to share tips, advice and words of wisdom or to share stories. Facebook was even utilized by users to answer questions posted by other users, which was a category that was not met with the other three organizations. This made the Facebook page somewhat self-sustainable as a forum for discussion among users without the intervention of the organization.

## ***Theoretical Discussion***

As discussed in the literature review, one of the purposes of this study was to examine the results through the theoretical lens of Grunig's Excellence Model, which posits that the two-way symmetrical form of communication is superior to the other three forms (Grunig, 1992).

Through the responses during the interviews, it is apparent that three of the four nonprofits in this study (excluding UNC Health Care) have the intention of, and see the potential for, using social networking for interaction, which would fall into the category of two-way symmetric communication. In practice, as gauged by the content analysis, however, Autism Speaks was the only nonprofit that seemed to be succeeding in communicating in this manner on Facebook, Twitter and the blog.

As mentioned in the literature review, Grunig's Excellence Model has received some criticism for being too narrow-minded in the assumption that two-way symmetric communication is always superior, because it does not take into account motivations and goals of the organization. UNC Health Care's social networking could be used as an example to support such a method. From the interviews, it was found that UNC Health Care did not have the intention of using social networking for interaction or recognition with users, and instead intended to use it for news sharing purposes, which is more of a public information model formula for communication. The content analysis showed that they did, in fact, use the platforms for news sharing purposes, and did it quite successfully. The majority of comments on these platforms made by other users were praise of the organization or of the social networking use. From this data, we can conclude that for UNC Health Care's audience, this type of news dissemination may be the best way of communicating. This data supports the criticism of Grunig's Excellence Model, and provides the tenet that looking at the audience may greatly impact the type of communication that is effective for the organization.

Another adaptation to Grunig's model found in this research came from Autism Speaks' Facebook page. On this page, users were extremely active. When Autism Speaks would post, hundreds of users would

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respond, which would often turn into a conversation between users in which Autism Speaks could monitor, but was mainly uninvolved. Users showed satisfaction with this method, and in turn would thank each other for information and Autism Speaks for hosting the forum of discussion. In a way, instead of having two-way symmetric communication between the publics and the organization, Autism Speaks serves as a facilitator for communication between users, which they seem to be happy with. Like the point made with UNC Health Care's successful news sharing above, this shows that two-way symmetric communication may not be the best choice for every organization and every audience. It is necessary to examine the audience and how they like to communicate, both with the organization and with each other, when deciding the best communications strategy to accomplish organizational goals.

For a passionate and informed audience like that of Autism Speaks, the best form of communication may be to provide an outlet for stories and emotions and a forum for discussion, only loosely linked to the organization itself. In this way, the organization may serve as a moderator or inspiration for communication, but is not always directly involved. This type of communication, which is somewhat unique to social networking and the Internet, is a new type of communication that does not fit neatly into Grunig's four types of public relations communication models.

This type of communication used by Autism Speaks is not effective for all organizations. Several factors go into determining the type of communication that the audience most craves and will respond best to and will also help achieve the goals of the organization as a whole. These factors, which determine how effective social networking for nonprofits is, are discussed in the next section.

### ***Factors Affecting the Success of Social Networking Platforms***

From this study, some conclusions can be drawn to explain reasons why some social networking plans are more effective than others. The cause itself and the audience interested in the cause plays a large role in the amount of time and energy spent on the social networking platforms by the users.

Autism Speaks was by far the most effective at gathering user interest and interaction through posts and comments. While there are several reasons for this, one may be the cause itself. Autism is becoming more prevalent in the U.S. and throughout the world and currently there is not a cure or preferred treatment. This issue affects the children of the users of the social networking platforms. There are very few issues that come close to raising the amount of passion and drive for answers than diseases impacting one's children. It is close to these users' hearts and they have a vested interest in research and advocacy in this field.

As discussed in the literature review, Southwell and Yzer (2009) found that increased salience, or closeness, to an issue could be used as a predictor for the involvement in conversation about the issues. Therefore, because Autism is an issue that users are extremely passionate about, they are naturally more inclined to join in conversations about it, and the social networking platforms used by Autism Speaks provides an outlet for this. Therefore, Autism Speaks was naturally positioned to succeed using social networking for purposes of communication to audiences and audiences communicating to one another.

Of course, Christel House International also affects children through providing education to those living in extreme poverty. Therefore, we could expect similar levels of passion and interest in the topic. However, due to the nature of the cause itself, poverty, Christel House International did not have the positional advantage to succeed in social networking in terms of creating a similar type of dialogue like that of Autism Speaks. The parents of the children impacted by this organization are also living in extreme poverty, and, therefore, are very unlikely to own or have access to a computer with Internet access. It is unlikely that they would be active on Facebook, Twitter, or a blog. The potential audience of Christel House International, instead, are potential donors with little direct contact with the children impacted by Christel House International, and, therefore, the salience of the issue is different, making them less likely to participate in conversation about education, whereas the supporters of the Autism Speaks page are very close to the issue because they themselves or their children are affected by Autism.

The literature review discussed Kang and Norton's (2004) hypothesis that the Internet would level the playing field for nonprofits with varying budgets. As in Goatman and Lewis's (2007) study, this research found that this is not entirely true. While the budgets of the nonprofits are not publicly known, we can see that the allocation of funds and resources allocated to social networking has a direct impact on the amount of posts and effectiveness of the platforms. Autism Speaks reported having an entire department devoted to their social networking needs, and also had far and away the most posts and most interaction across all

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three sites (Facebook, Twitter and the blogs) of all of the examined nonprofits. UNC Health Care reported that social networking was a project for multiple people, but was not a full-time job for anyone. UNC Health Care had several postings, and while they did not often use interaction, their social networking can be considered a success because it is in line with their current goals of news sharing. Christel House International's social networking was a side project for one employee, with interns contributing seasonally, which is reflected in the sporadic use of the sites and limited interaction. OE Enterprises relied solely on students from a local university that were able to contribute during some semesters and not others, and this is evidenced by their lack of any Facebook posts during the two week period the sites were analyzed, and the fact that they are not yet on Twitter or have a blog. They simply do not have the resources to allocate to social networking. This shows that social networking, contrary to popular opinion, is not free; It costs the organization human resources and time, which are often limited by budget and other duties. In this case study, the playing field was not leveled by the Internet, as posited by Kang and Norton. Social networking, like other marketing and communications tools, is limited by the resources and size of the organization.

### ***Weaknesses in Research & Call for Further Research***

A weakness in this research is that it is narrow in scope, looking at only four nonprofits. While some conclusions were able to be drawn from these in-depth analyses, a more comprehensive study using many more nonprofits' social networking sites would lead to conclusions that are useful for generalization across all nonprofit organizations. Similarly, looking at more than two-weeks worth of data for the content analysis would have yielded results more suitable for generalization, but due to the scope of this project, more than two-weeks would have been unmanageable.

Another weakness was the inability to collect and analyze comments by other users on Twitter. I was able to collect this data for Facebook and the blogs, but there is currently not a method to accurately capture the full picture of comments by users on Twitter, which may have skewed results. This study also only looked at American nonprofits and, due to my language skills, could only analyze posts and comments in English.

Current limitations in monitoring of social networking's impact on fundraising and awareness by the organization serve as another weakness. In the future, tools may be developed that will more concretely show the impact, or lack of impact, on these areas, which would make for meaningful future research in this field.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This research addressed a call for further research on nonprofits' use of social networking as a relationship-building and interaction tool (Kent & Taylor, 1998). This research shows that, for the most part, nonprofits are not using social networking tools to their full potential. I also found that Grunig's Excellence Model (1992) has some weaknesses, and that it needs to be modified to take into account the type of audience and the needs of the audience to decide what is the best communications strategy. Future creation of tools to monitor social networking results may help organizations decide which strategies and methods are most effective for the organizations' audiences.

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The Researcher would like to dedicate this work:

To my parents, who make all my dreams possible, and to Steven and Christine, who always keep me laughing; To Leadtackped, for their boundless friendship and unwavering support in everything I do; And to Tommy, who is always there when I need tough love.

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## Appendix A

Category	Description
Posts by organization	
News Sharing	Posts in this category simply share or distribute news; can be written by the organization or link to another organization's news; use is to distribute information
Story/Narrative	This post features a personal story or narrative written by someone in the organization or by a guest; is anecdotal in nature
Guest Post	Someone outside the organization writes a post
Promotion/Sweepstakes/Event	The organization is spreading the word about a promotion, sweepstakes, or event. Can be run by the organization or by someone outside of the organization.
Response to problem/issue	The organization addressed an issue with the social media site or Web site; usually a technological issue
Thank user/volunteers/donors	A post used to recognize the efforts of donors/volunteers/users; for these purposes, can not be an implied thanks – must include the words “thanks” or “thank you”
Tips/advice/words of wisdom	Offers users helpful tips, advice, or words of wisdom related to their cause
Request feedback/solicit information	Asks users to answer a question, provide information, or give feedback on the organization and/or social media practices
Call to action	Encourages users to take an action beyond social media
Respond to other user	Organization's response to another user
Retweet (RT)	Applicable only to Twitter; RT function of this platform
Total Posts by organization	Total number of posts made by the organization – can be a post or a comment to a post

Category	Description
Posts by users	
Share story/personal information	User tells a story or offers personal information
Request information/Ask for advice/Ask a question	The user asks the organization and/or other users to advice or to answer their questions
Praise/agreement with organization	User praises the organization, thanks the organization, or shows agreement or appreciation for a post or the organization as a whole
Criticism of organization	Expresses negative emotions toward a post made by the organization or the organization as a whole
Provide new information/point of view	User makes a post that gives an update or new information, or shares another point of view
Promotion	User makes a post that promotes a Web site, organization, or event they are involved in. This can range the gamut from employees of companies offering their services, to someone running a charitable 5K looking for sponsorship and support
Report problems/resolutions of problems	User makes a posts that points out technological difficulties, a missing link, etc.; or acknowledges a resolution to a problem
Tips/advice/words of wisdom	User provides helpful tips, advice, or words of wisdom related to their cause
Not in English	Post is not in English and there for can not be coded
Criticize other users	User makes a posts in disagreement or showing negative emotions toward a post made by another user
Praise/encourage other users	User makes a post in agreement or showing positive emotions toward a post made by another user
Answer questions by other users	User addresses a question posted by another user
Neutral post	A post that not meet the descriptions of the other categories and is neutral in nature
Number of likes of organization post	Only applicable to Facebook – number of likes given to a post made by the organization itself
Number of likes of user post	Only applicable to Facebook – number of likes given to a post made by another user
Total Comments	Number of comments made by users on organization's posts
Total Posts by User	Number of individual posts made by users, independent of posts made by the organization (it is not a comment)

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Category	Description
Posts by users	
Share story/personal information	User tells a story or offers personal information
Request information/Ask for advice/Ask a question	The user asks the organization and/or other users to advice or to answer their questions
Praise/agreement with organization	User praises the organization, thanks the organization, or shows agreement or appreciation for a post or the organization as a whole
Criticism of organization	Expresses negative emotions toward a post made by the organization or the organization as a whole
Provide new information/point of view	User makes a post that gives an update or new information, or shares another point of view
Promotion	User makes a post that promotes a Web site, organization, or event they are involved in. This can range the gamut from employees of companies offering their services, to someone running a charitable 5K looking for sponsorship and support
Report problems/resolutions of problems	User makes a posts that points out technological difficulties, a missing link, etc.; or acknowledges a resolution to a problem
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Not in English	Post is not in English and there for can not be coded
Criticize other users	User makes a posts in disagreement or showing negative emotions toward a post made by another user
Praise/encourage other users	User makes a post in agreement or showing positive emotions toward a post made by another user
Answer questions by other users	User addresses a question posted by another user
Neutral post	A post that not meet the descriptions of the other categories and is neutral in nature
Number of likes of organization post	Only applicable to Facebook – number of likes given to a post made by the organization itself
Number of likes of user post	Only applicable to Facebook – number of likes given to a post made by another user
Total Comments	Number of comments made by users on organization's posts
Total Posts by User	Number of individual posts made by users, independent of posts made by the organization (it is not a comment)

## Appendix B

*Table A*

Category	Total (All organizations)
Posts by organization	Number Percentage of total
News Sharing	28 9.7%
Story/Narrative	16 5.5%
Guest Post	14 4.8%
Promotion/Sweepstakes/Event	33 11.4%
Response to problem/issue	1 0.3%
Thank user/volunteers/donors	23 8.0%
Tips/advice/words of wisdom	9 3.1%
Request feedback/solicit information	17 5.9%
Call to action	10 3.5%
Respond to other user	60 20.8%
Retweet	9 3.1%
Total Posts by Organizations	289

*Table B*

Category	Autism Speaks	UNC Health Care	Christel House International	OE Enterprises
Posts by organization				
News Sharing	18	16	4	0
Story/Narrative	15	1	0	0
Guest Post	14	0	0	0
Promotion/Sweepstakes/Event	28	1	4	0
Response to problem/issue	0	1	0	0
Thank user/volunteers/donors	20	1	2	0
Tips/advice/words of wisdom	8	1	0	0
Request feedback/solicit information	17	0	0	0

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Call to action	10	0	0	0
Respond to other user	58	2	0	0
Retweet	6	3	0	0
Total Posts by Organizations	254	25	10	0

**Table C**

Category	Total (All Organizations)
Posts by Users	Number Percentage of total
Share story/personal information	569 24.0%
Request information/Ask for advice/Ask a question	170 7.8%
Praise/agreement with organization	564 23.8%
Criticism of organization	34 1.4%
Provide new information/point of view	33 1.4%
Promotion	68 2.9%
Report problems/resolutions of problems	6 0.3%
Tips/advice/words of wisdom	752 31.8%
Not in English	5 0.2%
Criticize other users	7 0.3%
Praise/encourage other users	50 2.1%
Answer questions by other users	20 0.8%
Neutral post	91 2.8%
Number of likes of organization post	11,893
Number of likes of user post	2,314
Total Comments	2,203
Total Posts by User	165

**Table D**

Category	Autism Speaks	UNC Health Care	Christel House International	OE Enterprises
Posts by Users				
Share story/personal information	569	0	0	0
Request information/Ask for advice/Ask a question	169	0	1	0
Praise/agreement with organization	557	5	2	0
Criticism of organization	34	0	0	0
Provide new information/point of view	32	1	0	0
Promotion	67	0	1	0
Report problems/resolutions of problems	6	0	0	0
Tips/advice/words of wisdom	752	0	0	0
Not in English	3	1	2	0
Criticize other users	7	0	0	0
Praise/encourage other users	50	0	0	0
Answer questions by other users	20	0	0	0
Neutral post	91	0	0	0
Number of likes of organization post	11,860	13	20	0
Number of likes of user post	2,313	0	1	0
Total Comments	2,197	2	4	0
Total Posts by User	162	1	2	0

**Table E**

Category	Facebook	Twitter	Blog
Autism Speaks			
Posts by organization	Number Percentage of total	Number Percentage of total	Number Percentage of total
News Sharing	7 12.3%	9 5.0%	12 70.6%
Story/Narrative	5 8.8%	8 4.0%	2 11.8%
Guest Post	4 7.0%	6 3.3%	4 23.5%

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Promotion/Sweepstakes/Event	8 14.0%	19 10.6%	1 5.9%
Response to problem/issue	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Thank user/volunteers/donors	0 0.0%	19 10.6%	1 5.9%
Tips/advice/words of wisdom	5 8.8%	3 1.7%	0 0.0%
Request feedback/solicit information	6 10.5%	10 5.6%	1 5.9%
Call to action	5 8.8%	5 2.8%	0 0.0%
Respond to other user	11 19.3%	47 26.1%	0 0.0%
Retweet	-	6 3.3%	-
Total Posts by organization	57	180	17

**Table F**

Category	Facebook	Twitter	Blog
Autism Speaks			
Posts by users	Number Percentage of total	Number Percentage of total	Number Percentage of total
Share story/personal information	560 24.1%	-	9 28.1%
Request information/Ask for advice/Ask a question	169 7.3%	-	0 0.0%
Praise/agreement with organization	540 23.2%	-	17 53.1%
Criticism of organization	33 1.4%	-	1 3.1%
Provide new information/point of view	31 1.3%	-	1 3.1%
Promotion	64 2.8%	-	3 9.4%
Report problems/resolutions of problems	3 0.1%	-	3 9.4%
Tips/advice/words of wisdom	752 32.3%	-	0 0.0%
Not in English	3 0.1%	-	0 0.0%
Criticize other users	7 0.3%	-	0 0.0%

Praise/encourage other users	50 2.1%	-	0 0.0%
Answer questions by other users	20 0.8%	-	0 0.0%
Neutral post	91 3.9%	-	0 0.0%
Number of likes of organization post	11,860	-	0
Number of likes of user post	2,313	-	0
Total Comments	2165	-	32
Total Posts by User	162	-	

**Table G**

Category	Facebook	Twitter	Blog
UNC Health Care			
Posts by organization	Number Percentage of total	Number Percentage of total	Number Percentage of total
News Sharing	5 62.5%	10 66.7%	1 50%
Story/Narrative	1 12.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Guest Post	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Promotion/Sweepstakes/Event	1 12.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Response to problem/issue	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 50%
Thank user/volunteers/donors	0 0.0%	1 6.7%	0 0.0%
Tips/advice/words of wisdom	1 12.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Request feedback/solicit information	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Call to action	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Respond to other user	0 0.0%	2 13.3%	0 0.0%
Retweet	-	3 20%	-
Total Posts by organization	8	15	2

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**Table H**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Twitter</b>	<b>Blog</b>
UNC Health Care			
Posts by users	Number Percentage of total	Number Percentage of total	Number Percentage of total
Share story/personal information	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Request information/Ask for advice/Ask a question	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Praise/agreement with organization	2 66.7%	-	3 100%
Criticism of organization	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Provide new information/point of view	0 0.0%	-	1 33.3%
Promotion	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Report problems/resolutions of problems	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Tips/advice/words of wisdom	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Not in English	1 33.3%	-	0 0.0%
Criticize other users	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Praise/encourage other users	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Answer questions by other users	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Neutral post	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Number of likes of organization post	13	-	0 0.0%
Number of likes of user post	0	-	0
Total Comments	2	-	3
Total Posts by User	1	-	-

**Table I**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Twitter</b>	<b>Blog</b>
Christel House International			
Posts by organization	Number Percentage of total	Number Percentage of total	Number Percentage of total
News Sharing	1 16.7%	1 100%	2 66.7%
Story/Narrative	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Guest Post	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Promotion/Sweepstakes/Event	4 66.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Response to problem/issue	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Thank user/volunteers/donors	1 16.7%	0 0.0%	1 33.3%
Tips/advice/words of wisdom	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Request feedback/solicit information	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Call to action	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Respond to other user	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
Retweet	-	0 0.0%	-
Total Posts by organization	6	1	3

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**Table J**

Category	Facebook	Twitter	Blog
Christel House International			
Posts by users	Number Percentage of total	Number Percentage of total	Number Percentage of total
Share story/personal information	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Request information/Ask for advice/Ask a question	0 0.0%	-	1 100%
Praise/agreement with organization	2 40%	-	0 0.0%
Criticism of organization	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Provide new information/point of view	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Promotion	1 20%	-	0 0.0%
Report problems/resolutions of problems	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Tips/advice/words of wisdom	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Not in English	2 40%	-	0 0.0%
Criticize other users	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Praise/encourage other users	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Answer questions by other users	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Neutral post	0 0.0%	-	0 0.0%
Number of likes of organization post	20	-	0 0.0%
Number of likes of user post	1	-	0 0.0%
Total Comments	3	-	1
Total Posts by User	2	-	0

## Appendix C

1. Why did your Autism Speaks first decide to join the social networking world?
2. How did you first launch your social networking plan? When?
3. What social networking outlets do you use? Why?
4. Who is in charge of maintaining these sites/profiles?
5. How often do you interact with volunteers and contributors through social networking?
6. What are the goals you aim to achieve through social networking? Have you added any goals since you launched your social networking plan?
7. What obstacles have you encountered using social networking? What are your “lessons learned”?
8. How effective has using social networking been for your organization?
9. Which social networking outlet has been most effective? The least effective?
10. Do you use social networking to directly talk to volunteers and donors? If so, how?
11. Do you use social networking to recognize volunteers and donors? Why or why not? If so, what kinds of results are you seen with this?

# Online: A Case Study of Advocacy Nonprofit Communications in the United States

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## Abstract

*This study examined two advocacy nonprofits in the United States to determine and compare primary factors that affect the organizations' Internet communication practices. Those most heavily involved with each organization's Internet presence were interviewed, and their websites were examined with attention to specific characteristics, such as interactivity and donation capabilities. Overall, this research did not reveal large differences between state and national advocacy nonprofits' communication strategies. The findings from this research, however, showed that while a small staff in an advocacy nonprofit did not lend itself well to website interactivity, it did not necessarily inhibit its overall web strategy. Therefore, small organizations were still capable of implementing strategic Internet communication practices.*

## I. Introduction

This research aims to identify the factors that influence how nonprofit organizations in the United States use the Internet for communications. Scholars have defined the nonprofit sector as "private organizations that are prohibited from distributing any profits they may generate to those who control or support them. These organizations are generally exempted from federal, and often from state and local, taxation on grounds that they serve some public purpose" (Salamon 2003). On the whole, scholars have determined that these organizations are not primarily motivated by commercial concerns (Najam 2000). Nonprofit organizations, also known as third or voluntary sector organizations, have been found to have an increasing presence in countries around the world. Recent estimates have determined that 11 percent of the American workforce is employed by a nonprofit organization, up from 7 percent in 1998 (Reed and Bridgeland 2009; Salamon 2003). Scholars have argued that nonprofit organizations are instrumental in a self-governing society (Ferris 1998; Pope 2009; Rees 1999; Taylor and Warburton 2003); however, they have also found that these organizations have served different functions throughout history. These functions include working with the government to provide services, working independently to provide services and advocating policy changes to the government (Young 2000; Hudson 2002).

## II. Literature Review

Though the existing literature on the political communication of nonprofit organizations is not extensive, studies have revealed essential information about this area generally. First, a general history of the

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nonprofit sectors in the United States is delineated. Second, literature on what scholars have found to be the roles nonprofits fulfill is discussed. Third, research on the relationship between donors and nonprofits is laid out, for scholars have found that donors are an important audience for nonprofits to target in communications (Chew and Osborne 2009). Fourth, the existing literature on donor patterns is outlined. Finally, what scholars have determined to be communication strategies of nonprofits is discussed. All of these areas lead to the question: What factors affect the communication strategies of advocacy nonprofits in the United States?

### ***History of the nonprofit sector***

In the 1960s, nonprofit organizations in the United States reached an agreement with the government, which specified that nonprofits would provide an array of services with government funds (Salamon 2003). Scholars have found that as public attitudes, demographics and policies shifted, however, so did the role of the nonprofit sector (Salamon 2003). In 1996, Congress enacted the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) and the Balanced Budget Act, both of which established caps on federal domestic expenditures that affect the safety net for low income and poor families (Hodgkinson and Nelson 2001). Research has shown that both programs have changed the essence of government welfare, causing families to increasingly turn to nonprofit organizations for support (Hodgkinson and Nelson 2001).

Though the sector experienced growth in the years up to 1992, it underwent decline throughout the 1990s because of decreasing government funding for nonprofits, as scholars have determined that the rise and fall of nonprofits is tied directly to the economy and government (Hodgkinson and Nelson 2001). Yet government successes do not directly lead to nonprofit success: more research has shown that the nonprofit sector in the United States is more frequently competing for the same audience as for-profit organizations (Hodgkinson and Nelson 2001; Young 2000).

### ***Roles of the nonprofit sector***

In an effort to explain the roles of the nonprofit sector in society, scholars have derived a variety of models that frame the relationship between governments and nonprofits. Generally, the scholarly models indicate how the form and structure of government impacts the roles nonprofit organizations fulfill (Ferris 1998).

Young (2000) designated three conceptualizations of nonprofit-government relations: complementary, supplementary and adversarial. Complementary organizations partner with the government, helping to carry out the delivery of public goods largely funded by the government. Supplementary nonprofits fulfill a demand from the people for public goods left unsatisfied by the government. Finally, adversarial organizations prod the government to make policy changes and to maintain accountability. These organizations may also be called advocacy organizations, whose activities are based on policy analysis, research and the channeling of information to the necessary bodies (Hudson 2002).

### ***Donor-nonprofit relationships***

While many argue the United States is experiencing a civic decline, scholars have found an exception to the decline in voting and association membership in the long-term growth in volunteering (Hodgkinson and Nelson 2001). Scholars have determined, therefore, that the relationship between donors and nonprofit organizations is more valued than that between citizens and the government. In the United States, scholars have seen that individual choice is held in high esteem, especially choices relating to philanthropy (Brammer and Pavelin 2005). Scholars have argued this may be related to the fact that Americans place a higher level of confidence in nonprofits than in government or business (O'Neill 2009). Further, research has shown donors in the United States give based on their commitment to an individual organization and its mission, a highly individual choice (Waters 2009).

### ***Donor patterns***

Seventy percent of American households reported giving 2.1 percent of their income to charitable causes in 1998 (Hodgkinson and Nelson 2001). Further, scholars have determined that Americans on the whole plan their giving, making donations to their charity of choice on a regular basis (Wright 2001). They have also shown that the bulk of this income is given to religious organizations, yet organized religion has "average" to "high" confidence ratings compared to other charitable institutions (Hodgkinson and Nelson 2001; O'Neill 2009). Again, scholars trace this to the high value placed on individual choice (Brammer and

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Pavelin 2005). Scholars have also found that Americans give to charities they are personally involved with where results can be seen (Wright 2001). On the whole, individual giving has remained consistent in the United States between 1988 and 2001 (O'Neill 2009). Finally, American laws allowing donations to nonprofit organizations to be tax-deductible is a motivator to donate. (Wright 2001).

## **Communication**

Because the mass media and public opinion are important venues of gauging influence of nonprofit organizations, scholars have determined it is important that these organizations understand worthy communication practices (Andrews and Edwards 2004). Scholars have found that for advocacy nonprofits in the United States, gaining media attention for their specific goals is important in defining the issues and creating consensus (Andrews and Edwards 2004). Since the media most frequently cover events rather than issues and show advocacy organizations in an unfavorable light (Andrews and Edwards 2004), scholars have found that nonprofits must actively work to maintain positive media coverage. According to Rees (1999), nonprofits should not attempt to lead public opinion, however—they should aim to tailor their message to current public attitudes.

Further, studies have suggested that nonprofits striving for policy influence should develop their message in the following ways: define the problem to make it seem manageable; present accurate and reliable data on the issue; survey the views of organization members and pass the information along; comb through official data to document the need for policy change; use economic arguments; and appeal to democratic and constitutional principles (Rees 1999).

Scholars have also determined that while the primary audience for nonprofits is its users or beneficiaries, funding sources are a close secondary audience (Chew and Osborne 2008). Studies have found that in order to obtain government contracts, strategic account management, or the practice of differentiating among organizations, combined with identifying client organizations whose contracts are critical for the financial well-being of the supplying body and then serving these key clients in a more individual manner generally provides successful outcomes (Bennett 2008; Chew and Osborne 2008). Essentially, scholars have found that nonprofits should enter government contract bids with a plan, a flexible mission and open communication (Bennett 2008).

Though nonprofit organizations value marketing, scholars have determined that nonprofits are not fully realizing their marketing capabilities when it comes to online or electronic resources (Pope 2009; McNutt and Boland 1999; Burt and Taylor 2000; Hackler and Saxton 2007; Waters 2007; Kang and Norton 2004; Ingenhoff and Koelling 2009). According to previous studies, the primary challenge for nonprofit organizations is a lack of keeping up with and retaining staff (Hodgkinson and Nelson 2001; Pope 2009). Additionally, a lack of time, funding, a clear message and knowledge of what to do hinders the ability of nonprofit organizations to market effectively (Pope 2009).

While expertise was the largest source of resistance to electronic marketing, scholars have seen that expense, equipment and awareness also hinder nonprofits' ability to effectively communicate online (McNutt and Boland 1999). Studies have found that 83.6 percent of nonprofits use electronic networking, which primarily consisted of organizations utilizing email (Burt and Taylor 2000; Waters 2007). Fewer than 10 percent of nonprofit organization websites included interactive functions (Kang and Norton 2004). Researchers have also found that websites generally target donor rather than media audiences, ignoring an important avenue through which public opinion can be created (Ingenhoff and Koelling 2009). Finally, scholars have determined that nonprofits generally only participate in electronic advocacy they perceive it will be effective and/or they believe other groups are using it (McNutt and Boland 1999).

When implemented effectively, scholars have determined that information and communication technologies can be used to deliver enhanced campaigning and more successful user services (Burt and Taylor 2003). A relationship between total organization income and their website's dialogic capacity, or ability to interact with relevant audiences, has also been found (Ingenhoff and Koelling 2009).

From the existing literature, it is evident that nonprofits are more likely to experience success when communication strategies are implemented. While it becomes obvious that nonprofits are generally not utilizing their Internet capabilities to the fullest extent possible, it is not clear how different nonprofits implement successful communication strategies. In light of the current global economic climate, nonprofit organizations will likely take a more prominent role in providing services. In many cases, this will involve competition among nonprofits for government contracts and jockeying to become the most desired provider among citizens.

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Therefore, a nonprofit must know how to market itself effectively to survive. This research will contribute to the body of analyses of nonprofit communications within the United States. Therefore, this research will seek to determine the factors that affect the communication strategies of advocacy nonprofits in the United States.

### III. Research Design

This research will seek to determine the factors that influence the Internet communication strategies of advocacy nonprofits in the United States.

H1: The primary content audience for advocacy organizations will be governmental sources or figures.

This hypothesis is based on Young's (2000) research on the different roles of nonprofit organizations. As advocacy organizations prod the government to make policy changes and to maintain accountability, they will, therefore, target the government as the primary audience for their website.

H2: A small staff and a lack of expertise will lead a nonprofit to have a less interactive web presence and non-comprehensive overall web strategy.

Prior research has found that the primary challenge for nonprofit organizations is a lack of keeping up with and retaining staff (Hodgkinson and Nelson 2001; Pope 2009). Additionally, a lack of time and knowledge of what to do has been found to hinder the ability of nonprofit organizations to market effectively (Pope 2009). Therefore, it stands to reason that these factors will work against the functionality of the website.

This study will use four ways to measure political communication strategies: the website, the use of social media, the website's interactivity and the organization's overall web strategy. For the purposes of this study, the term "website" is defined as whether or not a nonprofit has its own website. Social media is defined as having Facebook or Twitter accounts and/or a blog that is hosted separately from the primary website. A website's interactivity is defined by whether the site facilitates user feedback, which is further defined as having contact information, a contact form or other methods a web user could submit information to the nonprofit organization. An organization's web strategy is defined by the measures taken to target or seek out users.

The study's independent variables are as follows: the scope of the nonprofit, the size/staffing of the organization and its web content audience(s). The nonprofit's scope is characterized by whether the organization serves a state-wide or national audience. One of each was chosen for this study. The staff size of a nonprofit is characterized as small when each member had more than one significant responsibility. Finally, the content audiences are delineated as beneficiaries, donors, government and volunteers. These audiences were derived from prior research that found that while the primary audience for nonprofits was its users or beneficiaries, funding sources were a close secondary audience (Chew and Osborne 2008).

Certain controls were incorporated into the study when choosing which nonprofits to study. First, each nonprofit deals with children or youth as their issue area of focus. The way in which they focus on children varies, but each nonprofit's beneficiaries are children. Second, both nonprofits have a similar income or revenue. In their 2009 reports to the IRS, both organizations posted around \$1,000,000 in revenue. This control is to ensure that both nonprofits studied would have similar resources so that comparisons can be made. Third, both nonprofits are advocacy organizations located in the United States.

The nonprofits studied were found through extensive online searches. Google searches were conducted with phrases similar to: "nonprofit organization + children + Washington DC," "nonprofit + advocacy + youth" and more. More often than not, lists of various charities in the United States would be returned as a top result. Idealist.org, an online database of nonprofit organizations around the world, as also searched for viable nonprofits. Once a potential organization was found, their financial information was sought on GuideStar US, a database that allow nonprofits to list themselves and provide whatever information they wish, which includes recent Form 990s and other financial reports. If the organization's financials were within the desired revenue range, it was added to a list of potential organizations to study. Approximately five to ten viable organizations were found. Each organization was then sent the same email explaining the purpose of the research and asking for their participation.

Once a nonprofit agreed to participate in the study, one interview was set up between the researcher and the staff member primarily involved with the organization's online presence. Interviews were conducted

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either in person at the location of the nonprofit or via telephone. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Interviews will prove to be a more productive method of data collecting than a different method, like focus groups, for several reasons. First, past research has shown that participants are more likely to open up in interviews when sensitive topics are being discussed (Lindlof 1995). Further, since subjects are chosen because of their background and/or insight, results are more likely to be useful in the research (Rosenberry and Vicker 57).

The organization's websites were then examined to procure such information as their use of social media and their ability to collect feedback. This analysis is a sort of content analysis, as elements of the nonprofits' websites will be sought and examined. Though the sample size for this particular study is small, having a systematic method for collecting the same data from each site will ensure the accuracy of the study (Rosenberry and Vicker 42).

## **IV. Case Presentation**

This study involves two nonprofit organizations: one national nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., and one state organization based in Raleigh, N.C. Both are advocacy organizations.

The national advocacy organization studied was the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, or CCAI, which is located in northeast Washington, D.C. CCAI was formed in 2001 in response to federal policy that inhibited foster parents from adopting their foster children. In founding CCAI, advocates for orphaned and fostered youth sought to be an objective resource for information necessary in advancing the efforts of policymakers on behalf of children. According to its website, "CCAI's goal is to educate federal policymakers about the need for reform; coordinate Congressional and community efforts to bring about change and facilitate opportunities for communication and awareness." The organization not only works to educate policymakers about adoption; it also hosts events and programs to raise awareness about adoption. One such program, Angels in Adoption, provides the opportunity for members of Congress to honor an individual or entity that has made a contribution on behalf of children in need of adoption. According to the last filed Form 990, CCAI's revenue was \$653,201 in 2008.

Emily Collins is the director of external relations for CCAI and was interviewed for this research. She joined the organization in June 2006 to assist with the Angels in Adoption program, and has since moved on to a larger role that involves organizing CCAI's involvement in National Adoption Day; managing CCAI's website, blog and database; and assisting the policy department within CCAI. Collins is almost entirely involved with CCAI's web presence, as there are only four other people employed by the organization.

The state advocacy organization studied was Action for Children North Carolina, which is located in downtown Raleigh, NC. According to its website, Action for Children NC "is a statewide, independent, non-partisan, non-profit child advocacy organization, dedicated to educating and engaging all people across the state to ensure that our children are healthy, safe, well-educated and have every opportunity for success." The organization was founded in 1983 as the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute in response to the lack of impartial data and research on the well-being of children in the state. In 2006, the current president and CEO, Barbara Bradley, joined the group and it was re-named Action for Children NC. The organization is the major source for research and data on North Carolina's children and publishes the North Carolina Children's Index, a profile of indicators on the health and well-being of the state's children. It is the nationally-recognized state affiliate of Voices for America's Children and is the state Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT partner. According to the last filed Form 990, the organization's revenue was \$1,038,345 in 2009, though it should be noted that more current estimates put Action for Children's revenue closer to \$750,000.

Mandy Ableidinger is Action for Children's director of policy and budget analysis. She joined the organization in November of 2007 and is primarily responsible for state budget and data research and analysis on a variety of topics, as well as lobbying at the General Assembly. Ableidinger is also responsible for Action for Children's website, as the organization does not currently employ a communications director. The communications duties are split up between three employees: the CEO searches the Internet to find articles mentioning Action for Children or pertinent issues, the office manager does news updates on the website, and Ableidinger manages the website and does most other updates. Personally, Ableidinger says that communications duties take up about 10 percent of her time.

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## V. Findings

After all of the interviews were completed, each organization's website was explored to find the various qualities noted in the research design (See Table 1).

CCAI allowed users to donate on the home page via a red "donate now!" button. Additionally, there was a "support CCAI" page under the "get involved" tab on the site's header. CCAI was present on many social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WordPress – which were all linked on its home page with the respective logos for each platform. The website had no way for users to submit feedback, though there was a link to a Microsoft Word document that potential volunteers can submit. An "info@ccainstitute.org" email address was also included at the footer of every page, along with the organization's physical address. There was no contact page on the website. The site's primary audiences were congressional staff members and the public – two audiences the site aimed to educate about adoption. CCAI worked to drive people to its website through the use of email lists to congressional staffers and general supporters from the media or friends of the organization. Such emails always linked back to website. Collins generally cited a lack of time as a challenge regarding the website, as she is the only person responsible for it but has other significant duties as well.

Action for Children also allowed users to donate on their home page – a "donate now" button under an Action for Children superhero graphic was just over halfway down the page. The same graphic was located on the "research and publications" page. The site also had a "donate" page that is static on the site's footer. Action for Children was present on Facebook, and the homepage displayed a "find us on Facebook" button just underneath the "donate" button. The organization also seemed to have two different YouTube channels – 1ncchild and ncchilddotorg – but neither were linked on their website. The site did not feature a way for users to submit feedback other than through an "admin@ncchild.org" email address, submissions to which were routed into the CEO's email inbox. This address was found on the contact page, which was linked at the footer of every page of the website. The page also contained the organization's physical address, phone number and driving directions. The site's primary audiences were interested members of the general public and state policy makers, each of which are audiences that Action for Children aimed to inform about the well-being of children in the state. Action for Children attempted to drive people to its website by distributing its information at conferences or other events where interested citizens were present. Further, whenever the organization hosted children's advocacy days or other events, they signed people up for action or information email lists. Finally, Action for Children asks their allies in the state to forward information along to their users, as people who are interested in issues like low-income housing issues might also be interested in low-income education issues. Ableidinger cited a lack of time and expertise as the primary challenges when it came to the organization's web presence.

## VI. Discussion

As was expected, both advocacy organizations named governmental figures as at least part of their primary web audiences. In fact, both organizations listed both governmental figures and members of the public as their combined primary audiences. CCAI listed congressional staff specifically as their governmental audience, as is expected with a national organization, while Action for Children named state policymakers. A slight difference was evident in what sort of public each organization sought to reach: while CCAI believed this audience was comprised of anyone who had heard about the organization and wanted to learn more, Action for Children thought this audience was comprised more of self-selected, active individuals looking to affect children's issues in the state. This difference aside, it seems that the hypothesis was correct in this particular study.

The next hypothesis positioned that a small staff and a lack of expertise would lead a nonprofit to have a less interactive web presence and non-comprehensive overall web strategy. Both nonprofit employees mentioned the small staff size of their organization and a lack of expertise as a challenge they faced with regards to their website. Neither organization, however, had interactive components to their website. CCAI had a Microsoft Word document available on their website that potential volunteers could submit and a generic "info" email address on the footer of every page. The site did not, however, have a contact page. Action for Children's site had a contact page linked on the footer of every page with a generic "admin" email address.

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Table 1: Comparison of Two Websites

	<b>Congressional Coalitio on Adoption Institute</b>	<b>Action for Children NC</b>
<b>Donation Ability</b>		
<b>Home page</b>	yes, red button	yes, bottom half
<b>Donate page</b>	“Support CCAI” under “Get In- volved”	yes on footer
<b>Other</b>		
<b>Social media</b>		
<b>Facebook</b>	“f” logo on homepage	“find us on facebook” on homepage
<b>Twitter</b>	“t” logo on homepage	no
<b>Blog</b>	yes; linked on homepage	no
<b>Other</b>	youtube account; linked on homepage	2 youtube channels; one visited 2 mo ago, one visited 3 wks ago
<b>Interactivity</b>		
<b>Feedback</b>	Word doc volunteer form; “info” email address on footer	admin@ncchild.org email on “contact us” page (footer)
<b>Other</b>	no contact page	
<b>Content audiences</b>		
<b>Beneficiaries</b>	congressional staff and general public primary audiences - edu- cate them	interested publics and policy-makers - educate
<b>Donors</b>		not mentioned
<b>Government</b>	educate congressional staff	educate state lawmakers
<b>Other</b>		inform people who can advocate for change, not necessarily children
<b>Web strategy</b>		
<b>Targeting techniques</b>	email list of congressional staff- ers; list of general supporters from media or friends - always link back to website	give people at conferences/events cards w/ website; sign people up for action notices; ask allies to forward things on to their networks
	national	state

Therefore, from the nonprofits studied, it can be seen that organizations with a lack of time or expertise do not have interactive websites. Both organizations, however, had strategic plans to drive people to their websites.

CCAI utilized lists of congressional staffers and friends in the public to send emails that link back to their website. Action for Children employed a similar method, signing people up to receive email updates and

action notices at various conferences and events and asking their nonprofit allies to forward pertinent information on to their networks. Therefore, the nonprofits studied in this case show that a small staff does not necessarily lead to a less comprehensive overall web strategy. Thus the second hypothesis was only partially correct.

## VII. Conclusion

Overall, this research did not reveal large differences between state and national advocacy nonprofits in the United States with regards to their Internet communication strategies. There were no differences in the primary audiences of each organization's website, nor were different comprehensive strategies employed. Finally, a small staff and a lack of expertise presented a challenge for each nonprofit, and their websites did not have a high level of interactivity. Each organization did, however, have a plan to drive web users to their website. Therefore, this research shows that a small staff in an advocacy nonprofit does not lend itself well to website interactivity, but does not necessarily inhibit its overall web strategy.

As this particular research only provided a small insight into the differences in Internet nonprofit communication between state and national advocacy organizations, further research could be done to expand our understanding of these differences. A larger number of organizations could be examined to broaden the extent to which these findings are true. For example, a larger study might sample an advocacy nonprofit from each state as well as a few additional national organizations. Additionally, as a small staff was noted as a hindrance to the communication practices in this research, studying larger nonprofits with more specialized staff members that are solely responsible for communication might yield different results, as they might be more focused on a more comprehensive communication strategy. Finally, future research would benefit from conducting all interviews in person. While it became impossible to do so for this research, it became evident that speaking to someone in person yields richer data than interviewing someone over the phone.

Overall, this study shows that small nonprofits, whether on a state or national level, are inhibited by staff, expertise and resources when it comes to their Internet communication strategies. Small organizations should note from this research that while their capabilities are limited, it is not impossible to have a comprehensive web strategy and a website that adequately informs its primary audience. Nonprofits, therefore, should focus on web strategy in an effort to more effectively serve their beneficiaries. Further, it is interesting to note that for one of the nonprofits studied, communications efforts only indirectly support the services the nonprofit provides and is therefore not seen as essential as other efforts. This study should also serve to show such organizations the importance of an Internet communication strategy. From this and prior research, it is evident that nonprofits who aim to serve more beneficiaries, gather more volunteers, achieve a higher number of donations or any combination of the above should focus some energy into web communications. Such efforts, while time-consuming in the short term, may very well prove their usefulness in the long term, as the Internet becomes an increasingly important venue for information gathering and two way communication.

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## Appendix: Interview Questions

1. Briefly, what is the purpose of your organization?
  2. Who/what is the primary audience for your website?
  3. How is this audience targeted?
  4. Secondary audience? And so on.
  5. Government role?
  6. How often is your website updated?
  7. Who in your organization is involved with your online presence?
  8. What do you believe to be the most important function of your website?
  9. What content do you have on the website?
  10. What content do you believe to be most important?
  11. How do current events affect your web presence?
  12. What sort of customer feedback do you most value?
  13. How do you obtain user feedback?
  14. How frequently do you receive feedback?
  15. How do you deal with feedback?
  16. When was your last website redesign?
  17. How often do you plan on re-evaluating your web design?
  18. Do you look at your competitor's websites when evaluating your own?
  19. Do you use social networking?
  20. What other online methods do you use to get the name of your organization out?
  21. What are some challenges you encounter when it comes to your online presence?
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# The Roman Catholic Church in America Through Online Media: A Narrative Analysis

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## Abstract

*Through the use of narrative analysis, this research sought to analyze how the Catholic Church, arguably the world's largest organization, represented itself through the use of its official online communications. Using framing and agenda-setting theories, the study examined the news subsidies of both the Vatican and U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The research revealed that the Catholic Church promoted messages that emphasized the importance of social reform and the sacredness of human life, engaging in social justice works around the world, celebrating cultural diversity and interfaith dialogue, and upholding the authority of the Church hierarchy. Ultimately, this study intended to identify dominant discourses about Catholicism in American culture.*

## I. Introduction

The Roman Catholic Church, an institution boasting over a billion members worldwide, is arguably the world's largest organization. While it spans myriad cultures, languages, races, political and social ideologies it remains, according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "the sole Church of Christ which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic" (1994). Despite its claim as the one true Church founded by Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church faces many challenges in today's world. In just about every form of media, the Church is frequently under attack, questioned, or undermined for its religious doctrines or stances on contentious political and moral issues. Between questionable depictions in popular literature (i.e. *Hitler's Pope*, *The Da Vinci Code*) to unflattering representations in television or film (i.e. *Religulous*, *Doubt*, *Dogma*), the Church has faced numerous challenges to both its identity and relevance in recent years.

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which the Roman Catholic Church—comprised of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the Holy See (also known as the Vatican or the Roman Curia), collectively—represents itself through its official online communication. The Roman Curia (2010), according to its website, serves as the official authority for the universal Church:

In exercising supreme, full, and immediate power in the universal Church, the Roman pontiff makes use of the departments of the Roman Curia which, therefore, perform their duties in his name and with his authority for the good of the churches and in the service of the sacred pastors. *CHRISTUS DOMINUS*, 9

For purposes of this study, the USCCB is also recognized as the official authority of the Catholic Church in the United States. According to Sister Mary Ann Walsh, director of media relations for the USCCB, "when the bishops want to speak as one, they do so through the USCCB... the USCCB could be considered

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the official voice of the church in the United States (Walsh, personal communication, February 02, 2010).

The research question used to guide this study is: In what ways does the Catholic Church represent itself through its official online communication?

## II. Literature Review

While no extant research has been conducted concerning the self-representation of the Catholic Church, thus making this an exploratory study, the Church's move toward online media is seen as an attempt to modernize its message for its more than one billion followers worldwide. In Pope Paul VI's decree *Inter Mirifica*, he called for Church leaders to use new inventions in media that have the power to "reach and influence not only individuals, but the very masses and the whole of human society" (1963, par. 1). A select few had already risen to the pope's call: Archbishop Fulton Sheen, who hosted the show *Life Is Worth Living* from 1952 to 1955, used television as a tool of social communication to broadcast a message of Jesus Christ that appealed to American Catholics. According to a study titled *Prime-Time Catholicism in 1950s America: Fulton J. Sheen and 'Life is Worth Living,'* the archbishop's show "adeptly identified real anxieties and tensions beneath the official celebratory national ideology of the 1950s and used such concerns as an opportunity to create a new image of Catholicism for national television audiences" (Smith, 1997, p. 73). The study added that "Sheen presented a Catholicism that addressed millions of Americans through their television screens and offered the promise of a happy, harmonious future for a traditional, godly America" (Smith, 1997, p. 73-74).

The Church's use of online media comes at an important time for a centuries-old religion. In a 2000 study by Lichter, Lichter, and Amundson titled *Media Coverage of the Catholic Church, 1963-1998*, it was determined that the news media often frame the Catholic Church as a political rather than a theological institution, using negative generalizations and stereotypes to project an unfavorable view of the Church onto American culture. The study also revealed that media sources supporting the Church were less frequent than those in opposition, especially when concerning topics of major social controversy, such as freedom of expression or birth control. According to the study, "Controversial issues were frequently presented as conflicts between the Church hierarchy, on one side, and lower-level clergy, lay Catholics, and non-Catholics on the other" (Lichter, Lichter, and Amundson, 2000).

A story that consistently makes headline news, the sex abuse crisis is one of the major challenges facing the Vatican today, and could require a public relations overhaul on the Church's part to help quell the problem. *The Boston Globe*, the newspaper renowned for breaking the now infamous Catholic clerical sexual abuse scandal in 2002, authored a book that same year titled *Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church*. The book offers an examination of the scandal from a secular news perspective, claiming that "even in the absence of hard data, it seemed increasingly clear that, although clergy from every religious denomination have sexually violated children, no major denomination has had a problem of the scale that has plagued the Catholic Church" (Boston Globe, 2002, p. 166-167). A 2008 study conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, titled the *Pew Forum's U.S. Religious Landscape Survey – Religious Beliefs and Practices: Diverse and Politically Relevant*, offers support for the argument that coverage of the sex abuse scandal in the U.S. may be linked to an increased secularization among Americans. Among other findings, the Pew study found that, among a group of religious traditions that also included Protestant Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and non-religious (self-prescribed non-practitioners, atheists and agnostics), "Catholicism has experienced the greatest net losses as a result of affiliation changes. While nearly one-in-three Americans (31%) were raised in the Catholic faith, today fewer than one-in-four (24%) describe themselves as Catholic" (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008, p. 5-6).

## III. Theory and Method

The research for this study targeted a three-month time frame between April 1, 2010, and June 30, 2010. Communications from the Catholic Church were taken from the official Vatican and USCCB websites (vatican.va and usccb.org, respectively), with special attention paid to news subsidies released through these two websites during the time frame. News subsidies are defined, for purposes of this research, as textual documents, such as press releases or written messages, which comprise the Catholic Church's self-repre-

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sentation. The study examined news releases issued by the USCCB and written papal proclamations and messages disseminated by the Vatican between April and June. In all, this study examined 66 USCCB news releases and 11 Vatican news subsidies. The primary focus is on textual aspects of coverage; analysis does not include streaming video or audio clips.

Because it is important to not simply understand *what* these organizations say, but also *how* these organizations say what they say, the qualitative method of discourse analysis was used to analyze the data gathered in this study. This research does not deal with coding or counting the language used in the official communications of the Catholic Church. Instead, this study focuses on understanding the meaning behind the language. Content analysis (the '*what*' approach) looks only at common words used within the articles of interest. While this approach is beneficial in some ways, it does not allow one to "associate the documents with conceptual and theoretical issues" (Altheide, 1996, p. 43). In discourse analysis (the '*how*' approach), "similar words are less important than meaningful patterns that are often apparent in context and relevance to another course of action, which may not even appear in one's notes with the same wording" (Altheide, 1996, p. 43).

Narrative analysis is a qualitative research method that emphasizes "stories" told by the subject matter being studied to see how people "impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives" (Riessman, 1993, p. 2). These stories are discoveries which lend themselves to a greater understanding of how people make sense of the various textual messages and apply meaning to them based on their prior experiences or in the context of their own worldview. Narrative analysis allows a researcher to identify patterns, themes, and discourses based on these stories and uncover a deeper meaning that is not always readily evident through quantitative research methods.

The study examines such patterns by developing a rubric to analyze Catholic Church news subsidies. Following a qualitative study protocol developed by David Altheide (1996), categories (variables) were identified which then guided data collection. Once these categories were identified, news subsidies were coded and sorted by themes or "distinctive characteristics" (Altheide, 1996, p. 44). These characteristics were then used to identify the four major Church narratives discussed in this research paper.

The coding rubric is integral to the narrative analysis and is used to categorize the Church news subsidies and develop the narratives that emerge from the analysis. The rubric also incorporates two communications theories: framing theory and agenda-setting theory. Framing is the idea that people's decisions can be affected or influenced by the way in which information is presented ("Framing explained"). Agenda-setting, developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, theorizes that the media, through the selection, promotion, and repetition of particular news topics, play an influential role in the formation of public opinion. "Over time, the issues emphasized in news reports become the issues regarded as most important among the public. The agenda of the news media becomes, to a considerable degree, the agenda of the public" (McCombs, 2004, p. 2). In this case, this study examines the Church's agenda based on its official online communications. These theories, along with the narrative analysis method, will be used to guide this study.

## IV. Church Narratives Identified

An analysis of 77 USCCB and Vatican subsidies from the three-month time period between April 1, 2010, and June 30, 2010, yielded four major narratives the Catholic Church in the United States espouses. The USCCB in particular stressed the important role the Church plays in reforming current political and social policies. The coding and analysis of USCCB and Vatican news subsidies revealed the largest topic of concern the Church in America seeks to address in its official communication is respect for human life.

### ***Narrative #1: The Catholic Church places emphasis on social reform that advances the Church's teaching on the universal right to, sacredness of, and respect for human life.***

Narrative #1 earned top priority in Pope Benedict's Easter 2010 message, *Urbi et Orbi* (Latin for "To the City and to the World"), in which the Holy Father prayed for peace around the world and an alleviation of suffering. His speech addressed nearly every continent, first praying "that in the Middle East, and especially in the land sanctified by his death and resurrection, the peoples will accomplish a true and definitive 'exodus' from war and violence to peace and concord" (Benedict XVI, 2010). He gave particular attention to Christians

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in Iraq, surrounded and affected by both political and religious conflict. The pope then cited the drug trafficking problems in Latin America and the Caribbean, extended his condolences to the peoples of Haiti and Chile, and concluded with prayers for an end to the atrocities in Africa, citing the nations where genocide is practiced. To have been the central subject of the pope's Easter address denotes the heavy emphasis the Catholic Church places on universal human rights and on the life and dignity of the human person.

Based on the research, immigration and abortion received the most attention of any issues related to the protection of the dignity and value of the human person. The USCCB's stance on immigration revolved around the passage of Arizona Law SB1070 "which already requires aliens (non-citizens) to register and carry their documents with them" (Camarota, 2010). This new law "simply states that violating federal immigration law is now a state crime as well" and that illegal immigrants "can now be arrested by local law enforcement in Arizona" (Camarota, 2010). The bill has received majority support among Arizona citizens, with 70 percent of the state population in favor of the law. The passage of this law, however, has ignited much controversy among the Catholic community. In an April 28, 2010, news release, Bishop John C. Wester of Salt Lake City, Utah, expressed his displeasure with the new law, calling it "symptomatic of the absence of federal leadership on the issue of immigration" ("USCCB Migration Chairman," 2010). In a May 10, 2010, news release, Catholic bishops conveyed the concerns regarding Law SB1070, which they had addressed at the Catholic Cultural Diversity Network Convocation 2010 at the University of Notre Dame, writing, "This is a law which undermines the fabric of society by creating an atmosphere of discrimination against certain members of the community, profiling minorities and creating fear among persons of color regardless of their immigration status" ("Leaders at Cultural Diversity Convocation," 2010). On May 11, shortly after the letter was published, the USCCB issued a news release announcing the partnership between its committee on Migration and Refugee Services and the Catholic University of America to develop a website that would educate publics about the role of the Church in immigration reform and its related issues. The site intends to provide students, faculty, and researchers with the information and tools necessary for a well-informed understanding of the topic from a Church perspective.

Abortion emerged as another major theme and was frequently raised in conjunction with health care reform. The pro-life agenda was prevalent in documents addressed to Congress, indicating the importance of this issue to the Church and its relevance to and potential impact on American society. Since the 1973 Supreme Court case of *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion in the United States, the Catholic Church has aggressively campaigned to reverse the decision through political and social action. On May 20, the USCCB published a letter written by Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of the USCCB's Committee on Pro-Life Activities on its website. The letter urged Congress to support H.R. 5111, a new bipartisan bill that would bring a recently passed government act "into line with policies on abortion and conscience rights that have long prevailed in other federal health programs" ("Bishops Urge Congress," 2010). DiNardo added that the bishops would continue to advocate for "a reformed health care system that respects the life, health and conscience of all" ("Bishops Urge Congress," 2010). The following day, the USCCB issued another news release reiterating its commitment to promoting the interests of all, attempting to assuage concerns that the Church would compromise to achieve certain goals, saying, "We will never cease to advocate for everyone, beginning with the most needy ... Our vision of the common good embraces the good for each and every member without exception, beginning with those who are weakest and most vulnerable" ("Bishops Note Way Forward," 2010).

The USCCB continued to address the United States Senate on the abortion issue in a June 29 letter, also posted online, in which Cardinal Dinardo asked for the removal of a bill that would provide authorization for elective abortions in military hospitals worldwide. The bill, the cardinal argued, would pose a moral dilemma to Catholic health care workers forced to choose between their professional duties and their religious convictions. The letter also indicates the government's historically pro-life stance and cites the departure from that pattern that this amendment would entail. DiNardo added, "It was disingenuous to suggest, as the amendment's proponents have, that the amendment is 'moderate' in requiring patients at military facilities to pay for their abortions" ("Bishops Urge Senate," 2010). Immigration and abortion thus emerged as the two largest sub-narratives of the Church's emphasis on social reform that values and protects human life.

### ***Narrative #2: The Catholic Church engages in social justice works around the world and calls upon Catholics and non-Catholics alike to do the same in accordance with Catholic social teaching.***

The Catholic Church has long espoused for social justice before its inclusion in the *Catechism of the*

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*Catholic Church*, the official written texts that spell out the teachings of the Church. Social justice, a major component of Catholic social teaching, plays an influential role in the Catholic Church's mission of disseminating the message of Christ worldwide. Research and analysis of USCCB and Vatican news subsidies yielded social justice as a second major narrative.

On April 1, 2010, the USCCB's Subcommittee on the Church in Latin America announced its donation of a \$280,000 grant to the recently earthquake-stricken Chile. The magnitude 8.8 earthquake struck the South American nation in early March, leaving hundreds dead and more than 1.5 million people displaced (Barrionuevo and Robbins, 2010). The quake also damaged a number of Chilean churches, leaving nearly one million Catholics without a place to worship. Partnering with Aid to the Church in Need, "an international Catholic charity under the guidance of the Holy Father" ("USCCB Reaches Out," 2010), the USCCB Subcommittee helped supply a total of 35 temporary chapels for the affected Chilean parishes. In addition to the funding provided for the temporary chapels, the USCCB Subcommittee also set aside \$50,000 for the Church in Chile to support its various pastoral projects. The Subcommittee also planned to visit the country at a later date to document the relief efforts and determine if further assistance was needed.

One week later, on April 8, 2010, the USCCB issued another news release about earthquake relief efforts, except this time the country making headlines was Haiti. January 12, 2010, saw the Caribbean nation hit by a magnitude 7.0 quake, leaving between 200,000 and 250,000 dead and damages ranging from \$7.2 billion to \$13.2 billion (New York Times, 2010). The next day, U.S. bishops began organizing a massive fund-raising campaign to help rebuild Haiti. In less than three months, the Collection for Haiti campaign had raised \$58.7 million from parishes across America. According to the news release, "Outside the special collection, generous support of more than \$60 million also has gone directly to CRS from individuals, groups, colleges, foundations and corporations" ("Catholics Donate," 2010), totaling \$120 million in donations. The actions of the Church in the wake of the natural disasters in Chile and Haiti offer evidence to its commitment of enacting social justice in areas of the world where the need is greatest.

On May 5, 2010, the USCCB issued a news release applauding the actions of Congress for introducing a new bill, the Haiti Economic Lift Program Act of 2010, which sought to increase trade preferences with Haiti. Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany, New York, expressed gratitude for Congress's actions on this matter, noting that the passage of this legislation would lead to the creation of thousands of jobs, increased confidence among investors and retailers, and an overall improvement in the quality of life of the Haitian people.

On June 1, 2010, the USCCB issued a news release promoting Peter's Pence, a collection that supports the works of the Holy Father. The theme, drawn from the 2009 papal encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (Latin for "In Charity and Truth"), was "Cast the love of Christ upon the world," citing the love of God as the source of people's kindness and good works (Peter's Pence Collection," 2010). According to the release, "offerings to the collection support church needs, humanitarian initiatives (such as aid of victims of war, oppression and natural disasters) and other human promotion projects around the world" ("Peter's Pence Collection," 2010). The USCCB planned the special collection for this ministry across America for the weekend of June 26-27; the news release sought to publicize the mission and purpose of the collection.

On June 15, 2010, the USCCB issued a news release detailing the efforts of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, or CCHD, in the wake of the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster. The CCHD raised \$300,000 for those primarily affected by the oil spill, offering "concrete support to the work that must be done to help these communities help themselves" ("Catholic Campaign for Human Development," 2010). A day later, on June 16, the USCCB issued another news release calling for Catholics to pray for those who died in the oil rig explosion, as well as for those reliant on the gulf for their economic well-being. The USCCB's YouTube channel featured a video message from Bishop Kevin Boland, promoter of the Apostleship by the Sea, which was uploaded on the same day as the news release. Boland offered his condolences for the victims of the disaster before citing *Caritas in Veritate* in his speech, saying "the way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa" ("A Message from Bishop Boland, Bishop Promoter of the Apostleship of the Sea (AOS)," 2010). Bishop Boland's words are evidence the Church believes the environment is an issue of social justice that both Catholics and non-Catholics should seek to address.

While the USCCB illustrated the importance of social justice and its application through various charitable operations of the Church, the Vatican made no explicit mention of the issue during the three-month time frame. Instead, the USCCB established a connection between the Vatican and the Church narrative on social justice by frequently citing Pope Benedict's *Caritas in Veritate*, which outlines the Church's social doctrine, specifically regarding "justice and the common good" (2009). The themes of the encyclical, charity and truth,

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are prevalent throughout the numerous USCCB news releases on social justice. It may be determined, therefore, that the social justice narrative, in fact, serves as a vehicle for the larger themes of love and truth the Church hopes to promote.

### ***Narrative #3: The Catholic Church encourages interfaith dialogue and embraces cultural diversity.***

The Catholic Church is at times referred to as “the universal Church.” Indeed, the word “catholic” comes from the Greek word *katholikos*, meaning “throughout the whole” or “universal” (Catholic Encyclopedia, 2009). Closely related to this idea, the Church’s commitment to advancing both interfaith dialogue and cultural diversity emerged as a third narrative, reflected in the USCCB and Vatican media subsidies analyzed in the April-June time frame.

On April 15, 2010, the USCCB released a media advisory promoting an event on the issue of cultural diversity, scheduled for May 6-8 at the University of Notre Dame. The gathering of more than 300 participants, including dozens of Church leaders, were convening to “advance ... recognition of cultural diversity in the Church; foster a strong Catholic identity and greater unity in diversity in the Church” (“Media Credentialing,” 2010), and to mark the tenth anniversary of Encuentro 2000, a celebration of multiculturalism and religious unity in the United States. The USCCB issued a press release on May 3, 2010, again promoting the event. Jesuit Father Allan Figueroa Deck was cited, saying, “Intercultural communication and relationships are more important than ever for the Church in our country. Today these relationships provide a key for the Church’s growth and vitality as one Body in Christ” (“Unity in Diversity,” 2010).

Archbishop Wilton B. Gregory of Atlanta maintained the emphasis on spiritual unity in his address to the Cultural Diversity Network Convocation on May 7. The speech was featured in a May 10 news release on the USCCB website. In his address, Archbishop Gregory noted how society often attempts to recognize diversity through an artificial means, namely by seeking to “minimize the uniqueness and distinctiveness of people” (“Archbishop Gregory,” 2010). The goal of the Catholic Church, he posited, should reflect exactly the opposite. Gregory said, “We are most Catholic when we reflect our oneness of faith and worship that is achieved in response to our rich mixture of human variety through the grace of the Holy Spirit” (“Archbishop Gregory,” 2010).

Interfaith dialogue, as mentioned earlier, was another major focus of the USCCB during the time frame. Twice the USCCB met with Muslim leaders, the first on May 5-6 in New Jersey and the second on May 19-20 in California. The USCCB highlighted the conferences in news releases issued on May 17, 2010, and June 1, 2010, respectively. At the first meeting, influential members of both the Muslim and Catholic communities discussed interreligious education and the danger of stereotypes. Dr. Talat Sultan of the Islamic Circle of North America, or ICNA, noted that “before people teach about other religions, they should use primary sources to correctly understand other faiths” (“Mid-Atlantic Catholic-Muslim Dialogue,” 2010). Members then collectively voiced concerns about inaccurate portrayals of their religions in the media, which both parties agreed were a major factor in shaping the negative attitudes about Islam and Catholicism in American culture. The two groups adopted a statement, vowing “to work for mutual understanding between their two faith traditions, to support one another in confronting negative stereotypes in all media, [and] to work with the leaders of their congregations in this effort” (“Mid-Atlantic Catholic-Muslim Dialogue,” 2010). The second meeting sought to compare a sacred text found within both the Christian and Muslim traditions. Catholic and Muslim leaders agreed that the two similar narratives, titled “The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus” in Christian texts and Al-Kahf (“The Cave”) in Surah 18:21 of the Qur’an, the holy book of Islam, “reveal God’s care for the young men who remained faithful” (“West Coast Catholic-Muslim Dialogue,” 2010).

In addition to enhancing its relationship with the Muslim community, the Catholic Church also worked to connect with those of the Jewish tradition, whom Pope John Paul referred to as “our elder brothers” (Cunningham, 2010) and whom Pope Benedict called “our fathers in the faith” (Moynihan, 2010). On May 19, 2010, the USCCB issued a news release documenting a Jewish-Catholic Dialogue held in New York a week earlier. The semi-annual consultation sought to understand the growing religious trends among youth members of their respective faiths based on the findings of the Pew Forum’s U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, conducted in 2008. Among its discoveries, the survey revealed that only 35 percent of American Catholics between the ages of 18-49 attend worship services on a weekly basis, while attendance is only 20 percent of American Jews in the same age bracket (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008, p. 38). Representatives from both sides agreed that the younger generations of religious people in America “perceive institutionalized

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religion as ‘alien, bland, coercive and divisive’” and that, if these members are to be retained, these institutions must devise ways to approach and address these young people outside of traditional worship settings (“Jewish-Catholic Dialogue,” 2010).

The Vatican also showed support for its Jewish brethren through its commemoration of the birthday of a former chief rabbi. On May 3, 2010, Pope Benedict extended his well-wishing to Rabbi Emeritus Rav Elio Toaff of Rome, who was celebrating his 95th birthday. The pope referred to Psalm 23 on several occasions, a biblical passage penned by King David, who wrote of his relationship with and the good will of the Lord. The Holy Father cites the Holocaust as the “darkest valley” in the history of the Jews, but that God was there to guide the rabbi and his people through this difficult period so that they might “become a sign of hope” for other adherents of Judaism and for humanity (“Message of Greetings,” 2010). In a call for increased dialogue between their two respective religions, Benedict added, “I am especially keen to recall your commitment to promoting fraternal relations between Catholics and Jews, and the sincere friendship that bound you to my venerable Predecessor, Pope John Paul II” (“Message of Greetings,” 2010).

The Catholic Church also emphasizes the need for communication with other Christian denominations. In particular, it seeks closer ties with the Orthodox Church, which separated from the Roman Catholic Church in the Great Schism of 1054, nearly a millennium ago. On June 8, 2010, the USCCB issued a news release detailing a meeting of Church leaders to discuss steps toward uniting the two churches. The consultation met on June 1-3 to draft a statement outlining the historical differences between the two institutions and attempt to discern a course of action that might facilitate their reunification. The document calls such reunification a “matter of urgency” and “reflects on what a reunited Catholic and Orthodox Church might look like, the ecclesial structures needed to facilitate such unity, and the questions that remain to be answered if such a reconciliation is to take place” (“Orthodox-Catholic Consultation,” 2010).

The Vatican also engaged in interfaith dialogue during the time frame, addressing a letter to Buddhists worldwide on the subject of the environment, as mentioned in the Church’s second narrative regarding its emphasis on social justice. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue issued the message on the feast of Vesākha, known in the Buddhist tradition as the birthday of Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism. The Vatican used this feast as an opportunity to discuss the environmental crisis and ask for help in addressing the problem. The Church, calling upon Buddhists because of their shared “profound respect for human life” (“Message for the Feast of Vesakh/Hanamatsuri,” 2010), hoped that people of both religions could serve as an example of coexistence for the rest of the world. The message, although addressed to Buddhists, was arguably targeted at Christians as well; their participation, although not explicitly requested, is implied. This is a general theme throughout all official Church communication with other religions: all Catholics, regardless of age, race, or vocation, are called to enter into dialogue with people of other faith traditions. This hearkens back to the Church’s belief in the universal respect for and dignity of the human person.

#### ***Narrative #4: The Catholic Church holds its leaders in high esteem, believing they possess authority bestowed upon them by God.***

The fourth and final major narrative that emerged from the research was the authority of the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church. The clergy consists of those men ordained to serve in a religious capacity within the Church. Catholic doctrine holds that Jesus Christ, when founding the Church, also appointed Peter the Apostle to serve as the first pope. “Through Apostolic Succession, that same hierarchy willed by Jesus, exists today in the Church with the Pope (the successor of St. Peter) at her head, leading the Bishops (the successors of the Apostles)” (“The Catholic Church: Hierarchical Structure of the Church,” 2007). In short, today’s clergy represents an unbroken line of Church leaders traced directly back to St. Peter. The Catholic Church’s depiction of the Church clergy as an authoritative body is important, therefore, not simply to illustrate the legitimacy of the hierarchy, but also to remind people of its divine origins.

The hierarchy was given serious attention in the USCCB’s coverage; based on the research coding, the subject that received the highest coverage in the USCCB’s news releases was that of episcopal appointments and resignations (episcopal meaning related to a bishop). The USCCB issued a total of 66 news releases in the three-month time frame. Of those news releases, 15 were the subject of episcopal appointments and/or resignations. From the beginning of April 2010 to the end of June 2010, the USCCB issued news releases marking the appointment of 17 bishops and the resignation of six bishops. All episcopal resignations were received by Pope Benedict. Each of the 15 stories detailing the appointments and resignations provide information on the academic, professional, and vocational backgrounds on the Church official or officials

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mentioned in the article. Eight of the articles feature demographic facts about the diocese where the Church official is assigned, including square mileage, total population of the diocese, and the number and percentage of the population that is Catholic.

The Vatican website also places a major emphasis on the leadership of the Catholic Church, with the pope at its head. Of the 11 news subsidies the Vatican produced during the three-month time frame, five were personally authored by Pope Benedict XVI. Four others were authored by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, a group of 23 cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, as well as 28 consultants, described as “professors in various Roman universities and pontifical faculties who are experts in different ecclesiastical disciplines” (“Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith”). The other two were written by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Synod of Bishops, which was “set up after Vatican Council II in order to foster the unity and cooperation of bishops around the world with the Holy See” (“Synod of Bishops,” 2011).

On May 10, 2010, Pope Benedict addressed a letter to the second meeting of the Church’s “Kirchentag” (German for “Church congress”) in Munich. In the message, the Holy Father voiced his support for the bishops, citing the motto used by the congress: “So That You Might Have Hope.” The pope added, “This phrase intends first of all to invite us not to lose sight of goodness and of good people. It invites us to be good ourselves and to become good again always” (“Message of His Holiness,” 2010). Furthermore, he pointed to Jesus Christ for encouragement. “We have not been left alone. God is living. God loves us. In Jesus Christ he became one of us. I can turn to him and he will listen to me” (“Message of His Holiness,” 2010). The pope’s message illustrates the belief that God, too, supports the efforts of the “Kirchentag” and, in a larger sense, the Catholic Church and its efforts to bring the faith to the world.

On May 21, 2010, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith released a letter notifying bishops around the world of a revision regarding the norms *de gravioribus delictis* (“grave delicts”), or the rules governing the proper treatment of serious offenses committed by members of the clergy (e.g., clerical child sex abuse). The letter intimated that bishops should review the changes made to the norms and ensure the priests and other members of the religious community of their respective dioceses were alerted of the changes as well. In addition to its publication as a likely response to the sex abuse scandal, which will be explored further in Chapter IV, the letter looked to provide members of the Church hierarchy with an alert to updates made to Church policy regarding sex abuse cases.

## V. Discussion

Addressing the research question, the Roman Catholic Church represents itself as a benevolent theological institution with strong ties to Jesus Christ and his messages. The four major Church narratives developed after an analysis of the USCCB and Vatican news subsidies indicated the Church’s commitment to spreading the Word of God throughout the world by charitable means and evangelical outreach. The Church’s mission and messages, however, were overshadowed in large part by unfavorable representations of the Church in secular news media. The sex abuse scandal, unveiled as a global problem and not one restricted to the United States as previously believed, dealt serious damage to the reputation of the institutional Church and its members. In response, the Church has taken steps to address this issue, appointing new bishops and priests to replace those who had a hand in the sex abuse scandal, resulting in a cleansing of sorts in the ranks of the Church. The Roman Catholic Church is now committed to new approaches that look to restore its integrity and regain the trust of those who have since abandoned hope in the institution.

Despite a more transparent approach, the Church needs a way to infiltrate the mainstream discourse and promote its agenda on a more frequent and consistent basis. The Church makes a great many positive contributions in the world, as evidenced through the four narratives highlighted in this study. Its challenge is to find and project its voice amid the noise and clutter of a society already oversaturated and influenced by media messages. The Roman Catholic Church faces numerous obstacles and threats in this modern world, but an institution that has lasted nearly 2,000 years and encountered more than its fair share of crises and struggles is far from finished.

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## **Limitations**

This study was conducted as part of an undergraduate honors thesis, which is structured as a two-year academic program. The limited time frame was a prime factor in the number of media subsidies collected and analyzed. The thesis, in addition to the 77 Church news subsidies analyzed, examined 281 articles from three major traditional online news sites—*USAToday.com*, *NYTimes.com*, and *Washingtonpost.com*. A study concentrated solely on Church subsidies and narratives has the possibility of yielding even more in-depth results and conclusions. Furthermore, the three-month time frame from April to June 2010 is a limitation in that it selects only a short time period to examine. The major Church narratives that existed during this time period are likely very different if examining a separate or larger time period. Lastly, the main researcher's faith background as an actively practicing Catholic may present a limitation to this thesis. It is possible that, despite the researcher's best efforts to remain unbiased throughout the study, some areas of the research are prone to a slight degree of partiality in one direction or another.

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# The Appeals Of Luxury Advertising: An Application Of Taylor's Six-Segment Message Strategy Wheel

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## Abstract

*The primary purpose of this study was to further expand upon Taylor's Six-Segment Message Strategy Wheel and provide the communication research community with insights into luxury brand advertising. Using content analysis and Taylor's message strategy wheel, this research analyzed 317 ads across multiple print publications between January of 2009 and October of 2010. The results concluded that ego was the most frequent appeal used in both a recession and economic growth for all luxury business sectors. Overall, transformational appeals were used most frequently in both timeframes by all business sectors except for Fast Moving Consumer Goods. This study provided details on the application of Taylor's message wheel and brought forth the groundwork for future studies in luxury advertising.*

## I. Introduction

Global luxury brands have a double role. First, luxury brands must be able to inform, persuade and sell a product of worth across a multitude of cultural boundaries. Second, global luxury brands must create, attract and maintain brand loyalty and value (Interbrand, 2010). The economic crisis of 2008-2009 posed an interesting test of marketing ability, advertising strategy and analyzing techniques of consumer buying trends. The brands that thrived through these trying times also are some of the least understood in terms of advertising strategy.

Many brands in the luxury industry strive for the elusive "recession-proof" status in which the product and brand can maintain or even increase value within fluctuating economies and markets (Sullivan, 2008). As such, Scilla Huan Sun of Julius Baer Luxury Brands Fund suggests that luxury brands are hierarchical in nature and that "affordable luxury still has a lot of long-term growth potential but [it] is more cyclical than true luxury, which remains very stable," as reported by Sullivan (2008, para. 8). But not all in the luxury business believe such hype. Founder Alexander Duckworth of Point One Percent, a marketing advising company for luxury companies, disagrees with Huan's point of view in a 2008 New York Times article reported by Stephanie Clifford stating, "the stereotype in our sector is [that] high-end luxury brands are Teflon to a recession, which is nonsense" (2008, para. 11). Evidence from the last three years of buying behavior generally seem to support both claims; for some luxury companies thrived and made large profits (e.g. Louis Vuitton, Cartier) while others faltered and cut advertising funding (e.g. Vogue) across a multitude of marketing platforms, most specifically, print (Clifford, 2008).

This current document aims to provide the research community with the first in-depth views into the

\* **Keywords:** luxury advertising, Taylor's message strategy wheel, advertising in a recession and in an economic boom, luxury appeal

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interplay between luxury brands, the advertising strategies used and consumer behaviors in both a recession and economic growth timeframe. Using content analysis and Taylor's (1999) Six-Segment Message Strategy Wheel as the framework, this study also aims to expand upon Taylor's model and provide insight to advertising strategies employed by luxury brands in print.

This current study also expands upon previous research using Taylor's message wheel, further adding to the credibility and validity of its use. By examining global luxury brands using Taylor's message wheel, the current study also provides a sound framework, a starting point for future research in advertising and marketing on luxury brands, and the methodology and procedure for future analysis in this particular business sector.

## **II. Literature Review**

### ***Defining Luxury***

Today, the term "luxury" is used somewhat subjectively. To some, "luxury" is defined as "indulging in and the enjoyment of rich, comfortable, and sumptuous living;" however, to others it is the obtainment of something that is expensive or rare (Free Online Dictionary, Thesaurus and Encyclopedia, 2010). Therefore, to increase objectivity and clarity, this research defines the term "luxury" as "something that is considered an indulgence rather than a necessity (Free Online Dictionary, Thesaurus and Encyclopedia, 2010). Using this definition constructs a more objective method for analysis of what is considered a luxury item and a luxury brand.

### ***Role of Advertising***

Similar to studies done by Sandage (1972) and Chong, Lee, and Taylor (n.d.), this research defines advertising as an institution where problems are managed through humanly designed methods. Likewise, Carey (1960) asserts that the purpose of advertising is to inform the public and consumers alike about goods and services, but when applied to economic conditions today, advertising can also be applied to noneconomic situations as well. Carey (1960) also maintains that advertising plays a role in shaping socio-economic norms, values and beliefs; seeing as inevitably, advertising brings both buyers and sellers of goods together, thus giving advertising a certain aspect of power of control in defining what behavioral and societal norms are acceptable and appropriate.

Based on Carey's (1960) study, it can be inferred that an advertiser's choice in advertising strategies is influenced and affected by economic conditions, and knowing when to adjust or change these strategies is placed on the advertisers themselves. Thus, depending on the industry, economy, the advertiser and social norms established, an advertising strategy can largely vary in length of time in use; from being short-term strategies of a couple of months, to lasting several years. In Taylor's (2005), and Chong, Lee, Taylor's study (Magnitude and Direction of Changes in Advertising Strategies of Financial Services Organizations during an Economic Crisis: An Application of Taylor's Six-Segment Message Strategy Wheel, n.d.) it is further explained that overall changes in advertising strategies happen more frequently due to the pressures on advertisers to prove and show positive results in the advertising tactics deployed; otherwise fearing being terminated by either the client or the agency. Noting this trend, though economic conditions should be factored into how message strategies are formed, we should not, however, infer that changing message strategies because of change in economic conditions is either the correct or optimal strategy (Chong, Lee, Taylor, n.d).

### ***Theoretical Framework for Message Strategy***

Though in many cases the terms, such as creative strategy and message strategy, have been used somewhat synonymously. This research, similar to research by Laskey, Day, and Crask (1989); Frazer (1983); and Taylor (1999), defines the term "message strategy" as "what to say" rather than "how to say it" (Taylor, 1999). Further differentiating between the two terms, Taylor clarifies that the term "message strategy" be viewed as the approach in which products, services, companies or institutions may be or are currently being used as its method in promotion or communication. This definition and Taylor's six-segment message strategy wheel is used as the groundwork for this research.

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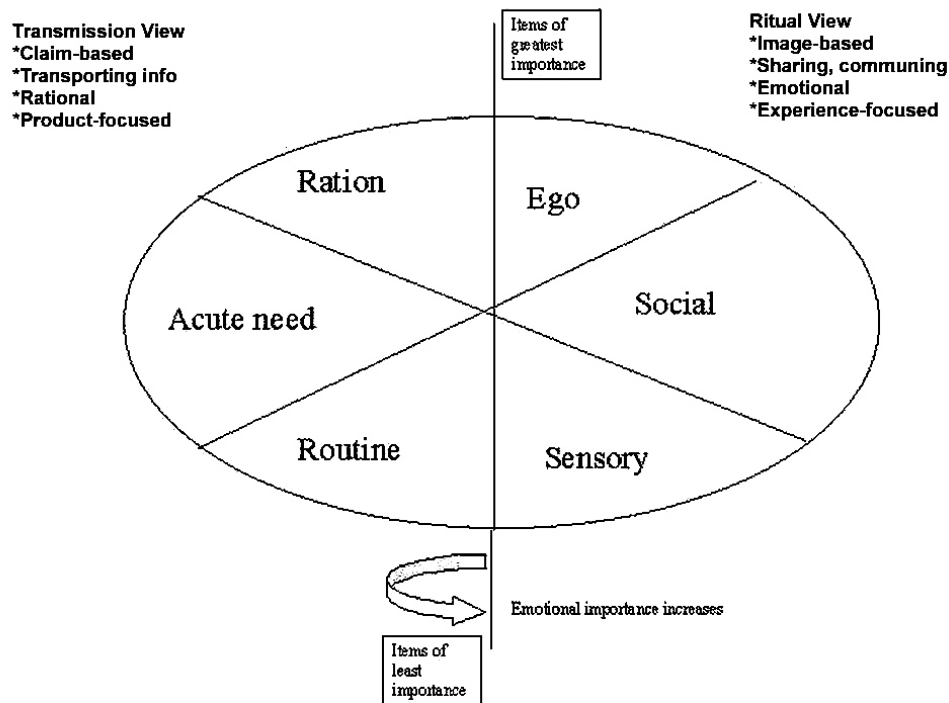


Figure 1. Taylor's six-segment message strategy wheel

Message strategies in product and service advertising have been studied extensively by researchers (e.g. Laskey, Day, and Crask 1989; Cutler & Javalgi 1993; Taylor 1999; Venger & Wolburg, 2008), thus providing a sound background for creating a framework for analysis of luxury brand's message strategies presented in this research. As mentioned above, there is extensive literature (e.g. Carey, 1975; Taylor, 1999; Hwang, McMillan, and Lee, 2003) on creative marketing and advertising strategies, and out of such, two basic classifications of advertisements emerged: transmission and ritual. These two classifications are similar to each other and became the basis for two more advertising classification terms often used synonymously with the transmission and ritual terms: informational and transformational (Carey, 1975; Pluto & Wells, 1984; Taylor, 1999; Chong et al. n.d.). Similar to advertising under the transmission view as presented by Carey (1975), the informational classification is suggested as "to impart, send, transmit or give information to consumers" (Hwang, McMillan, and Lee, 2003 p. 3). Advertising that has been categorized as ritual or transformational is typically defined as utilizing emotional, self-gratifying, unconventional or original means and strategies to reach consumers (Pluto & Wells, 1984; Laskey, Day, and Crask, 1989; Taylor, 1999; Golan & Zaider, 2008; Chong et al. n.d.). The terms informational and transformational are used throughout the remainder of this document from this point onward. Expanding past research, Taylor (1999) proposed a six-segment message strategy wheel that divided the two primary categories into subcategories. Under the informational category, Taylor identified three more message segments: ration, acute need, and routine. Under the transformational category, Taylor also proposed that this category be divided into three more message segments as well: ego, social, and sensory. In this model, these subcategories are explained further below.

#### **Informational View:**

The ration segment under Taylor's model appeals to the consumer's need for data and information. Advertising elements under this segment use a high frequency of informative and persuasion techniques (Taylor, 1999). Examples of products typically using a ration appeal include electronics, such as televisions, computers, and other products, such as cars or household appliances.

The acute need segment under Taylor's model is based on the consumer's limited time for purchase, thus brand recognition and familiarity play a factor in the decision-making as well. Examples of products using the acute need segment are car tires and batteries due to the nature of uncertainty of when the need for these products would arise.

The routine segment attempts to, or does, take advantage of consumer routine buying habits. Taylor (as cited by Golan & Zaidner, 2008) suggests that this segment has dual roles in that it provides consumers an outlet to maintain brand consumption and purchasing habits as well as providing the “why” the product will fulfill their needs. Examples of products under this segment are cosmetics, common household goods (e.g. dryer sheets and cooking oil), and cereal.

**Transformational View:**

The ego segment under Taylor’s (1999) message strategy wheel is defined as advertising strategically appealing to consumer’s sense of self-image and importance. Advertisements in the ego segment appeal to how the individual would like to be perceived by others, and the messages are typically related to vanity or self-actualization (Taylor, 1999; Golan & Zaidner 2008; Venger & Wolburg 2008; Chong, Lee, and Taylor, n.d.). Messages within this segment aim to reflect an individual’s ego or status, rather than citing that the product will change who they are. This segment is most often associated with luxury products and services such as but not limited to: luxury watches and cars; high-fashion clothing; and as suggested by Golan & Zaidner (2008), publications such as *The Economist* and *The Wall Street Journal* as well. In application, this segment holds little need for information and more often than not, is more image-driven than other segments.

The social segment of Taylor’s message strategy wheel is classified as how the individual would like others to perceive about them. Thus, advertisements classified in this segment should “be directed to being noticed, gaining social approval, engaging in the socially correct behavior, or recalling and reliving social experiences through product consumption” (Taylor, 1999 p. 13). Examples of products associated with using the social segment may include jewelry and holiday gifts (Golan & Zaidner, 2008).

Last of the transformational view subcategories is sensory. In this segment, advertisers appeal to the consumer’s five major senses, often using gifts or rewards as added incentives. Advertisements using elements that enact a sense of touch, smell, taste, sight or sound will fall in this category. Examples of advertisements using sensory view with gifts include print ads attaching perfume or cologne sample strips to the advertising message. Other examples of under this segment may also include food and beverage products and household goods (Golan & Zaidner, 2008).

### ***Applications of Taylor’s Six-Segment Message Strategy Wheel***

Since its publication in 1999, several researchers gauging message strategies have effectively utilized Taylor’s Six-Segment Message Strategy Wheel. Though its implications vary, the overall effectiveness of the message strategy wheel is evident.

Hwang, McMillan, and Lee (2003) used Taylor’s message strategy wheel to analyze message strategy, audience and function in corporate website advertising. Using content analysis to study 160 corporate websites, the authors found that Taylor’s routine segment was the most predominant appeal strategy among the websites studied.

Golan and Zaidner (2008) used Taylor’s six-segment message strategy wheel to analyze creative strategies in viral advertising. Using content analysis to study 360 viral ads on the World Wide Web, the authors concluded that ego was the most used advertising appeal in viral advertising.

Researchers Olesya Venger and Joyce M. Wolburg (2008) used Taylor’s strategy wheel when comparing Ukrainian and American tobacco advertising strategies in magazines. After analyzing the text within each advertisement and comparing message strategies used from each country, they found a difference in message strategies, particularly towards ego, social needs and sensory.

Chong, Lee, and Taylor (n.d.) used Taylor’s six-segment message strategy wheel to study Financial Services advertising from 2005-2009 in order to gauge the magnitude and change in the direction in advertising strategies within this sector during an economic crisis. Applying Taylor’s (1999) strategy wheel, the author’s found that prior to an economic crisis, transformational strategies were employed; however, during an economic crisis, the Financial Services sector showed statistically higher numbers in frequency of informational appeals employed.

Taylor’s model for evaluating message strategies is the basis for the current study. The message wheel provides a unique and accurate method for analyzing consumer trends in advertising and consumer behavior and is founded on communication theories. Taylor’s model also provides a better method of analysis of these message appeals than previous models like Kotler’s (1965) Buying Model (as cited by Hwang, McMillan, and Lee, 2003) and broke down previous message appeals categories further into more specific

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subcategories. It is Taylor's six-segment message strategy wheel that provides the current document with the most thorough process of analysis of advertising appeals.

### **Research Questions**

Based on Golan and Zaidner's (2008) study as well as stemming from previous research using Taylor's message strategy wheel, the current document formulated the following research questions:

RQ1: What advertising appeals were most frequently used by luxury brands in an economic boom?

RQ2: What advertising appeals were most frequently used by luxury brands in an economic recession?

RQ3: Which of the six-segments presented in Taylor's message strategy wheel was most commonly used by luxury industries in both an economic boom and recession?

RQ4: Are there similar appeals strategies among industries of luxury?

RQ5: Are there major differences present in appeals strategies across industries of luxury?

## **III. Method**

### **Sampling Procedure**

This study examined international luxury brands' message appeal strategies in print advertising using content analysis. The content analysis was conducted using one coder to analyze print advertisements in high fashion and luxury-oriented magazines from January 2009 through October 2010. Due to the fact that international luxury brands have different target audiences and thus, different advertising strategies, magazines were chosen to target three different types of audiences through female-oriented, male-oriented and gender-neutral publications. The magazine publications chosen here for their female audience were *Glamour Magazine* and *Vogue Magazine*. *GQ Magazine* was chosen for this research to capture luxury brands and products tailored towards men. Lastly, *New York Times Magazine* was chosen to bridge between the two publics. For relative ease and simplicity in selecting which luxury brands to dissect, this research used Interbrand's "Best Global Brands of 2010" (BGB) report to narrow the brands that this document focused on (Interbrand, 2010). Using this report, luxury brands were chosen by how they ranked within each respective industry sector. Though 19 different business sectors in this report were present, only alcohol, apparel, automotive, fast moving consumer goods (FMCG), and luxury sectors were chosen. Many of these business sectors varied in the number of brands that were under each section, and thus, the author used several different approaches to how the brands were ultimately selected.

Brands in the alcohol sector were chosen from two different sources. Using Beverage World's April 2010 guide as a guide for selecting which alcohol brand to analyze, only the top one (1) champagne, liquor, vodka and beer brands ranked by Interbrand were chosen. The brands chosen that fit the above criteria were *Moët & Chandon*, *Smirnoff*, *Johnny Walker* and *Heineken*, respectively. Though the vodka brand, *Grey Goose*, was not ranked among Interbrand's BGB report, it was included into this research to provide a better comparative analysis between two of the same types of alcohol beverages.

To choose brands in the apparel sector, the top two global brands, *H&M* and *Zara*, were selected.

Due to inconsistencies found in data defining what qualities make for a "luxury" automobile, only the top two European automakers *Mercedes-Benz* and *BMW*, ranked in Interbrand's BGB's of 2010 report, was selected for the automotive sector.

To represent the FMCG sector, *Lancôme* was chosen from Interbrand's 2010 BGB report due to its global rank as well as its association as a luxury brand in cosmetic products by consumers (Interbrand, 2010).

In the luxury sector, all global brands listed in this category by Interbrand are *Louis Vuitton*, *Gucci*, *HERMES Paris*, *Tiffany & Co.*, *Cartier*, *Armani*, and *Burberry*. The timeframe was defined and provided by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) at [www.bea.gov](http://www.bea.gov). As stated by the BEA, an economic recession is measured by two or more consecutive quarters of negative gain and likewise, an economic boom is defined by two or more quarters of positive gain in overall GDP. These definitions of an economic boom and recession

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were used to define the timeframe used in the current document.

### Coding Strategy

This study uses the coding procedure (appendices 1-2) as provided by Hwang, McMillan and Lee's (2003) research using Taylor's message strategy wheel. This procedure used a two-step process in the coding of each ad. First, each ad was categorized as either Transformational or Informational under the guide that transformational ads should

- "Associate the experience of using a brand with a set of psychological characteristics."
- "Focus on the users of a brand and their lifestyle, focus[ing] on developing a communication about the brand."

And informational ads

- "provide factual product information about a brand or a company."
- "Provide relevant brand data in a clear and logical manner."
- "Show competing brands, focusing on claims of uniqueness, and provides nature of brands."

The ads were then categorized using Hwang, McMillan and Lee's (2003) coding guide that used Taylor's strategy wheel model found in the appendix.

## IV. Results

A total of 317 ads were coded by the researcher. Duplicated ads were also counted for frequency of placement as well as frequency of appeals used. The researcher was also the coder. Of the ads analyzed, 35% were recoded using Hwang, McMillan and Lee's (2003) coding guide and cross-checked with results from the original coding. Of the 111 ads recoded, twelve (10%) ads originally coded were revised.

RQ1 asked what was the most frequent advertising appeal used by luxury brands as a whole during an economic boom? Advertisements in an economic boom showed that an overwhelming majority of ads targeted ego (at 43.4%). Sensory (15.6%) and ration (14.2%) appeals followed behind ego in frequency, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Specific Message Strategies of Luxury Brands in an Economic Boom**

Strategy	Frequency	Percent
<b>Transformational Strategies</b>		
Ego	119	43.4%
Social	35	12.7%
Sensory	43	15.6%
<b>Informational Strategies</b>		
Routine	4	1.4%
Acute Need	34	12.4%
Ration	39	14.2%
Total	274	—

*Note:* Percentages were calculated by taking the frequency divided by the total (e.g.  $119/274 = 43.4\%$ ). Each percentage calculated was rounded to the nearest tenth.

The answer to RQ 1, asking what advertising appeals were most frequent by luxury brands during a recessionary time period, is found in Table 3, which shows that advertising for luxury brands still overwhelm-

ingly used ego (41%) than any other appeal. Second in frequency was ration (16%) followed by acute need (13.3%).

Tables 1 and 2 provide the answer to RQ 3, what advertising appeal was most commonly used by luxury brands in both a economic recession and economic boom, by showing that ego was the most frequent at 41% in a recession and 43% in an economic boom.

**Table 2. Specific Message Strategies of Luxury Brands in an Economic Recession**

Strategy	Frequency	Percent
<b>Transformational Strategies</b>		
Ego	110	41%
Social	35	13%
Sensory	33	12.2%
<b>Informational Strategies</b>		
Routine	11	4%
Acute Need	36	13.3%
Ration	43	16%
Total	269	—

RQ 4 can be answered by tables 3 and 4, which show that there are similarities in appeal strategies between some luxury sectors. Table 3 shows that alcohol and FMCG sectors advertise similarly in ego, sensory and routine appeals in a recession and likewise, these two sectors are similarly matched in an economic boom represented in Table 4. Additionally, FMCG and alcohol sectors hold similar numbers in frequency of ad placements (the alcohol sector placed 25 ads in a recession and 29 in an economic boom; FMCG placed 31 ads in a recession and 36 in an economic boom) as shown in tables 3 and 4. Furthermore, the apparel and automotive business sectors showed similarities in frequency of ego appeal used (apparel: 4, automotive: 3), total frequency of appeals strategies used (apparel: 8, automotive: 10) and frequency of ads placed (apparel: 4, automotive: 4), as represented in Table 3. In an economic boom, apparel and automotive business sectors show similarities in ego (apparel: 4, automotive: 4), acute need (apparel: 4, automotive: 2), ration (apparel: 4, automotive: 4), total frequency of appeals strategies used (apparel: 12, automotive: 14), and total number of ads placed (apparel: 7, automotive: 8).

**Table 3. Message Strategies Across Business Sectors in an Economic Recession**

Sector	Ego	Social	Sensory	Routine	Acute Need	Ration	Total strategies in category	Total number of ads placed
<b>Alcohol</b>	14	19	6	6	2	8	55	25
<b>Apparel</b>	4	0	0	0	4	0	8	4
<b>Automotive</b>	3	0	3	0	0	4	10	4
<b>FMCG</b>	16	2	5	5	0	31	59	36
<b>Luxury</b>	73	14	19	0	30	0	137	90
<b>Total</b>	110	35	33	11	36	43	269	159

Are there major differences present in appeals strategies across industries of luxury?

Data pertaining to RQ 5--if there were any major differences present among the luxury sectors--and the message appeals show that differences were vast, and are found in table 3 and table 4. Most notably, the luxury sector placed the most advertisements in both a recession (90) and an economic boom (83) than any other sector. Luxury also used the ego appeal in both time periods more frequently (73 in a recession; 80 in an economic boom) than any other sector. Apparel and automotive sectors placed the fewest advertisements compared to the other business sectors. Furthermore, FMCG was the only business sector to use the ration appeal most frequently in both time frames (31 times in a recession and 24 times in a economic boom).

**Table 4. Message Strategies Across Business Sectors in an Economic Boom**

Sector	Ego	Social	Sensory	Routine	Acute Need	Ration	Total strategies in category	Total number of ads placed
Alcohol	16	19	11	0	0	7	53	29
Apparel	4	0	0	0	4	4	12	7
Automotive	4	0	4	0	2	4	14	8
FMCG	15	2	5	4	0	24	50	31
Luxury	80	14	23	0	28	0	145	83
Total	119	35	43	4	34	39	274	158

## V. Discussion

The current document expands upon Taylor's (1999) six-segment message strategy wheel and the luxury industry by providing further evidence to the effectiveness of Taylor's model, and insight into the strategies in appeals among leading luxury brands.

The analysis of luxury brands produced varied results among luxury industries during an economic recession and boom. Though consistent with previous research (e.g. Chong et al., n.d.) by showing advertising's ability to facilitate efforts to parlay information between buyers and sellers, the results in this study show that luxury brands are less likely to change advertising strategies (e.g. Hwang, McMillan and, Lee 2003; Chong, et al., n.d.).

In comparison to research done by Hwang, McMillan and Lee (2003), in which routine was the most frequently used appeals strategy by corporate websites advertising, ego was most frequently used appeals strategy employed by luxury brands. The luxury sector used an ego appeal in almost 100% of ads placed (80 out of 83 ads placed) in an economic boom as shown in Table 4, but in a recession, the luxury sector used a larger combination of appeals strategies rather than ego alone (only 73 out of 90). This might confirm findings by Everett's (1988) research that in an economic downturn, appeals in advertising lean heavier towards informational strategies (as cited by Chong, et al., n.d.).

While none of the luxury business sectors showed any consistent correlations throughout all appeals in either a recession or economic boom alike, one trend of note was found between the alcohol and FMCG sectors. These two sectors show similar trends in the use of ego, sensory, routine and frequency of appeals used in a recession and economic boom as shown in Table 3. Though the correlation was not a direct match, the close relationship between both sectors and the advertising strategies might suggest that though some alcohol brands are considered "luxury," these "luxuries" are consumed at a similar rate as FMCG, thus showing a need to be advertised in similar fashion. Moreover, the alcohol sector considerably increased the use of the sensory appeal strategy from the recession timeframe to the economic boom. This noted change in appeals strategy might reflect the notion that as the economy recovered, consumer's needs for more rational and informational ads waned.

The luxury industry as a whole showed an interesting trend as well. Between the recessionary period in 2009 and the economic boom in 2010, luxury brands relatively maintained the same number of ads placed;

however, in the economic boom, more appeals strategies as a whole increased slightly. This might suggest that, as the economy recovered there was a need to increase the broad reach of appeals to a larger audience of consumers now more willing to consume.

Transformational strategies were most frequently used in both the economic recession and boom compared to informational strategies. Further supporting previous research (e.g. Chong et al. n.d.) stating informational appeals are more frequently used in a downturn economy, this research found that from the recession to the economic boom timeframe, informational strategies relatively decreased overall. In particular, the ration appeal dropped from 16% to 14%, and acute need from 36% to 34%, while ego increased from 41% to 43% and sensory from 12.2% to 15.6%, as shown in tables 1 and 2.

The automotive and apparel brands chosen for analysis showed low numbers in frequency of ads placed and in appeals used. However, the data did reveal that automotive and apparel sectors appeared to stay consistent in appeals strategies throughout the 2009-2010 timeframe.

Other than the ego and ration appeal, the other four appeals varied widely from previous results using Taylor's six-segment message strategy wheel. For example, in a study on corporate websites by Hwang, McMillan and Lee (2003), they state that routine was most frequent appeal used. This discrepancy in appeals between this current study and previous research using Taylor's model must suggest that appeal strategies depend on the product category and frequency. Because the data shows that most luxury brand advertisements use transformational appeals as shown above while other product categories use different strategies at different frequencies, a strong correlation did not exist.

## VI. Conclusion

This research looked at 317 ads across several magazine publications between January of 2009 and October of 2010 to further expand upon Taylor's message wheel and provide the communication research community with insights into luxury brand advertising. The timeframe was chosen to include a recession and the beginning of an economic boom to see if any potential correlations could be made between luxury brand advertising strategies in an economic recession and economic growth. To this point, no known research has been published on luxury advertising appeal strategies. Using previous research on Taylor's message wheel as a guide for conducting the content analysis for the current document, the data revealed that transformational advertising appeals were most frequent within both timeframes. In particular, ego appeals was the most used in all luxury sectors except for FMCG, in which ration was dominantly used within both timeframes. Though some sectors like automotive and apparel showed low numbers in frequency of ads placed and in appeals used, data did reveal that automotive and apparel sectors appeared to stay consistent in appeals strategies throughout the 2009-2010 timeframe.

Future research and studies in luxury advertising should address several limitations involved with the current study. The current study used only print advertisements from several magazine publications. Future studies should potentially expand the pool of magazines used for the content analysis to further increase the effectiveness of Taylor's model as well as the accuracy of the results found. Future studies may also wish to consider using a larger timeframe in the analysis to show changes in advertising appeals in greater scale and depth. The current research used the timeframe and publications as available in hardcopies; thus, expanding the timeframe and publications used should be done so as there are resources to do such. The current research did not include online luxury advertisements, but future research using online advertisements may help further enhance the accuracy of the results found when using Taylor's model.

Past research using Taylor's model have suggested several outlets of future use for marketing and advertising using the message wheel model. This research also has similar implications for researchers in marketing and advertising. Taylor's message wheel model has shown consistent effectiveness in the fields of marketing and advertising and future use of the wheel may provide a more in-depth look at the luxury industry. In particular, a focus on specific brands in one particular business sector across a multitude of fluctuations in economic activity may expand upon the findings held within this study. Doing so may provide the research community with a better understanding of the history behind the luxury industry and insights to any potential patterns that arise.

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## Appendix 1. Coding Scheme

ID Number			
Product Category			
Company Name			
URL	http://		
Date			
Rank Category	High		Low

### 1. Message Strategy

#### a. Specific Message Strategy (Check All That Apply – At Least One)

Ration	_____	Ego	_____
Acute Needs	_____	Social	_____
Routine	_____	sensory	_____

#### b. Overall Message Strategy (Check One)

Entirely Transformational	_____
Relatively Transformational	_____
Both Transformational and Informational	_____
Relatively Informational	_____
Entirely Informational	_____

## Appendix 2. Coder Guide

### 1. Message Strategy

General direction: Mainly examine the main visual and texts but links including buttons. To get consistency, code the specific strategy (a) first followed by overall strategy (b).

#### a. Specific Message Strategy

<b>Ego</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appeal to vanity, self-actualization (Not corporate image but consumer image)</li> <li>- Emotional needs relating to self are fulfilled</li> <li>- Image based executions (visual dominance) with little or no factual information</li> <li>- Unstructured and ambiguous enough so each person can fit him/herself into the ad</li> <li>- Usual Strategy*: User image, communication about the brand</li> <li>- Example**: For the computer mania</li> </ul>
<b>Social</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Valuing on others' (thoughts, opinions, evaluations, etc.)</li> <li>- Stating to others, not to self</li> <li>- Showing social situation motivating consumers (Group identification)</li> <li>- Showing target market member as socially important to others</li> <li>- Usual Strategy: User image (in a social situation), Use occasion</li> <li>- Example: Share it with a friend / Sept. 11 Tragedy, our hearts and minds are burdened</li> </ul>
<b>Sensory</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Five senses emphasized</li> <li>- Sensory gratification</li> <li>- Pleasurable moments</li> <li>- Usual Strategy: Moment of pleasure</li> <li>- Example: Yum! / Feel the speed</li> </ul>
<b>Routine</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Habitual purchase / Don't need deliberation</li> <li>- Serving a cue or a reminder (brand name and package emphasized)</li> <li>- Appeal to convenience and trivial interests</li> <li>- Usual Strategy: Hyperbole, Preemptive, Brand Familiarity</li> <li>- Example: Future of memory / Welcome to Mesa Electronics</li> </ul>
<b>Acute need</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited time to make decision (timely decision)</li> <li>- Serving a cue or a reminder in an urgent situation</li> <li>- Requiring immediate action</li> <li>- Strategy: Brand familiarity</li> <li>- Example: Fall/2001 fashion / Call now to process the claim</li> </ul>
<b>Ration</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rational consumers assumed</li> <li>- Needs a large amount of deliberation (lots of corporate information)</li> <li>- Problem solving offered</li> <li>- Emphasizing the differences or competitive advantages</li> <li>- Usual Strategy: Comparative, USP, Generic</li> <li>- Example: Get the wider picture / Faster Pentium 4 with 256MB memory under \$1,500</li> </ul>

\* Usual strategies in each message strategy are not strictly fixed, since the Taylor's message strategy emphasizes the consumer motivation. These "usual strategies" are traditionally common in each cell.

\*\* Examples here are text-based messages only, but coders should consider the visual as well as texts.

**b. Informational/ Transformational Strategy**

General direction: This five-point scale needs to get somewhat qualitative sense. The decision needs to be made strongly based on the result of specific message strategy (1-a). For example, if no transformational strategy (e.g., Ego, Social, sensory) is found in the precedent step of 1-a, the decision on this item should be either "Relatively informational" or "Entirely informational." If the coder evaluate that both transformational-side strategy and informational-side strategy are almost equally employed, "Both transformational and informational" should be coded. Both "entirely informational" and "entirely transformational" can be coded when all specific strategies coded in 1-(a) are one-side (either transformational or informational) strategies. (Basic assumption: Six message strategies can cover all message strategies.)

<b>Transformational</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associates the experience of using a brand with a set of psychological characteristic.</li> <li>• Focuses on the users of a brand and their life style, focuses on developing a communication about the brand</li> </ul>
<b>Informational</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides with factual product information about a brand or a company</li> <li>• Provides with relevant brand data in a clear and logical manner.</li> <li>• Show competing brands, focuses on claims of uniqueness, and provides nature of brands.</li> </ul>

# The Framing of Fossil Fuels and Climate Change: Coverage of Environmental Issues in Three of the Nation's Top Newspapers

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## Abstract

*This is a study of the of the country's top newspapers, USA Today, The New York Times, and The Washington Post, that examined their coverage and framing of environmental issues from 2008 to 2011. Specifically, issues relating to fossil fuels and climate change were analyzed. A sample of stories was gathered using NewsBank's Access World News database and coded for length, prominence, obtrusiveness, tone and framing. A content analysis of the stories helped to compile findings that painted a clear picture of each paper's coverage of these issues. Results showed that the Times and Post published many more stories on climate change issues than did USA Today. Though USA Today had fewer stories, it carried a wider range of frames in its coverage.*

## I. Introduction

In this country the environment has historically been looked at as a commodity that should be used for the betterment of society. While there have been people who saw the environment and nature as part of the community rather than just a commodity, those people were not in the majority. The "environmental movement" didn't really begin until the 20th century, and only in recent years has the environment, and more specifically climate change, become a mainstream issue both politically and socially. This is in large part due to a general consensus among the scientific community supported by increasing amounts of evidence that humans are indeed affecting the earth's climate. According to the EPA's website,

"For over the past 200 years, the burning of fossil fuels, such as coal and oil, and deforestation have caused the concentrations of heat-trapping "greenhouse gases" to increase significantly in our atmosphere ... as the concentrations of these gases continue to increase in the atmosphere, the Earth's temperature is climbing above past levels" (EPA 1).

As mentioned on the EPA's website the burning of fossil fuels is one of the leading contributors to climate change, and energy sources like coal and oil are now looked at in a completely different light than they used to be. Fossil fuels are obviously an important issue, not only because of their environmental impact but because of their economic consequences as well.

In response to these concerns, people's interest in the environment has grown dramatically in recent years, and in turn media coverage has increased significantly. Evidence of this can be seen by looking at the number of news stories per year concerning climate change. A NewsBank search for articles in the U.S. con-

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\* **Keywords:** framing, environmental issues, newspapers, fossil fuels, climate change  
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taining the words “Fossil Fuels” and “Climate Change” brought up 85 results for the year 2004 (NewsBank). For a little more perspective, there were 49 results from 1999 and a mere two results from 1987 (NewsBank). These figures not only show that the public is more interested in the environment than ever before, but also that fossil fuels and climate change are important issues, since they are prominent enough to be covered in the media so often.

Because the media covers these issues so often now, it is important to understand exactly how they are portrayed. This paper will examine stories from *USA Today*, *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* in an attempt to compare coverage among popular newspapers. Media frames are defined as “the central, organizing themes that connect different semantic elements of a news story into a coherent whole to suggest what is at issue” (Cox 163). By focusing on framing and frame analysis, conclusions can be drawn concerning how these different agenda-setting media outlets want their audiences to think about climate change and fossil fuels.

## II. Literature Review

According to a recent column in *The New York Times*, journalists' coverage of environmental issues has changed significantly over the past few years. The “environmental reporting” movement became big in 2006, when energy prices were high and climbing, and Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* hit theaters (Galbraith 1). Coverage of issues concerning fossil fuels, climate change and the environment exploded, with stories about companies going green, adding solar panels, etc. This trend has changed:

“This type of story is now nearing extinction. Journalists are a little less wide-eyed, and a little more picky. The cutting-edge coverage today does not typically revolve around the green-ing of fill-in-the-blank company. Instead, topics like “Who's not going green?” and “What are the difficulties of going green?” are being seen more frequently ... coverage tends to focus more on the challenges and quirks of these new technologies. How will the electric grid solve the problem of integrating large numbers of wind turbines, which don't spin when the wind doesn't blow? Will wind machines interfere with military radar? What happens if the blades get icy? And perhaps most importantly, how will the clean-energy industry, especially solar, bring its costs down far enough to become competitive with fossil fuels?” (Galbraith 1)

The fact that fossil fuels and their role in climate change have become mainstream issues in today's society, and in turn have attracted so much media attention is the basis for this paper. It is also clear that a change in coverage has occurred, and that change needs to be examined. Mass media have an effect on their audience, and this paper focuses on how news outlets can have a great influence on readers or viewers through stories about fossil fuels and climate change. Certain elements in the stories, particularly the frames and framing devices present, help paint a clearer picture of the impact that media can have on an audience.

Sociologist Erving Goffman first came up with the idea of “frame analysis,” and described frames as “a specific set of expectations that are used to make sense of a social situation at a given point in time” (Baran 299). Essentially, frames in this sense are like maps that help people make sense of reality and are what people draw on to make decisions about what they should do during some social interaction (Cox 163).

Media frames, which are the focus of this paper, are closely related to these and were developed from Goffman's theory. Media frames are defined as “the central, organizing themes that connect different semantic elements of a news story into a coherent whole to suggest what is at issue” (Cox 163).

In other words, the elements of a news story, including narrative structure, headlines, quotes, leads and others, all work together to organize or construct a reality and suggest what the issue is. Other elements involved in media framing include emphasis, exclusion, elaboration and selection. Matthew C. Nisbet put it this way:

“Frames simplify complex issues by lending greater importance or weight to certain considerations and arguments over others. In the process, they help communicate why an issue might be a problem, who or what might be responsible, and what should be done.” (Nisbet 4)

Through analyzing a news story, and looking closely at what is emphasized in the story, what is excluded and what is elaborated on, it becomes very apparent that the way the story is presented has a big impact on the effect of the article. In Author Robert Cox's words, “a similar set of facts may be perceived quite differently

when editors chose dramatically different media frames for stories” (Cox 163). Cox goes on to talk about media framing in his book *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere* by pointing out that different stakeholders in a certain issue often try to gain the upper hand by influencing the framing of a story rather than offering new facts (Cox 164). If that stakeholder were successful, a news frame could paint their opposition in a more negative light.

In terms of coverage of environmental issues, there are several typical frames that appear frequently. Examples of these frames include “be worried,” “environmental stewardship,” “public health,” “solutions,” “conflict,” “social progress” frames and others (Nisbet 7-22).

### **Research Questions**

This paper takes these frames, along with the ideas of obtrusive and unobtrusive coverage into consideration while examining news stories relating to fossil fuels and climate change in an attempt to understand how framing affects the coverage of the issue. More specifically this paper focuses on *USA Today*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post* and asks, how are these issues covered in the newspaper industry, and, how do these individual papers frame coverage related to fossil fuels and climate change? Does one paper cover more environmental issues than another? What does the newspaper industry in general look like in terms of environmental coverage? Are there any trends or patterns that can be seen over the past few years?

## **III. Research Methods**

Focusing on media framing, this study intended to find out different forms of frames that newspaper stories adopted on the environmental issues of fossil fuels and climate change. To analyze news stories for this purpose, this study employed content analysis. The content analysis method was chosen because it is the best method for gathering and impartially analyzing the data from the stories. Content analysis is “a research technique for objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Rosenberry 42). The author categorized news content systematically using a set method of coding, which would allow researcher’s personal opinion not to taint the results. The author also draws on not just quantitative analysis methods, but qualitative ones as well in order to fully analyze the content for media frames and tone (Rosenberry 62-63).

Through analyzing a news story, and looking closely at what is emphasized in the story, what is excluded and what is elaborated on, the study is able to detect a big impact the way the story is presented has on the nature of the article. To select stories for analysis, the author utilized NewsBank’s Access World News database (Newsbank), which allows users to search for a variety of things, including terms, words and phrases in stories. Users can specify a date range, and specific terms, as well as specific sources.

Stories published by three major newspapers between 2008 and 2011 were examined to see whether the following terms appeared somewhere in a newspaper story: “climate change,” “fossil fuels” or “global warming” somewhere in the text or in the lead paragraph of the story; or both “fossil fuels” and “climate change” somewhere in their text (see Table 1).

After that, each newspaper (*New York Times*, *USA Today* and the *Washington Post*) was examined on a more qualitative level. A search was run on each newspaper’s website for “fossil fuels and climate change,” and the most recent 10 stories that came up in the search were selected. These stories covered topics, such as renewable energy, auto emissions standards and governmental policy to name a few.

Only news or feature stories were selected, not opinion pieces because opinion authors intentionally set out to sway an opinion, so they could not be analyzed for framing and tone. On most of the websites, stories fitting these criteria were from as recent as April 2011, to well back into 2010.

Selected stories were divided into three groups: a short story with around 200-400 words, a medium story with around 500-900 words and a long story with 1000 words or more. The selected stories were also analyzed to see whether they were prominent and obtrusive or not. Whether or not a story was prominent was based on recognizable names, organizations and other prominent, outstanding things (think Obama, etc.). Obtrusiveness was based on whether or not the subject of the story had a *direct* impact on people’s lives; a policy change wouldn’t count as obtrusive, but a natural disaster would. A policy change would not count as obtrusive because although it does impact lives in some ways, that impact isn’t typically direct and immediate.

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After framing categories of each story were recorded, they were analyzed for the direction of tone: positive, negative and neutral. Tone of a story was based upon the number of sources in support of and against an issue, phrasing and wordage in the first six paragraphs, and headlines.

## IV. Findings

### *General findings in content analysis*

Table 1 reveals some critical information regarding the number of stories containing each of the aforementioned search terms that appeared in three U.S. Newspapers through the NewsBank's database. These numbers shed some light on how the issues have been covered by print media in general over the past few years.

**Table 1. Number of stories by three U.S. newspapers**

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Search terms:</b>				
CC*/All Text	54,467	62,584	50,592	10,091
CC/Lead	5,788	8,860	5,401	843
FF*/All Text	20,046	16,406	16,082	3,741
FF/Lead	1,733	1,247	1,186	238
FF and CC/All Text	4,446	5,208	4,066	756
GW*/All Text	65,582	50,797	32,683	6,137
GW/Lead	10,964	8,981	5,122	878

*Note:* \* CC stands for climate change; FF, fossil fuels; and GW, global warming.

In general, the phrase "climate change" has begun to appear more than the phrases "fossil fuels" or "global warming" somewhere in the text of stories over the years. In 2008, "climate change" appeared 54,467 times, and "fossil fuels" appeared 20,046 times while "global warming" appeared 65,582 times. In 2009, these numbers were 62,584, 16,406, and 50,797 respectively. In 2010, searches yielded 50,592 stories containing "climate change" somewhere in the text, 16,082 stories with "fossil fuels" somewhere in the text and 32,683 somewhere in the text.

Climate change was covered more in 2009 than any other year, but fossil fuels were a bigger topic in 2008 than any other year. Global warming saw the most coverage in 2008, as well, and the number of stories with the phrase somewhere in the text fell drastically from 2008 to 2010, going from 65,582 stories to 32,683 stories. This was a much bigger change than either of the other two phrases experienced. The number of stories containing both the phrase "climate change" and "fossil fuels" stayed fairly consistent, peaking at 5,208 in 2009. It is also important to note that patterns stayed consistent on a national scale, with results correlating to numbers found on the individual paper level in terms of phrases appearing in the lead paragraph or just somewhere in the story. For instance, every year there were more stories with "climate change" somewhere in the text than there were stories with "climate change" in the lead paragraph, etc.

The searches performed on NewsBank proved extremely useful in providing data concerning general newspaper coverage of "fossil fuels" and "climate change" during the past three and a half years. The 28 searches per paper yielded some important information. For all years, every search yielded similar results: *USA Today* produced the fewest number of stories, followed by the *Washington Post*, and then the *New York Times*.

The same trend could be found through stories of each newspaper, as shown in Table 2. For instance, in 2008 NewsBank turned up 244 *USA Today* stories with "climate change" somewhere in the text, 766 *Washington Post* stories and 868 *New York Times* stories. The same searches for the year 2009 yielded

423 *USA Today* stories, 1,056 *New York Times* stories and 939 *Washington Post* stories. The year of 2010 yielded similar results, with 451 *USA Today* stories, 760 *New York Times* stories and 669 *Washington Post* stories, and so far for 2011 results fit the mold.

Searching for stories that contained the phrase “fossil fuels” somewhere in the text proved to have a similar outcome. Overall, these terms were found significantly less than the phrase “climate change” in each newspaper. This was the case for each year searched. For example, in 2009, searches revealed 90 *USA Today* stories with “fossil fuels” somewhere in the text, 180 *New York Times* stories and 137 *Washington Post* stories. The same was true in 2010, with 99 from *USA Today*, 163 from the *New York Times*, and 123 from the *Washington Post*. The same pattern emerged from these searches, with the highest number of stories coming from the *New York Times*, and the fewest from *USA Today*. The same patterns continued to emerge; in every search *USA Today* produced the fewest stories containing search terms, followed by the *Washington Post*, followed by the *New York Times*.

**Table 2: Number of stories in each category by year**

Year	2008			2009			2010			2011		
Newspaper	USA*	WP*	NYT*	USA	WP	NYT	USA	WP	NYT	USA	WP	NYT
Category												
CC**/All Text	244	766	868	423	939	1056	451	669	760	84	155	188
CC/Lead	23	110	166	32	173	322	8	112	168	1	6	20
FF**/All Text	71	162	208	90	137	180	99	123	163	19	33	56
FF/Lead	5	17	34	3	10	31	2	12	32	0	4	10
FF and CC/ All Text	19	56	61	49	69	90	34	31	57	5	9	17
GW**/All Text	347	764	927	293	499	857	245	316	468	36	66	77
GW/Lead	64	125	234	45	77	259	19	46	126	3	9	20
Total	773	2000	2498	935	1904	2795	858	1309	1774	148	282	388

*Note:* \* USA stands for *USA Today*; NYT, *New York Times*; and WP, *Washington Post*.

\*\* CC stands for climate change; FF, fossil fuels and GW, global warming.

As previously mentioned, in general the phrase “climate change” appeared more often in stories than the words “fossil fuels” did. A search of the *New York Times* in 2009 yielded 1056 stories containing “climate change” somewhere in the text, and 180 stories containing “fossil fuels” somewhere in the text. The same pattern was true for all years. Not only were there differences in the number of stories containing the words “fossil fuels” versus the words “climate change,” there were drastic differences between searches in terms of where the phrases were located. A much lower percentage of stories had any of the search terms located in the lead paragraph. For instance, in 2008, *USA Today* had 71 stories that contained the phrase “fossil fuels” somewhere in the text, and 5 that had the phrase in the lead paragraph. In 2009, there were 90 stories containing the phrase somewhere in the text, and 3 that had it in the lead. The same can be said for the phrase “climate change.” In 2009, the *New York Times* had 1,056 stories containing the words “climate change” somewhere in the text, and it appeared in the lead paragraph in 322 stories. This pattern was consistent for each paper, in every year searched.

Predictably, stories that related the most to fossil fuels and climate change (i.e. those containing both phrases somewhere in the text of the story) were fewer in number than stories related solely to one issue. These stories also followed the same patterns pointed out earlier: the fewest came from *USA Today*, and the most came from the *New York Times*, with the *Washington Post* falling in between. In 2008, searches showed 19 stories containing both phrases published in *USA Today*, 61 published in the *New York Times*, and 56 published in the *Washington Post*. In 2010, the numbers were 34, 57 and 31, respectively.

The phrase “global warming” appeared more in stories than did “fossil fuels,” and also appeared more than “fossil fuels” and “climate change,” but not as often as just “climate change.” In 2008, *USA Today* produced 347 stories containing the phrase “global warming,” the *New York Times* produced 927 and the *Washington Post* produced 764. In 2010, those numbers were 245, 468 and 316, respectively.

### **Story Analysis**

Story length: *USA Today* had five medium-length stories and five long stories; *The New York Times*, four medium and six long stories; and the *Washington Post* stories, one short, three medium and six long stories.

Obtrusiveness: *USA Today* had four obtrusive and six unobtrusive stories; *The New York Times* had five unobtrusive and obtrusive stories each; *The Washington Post* had three obtrusive and seven unobtrusive stories.

Prominence: *USA Today* had three prominent and seven non-prominent stories. On the other hand, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* had five prominent and non-prominent stories each.

Tone: two of *USA Today* stories were positive in tone, four were neutral and four were negative. *The New York Times* had two, five and three in the positive, neutral and negative categories. *The Washington Post* had two, five and three stories.

Frames: Each story was not grouped into only one frame. Some stories had as many as three frames. Of the 10 *USA Today* stories, the “be worried” frame appeared five times, “conflict” appeared 7 times, “solutions” appeared 4 times, “environmental stewardship” appeared 4 times and “social progress” appeared 3 times. For *The New York Times*, the “conflict” frame was the most dominant, showing up in all 10 stories. The “be worried” and “solutions” frames were the closest followers, showing up three times each. For *The Washington Post*, the “conflict” frame was the most dominant, showing up in 9 of the 10 stories. The closest followers were the “solutions” frame and the “be worried” frame, showing up in five and four of the stories, respectively.

## **V. Conclusions**

The single most important finding is that the same pattern emerged in literally every search that was conducted; stories concerning climate change and fossil fuels were published most often in *The New York Times*, followed by *The Washington Post*, followed by *USA Today*. These results were consistent after 2008 up until a fourth of the way through 2011, and speak volumes about these three newspapers (this will be covered more in depth later on). In terms of the newspaper industry in general, it is clear that coverage of environmental issues has declined since 2009, and looks like it will continue to do so if stories are published at their current rate for 2011. It seems as if 2009 might have been the pinnacle of the environmental movement, considering the fact that nearly 10,000 more stories containing the words “climate change” were published than in 2008 or 2010. It is interesting to see how the number jumped from 54,467 stories in 2008 to 62,584 in 2009 and then fell back down to 50,592 in 2010. If stories concerning climate change continue to be published at their current rate for 2011, numbers indicate that the number will be very similar if not smaller than it was in 2010 (refer to Table E). The same holds true for stories containing both “climate change” and “fossil fuels” somewhere in the text; 2009 seemed to be the big year.

One interesting piece of data that didn't fit the pattern that emerged in terms of number of stories was the number of stories about global warming. Stories containing the term “global warming” somewhere in the text have decreased significantly since 2008, when 65,582 stories were published. That number fell nearly by 15,000 stories in 2009, and fell by almost another 20,000 in 2010. This year, the number is set to decrease by nearly another 10,000. This is probably because of how much of a hot button issue the phrase itself has become. Since around 2008, “climate change” has become the more accepted term for what is happening to the planet's climate, because it is the more scientifically correct term and because it more accurately describes what is happening (Conway 1). According to NASA's website,

“Global warming became the dominant popular term in June 1988, when NASA scientist James E. Hansen had testified to Congress about climate, specifically referring to global warming ... Hansen's testimony was very widely reported in popular and business media,



and after that popular use of the term global warming exploded ... But temperature change itself isn't the most severe effect of changing climate. Changes to precipitation patterns and sea level are likely to have much greater human impact than the higher temperatures alone. For this reason, scientific research on climate change encompasses far more than surface temperature change." (Conway 1)

The steady decline in the number of global warming stories since 2008 reflects the change in scientific opinion and public opinion about the phrasing. This theory was brought up earlier in the paper, and was proven right by the results.

Another issue that the numbers bring up is the fact that so few of the stories contained any of the search terms in the lead paragraph, relative to the number of stories that had it *somewhere* in the text. This suggests that the stories themselves were not necessarily *about* climate change, fossil fuels, or both, but merely mentioned them. For example, there were 62,584 stories that contained the words "climate change" somewhere in the text of the story in US Newspapers in 2009, and only 8860 stories that had that phrase in the lead paragraph. That means only around one seventh of the stories about climate change in 2009 mentioned climate change in the first paragraph, which says a lot about the coverage of the issue. Climate change is a broad topic that encompasses a lot of different things, and apparently newspaper coverage focuses mainly on topics that *relate* to climate change. The same was true for stories about fossil fuels. That begs the question, how in depth is coverage of issues relating to fossil fuels and climate change, and how do different newspapers cover those topics?

### ***Individual Newspaper Comparisons***

The results of this study do a lot to answer that question. First, however, it's important to keep several things in mind. *USA Today* is the most read newspaper in the country, with a circulation of 2,293,310 (NewsBank). The *New York Times* has a circulation of 1,126,190, and the *Washington Post* has a circulation of 732,872 (NewsBank). These are important figures when analyzing the data. For every year examined, The *New York Times* consistently produced the most stories about climate change, fossil fuels and global warming. The *Washington Post* followed closely behind. For instance, in 2009, they published 939 stories about climate change while the *New York Times* published 1056. The *New York Times* published 180 about fossil fuels that year, and the *Washington Post* published 137; this pattern held through every year searched. *USA Today* consistently published far fewer stories than either of the other two publications. This held true from 2008 to 2011, and also held for every search term. Take the year 2008, for example. The *New York Times* published 868 stories that contained the words "climate change" somewhere in the text, and *USA Today* published only 244. In 2009, the *Times* had 322 stories that contained "climate change" in the lead paragraph, and *USA Today* had only 32. For comparison, the *Washington Post* published 173.

These numbers are quite telling. The paper with the largest circulation published the fewest number of stories relating to fossil fuels, climate change and global warming. The argument could be made that the majority of newspaper readers in the country read *USA Today*, since it has the greatest circulation, which in turn means that the majority of newspaper readers in this country do not see as many stories concerning climate change, fossil fuels or global warming as they would if they read the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*. The *New York Times* has roughly half of the circulation that *USA Today* does, but during the past three years it has published more than double the amount of stories concerning these issues. The same can be said of the *Washington Post*, which has the smallest circulation of the three. This leads to speculation as to why *USA Today* doesn't choose to publish as many articles about fossil fuels and climate change; perhaps it tries to appeal to a larger audience by not publishing articles concerning what many consider to be a fairly left-wing ideal? Or, perhaps *USA Today's* reader base is more conservative than the reader base of the other two papers, and *USA Today* is trying to cater to that by publishing stories that they feel would better serve the interests of their audience.

### ***Story Analysis***

Data on the stories from the three paper's websites is telling, as well. The numbers suggest that in general, the *New York Times* coverage of fossil fuels and climate change was more balanced, more in depth and unbiased than *USA Today's* coverage, as was the *Washington Post's*. *USA Today* stories tended to be about obtrusive events, not have the element of prominence, and lean towards being either neutral or negative in tone. The framing of *USA Today* stories was also interesting, considering how many of the dif-

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ferent frames continually showed up. While the “conflict” frame showed up in seven of the stories, the “be worried” frame showed up in five, and the “solutions” and “environmental stewardship” frames showed up in four stories each. So, even though *USA Today*’s coverage might not have been as in depth or unbiased, they did have the widest variety of frames evident in stories. Whether or not that is a good thing is debatable. For instance, while the “conflict” frame was the most common in stories, the second most was the “be worried” frame. This means that most of the newspaper readers in the country are being subjected to that frame when they read a story in *USA Today* about fossil fuels and climate change.

The *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, as previously mentioned, seemed to have more balanced coverage, judging from the higher amount of neutral toned stories (five each), the fact that there were an even number of prominent versus non-prominent and obtrusive versus unobtrusive stories, and the fact that the majority of stories were longer in length. In each paper’s case, the “conflict” frame was the most prominent. This suggests that the element of conflict was evident in the story, meaning that at least two opposing sides were presented. This suggests that coverage was relatively fair and balanced, since most stories had this element. The flip side to this is that readers of the *New York Times* are not as exposed to as many different media frames as *USA Today* readers are when it comes to stories about climate change and fossil fuels. The *Washington Post* displayed a higher number of other frames than did the *New York Times*, but still less than *USA Today* (refer to Figure I). The *Washington Post* also had the greatest number of stories that displayed the “solutions” frame, which could suggest that the overall feeling the newspaper has concerning fossil fuels and climate change is optimistic, or at least more optimistic than the other two papers analyzed in this survey.

### ***Limitations/future research***

Like with any study, this one was not without its limitations. There were two major ones; the first being the number of years searched on NewsBank, the second being the number of stories analyzed for in-depth analysis. A time period of only a little more than three years was searched, and those searches could have gone further back. Doing so would expose more patterns and trends, and speak volumes about the newspaper industry and the coverage of environmental issues, as well as give a better understanding of the three newspapers researched. Time constraints were the biggest factor in not researching further back for this study.

The second, and probably bigger, limitation this study faced was the fact that only 10 stories from each newspaper were analyzed. While this was enough to get an idea of the type of coverage each paper provides, a better understanding could be gained from analyzing more stories for the same elements. Time was again the biggest limiting factor in this study, and there simply wasn’t enough time or resources to analyze more stories to the extent they would need to be analyzed.

In terms of future research, a study like this would be very easy to build upon. A broader knowledge could be gained by simply including more stories for analysis and extending the date range on searches.

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## Framing the Soviet Athlete in American Media

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### Abstract

*This study looked at how the athletes from the Soviet bloc were portrayed in the U.S. print sports media during the first and last Olympic Games during the Cold War. It looked at one-third of the articles published in the New York Times and the Washington Post during the two Olympics and examined how often the press mentioned the Soviet bloc athletes, how they referenced them, how the coverage of Soviet wins and losses reflected reality and whether the athletes were mentioned within a Cold War context. The findings showed that while about 50 percent of the articles studied covered Soviet athletes and athletes were depicted as simply athletes, the coverage did not entirely match reality of success of the Soviet bloc athletes.*

### I. Introduction

Sports and politics go hand-in-hand, mirroring each other in the ways they show the human character, institutional relations and the ideology behind those relations. By pitting team against team, as politics often does with political parties, countries or sets of allies, it ultimately gives sports a relationship with politics in the most inherent way. The two institutions, sport and politics, are inseparable, and the connection is unavoidable (Edwards, 1984). This connection can be seen most easily on the international scale with the Olympic Games. Due to the linkage between sports and politics, as well as the basic characteristics of the Olympics, the Games have become a suitable tool for foreign policy (Riggs, Eastman and Golobic, 1993). In modern times, almost as many political journalists have attended the Olympics as sports journalists. In many media outlets, this has translated into stories from both political and sports angles, giving audiences pieces from both sides of the same coin (Hill, 1999). No example of this has been greater, however, than directly after World War II. It was then that the world was able to witness the "Cold War drama being acted out in the international sports arena by two titans locked in an ideological struggle" (Edwards, 1984).

With the presence of the television becoming more extensive by the first Olympic Games of the Cold War, the media was able to begin politicizing the Games for the public, which amplified the effects of the East-West battle in the international sports arena (Riggs, Eastman and Golobic, 1993). The media used framing to shape what people saw, which can be thought of as a sub-part of agenda setting. It affected the saliency of a certain viewpoint and the way in which the audience interpreted it (Scheufele, 1999). Scholar Dietram A. Scheufele described framing as such: "Within the realm of political communication, framing has to be defined and operationalized on the basis of this social constructivism. Mass media actively set the frames of reference that readers or viewer use to interpret and discuss public events" (1999). Because the media intentionally chooses to tell one story and not another, it has the ultimate control over what the public sees within a certain event, such as the Olympics. Therefore, it was the media that exploited the political battle of the Cold

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War throughout the Olympics, accentuating the politicalization of the games. It used politics and nationalism to increase viewer interest and up revenue, which brought upon an overwhelming sense of ideological battle to the Cold War (Riggs, Eastman and Golobic, 1993). It used images, such as national flags and teamwork, as well as rhetoric of patriotism and unity to perpetuate the idea of nationalism in the Olympics (Wenner, 1988).

## **II. Literature Review**

Every two years, the mass media turns its eyes to the Olympic Games. The Olympics is an event that is extensively covered by the media and has been covered on a large scale, even back when the Winter and Summer Olympics were in the same year (Puijk, 2009). Aristotle described a spectacle as a “weak hybrid form of drama, a theatrical concoction that relied upon external factors (shock, sensation and the passionate release) as a substitute for intrinsic aesthetic integrity” (Farrell, 1989). Farrell asserted that the Olympics have become a spectacle due to the rhetoric used in the mass media to cover it (1989). The review of the literature in this field looked scholars’ findings on how the mass media has approached the Olympics in the modern era (since the Winter Olympics began in 1924), especially in terms of how it approached the Games during the Cold War.

### ***Framing and sports media***

Many scholars have defined agenda-setting framing as the selection of information about a topic to convey one story to an audience over another (McCombs and Shaw, 1972, Neuman, Just, Crigler 1992, Entman, 1993). Neuman, Just and Crigler argued that these two methods have been the tools with which the media has worked (1992), and McCombs and Shaw suggested that such tools have been used to create an idea of what was and was not important (1972). Entman described framing as such: “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (1993).

Scholars have recognized sports media’s role in framing and agenda setting (Billings and Angelini, 2007, Zaharopoulos, 2007). The mass media has an agenda, even in sports media, and it uses its communication to create frames of information for the public to consume (Zaharopoulos, 2007). Zaharopoulos found that the frames have primarily reflected journalistic values, such as impact, relevance and proximity, and so these values have shaped what stories were told and how they were portrayed to the audience (2007). Many scholars have argued that because sports media have acted as gatekeepers to information, sometimes the representations in stories have not necessarily matched reality (Hardin, Dodd, Chance and Walsdorf, 2004, Billings and Angelini, 2007). For example, Billings and Angelini found that oftentimes in Olympic coverage, Americans have been portrayed more in the United States media than other athletes from other nations, even though Americans haven’t always been the ones who are winning events (2007).

### ***In the best interest of the media***

Several scholars have found that the mass media, especially television, directly benefits from coverage of the Olympic Games (Slater, 1998, Farrell, 1989, Billings and Angelini, 2007, Riggs, Eastman and Golobic, 1993). Slater argued that network executives realized quickly that the Olympics drew in a multitude of viewers and they were willing to do whatever it took to attract the most viewers possible (1998). In the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo, the American Broadcasting Company spent \$91.5 million for the rights to air 22 hours of prime-time coverage of the Games (Farrell, 1989).

Scholarship also has looked at how the most common sports with the biggest American names have been chosen to air during the Olympics because that has been what the target audience wanted to see (Billings and Angelini, 2007). Other scholars have found that the media also exploited the political situation during the Cold War for its own purposes, using politics and nationalism to increase viewer interest and up revenue (Riggs, Eastman and Golobic, 1993).

### ***The Olympics as a political playing field***

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In general, scholars have argued that media coverage of sports has emphasized two things—conflict and animosity (Salwen and Garrison, 1987). One basic example of this is the way it has provided updates and commentary on nations viewed as political enemies during the Olympics, such as the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Dai, 2006). Salwen and Garrison noted that “politics cannot be divorced from sport” (1987), and this has been shown in sports’ ability to divide people into groups based on nationalities and politics (Cho, 2009). The Olympics has provided a perfect model for seeing the politicalization of sports in the media, as it has always been used as an arena for diplomatic struggle for dominance (Trbic, 2008, Schillinger and Jenswold, 1987). Puijk suggested that the U.S. media has done this often, framing stories in terms of “long-lasting battles between enemies, transforming single events into continuing melodramas” (2009).

Hill argued that this politicalization has caused as many, if not more, political journalists to attend the Olympics as sports journalists. With this has come many political and athletic stories, covering the same event but from a different angle (1999). Research during the 1984 Summer Olympics found that the Los Angeles *Times* even reported athletic results in political terms, referring to event titles as victories for the country or even the ideology of that country instead of simply an athletic victory (Salwen and Garrison, 1987).

### ***Nationalism and the American athlete***

Many scholars have argued that the typical mass media outlet has tended to convey the ideology of the nation in which it reports and has extended to political and economical realms, which in the case of the United States, has meant showing things that related to America first. (Dai, 2006, Billings and Angelini, 2007). Dai also noted that media coverage has related to the news interest of the state in which it is being shown, and thus the Olympic coverage in the United States has related to the country as a whole (2006). The mass media also has been found to be ethnocentric in coverage, and so it has focused on the country to which it catered (Zaharopoulos, 2007). Billings and Angelini described U.S. media coverage of the Olympics as “unabashedly American,” used to strengthen the country’s sense of self-importance in the world (2007).

Several scholars have explored how the mass media uses images, such as national flags and teamwork, patriotic rhetoric and heroic profile pieces of American athletes to perpetuate the idea of nationalism in the Olympics (Wenner, 1988, Farrell, 1989). Billings and Angelini argued that this has translated into less coverage of obscure sports where foreign athletes win most medals and more coverage of events in which there is a chance for American athletes to win medals (2007). Puijk found that the commentators for the events also have used what they said—and what they didn’t say—to frame the competitions to take on a national angle (2009). For instance, Schillinger and Jenswold found that in the 1980 and 1984 Games, the *Washington Post* carried a nationalistic tone in its coverage of the Olympics (1987). Even *TV Guide* was found to have a nationalistic bias, demonstrated by its cover story on February 4, 1984, which was entitled, “Viewer’s Guide to America’s Golden Opportunities in Sarajevo.” It focused on which events the Americans should succeed in and ignored athletes from other countries (Farrell, 1989).

### ***The battle between the US and the USSR***

During the Cold War, the Olympics were largely seen as a political arena, and with the rise of television coinciding with the first Olympic Games of the Cold War era in 1952, the East-West tensions were found to be amplified by the mass media (Nendel, 2002, Riggs, Eastman and Golobic, 1993). Scholars have found that Soviet success was attributed greatly to the “machine-like” quality of its political system and that the athletes were much like robots with little or no emotion (Nendel, 2002, Pedersen, Miloch and Laucella, 2007). The *Reader’s Digest*, in 1955, was found to have credited the success of the athletes from the USSR as due to “conscription and early training, hard work, excellent coaching and, above all, to generous assistance by the state,” and it pushed for the United States to assist its athletes so they could get on the same level as the Soviets (Nendel 2002). Nendel found that when the Soviets failed, it was seen as proof that Communism could not succeed, but when the Soviet athletes were victorious, the media was flippant, saying this was not surprising because of the unfair advantage the Soviet athletes had (2002).

Guttman argued that the subtle idea that the Games were a chance to show superiority over the Soviets pervaded throughout the media coverage of the Olympics during the Cold War (1987). Several scholars have suggested that the media chose to show American superiority by emphasizing American sportsmanship and highlighting the medal count (Nendel, 2002, Hill, 1999), which Hill found to have interested the United States’ public mainly because it wanted to see America defeat the Soviets, not because it cared about the

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athletes or the sports (1999). The United States media also was found to have said the Soviet presence in the Olympics posed a threat to the future of the Olympic movement because the USSR was so focused on nationalism and winning (Nendel, 2002). Farrell argued that the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid stirred up more Cold War zeal, as the Games became a symbolic confrontation with the Soviets that the country hadn't had yet in the political sphere (1989). This idea that the Olympics were characterized by the Cold War was so pervasive that even in the 1984 Summer Olympics, when the USSR was not present, Salwen and Garrison found that the United States-USSR relationship was still the focus of many stories throughout the Games (1987).

Overall, the literature shows an overarching trend in the American mass media to frame the coverage to emphasize U.S. athletes and U.S. principles, pitting them against other nations. The Cold War era was no exception, and the mass media during this time was characterized by the dichotomy of "Us versus Them"—the United States versus the Soviet Union.

All of the literature in this field shows the American mass media's general approach to the Olympics. It focuses on large topics, such as the interaction between nations such as the United States and the Soviet Union. It does not, however, look at the smaller players in that battle. It discusses the pawns for the United States—the American athletes—but it leaves out the other side. Information on how the Soviet athletes were covered in the U.S. mass media is missing. This study examined that missing link in order to better understand the Olympic Games during the Cold War era. It looked at how the U.S. mass media portrayed Soviet Olympic athletes during the Cold War.

### III. Methods

The study was aimed to look at the depiction of athletes from the Soviet Union during the Cold War. There were four main research questions that have been answered in the study.

RQ1: How often did the U.S. print sports media mention Soviet athletes, and was the frequency different from one Olympics to the other?

RQ2: Did the U.S. print sports media reference the athletes by name, or did it identify them by nationality/ideology?

RQ3: Were the mentions of successes and failures of the Soviet athletes comparable to their actual successes in the Olympics?

RQ4: Were the Soviet athletes mentioned within a Cold War context, or were they seen simply as athletes?

The research looked at print media during the 1952 and 1988 Summer Olympics. Print media was chosen because it is readily available for both time periods. Because television was just beginning its rise in 1952, broadcasts are not easily attainable for that year. The newspapers that were examined were the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, chosen for their prevalence in American society and their availability for study. Both were accessed through the ProQuest Historical Newspaper database.

The time frame was during both the 1952 and 1988 Summer Olympics. These two years were chosen because they were the first and last Olympics of the Cold War in which both the United States and the Soviet Union participated. This allows one to see how the media functioned at the beginning and the end of the ideological battle. It enables one to not only see how the media worked during the Cold War, but also to compare how U.S. media coverage of Soviet athletes was at two opposite points in the Cold War and see how it changed over time. The study looked at newspaper articles during the 16-day period in which the Olympics ensued. The 1952 Summer Olympics took place between July 19 and August 2, while the 1988 Summer Olympics were from September 17 to October 2. Articles were chosen during this time period to look at how the athletes were portrayed as the events were happening, rather than after the fact when more reflecting and analyzing could go on. This ensures that the research gathered looked at how the U.S print media covered the athletes in real time.

The articles were chosen by using the search term "Olympics" for each newspaper during the specified dates. Because this key word was so overarching to the topic and provided so many results, it was the only one chosen. The search resulted in 952 pieces, which were then sorted through and all articles relating

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to the Games were selected for examination. Results not used were photos and cutlines with no accompanying articles, duplicated articles, information boxes, advertisements, columns, news summaries, letters to the editor, articles that did not mention sports in the first three paragraphs and therefore were not seen as being primarily about the Olympics, event statistics and Associate Press/United Press International articles present in both newspapers—in this case, only one was looked at. The reason for this was because none of these things provide accurate information relating to this study. Items without articles, such as photos, cutlines and information boxes, give quick information without detail, which eliminates a lot of opportunities for framing. Also, because the media is providing a service to the American public, these quick pieces of information were mostly about American athletes. Items such as columns, letters to the editor and advertisements are supposed to be opinionated, and therefore these pieces do not accurately depict the majority of United States' print stories. Finally, stories that are not directly about sports oftentimes reference the Olympics and different happenings with athletes in order to make a point, but the writer uses these references for his or her own agenda. This means that the references are not purely sports, and that was not what this study is about.

All articles from both Olympics were reviewed for mentions of Soviet athletes. If the team or athlete was referenced only as the country name, then it was not counted (i.e. the Soviet Union versus Soviets). The reasoning for this was based on a couple ideas. First, a lot of literature has already been published on how the Soviet Union as a whole was portrayed in the United States' media, and by coding for those mentions, the study would simply be repeating what has already been done. Second, by only looking at references to actual people, it would see how the press treats the athletes themselves, who have names and faces and emotions. It is much easier for the press to stereotype something that does not have a concrete entity, but this study was aimed to see how the print media depicted living, breathing souls.

Athletes from the entire Soviet bloc were included in the study, so the following countries were identified: the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany (in the 1988 Olympics — it was not allowed to compete in the 1952 Games), Hungary, Poland and Romania. The reason for this was that because of the close relations with the Soviet Union, many of these countries were grouped together with the nation in the minds of the American public. Therefore, the athletes from these countries should be examined for the same reason that the Soviet athletes should be examined. All of these countries were on the opposite side of the Cold War from the United States, so in a Cold War context, it would make sense that they would be portrayed in the same way as the Soviet Union.

All the articles that mentioned Soviet bloc athletes were recorded. One third of those articles, 62 total, were chosen as a sample for this study. The author carefully investigated the sample to look for several specific parts. First, how the athletes were referenced was recorded, whether it be simply by nationality/ideology or by name (i.e. the Soviet runner vs. Emil Zatopek). Then, the mentions of wins and losses were tallied. If the athlete won an event, it was marked as a Soviet win. If the athletes that are referenced do not win the event, regardless of the finish, then it was tallied as a loss. This way one could determine how often the U.S. press gave Soviet athletes coverage when they weren't winning gold medals. Finally, direct mentions of United States-Soviet Union relations were noted. These mentions included if Americans were depicted as having interaction with any number of Soviets outside of the actual competition, if the article implicitly mentioned the Cold War or if it mentioned the "East" and the "West."

There was an expected outcome for each of the research questions.

H1: Soviets would not be mentioned very often in the U.S. print media, and there would be a lower percentage of articles mentioning Soviet athletes in the first Olympics than the last.

H2: The U.S. print media would refer to the athletes more times by nationality/ideology than by their actual names, thus tying their identity entirely to their association with the Soviet Union.

H3: The media would favor mentioning Soviet losses, regardless of how well the Soviet bloc's overall performance actually was in the Olympics.

H4: The athletes would be seen more often in a Cold War context; however, in the 1988 Games, the press would begin to depict them more as athletes, although still in a Cold War setting a fair amount.

Each of these hypotheses was developed based on knowledge of the Cold War and the previous research done on the general depiction of the Soviet Union during the Olympics of the Cold War era.

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## IV. Results

A total of 337 articles were examined during the two Olympics using this method—96 from the 1952 Games and 241 from the 1988 Games. Of those articles, 186 mentioned Soviet athletes in some capacity. A full breakdown of the raw article data can be found in Table 1.

During the Helsinki Olympics, 59.4 percent of the articles mentioned competitors from the Soviet bloc, while 53.5 percent of the articles from Seoul mentioned them. The breakdown between the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* are very similar, with 55.2 percent of *Times* articles and 55.2 percent of *Post* articles referencing the Soviets. In both years, 55.2 percent of the stories mention Soviet athletes, while 78.6 percent mention American athletes. It was not surprising that more stories were written about American athletes because American mass media was catering toward an American audience. The 55.2 percent, though, was 13.9 percent more than the amount of articles referencing athletes from all the other countries combined. That means that 66 other nations' athletes combined had less press coverage than the Soviet bloc athletes received. This can be interpreted as part of the Cold War context in the media. The U.S. mass media showed what will draw the most viewers, and the first thing the American public wanted was to see American athletes. The next thing on the list is to see Soviet block athletes.

The Cold War battle played out through the Olympics. This explains why the Soviets were in the media more often than other nations. The public wanted to see the superiority of the United States by comparing U.S. and Soviet block athletes.

In 1952, it was found more common for reporters to simply reference the athletes by their countries, not giving them a name or identity outside of their home nation. The *New York Times* only gave the athletes an identity in 30 percent of the articles sampled, while grouping them with their birthplace 90 percent of the time. In 1988, a turnaround in this trend was found. Of the articles sampled, 63 percent lumped the athletes under the country's name, but 93 percent of these same articles identified the athletes by name. This showed that the U.S. media began to frame the athletes more as simply competitors in the Olympics, and not as part of a larger country. Earlier when the United States was on its way into the Cold War, rather than on its way out, it saw things more in terms of countries and which country was against which. But in 1988, when the Cold War was coming to a close, the competitors were simply seen as individual competitors and the articles focused more on the Games themselves.

When the athletes were named in the articles, most of the time it was just in a list of finishes. The media would report on various events, oftentimes listing the top finishers, their home countries and the appropriate event statistic. It would also mention the favorites for those events, but little else would be said. For example, one article read as follows: "In other races, Tamas Darnyi of Hungary set a world record in the 400-meter individual medley and Silke Hoerner of East Germany set a world record in the 200-meter breaststroke. Dave Wharton of Warminster, Pa., won the silver medal in the 400 IM. Heike Friedrich of East Germany won the 200-meter freestyle, in which defending gold medalist Mary Wayte of Mercer Island, Wash., finished fourth."\*\*\* There is not a frame surrounding these athletes, except to say that they are competitors in the Olympics.

A large difference between the two games could be seen in the way the two newspapers approached Soviet wins and losses. In the 1952 articles, for every one article, 1.2 losses were discussed, while .7 wins made it into the copy. The *New York Times* was rarely found talking of results, where only .6 losses and .2 wins were mentioned per article. The *Post* was found more likely to print how the Soviets performed, with 1.9 losses and 1.2 wins per article sampled. In 1988, the *Times* was still less likely to talk about results, printing 1.1 losses and .6 wins for every one article. In contrast, the *Post* printed 1.3 losses and 1.4 wins per article. All in all, based on the sample, readers in 1988 would have seen 1.2 losses and 1.0 win for every one article they read. Although more parity can be seen between the losses and wins mentioned in 1988, more Soviet losses made the papers than wins. This comes in contrast with the reality of the medal counts in both Olympics. By emphasizing the losses more than the wins, it makes the reader assume that athletes from behind the Iron Curtain did not succeed in the Games. In reality, Soviet bloc athletes took home the most gold medals in both Olympics.

In 1952, the Soviet Union came in second, with 22 gold medals. Hungary and Czechoslovakia were also in the top-10 in the gold medal count. The Soviet bloc finished with 47 gold medals, compared to the

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\*\*\* Christine Brennan, "Biondi Atones for Mistake Anchors World Record Win," *Washington Post*, Sept. 21, 1988.



United States' 40. In 1988, the Soviets won the gold medal race with 55, while East Germany came in second. Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria also finished in the top-10. The Soviet bloc earned 118 gold medals that year, while the United States won 36. The large disparity in losses-to-wins in the earlier Olympics can be interpreted as a bias against the Soviets in a Cold War context because the press wanted to emphasize what the Soviets were doing wrong, rather than what they were doing right. While it is not explicit, it is a way that the press can shape what information the audience sees. In the later Games, there is still more losses reported than wins. The press reported fewer wins for every loss than was accurate. Since that does not match reality, it causes one to stop and ponder why the press would choose to represent the Soviets as such. Because of the Cold War context, it can be concluded that the United States press still was trying to show the Soviets in a negative light because they were the enemy of the United States.

The research produced many fewer Cold War frames than expected. In 1952, only just over 30 percent of the articles gave any explicit reference to United States-Soviet Union relations when talking of the athletes themselves. The ones that did often spoke of how well the Soviet athletes were getting along with the American athletes. One article described a scene as such: "As the Vaulting Vicar [Robert Richards, an American athlete] got up after his third failure and smilingly waved his hands to the applauding crowd, Peter Denisenko [a Soviet athlete] rushed over to him, grabbed him in a bear hug and lifted him off the ground."<sup>\*\*\*</sup> There were no such scenes as describing athletes from other countries celebrating or congratulating each other—only the Soviets and Americans. There was an entire article devoted to the American rowing team "fraternizing" with the Soviet rowing team. The article starts out: "American's eight-oar Olympic rowing champions were wined and dined by the Russians today at the Soviet's camp at Otaniemi. The midshipmen from the United States Naval Academy drank vodka, ate caviar, hugged pretty Russian girls and toasted international friendship."<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> The rest of the article went on to detail the entirety of the socializing between the two teams. None of the other articles talked about how athletes from other countries spent their time, but because it happened to be the Soviets and the Americans during the Cold War, this is what showed up in the newspapers. However, it appeared much less than expected, with only 31.6 percent of articles during the Helsinki Olympics showing any mention of such a frame and less than one percent in the Seoul Games. Two articles out of the 43 sampled from the Seoul Olympics mentioned the Soviet athletes in a Cold War context.

One frame that did appear during the 1988 Games was that of illegal substances and Soviet athletes. During the Games, the Bulgarian weightlifting team withdrew from competition after two gold medals were stripped from the team for the use of banned substances. A Hungarian was also penalized for such drug use. The United States' media mentioned the incidents in 18.6 percent of its articles during the Olympics. Even in some articles in which the main subject had nothing to do with the weightlifting incident, references to the controversy would creep into the story. One article was entirely about Bulgaria, listing all of the issues that the country had during the Olympics. There was no reference to a specific athlete, but the article specifically mentioned all the troubles that the country encountered during the Games. These mentions influenced the way the audience viewed Bulgarian athletes, even though the weightlifting team was the only one affected by the positive drug tests. There also weren't articles about other countries dealing with such controversy—just the Soviet bloc.

The terms "Soviets" and "Russians" were used interchangeably. The Soviet Union encompassed not only Russia, but also Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Regardless, the U.S. media felt as though the two terms were substitutable. This shows the lack of knowledge of the U.S. media about the Soviet Union, presumably because it was not worth knowing. The United States only saw the Soviet Union as the enemy because of the Cold War, but it didn't take the opportunity to even understand the nation. Therefore, the mass media, and thus the American public, saw the Soviet Union and Russia as the same entity, even though the Soviet Union was so much more than just Russia.

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<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Allison Danzig, "U.S. Takes 3 More Track Titles but Russia Keeps Olympic Lead," *New York Times*, July 23, 1952.

<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> "U.S., Russia Agree on Steaks, Rowing," *New York Times*, July 25, 1952.

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**Table 1. Raw data from the examination of 337 newspaper articles**

	1952 Summer Olympics	1988 Summer Olympics
<b>Total articles under search term "Olympics"</b>	96	241
<b>Total articles mentioning Soviet bloc athletes</b>	57	129
<b>Total sample size of articles mention Soviet bloc athletes</b>	19	43
<b>Total Soviet bloc wins mentioned in sample articles</b>	13	42
<b>Total Soviet bloc losses mentioned in sample articles</b>	23	51
<b>Total Soviet bloc athletes mentioned by name in sample articles</b>	8	40
<b>Total Soviet bloc athletes referred to only by country in sample articles</b>	14	40

## V. Conclusion

Although there were hints of Cold War mentality throughout the samples of the U.S. print media analyzed, for the most part, the press did a good job of portraying Soviet athletes as athletes first, Soviets second. It emphasized the athletic competition without bringing in a lot of Cold War subtexts to distract attention from the sporting events. While some of the athletes and athletic events were specifically chosen to fit a frame that the media were trying to tell, the fact that the frames were as minor as they were showed that the journalists were thinking about the Soviets as fellow athletes, rather than enemies of the Cold War. It must be kept in mind, however, that this is only in terms of references to the athletes themselves. The U.S. media approached the country as a whole differently than they did the athletes themselves.

This study has several limitations, though, that keep the U.S. media's portrayal of Soviet athletes from being generalized. First, it only examined two major newspapers on the East Coast, while there were thousands of others across the United States that may have done things differently. Second, it did not look at any other forms of media, such as television or news magazines. Each medium approached the news differently, and so the portrayal of Soviet athletes may have been different from what was found in these two newspapers. Third, the research was only done for two Olympics during the Cold War (the first and last). There are eight other Olympic Games between the two that were left out of the study. Analysis of those games would have shed some light on the process of changes in the coverage of the Olympics.

In these articles, there were mentions of the North Korean teams and the Cuban teams who were not present because of boycotts. While these countries were big in the news at the time, they were not as big in the news as the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Research could be done to see how the press discussed Soviet athletes when they boycotted the 1984 Olympics.

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# **Global News and Awareness: An Examination of *El País* and *The New York Times* and their Relation to Public Knowledge and Opinion Levels**

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## **Abstract**

*This research examined the content of articles about Brazil in *The New York Times* and *El País* and the correlation between news coverage and students' knowledge and opinion levels on current events in Brazil. Content analysis revealed that American news coverage of Brazil in *The New York Times* had more depth and breadth than Spanish coverage in *El País*. Questionnaires distributed to University of Seville and Elon University students indicated that students in Spain had more limited knowledge of current events in Brazil than American students, reflecting the narrow focus of Spanish news coverage. However, the American students had a much broader array of knowledge and opinion of current events in Brazil, reflecting the more extensive focus of American news.*

## **I. Introduction**

The relationship between the media and the visibility of certain events and issues in foreign countries is extremely important, especially in this globalized world. Awareness of current events throughout the world is critical to business, politics, and the establishment of an informed, global citizenry. It is difficult for citizens to be fully informed without keeping up with the media, on which the public depends for accurate reporting on current global events.

The relationship between public opinion and the media is closely related to the agenda setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). According to Besova and Cooley's study (2009), the first-level agenda setting theory reflects the assumption that the public will credit a particular event with more importance if the media covers it more thoroughly than others. The second-level agenda setting theory, also known as attribute agenda, states that the media strongly influences how the public views certain issues as well as what issues the public thinks about in general, known as an issue agenda. According to the agenda-setting theory, a particular nation that is thoroughly reported on with frequency will constantly be in the minds of the public. The depth of this coverage will subsequently affect the attitudes the public has toward that country. However, the public is generally unaware of countries the media neglects.

This study examined the content of articles about Brazil in *El País* and *The New York Times* and the relationship between newspaper content and students' attitudes and levels of knowledge. The researcher chose to examine Brazil because of its perceived mutual level of interest to both the United States and Spain. After analyzing content of the two newspapers for frequency and depth of reporting, questionnaires were cre-

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\* **Keywords:** Brazil, U.S., global news, public knowledge, favorable opinion, relationship  
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ated and distributed to students in Spain and the United States. Student responses are important to measure because today's students will soon be influencers in the work force, impacting the opinions of their peers in the general public. They also provide a convenience sampling for university students who are conducting research.

The study was particularly influenced by Besova and Cooley's (2009) study that examined foreign news and public opinion and the attribute agenda-setting theory. As in this study, these researchers investigated the correlation between media coverage and public opinion. Such studies help to understand why the public is more aware of certain issues than others, and more generally, whether there is a difference in global awareness between Europeans and Americans. Besova and Cooley's work, along with others, will be reviewed in the following section.

## II. Literature Review

International news continues to be the subject of many studies. The most relevant study to this research is an analysis of the media coverage of foreign countries in *The New York Times* and the British periodical, *The Times*. Content analysis and surveys indicated that media coverage and public opinion were strongly correlated. The study also found that coverage of foreign countries is generally brief and stereotypical (Besova & Cooley, 2009).

Besova and Cooley (2009) valued the growing importance of global knowledge in the modern world. They wanted to dig deeper into the relationship between visibility of countries in foreign news and public opinion regarding these countries. As with the case with the present study, Besova and Cooley wanted to examine the correlation between media coverage and opinion. They did so by conducting extensive content analysis of a total of 497 articles. They coded 200 articles from *The Times* and 297 articles from *The New York Times*. Each article was chosen because it mentioned at least one nation, as opposed to the current study, which only looks at articles written about Brazil. The researchers conducted a qualitative content analysis that analyzed whether there was predominantly positive, neutral, or negative coverage. Issues discussed in the news articles were recorded as well.

Besova and Cooley (2009) utilized the TransAtlantic Trends Survey 2004 (Roper Center for Public Opinion) to evaluate public opinions regarding the various nations mentioned in the media. A random sample of an average of 1,000 respondents from 11 countries was obtained by telephone interviews. The survey instructed the participants to indicate their feelings regarding particular countries with a "feeling thermometer." Such countries included: Russia, Israel, North Korea, Turkey, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, France, and Germany.

As mentioned previously, the Besova and Cooley (2009) study revealed that media coverage and public opinion were strongly correlated and that the negative media coverage has more of an agenda-setting effect than neutral and positive coverage. Furthermore, the media limits news coverage of foreign countries to few stories that are centered on a limited number of stories. This limited scope results in a stereotypical portrayal of these foreign nations.

Besova and Cooley's (2009) study inspired the researcher to mirror their methods on a much smaller scale. She saw how well their content analysis revealed the information the public was consuming and its relationship to public opinion and decided to examine content of *The New York Times* and *El País* of Spain for depth and breadth of coverage of Brazil. Limitations restricted the researcher to analysis of news coverage of only one foreign nation. Limitations also forced the researcher to analyze the opinions of a small sample size from two nations only. Finally, limitations forced the researcher to obtain data by creating and distributing a questionnaire rather than utilizing a more elaborate survey.

International news coverage across various channels of media is shrinking. Less than 25% of newspaper coverage is devoted to international affairs (Adams, 1982). According to an analysis of American mainstream newspapers between 1963 and 1964, as well as between 1998 and 1999, foreign hard news decreased from 5% to 3%, a strikingly low percentage (Stepp, 1999). In addition to the declining amount of news coverage of international events, studies indicate a decline in the quality of such coverage. Not only are there inaccurate and incomplete news reports, but they also focus on topics of human interest, such as violence, crisis and disaster (Goodman, 1999; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1981; Wilhoit & Weaver, 1983). Not every foreign

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nation receives equal coverage by the media. Certain countries are covered with more depth and breadth than others. The amount of coverage devoted to a particular foreign country depends on the country's position in global politics, culture, and economy (Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1996).

The decreasing priority the media in the United States places on foreign affairs is out of proportion to the large impact that media coverage is thought to have on public opinion (Golan & Wanta, 2003). A study by Semetko, Brzinski, Weaver and Willnat (1992) indicated that the higher a country's visibility in U.S. news reports, "the stronger the media attention and exposure measures will be as predictors of public opinion about a country." News coverage of international affairs can alter public opinion with regard to assessing danger but cannot set the agenda "in terms of friends and enemies of the United States" (Salwen & Matera, 1992). Such studies are related to the agenda-setting theory. According to McCombs (2004), such studies look at the prominence placed on events from the media and public opinion. Ultimately, agenda setting has been defined as "the idea that the news media, by their display of news, come to determine the issues the public thinks about and talks about" (Severin & Tankard, 1988).

### **Research Questions**

This research, propelled by past studies mentioned, looks at the international coverage of Brazil in *The New York Times* and *El País* and the opinions of American and Spanish students. Based on this discussion, this paper posed the following questions:

RQ1: To what extent do topics, lengths and sources vary in coverage between *The New York Times* and *El País*?

RQ2: To what extent are American and Spanish students informed on events in Brazil?

## **III. Methods**

This study used content analysis as well as surveys to examine the depth and breadth of media coverage of the country of Brazil in the United States and Spain and the effect of that media coverage on students' levels of knowledge and opinions.

### **Content Analysis as a Form of Inquiry**

Content analysis is "the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods" (Rife, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). By performing content analysis, researchers are able to make inferences from the data. "The researcher can gain access to communicators who may be unwilling or unable to be examined directly" (Rife, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). There are other advantages to content analysis as well. For example, in quantitative content analysis, longitudinal studies can be achieved, and coding teams can be easily trained and formed to ensure that a great volume of content is analyzed that a single researcher would have difficulty performing individually. By creating definitions for what exactly the researchers are coding for before the process begins, researchers ensure more accuracy in their results. Intercoder reliability allows the researcher to make sure that each coder is coding the content consistently, contributing to the accuracy of the findings.

This study used *The New York Times* and *El País* to analyze the media coverage of Brazil in the United States and Spain. The researcher chose to focus on news coverage of Brazil. These publications were chosen because of their large circulation and prestige within the media industry. *The New York Times* has been used in previous studies to analyze international news coverage (Chang, Shoemaker, & Brendlinger, 1987). It has won 104 Pulitzer prizes and hosts the most popular American online newspaper website (Adams, 2011). *El País*, like *The New York Times*, has the status of a "newspaper of record" (Besova, Cooley, 2009), and not only has a great online and print following, but a strong social media presence as well. Therefore, the value of these papers is that the information they provide may be direct or indirect. They are primary content providers, particularly with respect to international news, and the information they carry seeps into other sources of information as well. The students don't necessarily have to read these newspapers directly to get the news they provide. These newspapers are key players in the overall news industry.

Before research was conducted, the researcher defined exactly what would qualify as an article on Brazil. Specifically, Brazil must be the main subject of the story. If it is not mentioned within the first two

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paragraphs, the story would not fall into the category of an article about Brazil. The subject of the article must be about Brazilian culture, economy, government, natural disasters, a person or group of people within Brazil, or a variety of other topics. If the article was focused on an aspect unique to Brazil, it was analyzed by the researchers.” A sample of articles about Brazil from *The New York Times* and *El País* was collected from the time period between January 1 and March 22, 2011 through the Lexis Nexis database. A coding sheet was also formulated, which listed three columns for coding. Each article was coded in an identical process for length, number of sources, and subject. Length was divided into three sections. Articles that contained between 1 and 500 words were considered short, those with 500 to 1,000 words were considered medium, and articles with over 1,000 words were considered by coders to be long. By looking at the number of sources, length and topic of the articles, the researcher was able to analyze the amount as well as the depth of the coverage.

### ***Survey as a Form of Inquiry***

Surveys are often used to discover opinions. However, survey questions must be carefully worded so there is no confusion about their meaning. Simple and clear wording is crucial to conducting surveys so that the respondents understand what the researchers are asking and in turn provide accurate information.

This research examines opinions and levels of knowledge of students in Spain and the United States. A convenience sample of students from Elon University and the University of Seville was selected to answer questions about their media use, as well as their knowledge and opinions of current events in Brazil. The participants were students that the researcher met while studying at Elon University and the University of Seville in Spain. The survey was distributed electronically and completed anonymously by 45 out of 100 solicited Elon University students. Ten students who studied either engineering or English at the University of Seville completed the survey in Spanish. Survey questions asked the participants to rate their feelings toward the current, recently elected president of Brazil as well as her predecessor. By doing so, the research examined their opinions as well as their levels of knowledge about Brazil. There were also open-ended questions regarding the number of hours each participant used various types of media. The responses to these questions reveal what types of media students are using to get their news.

## **IV. Findings**

### ***Content Analysis of Newspaper Articles***

#### ***The New York Times***

The researcher performed content analysis on 22 articles from *The New York Times* to test for depth and amount of coverage of articles about current events in Brazil. After coding for length, sources and article topics, the researcher discovered that there is variety in news coverage in *The New York Times*. There were seven short stories printed under 500 words, eight medium articles containing between 500 and 1,000 words, and seven long articles of over 1,000 words. The most frequently published article was between 500 and 1,000 words. Analysis of the number of sources used revealed that although there were as many as eight sources used in some articles, the average number of sources used was 3.18. The most prevalent topic, appearing in eight out of the 22 analyzed stories, was natural disasters. Other topics included human interest, international relations and race and gender (two articles each). Also included were national politics, the environment, international politics, law enforcement, crime, business, the Olympics, and travel (one article each).

#### ***El País***

The researcher coded 15 articles from *El País* about Brazil for length of article, number of sources used and topic of article in exactly the same way that *The New York Times* was coded. However, unlike *The New York Times* articles, there was not much variety in the length of articles coded. There were four short articles, 10 medium articles, and one long article. Although the largest number of sources used was 10 sources in one article, the average number was only 2.53. On average, *El País* referenced fewer sources than *The New York Times*. The examination of article topics revealed that there was not one truly predominant topic in the Spanish news coverage. Of the 15 articles analyzed, the economy, society, and international relations of Brazil were each addressed in three articles; the business and culture of Brazil were each addressed in two articles; and the national politics, international politics, law enforcement, and, trade and commerce of Brazil

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were each addressed in one article.

### **Survey of Students of Elon University Students**

A 10-question survey asked questions about media use, knowledge and opinions about current events in Brazil. The majority of Elon students (64.4%) get news from print and online newspapers. Students also frequently look to television (60%) and social media (60%) to retrieve news. Students also indicated that they spent a great amount of time using social media. On average, Elon students spent 9.45 hours on social media a week, as well as 1.05 hours reading print newspapers, 2 hours reading online newspapers, .95 hours reading print magazines, .74 hours reading online magazines, 2.93 hours reading books, and 6.47 hours watching the television.

Questions on the students' knowledge of current events in Brazil revealed mixed results. Although the most devastating natural disaster that has occurred in Brazil most recently was a series of mudslides, 46.7% of students responded that the answer was floods. However, the greatest number of respondents correctly indicated Brazil as the eighth largest economy in the world in terms of GDP. Most Elon students correctly indicated which word best describes the police in Brazil, with 60% of respondents choosing the word "corrupt." Over 55% of respondents correctly indicated that Ronaldo is the Brazilian soccer player who has dominated the news most recently. However, students failed to demonstrate knowledge of why he has been in the news. Although the answer was that he retired, most Elon students chose the response, "He donated thousands of dollars to victims in Japan."

Elon students did not have strong feelings toward events in Brazil. Although 48.9% of respondents felt that Brazil is a strong emerging market, 22.2% of students lacked an opinion about the subject. When asked to indicate the strength of the relationship between the United States and Brazil, 51.1% of respondents believe that the relationship is improving. However, a striking 42.2% of students did not have an opinion. Finally, when asked to rate the current president Dilma Rousseff, the first woman present of Brazil, 55.6% of students did not know the individual and 40% lacked an opinion. Such results are similar to responses about Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva, the past president of Brazil. Only 11% of respondents had an opinion, whereas 53% had no opinion and 35.6% did not know the individual.

### **University of Seville Students**

University of Seville students were asked in Spanish the same 10 questions that the Elon University students answered. The students did not have a strong opinion regarding Brazilian current events. When asked to rank the current and past president of Brazil, nearly 100% of respondents did not have either an opinion or complete knowledge of the individual. When asked to indicate their opinion of the strength of the relationship between the United States and Brazil, 50% of respondents expressed they that did not have an opinion on the subject.

University of Seville students had some general knowledge about Brazil. The majority of students (60%) seemed to know which soccer star was dominating the news at the time, yet only 20% of respondents knew that the Brazilian economy was ranked number 8 in the world in 2010. No respondents knew that mudslides had been the most devastating natural disaster.

## **V. Conclusion**

The researcher performed content analysis on media coverage that showed that *El País* and *The New York Times* cover current issues in Brazil differently. The Spanish newspaper emphasized the economic and political aspects of Brazil, whereas the U.S. newspaper painted a broader picture of the country, including cultural aspects as well as the political and economic side of the country. This difference in reporting reflects the differing public interest of the two countries. Such reporting went against the researcher's hypothesis that Spain would be more interested in cultural and human aspects of Brazil, such as traditions, sporting events and the upcoming Olympics, as well as the devastation of the mudslides and their impact on the people of Brazil.

The researcher discovered that the two newspapers covered current issues in Brazil differently. *The New York Times* offered a breadth of topics ranging from business and international relations to the environment and racial tensions within Brazil. The combination of diverse topics and variation of depth provide readers with a whole picture of Brazil and the events that take place there. However, *El País* focused on fewer

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articles and fewer topics, but the majority of its reporting consisted of articles of medium depth of about 500-1,000 words that reflect few topics. Therefore, the readers of *El País* and those influenced by the publication are well informed about select issues in Brazil. However, although readers of *El País* should have a great deal of knowledge about the economy and Brazil's society and relations with other countries, they showed a lack of knowledge of the big picture issues that really shed light on current issues in Brazil as a whole.

Results of a student survey reflected differences in knowledge and opinion levels between American and Spanish students. Survey results revealed that most American students knew there was massive devastation in Brazil due to mudslides. However, there were no Spanish students who indicated that mudslides were the most devastating natural disaster. Such discrepancies were also evident in knowledge about the country's economy in comparison to others in the world. Generally speaking, however, students from both Elon and the University of Seville both lacked knowledge and opinions on the past and current presidents of Brazil. Lack of opinion likely reflects a lack of knowledge about the subject. Therefore, stronger reporting on the country of Brazil could increase both students' levels of knowledge and opinions regarding current events in that country.

Unless it reports on an array of topics, the media are in the danger of painting only a stereotypical portrait of a country, as Besova and Cooley (2009) indicated. Such reporting could be responsible for narrow views and ignorance of real issues occurring in foreign countries. U.S. students' level of knowledge and opinion was higher than that of Spanish students, reflecting the amount, depth, and breadth of news coverage in *The New York Times*. Such findings uphold the issue agenda setting theory that suggests that "the media are influential in telling us what issues to think about" (Besova & Cooley, 2009; Wanta, Golan and Lee, 2004).

There were a number of limitations to this study. A future study may analyze news coverage of multiple countries and examine the public opinion of a large, random sample of residents in various countries, much like the Besova and Cooley (2009) study. Since the research was conducted in North Carolina and in a short period of time, it was extremely difficult to recruit participants from the University of Seville. The distance between the researcher and students at the University of Seville also affected control and regulation. Originally, the researcher wanted to personally distribute surveys and proctor the students as they completed them; however, time restrictions and a lack of direct supervision of Spanish participants forced the researcher to create a Survey Monkey questionnaire instead. By having participants answer questions about their knowledge and opinion levels about Brazil over the Internet, the researcher risked getting inaccurate findings. Participants could have easily looked up the answers to questions on websites such as Google, thus distorting the results.

Content analysis of *El País* and the creation or interpretation of the survey for Spanish students required extensive knowledge of the Spanish language so translation may also have led to inaccurate findings.

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# Transformation of Newspapers in the Technology Era

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## Abstract

*This study attempted to investigate how newspapers were adapting to technology and how well the changes were keeping up with altering consumer demands. This research examined what prominent technology newspapers were using to deliver news and whether adjusting to current technology was keeping readers satisfied. Using a triangular research approach by conducting interviews, secondary research, and survey, this research tackled questions from various perspectives to reach a multi-faceted conclusion. Despite the decline of print newspaper subscriptions, this research explained why newspapers might not be a dying business. To remain competitive news sources, newspapers were implementing new technologies, such as web sites, blogging and text/instant messaging, to deliver information. By optimizing advertising dollars and promoting consumer participation, these changes suggested a positive future for the newspaper industry.*

## I. Introduction

Over the past several decades, many newspapers became sluggish. They had been accustomed to raking in revenue without much competition. After the onset of the Internet, newspapers are realizing they will encounter a financial crisis if they do not keep up with new technological competitors. Now, newspaper businesses are embracing technology as a way to meet audiences' expectations. The researcher will investigate whether newspapers have been successfully transitioning toward technologically advanced media and how well the changes are keeping up with consumer demands.

## II. Literature Review

### ***Profitability of Online Business***

The first goal of a business is to make a profit. Without earning enough money, a business simply cannot succeed. Newspapers are no exception. As years go by, businesses must adapt to meet customer demands. For decades, newspapers have dealt with small adjustments, but they are now at a point where major changes need to take place to remain competitive. Researcher Trombly (2002) found that just over half of 170 online newspapers showed a slight profit in 2001. The nearly 10-year-old study would probably show significantly different results if it had been conducted in 2011. Still, the numbers show an increase of previous years and could give important insight into the future of newspaper profitability online. During this study, Trombly found that Web development was the second-most revenue-generating element of newspapers,

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which many people may not realize.

Since the beginning of the Internet, newspapers have asked themselves if they could provide a healthy stream of revenue for business, and if so, how it would be possible. The question is not simple to be answered, especially by a study conducted nearly 15 years ago (Kirsner, 1997). There was no way for anyone to understand how fast technology would grow in the next decade. Although Kirsner's predictions may be slightly conservative, he made several fair arguments. For instance, he mentioned that people need to be patient. Even newspapers today fail to allocate enough resources to technology, thinking it will not deliver worthwhile results. Further, he mentioned how vital advertising on the Web will be to online businesses. This statement is very accurate, because newspapers with Web sites now see increases in revenue from advertising as long as they deliver large audiences other businesses seek to target. In the last few years, advertisers are finding that online advertising is much more effective than print. Online advertising is more of a long-term investment (Dorroh, 2005). In print, readers can identify advertisements much more easily, but online it is sometimes difficult to separate advertising from entertainment. According to Robertson (2005), newspaper subscriptions are decreasing, because consumers are realizing they can read the same content online for free. If newspapers require users to pay for online subscriptions to read all content, they may lose revenue.

### ***Advantages of Using the Internet and Other Technologies***

Judging from many studies, using up-and-coming technologies could provide newspapers with many advantages. Besides increased revenues, they offer many other advantages that people often overlook.

New technologies attract audiences to the news industry. For instance, the interactivity of social media is transforming the way consumers receive and participate in news (Gleason, 2010). For instance, Twitter allows "followers" to personalize their news and respond to the news sources they "follow" with questions, ideas or concerns (Farhi, 2009). Farhi observed that social media, especially Twitter, has changed the newspaper landscape. Consumer involvement appears to be a significant advantage of using new, innovative technologies, and the participation makes audiences feel appreciated. Further, these technologies are giving audiences a sense of power when they comment on news content (Bly, 2010). According to Bly, audience interaction via social media could be the "new 'big thing'" (Bly, 2010, para. 1).

With profitability still the ultimate goal, some newspaper businesses transformed once-print newspapers into primarily online-based news sources. The article "Small Paper Redefines Itself Online" (Frye, 2003) describes how much more money has been generated from online news than print. Most newspapers find it difficult to change and adapt to different methods to which they are unaccustomed; however, one 70-year-old weekly turned to the Internet as a lifeline for its business. Even in a small town of 3,500 residents, it found that publishing news on a Web site brought the business great success. The opposite is a common problem with many newspapers struggling to keep customers reading, because they choose not to invest the time and money into technology that they should have years ago (Morton, 2007). The small-town newspaper gave great insight into how taking the first step could turn a newspaper business around for the better. Advertising online is much easier to track and gives advertisers more flexibility than print. As a result, they are willing to pay top dollars to make sure that their messages are seen by specific audiences for certain time periods.

### ***Different Types of Technologies***

Throughout the last decade, technological advancements have changed the way we live our lives. They each come with their own advantages and disadvantages that consumers must weigh before making decisions. There were several researchers who took an in-depth look at the most popular technology that shaped the way newspapers are now doing business.

Researcher Yahr (2008) wrote that blogs would contribute greatly to online newspapers' success in the coming years. Blogs provide a lot of audience interaction that was not previously possible, not just between audience members, but also between journalists and audiences. Consumers feel more connected and continue coming back for more when they are a part of an intellectual conversation about a news topic that interests them. Yahr said blogs are not for everyone. With blog editors monitoring conversations, blogs can be a healthy addition to all news-related Web sites that can help increase audience numbers as well as improve the way news is delivered.

Cellular phones are also an up-and-coming technology to which newspapers are adapting. Smart-phones are rapidly changing the way audiences perceive news. In the article "The Ever-Evolving Newspa-

per,” Frye said that text messages and phone applications are becoming popular in newsrooms, because they send information instantly to readers (2006). Adjusting to this new phenomenon helps maintain audiences’ trust and attention.

In the 1990s, newspapers did not embrace technology as much as broadcasters and even tried to block telephone companies from entering the electronic market, because they feared competition and the unknown (McKenna, 1993). In this decade, combining things consumers want into one product is common, and newspapers are finding that they cannot continue to shy away from broadcast, cell phones and the Internet any more. Not only do newspapers need to compete against these technologies, but they need to learn to collaborate with them.

### ***Future of the News in a Technological World***

It is uncertain where technology is headed in the future, so it is difficult to gauge what the future of the newspaper business will look like. Information from the past and present, however, will help forecasters make predictions about future trends. Media futurists also share their insights on how newspapers will change in the future.

Often, people attribute the decline of newspapers to the rise of the online news. On the contrary, there is not as much of a connection between the two as many people believe (Palser, 2007). Certainly, people have begun to gravitate toward quick and effective news on the Internet and slowly cancel newspaper subscriptions, but Palser suggested it is the type of journalism, not the form, that contributes to newspaper struggles. Audiences’ demands are changing, and they want something convenient instead of tangible.

Secondly, a fair amount of customers still find it difficult to trust online news. Since anyone can contribute to news content online, some consumers hesitate to give much credibility to information on the Internet in comparison with other news sources (Baetke, 2006). Newspapers need to reach out to these online customers by building trust. Once newspapers develop trust, they will see higher profits rolling in.

Many newspapers are monitoring consumers’ online comments by requiring them to register. Newspapers are trying to balance audiences’ freedom to post what they please on Web sites with the responsibility of making sure that comments are appropriate and relevant. By keeping track of identified posts, offensive comments will decrease (Gsell, 2009). The growing transparency and consumer involvement are building audiences’ trust of technologies that newspapers use. If newspapers continue on their current route, readers will be pleased, and newspapers will more than likely advance as a result.

### ***Research Purpose***

The 21st century has brought along with it a long list of new technologies. It seems that one technological discovery is quickly replaced by something more impressive and efficient. As a result, “old-fashioned” technologies to which we have been accustomed in the past are forced to fight for survival or surrender. In the age of the Internet, online news businesses are popping up daily, leaving print news in dust. As a result, many newspapers are realizing they need to tailor their news-delivering techniques to be quicker and more accessible. It has been a slow and difficult process, but hundreds of newspapers are transforming the way they approach news. Older businesses are trading in their pens for a keyboard and desk phones for online video conferencing. This change newspapers are embracing is extremely important to understand, because it helps us comprehend not only why it is happening, but what the future of news will look like. This research will discuss how newspaper businesses are embracing technology, how journalists and audiences are accepting the transformations and which technologies audiences prefer. Newspapers’ potential depends on their ability to continuously alter the fundamentals they held close for many years. The researcher will not be explaining how the newspaper industry is in decline and why electronic media is now the industry’s strongest competitor for audiences.

## **III. Methods**

This study aims at deciphering how newspaper businesses are turning to technology to remain a successful and credible news source. The researcher chose to triangulate the topic by investigating the topic with a survey, interviews and secondary research. Utilizing these three methods will provide well-rounded

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explanations to research questions.

In April 2011, 109 people participated in a survey conducted using Survey Monkey where the researcher created her own survey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)). The author provided a web link on Facebook so research participants could answer 12 questions in the survey. The researcher invited all of her “friends” to complete the survey, and these participants did invite their own “friends” to complete the survey. Users were able to complete the survey at their own convenience. Of the participants, 90.7% were between the ages of 18 and 25; 0.9% between the ages of 26 and 39; 5.6% between the ages of 40 and 54; and 2.8% 55 years and older.

The survey includes multiple choice questions regarding how much participants use newspapers and other news-delivering technologies, how often they use these technologies and to what extent they would go to obtain news from different forms. Additionally, they ranked various platforms in order of how much they trust the information they read from them (Refer to Appendix).

The survey questions asked audiences how they perceive the current newspaper industry, what they like and dislike about how the industry has adjusted to technology and what changes would make them more likely to choose print news over news that utilizes technology.

Interviews with people from different backgrounds provide a greater, more in-depth perspective on the state of the newspaper business. The researcher interviewed four people: *Burlington-Times News Online* Content Editor Joe Journey, *Miami Herald* Vice President of news Anders Gyllenhaal, freelance writer John Smith and newspaper consumer John Yancey. The researcher selected these interviewees, because she wanted to accurately gauge the success of newspapers’ transition to technology by hearing diverse perspectives.

## IV. Findings and Analyses

### **Technology**

Over the past decade, technology has advanced drastically. The growing presence of technology is influencing the way newspapers are distributing news, and audiences are noticing it. In the survey, 63.3% of 109 participants believed that newspapers are doing a good job adapting to new technology. Although types of technology used by newspapers are continuously changing, survey participants are accessing newspaper-published information in five core ways. With 97.2% of participants using Web sites, 70.6% using social media, 42.2% using text or instant messaging and 37.6% using Smartphone or iPad applications, newspapers are delivering news via more devices than in previous decades. These percentages compare to 93.6% watching television and 71.6% listening to the radio for news (see *Figure 1*).

Asked to choose one of the seven news sources they preferred, 50.5% of the participants favored Web sites and only 29.3% favored television. The rest of responses were split, with each source receiving approximately 2-4% of the vote.

In an interview, *Burlington-Times News Online* Content Editor Joe Journey said that several employees at the *Times-News*, a local newspaper with a circulation of 36,000, write blogs for the business. Two or three employees at this North Carolina newspaper blog about entertainment while the others write primarily news. The newspaper offers free text message subscriptions, which notify readers of breaking news, but there are no text services for other content. With the rise of Smartphone popularity, the *Times-News* is working to create a Smartphone application, which will allow subscribers to view the latest headlines, videos and Web exclusives from anywhere (personal communication, April 19, 2011).

*Miami Herald* Vice President of news Anders Gyllenhaal believed the modern approach toward technology is not only about the Internet, but also dependence on other technology (personal communication, April 21, 2011). For instance, the *Herald* partners with a public radio company. Gyllenhaal said the partnership provides an interesting combination, because the *Herald* uses its news staff for all of the different positions needed. Changes go far beyond news distribution. The *Herald* and *Times-News* are also upgrading technology within the newsroom, from new publishing systems and wire feeds via satellite to pre-press machines that create plates for the press.

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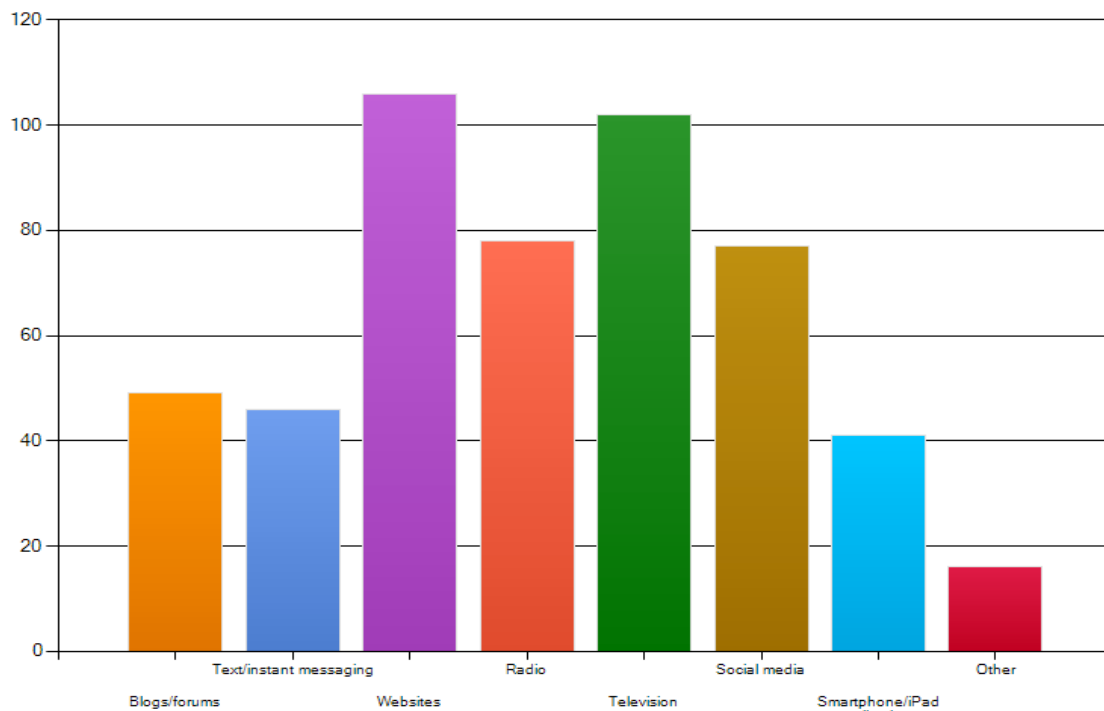


Figure 1. Types of Technology Consumers Use for News

Secondary research confirms mobile technology may have a promising future, although the technology's potential has yet to be discovered. This "direct channel to contact mobile Internet customers is an important asset and suggests a growing importance of customer relationship management as well as brand strategy" for newspaper businesses in the mobile Internet (Feldmann, 2002, p. 352). Social media is also becoming an important element in news distribution. The growing demand has led news organizations such as the *New York Times* and the *Associate Press* to create new social media job positions. For example, 27-year-old Lauren McCullough filled a new social media editor position at the *Associated Press* in 2010. Describing her job as "both emerging and evolving," she said her position requires her to be "keeping an eye on various social networks and have an understanding of what's being talked about" and new trends (Gleason, 2010, p. 6). News organizations are utilizing social media as a strategy to help "reach an audience, especially when major news erupts" that is usually difficult to target (2010, p. 6).

Blogging, text and instant messaging, Smartphone applications and social media are sweeping across the news industry. Although slower to adapt, newspapers are now embracing innovative technologies to enhance business. Tighter budgets make it more difficult for newspapers to hire employees to utilize all new technologies, but many newspapers find ways to explore at least one of them.

With smartphones and iPads populating millions of consumers' pockets and purses, creating applications to access news via these platforms only seems natural. Further, text messaging is still an emerging concept in the newsroom, and newspapers are still exploring ways to maximize the potential of this infant technology.

The largest finding from interviews was that technology is changing the way newspapers are doing business and it is very unlikely they will ever go back to older, antiquated methods. Many newspapers' fear of jumping into the technological world once interfered with the ability to compete against innovative, technology-embracing opponents. Now, newspapers do not appear to be going anywhere soon, and survey results show consumers' ages only appear to play a slight role in the success of new technologies in the newsroom.

Because technology is constantly changing, the future of the newspapers remains unclear; however, it is certain that newspapers will encounter new challenges and successes while expanding their use of technology.



## **Demand for Free News**

Research participants gravitate toward free news content. Based on results, 16% of them currently subscribe to at least one newspaper, and only 9% are willing to pay to read news content online. Further, 17.4% of participants said no cost is the greatest advantage of reading news online. Despite online reading being free, 32.7% still prefer reading a physical newspaper to its Internet counterpart.

John Yancey, interviewed for this study, is a 24-year-old industrial engineer who looks forward to reading his weekend newspaper even though it costs money. It is only during the week that he reads news online. He said, "Free is definitely an advantage, but there is just something about being able to hold a physical copy that makes the cost worthwhile" (personal communication, March 30, 2011). Despite Yancey preferring print news, the *Times-News* reported a decrease in newspaper subscriptions due to the rise of the Internet. Online Content Editor Joe Journey said *Times-News* newspaper audiences tend to be older and online readers younger, because "younger readers tend to use computers more" (personal communication, April, 19, 2011).

In 2004, the *Spokesman-Review* in Spokane, Washington, began charging readers to view online content. During the first eight months of the year, the publication experienced a site traffic increase of 42%. Immediately after the site imposed a subscription fee, online subscribers became angry and many refused to continue their subscriptions (Robertson, 2005, p. 52). Although more people subscribed to the site over time, its 1,000 online subscribers are still much fewer than the newspaper's 100,160 paper subscribers (2004, p. 52).

Newspapers realize consumers are hesitant to pay for subscriptions when they can access news free online. To combat this problem, newspapers are experimenting with ways to tailor subscriptions in a way that will make customers happy and consequently maximize readership.

It is unlikely that newspapers will remain successful if they charge fees for accessing all online content. The virtually unlimited space on the Internet gives audiences the opportunity to read news about any topic, and to many people newspapers are not worth the cost. In many cases, newspapers are losing money from print subscriptions because consumers recognize that they can find the same information online for no charge.

## **Profitability**

Newspapers are businesses, and the goal of businesses is to be profitable. Using technology to deliver news is opening up a whole new realm of money-making possibilities. Although the concept of newspaper advertising has been around for many decades, there are many forms of advertising that would not be possible without technology. At the *Miami Herald*, 21% of revenue comes from online. Although this percentage is higher than many other newspapers, Anders Gyllenhaal said it isn't good enough and should be closer to 40-45% (personal communication, April 21, 2011).

Publishing online continues to be an experiment for newspapers, and for years they spent resources on developing Web sites and lost money. Now, newspapers are employing various strategies to make online businesses profitable. The most common approach is to require consumers to register before permitting access to content, which consequently boosts advertising revenue (Brown, 2003, p. 55). Registration reveals great amounts of valuable consumer information, such as demographics and reading habits, that publishers can sell at top dollar to advertisers who want to target specific audiences (Shiver, 2006, para. 8). This strategy creates a huge advantage for online publishing, making it easier to bring in advertising revenue than print.

Selling advertising space is especially important in recent years, because consumers are less willing to pay for subscriptions to news, whether print or online (Brown, 2003, p. 54). Over the last five years, advertising has contributed to about 75-80% of revenue for newspaper companies (Morton, 2007, p. 76). In 2006, only 5% of this amount came directly from online advertising. The "major reason for this small presence is that entrepreneurs in the early years of the Internet era did invest the money necessary" and have become online competitors, which are now taking away business from newspapers (2007, p. 76).

The blurring of news and advertising can make it even easier to draw consumers' eyes to advertisements. If advertisers create an ad to simulate the appearance of newspaper content, they can draw greater viewership. Although this strategy may backfire in the future, the theoretically endless space on the Internet makes it easier for newspapers to pack in more advertising for more money (Dorroh, 2005, p. 38). Additionally, display advertising on the Web is quite different than in print news, because advertisers pay to have their

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ad displayed for a specific period of time on a particular number of pages (Kirsner, 1997, p. 42). Interested consumers click the ad to visit the sponsoring company's Web site and learn more about the advertised product or service.

Although profit margins are steadily decreasing, newspapers have still managed to keep them high not only through technology-driven successes, but also "cost-cutting and the decline of newsprint costs" (Morton, 2007, p. 76).

New forms of advertising make it much easier for advertisers to gain attention and make money, because clicking on a link on a web newspaper is easier than looking up the advertising company from a print version. Even though newspapers struggled in the past with how to make money from technology, they are beginning to figure out how to profit successfully, even though it may take time.

### ***Consumer Involvement***

The growing presence of technology lets consumers connect with newspapers in a way not previously possible. Newspapers' Web sites often allow users to comment on any article or repost it via social networks.

Gyllenhaal said that audiences can contribute to news in many ways, such as submitting photographs and videos of breaking news (personal communication, April 21, 2011). For instance, if a tornado destroyed buildings, witnesses could use cell phone cameras or other technology to record footage reporters cannot. Freelancer John Smith is one of the thousands of people taking advantage of consumer involvement opportunities online. He frequently comments on Web content and blogs about stories that are most important to him, such as politics and international affairs. Online participation is creating career opportunities for his future (personal communication, April 3, 2011).

Success from consumer participation is partially responsible for the spike in blogs and forums on newspaper sites over the past several years, but audience involvement does have a downside. Even though "most readers are civil," there are sometimes "comments that turn nasty and unduly personal" (Yahr, 2008, p. 11). The benefit of having open discussion among readers can spur people to take advantage of the freedom. Therefore, newspapers are assigning employees to act as moderators to supervise discussions. Often, newspapers allow readers to flag comments that are offensive or inappropriate. In response to inappropriate reader submissions, the *Raleigh News and Observer* requires users to register before participating. This strategy keeps participants from posting anonymously and consequently decreases the amount of offensive comments (Gsell, 2009, para. 3). Although there are editors on most newspaper blogs and forums, online participation takes the "power out of the hands of the publishing establishment and puts it into the hands of individual authors" (Bly, 2010, para. 1).

Social media introduces a new level of consumer involvement. Twitter has become a leader of social networking in the newsroom. The site not only allows consumers to interact with newspapers, but it allows reporters to stay in close contact with sources (Farhi, 2009, para. 12). In many cases, the number of readers "following" newspapers almost exceeds actual print circulation (2009, p. 3). Arizona State University journalism professor and news blogger Dan Gillmor said journalists can "follow people who point them to things they should know about" and followers can direct questions or concerns back to them (2009, para. 13).

Not only does participation make it easier for newspapers to receive constructive feedback from audiences, but it also gives readers a sense of importance. Many newspapers often receive valuable story ideas, pictures and other information from devoted audiences. If readers feel that their thoughts and opinions are valued, they are more likely to continue reading the newspaper.

As technology improves, newspapers become more transparent. They are taking advantage of innovative technologies to become closer to audiences than ever. Readers often feel distant from the media, and new developments, such as blogging and forums, help bridge this clear gap between writers and readers. Newspapers are able to use the Internet as a tool to make audiences feel appreciated.

### ***Anyone Can Be Published***

Technology makes it quick and easy for consumers to be involved in the news industry. Survey results show that 30.8% of participants have commented or contributed to a news article online at least once.

Writers without college educations now have more of an opportunity to have their work published because of technology. John Smith, a 22-year-old freelancer for the *Examiner*, an online news publication,

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sees newspapers' slow progress toward technology as a strong career-advancing opportunity. Unlike the vast majority of journalists, Smith does not have a college degree, but still reaches hundreds of people through his work. Without the Internet, Smith said he would not have the same career opportunities as someone with a college education. Instead of fiercely competing against college graduates for top journalism jobs, Smith emails articles to U.S. senators, the publisher at the *Moscow Times* and many others. Although he lacks a strong academic background, Smith utilizes technology to branch out, make contacts with news outlets and be published in news media (personal communication, April 3, 2011).

Smith said that without editors or other management monitoring writing, casual writers feel free to write what and how they please without others' supervision. In newsrooms, editors often decide which stories are newsworthy, but people who post news-related content on their personal blogs or social media sites lack this restriction and publish information they feel is most important (personal communication, April 3, 2011).

Although it is easier for anyone to be published online, Gyllenhaal said there is "no substitute for good, solid reporting" (personal communication, April 27, 2011). The Internet and other technologies provide a very open platform for people to freely express their beliefs; however, audiences still give credibility to educated journalists (John Yancey, personal communication, March 30, 2011).

Ultimately, "news sites must strike a delicate balance when deciding whether to allow those who comment to remain anonymous" (Gsell, 2009, para. 4). Newspapers want to attract people to participate by making it easy and giving consumers a certain amount of freedom; however, they do not want offensive comments to hinder others' abilities to participate. Newspapers' use of new technology, such as blogs, forums and social media, are a fresh, unique way to attract readers while increasing advertising revenue and consumer loyalty. By hiring employees to monitor audiences' conversations, newspapers keep content clean while making sure comments are relevant and productive.

### ***Trust and Credibility***

Older technology has had the opportunity to develop the most credibility in the eyes of consumers; however, the survey showed Web sites as an exception. Results show that participants trust Web sites the most as a news source, with 93.4% at least somewhat trusting the platform. Radio and television followed with 90.7% and 89.9%, respectively. The most recent developing technologies, such as blogs, forums and social media, were not viewed as credible as Web sites, radio and television. Further, 56% of participants do not think blogs are reliable, and 58% do not trust text or instant messaging as news sources (see *Figure II*).

Yancey said he has difficulty trusting online content, because anyone can publish on the Internet. "Newspapers, radio and television have been around longer, and professionals are in greater control of the content published on these sources than on other technology" (personal communication, March 30, 2011). An avid reader of the *News and Observer*, a daily circulation of 176,000, Yancey is learning to trust what he reads via technology, but puts the most trust in content published by a newspaper.

Using these technologies is cheap, quick and easily-accessible to a wide variety of audiences, and businesses do not have to personally deliver the information. In fact, "when it comes to reaching audiences, the Web is actually the best thing that could have happened to newspaper journalism" (Palser, 2006, p. 62). Distribution comes at the touch of a button and allows more people to read and participate in the news than ever. Many news experts said the controversy with technologies, such as blogging and forums, "lies with accountability, accurate reporting and fair access to information" (Baetke, 2006, para. 4). The Web provides more people with the opportunity to stay updated on news by lowering costs (Martin & Robinson, 2007, p. 1), which may be a reason why participants trust it the most.

The growing transparency of newspapers online helps readers develop a deeper trust for what they read. They are not only able to read, but they can participate. If a reader wants to contribute information to a topic or make a complaint, they can post what they want instantly. As consumers' trust in new technology strengthens, so should their personal connection with newspapers. Audiences will feel that the business really values their contributions, and will develop more respect for the business as a result.

Trust takes time to build, and newspapers worked hard over the years to earn this trust. Technology will also need time to develop credibility as a news source, especially since many writers who use technology lack journalism degrees. As newspapers adjust to new technology, audiences will develop confidence in new technology as a news source.

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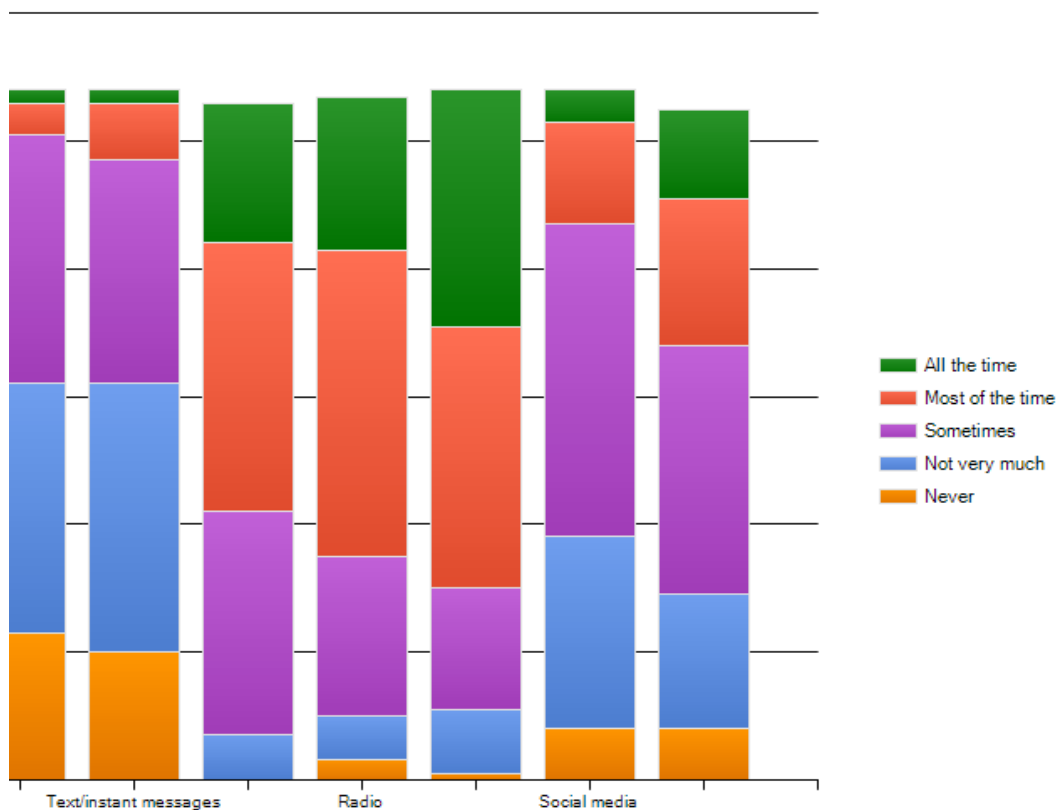


Figure II. How much Consumers Trust Types of Technology for News

### Future of Newspapers

Because newspapers are adapting to technology to meet consumer demands, what audiences want will likely play a significant role in newspapers' futures. The survey shows that 61.1% of participants think newspapers will be less popular in the next 10 years and 22.2% think they will not exist. Because 58.7% of participants said they use electronic devices all of the time, survey results suggest newspapers have to continue adapting to new technology.

A major challenge for the *Times-News* will be to continue utilizing new technology and figuring out ways to make their online product profitable. Because consumers are demanding more electronically-based news, Online Content Editor Joe Journey said more "reporters will need to realize that the Web is the future and that newspapers need to provide news instantaneously" (personal communication, April 19, 2011).

The newspaper mentally needs to switch from print to online, and reporters and editors need to realize future success is with the Internet. Like the *Times-News*, it is a concept many newspapers now recognizing. Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, who owes his success to technology, said "people are online because it is a more efficient way of doing things" (Cassidy, 2006, para. 63). As competitors post news on the Internet 24 hours a day, the pressure increases for newspapers to also deliver news quickly.

Selling information acquired through online registration has been a primary resource for money for newspapers; however, a line should be drawn as to how much information they should sell to whom. Online publishing has thrived by selling consumer information to advertisers, but they could lose audiences' trust if they begin to carelessly sell the information to other businesses. Ultimately, newspapers need to strike a balance between customized advertising and intrusiveness. If the balance is found, newspapers as well as advertisers will be able "to capitalize on the Internet's commercial possibilities" (Brown, 2003, para. 24).

Some experts suggest that to have successful future, newspapers need to put their resources toward developing more technology for newspapers to use, instead of pushing to preserve profit margins (Frye, 2006, p. 15).

Content is often judged by what topics interest readers. Because technology makes it easier to distribute information, some critics suggested newspapers may encounter major challenges preserving “editorial independence while trying to grab the attention of Web readers” in the future (Shiver, 2006, para. 18).

For now, the benefits of online newspapers appear to outweigh the costs, and newspapers will continue building up their businesses with up-and-coming technology (Gentzkow, 2007, p. 742). “The reality is that for the future, there won’t be any single product that will capture a large audience,” said Roger Fidler, the director of technology initiatives for the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute at the Missouri School of Journalism (Frye, 2006, p. 14). As trust for new technology continues to develop, it will be more likely newspaper businesses will make money from online subscriptions (Grabner-Kraeuter, 2002, p. 1).

Although it will be difficult to convince audiences to pay for online content that they used to read for free, subscriptions will still likely increase as consumers begin to trust technology newspapers use. Accurately measuring how many newspaper Web sites are profitable can be difficult, especially because each business may do its accounting differently (Trombly, 2002, para. 14). Even so, trends are showing an increase in online profitability.

Ultimately, newspapers are experiencing a lot of change, and they are transforming in response to altering consumer demands. Gyllenhaal said, “The future, in a lot of different ways, has never been more interesting” and the transformation of newspapers over the last several years is opening up new opportunities for people trying to enter journalism careers (personal communication, April 21, 2011). Although newspapers’ future remains relatively unclear, they are now embracing change in a way that promises an optimistic future.

## **V. Conclusion**

Newspapers in the past seemed to fear technology. Now recognizing that technology is becoming the way of the future, newspapers are adapting and reaping many of the consequential benefits. As competition continues to challenge newspapers, it is highly unlikely that newspapers will ever return to the way they were decades ago. Newspapers are finally “coming to terms with the inevitable high-tech future” (McKenna, 1993, para. 11).

Newspapers have gone from seeing technology as a rival to embracing it as a companion. The competition between old and new is becoming obsolete, and newspapers and technology are unifying. Technology may be changing how news is delivered, but newspapers are still as focused as ever on delivering quality journalism that readers trust (Palser, 2006, p. 62).

Although the future of newspaper businesses is obscure, it is certain that it will include technology. Newspapers are transforming into a news source that consumers want, and are successfully embracing their technological fate.

The survey had a small sample of participants, and the majority of participants were between the ages of 18 and 25. More participants especially from a wider age spectrum would have produced a result that can be generalized more accurately to a broader group of the population. Because technology is rapidly transforming, sources in the author’s literature review, such as scholastic journal articles, cannot be updated quickly because of their nature. Even so, these publications provided plenty of evidence on how far newspapers have advanced and their previous successes and challenges.

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## Appendix: Survey Questions

1. What is your age group:

18 – 25

26 – 39

40 – 54

55 and older

2. What forms of technology have you used as a news source? Choose all that apply.

Blogs/forums

Text/instant messaging

Web sites

Radio

Television

Social media

Smartphone/iPad applications

Other

3. Which is your favorite source for news?

Blogs/forums

Text/instant messaging

Web sites

Radio

Television

Social media

Smartphone/iPad applications

Other

4. Do you subscribe to a newspaper?

Yes

No

5. Would you pay to access news online?

Yes

No

6. Have you ever commented or contributed to a news article online?

Yes

No

7. On a scale of 1 – 10, how much do you trust news you read from:

Blogs/forums

Text/instant messaging

Web sites

Radio

Television

Social media

Smartphone/iPad applications

Other

8. Where do you think newspapers will be in the next 10 years?

More popular

Same as now

Less popular

Non-existent

9. How often do you use an electronic device each day?

- Never
- Not often
- Often
- Very often
- All of the time

10. What is the biggest advantage of reading news online?

- Inexpensive/free
- Convenient
- Fast access
- Interactive
- None

11. Are newspapers doing a good job adapting to technology?

- Yes
- No

12. Do you prefer to read news from newspapers or the Internet?

- Newspapers
  - Internet
-

# Network Television Broadcasting during U.S. Crises: Its Evolution, Execution, and Effects

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## Abstract

*The Kennedy assassination and September 11, 2001: these were the beginnings of two distinctive catastrophic events in U.S. history, both of which were captured by network news stations. The purpose of this research was to determine how and why broadcast production decisions were made during such crises. Six qualitative interviews were conducted with news producers and reporters. These subjective narratives were used to analyze the overall patterns of decision-making at a television station during a catastrophic event. Analyzing techniques involved 1) the identification of production themes within each station and 2) the comparison of these themes to other interviewee accounts. Snowball sampling was used to gather quantitative statistics regarding viewer's opinions on a station's coverage of an iconic event. The sample consisted of 200 viewers across the country. This research found the qualities valued when the stations broke the news of a crisis, as well as determining factors in viewers' preference for a specific network. Production decisions varied based on the network, yet the research discovered a common theme among all networks: Production teams wanted to relay the latest information by showing audiences decent and relative stories. This research discovered multiple themes in order to attempt to explain the significance of the work conducted behind the camera.*

## I. Introduction

The gun points at the president and discharges a bullet. The plane nosedives straight into dozens of offices. These are the beginnings of two distinctive catastrophes forever ingrained in United States history. Network news stations were there to record as the events unfolded, and they were there as America fell into a time of crisis. The Kennedy assassination set the precedent for how production decisions on the network level are made during crises. Groundbreaking technological developments prepared the broadcast industry to cover the terror attacks on September 11, 2001, yet precisely how those decisions were made are still unclear to the general public. It is through the evolution, execution, and effects of network television broadcasting during United States crises that we can better understand the meaning behind what it is to broadcast during catastrophic events.

## II. Literature Review

A variety of scholarly research exists on the role of the mass communication system in delivering the

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news of United States crises, as well as developments in technology that make such deliverance possible. Yet there is little, if any, concrete academic research regarding the evolution, execution, and effects of network television broadcasting during catastrophic events as portrayed in two events — the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. Based on the completed research focusing on the mass communications system as a whole, conclusions can be drawn pertaining to the effects of each monumental event. The following research has looked at the way broadcast media have approached crises communication.

In their 1977 article, Blackman and Hornstein focused on the ways in which good and bad news impact people's descriptions of human nature as well as their perceptions of others and of themselves. Specifically, their research offered an interpretation of the effects of media messages on people's behavioral choices and their psychological perspectives. One portion of the study was based on undergraduate responses to President Kennedy's assassination. It found that "a person's philosophy of human nature may be changed temporarily by a dramatic piece of information or personal experience" (Blackman, 302). Five days after Kennedy's death, a test about human nature was given to 30 undergraduates who had taken the same survey 14 months prior. About half of them who were the most disturbed by the president's death had become more negative about human nature. Lee Harvey Oswald's actions influenced their expectations and beliefs about the entire social community. It is probable, then, to infer from this presumption that the actions of the terrorists on 9/11 also significantly altered American's regard for human behavior.

Garnett argued that instead of focusing on their effect on the people, the media divert attention to materialistic endeavors. He said that, "crises become opportunities to showcase the capabilities of advanced, virtual communications hardware and software," (Garnett, 177). The application of new technologies and their results became the main interest, instead of the people such a technology intends to reach. These technological developments included telecommunications networks, geographic and spatial information systems, chat rooms and websites. They have already been applied to a number of crisis types including evacuation tracking, terrorist dynamics modeling, and emergency response monitoring. The principal instrumental function within the technology showcase is to apply this knowledge to better crisis handling. Because these technologies were not available, networks could not use them to inform the public of the 1963 assassination. Yet they were effective during 9/11 because in many crisis situations, the only feasible way to disseminate information to those managing and responding to the crisis was through communications technologies.

Another key factor in determining a news station's treatment of crisis communication relies on the media personnel employed at the company. Crisis communication is defined as "the communication between the organization and its publics prior to, during, and after the negative occurrence" (King, 237). King's article suggested that effective crisis management depends upon several team-related factors that may influence an organization's response and its ethical responsibility. He argued that it is more effective to have a team than an individual, which puts the responsibility of the executive producer, or even the news director, into question. Therefore, it can be inferred that a pre-coordinated team and not an individual's judgment decides the execution of network television broadcasting during a time of crisis.

Quarantelli asserted that it is not necessarily a crisis management team that decides a course of action but rather the social requirements in the journalistic world. This world has its own distinctive sets of norms, beliefs, and values on what is news, how news should be handled, and in general how news organizations and journalists ought to look at the world. This in turn determines what, how, and when crises are covered and reported. Yet the quality of reporting is altered during such situations, in ways both positive and negative. Unlike Garnett, Quarantelli argued that the mass media become "personal media" because personal messages are transmitted to listeners concerning their safety and well being (Quarantelli, 13). Based on scholarly findings, these altered protocols share a direct relationship with the way broadcasting during crises affect the American population.

In the weeks following September 11, 2001, the television industry exhibited a new will toward tastefulness as violent, televised movies came under network scrutiny. USA cancelled its primetime run of *The Seige*, and TBS replaced *Lethal Weapon* with movies for family fare such as *Look Who's Talking*. Spigel studied the strategies of the post-9/11 media industry and concluded that television was the medium hit hardest by the conflict between maintaining the image of serving the public's interest and the need to cater to the public taste (Spigel, 236). Implementing nonstop, commercial-free coverage would have cost the television industry gigantic sums of revenue. It would have also arguably taken a toll on its viewers. It can therefore be theorized that crises inflict both positive and negative results on both consumers and networks.

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While there is a gap in research between various scholarly articles and the actual topics in question, the research that has been conducted can aid in supplying a greater understanding of the developments, implementation, and results of television broadcasting during the Kennedy assassination and 9/11. This study will use existing studies and interviews to produce a template for understanding crises communication via television that covered arguably two of the most important broadcasting tragedies in the United States since the widespread use of television.

### **III. Methodology**

To explore crisis management in regard to production decisions at television broadcasting stations, this study conducted qualitative personal interviews with four producers and one reporter from both local and network news stations. They had all worked in telecommunications during a time of crisis. The range of professional experience varied from less than a year to nearly half a lifetime.

Interviews, which were composed of 15 questions, were conducted individually and transcribed. Interviewees were asked questions that covered a variety of topics, including major forms of technology that enabled the deliverance of breaking news, how production decisions were made, how to serve the public interest, standard protocol for acceptable footage, ethical considerations, quality of reporting, and the acknowledgment of a crisis' anniversary. These subjective narratives, in combination with a review of previous research, were used to analyze the overall patterns of decision-making at a television station during a catastrophic event. Analyzing techniques involved 1) the identification of production themes within each station that appeared to characterize the interviewee's experience with crisis coverage and 2) the comparison of these themes to other interviewee accounts and current scholarly research.

Snowball sampling was used to express viewer opinions on a station's coverage of an iconic event: specifically the terror attacks on 9/11. The effect of the coverage on surveyed viewers was also studied. The sample consisted of 200 viewers between 18 to 80 years old from multiple parts in the United States including North Carolina, New York, Georgia, Massachusetts, and Michigan. The survey was distributed through social media sites, emails, and group organizations.

Understanding what constitutes a crisis is important. This was done by combining the term's various definition from scholarly research.

In a broad sense, crisis can be defined as "an interruption in the accumulation of capital, or 'system disintegration'" (O'Connor, 1). The dominant neo-Marxist theory of crisis simply describes it as an interruption of normative structures, otherwise known as social disintegration. Crises are also characterized by "high consequence, low probability, and short decision time" (Hale, 1). They can cause destruction to both tangible and intangible assets, such as buildings, machinery, and public image (Ashby, 7). Several other writers focus the word's definition on the threat to key organizational values and stress the limited amount of time in which the catastrophic event unfolds.

For the purpose of this research, crisis was defined as a destructive interruption of high consequence that jeopardizes social integration and its values by demanding incredibly quick decision-making.

### **IV. The Events**

#### ***The Kennedy Assassination***

The assassination of former president John F. Kennedy was a monumental event for broadcast television. Though it's been studied in classrooms and textbooks, a brief recap of the event is necessary to understand crisis communication and its technological evolution.

It was a year before the 1964 presidential election. President Kennedy was concerned about losing elections from the Solid South, or at least its majority to the Republican Party's nominee. At the end of November 1963, Kennedy visited Texas along his campaign trail in an attempt to gain support. On November 22, Kennedy was scheduled to speak at a luncheon. Kennedy's limousine entered Dealey Plaza and was

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greeted by a long line of supporters on either side of the road. As the open-roofed limousine continued down Elm Street, three shots were fired at the president. He was declared dead at Parkland Hospital after suffering a gunshot wound to the head ("JFK Assassination").

### **Technological Developments**

A television network producer had this to say about covering the crisis: "The most significant stories I can recall have to do with the era of three major TV networks. All programming was to be suspended for on-going coverage." Before the shooting, WFAA-TV, ABC's local affiliate, was to provide live coverage of the president's arrival at Love Field. KRLD-TV, the CBS affiliate, was set up to cover Kennedy's luncheon speech. Finally, NBC's affiliate WBAP-TV had done live coverage of Kennedy's speech in Fort Worth earlier that day. After the shots were fired, ABC was the first network to switch its programming directly to Dallas. Therefore, ABC was the first station to break the news locally. Affiliate WFAA-TV started reporting from the scene of the luncheon Kennedy was supposed to attend. While the affiliate gathered initial facts and reports, the network began to plan its next moves. These moves included sending camera crews, correspondents, videotape facilities, live remote vans, writers, film editors and news dispatchers to Dallas (Lower, 67). But it was a different type of technology that enabled the network to effectively broadcast coverage of the crisis to its viewers.

The studio that ABC originally used for its first live reports on the crisis only had one camera and was therefore inadequate for sustained broadcasting. As a result, the network lost time and efficiency because it was forced to change studios. Yet with the establishment of TV 11, ABC's main news studio, the network was able to produce more than 36 hours of straight content (Lower, 69). For the first time, ABC-TV's news department<sup>1</sup> took over and ran the network. Through its coverage of the event and the well-executed "tough decisions ... made under the pressures of time" (Lower, 70) by its producers, the network proved that it could conduct itself responsibly under unprecedented circumstances while remaining conscious of a stunned and distressed nation.

Although ABC was the first to report the murder locally, CBS was the first network to break the news nationally. Ten minutes after Kennedy was shot, CBS interrupted its live broadcast of *As the World Turns* with a news bulletin. Anchor Walter Cronkite delivered an audio-only report, meaning that he did not appear on screen as the news was read (Trost). This was because the studio did not have a camera available at the time, a mistake that would be unheard of today. Twenty minutes later, CBS obtained a camera and Cronkite appeared on air. Following the official announcement of Kennedy's death, all three networks cancelled their regular programming and commercials for the first time in television's brief history<sup>2</sup>. According to a New York Times article, the assassination of President Kennedy was the longest uninterrupted news event in the history of American television, until the networks were on air for 72 hours straight covering the terrorist attacks in 2001 (Carter, A14).

## **September 11, 2001**

The terror attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, were arguably the greatest forms of American crisis since the assassination of a former United States president. During the early morning of the 11th, 19 al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial passenger jet airlines. Two of the airplanes were intentionally flown into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, while the third plane crashed into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. The fourth airliner crashed into a field in rural Pennsylvania, though it was intended to hit Washington, D.C.

### **Network Coverage**

The first television report of an incident at the World Trade Center was broadcast by WNYW, a local New York station, less than two minutes after the first plane crashed into the North Tower. One minute later, CNN was the first network to broadcast the information, followed by MSNBC. The author found that a plurality of respondents (41.5%) reported watching CNN throughout the day, as well as days following. They cited "CNN seems to be the most reliable and has the most in-depth coverage of news stories," "It's unbiased," and it offers "good reporting." This is concurrent with previous studies completed by the Pew Research Center Report, which concluded that CNN was the most popular news source to get information about the attacks<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> ABC-TV was composed of a news department, sports, programming, sales, et cetera – but in the time following the assassination, the station's content was completely controlled by news.

<sup>2</sup> Television was still considered "new" during this time, as it had only been around for less than 40 years.

<sup>3</sup> "Terror Coverage Boost News Media's Images."

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### Technological Developments

News tickers, occasionally referred to as crawlers, are defined as a small screen space on broadcast news networks dedicated to presenting headlines. Multiple networks had used tickers in years prior to 2001; however, it was the September 11 attacks that made the ticker an omnipresent part of a newscast. Fox News Channel was the first station to place a ticker on screen at 10:49 a.m. This allowed the network to provide a continuous stream of vital emergency information to viewers. CNN followed with a ticker at 11:11 a.m. By using the ticker, news stations were able to show images of one event while printing information for another issue (Bremen). Since the attacks, management at Fox, CNN, and MSNBC — the three major news channels of September 11 — implemented the tickers as permanent features during newscasts. These developments allowed networks to increase the dissemination of news in a way that is more intelligible and efficient for viewers. Today, cable news frequently uses news tickers to let viewers offer their opinions on the stories being covered. For example, News12 Long Island displays a ticker throughout its half-hour long show Long Island Talks that encourages audiences to call in and voice their thoughts on the day's topic.

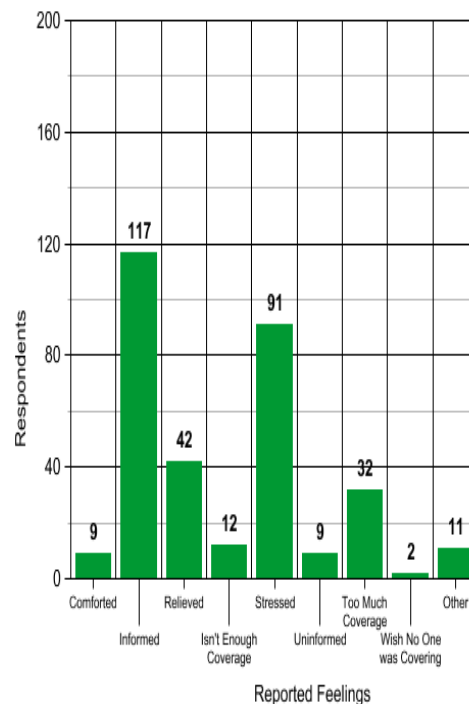
### Impact of crisis coverage on viewers

Not only did the events on September 11 affect the nation, but the ways in which broadcast news delivered the day's content also impacted audiences. This research studied television's impact on its viewers, as well as the viewer's impact on its ratings.

More than half (53%) of those surveyed for this research thought that a more subtle and neutral approach to relaying breaking news is the most effective way to get the news across. This could explain why a plurality of respondents turned to CNN during the attacks because of the network's more subtle and neutral layout. This can be contrasted to a vivacious and bold style reflective of Fox News Channel's broadcasts, which 39% of respondents preferred. When watching the coverage of a crisis, a majority (59%) of viewers said they felt informed (See *Figure 1*). This compares to 4.5% who felt uninformed. A plurality of respondents (46%) also reported feeling stressed while watching a station's coverage of a national crisis. Although most respondents acknowledged watching CNN during September 11, 54% said there is not a certain network they would turn to during a time of crisis. Forty-six percent said they would watch a specific network. The results from the following question are consistent with respondents' indifferent attitude toward selecting a particular station for crisis information. When asked if they were more likely or less likely to rely on that network during the next crisis, 44% of viewers reported they were neither more nor less likely to tune to the same network for a different crisis. However, only three percent fewer viewers (41%) were more likely to stay with a consistent network during a catastrophic event.

It can be inferred that feeling "stressed" and "informed" were the most popular responses because of the ways in which broadcast news impacted its audience. One respondent noted that he/she felt informed because during a crisis, such as September 11, stations were delivering raw facts from the scene as they happened, as opposed to potentially interlacing the facts among a more complicated story. In fact, more reporters from ABC, CBS, CNN, and NBC reported objective, factual information during the attacks (Reynolds, 697). This reflects the method of a traditional journalist. However, if the journalist assumed a social commentator role, then personal attitudes, values, or beliefs could influence content. Receiving information in this manner allowed another respondent to feel informed because the news connected viewers with the rest of the world during a major event. However, certain aspects of network coverage, as well as typical human behavior, caused many viewers to feel predominately stressed during a time of American crisis.

Wilbur Schramm studied viewer stress during the Kennedy assassination and concluded that monitoring



*Figure 1. Feelings while watching crisis coverage*



a crisis through television news can reduce stress related to the crisis (Reynolds, 700). This author's current study disproved this conclusion. Instead, the research showed stress was another popular feeling among respondents for two reasons. 1) It is a natural response of human behavior, particularly repeatedly watching planes fly into towers. "The impact of witnessing the collapse of the World Trade Center over and over again has to have a negative influence on the anxiety and anger levels of the public" (Waters, 59). The combination of repeatedly showing emotional images, as well as the style of the newscast, can also influence a stressed response in viewers. One respondent expressed the opinion that the continuous use of graphics or phrases such as 'more in a minute' was more stressful than helpful. Yet regardless of viewers' opinion, the coverage of the September 11 attacks brought in higher ratings than networks had seen in quite a while.

#### **Impact of crisis coverage on ratings**

The crisis that unfolded on September 11 had a profound impact on national network ratings. A week prior to the attacks, Nielsen Media Research registered about 13% of American adults watched an evening newscast. That percentage more than doubled (26%) in the week of September 10-16, 2001. The research later suggested that 79.5 million viewers were tuning in to any of the main broadcast or cable networks on the night of the attacks (Althaus, 518). The media's approval ratings reached a record high as well. According to a Pew Research Center report, 89% of Americans gave the media a positive rating for their reporting efforts during September 11.<sup>4</sup> Other United States crises, including the Oklahoma City bombing, also resulted in record-high ratings. Nielsen reported that in 1995, CNN's coverage of the bombing drastically raised its ratings because of the 133 million viewers. Therefore, it is concluded that crisis coverage significantly increases a network's ratings.

## **V. The Execution of Production Decisions during Crises**

In her study concerning the challenges of communication during crisis response, Joanne Hale asserts that crises "create a unique and threatening decision-making environment that must be conscientiously supported" (Hale, 235). This is especially accurate in the world of broadcast journalism. For this research, producers from both network and local news stations were interviewed about issues concerning broadcasting in the public interest, ethical decision making, and making production decisions during a crisis.

How are production decisions made during a time of crisis? John Piranian is a producer at a New York station. He answered, "Decisions are made in a split second. The nature of breaking news is to do as you go and try to best plan the next step." This is because producers and executive producers are trying to get the latest and most accurate information out to people; they are also trying to accompany that information with the best available images they can find. Dave North is a producer who works with John. Dave said that the executive producer and the news director — both of whom "assess the people and resources available" — make these decisions. Samantha, a producer in North Carolina, offered a more generalized answer. "The whole newsroom generally comes together to make decisions as a collective unit, but it's always on the fly. Suggestions may come from managers, but it has to be organized, and ultimately called by, the producer."

Understanding a news station's standard plan of action during crisis coverage leads to a deeper comprehension of how and why certain decisions are made. To obtain such information, producers were asked to explain the chain of events that ultimately led to an informative newscast, as well as the most appropriate plan of action for announcing a crisis. Kevin described a consecutive chain of events. The station hears about the situation through scanners, viewer phone calls or emails, the wires, or a competitor's newscast. Journalists then work to get the situation confirmed so that the newscast can report the event and follow up with developments. John said the following about the most appropriate plan of action for announcing September 11: "You get on the air as soon as possible — as soon as you have information you can definitely go with. For 9-11, you have the anchor explain the situation then keep updating as more information pours in. When it's something really big like 9-11 ... you can't be showing another story. Nothing else matters in moments like that." John also said, "The most effective thing to do is to have the entire news team working toward the same goal — getting out the latest information." This information must be pertinent to network viewers.

One of a producer's main concerns while televising a national crisis is to ensure the network is appealing to the public interest. As is true in most crisis situations, the public's priority is safety during such a time. By understanding this aspect, it is simpler to comprehend how a producer determines what to air

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<sup>4</sup> "American Psyche Reeling from Terror Attacks," 1.



while considering the greater interests at hand. John explained, “It’s crucial to get as much out to the people as possible because we have the ability to mobilize people in the event of an evacuation, or inform people of potentially dangerous situations in their area.” During September 11, the main goal was to keep people informed. This also included getting “informed analysis about what could happen next and what steps folks can take to stay safe” (Piranian). Kevin Kline, a producer in North Carolina, believes reflecting internally on the issues at hand can prepare the producer for a stronger newscast. “You have to ask yourself the questions that determine public interest — Was anyone hurt? Is the shooter still out there? Those questions judge the public’s interest — how much they’ll care — and the public interest — how much they should care.”

How much a viewer cares is closely related to the ways in which news networks decide the most effective way of getting the message across. Samantha Miller, a producer at Fox 8, put it simply. “Visually — we are a visual medium. Especially in cases of crisis, sometimes there aren’t words to say exactly how bad a situation is.” Typically, when important information needs to be shared, compelling video exists. This was especially true during September 11. “That video speaks without words” (Miller). Dave explained that the best way to deliver high-impact messages is to keep the writing simple, where as Kevin believes “the most effective way to pass along a message is with every medium possible.” This includes putting the broadcast on the air, web, Twitter, Facebook, cell phones, etc.

Network reporters have a heavy influence on how effectively the information surrounding a crisis is being reported to a station’s viewers. This led to one of my research questions: How does continuous coverage of a crisis affect the quality of reporting? Amy Reynolds’ study showed that during September, CBS spent the most time performing the functions of the traditional journalist, followed by ABC and NBC. This is considered a “good” journalism practice, compared to reporters from NBC who spent the most time making social commentary or reporting rumors (Reynolds, 696). Drew Scott, a senior reporter in New York, gave an unpredictable answer to this question during his interview. He said, “I think the quality of reporting initially is sketchy, shallow, and sometimes inaccurate until the full scope of a breaking news story is understood. Once [the production team] realizes the story’s parameters, the quality improves and becomes even more high quality than normal because of the time we can spend on just one story.” The producer interviews resulted in a more indefinite response. John thinks the quality of reporting “increases because it’s all we’re focusing on. Reporters, anchors, producers, and writers become familiar with the topic so we end up delivering a more focused product.” Kevin, however, says it most likely decreases because the writing can become stale. With regard to reporting during September 11, Samantha said, “Continuous coverage was necessary even though we didn’t have any information. The media had to constantly watch the situation because that was what the American public needed. They needed to experience it, even if the media couldn’t as a populous wrap our heads around what was actually going on.”

Regardless of the media’s comprehension, or lack thereof in relation to covering a national crisis, the field of journalism’s standard of ethics remains intact. According to the Society of Professional Journalists, the main points of a reporter’s code of ethics include seeking the truth and reporting it, minimizing harm, acting independently, and being accountable (“SPJ Code of Ethics”). The author studied whether or not a news network’s code of ethics strengthens or becomes more lax during continuous coverage. Examples of ethical considerations to be aware of during the broadcast include identifying a victim before family verification, or interfering with police investigation by its coverage. Dave said, “A good team keeps consistently high standards as a matter of practice. That way, that’s how you’ll do business under all circumstances.” Kevin concurs, saying that, “Our ethical standards are important no matter the story.” This parallels Samantha’s response, which was “You have to be fair.” Other ethical considerations, such as what footage is acceptable to broadcast, became major considerations faced by network producers.

In referencing the broadcast of September 11, Jill Geisler, a writer for the Radio Television Digital News Association, said, “You could see the conscious decision of directors; stay with the pictures. This was not a day to see the faces of anchors. Viewers needed to see the towers, the Pentagon” (Geisler). Eventually, however, executive producers and news directors made the ethical decision to discontinue airing such graphic content. This research studied the process behind this decision making by asking: What is the protocol for what footage is acceptable to air during a crisis? Each producer responded with one set answer: A station will not show dead bodies. John elaborated, saying, “We don’t want to put out any images that are gratuitous, like people jumping from the Twin Towers. We know it’s a story about death and destruction, so we don’t need to show specific instances of it.” Dave explained another decision-making process. Producers ask themselves, “Does it tell the story, or just grab attention? Good actualities do both.” These actualities are likely the ones

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viewers will see when newscasts are commemorating the anniversary of a crisis.

John, Dave, Kevin, and Samantha unanimously agreed on the treatment of the anniversary of a national crisis. Kevin put it simply: "We cover them." Yet they were covered slightly different than a typical hard news story. Dave explained, "Acknowledging anniversaries is a demonstration of respect. But it can be a balancing act as the catastrophe recedes." Producers are concerned with investigating fresh issues associated with the crisis. For example, years after September 11 occurred, networks reported on the struggle for health insurance for emergency responders. John elaborated, saying, "We certainly mark somber anniversaries to show where we've come and what still needs to be addressed." Samantha addresses the emotions behind the event. "Major national disasters are remembered ... with a current story of how someone's remembering the event of honoring the person." Based on this research, producers are not planning on discontinuing the commemoration of such crises. John said, "I'm sure we'll be covering the 9-11 anniversary for many years, if not decades to come."

## **VI. Conclusion**

The assassination of former president John F. Kennedy was a monumental event in broadcast television history. It was the first time that the American public fully relied on the reporting skills of those operating major network stations both in front of, and behind, the camera. It challenged network employers because before 2001, it was the longest run of uninterrupted programming in broadcast history. Technological developments, including the construction of multiple studios, expanded network's broadcast abilities and enabled news anchors to relay more current information to a wider range of viewers. As a result of televising the Kennedy assassination, news networks were able to better prepare for the next major national crisis: September 11.

The survey conducted for this research found that a plurality of respondents watched CNN on the day of the terror attacks. Based on these results, as well as other scholarly studies, it can be concluded that CNN was viewers' network of choice during the crisis because it was the first channel to break the information. Survey respondents also noted a preference for CNN's subtle breaking news style. This is another conclusion that can be drawn as to why audiences chose to watch a particular network. As it was determined in personal interviews with producers, viewers valued immediacy, accuracy and relativity, all of which survey respondents acknowledged recognizing in CNN's reports. New forms of technology, such as continuous news tickers, strengthened the deliverance of these vital qualities. September 11 permanently influenced the way that broadcast news delivers stories because it made news tickers a standard element in network newscasts. It is also possible to draw conclusions about how and why certain production decisions are made during times of crisis.

After analyzing the transcripts from the interviews of four different producers, this study found the following assertions: 1) Regardless of the potential impact of a national crisis, only one or two people decide the content a network broadcasts. This is because executive producers and news directors are trained to make such decisions in compromising situations: it is what they are hired to do. 2) There is one goal for news organizations: relay the latest information. The methods of how to do so remain considerably open for interpretation, so long as they remain within the network's code of ethics. 3) Safety is always in the public's interest. Since news stations have the ability to mobilize, or immobilize people during a crisis, they must provide consistent updates. In such situations, the media bears witness to the event and is therefore a viewer's sole source of safety information and evacuation plans. 4) During a crisis, a network's ethical standards remain the same: accuracy before anything. 5) Production teams want to show audiences a story, not offend them. This explains the decisions behind ceasing to air the planes crashing into the towers: "It's scary enough without showing the most horrific moments over and over again" (Piranian).

Understanding the execution of production decisions during a national crisis is a task that arguably will never be completely comprehended by anyone not employed at a news station. Yet this research discovered the previous themes in order to attempt to explain the significance of the work conducted behind the camera. Future research may address more developing trends in production decisions, particularly with the creation of future technologies and broadcast mediums. However, one overarching theme will remain constant throughout broadcast history: The public depended on television as their medium for crisis information then, and now.

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# Analysis of CNN and The Fox News Networks' framing of the Muslim Brotherhood during the Egyptian revolution in 2011

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## Abstract

*As the world watched the Egyptian revolution unfold in January 2011, all of the images broadcast over the news from Tahrir Square had an accompanying commentary that explained to viewers in the United States the events unfolding. This research specifically focused on the characterization and information reported about Egypt's leading political opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, during the revolution and directly following Mubarak's resignation. The portrayal of the Muslim Brotherhood by CNN and The Fox News Channel was analyzed in this study during the time frame mentioned previously through a content analysis of television broadcast transcripts. This analysis aimed to provide a holistic review of the scope of the coverage and discrepancies in reporting during the crisis, but more so, it sought to examine American understanding through the popular news media of a political Islamist group in the forefront of the political upheaval presently occurring in Egypt. It illuminated a bias in both news channels but showed a higher frequency of exaggerated extremism in The Fox News Channel's reporting.*

## I. Introduction

The beginning of 2011 witnessed the start of what has proven to be major upheaval in the political stability of the Middle East. Starting in Tunisia and spreading across North Africa and the Middle East, popular protest and revolt against the ruling regimes has changed the political landscape, and the world's understanding of the region, forever. On the heels of Tunisia's revolution, another peaceful, mass protest was born in the North African country of Egypt. After three decades of semi-authoritarian rule under President Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian people staged one of the largest peaceful protests in recent history.

Given America's close relationship with Egypt—American foreign aid to Egypt totals two-three billion dollars annually (Perry, 2004)—the change in government leadership and its effect on America's relationship with its most important ally in the Arab world put the revolution in the headlines of virtually all major news media outlets in the U.S. In addition to chronicling the progress of the revolution, American media also reported on possible remedies or outcomes of the revolution and just who could take over the vacant leadership role if Mubarak was to step down, as he later did. One of the most discussed possibilities of future leadership was Egypt's largest opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood.

With a tumultuous past, a formidable presence on Egypt's political scene today, and one of the few political groups organized enough to take a substantial role in the development of a post-revolution Egypt, it is no wonder American media dedicated a large amount of inches and airtime reporting on the nature and intentions of the Muslim Brotherhood and how it would affect Egyptian-American relations if they were to take

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power.

From this coverage comes the impetus for this study—to discern how American media framed the Muslim Brotherhood during the revolution and directly following its conclusion. The proliferation of news sources in the United States in the contemporary media ecology created a wide variety of sources to analyze, but to maintain uniformity in media sources thus enabling an equivalent field to compare, the two leading cable news networks were chosen for analysis. Additionally, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

R1: What language was used in CNN and Fox News Network coverage to frame the Muslim Brotherhood and its role in the revolution?

R2: How did framing of the Muslim Brotherhood vary between CNN and The Fox News Network?

R3: How does the media portrayal of the Muslim Brotherhood compare to contemporary scholar's portrayal, explained below, of the Muslim Brotherhood?

Understanding how the Muslim Brotherhood was framed to the American people will constitute the first step towards future research to understand forthcoming American foreign policy towards the Brotherhood (Entman, 2004), and Egypt as a whole, as it moves forward from the revolution and begins to make steps towards instituting a true democracy.

## II. What is being discussed in Academia?

### ***The Muslim Brotherhood in the 21st Century***

In 2007, *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin* or the Muslim Brotherhood released a draft of its political platform if it were to be granted legal status as a political party (Brown & Hamzawy, 2008; 2010; Harnisch & Mecham, 2009; Stilt, 2010). Though originally released to a limited selection of Egyptian intellectuals, the platform draft was soon leaked to the media and has since been released entirely to the public and published, but has never been completed. This draft signified the clearest, comprehensive picture of the goals and aspirations of the organization to date and opened the floodgates for domestic and international scrutiny and discussion about its platform tenets (Brown & Hamzawy, 2008). As a result, a number of scholars have written on the topic of who the Muslim Brotherhood is today as an organization and the realities and implications of its objectives as a social and political movement.

### ***A Brief History***

Founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood sprung forth out the growing contempt within Egyptian society towards the ruling monarchy, its manipulation by the British, and the general secular nature of the political system (Soage & Franganillo, 2010). By the 1930s the organization had quickly grown throughout Egypt and began to spread across the Middle East and began to face extreme persecution by the monarchy (Simms, 2002). Into the 1940s the tensions continued to escalate between the Brotherhood and the regime, as did the violence carried out by the Brotherhood's militant wing known as the Secret Apparatus, culminating with the Brotherhood's organized and executed assassination of Egyptian Prime Minister Nuqrashi in 1948 (Perry, 2004; Zollner, 2009). In retaliation, secret government police assassinated Hasan al-Banna in 1949 and sent the movement underground (Simms, 2002).

In 1952 the political landscape of Egypt changed drastically with the *coup d'état* lead by the Free Officers, ultimately abolishing the monarchy and installing Gamal Abdel Nasser as President (Glover, 2011; Perry, 2004; Simms, 2002; Soage & Franganillo, 2010; Zollner, 2009). Under Nasser's regime, which allowed no political dissent, the Brotherhood suffered its most severe oppression with the arrest, imprisonment, and torture of thousands of members in concentration camps (Kepel, 1985). While imprisoned and languishing from abhorrent treatment and poor health, one Brotherhood member took to writing about his disillusionment with the secular Nasserist government and since has become one of the most influential Islamist ideologues in history. Sayyid Qutb's works, most famously *Milestones*, have become part of the basic ideology of almost every Islamist movement today, from the Muslim Brotherhood to Al Qaeda depending on its interpretation

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(Kepel, 1985). This association with other extremist groups has muddled the Muslim Brotherhood's true objectives for decades. Ultimately, the movement was able to survive Nasser's persecution and emerge onto the political scene after his death and the transfer of the presidency to Anwar Sadat in 1970 (Perry, 2004).

Sadat soon began to reverse many of his predecessor's policies and initiated a liberalization of the political system, which allowed the Brotherhood to rebuild itself after the destruction caused by Nasser's oppression. Sadat allowed the Brotherhood a measure of vocal opposition as long it stayed within specific boundaries and for most of his rule the movement experienced a reasonably tolerable political landscape (Beattie, 2000). It was also during this time that the Brotherhood officially renounced violence as a method to bring about change. Once Sadat initiated and secured peace with Israel, though, through the Camp David Peace accords, the Muslim Brotherhood criticisms of his regime and of the President himself became abundantly more vociferous and Sadat responded with oppression and his own mass arrests (Zollner, 2009). The Muslim Brotherhood was not the only Islamic group unhappy with Sadat's relationship with Israel and America, and in October of 1981, a radical Islamic extremist group assassinated Sadat while he was reviewing a military parade (Perry, 2004; Soage & Franganillo, 2010).

"With Sadat's death, the reins of power were placed in the hands of his Vice President, Husni [sic] Mubarak. A state of emergency was declared throughout the country and the government was granted absolute authority in coping with domestic threats" (Meital, 2006, p. 259). The state of emergency was renewed for more than twenty-five years and afforded Mubarak the right to curb civil liberties, as he needed, including in the political system (Soage & Franganillo, 2010). With this in mind, Mubarak initially allowed a fair amount of political liberalization and pluralism within the Egyptian political ecology, but as his regime became more entrenched and the Brotherhood began to have a larger presence in elections, Mubarak continually instigated waves of oppression and persecution, though milder than the measures of his predecessors (al-Awadi, 2009). "Representatives of the opposition parties and independent candidates (many of whom are affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood movement) have participated in parliamentary elections since 1984, however, their limited representation has not sufficed to undermine the absolute control of the government party over the legislative body" (Meital, 2006, p. 259). In recent years, the Muslim Brotherhood has made significant gains in the Parliamentary elections of 2000 and 2005, where they won 88 out of 444 seats (Zahid & Medley, 2006). President Hosni Mubarak was in power for thirty years and officially resigned the presidency on February 11, 2011 after eighteen days of mass popular protest. This brief historical background can provide a context to understand contemporary scholarly discourse about the Muslim Brotherhood today.

### ***Recent discussions about the Muslim Brotherhood in the 21st century***

As stated above, the recent dispersion of the never-finished draft of the Muslim Brotherhood's political platform, 128 pages in total, in conjunction with their growing participation and presence in the Egyptian Parliament over the past twenty years, has fostered a discussion of its implications on the Egyptian political system and what it says about the nature and objectives of the movement today. As early as 1995, scholar Sana abed-Kotob, among others, had begun to examine just exactly how moderate or extreme the Muslim Brotherhood was. She came to the conclusion that a conviction exists amongst the Brothers to work within the existing political system for change, along with the belief that democratic principles are in fact compatible with an Islamic system of governance; she argues the Brotherhood of today actually encourages the cultivation of democracy within Egypt while denouncing violence as a method of change, despite their less than peaceful history (Abed-Kotob, 1995).

Many other scholars have reinforced these findings over the last fifteen years and elaborated on them as the Brotherhood has further elucidated its goals via campaigning, public statements, its actions and the draft political platform (al-Awadi, 2009; Brown & Hamzawy, 2008; 2010; Glover, 2011; Harnisch & Mecham, 2009; Soage & Franganillo, 2010; Stilt, 2010). Furthermore, scholars have acknowledged that while the fact the Brotherhood still propagates its goal of a governing system based on *Shari'a* law "is no doubt alien to Western political thought, and perhaps even threatening in the view of many scholars, it is significant that the vision of an Islamic state encompasses other, less alien objectives, namely, (1) the imposition of democratic ideals... and (2) the pursuit of socioeconomic justice" (Abed-Kotob, 1995, p. 336; Brown & Hamzawy, 2010). Moreover, the Brotherhood also stresses that even though it wants to implement *Shari'a* law in the governing system, it wants a pluralistic political economy made up of many parties who can together represent the entire Egyptian population in the making of legislation and governance (Harnisch & Mecham, 2009). The development of democracy within the political strategy has enabled the movement to criticize the ruling regime

because of its lack of adherence to true democratic principles evident in its corrupt elections, oppressive measures against opposition movements, and general semi-authoritarian tactics (Harnisch & Mecham, 2009). If a survey were taken of scholars' arguments put forth characterizing the Muslim Brotherhood, the overall judgment would be one of accommodation and political engagement to bring about change that has similar goals to many familiar Western political principles. This summary judgment, however, would be made with reservation given the vagueness that still exists around some of its goals and objectives and lack of certainty about the true intentions of the Brotherhood's leadership since their actions are limited and unable to fully endorse what they are professing.

These findings have not come without their critics, though. During Mubarak's reign as President over the last thirty years, he has systematically depicted himself and his regime as the only roadblock between the Islamists, namely the Muslim Brotherhood, and the establishment of an Islamic state (al-Awadi, 2009; Stilt, 2010). Many scholars have claimed the Brotherhood is still a radical Islamist group and closely connected to the extremist groups around the world that have roots in the Brotherhood. Scholar Christine Sixta Rinehart posited the Muslim Brotherhood, "not only transformed into a terrorist organization but also eventually spawned some of the most violent terrorist organizations throughout the world. The Muslim Brotherhood became the prototype for the Muslim fundamentalist terrorist organizations and some of its members later created organizations such as Hamas and Al Qaeda" (2009, p. 953). This link with more radical groups has affected the West's ability to understand the nature of the Muslim Brotherhood today and only amplifies the need for research into how the U.S. media is portraying the organization at such a pivotal time in Egyptian history. Below, the current arguments in the academic milieu will be explained to understand how media framing impacts the transmission of a story and why it is important to take into consideration when examining the Muslim Brotherhood during the January 25th Revolution.

### ***Framing Analysis***

Framing Analysis, as a methodology within the field of communications, casts its net around a wide range of possible approaches, and a more general survey of the scholarly discourse will be whittled down to understand the specific methodology utilized in this study to discern the bias created through the frame used, if any, in the portrayal of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt. Frames can have a measureable impact on public opinion, but as Kuypers (2002) said,

Looking for bias within press accounts of events is not an easy task. Bias is not highlighted as such, and newspapers certainly do not advertise their political leanings on the front page. However, by using framing analysis, one may discover how the press frames an issue and then look at that frame for bias. (p. 18)

A general consensus exists among scholars that media framing of news coverage can mold the audience's opinions and beliefs about policies, concerning both domestic and foreign issues (Brewer, 2006; Coe, et al., 2008; Druckman, The implications of framing effects for citizen competence, 2001; Entman, 2004; Evans, 2010; Harmon & Muenchen, 2009; Kuypers, 2002; Morris, 2007). There is dissent, however, on what exactly is defined as 'framing' and what unit of analysis should be used to detect framing (Entman, 2004; Kuypers, 2002; Soroka, 2003; Druckman, The implications of framing effects for citizen competence, 2001). The basic definition that is most cited among scholars is from the work of Robert M. Entman who has posited, "frames reside in the specific properties of the news narrative that encourage those perceiving and thinking about events to develop particular understandings of them" (as cited in Kuypers, 2002, p. 10). Examples of these specific properties include the use of metaphors, symbols, keywords, images, and concepts which repeated surface within news accounts that together codify a particular theme over time (Kuypers, 2002).

One of the major fields of studies is its effects on public opinion and subsequent domestic and foreign policy. There is an added emphasis on foreign policy given that the public tends to gain all of its knowledge about a foreign event solely from news coverage, instead of using it to supplement their opinions based on lived experience, like in the case of domestic policy (Brewer, 2006; Druckman, The implications of framing effects for citizen competence, 2001; Evans, 2010; Soroka, 2003). Some scholars have argued that media framing rots the principles of a democratic society by positioning the public in a certain frame of mind and leave them incapable of making an autonomous policy decisions (Druckman, The implications of framing effects for citizen competence, 2001; Soroka, 2003). Other scholars have taken a vested interest in the effects of framing on perceptions of other countries, especially when related to conflict or competition and have found that media framing has a discernable impact on the development of U.S. foreign policy (Barkho, 2007;

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Brewer, 2006; Evans, 2010; Harmon & Muenchen, 2009; Soroka, 2003). However, there is a strong current within scholarship that emphasizes the limitations of framing according to source credibility, lived experience, and personal preference (Druckman, On the limits of framing effects: Who can frame?, 2001; Entman, 2004; Kuypers, 2002).

With the evident effects of media framing on foreign policy in mind, another burgeoning field of study within framing analysis research is the role of cable news stations, their use of framing, and its widespread effect on public opinion. As cable news networks have increasingly identified themselves more closely with a particular political view and become fragmented, the effects of such alignment have become the focus of more research (Coe, et al., 2008; Morris, 2005; 2007; Harnisch & Mecham, 2009).

"Facts remain neutral until framed; thus, how the press frames an issue or event will affect public understanding of that issue or event" (Kuypers, 2002, p. 7). The so-called 'CNN effect' and the general influence of cable news on humanitarian intervention and the formation of U.S. foreign policy has piqued the interest of several leading scholars. Their frame analysis research into the fragmentation of cable news media, specifically comparing CNN and The Fox News Network, showed that Fox consistently resonated more and was thought to have less bias with a more conservative audience and CNN was more likely to resonate with people who viewed the press, as a whole, as a less biased entity (Morris, 2005; 2007). These previous studies will inform the methodology and hypotheses of this study as it seeks to analyze the leading cable news networks' portrayal of an international issue that is directly related to US foreign policy.

Before moving to methodology, it must first be reiterated what the consensus is among scholars as to how to determine a frame. According to leading scholars Entman and Kuypers, "frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies" (Kuypers, 2002, p. 18). Additionally, they are set around an event and actor who come together to create the issue being framed according to the specifications in the previous sentence (Entman, 2004). It is in accordance with these standards of frame measurement that the move to methodology is made.

### III. Methodology

As is evident from the review of current academic literature on framing analysis, the breadth of research and areas of focus with framing analysis and their subsequent methodologies are bountiful, but, as consistently done in several other studies using framing analysis, this study will follow the guidelines set forth by Entman, which are discussed below.

This study analyzed the broadcast transcripts of CNN and The Fox News Network (Fox News) from January 25, 2011, the official start of the Egyptian Revolution, to February 16, 2011," five days after the official resignation of Hosni Mubarak as President of Egypt. The dates were chosen to examine how CNN and Fox News discussed the role of the Muslim Brotherhood during the revolution and after the drastic change in Egypt's political landscape.

The transcripts were coded as a cohesive narrative divided into two groups according to their parent cable news network, and were analyzed for the particular frame through which the narrative was transmitted. A frame, according to Entman, takes "some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in communicating text, in such a way to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman as cited in Kuypers, 2002, p. 18). To better illustrate this measurement tool Entman (2004) created *Figure I* on the next page.

The coding of both CNN and Fox News' transcripts was done with the aid of the Atlas.ti computer program. The program allows for both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the documents allowing for a contextualization of the coded words and phrases indicative of framing measurements, such as possible remedies and moral judgments, present in the narrative. Based on the above mentioned research questions, the following three hypotheses were made:

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\*\* To collect the transcripts used in this study follow the guidelines below using the LexisNexis Academic database: LexisNexis Academic > Power Search>Search type "Terms and Connectors">Search terms "Muslim Brotherhood"> Specify Date "Date is between... 1/25/2011 and 2/16/2011"> Select Source "By type: Broadcast Transcripts"> Search>Search Results: +News Transcripts>CNN Transcripts (199 transcripts), Fox News Network (144 transcripts)

H1: The language used by both CNN and Fox News to frame or 'evaluate' the Muslim Brotherhood will more often be connected with terrorism or radical Islam than with moderate, non-violent Islamic political movement.

H2: Given the literature's indication that the Fox News Network consistently frames their coverage along more conservative lines, Fox News will more often evaluate and convey the moral judgment that Muslim Brotherhood is an extremist and radical organization than CNN.

H3: The media framing of the Muslim Brotherhood will predominantly characterize the organization as a threat to democracy as opposed to the current trend in academia suggesting the Brotherhood will positively contribute and support the development of democracy in Egypt.

Function of Frame	Issues	Events	Political Actor (Individual, Group, Nation)
Defining problematic effects/ conditions			
Identifying Cause			
Endorsing remedy			
Conveying moral Judgment			

Figure 1. Focus of Frame

## IV. Findings and analysis

The analyses of this study focused on the 'evaluation' and 'remedy' or 'moral judgment' of the Muslim Brotherhood by the media in determining the Muslim Brotherhood's role in the revolution and possible role in the future of Egypt (See *Figure 1*). The Muslim Brotherhood was mentioned 847 times in 144 Fox News transcripts, creating an average of 5.8 times per transcript. Alternately, the Muslim Brotherhood was mentioned 817 times in 199 CNN transcripts, creating an average of 4.10 times per transcript during this time frame. Simple though these statistics may be, it illuminates that fact the Fox News devoted more of their coverage, on average, to the Muslim Brotherhood in their broadcasts than CNN when reporting the narrative of the revolution.

After examining the context in which the Muslim Brotherhood was discussed throughout both cable networks' transcripts, the results were most often associated with radical Islam or as a threat to the democratic ideals because of the Brotherhood's goal of Islamic jurisprudence. Between the two networks, 45 instances of co-occurrence were noted with the words coded as describing the Muslim Brotherhood to be 'radical' and the words coded because they associate the Brotherhood with terrorism. For example, Sean Hannity of The Sean Hannity show on Fox News described the Brotherhood as, "a real, clear present danger and the only organized political opposition. I think the odds are that radicals, maybe not immediately, but over time, they will sound moderate then it becomes radical Islamic." On CNN, it was said it compared the Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt's future to the Iranian Revolution when they said,

Now Israel is right next door as the obvious target and, of course, the Muslim Brotherhood has been playing that card for many years. Don't underestimate the radicals in these situations. That is the mistake that America made in 1979. People in the western media initially thought it was great news that the shah of Iran had gone. It took them a while to realize that the main beneficiaries of this would not be secular Democrats, but radical Islamists. This would happen again.

The significant occurrence of portraying the Brotherhood in such a manner will almost certainly affect American public opinion of the Muslim Brotherhood when taking into account America's sensitivity concerning terrorism. Furthermore, on numerous occasions, the Brotherhood was evaluated as a threat instead of as a positive part of a pluralistic political system in the Egypt. All of these findings support H1. Additionally, there is



a great amount of dissent and little agreement within both network's reporting about the attainability of democracy if an Islamist organization gets into power.

To address H2, the transcripts of both CNN and Fox News were coded for the paragraphs mentioning the Muslim Brotherhood to eliminate extraneous information and words that could skew the data collection. The resulting paragraphs containing a mention of the Muslim Brotherhood were further analyzed to determine which network evaluated the Muslim Brotherhood and passed judgment more obviously negatively, therefore, framing them in a more radical manner. Of those 45 co-occurrences of coded words falling under 'radical' and 'association with terrorism' in the same paragraph, Fox News accounted for 30 or three-fourths of those co-occurrences.

Additionally, Fox News routinely discussed the Muslim Brotherhood as the enemy of democracy, while CNN provided slightly more moderate comments and discussion of the Muslim Brotherhood amongst its Islamic democracy naysayers and reporting. Moreover, Fox News averaged nearly 98 associations of the Muslim Brotherhood with terrorism per every 100 transcripts whereas CNN averaged only 35 associations for every 100 transcripts.

All of these findings indicated that H2 is accurate in claiming that Fox News more negatively evaluated and judged the Muslim Brotherhood as a radical organization with ties to terrorism than CNN did in their broadcasts. Referring back to the literature, studies found that Fox News' audience tended to be conservative than CNN's and that conservatism was evident in their frame of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is outside the scope of this research to decide which frame was correct or not, but it is important to note the correlation between Fox News's conservative audience and their conservative frame of the Muslim Brotherhood in regard to applying traditionally Western ideals to an Islamic organization and weighing in on the likelihood of their success.

Finally, as is indicated by H1, the media evaluation and moral judgment of the Muslim Brotherhood during and directly following the January 25th Revolution was riddled with classification and associations not found in contemporary scholarship. While both the news media and scholarship focused on the implications of Islamic jurisprudence on the governing system of Egypt, as outlined in the goals of the Brotherhood, academia goes beyond this point and focuses on the organization as a whole through their strategic narrative which is a combination of their past, present and planned future actions, social impact, cultural history, goals and objectives (Glover, 2011). The media frame failed to factor in all of these components of the modern day Muslim Brotherhood and relied too heavily on one or two components instead.

H3 was supported by the findings of this study and showed that the frame propagated by American news coverage of the Muslim Brotherhood during the revolution and their possible role in post-Mubarak Egypt was not as informed as current academia nor was it without bias when reporting nature of the Muslim Brotherhood today. Obviously, news reporters are not going to have the expertise that academics do in this particular area of Egyptian politics, but this lack of knowledge is usually supplemented by the employment of expert analysis and comments during the broadcasts. While this study is in no way claiming that academia has innately greater insight into issues, but peer-review and other systems of accountability lessen the amount inaccuracies than found in news television.

Even those experts consulted on air did not foment the same trends described in the literature above, which could be for many reasons including the fact that the experts may not be strong enough to change the hegemonic frame already in place at a news organization. One example occurred during a Fox News program where one commentator what putting for the idea that the Muslim Brotherhood were in fact moderate but was refuted by nearly every other contributor to the show, thus silencing his alternative evaluation and remedy (Hannity, 2011). The effects of this nullification of expert commentary by the hegemonic frame of the news network could have serious implications for the plurality and diversity of news sources that allow their audiences to make informed decisions.

## V. Conclusion

*Figure II* below (Entman, 2004) fully elucidates the intricacies of the frame used to portray the Muslim Brotherhood during the Egyptian Revolution. Though the frame varied slightly between CNN and Fox News, the figure shows a general guide and overall analysis of the framing used by two of America's leading and most influential media outlets, CNN and The Fox News Network. The 'event' that brought the frame into being was the revolution itself and one of the main 'actors' discussed during the revolution, and the focus of this study, was the Muslim Brotherhood. These two factors combined to form the overall 'issue,' which was informed by this analysis of CNN and Fox News' attempt to frame the 'actor' within the 'event' while evaluating

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and remedying the 'issue.'

This frame and analysis had implications in many different areas. Firstly, it addressed some of the discrepancies always discussed about the media but not often verified by hard fact and should be kept in mind as an audience member viewing either channel. Furthermore, the consequences of such a frame could be later researched through subsequent public opinion and foreign policy to look for direct connections in popular cognitive thought about the Muslim Brotherhood and terrorism in general.

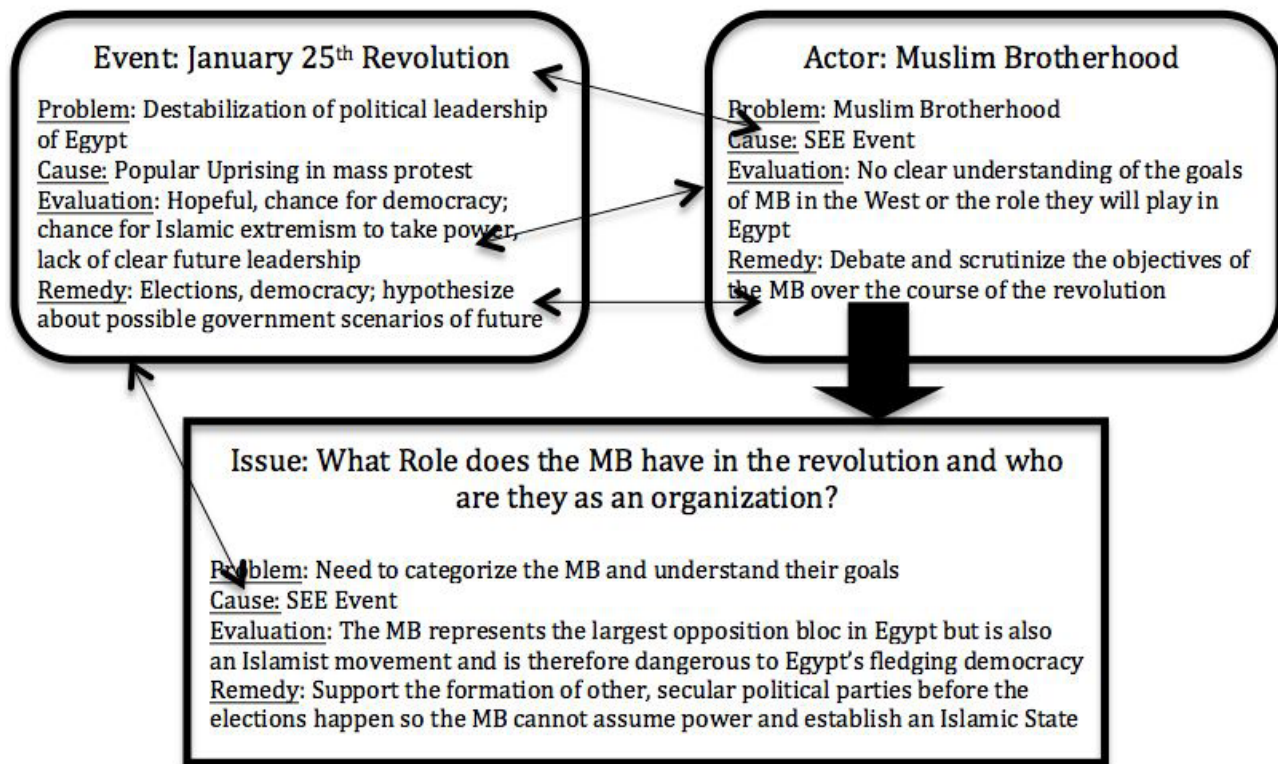


Figure II. News frame used for the Muslim Brotherhood. Fully developed frame for the Muslim Brotherhood's portrayal by CNN and The Fox News Network during the January 25th Revolution in Egypt and the five days following its end.

It is important to address two limitations of this study. While coding through a computer program can provide a rich pool of data, it can also increase the margin of error either through program or operator error. Furthermore, the Egyptian Revolution occurred too recently to be able to measure the framing effects on public opinion and subsequent foreign policy, limiting the scope of this analysis. The results of this study, however, can be built upon in the years to come as Egypt's current, chaotic political landscape begins to mold itself into a definite shape of some set system of governance, and given the demands of the Egyptian people, hopefully that system will be a true democratic one.

Given the influential nature of framing on the development of public opinion and foreign policy as discussed in the current scholarship on framing analysis, this analysis should act as the first step towards long-term research concerning the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, American public opinion of the Islamist movement, and U.S. foreign policy towards the organization over the next five to ten years as the Brotherhood's role in the future of Egypt becomes clearer. Though large amounts of research exist in the realms of the impact of framing during humanitarian crises and conflicts/wars, little research exists concerning framing's influence on domestic public opinion of a foreign revolution.

With the beginning of 2011 beginning the tsunami of protest and civil disobedience in the Middle East that has become popularly known as the 'Arab Spring,' there are many rich case studies in American media framing of Arab revolutions waiting to be analyzed. This research will inform communications professionals and audiences alike as to how they should approach the news coverage of a foreign revolution and can understand how to more objectively communicate in times of such chaos.

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# Are Spike's Commercials More Sexist than Lifetime's: A Comparison of Gender Role Portrayals in Advertising

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## Abstract

*In light of the proliferation of niche market networks and other trends towards market segmentation that have arisen in recent years, this study explored the prevalence of gender role stereotyping and product stereotyping in the commercials aired on gender-specific niche market networks. This study used content analysis to examine gender role portrayals in the advertisements played on Spike TV, Lifetime, and NBC. Results indicated that gender stereotyping was, in general, still prevalent in the commercials shown on all three networks. Female characters were more frequently associated with the home and family, while males had a stronger association with work and the business realm. When comparing across networks, the author found that stereotyping was not always shown in the same areas and that the same kind of stereotypes were not always emphasized.*

Raj: The only thing I've learned in the last two hours is that American men love drinking beer, pee too often, and have trouble getting erections.

Leonard: Focus on the game, not the commercials, Raj.

- "The Cornhusker Vortex," The Big Bang Theory (2009)

## I. Introduction

When television was first developed as a consumer medium in the late 1930s and 40s, American broadcast networks lived up to their name by deliberately making their appeal as wide and general as possible in order to attract the largest share of viewers. Since then, the rise of cable television and other new technology has solved the scarcity problem presented by the traditional method of broadcasting television signals via radio waves. This paradigm shift has allowed for the creation and distribution of a virtually unlimited number of cable networks and has resulted in the proliferation of media outlets we see today. Instead of all of these cable channels trying to attract the same general audience as broadcast networks, in recent decades the emphasis has shifted more to a niche market approach in which stations target a specific demographic (Messineo, 2008). In response to the narrowing in target audience, this study seeks to reconsider the use of gender role portrayals and stereotypes in television advertisements—a topic that has been widely researched in a broadcast setting—by investigating it within the framework of two opposing gender-specific niche market stations.

Since the 1970s, a significant amount of research has been done on the topic of gender roles in television commercials. While most previous studies have purposely collected data from broadcast stations

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to examine only commercials aimed at the general viewing public (Royo-Vela et al., 2008; Eisend, 2010), this study will explore the gender roles in advertisements played on two gender-specific niche channels: Spike TV (for men) and Lifetime (for women). For the sake of comparison, this study will also look at one broadcast station, NBC, as a control in order to compare the gender representations in the commercials aimed at niche audiences to those aimed at a more generalized audience. This study applied a content analysis methodology to the commercials played on each channel.

Spike TV and Lifetime are both aimed at attracting gender-specific demographics and so are the companies that advertise with them. When establishing its brand in the mid-2000s, Spike TV explicitly set out to cultivate a demographically pure male audience so that “you [advertisers] know what you’re buying” (Stanley & Fine, 2004). Studies have suggested that it is not just the products being advertized, but also the nature of gender representation in the commercials themselves, that varies based on the demographic of the target audience (Hentges et al., 2007). Meanwhile, another study found that non-traditional gender role portrayals in television commercials could have a positive influence on women’s self-confidence and independent judgment. This, in turn, suggests that commercials may have some effect on viewers, functioning as social cues to trigger and reinforce sex role stereotypes (Jennings et al., 1980). Therefore, it is worth exploring whether the shift in target audience for niche stations has coincided with a shift in the nature of the representation of gender roles in television advertising. This study compared the prevalence of gender stereotyping, looking at both gender role portrayals and product stereotyping (associating certain kind of products with gender), in the commercials shown on Spike TV, Lifetime, and NBC.

## II. Literature Review

As previously mentioned, there has been a great deal of scholarly interest in the topic of gender roles in advertising since the late 1960s and 1970s. This time period coincides with the rise of second-wave feminism. While first wave feminism focused on the overturning of legal inequalities, second wave feminism focused more on *de facto*, or unofficial, inequalities. This included questioning and otherwise calling attention to traditional gender roles in the family, in the work place, and in media representations such as advertising (Zeisler, 2008).

Since then, studies exploring gender role portrayals and stereotyping in the commercials played on broadcast television have been conducted in a variety of markets all across America and the world. The results of meta-data analyses are a helpful way to look at the overall themes and trends that all of this research has uncovered over the past 40 or so years. Furnham and Mark (1999) carried out a meta-data study of 14 primary studies conducted over five continents in the past 25 years and found that, despite the cultural and chronological differences between many studies, when taken together they show a “clear pattern” that indicates “the universality of sex-role stereotyping in television commercials.”

In 2010, Eisend conducted an even more in depth meta-data analysis on the topic of gender role portrayals specifically in U.S. commercials by looking at 64 primary studies. He found that gender stereotyping is still prevalent in advertising today, particularly in regards to a character’s occupational status, but that stereotyping in general has declined somewhat over the years. Results also indicate that this decrease is dependent on “gender-related developments” and “value changes in society over time.” In other words, movements like second and third wave feminism, along with today’s era of political correctness, have led to differences in the way society perceives gender and, to some extent, have lessened our cultural reliance on traditional gender role stereotypes to define what it means to be “male” or “female.” In terms of advertising’s consequences for society, these results support the mirror argument—that changing social norms cause changes in advertising—rather than the mold argument—that value changes in advertising lead to similar changes in society. This conclusion is supported by Kim & Lowry (2007), who argue that advertisers seem to hold to “traditional images of gender roles,” therefore, reinforcing and often exaggerating gender stereotypes, despite the significant changes in “modern societal images.” Further, many others believe that “the media does far more to foster prejudice against women and minorities than to overcome it” (Messineo, 2008; Wilson et al., 2003). So, although we are currently living in what some have dubbed a “postfeminist” world, advertisers—and, some would argue, the mainstream media in general—are still struggling to catch up (Zeisler, 2008).

Similarly, in response to the recent proliferation of niche market networks, there has been some debate over whether such stations provide a new outlet for previously marginalized voices in our society or

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simply hold onto and exaggerate existing stereotypes about their audience group. This debate relates to both the programming and the advertising shown on niche channels. As Messineo (2008) explained in her study of gender representations in commercials played on Black Entertainment Television (BET), "Market segmentation has the potential to create broader and more diverse representations of women and minorities, yet the process might equally be capable of producing narrower and more stereotypical images."

Another growing concern surrounding niche markets is that this recent trend towards market segmentation is enabling viewers to more easily filter out diverse or contrary opinions and points of view (Sunstein, 2001). According to the "echo-chamber" theory, as more narrow and specific niche networks arise, it becomes ever easier for individuals to pick and choose the messages they consume, viewing only those that "perfectly match their own beliefs and desires" and thereby inadvertently creating echo-chambers that "silence alternative voices" (Messineo, 2008). This trend is problematic, Sunstein (2001) argues, because the positive-feedback loop created when a consumer watches only programming that supports his or her point of view and this limits that consumer's ability to be aware of, open to, or familiar with diverse opinions and beliefs. Messineo (2008) argues that this echo-chamber effect could diminish empathy, or perhaps even increase prejudice, towards "out-groups," or those outside of a given individual's specific demographic or psychographic.

Adding to this trend is the understandable but significant fact that viewers find it "validating" to see others like themselves in the media they consume (Brand-Williams and Kiska, 1999). According to Joseph Turow's (1997) "image tribe" theory, marketers are highly aware of this and are therefore more likely to incorporate members of the target audience or aspects of that group's "assumed culture" into their advertisements. In other words, viewers are more likely to internalize advertisements in which they can relate to the characters or situations involved. So a woman who is a young, single lawyer is more likely to respond favorably to a commercial featuring an independent, professional female character than to one about a soccer mom.

Niche networks develop their identities based not just on what they are and whom they are targeting, but also on what they are not and whom they are not targeting, thereby creating easily identifiable in-groups and out-groups (Messineo, 2008). For example, Spike TV developed its station identity by branding itself as the "first network for men," deliberately avoiding women's programming and warding off potential female audience members. In fact, when Spike TV chief Albie Hecht, who helped launch the channel in 2003, resigned from his position in early 2005, some claimed that it was because the station's female audience had grown from 32% in 2003 to 42% in 2004 (New York Post, 2005).

When establishing the network, Spike TV designed and redesigned everything—from the shows to the on air graphics to the layout of the website—specifically in an attempt to attract the 18-to-34-year-old male demographic. As Stanley & Fine (2004) put it, "Spike's no network for the man who moisturizes. It's an unabashed network for the guy's guy who likes to watch people fall down and blow things up." That's the exact reputation Spike TV executives worked so hard to cultivate. Yet, from that description, it's easy to see why Messineo and others fear that niche networks can promote stereotypes just as easily as they can fight them. Then again, Spike TV is a bit of an anomaly in the world of market segmentation: It is a niche network aimed at white, middle to upper class, heterosexual males, the one demographic that does not fall under any minority statuses.

In March 2011, Viacom, which owns Spike TV, announced that the channel is being retooled in an attempt to reach a wider audience. After ratings losses at the end of 2010, the network is hoping to go beyond its current demographic by attracting both a somewhat older male audience and, surprisingly enough, expanding on its current female audience. However, the network will still be aimed primarily at men. The new goal is not to actively attract female viewers but rather to stop actively deterring them by stepping back from the "guy-centric, fratty tone and attitude" that the channel has worked so hard to build since it was introduced. As network executive Jeff Lucas explained, "We don't want the women leaving the room when the guy's watching the stuff" (Elliot, 2011).

On the opposite side of the niche network spectrum is Lifetime television network with its core demographic of 18-to-49-year-old females. Lifetime has been careful to label itself as "television for women" and avoid being called the "feminist network." Former network president and CEO Douglas McCormick said that Lifetime tries "to portray women in ways that move us all forward to a greater sense of enlightenment and understanding" (Hundley, 2000). The network claims to be of great value to the personal and social growth of women and has become an active and widely known advocate for the recognition and advancement of women (Humphries, 2009). In line with this, Lifetime's website states:

In addressing critical social issues affecting the lives of women and girls, Lifetime develops,

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creates and launches multi-year advocacy campaigns that involve public service announcements, legislative advocacy and partnerships with hundreds of non-profit organizations, women leaders, public officials and key members of the media to reach women on-air, online and in communities across the country. As a result of its unified programming, digital and advocacy initiatives, Lifetime has remained the “most trusted” and “most empowering” network for women for nine consecutive years. (Lifetime, 2009)

Spike TV’s website makes no such claims and does not explicitly endorse, fund, advocate for or otherwise support any causes or organizations (Spike TV, 2011).

Although the network says nothing about how or if this dedication to women’s advocacy affects what commercials it shows, Lifetime does say that its advocacy extends to the content of the network’s original programming. This is particularly true when it comes to its woman-centered, made-for-television movies (Lifetime, 2009). A 2009 study that looked at gender and criminal victimization in such made-for-TV movies on three women’s networks—Lifetime, the Women’s Entertainment Network (WE), and Oxygen—argued that, of the three, Lifetime had the most realistic depiction because it “seemed to link each act of criminal victimization to subsequent victimizations,” be they social, psychological, or systematic (Humphries, 2009). However, both Humphries and Hundley (2000) are quick to point out that, despite the network’s advocacy, Lifetime’s films are not immune to stereotypes. Hundley found that:

Lifetime portrays white, upper/middle class, young/middle aged, heterosexual, physically beautiful, strong-willed, emotionally charged, sexual objects and procreators in its original movies. While Lifetime’s movies do address some women’s issues, they concurrently contain and undermine feminism by consistently reasserting that women cannot “have it all.”

Meanwhile, Humphries (2009) noted that the victimized female characters in the network’s films tended to “promote a rigid conceptualization of feminine behaviors and roles. They were sexually promiscuous or provocative. They were mediocre as parents or unfaithful as wives.” In other words, most victims fell into the “bad girl” archetype, a modality that allows many viewers to see the victims’ narratives as cautionary tales.

Do Lifetime’s dedication to women’s advocacy or Spike TV’s recent decision to broaden its viewership manifest themselves in the commercials played on each respective station? Ultimately, this study seeks to explore how advertisers use gendered niche stations and whether they use them as a medium for displaying broader and more diverse representations of gender, as an echo-chamber for repeating and exaggerating old stereotypes, or in the same way as they use broadcast networks.

Based on literature review, the following two research questions were formulated:

RQ1. When compared to a broadcast station, did TV commercials played on stations targeting gender-specific niche audiences show a higher incidence of gender stereotyping in gender role portrayals and/or product stereotyping?

RQ2. Do the commercials shown on a television channel aimed primarily at a male audience (Spike TV) show a higher incidence of gender stereotyping in gender role portrayals and/or product stereotyping than those shown on a television channel aimed primarily at a female audience (Lifetime)?

### **III. Method**

This study applied content analysis. In mass communications research, content analysis is seen as a good research technique for finding data about the manifest content in media messages that is objective, systematic, and quantitative. In this case, the media messages being explored are gender role portrayals in television commercials. This data is collected by breaking the commercials’ contents into the smaller, more specific elements that the researcher wishes to examine in more detail and then evaluating and categorizing the manifest content of each commercial based on these categories. This method’s major benefit is its data-reduction capacity, in other words, its ability to take a vast amount of data and systematically break it down for a more manageable analysis. Its inability to adequately explore latent content is perhaps the biggest limitation of content analysis (Rosenberry & Vickers, 2009). However, for the purposes of this study, this will not be a drawback because it will suffice to explore just the manifest content of sex roles in the commercials for each channel being examined.

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## **Sampling**

The sample for this study was made up of all the different commercials broadcast on Spike TV, Lifetime, and NBC between the hours of 8 and 10 on three consecutive weeknights in March 2011.

As previously stated, these channels were selected based on their intended audience: Spike TV and Lifetime are both specialized cable networks targeting opposite genders, and NBC is a non-specialized broadcast network aimed at a general viewing public. All three are national channels. The networks were recorded during prime time hours, from 8 to 10, in order to capture the commercials at peak viewing times, as is standard in this type of research (Royo-Vela et al., 2008; Messineo, 2008).

Although some commercials were played more than once during the period of the study, duplicated advertisements were considered only once per channel. In other words, if a specific Nissan commercial plays twice on NBC, it was only counted once for the NBC sample but, if the same commercial plays once on NBC and once on Spike TV, it will be counted for both the NBC sample and the Spike TV sample. In accordance with the models set forth in the studies conducted by Gilly (1988) and Schneider and Schneider (1979), all noncommercial programming, public service announcements, film trailers, station identifications, and other spots reserved for the network to promote itself or its programming were not counted or analyzed.

## **Coding**

The coding categories for this research are based on previous successful research models, particularly those used by Royo-Vela et al. (2008), Messineo (2008), Gilly (1988), and Ferguson et al. (1990), and altered or expanded as was appropriate to fit the needs of this investigation. For the sake of this study, a primary figure is any human or animated character in the commercial who has a speaking part, holds or uses the actual product, or appears on screen for at least five seconds.

The primary characters or figures in each commercial were analyzed by gender regarding the following variables as shown in Table 1: (1) class of product advertised; (2) role played; (3) social relationship with the other characters in the commercial; (4) the setting or location in which the advertisement takes place; (5) what a character's credibility is based on if he/she serves as an on camera spokesperson. For variables 2, 3, and 4, the classes within these categories are not mutually exclusive. In other words, a single male character in a commercial can be portrayed as both a husband and a parent or a single female character can be shown in both an office setting and outdoors during the same commercial. For variables 1 and 5, on the other hand, the categories are mutually exclusive. For commercials featuring a voice over, the gender of the off camera announcer was also coded.

## **IV. Findings**

This study found that there are some notable differences in the representations of gender role portrayals in commercial advertisements by network. Further, network differences were found for every variable explored. While it is expected that different types of products would be advertised to different niche groups—after all, creating a medium for advertisers to easily reach narrower target audiences was the point of creating niche market networks in the first place—the differences coded for in this study are significant because they went beyond what was being advertised to explore how things were being advertised.

On the most basic level, differences began to appear in the number of women and men appearing in the commercials (see Table 2). While female representation was somewhat disproportionate in Lifetime's commercials at 56.3% compared to 43.7% for men, the Spike TV sample was far more skewed with male characters being vastly over-represented. At 67.9% of the representations, Spike TV advertisements showed more than twice as many male characters as they did female characters, which only accounted for 32.1% of the characters. NBC, the control network for this study, had the most evenly divided gender representations, with only a slightly larger percentage of men appearing at 53%.

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**Table 1 Variables and coding scheme**

<b>Character Variables</b>	<b>Classes</b>
(1) Product	Alcohol Cars and car accessories Dating/singles Electronics and games Food or non-alcoholic drinks Household appliances and cleaning Personal and beauty care Pharmaceuticals Restaurants and retail outlets Travel and leisure Telecommunications (phone and TV) Other
(2) Character role	Husband/wife or boy/girlfriend Parent/child Homemaker or maid Professional or boss Office worker/white-collar worker Blue-collar worker Spokesperson/presenter Celebrity Romantic stranger/sex object Other
(3) Relationship with the other characters in the commercial	Family Social Business No relationship
(4) Setting	Private residence Store/restaurant Occupational setting Outdoors Other
(5) Spokesperson credibility	Character is product user Character is an authority Neither
<b>Commercial Variables</b>	<b>Classes</b>
(1) Voiceover (off-camera)	Male Female Both No voiceover

**Table 2 Relation between product class and gender**

Product Class	Spike TV		Lifetime Television		NBC	
	Male (%)	Female(%)	Male (%)	Female(%)	Male (%)	Female(%)
Alcohol	12 (4.4 %)	6 (4.7 %)	1 (0.6 %)	3 (1.4 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Cars and car accessories	57 (20.9 %)	13 (10.1%)	8 (4.9 %)	6 (2.9 %)	27 (15.4%)	8 (5.2 %)
Dating/singles	10 (3.7 %)	15 (11.6 %)	5 (3.2 %)	6 (2.9 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Electronics and games	30 (11 %)	15 (11.6%)	8 (4.9 %)	11 (5.2 %)	5 (2.9 %)	3 (1.9 %)
Food or non-alcoholic drinks	37 (13.5 %)	25 (19.4 %)	51 (31.3 %)	47 (22.4 %)	20 (11.4%)	16 (10.3 %)
Household appliances and cleaning	0 (0 %)	1 (0.8 %)	25 (15.3 %)	22 (10.5 %)	5 (2.9 %)	7 (4.5 %)
Personal and beauty care	9 (3.3 %)	8 (6.2 %)	10 (6.1 %)	43 (20.5 %)	5 (2.9 %)	34 (21.9 %)
Pharmaceuticals	1 (0.3 %)	1 (0.8 %)	9 (5.5 %)	26 (12.4 %)	24 (13.7 %)	22 (14.2 %)
Restaurants and retail outlets	81 (29.7 %)	26 (20.1 %)	6 (3.7 %)	14 (6.7 %)	39 (22.3%)	37 (23.9 %)
Travel and leisure	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	21 (12.9 %)	15 (7.1 %)	11 (6.3 %)	5 (3.2 %)
Telecommunications	15 (5.5 %)	10 (7.8%)	10 (6.1 %)	4 (1.9 %)	12 (6.9 %)	6 (3.9 %)
Other	21 (7.7 %)	9 (7 %)	9 (5.5 %)	13 (6.1 %)	27 (15.4%)	17 (11%)
Total number of characters (% of total)	273 (67.9%)	129 (32.1%)	163 (43.7%)	210 (56.3%)	175 (53%)	155 (47%)

When it came to the product class being advertised (see Table 2), women were more likely to be associated with personal and beauty care products while men were more likely to be associated with cars and car accessories on all three networks. Network results differed in some of the other categories. When compared with the other networks, men appeared more frequently on Lifetime in commercials for two categories: food or non-alcoholic beverages (31.3%) and household appliances or cleaning (15.3%). Meanwhile, Spike TV showed 81 (29.7%) male characters in advertisements for restaurants and retail outlets while Lifetime only showed 6 (3.7%). Another interesting difference appears in the travel and leisure category: although more male characters appear in commercials for this category on both Lifetime and NBC, there were no commercials in this category at all on the network that is actually aimed at men, Spike TV.

Several significant differences can be seen between the portrayals of men and women when looking at the data collected regarding character roles (see Table 3). While the frequency of association does vary, the advertisements on all three networks show more women than men in the roles of parent/child, homemaker, and romantic stranger/sex-object. Men, on the other hand, are shown more in all three categories of working roles: professional or boss, office/white-collar worker, and blue-collar worker.

**Table 3 Relation between character roles and gender**

Character Role	Spike TV		Lifetime Television		NBC	
	Male (%)	Female(%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female(%)
Husband/wife or boy/girlfriend	17 (5.9%)	20 (13.9 %)	26 (13.5 %)	25 (9.4 %)	25 (11.2 %)	30 (15.5 %)
Parent/child	8 (2.8 %)	9 (6.3 %)	27 (14 %)	54 (20.2 %)	22 (9.8 %)	36 (18.7 %)
Homemaker	2 (0.7 %)	5 (3.5 %)	3 (1.6 %)	38 (14.2 %)	7 (3.1 %)	10 (5.2 %)
Professional or boss	42 (14.8 %)	4 (2.8 %)	19 (9.8 %)	11 (4.1 %)	27 (12.1 %)	14 (7.3 %)
Office/white-collar worker	31 (10.8 %)	17 (11.8 %)	15 (7.8 %)	13 (4.9 %)	25 (11.2 %)	12 (6.2 %)
Blue-collar worker	45 (15.7 %)	10 (6.9 %)	16 (8.3 %)	5 (1.9 %)	31 (13.8 %)	5 (2.6 %)
Spokesperson/presenter	25 (8.7 %)	20 (13.9 %)	27 (14 %)	42 (15.7 %)	37 (16.5 %)	29 (15 %)
Celebrity	12 (4.2 %)	1 (0.7 %)	6 (3.1 %)	10 (3.7 %)	7 (3.1 %)	10 (5.2 %)
Romantic stranger/sex object	8 (2.8 %)	26 (18.1 %)	3 (1.6 %)	5 (1.9 %)	1 (0.4 %)	6 (3.1 %)
Other	96 (33.6 %)	32 (22.2 %)	51 (26.4 %)	64 (24 %)	42 (18.8 %)	41 (21.2 %)
Totals	286	144	193	267	224	193



The next variable this study looked at, the relationship between a character's gender and that character's relationship(s) with the other characters in the commercial (Table 4), follows the same trend. On all three networks explored, female characters appear more frequently in familial roles while male characters are more likely to be shown in business relationships. Here, it is again worth noting a few differences between the networks. Specifically, it is worth noting that, when looking at the percentages for each category, the most significant gender divides were shown on NBC's commercials. Spike showed more characters in general, both male and female, in business relationships while Lifetime showed more characters in general in family situations but NBC's commercials showed the greatest differences in characters' relationships based on gender.

**Table 4 Relation between gender and character's relationships**

(3) Relationship(s) with other characters	Spike TV		Lifetime Television		NBC	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Family	16 (6.7 %)	15 (12.9 %)	36 (23.8 %)	55 (29.4 %)	34 (20.5 %)	52 (36.6 %)
Social	71 (29.7 %)	39 (33.6 %)	42 (27.8 %)	45 (24.1 %)	36 (21.7 %)	30 (21.1 %)
Business	86 (36 %)	31 (26.7 %)	37 (24.5 %)	23 (12.3 %)	61 (36.7 %)	25 (17.6 %)
No relationship	66 (27.6 %)	31 (26.7 %)	36 (23.8 %)	64 (34.2 %)	35 (21.1 %)	35 (24.6 %)
Totals	239	116	151	187	166	142

When looking at the relationship between gender and the setting in which the character appears (Table 5), women were placed in residential settings more often than men. Lifetime is the most notable example of this, with 46% of all female characters appearing in the home compared to 24.6% of female characters on Spike TV and 32.5% on NBC. Men were shown more frequently than women in occupational settings and, to a lesser degree, outdoors on all three networks. Interestingly, of the networks examined, Spike TV has the highest percentage of female characters portrayed in occupational settings (26.9%) and the smallest differences between the percent of male characters and the percent of female characters who appear in both occupational settings and in residential settings.

**Table 5 Relation between gender and the setting**

(4) Setting	Spike TV		Lifetime Television		NBC	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Private residence	40 (14 %)	33 (24.6 %)	50 (29.2 %)	104 (46 %)	35 (17.9 %)	55 (32.5 %)
Store/restaurant	33 (11.6 %)	20 (14.9 %)	20 (11.7 %)	29 (12.8 %)	16 (8.2 %)	25 (14.8 %)
Occupational Setting	91 (31.9 %)	36 (26.9 %)	51 (29.8 %)	31 (13.7 %)	68 (34.9 %)	29 (17.2 %)
Outdoors	91 (31.9 %)	31 (23.1 %)	42 (24.6 %)	49 (21.7 %)	68 (34.9 %)	44 (26 %)
Other	30 (10.5 %)	14 (10.4 %)	8 (4.7 %)	13 (5.8 %)	8 (4.1 %)	16 (9.5 %)
Totals	285	134	171	226	195	169

Taken together, the variables examined in tables 6 and 7 show that, in general, the "voice of authority" in advertising is still associated with men (Messineo, 2008; Royo-Vela et al., 2008). Male spokespersons on all three networks were more likely to be an authority on the product being advertised, such as a doctor in a pharmaceutical commercial or a lawyer advertising legal services, than female spokespersons, whose credibility was more frequently the result of being a product user, particularly when it came to hair dyes, face creams, and other beauty products. When it came to voiceovers, Spike TV had the most significant difference between genders, with male voiceovers appearing in 72.7% of commercials compared to 12.3% featuring females. NBC also had more male voiceovers (43.9%) than female (37.4%). Lifetime is the only network whose commercials broke away from the paradigm of predominantly male voiceovers (Eisend, 2010; Messineo, 2008) by having a higher percentage of females (44.4%) than males (38.2%). The numbers of commercials with both male and female voiceovers or no voiceover at all were comparable for all three networks.

**Table 6 Relation between spokesperson gender and credibility**

(5) Spokesperson credibility	Spike TV		Lifetime Television		NBC	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Character is product user	25 (54.3 %)	26 (96.3 %)	10 (40 %)	37 (84.1 %)	12 (33.3 %)	25 (86.2 %)
Character is authority	12 (26.1 %)	1 (3.7 %)	8 (32 %)	4 (9.1 %)	17 (47.2 %)	4 (13.8 %)
Neither	9 (19.6 %)	0 (0 %)	7 (28 %)	3 (6.8 %)	7 (19.4 %)	0 (0 %)
Totals	46	27	25	44	36	29

**Table 7 Frequency of voiceover gender by network**

Gender of voiceover	Spike TV	Lifetime Television	NBC
Male	112 (72.7 %)	55 (38.2 %)	61 (43.9 %)
Female	19 (12.3 %)	64 (44.4 %)	52 (37.4 %)
Both	5 (3.2 %)	7 (4.9 %)	9 (6.5 %)
No voiceover	18 (11.7 %)	18 (12.5 %)	17 (12.2 %)
Total number of commercials	154	144	139

## V. Discussion

This study sought to answer two primary research questions, each of which compared the relative frequency of gender stereotyping in the commercials of three television networks: Spike TV, which is a niche network aimed primarily at men, Lifetime, a niche network aimed primarily at women, and NBC, a more generalized broadcast station. The first question asked whether or not the advertisements aired on gendered niche networks showed a higher incidence of gender stereotyping than those played on a broadcast station. The second question looked at both niche channels independently and sought to compare and contrast the prevalence of gender stereotyping – through both gender role portrayals and through product stereotyping—in the commercials aired on a network aimed at women with those shown on a network aimed at men. However, the results indicate that neither question has a simple answer. The advertisements on all three networks show gender stereotyping in some areas, but it is not always in the same areas or the same stereotypes that are being emphasized.

On a more general note, the results show some overarching product stereotyping on all three networks, with female characters consistently being associated with personal and beauty care products while males are associated with cars and car accessories. This trend follows the traditional stereotypes of physical beauty being a woman's domain or responsibility while significant financial or purchasing decisions fall within the male's domain. As previously mentioned, one notable difference between networks is within the travel and leisure category. While Spike TV showed no commercials at all for this category, both Lifetime and NBC commercials associated this category more frequently with male characters. This suggests that, while men do go on vacations, advertisers believe that, as a demographic, women are more likely to make travel related decisions and they therefore advertise accordingly.

Some pervasive, cross network stereotyping in gender role portrayals can also be seen when looking at other categories. Female characters are more commonly associated with the traditional realms of home and family. This trend can be observed across several categories: Females are shown more frequently as parents and homemakers, with familial relationships, and in residential settings. Male characters, on the other hand, are shown more frequently within the traditionally male realm of the business world. Advertisements on all three networks show more men as professionals, office workers, and blue-collar workers. Male characters are more likely to have business relationships, with more male interactions on Spike TV and NBC have falling into the category of business relationships than any other type of relationship, and are more frequently shown in occupational or outdoor settings. These general findings support previous research, which suggests that, although society as a whole has made significant strides toward internalizing gender equality in recent decades, advertisers are still clinging to traditional gender role portrayals and product stereotyping (Eisend,

2010; Furnham and Mark, 1999; Kim & Lowry, 2007; Messineo, 2008; Royo-Vela et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2003).

Looking at channels individually, there are some notable differences in gender role portrayals by network. When comparing Spike TV to the Lifetime network, it could be argued that the commercials shown on both channels are reinforcing or exaggerating potentially negative gender stereotypes but, when it comes to female characters, they tend to emphasize two very different archetypes. Advertisements on Lifetime are more likely to show women as maternal, domestic characters that fit the mold of the suburban “soccer mom” while the female characters on Spike TV tend toward the “sex-object” model of femininity. Results from NBC generally fell between these two, with both stereotypes being present in its commercials but neither appearing quite as frequently as it did on the respective niche networks.

On the Spike TV commercials, women are shown more frequently as sex objects or romantic strangers (18.1%) but they are also more likely to be shown as independent or autonomous. Female characters on this network have a significantly weaker association with the home and family than they do on Lifetime or NBC. Further, they have a much greater level of representation in the workplace. As a network, Spike TV’s commercials show the highest percentage of women in white-collar and blue-collar jobs, in business relationships, and in occupational settings. It is the only network whose commercials show more females in an occupational setting than at home. However, while women are being shown as a part of the workforce, they are not being shown in the role of professional or boss (only 4 females fit into this category as compared to 42 males). In this way, female characters are being given some agency but are still being “kept in their place” by being relegated to the role of sex-object while having the role of professional withheld.

Male characters on Spike TV are frequently shown in traditionally masculine roles. They are significantly more likely than female characters to be associated with cars and with professional or blue-collar jobs. Characterizations often relied on the archetypes of the successful businessman or the rugged, outdoorsy blue-collar worker. For both genders, the commercials on Spike TV show a weaker association with the home and family and a stronger association with business and social relationships or settings.

Lifetime commercials are the complete opposite. When compared to those shown on NBC and Spike TV, both genders are shown more often on Lifetime at home and in familial roles and less often at work or in business situations. Female characters in particular are shown more frequently as mothers and homemakers (or both) but, interestingly, less frequently as wives or girlfriends. Additionally, nearly half of all the female characters appear in residential settings. Male characters are also shown more often in residential settings than they are on the other two networks. Even so, males are rarely shown doing domestic tasks such as cooking or cleaning (only 3 men fit into the homemaker category compared to 38 women) and are generally shown within the domestic realm in the traditional role of the patriarchal head of the family. Meanwhile, Lifetime is the network least likely to show female characters cast as romantic strangers or sex objects.

These results seem to support the image tribe theory (Turow, 1997). In the cases of both networks, the advertisements seem more likely to incorporate characters that fit the demographics or psychographics of the network’s target audience. In addition, they seem more likely to portray members of the opposite gender in similar roles. For example, Lifetime’s core demographic is women between the ages of 18 and 49. Beyond that, many of the women who watch the network are white, middle to upper class mothers and/or wives (Hundley, 2000). So it is no accident that many of the characters shown in commercials on Lifetime, both male and female, are portrayed as members of traditional, middle to upper class, suburban families. On the other side of the spectrum, the 18-to-34-year-old male target audience for Spike TV with its “laddie sensibility” (Crupi, 2006; Stanley & Fine, 2004) is less likely to relate to characters in familial roles. Despite the network’s recent announcement that it plans to broaden its viewership demographics (Elliot, 2011), it is the very nature of the “boy-man” psychographic that the network has been working to cultivate over the last several years to be less mature and less ready to settle down or, at the very least, less willing to embrace images of characters who have settled down and taken on the responsibilities that go along with the suburban family lifestyle (Cross, 2008, pp. 206-207). Therefore, both male and female characters in the commercials on Spike TV are portrayed less frequently in familial situations. Instead, both sexes are associated more with business or social relationships and are shown outdoors, at work, or in bars and restaurants. Most characters are single, active, independent adults and are, in many cases, defined by their sexuality or their careers.

It could be argued that the conflicting female archetypes represented by the commercials on both networks are potentially harmful and both portrayals are undoubtedly stereotypical. There is some current scholarly debate over which female archetype is more negative. Royo-Vela et al. (2008) argues that to make

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a character of either gender into a sexual object or a "decorative object" is to actively "put him/her down" while to show a man or woman in a mostly traditional realm or role is less severe and serves to keep that character "in his/her place." Messineo (2008), on the other hand, believes that sexual desirability gives characters some power, especially when looked at through the lens of capitalism. She even goes as far as to say that, "in the lexicon of advertising, to be powerful or to be sexually desirable is a worthy, if not the most worthy, goal of consumers." Ultimately, it is difficult to judge which network's commercials show more stereotyping (research question 2) because the advertising on both channels seem to espouse one type of gender stereotyping while eschewing the other. It is therefore the argument of this study that both networks show equally stereotypical, if opposing, gender role portrayals of female characters while Spike TV has slightly more stereotypically masculine depictions of male characters.

In the commercials shown on NBC, the control channel for this study, the gender stereotypes shown on both Spike TV and Lifetime are present. Additionally, the divides between the two sexes are greater in many categories such as parent, office or blue-collar worker, family relationships, and business relationships. In all of these categories, males are more likely to be shown in the stereotypically masculine realm of work while females are more associated with maternal roles and the home. As far as product stereotyping is concerned, the advertisements on NBC also showed the most significant gender divide, percentagewise, of any network when it came to the categories of personal and beauty products and cars or car accessories. The advertisements on both niche markets are slanted towards a specific realm or group of stereotypes, but that means that both genders on each channel are adjusted to fit the channel's respective curve. The gender role portrayals on NBC commercials, on the other hand, are just all around more stereotypical, clinging to the whole array of gender stereotypes where Spike TV and Lifetime both stick primarily to one. These findings therefore suggest that, by keeping to the traditional middle ground, the commercials on NBC ultimately show a more widespread prevalence of gender stereotyping than those of either Spike TV or Lifetime.

### ***Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research***

This study was conducted on a relatively small scale. The advertisements are from three networks at prime time during three consecutive nights. Future studies could expand upon this research by collecting samples at different times during the day, during different parts of the year, or for a longer period of time. Researchers could also explore a greater variety of gender oriented niche networks in future studies, particularly the Oxygen and Women's Entertainment (WE) channels. Although it is not a gender-specific niche market network in the strictest sense, incorporating the Logo TV channel, which is geared towards the LGBTQ community, into future research may also yield interesting results.

Due to time and budget constraints, another limitation of this study is that there was only one coder, therefore making it impossible to test for intercoder reliability. Future studies could benefit from using multiple independent coders during the content analysis process.

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# What Influences Young Adults' Decision to Adopt New Technology?

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to discover who and/or what influenced young people, specifically when selecting a mobile phone. Studies by Paul Lazarsfeld, Everett Rodgers, Joel Best, and Peter Zollo were examined to gain a deep understanding of the behavior of influencers and other consumer groups. A survey was conducted to gather quantitative data about respondents' behaviors and what influenced them when they made purchasing decisions of mobile phone and other technology. The bulk of young adults identified themselves as members of the majority adopter category (54.2%). The influencers' category was the second largest group with 26.0% of respondents classifying themselves as such by telling that others respected their opinion and they were the least traditional. The innovators, those who identified themselves as venture-some, rebellious and the least traditional, consisted of 12.5% of the respondents. Laggards, traditionalists suspicious of change, made up the smallest portion (7.3%) of all respondents. When young people looked to purchase a new mobile phone, they were influenced mostly by friends, followed by family, salespeople and others. In terms of non-human information channels, they were most influenced by advertising, followed by technology blogs and traditional media.*

## I. Introduction

Bell-bottom jeans, Walkmans, Four Lokos, Crocs and iPods all share one commonality—each of them were trends on some level that were aided in the climb to their peak with the help of influencers. Researchers have for years attempted to pinpoint each phase that characterizes the behavior of a trend before, during, and after its climax. Paul Lazarsfeld (1983), Everett Rodgers (1983), Malcolm Gladwell (2000) and several others introduced feasible models that attempt to explain the rise and fall of a phenomenon, including the types of people who are most involved in kicking things off. The majority of researchers seem to agree that there is a key group of consumers that is responsible for the move of a product or service to a phenomenal innovation or trend status. Influencers, those credited with propelling an innovation into a trend, are the key group of people whom the following study sought to examine. Technology with a focus on trends in mobile phone innovation was the primary area of interest. Identifying those who were ahead of the curve and behind in current technology was important in being able to ultimately accomplish the larger mission of identifying those sources or persons key in influencing the influentials.

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\* **Keywords:** influencers, young adults, technology, media, adopter categories  
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## II. Literature Review

The chain that a trend climbs has varying levels depending on which researcher one decides to ask, whether it is Paul Lazarsfeld (1983), Everett Rodgers (1983), Joel Best (2006) or Peter Zollo (2004). A number of researchers have created their individual models of the types of people involved in an innovation's journey pre-trend, post-trend, and at the points in-between.

### ***Two-Step Flow Model***

The two-step flow model, developed by Paul Lazarsfeld, was the result of a move to discard the hypodermic needle model, in which "mass media had direct, immediate, and powerful effects on a mass audience," (Rodgers, 1983, p. 272). Lazarsfeld's study revealed two important pieces of information about the flow or diffusion of ideas. The first is that the transmitting of information typically happens from sources to opinion leaders. The second step is the expansion of influence from opinion leaders to potential followers (Rodgers, 1983, p. 273).

### ***Diffusion of Innovations***

Everett Rodgers' *Diffusion of Innovations* (1983) presents a number of valid points that are foundational in the process of discovering influencers among Generation Y consumers, including the establishment of adopter categories and Lazarsfeld's two-step flow model

All of the five categories of adoption in Rodgers' innovation model were created based on people's varying levels of innovativeness. Innovativeness is defined as a continuous variable that measures "the degree to which an individual or other units of adoption [are] relatively earlier in adopting new ideas" (Rodgers, 1983, p. 245).

Fueled by a venturesome nature that propels their eagerness to try new things, innovators are generally the first to adopt a concept. The innovator plays a major part in the diffusion process where the individual is a gatekeeper or one who has control over whether something is introduced in the social sphere. Innovators typically surround themselves with other innovators who seek to involve themselves in risky, rash and daring activities (Rodgers, 1983, p. 248).

Early adopters are the next group in embracing a new concept. This group has the most opinion leadership among all the categories. Early adopters are sought for advice or used as a point of reference for information about a new phenomenon by their peers. The early adopter is respected by peers for the insights he or she can provide to those seeking to decrease uncertainty about a new innovation (Rodgers, 1983, p. 249). The early adopters group also has the most opinion leadership among all five categories.

The third group, the early majority, adopts new trends slightly ahead of the average person. This group is characterized by the time they take to deliberate prior to adopting new concepts. A careful decision is made although not early enough to make them leaders but still far from the last group as it relates to embracing something new (Rodgers, 1983, p. 249).

The late majority is composed of people who adopt new developments a little while after the average person. When the late majority has adopted something, it is because all uncertainty has been cleared, thus the item is now a necessity and there is mounting peer pressure to embrace it. The decision to adopt something is reached after a great deal of caution, because anything this group uses must be deemed safe to adopt by influencers. The late majority is often referred to as the skeptics of all the adopter categories (Rodgers, 1983, p. 250).

The last group to adopt a new concept is the laggards. The past is a primary points of reference for laggards who are known as the traditional group. Before a laggard accepts a new phenomenon, it more than likely "may already have been superseded by another more recent idea that is already being used by the innovators," (Rodgers, 1983, p. 250).

### ***Teens Trend Hierarchy***

Teenage Research Unlimited, a company specializing in youth research and insights, developed a few primary categories that teens typically fall into. The president of the company noted, "Teens live in a hierarchical society ... typically, trends are created or adopted by Edge teens or Influencers and then trickle down

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to Conformers and finally Passives” (Zollo, 2004, p. 108).

Edge teens lead lives that are on the cutting edge of teen lifestyle and fashion trends, although they prefer not to be referred to as such. These teens are described as huge music lovers, particularly of hardcore and punk music. Edge teens' lifestyles lead them to engage in activities that are rebellious, contradictory, adventurous, experimental, and the least traditional (Zollo, 2004, p. 110).

Influencers are the most exclusive and ethnically diverse group of teens that others are the most likely to listen to when they speak. A day in the life of an influencer teen would include a significantly higher amount of shopping, being with a boyfriend/girlfriend, hanging out with friends and cruising in cars, in addition to taking pleasure in being the center of attention. Appearance is also overly important to these teens who create their own trends, whether it is what they wear or whom they associate themselves with, thus they have the look that others desire (Zollo, 2004, p. 111-112).

The majority, sometimes referred to as the “silent majority,” is known as the conformers. These teens only embrace what has already gained a seal of approval from the cool teens; also known as the influencers, thus they gravitate toward adopting the latest styles, trends and behaviors. This group also consists of teens with lower confidence, self-esteem and social status than the other previously mentioned groups (Zollo, 2004, p. 113).

The final group, at the bottom of the hierarchical teen structure, is passives. Essentially, these teens are the polar opposites of the edge and influencer teens. Passives lack confidence and ambition, in addition to spending the least amount of time indulging in social activities, thus they are not fans of dancing or emerging music. But this group yearns to be popular and well liked and like their semi-counterparts, the conformers, they do not adopt trends until influencers approve them (Zollo, 2004, p. 114).

### ***Illusion of Diffusion***

Best, in his book *Flavor of the Month: Why Smart People Fall for Fads*, discussed the essential components surrounding whether a new innovation will enter either a phase of a mere fad or a long-term innovation (2006, p. 8). The illusion of diffusion was described as a mistake made by marketers and the media in which high expectations are placed on an innovation that, to the surprise of its forecasters, loses popularity almost as quickly as it gained it, thus becoming a fad (Best, 2006, p. 8 -12).

German sociologist, Georg Simmel, detailed what Best described as the trickle-down process that consists of “a hierarchy or ladder, on which those at the top try to differentiate themselves from the people on the rung below them by adopting new symbols of their higher status,” (2006, p. 10). The ladder continues descending to the second tier who usually imitates their superiors by adopting the items they possess to distinguish themselves from the third tier (Best, 2006, p. 10 - 11). Once the third and final tier adopts something, it is no longer used by people with higher societal status as a distinguishing characteristic, thus perpetuating the cycle where the first rank is forced to seek out new ways to set themselves apart from others (Best, 2006, p. 10 - 11).

For an innovation to become a successful fad or trend with some length of longevity there are usually various people involved at the beginning level who aid the concept's launch. Best outlines three types of people including originators, promoters, and trendsetters. Originators are people who can be traced as the starting point for a new idea or concept (Best, 2006, p. 64). Promoters are responsible for “disseminating the innovation” (Best, 2006, p. 65). These people are described as having many different, yet similar roles in achieving the same task—from financial stakeholders to public relations specialists. Trendsetters are the inaugural group who embraces an innovation and is also known as early adopters or opinion leaders. Trendsetters are described “as exemplary, because they are viewed either as knowledgeable individuals or as social types that represent creativity, adventurousness or other social virtues that celebrate change,” (Best, 2006, p. 68).

### ***Spheres of Influence***

The manner in which social interaction influences consumer purchasing decisions is of great importance when seeking to determine who or what influences people. Whenever there is a perceived risk involved in making a purchase, the average person usually seeks the opinion of others to reduce the degree of uncertainty. These social interactions happen with family members, opinion leaders and reference groups (Lamb, 2004, p. 156).

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**Family members**

Family holds the strongest influence for most consumers because they generally help shape “values, attitudes, self-concept and buying behavior,” and is marked by a process called socialization (Lamb, 2004, p. 160). The socialization process is a term used to explain the way parents and other elder figures pass cultural values and norms to children. Also in the socialization process, there are five phases in the order of the buying procedure: initiators, influencers, decision makers, purchasers and consumers. Family purchases also create dynamics where different people are involved in each role.

**Opinion leaders**

Opinion leaders are people who influence the masses. Curiosity leads opinion leaders to routinely be the first wave of people to try new products and services. The casual and inconspicuous nature associated with opinion leadership makes these leaders difficult for marketers to outright find, so marketers sometimes create opinion leaders. Forced opinion leaders for example have been cheerleaders on a local level when trying to reach teens, but on a national scale, celebrities are used when seeking to reach much larger audiences (Lamb, 2004, p. 159).

Research conducted by Katz and Lazarsfeld suggested that one-third of opinion leaders have expertise to influence others in multiple categories, which is called polymorphism, or the ability to be an opinion leader in an assortment of areas (Rodgers, 1983, p. 288). Monomorphism is relayed the capacity to be an opinion leader in only one specific area (Rodgers, 1983, p. 288).

**Reference groups**

Reference groups are all groups—whether formal or informal—that a person is associated with that have the power to sway a person’s purchasing behavior to some degree. Reference groups that directly influence consumers are primary and secondary membership groups. Primary groups are people you encounter regularly that can be informal or in-person, while secondary membership groups are typically more formal, yet less frequent face-to-face encounters. Reference groups that indirectly influence people are groups that people would ideally like to become a part of, aspirational reference groups, and groups that people would never want to be associated with, referred to as non-aspirational reference groups (Lamb, 2004, p. 158).

***Characteristics and Types of Influencers***

Malcolm Gladwell (2006), Ed Keller and Jon Berry (2003) as well as Andy Sernovitz (2006) each explicitly discuss the characteristics of influential characters beyond the mere mention of them in the hierarchy of influence models. Each researcher reveals a set of personality traits, habits and favorable tasks that are embodied as core attributes of influencers.

Three types of people that work in distinctive, yet similar ways to control word-of-mouth epidemics help influence the masses. Connectors, the first type, simply seem to know everyone, particularly a lot of people from various walks of life (Gladwell, 2000, p. 46-49). The second type, mavens, contains a wealth of knowledge about a number of products, prices and/or places. Mavens also like to spread their knowledge to help others anyway they can (Gladwell, 2000, p. 62-67). Salesmen, the final category, possess the skills vital to seal the deal or to persuade the unconvinced (Gladwell, 2000, p. 70).

Five traits that influentials possess are outlined in Keller and Berry’s book, *The Influentials*:

1. “Being actively engaged in the community and many areas of life,”
2. “Have a broad network of connections,”
3. “Are looked to by others for their advice and insight,”
4. “Have active minds,”
5. “Trendsetters for the larger society,” (2003, p. 64).

Standout attributes of influentials include being more opinionated, computer savvy and frugal than the average person, in addition to holding moderate/centrist views (Keller, 2003, p. 37). Influentials span a broad range of ages, household incomes and range of occupations (Keller, 2003, p. 39). The primary leisure activities that influentials indulge in typically include reading newspapers, books and magazines, in addition to listening to music, cooking and spending time on hobbies. These types of people are less likely to engage in passive activities like watching TV, sports or videos, as well as napping, going to the movies and playing video games (Keller, 2003, p. 43).

Influentials do not usually have the most of everything or the most expensive items, but these people

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are more like “assiduous experimenters” who have a way of discovering important things before others (Keller, 2003, p. 64). Some of those important products include personal computers, the Internet, ATMs, VCRs and mobile phones. Generally, influentials are usually three to five years ahead of the public when discovering new things (Keller, 2003, p. 65).

Influentials had a key role in developing the overall market for mobile phones since its inception a few decades ago. Influentials consistently owned cell phones at higher rates than the general public (Keller, 2003, p. 63).

Most successful products and services are fueled by some amount of marketing, whether traditional or nontraditional. One organic form of marketing that typically plays a role is word-of-mouth marketing. According to Sernovitz (2006), word-of-mouth marketing requires five elements, among which the most significant element is Talkers. Talkers are people who spread the message about a product or service enthusiastically to others and “sometimes they are called ‘influencers’ or ‘evangelists’,” (Sernovitz 2006, p. 22). “Talkers talk because they love to share great ideas and help their friends,” (Sernovitz 2006, p. 22). Talkers are fans, customers, bloggers, influencers, employees, hobbyists, professionals and even listeners in some cases. They are also different from and usually not trendsetters, celebrities or journalists (Sernovitz 2006, p. 71-75).

## **Segmentation Research**

Understanding segmentation research was important to the study in order to identify influencers and others in the chain of diffusion. Conducting a segmentation research study is explained as the process of “identifying groups of people that respond differently to marketing,” which also defines important differences between groups of people and can divulge unmet needs or give insights regarding how to approach certain dynamic groups of people differently for the same product or brand (Phillips, 2011).

### **Step one**

To begin a segmentation study, a researcher’s primary task is to “explore and define buying behavior.” There are six areas that should be explored, which include: what they buy, how they buy, when they buy, what they spend, how often they spend and who are they (Phillips, 2011).

### **Step two**

The secondary action required to complete a segmentation study is “to measure additional information that can provide insights as to why customers behave differently.” Additional information includes gathering data about attitudes (lifestyles, interests, opinions, values), motivations, perceptions, intent and in-depth demographics (Phillips, 2011). According to MarketVision Research (1998), other common areas that information can be gathered about include:

- Product usage or knowledge – frequency of use, brand loyalty, usage patterns, purchase volume and end-use.
- Decision process – shopping patterns, media use, buyer profile, decision-making unit, distribution channel and information search.
- Needs/product benefits – needs to be filled, expectations, satisfaction, product preference and perception of product.
- Adoption propensity – interest in new products, opinion leadership and likelihood of buying new products (1998, p. 4).

All of the key segmentation measures allow the chance for similarities among certain groups of people to surface.

## **Research Questions**

After evaluating literature about influencers, a set of research questions was developed, both to challenge and to discover new information about young adult technology influencers.

The models developed by previous researchers outlined groups of people whom trends cycle through, from early adopters to laggards. This was an important element that needed to be used to separate the influencers from the latter. Thus, RQ1: Can influencers be identified and segmented according to the segments created by Rodgers’ *Diffusions of Innovations* Theory and Peter Zollo?

After determining which part of the innovation cycle a person belongs to, the next question sought

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to discover who influences the individual, whether a member of the influencer group or the majority. Hence, RQ2: Who (reference groups, opinion leaders, family members) or what influences each segment of young adults the most when making mobile phone and other technology purchasing decisions?

Like-minded people often have other things in common, whether it's habits or demographics. These other characteristics that influencers share are a secondary insight that could potentially add to the young adult influencers research. RQ3: What characteristics do young adult influencers share?

Rodgers (1983), Best (2006) and other researchers have developed various, but similar models for identifying the groups of people that innovations move between, but could there be an undiscovered group among young people when looking at the group of people innovations pass through? Consequently, RQ4: Is there an additional segment that Peter Zollo's or *Diffusions of Innovations* studies failed to identify?

The aforementioned questions guided the development of the survey questionnaire. The ultimate goal here was to discover technology influencers among young adults and what has a relative influence on them when making a technology purchasing decision.

This research tried to fit respondents into segments, then conducted a more in-depth analysis of one particular group, the influencers. The findings are based on quantitative research gathered from an online survey of young adults.

The survey was administered online using Survey Monkey's online survey tool. Respondents for the survey were solicited through multiple Facebook accounts belonging to other people in an attempt to gather a variety of people for the sample. The goal was to get at least 150 responses. The author used Facebook specifically to post status updates containing the link and a plea for help gathering voluntary responses, and reached an estimated 400 people via Facebook messages. College students and recent graduates were the primary targets for the survey, thus those who were randomly messaged were known to currently be attending college or recently finished college. In addition, there were also two ads placed on Elon University's E-Net, the online university news bulletin board, in the Student Center section: one under the General Tab and the other under the Volunteer Tab. The survey was intended to reach the target response number within one week's time, but was extended to allow responses for an additional week. Then, it was closed with 96 responses and an 83.3% total completion rate.

The survey began by asking a few forced choice questions, each of which directly correlated to one of the categories from Rodgers' diffusions of innovations theory (Innovators, Early Adopters, Early Majority, Late Majority and Laggards) or Peter Zollo's teen/type categories (the Edge, Influencers, Conformers and Passives Teens). The categories from the two models previously mentioned were collapsed into four, which combined two like categories, early majority and late majority, from the diffusions of innovations theory. The final four categories, in order of their place in the diffusion chain, were innovators, influencers, majority and laggards.

The survey also asked questions about participants' technology opinions and purchasing habits, specific to their current phones, as well as the most desired phone. Questions about mobile phone purchasing habits then led to questions about groups and organizations that respondents are involved with, in addition to family members and other references that may have influenced their mobile phone purchasing decision. The survey was comprised of a total of 27 questions, which included a few demographic questions.

Descriptive statistics were utilized to determine young people's technology purchasing habits and the spheres of influence on those habits. Then, survey takers were segmented according to their self-identified adopter category characteristics, which they chose at the beginning of the survey, and comparisons between the groups were made using cross tabulations.

### III. Findings

#### **Overview of All Responses**

The bulk of young adults identify themselves as somewhat traditional and slightly skeptical of change (54.2%), thus making them members of the majority adopter category. The influencers' category was the second largest group with 26% of respondents classifying themselves as such by identifying that others respect their opinion and they are the least traditional. The innovators, those who identified themselves as venture-some, rebellious and the least traditional, consisted of 12.5% of the responses. Laggards, traditionalists

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suspicious of change, made up the smallest portion (7.3%) of all young adult survey responses.

When young adults are in the market for a new mobile phone, slightly more than 70% either wait a few months until a new phone becomes a safe choice before purchasing it or are the last to purchase a recently released phone once it's no longer a new release.

The coolest phone according to young adults is the iPhone, which accounted for 58% of responses. The question that asked survey respondents what the coolest phone is allowed people to write in their personal choice. Droid phones were a distant second with 19% of respondents' votes. Blackberry phones reflected 11% of young adults' choice for the coolest phone taking third place. Evo(7%) and HTC(5%) followed thereafter.

Half of all new cell phone purchases were the result of being eligible for a device upgrade from a service provider, while 30% of new phone purchases were made because young adult consumers broke their previous phone. But who was actually making these purchases? Were young people themselves buying them or were they having someone make the purchase on their behalf? According to the data collected, 54% of young people were purchasing their own new mobile phone, while 38% were requesting that someone purchase the phone they desire for them.

The extent to which young consumers used their mobile phones was another subject of interest. The question that was posed to respondents was "how do you use your phone?" The response favored by most with 40% was one declaring that they "use most of its features and have downloaded a few applications beyond the standards that [they] deemed necessary." Thirty percent of respondents felt that they identified more with the following statement: "You use your phone for the basics ... and from time to time use the other applications that were standard with the phone."

There are a variety of people, places and things influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. Friends were the most influential people for young adults when looking to purchase a new mobile phone, which received a 2.15 ratings average, the highest in this category. Family was a close second with 2.10 ratings average for the most influential people who aided young people in making a decision regarding a new mobile phone. Salespeople ranked third, with a 2.04 ratings average, while organizations, associations respondents are members of, were the least influential. Young people were also asked who were the most influential when making other technology purchases (e.g. digital camera, tablets, e-books). In this case, family and friends interestingly had almost even ratings averages with 2.64 and 2.63 averages respectively. Salespeople gained a higher influence ratings average (2.13) when young people were in the market to purchase technology besides a mobile phone, but was still ranked as three out of four (family, friends, salespeople and organizations).

There are so many other things besides people who influence consumers before buying a product. Young people were asked to rate how much specific online media, print media, social media and others influenced both their mobile phone choice and other technology choices.

Any form of advertising and technology blogs took the top spots as the most influential when making a mobile phone purchase or any other technology purchase. Advertising had the highest ratings average (2.34), with 49% of young adults rating it as either somewhat or very influential in their mobile phone decision. When making other technology purchases, advertising remained number one; the ratings average increased a little bit to an average of 2.61, with more than 60% stating that advertising was either somewhat or very influential.

The second most influential media was technology blogs, which received a 1.85 rating average when young consumers were considering a new mobile phone and a 1.95 rating average for all other technology purchases. A combined 31% of young people stated that technology blogs were either somewhat or very influential.

Traditional media, such as magazines, newspapers and radio, were three of the bottom five rating averages, thus having the least amount of influence among the twelve different types of media listed. The least influential media for young consumers making a cell phone decision were, in ascending order: personal online diary blogs (1.21), radio (1.26), newspapers (1.26), YouTube (1.29) and magazines (1.31). For all other technology purchases, the following medium was influential in ascending order of ratings averages: personal diary blogs (1.24), radio (1.28), newspapers (1.30), Twitter (1.33) and YouTube (1.38).

Overall, young people were a powerful group who influenced each other as well as those from other generations. Seventy-nine percent of young people said that they had directly influenced or encouraged

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someone to purchase a specific product or brand of technology. As far as young people who are influencing people online were concerned, only 40% acknowledged that they had posted information on the Internet about technology in the past.

All respondents to this survey received some amount of a college education. People who majored in communications and social sciences represented the largest fields of study. The majority of survey respondents were females representing an overwhelming 90%. The primary age of the respondents was 20 to 23 years of age, which comprised more than 70% of respondents. Among the respondents, 60% declared they were members of the Democratic Party.

### ***Adopter Category Specific Responses***

The data was segmented according to the way respondents answered the first question, which had them select the set of characteristics that best described them. Each selection represents one of the four adjusted innovation adopter categories. The adopter categories were modeled after those from both Everett Rodgers (1983) and Peter Zollo (2004). The young adult adopter categories were developed like the following: 1. Innovators 2. Influencers 3. Majority 4. Laggards. Influencers' responses will be given an in-depth evaluation to discover trends specific to this younger set of influencers. The following is a snapshot of how young innovators, influencers, the majority and laggards responded to questions about technology habits as well as who or what has the power to persuade them.

Contrary to previous research, 50% of self-identified innovators declared that they were the last to purchase a recently released phone, usually once it's no longer a recent release. Young influencers (40%) stated that, when in the market for a new mobile phone, they wait a short while before purchasing it, while also evaluating other mobile phone options. Influencers were the most likely of all the adopter groups to have purchased their phone within the first six months of release, at a rate of 44%. The majority and laggards were much more likely to have purchased a new phone because they were due for an upgrade. Wanting something new or breaking a previous phone was a more common reason for getting a new phone among innovators (59%) and influencers (60%), although influencers were also more likely than any group to get a new phone because they wanted something new (24%).

The people that influence each of the adopter categories are the next set of insights that will be examined closely. Plans to make a new cell phone purchase or any other technology purchase will be compared and contrasted to determine to what degree each adopter category is influenced.

The influence that other people have on mobile phone purchases for all adopter categories will be discussed first. Innovators seemed to be influenced only partially by either family or friends, with 55% identifying that these people had no influence at all. Sixty-three percent of influencers felt that family was not at all influential, while they in turn felt that friends were more influential with 45% stating that friends were somewhat or most influential. The majority and laggards were overall more likely to find friends and family more influential than salespeople and organizations that they belong to in comparison to innovators and influencers. In contrast, innovators and influencers were more likely to find salespeople and organizations that they are associated with more influential than the majority and laggards.

When making other technology buying decisions, the amount of influence that people have on young people's buying decisions increased. Laggards recorded friends as more influential, a 3.0 ratings average, when comparing their responses to other adopter groups. Of all the adopter groups, influencers were more likely to believe that family members were the most influential with a 2.85 ratings average. Salespeople and organizations have the most influence on influencers, when comparing ratings to other adopter groups, a 2.25 rating average for salespeople and a 1.50 rating average for organizations.

The influence that the media has on young people's decisions within specific adopter categories, whether making mobile phone purchases or other technology purchases, is of enormous importance since we are exposed to so many messages every day. The influence that the media has on general technology purchases is greater than the influence it has on mobile phone purchases.

Interestingly, all adopter groups are influenced the most by advertisements when making mobile phone purchases. The influencer group was the most influenced by advertisements, capturing a 2.7 ratings average. In comparing how influential advertisements are across adopter segments, the innovators fell on the lower end of the ratings averages (2.09) for advertisements.

Facebook was the most influential with laggards when considering the purchase of a new mobile

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phone (1.42 ratings average). Facebook fared the worst with innovators, documenting a 1.18 ratings average for the amount of influence that the social media network has on their mobile purchasing decision. Online news sites had a decent amount of influence among all adopter categories except the innovators, but the most influence was with influencers who at least felt that online news was somewhat influential at a rate of 40%. Technology blogs was another area that exhibited a fairly solid amount of influence with influencers, having the largest share of people (35%) attributing that technology blogs had at least somewhat of an influence on their purchasing decision.

The rate that young people across all categories are influencing others to purchase a particular product or brand offered interesting data. More than 80% of laggards and the majority stated that they had influenced others in making a particular technology purchase of a specific product or specific brand. Innovators and influencers, however, averaged about ten points less than the previous segments with about 70% declaring that they had influenced others to purchase a certain technology.

Among innovators, the iPhone took the largest piece of the pie with 37%, while Droid and Evo model phones shared the second spot with 25%, each, and Blackberry, 13%.

Influencers felt that Droid model phones (19%) were worthy as the second coolest phone after iPhone (52%), the Evo as the third accounted for 14%, followed by HTC(10% and Blackberry (5%).

The majority, the largest adopter category, agreed that the iPhone (66%) was the coolest phone at 66%), followed by Droid (16%), Blackberry (11%), HTC(5%), and Evo(2%). Laggards were more likely to name Blackberry (28%) and Droid (29%) phones as cool although the bulk of them named the iPhone (43%) more than any other phone.

It's also interesting to note that the Evo received recognition among the innovators and influencers (a combined 39%), but virtually none (2%) among the other two groups. Since the Evo is considered one of the most advanced phones on the market, could this be the next coolest phone for young adults?

## **IV. Discussion**

Young innovators, influencers, the majority and laggards for the most part seemed to confirm what past research about each specific category suggested, although there was some variance. New information was discovered mostly related to behavioral patterns, which were slightly different from what researchers had predicted. The study showed that influencers *could* be identified and segmented according to the adopter segmentation groups. However, while influencers typically stayed the course and proved themselves with each behavioral response, innovators and laggards created some unexpected trends.

Slightly more than half of innovators (54%) either use their phones for the basics or the bare minimum, which speaks volumes for a group that is supposed to be the least traditional and the most venture-some when it comes to trying new things. The sources of influence for innovators were also not consistent with what Rodgers said about this group. For example, innovators were the least likely to be influenced by most media. These well-connected innovators were also the least likely to post information online about technology. Additionally, one of the least likely groups to directly influence someone's buying decision were innovators. This could suggest that these self-declared innovators are perhaps not innovators in technology but in other genres, such as clothing or music.

Laggards, who are termed as being the most traditional of all adopter categories and typically suspicious of change, actually influence others more than past research has given them credit for when it comes to technology. This group of suspicious traditionalists was the most likely to have posted something online about technology over any other group. Young adult laggards were also the most likely adopter category to identify that they have directly influenced another person in the purchase of a specific brand or product. These findings certainly suggest that laggards are not just sitting back and letting other groups influence them, perhaps passing influence along to others, although whom they influenced is not particularly clear. Another possible explanation could be that, because laggards are so suspicious of change, when they find something new that earns their seal of approval they feel compelled to share it with others.

Influencers were most influenced by family members, when generally purchasing technology, and by friends, when specifically purchasing mobile phones. This could suggest that innovators rely on the opinion of their friends when looking for a new phone because friends are more likely to use their phones in the same

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way as they do, whereas family members may include older adults who use their phones differently. These family members, however, are likely more experienced or knowledgeable in other technology fields when it comes to televisions, computers, cameras, home printers, appliances and various other items.

When making purchasing decisions about mobile phones and other technologies, influencers are mostly influenced by advertising and technology blogs. Advertisements took the number one spot as far as the influence that the media have, proving that advertising was not completely irrelevant to young people. The type of advertising that influenced influencers the most offered potential for further research, whether it is television ads, outdoor ads, online ads or some other form of advertising. Technology blogs were a strong second for not only influencers, but all other adopter groups except laggards, whose second most influential media varied depending on whether they are in the market for a mobile phone or other technology. Larger technology blogs were often authored by reputable technology experts and had millions of unique visitors that translated into vast influence on most adopter categories including influencers.

Influencers decided that the iPhone was the coolest phone, although it was not a landslide decision, with only 52% of the vote. Droid phones accounted for 19% and the Evo phone consisted of 14% of influencers' opinions. Influencers also indicated that they waited a short while after the release of a phone before purchasing it, while also evaluating other options. This suggests that influencers were always on the hunt for the latest and greatest phone when they were in the market for one, but they did not lose all interest in one particular model just because a more recent release arrived. Demographically, influencers were more likely to be politically affiliated with the Democratic Party.

The way that the survey questions were composed did not help discover an additional adopter group, but more open-ended questions to describe respondents' behavior might have allowed for such a discovery. For the purpose of segmenting respondents into specific categories as planned by this research, it was best to keep personality and behavioral questions typical of each of the four groups, innovators, influencers, majority and laggards, within separate response choices for each question throughout this research.

Something that surfaced to challenge what previous research claimed is that the majority and laggards did influence others. Although they may not be influencers of the newest technology, perhaps they were influencers in determining what's current or of items that have become staples of society. The influence that Facebook has on laggards when making mobile phone decisions suggests that social media is what marketers should turn to when looking to create a lasting brand and product visibility. Advertising is what should be a top priority when looking to introduce a new product or brand to the marketplace, so that innovators and influencers can take the concept and spread it to the masses in the process to create a major innovation. Thus, the diffusion of innovations theory may need to be expanded or elaborated upon to include the differences in the communications sources that may be relevant to each adopter group at each phase of the diffusion process.

This study is limited to a non-random sample of young adults. Future research should use a random sample to see whether these results can be generalized to a larger population. In particular, since this study was comprised primarily of female respondents, it would be interesting to investigate the issues after adding an equivalent number of males. In addition, because respondents were asked to self identify with one of the adopter categories through a forced-choice question. It is possible that respondents may not have accurately selected the characteristics that truly described their habits. Future research should take this into account and devise a lengthier set of adopter profile questions that can segment respondent characteristics. Adding qualitative interviews to the study may also help confirm these initial findings.

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