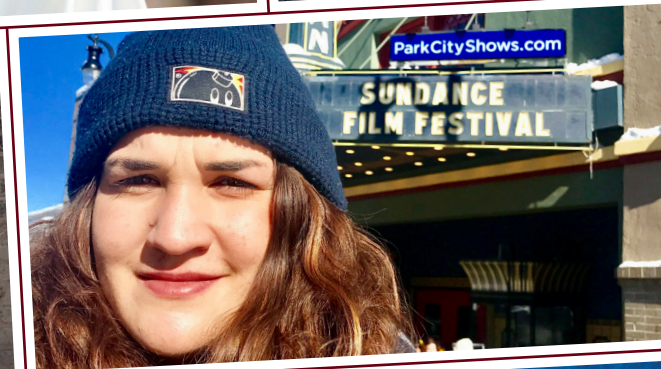


ELON JOURNAL

OF UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH IN

COMMUNICATIONS



Spring 2019

VOLUME 10, NO. 1



ELON
UNIVERSITY

School of Communications

Joining the World of Journals

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

The website of the Council on Undergraduate Research lists more than 200 undergraduate research journals nationwide (http://www.cur.org/resources/students/undergraduate_journals/).

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 others are university-based and disciplinary (e.g., Harvard Political Review).

The Elon Journal focuses 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 in the journal may be downloaded, reproduced and redistributed without permission for non-commercial purposes as long as the author and source are properly cited. Student authors retain copyright ownership of their works.

A Celebration of Student Research

I am so proud that Elon University is home to the nation's only undergraduate research journal in communications.

This twice-a-year publication provides opportunities for our students to extend themselves beyond the classroom and investigate new areas of interest tied to their fields of study. Through research, our students further develop critical thinking skills, creativity, problem-solving abilities and intellectual independence.

This journal reflects what we enjoy seeing most in our students – continued intellectual maturation.

Complemented by video introductions featuring the student authors, these articles make us aware of the solitary hours that students spend in research, as well as the untold hours in which students and teacher-mentors work together to revise a paper for public consumption. These relationships and experiences often transform a student's future career path, making these projects truly life-changing.

This journal is a celebration of undergraduate research, as well as a celebration of learning, critical thinking and exploration.

Dr. Rochelle Ford, APR
Dean, School of Communications

Editorial Board

Nearly 30 faculty members in Elon's School of Communications served as the Editorial Board that selected 12 undergraduate research papers for the spring 2019 issue.

From more than 100 research papers written in advanced School of Communications classes, 21 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 Bill Anderson, Vanessa Bravo, Lee Bush, Naeemah Clark, David Copeland, Vic Costello, Kelly Furnas, Kenn Gaither, Jessica Gisclair, Don Grady, Ben Hannam, Sana Haq, Anthony Hatcher, Dan Haygood, Jooyun Hwang, Laura Lacy, Byung Lee, Alex Luchsinger, Barbara Miller, William Moner, Phillip Motley, Tom Nelson, Jane O'Boyle, George Padgett, Glenn Scott, Kathleen Stansberry, Jessalyn Strauss, Amanda Sturgill, Hal Vincent, and Qian Xu.

Thanks also go to Bryan Baker and Mitch Herndon, who recorded the website's student introductions; Associate Deans Don Grady and Kenn Gaither, who reviewed articles to help ensure the quality of the journal; and Tommy Kopetskie, who proofread articles, designed the online publication, and updated the publication's website.

Editor's Note

The spring 2019 issue of the *Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications* is dominated by two primary concerns: representation and engagement.

Representation, the manner in which media depict constituent groups in society, is examined by our undergraduate scholars in a wide range of contexts. Laney Alspaugh's study of how magazines contextualize a well-known African hairstyle, Kristina Piersanti's analysis of Italian-American roles in cinema, Meagan Henderson's comparison of black women in television programs 20 years apart, and Erin McDowell's research on diversity in the fashion industry each discover that race and ethnicity depictions often lag far behind the demographic realities of the population, and are often sorely lacking in context and nuance.

Two articles focus on representation of gender: Lindsey Case's visual analysis explores magazine ads through the lens of the "femvertising" movement, while Devin Kiernan examines television shows and what messages they may be sending to teenage girls about eating disorders.

Engagement with social media is the focus of four articles in this issue. Leah Kay's study of Pope Francis, and Stefanie Milovic's analysis of North Carolina politicians, each give insight into how people in power, or those who seek power, use social media. Conversely, Jenna Barone and Anna Cosentino each focus on the audience and how they engaged with social media to make sense of two very different events: the suicide of celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain, and the controversial Nike ad campaign featuring former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick.

In addition, studies by Lucas Buck and Dana Chwatt each explore how writers with different perspectives and backgrounds can see things in vastly divergent ways. Buck's comparison of professional and amateur film reviews discovers that the two groups do not share the same set of values about cinema, while Chwatt's content analysis of a Jewish newspaper and an Arab newspaper finds that each publication had its own set of frames in explaining the move of the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

These are serious topics, and I hope you will join me in applauding these students for tackling them in such a rigorous manner.

Harlen Makemson
Professor
Editor, *Elon Journal*

Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications

Volume 10, No. 1 • Spring 2019

Is Cultural Appropriation Braided into Fashion Coverage? An Examination of American Magazines <i>Laney Alspaugh</i>	6
Making Sense of a Celebrity Suicide: Qualitative Analysis of High-Engagement Tweets Following the Suicide of Anthony Bourdain <i>Jenna L. Barone</i>	15
Dissecting the Sundance Curse: Exploring Discrepancies Between Film Reviews by Professional and Amateur Critics <i>Lucas Buck</i>	27
From Femininity to Feminism: A Visual Analysis of Advertisements Before and After the Femvertising Movement <i>Lindsey M. Case</i>	35
Framing of the U.S. Embassy Move to Jerusalem: A Comparative Qualitative Study <i>Dana Chwatt</i>	46
Risk and Reward: An Analysis of #BoycottNike as a Response to Nike's Colin Kaepernick Advertising Campaign <i>Anna Cosentino</i>	54
Portrayals of Black Women in TV Shows That Aired in 1997 Versus 2017: A Qualitative Content Analysis <i>Meagan Henderson</i>	64
Pope Francis or @Pontifex? The Engagement from Pope Francis's Presence on Twitter <i>Leah Kay</i>	70
"I Wanted To Be Like Her": A Study of Eating Behaviors and Attitudes in Television Shows Targeted to Teenage Girls <i>Devin Kiernan</i>	81

Improved Racial Diversity on the Runways of Fashion Week <i>Erin McDowell</i>	<i>92</i>
Vote for Me: How North Carolina Politicians Use Facebook to Engage with Online Users During a Campaign <i>Stefanie R. Milovic</i>	<i>100</i>
Portrayals of Italian Americans in U.S.-Produced Films <i>Kristina Piersanti</i>	<i>111</i>

Is Cultural Appropriation Braided into Fashion Coverage? An Examination of American Magazines

Laney Alspaugh

Strategic Communications
Elon University

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

Abstract

Cultural appropriation, the use of culturally laden images by people with no association with that culture, occurs across the fashion industry. Such appropriation can be practiced without an understanding or appreciation of the originating culture, thereby cheapening the underlying heritage. This study explored the incidence of and attitudes toward cultural appropriation of cornrows as depicted in three U.S. fashion magazines (Cosmopolitan, Vogue, and Essence) from 2013-2018. The author used a qualitative content analysis, structured by framing theory, to explore how each publication uniquely addressed the cultural appropriation of this hairstyle over time. This study identified a shift in the depiction of cornrows across the magazines in 2016 toward a more socially conscious perspective. This shift differed in each publication. Cosmopolitan developed an explicitly verbalized stance against the cultural appropriation of cornrows, Vogue shifted its visual depiction of this hairstyle, and Essence most often depicted cornrows within cultural and historical contexts.

I. Introduction

Instances of cultural appropriation, the use of culturally laden iconic images by people who have no association with that culture, have drawn increased attention in recent years. Cultural appropriation can be a form of denigration, especially of a minority or foreign culture. The complexity of this issue is heightened in an increasingly pluralistic society in which many people might want to explore and appreciate aspects of cultures to which they do not belong. Therefore, the motives for appropriation might range from a well-meaning intercultural exploration, to a negative expression of xenophobia. Over time, there has been a shift in American society away from cultural appropriation by white culture. Occurrences of appropriation have become more noted, and their elimination urged.

While cultural appropriation is a powerful societal phenomenon, many suggest that it casts a particularly dark shadow on the fashion industry, which prides itself on emphasizing innovation and prestige. Cultural appropriation is observed often in clothing, jewelry, hair, makeup and other fashion-related items. Thus, the fashion industry is important to examine as it frequently borrows elements from the past and other cultures.

In particular, this study examined the portrayal of cornrows in high-profile fashion publications, including an exploration of the culturally rich and potentially sacred features of this hairstyle, and how

Keywords: magazines, cultural appropriation, framing theory, qualitative content analysis
Email: malspaugh@elon.edu

appropriation of the cornrows style may cheapen its history and meaning.

Fashion magazines are ideal to analyze, as these publications transmit fresh and important industry trends and values to its readers. Specifically, this study explores whether there is a change in the portrayal of cornrows, a culturally laden hairstyle, among three prominent fashion publications – *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue*, and *Essence* – from 2013-2018. Using framing theory, the research identifies a substantive shift in content in some publications, reflecting the public's increased attention on appropriation of trends, dances and songs that originated in other cultures.

II. Literature Review

In previous scholarship, there are connections between how magazines frame cultural appropriation and how its readers perceive the appropriation. Research has examined the cultural appropriation of black hair, the role fashion magazines play in society, and the effect of framing on an audience's attitude. These scholars lay the foundation for studying how a magazine's perspective concerning the cultural appropriation of cornrows may influence readers.

Interestingly, very few scholarly articles explicitly define the term "cultural appropriation." Rogers (2006) defines cultural appropriation as "the use of a culture's symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals or technologies by members of another culture" (p. 474). On the other hand, Alexander (2001) writes that "appropriation occurs when someone else speaks for, defines, describes, represents, uses or recruits the images, stories, experience and dreams of others for their own" (p. 185).

Rogers suggests that cultural appropriation is inevitable when different cultures interact either physically or virtually. One can appropriate history, ways of knowledge, or modes of expression from other cultures (Rogers, 2006). Rogers describes categories that name the conditions under which acts of appropriation occur, such as cultural exploitation, or appropriative acts that reinforce the dominant culture. These instances often carry the connotation of stealing or exploiting the culture of a minority group.

There often are serious negative consequences that arise when a dominant culture marginalizes members of a minority culture through appropriation. At worst, this type of negative intercultural interaction can involve taking from another culture things that are not one's own, such as intellectual property or historical artifacts. Lancefield, Ziff, and Rao (1998) identify key concerns about acts of cultural appropriation by dominant cultures, including a loss of nuanced understanding of other cultures, and the removal of context from cultural objects or practices. Isabella Alexander adds to this by explaining how items that have been appropriated from another culture are often wrongfully exploited for financial gain. Creating cheap duplicates devalue the original item by stripping it of its significance. Whatever is being appropriated is more than just a tool, decoration, or trend; it is often interwoven into the religion, land, and overall social structure (Alexander, 2001).

Other scholars study appropriation in specific cultural contexts. For example, White (2017) examined the appropriation of the war bonnet in popular culture and whether it would ever be correct for anyone to wear this traditional Native American headgear other than members of the culture from which it originated. White's article demonstrates the extent to which this specific appropriation occurred, examined the criticism received by brands that engaged in this appropriation, and explored the backlash received by "cultural appropriation critics" who were concerned with excessive censorship. This exploration into the range of public attitudes over the wearing of a piece of Native American culture demonstrates the current societal divide between those who categorically disapprove of cultural appropriation and those who are more permissive of the practice.

A specific example of a unique cultural feature are cornrows. The traditional hairstyle of many sub-Saharan African cultures, cornrows are distinguished by hair braided close to the scalp. They have a rich history and represent much more than just a hairstyle. The story begins in parts of Africa where hairstyles were often elaborate works of art, exhibiting styles like braids and designs shaved into the scalp. The social, aesthetic, and spiritual significance of this decoration has been intrinsic to the sense of self among the originating cultures for thousands of years (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). Because of this, hair has never been a purely cosmetic attribute for many West African people. The specific style of hair in each African culture signified characteristics, like a person's marital status, age, religion and prominence within the community.

Because of the spiritual aspects associated with hair, people took great care of it. Byrd and Tharps note that in many African cultures, neglected or messy hair implied a deep disturbance, such as one being

bereaved, depressed or habitually dirty. For this reason, there was a significant and often overlooked importance in the treatment of African hair in America. Newly arrived African slaves were often subjected to having their hair shaved, a mindless act that disregards African culture. To slaves, and likely to many of the slave owners, this act represented the elimination of autonomy. In many African cultures, a shaved head was equivalent to taking away one's identity (Byrd & Tharps, 2014).

Among Africans now living in the Americas, hair tended to carry less of its original meaning in a land dominated by fair skin and straight hair; instead, hairstyles often mirrored the desires to conform to the prevailing power dynamics, even after emancipation. Conforming seemed necessary for survival, as jobs and education were often contingent on the texture of hair and skin tone (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). Even as recently as the 1970s and 1980s, American culture often racially characterized people of color according to how they styled their hair. In 1977, a soldier was nearly court-martialed simply for sporting cornrows. Until the late 1980s, some major corporations, perceived "natural" hair and braids by blacks as undesirable and grounds for dismissal (Babou, 2009).

The conversation began to shift in the 1990s when natural hair, and hair braiding in particular, started to gain recognition in mainstream circles. Braiders were seen as artists and lauded for their creations. Newspapers ran photo spreads of braids, and cornrows received positive media attention. This positive portrayal allowed African American women to present themselves in a way that most represented themselves and their culture (Babou, 2009). Although there was a less intense need to conform to society and sacrifice ancestral identity, another issue began to arise - that of cultural appropriation. With the rise in the popularity in braiding, other cultures began to consider this as a highly desirable beauty trend. In doing this, however, many people disregarded the history of African hair and braiding. The lack of understanding and respect for the culture and history of cornrows resulted in inappropriate cultural appropriation, rather than behavior derived from respect for others.

Fashion magazines popularized African-style hair braiding as a cultural trend, and women's fashion magazines have a longstanding history in defining where society is at that time (MacGowan, 2014). These are publications written almost exclusively for women and by women, combining elements of health, beauty, fashion, relationships and work. For more than three centuries, women's magazines have provided their readers with a public forum in which their voices could be heard (MacGowan, 2014). Despite the common stereotype that these magazines primarily focus on women's issues, American women's fashion magazines helped to modify the role of women in an American society.

Fashion magazines simultaneously represent and influence the current society by portraying aspects of beauty among a diverse group of women. In this way, they are powerful influencers of culture. Bramlett-Solomon (2002) studied this phenomenon, documenting the representation of black women in fashion magazine ads throughout the 1990s. She determined that there was a stark contrast between the number of black and white women featured. However, the ads that depicted black women increasingly challenged mainstream perceptions of beauty. Even as Babou (2009) described the 1990s as a time that popularized black hair traditions, he found that there was still a dominance of images that strongly favored European beauty standards. This demonstrates both the lack of representation of black women in magazines and the dismissal of more African cultural traditions. Babou found some movement toward redefining acceptable beauty standards in ways that emphasized ethnic images, although this was not the predominantly depicted fashion paradigm.

Scholars have identified changes in cultural trends using various theoretical constructs, including framing theory. Frames affect the attitudes and behaviors of an audience according to how a topic is presented. Media focus attention on certain issues, consciously choosing a certain angle on a topic (Goffman, 1974). The way the topic is presented, the angle chosen, creates a frame for that information. Framing theory expands on agenda setting research, as it includes the media telling the audience what aspects of an issue to focus upon. Framing works by making new beliefs available about an issue, making certain available beliefs accessible, or making beliefs applicable in people's evaluations (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Frames do not have to be true and sometimes can play on the predispositions of the public, building the frame around misrepresentation and fabrication. Journalists have the ability to pick and choose aspects of a topic and the ability to write a story from a chosen perspective, including one that aligns with the magazine and societal values (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

This study, through framing theory, will examine how fashion magazines have changed the way they address and display black hair. While black hair and its appropriation has been studied, there is little

insight into how conversations about cornrows have altered over time, especially in recent years. Fashion magazines that have the platform to discuss hair are the ideal content to analyze, as these publications transmit fresh and important trends and values to their readers. Cultural appropriation, cornrows and fashion magazines have all been studied, but not as a collective concept: How fashion magazines frame the cultural appropriation of cornrows.

III. Methods

This study examined three fashion magazines: *Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Essence*. Each of these magazines was chosen for the specific context it provides.

Vogue is the most esteemed fashion publication internationally, and is considered by many readers to be a personal fashion Bible. Its prominence has led people to use *Vogue* as a voice to represent the heart of the fashion industry. Outside of fashion, this magazine has acknowledged current political and cultural issues by featuring women in burqas and endorsing Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Presidential election (McLarney, 2009). Knowing *Vogue*'s stance will be powerful to demonstrate the perspective of fashion's leading industry experts.

Cosmopolitan is the highest selling women's fashion magazine in the U.S. It grew to this level because of shock value, an approach that challenged conventional societal norms. While the level of shock was originally due to more risqué content, *Cosmopolitan* is now known for its progressive stance on societal issues, especially women's rights. Delving into the conversation of America's most popular fashion magazine will be vital to this study.

Essence is different, being the only magazine selected that targets a specific racial demographic, African American women. Although similar in format, layout and content to the other women's fashion magazines, *Essence* is a magazine both by and for African American women. This publication focuses African American women's issues, an important one being cultural appropriation. This is a distinct and important perspective, because the magazine speaks to its demographic as a community being appropriated.

Articles from the online database of each magazine were sampled between 2013-2018. A consistent subset of months (March, May, August and November) for each year were chosen. The months were selected to represent each fashion season and to limit the sample to an appropriate size. The online version of women's fashion magazines are regularly updated, usually daily, which provides more content by volume than the monthly editions. The specific example of traditional African hairstyles, that of cornrows, was chosen because this term would likely be used in a similar manner in all three fashion magazines. This specific term was also a subject of widespread discussion during this time period, making it likely this hairstyle would be covered as a topic of artistic expression.

The identified articles were then examined through a qualitative content analysis based on a study by Clarke (2010). Once all of the articles were collected, each was individually analyzed for the nature of the reference—whether cornrows was the main topic of the article or if it was simply included as a reference. For the 11 articles in which cornrows were the main focus, the study also determined the prominent themes that emerged. Additionally, if an image paired with the reference was not of a person of color, it was noted if there was any mention of cultural appropriation and if there was an implied negative or positive connotation. For the purpose of this study, it was considered to be culturally appropriating if the person was not clearly of African descent.

IV. Findings & Discussion

Across all three magazines, cornrows were referenced in a total of 81 instances between 2013-2018. However, there was a large disparity when comparing the number of articles found in each magazine. *Cosmopolitan* only had a total of seven mentions, which was far lower than the 28 mentions in *Vogue* and 48 mentions in *Essence*. The frequency of articles was not the only difference among the magazines. Each publication differed in how often the topic of cultural appropriation appeared in conjunction with cornrows, and how each magazine's coverage of the cultural appropriation of cornrows shifted over time.

Topical Emphasis on Cornrows

Out of the 81 articles that referenced cornrows, only 11 featured cornrows as the main topic. There was a clear imbalance in the number of these articles from each magazine: *Cosmopolitan* had two, *Vogue* had zero, and *Essence* had the remaining nine. Similar content frames were evident across all of the magazine articles.

The majority of these articles over the five-year period focused on cornrows in the context of celebrity. The purpose of these articles seemed to be to portray the prevalence of the hairstyle and its place in society. By employing the frame of celebrity across a variety of contexts, these articles demonstrated how commonplace cornrows were becoming and the increasing acceptance from society. The articles' wording fostered a sense of inspiration and belonging for *Essence* readers. *Cosmopolitan* also had an article that highlighted celebrities and cornrows, but the focus was on a celebrity appropriating the style (Rose, 2015). The article was brief, describing the celebrity's actions—posting a picture with cornrows on social media—and documenting the commentary of others expressing their distaste. In contrast to *Essence*, the celebrity was not acting as a source of inspiration or education for the reader. Instead, *Cosmopolitan*'s inclusion of a celebrity appropriating cornrows was an effort to remain relevant by covering a culturally controversial moment.

The articles that did not concentrate on celebrities examined cornrows through societal frames. These articles were more profound, often commenting on society's lack of acceptance. In contrast to the celebrity-focused articles, these articles identified social issues and explained the history of this hairstyle's controversial nature. Each article paired either the author's personal journey or a newsworthy event to illustrate this theme. Regardless of the publication, these articles in *Cosmopolitan* and *Essence* had two purposes: to inspire and educate.

An article in *Cosmopolitan* that followed the author's journey of hair acceptance exemplified these trends. The author wrote that she had felt forced to embrace the more societally acceptable straight hair for the majority of her life, disregarding her African roots. Her outlook changed once she began learning about how deeply cornrows ties are rooted in African history. Here she referenced research about the chronicled prejudice that surrounded black hair, like black women being fired from jobs for embracing their natural texture (Allen, 2017). Some articles in *Essence* were also presented in a societal context. Rather than the focus being on a personal hair journey though, these articles emphasized newsworthy events that touched on cornrows. These events often pertained to influencers commenting on the cultural appropriation of cornrows. One of *Essence*'s articles included an influencer challenging the trendy nature of cornrows among celebrities and socialites. Her frustration arose because "braids are not new. Black women have been wearing braids for a long time... cornrows became new and fresh and fun, because it was on someone else other than a black woman" (Perkins, 2016).

These societally-focused articles that featured cornrows as the main topic were mostly written by women of color. As a part of the population whose hair is being appropriated, these women spoke based on their personal experiences and inspired others to push past the prejudice and embrace their background. The writers noted the strides that had been made in this country, but also that there was still a pressing need for societal acceptance of cornrows.

The 70 articles that did not place their primary focus on cornrows simply included the hairstyle as a fleeting mention (*Vogue*: 28; *Essence*: 37; *Cosmopolitan*: 5). Often this was in a list of other braided styles, or as a brief example for inspiration. The single-word reference was most common in *Vogue* articles (28 single-mention instances), which is notable because *Vogue* had no articles dedicated to cornrows as the main discussion point. The role of cornrows in *Vogue*'s articles, as well as *Cosmopolitan* (5) and *Essence*'s (37) brief references, was often noted as a trend worn by celebrities or fashion designers.

Difference in Depiction of Cultural Appropriation

When analyzing articles where cornrows were the primary focus, there were a few similarities between the magazines. For example, *Cosmopolitan* and *Essence* only portrayed cornrows in a negative light when they were being appropriated. In each instance when cornrows were worn by a non-person of color, the articles dismissed the person wearing them and suggested a poor understanding of the cultural and social implications.

However, there were also differences between each publication's reference to cultural appropriation. This discrepancy was most evident when directly comparing two articles that covered the same topic, but

was written for different magazines. One example was the coverage by both *Vogue* and *Essence* concerning Solange Knowles's "Saturday Night Live" performance in 2016. Both of the articles in *Essence* and *Vogue* referenced cornrows, but the amount devoted to the hairstyle's place in society differed between the magazines. *Vogue*'s article was more of an overarching discussion of Knowles's performance. Praising her beauty and ingenuity, the article said that she stunned in "a netted crystal dress and a sparkling headpiece reminiscent of a dreamcatcher placed atop her finely woven cornrows" (Schulte-Hillen, 2016). It was clear by the end of the article that the purpose was not to praise her cornrows, but to use Solange's sparkly outfit to identify glitter as the new holiday trend.

Vogue's coverage of cornrows in the Solange Knowles performance stands in stark contrast to that in *Essence*. Although the *Essence* article opened similarly to *Vogue*'s, it moved quickly past the fashion analysis and focused in on Solange's hair. "It was beautifully plaited with cornrows and topped off with a show-stopping headpiece by artist Shani Crowe that resembled a dazzling halo, which took more than 40 hours of braiding and beading" (Wilson, 2016). The article continued by further discussing the partnership between artists, as both had a history of celebrating and supporting braid designs on black women. The article began to touch on the implications of a celebrity supporting an artist that engages with the history of African hair. Although neither the performance nor the celebrity written about in this article directly related to an instance of cultural appropriation, *Essence* took the time to depict its connection in this article.

Although *Cosmopolitan* did not dedicate an article to this particular performance, its approach to the discussion of cultural appropriation in other articles had similarities to how *Essence* addressed cornrows. *Cosmopolitan* often strongly referenced this fashion style as cultural appropriation. This portrayal of cornrows was evident no matter the context of the article, from a journalist's personal hair journey in accepting her natural hair, to exposing institutional racism in public school dress codes. Although this sometimes seemed to be a method of maintaining relevancy, especially in its coverage of celebrities donning cornrows, it still demonstrated *Cosmopolitan*'s awareness of appropriation and its disapproval for it.

Shift In Coverage of Cultural Appropriation

When considering the evolution of each publication from 2013-2018, the development of coverage in each magazine varied. *Cosmopolitan* remained rather consistent in the number of articles written about cornrows throughout the years, while *Vogue* and *Essence* each increased coverage. For example, *Vogue* had zero mentions of cornrows in 2013, but had eight in 2018. Similarly, *Essence* had one article in 2013, but 15 in 2018.

While the number of articles written about cornrows in *Essence* increased, the nature of the articles' content did not change. Throughout the period studied, cornrows were heralded with rich history and recognized as a part of *Essence* readers' daily lives. Its first article emphasized the cultural appropriation of cornrows that one woman has observed throughout her life, and the most recent article listed celebrity examples to inspire new cornrow styles. During each year, there were a variety of approaches used in articles that touched on the cultural appropriation of cornrows. The mere mention of cornrows in an *Essence* article would lead to the discussion of appropriation.

In 2016, though, there was a significant increase in the number of articles written about the cultural appropriation of cornrows. This increase could have been due to other changes in society. However, when comparing this shift in 2016 to the other magazines, it is plausible that the increase in these articles could be due to the editors and writers at *Essence* wanting to conjure a change in society. *Essence* maintained a consistent frame that constructed a negative portrayal of cornrows in the context of cultural appropriation. Because the shift was not in how the magazine discussed cornrows (meaning the frame was consistent), the shift occurred in *how often* this topic was discussed. Thus, it was clearly a priority to shift this frame into the forefront of its readers' minds.

Essence is a magazine that predominantly targets African American women. To evoke a sense of importance, *Essence* increased the number of articles written on the cultural appropriation of cornrows. It is clear the magazine wanted its readers – and by extension society as a whole – to put greater focus on appropriation. In addition, the increase in coverage by both *Cosmopolitan* and *Vogue* in 2016 suggest *Essence* may have had an influence on the coverage of other magazines with different demographics. The role of intermedia influence on framing is beyond the scope of this study, but interesting to consider.

The shift that was observed in *Cosmopolitan* in 2016 was a change in both authorship and content. All

of the articles prior to 2016 were related to celebrity controversy. Although there was discussion of celebrities appropriating cornrows, it was minimal and did not detail the issue in its fullest extent by drawing from history and culture. Instead of defining the deeper issues underlying appropriation, the articles appeared to be more interested in celebrity news. Once the shift occurred in 2016, the articles transitioned to more in-depth discussions, covering deeper topics concerning appropriation and social change.

The noticeable difference in *Cosmopolitan* content may be due to the change in the race of its writers. While the authors of the articles in 2015 were white, those writing in 2016 were women of color. As an example, one article in particular was written by a black woman who spoke of her personal experience with cornrows, as well as the institutional racism evident in situations where hair is used to stop people with natural hair from following dress codes (Allen, 2017). This shift underscores the importance of someone of color writing about the topic; someone who had experience with this prejudice. The increase in articles may have demonstrated that *Cosmopolitan* realized that other magazines, like *Essence*, were deepening its coverage of cultural appropriation. The writers and editors realized that this issue should be treated as more than just a catchy headline, but a deep and serious topic.

In *Vogue*, the language and content of the articles remained primarily the same from 2013-2018. *Vogue*'s purpose and main message was to cover culture and fashion with an idealized and mostly glorifying tone. Throughout its articles during this time, cornrows were regarded with beauty and style. The difference, though, was that *Vogue* never addressed appropriation when covering non-people of color wearing cornrows. There was never a negative comment about cornrows, which were often lumped in with the other examples of braids. There was never a comment about the history of cornrows or their origin.

Despite this, there was still a shift that was unnoticeable if just looking at the articles' copy. The major shift that occurred in 2016 issues of *Vogue* was the visual representation of race and cornrows. In 2015, the celebrities or models that were portrayed donning cornrows were mainly white. Whether at a fashion show, on red carpets, or on social media, it did not matter. Whoever was wearing cornrows was featured the same—as a new trend for everyone to enjoy. However, in 2016 the representation changed, as *Vogue* stopped depicting people with cornrows if he or she was not a person of color. This visual shift is notable, because aside from the image, there was no change in content emphasis. Throughout the years, there was never a mention of cultural appropriation at all, not in a positive or negative manner. No matter the year or the race of the person, *Vogue* regarded people wearing cornrows exactly the same in the articles' framing. Given the demonstrated overall change in coverage from *Essence* and *Cosmopolitan* however, *Vogue*'s 2016 racial shift in photographs depicting cornrows suggest that the magazine was well aware of the changing cultural ground.

V. Conclusion

This study sought to explore the cultural appropriation of cornrows within the context of three U.S. fashion magazines and how the coverage developed between 2013-2018. The study determined that the development differed for each publication. The two publications that often featured cornrows as a main article topic, *Cosmopolitan* and *Essence*, had a clearer evolution of content during the period examined.

While *Cosmopolitan* remained steady in the number of articles on the cultural appropriation of cornrows, a shift in authorship coincided with a change in content. The articles initially placed a greater focus on celebrity controversy concerning cornrows, but later evolved to focus on the larger implications of appropriation. This shift in content was paired with a shift in authorship, as the later articles were written almost exclusively by women of color. *Essence* had the largest increase in the number of articles written on the topic over time. The difference in content was less evident in *Vogue*'s analysis, because none of its articles featured cornrows or their appropriation as the main discussion of an article. *Vogue*, however, changed its visual representation of race, showing people of color with cornrows. The visual treatment of those shown with cornrows changed, but *Vogue*'s discussion of those wearing them did not.

The convergence of an increase in *Essence* conversations with the shifts in portrayals of cornrows in *Vogue* and *Cosmopolitan* suggest that *Essence* could be driving the media and societal conversation concerning cornrows to a more robust and culturally conscious place. However, it must be noted that this study was limited in scope. These three magazines are not necessarily representative of the fashion industry as a whole, and this study could only make conclusions based only on these magazines' specific content.

In addition, the content was limited to four specific months. Thus, it did not capture mentions of cultural appropriation or cornrows during other months. Another limitation of this study is that only trends, and not motives of editors and writers, can be assessed. Future research could examine other U.S. or global fashion magazines, as well as include a larger sample during each year.

Acknowledgments

The author is grateful for the advice and guidance given by Professor Harlen Makemson throughout the publication of this article. The author also thanks the School of Communications and her friends and family for their support.

References

- Accelerating acceptance. (2017). GLAAD. Retrieved November 3, 2017, from http://www.glaad.org/files/aa/2017_GLAAD_Accelerating_Acceptance.pdf
- Alexander, I. (2001). White law, black art. *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 10(2), 185-216.
- Allen, M. (2017, August 21). I swapped my straight hair for 4 months of braids – Here's what I learned. Retrieved from <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/style-beauty/beauty/a11429634/box-braids-experiment/>
- Babou, C. A. (2009). Exploring the impact of migration abroad and at home: Money, "caste," gender, and social status among Senegalese female hair braiders in the United States. *Africa Today*, 55(2), 2-22.
- Bramlett-Solomon, S. (2002). Barely there but redefining beauty? Black women in fashion magazine ads. *Organization for the Study of Communication*, 25(2), 1-3.
- Byrd, A. D., & Tharps, L. L. (2014). *Hair story: Untangling the roots of black hair in America*. New York: St. Martins Griffin.
- Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10, 103-126.
- Clarke, J. (2009). Women's work, worry and fear: The portrayal of sexuality and sexual health in US magazines for teenage and middle-aged women, 2000–2007. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 11(4), 415-429.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Lancefield, R. C., Ziff, B., & Rao, P. V. (1998). Borrowed power: Essays on cultural appropriation. *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 30, 133.
- MacGowan, C. (2014). Modernism and the magazines: North America. *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, 21(3), 843-849.
- McLarney, E. (2009). The burqa in vogue. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 5(1), 1-23.
- Perkins, S. R. (2016, March 21). Zendaya is over the "boxer braid" trend, says "braids aren't new!" Retrieved from <https://www.essence.com/celebrity/zendaya-over-boxer-braid-trend-says-braids-arent-new/>
- Rogers, R. A. (2006). From cultural exchange to transculturation: A review and reconceptualization of cultural appropriation. *Communication Theory*, 16(4), 474-503.
-

Rose, R. (2015, July 12). "Hunger Games" star Amandla Stenberg reportedly called out Kylie Jenner over her cornrows. Retrieved from <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/news/a43203/kylie-jenner-and-hunger-games-star-amandla-stenber/>

Schulte-Hillen, S. (2016, November 7). Solange Knowles proves there's no such thing as too much glitter. Retrieved from <https://www.vogue.com/article/solange-knowles-snl-nude-makeup-glitter>

White, F. (2017). Fashion and intolerance: Misappropriation of the war bonnet and mainstream anger. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 50(6), 1421-1436.

Wilson, J. (2016, November 6). Solange is a sparkling goddess during her Saturday Night Live performance. Retrieved from <https://www.essence.com/celebrity/solange-saturday-night-live-style/>

Making Sense of a Celebrity Suicide: Qualitative Analysis of High-Engagement Tweets Following the Suicide of Anthony Bourdain

Jenna L. Barone

Strategic Communications
Elon University

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

Abstract

Following a celebrity suicide, social media explodes with commentary, reflecting national attention on the issue. This research looks at how society and individuals emotionally process and react to celebrity suicide on social media. Qualitative content analysis was used to identify thematic content present in the fifty tweets with the highest engagement each day over the course of one month following Anthony Bourdain's suicide. Several themes were identified and divided into categories. Results showed that the conversation surrounding Bourdain and suicide decreased rapidly after only a few days. The data suggests a small population of users continued the conversation beyond this point, perhaps looking for meaning and encouraging change as a coping mechanism for grieving. For this subgroup, the data suggests the societal effects of Bourdain's suicide became more concerning and relevant over time than the event itself.

I. Introduction

Anthony Bourdain, a world-renowned chef and television star, shocked the world by committing suicide in June 2018. Through his award-winning CNN series, *Parts Unknown*, Bourdain had shared his travel and culinary experiences with millions of viewers eager to explore new cultures. Famous for his large personality and gifted ability as a storyteller, Bourdain had also written several books detailing his adventures (Stelter, 2018). Days earlier, Kate Spade, a successful fashion designer, had also committed suicide by hanging. The shock of two celebrity suicides occurring so close together spurred a national conversation about suicide.

In nearly twenty years, suicide rates have increased by 25% across the United States (Stelter, 2018). According to a recent Vital Signs report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide rates have been rising in nearly every state, and nearly 45,000 Americans over the age of ten died by suicide in 2016. Prevention efforts typically focus on identifying those in need and providing resources. Following Bourdain's death, Rose McGowan wrote a public letter shedding light on Bourdain's struggle with depression. Prior to his death, Bourdain had reached out to a medical professional about his depression but did not follow the doctor's advice. McGowan blamed Bourdain's death on the "a strong man doesn't ask for help generation" (Patten, 2018).

Keywords: social media, suicide, Anthony Bourdain, qualitative content analysis
Email: jbarone@elon.edu

Suicide is rarely caused by a single factor (“CDC Newsroom,” 2018). News reports following Bourdain’s death pointed to financial stress and past substance abuse that may have exacerbated his depression (Stelter, 2018). Relationship issues, poor physical health, legal woes, among many other factors, can also contribute to suicide risk. In fact, CDC researchers reported that over half of those “who died by suicide did not have a known diagnosed mental health condition at the time of death” (“CDC Newsroom,” 2018).

In response to Bourdain’s death, many turned to social media to celebrate him, mourn his loss, offer opinions, and share concerns related to suicide. Social media plays a role in spreading information among audiences in the aftermath of celebrity suicides, and references to such seem to dominate platforms for a period of time. But as time passes, conversation surrounding the celebrity and suicide in general can wane quickly in the wake of other global events. The topic appears to lose prominence until the next time a newsworthy celebrity commits suicide, then suddenly, addressing suicide once again becomes a national priority.

When posts go viral at the beginning of this cycle, they have “the ability to reach comparably higher amounts of shares on news stories compared to common sharing practices,” and therefore garner greater engagement and provide insight to how users grieve a celebrity suicide online (Kalsnes & Larsson, 2017, p. 1674). This study will identify and examine high-engagement tweets immediately following Bourdain’s death to determine trends and patterns. This will be accomplished by analyzing the top fifty tweets with the highest engagement pertaining to Bourdain and the topic of suicide immediately following his death each day for one month.

II. Literature Review

Previous research has explored how the diffusion of innovations theory contributes to news sharing in a modern media landscape, and the psychological reasons for sharing information via social media platforms. When a celebrity commits suicide, these intrinsic motivations influence sharing and social media engagement. Parasocial relationships have been shown by researchers to be powerful mechanisms for facilitating discussion and sparking communities based on shared experiences. Scholars have also examined how celebrity suicides also trigger information-seeking patterns among those using social media.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Modern applications of the diffusion of innovations theory involve complex platforms and interactions, making how information moves through society a multi-faceted process. The diffusion of innovations theory helps explain “the way information moves through a society” (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2017, p. 157). Katz identified four key components to the diffusion of innovations theory: “transmitters or those who initiate the diffusion of the innovation; adopters or those who receive the innovation; the innovation or item that is being diffused; and the channel or the means by which diffusion occurs” (Katz, 1963).

Everett Rogers (1995), a pioneer in diffusion research, studied the stages in which innovations become adopted by society. For media practitioners, Rogers’ theory can be applied to studying how information from news, advertising, and campaigns are spread among audiences. Melvin Defleur was among the first researchers to use a hierarchical model to explain the news cycle: the news as the innovation, the mainstream media as the primary transmitter, the audience as the adopters, and the channel as traditional forms of media like print or broadcast (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2017).

While a top-down, hierarchical model of diffusion may once have been the scholarly norm, a proximal model may better describe the modern media landscape. These researchers argue that the proximal model “corresponds more closely to the structure facilitated by social media, whereby actors engage with others with whom they identify or are spatially or culturally relevant” (Rane & Salem, 2012, p. 99). For example, news organizations and users often post about events as they happen on Twitter. Twitter users are heavily involved in the speed and depth of sharing information by re-tweeting articles and comments that travel and connect through digital networks relevant to individual users.

As an example, Highfield (2015) found that tweets related to the immediate aftermath of a breaking news story experience high rates of re-tweets. However, as a story develops and new information is released,

there is a “decline in attention for the initial tweets,” Highfield observes, and once the “initial information has been spread sufficiently and the breaking news is now common knowledge,” the number of re-tweets diminishes significantly often within hours (p. 2725). In this situation, the channel has changed to a complex, interactive social media platform connecting and engaging users from all over the world. The mainstream media may or may not act as the initial transmitter or even the primary transmitter. Thus, it has been “suggested that determining how news is presented is no longer the role of journalists alone” (p. 2716).

Scholars have also discovered that the influence of media frames from traditional news sources does not necessarily parallel the topics and conversation present on social media. In the case of a Flemish celebrity suicide, the media pursued frames related to remorse, the celebrity as a lesbian icon, and as a victim of abuse. The audience revealed several counter-frames when interacting with peers on social media that did not exist in more traditional news coverage. Rather than directly mimic media frames, the audience “instead mediated in different ways by personal experiences, peers, and parasocial relationships...” (Bulck & Claessens, 2013, p. 78).

User Intentions and Relatedness

The diffusion of innovations theory also helps explain user intentions when sharing news in a social media context. One study found that users decide to share articles when they perceive news as relevant to their interests or believe the online community will benefit from awareness of the news. Users feel like they are helping others by sharing content, and they feel “a sense of altruism and social affiliation” by contributing to the growing awareness of others (“Relatedness Need Satisfaction,” 2012, p. 2).

Additional scholars have observed that stories that stir strong emotions among audience members, such as sensational news and celebrity news, also lay the foundation for the viral phenomenon (Ma, Lee, & Goh, 2014). Related research has found that sharing content significantly contributes to the spread of information, as users are more likely to engage in a less-demanding form of social media activity rather than taking the time to post a comment (Hujanen & Pietikainen, 2004).

In general, users are motivated to participate on social media platforms to satisfy relatedness, a feeling of closeness with friends, peers, and/or community. In the event of a celebrity suicide, these intrinsic motivations influence individuals’ engagement on social media with each other and with content.

Parasocial Relationships and Celebrity Suicides

Parasocial relationships influence social media engagement and often spark communities based on shared experiences. These relationships impact audience response and interaction with content and other users in the aftermath of a celebrity suicide. Hoffner and Cohen (2017) describe parasocial relationships as a one-sided relationship between an audience member and public figure based on the media consumption of the audience member. Though the public figure has no awareness of the relationship’s existence, individual audience members can develop a genuine, intimate-feeling relationship with celebrities based on their private and public life as presented to the world through the media (Holmes, 2005).

Scholars also have found that social media platforms are well structured to facilitate parasocial interaction, and that Twitter can play a role in enriching parasocial relationships (Humphreys et al., 2013). Researchers have also studied how parasocial relationships influence a feeling of belonging to a community in which engaged audiences share experiences of attachment to a celebrity (Greenwood & Long, 2009). For example, after Robin Williams’ death in 2014, fans responded by sharing content related to mental health issues, grief, Williams’ career, and positive remembrance. Audience members who have parasocial relationships with a celebrity can feel intense grief in response to a celebrity death. (Radford & Block, 2012).

Studies have also found that the role of celebrity attachment in response to extensive media coverage on celebrity health issues has the potential to shape attitudes, beliefs, and interactions (Noar, et al., 2014). Celebrities who share health issues publically have positively impacted “public awareness, knowledge gain, and willingness to discuss these health issues” (Carpentier & Parrott, 2016, p. 1335). Parasocial contact has been shown to have the great benefit in reducing stigma (Bulck & Claessens, 2013). Hoffner and Cohen (2017) also discovered that individuals with stronger parasocial relationships with Williams “reported low social distance from people with depression, greater willingness to seek treatment for depression, and more frequent outreach to other people with depression or suicidal thoughts following his death” (p. 1573).

Information Seeking in the Aftermath of Celebrity Suicides

The death of a celebrity can “trigger information-seeking behaviors as a means of coping with the loss” (Schaefer & Moos, 1998). In fact, Google reported over 10 million searches for information related to Robin Williams the day he died, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness experienced a 20% call increase the following day (Carpentier & Parrott, 2016).

Carpentier and Parrott’s study examined the information-seeking patterns and commentary of undergraduate students shortly after Williams’ suicide. In terms of information seeking, respondents primarily checked Twitter and Facebook to find details related to his suicide, depression, career, and celebrity responses to his death. In terms of respondent commentary, dominant themes included the challenges of diagnosis, susceptibility to suicide, seriousness of suicide, need for prevention efforts, causes of suicide, and judgment and lack of understanding (Carpentier & Parrott, 2016).

Previous research explores how parasocial relationships and information dissemination influence information seeking and dialogue surrounding celebrity suicides on social media. But, previous research has not investigated the nature of popular content on social media immediately following a celebrity suicide. This study intends to fill the research gap by identifying the thematic components of high-engagement tweets in the weeks immediately following a celebrity suicide to analyze potential trends, topics, timeframes, attitudes, and conversation surrounding suicide following the breaking news.

Research Questions

This study will answer the following questions, for tweets containing a reference to Bourdain and “#suicide”:

RQ1: What themes are present in the top fifty highest engagement tweets each day for one month following Anthony Bourdain’s death?

RQ2: What thematic trends are present in the top fifty highest engagement tweets each day for one month following Anthony Bourdain’s death, and when did the trends occur and for how long?

RQ3: Overall, what three themes occurred most frequently out of the top fifty highest engagement tweets each day for one month following Anthony Bourdain’s suicide?

This research is important because themes present in popular social media content following a celebrity suicide may provide valuable insight for understanding how society and individuals relate to and emotionally process the event. Additionally, an understanding of these processes may help healthcare professionals address copycat suicides and jumpstart new prevention efforts to fight the suicide epidemic in the future.

This study differs from previous research and provides a unique perspective on the subject matter. Past studies explored social media relatedness and common trends, such as the life span of tweets, but not in the context of a celebrity suicide. Other studies looked at parasocial relationships and information-seeking through a celebrity suicide lens, but did not analyze or address the timing, trends, or thematic components of popular social media content immediately following a celebrity suicide. Therefore, the research builds on previous studies and bridges the gap between social media conversation and celebrity suicide research.

III. Methods

The research uses qualitative content analysis to identify the thematic components of high-engagement tweets following Bourdain’s suicide. The materials were reviewed several times to ensure accuracy and a systematic approach.

To retrieve and filter data from Twitter, the researcher used the media analytics tool Meltwater to create a dashboard containing data related to Bourdain’s suicide. First, a custom date range was selected starting with the day Bourdain committed suicide (June 8, 2018) and ending exactly one month later (July 8, 2018). Based on informal social media observations from past celebrity suicides, high rates of tweets and engagement pertaining to Bourdain’s suicide were not expected to last longer than one month. If significant data had existed beyond the specified end date, the date range would have been adjusted accordingly. But,

after June 23, the number of engagements never increased from single digits. After specifying the date range, the data was again filtered to isolate tweets with the presence of “#suicide” and “Bourdain” and/or “#Bourdain” (without regard to capitalization).

Because “suicide” is such a broad search term, only tweets with “#suicide” were included in the data set. “Suicide” as a search term would infiltrate the data with links, usernames, news articles, etc. that would not be relevant to the data set. Because it is a name, “Bourdain” as a search term is far more limited than “suicide,” so the same restrictions did not apply.

This study’s methodology draws from Highfield’s study, which did not represent complete data sets. However, practical filter limitations still maintained a valid sample and adequate sample size (Highfield, 2015). This current research is exploratory in nature and only a first step in capturing large-scale analysis pertaining to online expressions of mourning a celebrity suicide.

Once the Bourdain dashboard was exported as an Excel spreadsheet, the tweets were organized by date. Next, for each individual date, tweets were organized by ascending order by highest level of engagement. Duplicate and unrelated tweets were removed from the data set.

There was a sharp decline in tweet engagement containing “#suicide” and “Bourdain” and/or “#Bourdain.” While there were more than 3,000 tweets that met the criteria on June 8, there were fewer than 50 such tweets each day after June 12. Once the data was filtered, the researcher conducted qualitative content analysis on a total of 438 tweets—the top fifty tweets with the highest engagement each day after and including the day Bourdain committed suicide. For each day containing less than fifty tweets total, the number of tweets available was included in the analysis regardless of the engagement.

Qualitative content analysis included sorting, reading, and familiarizing with the material to identify themes. Altheide says themes are “the most powerful features of public information” when conducting qualitative content analysis. Therefore, themes in this study are essential to understanding change over time and “the relevance of communication media” (Altheide, 1996, p. 31).

Additionally, any tweets containing unfamiliar references to Bourdain and other related events were researched individually to enhance comprehension of a tweet’s context. Then, themes were identified based on analysis of the tweets. If a topic or reference appeared in more than one tweet, it qualified as a theme. Next, similar themes were grouped into overarching categories. For example, several tweets encouraged those in need to use the suicide hotline. This theme was then placed in a category with other themes related to consoling individuals in need. If applicable, each tweet could embody more than one theme and therefore count in more than one category. Themes occurring roughly six or more times in one day were considered highly prevalent, themes occurring four or five times considered prevalent, themes occurring three times somewhat prevalent, themes occurring once or twice not very prevalent, and no themes occurring not prevalent at all.

IV. Findings

The study identified five categories of tweets about Anthony Bourdain’s suicide (Table 1). In terms of prominent themes and trends, some were present only during certain time periods, some occurred consistently during the time period, and others fell somewhere in between.

Table 1: Categories of tweets and themes within them

CATEGORY	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
References to Bourdain	Announcements and proclamations of Bourdain's death	Expressions of sadness and shock	Bourdain as an inspiration/ compliments of his work	Tributes	N/A
Helping Individuals in Need	Encouragement to seek resources if needed	Encouragement to use Suicide Hotline	Reports citing a rapid increase in calls to the Suicide Hotline	Encouragement to look for warning signs/ reaching out to loved ones	Coping through religion
Suicide as an Epidemic	Interviews with mental health experts to make sense of epidemic and celebrity suicide	Suicide in the context of a public health crisis	Increasing rate of suicide	Call for prevention strategies	Concern for the contagion effect
Discussing Suicide as a Society	Expression of upset with user commentary	Encouragement to continue talking about suicide as a society	Call to end stigma and danger of stigma	Suicide can affect any person, even the rich/famous	User sharing of personal experiences
References to Other Individuals/ Groups	Kate Spade	Clintons	Pedophile ring	Journalists covering Bourdain's suicide	Mention of past celebrity suicides

Note: Themes included in the table are not an exhaustive list. Cells marked “N/A” indicate there are fewer than five themes in the category.

Category 1: References to Bourdain

Themes directly referencing Bourdain himself had a strong presence shortly after he committed suicide but soon decreased and eventually dropped off. For example, tweets announcing or proclaiming the death of Bourdain was a highly prevalent tweet the day he committed suicide, but it declined over the next few days and was either a not very prevalent, or not prevalent at all, tweet for the duration of the time period. Many of these tweets, such as, “Celebrity chef and storyteller Anthony Bourdain dead by #suicide at 61,” had embedded links to news articles and were tweeted by news outlets (@picardonhealth, 2018).

A related theme expressing sadness and shock at Bourdain's death was also a prevalent theme on the first and second day, lessened in prevalence over the next few days, and was rarely seen the second half of the month. Furthermore, references to Bourdain as an inspiration or complimenting his life's work was very prevalent for the first three days after his death, became less prominent the next two days, and was only occasionally present for rest of the time period. Additionally, tributes to Bourdain through music, programming, and ceremonies, was a somewhat prevalent theme the day after Bourdain's suicide and on June 11. The theme largely disappeared after June 12.

Category 2: Helping individuals in need

Category two, themes related to helping individuals in need, followed a similar pattern as the first category. For example, a theme encouraging individuals with suicidal thoughts to acquire resources or reach out to trusted peers was very prevalent the day Bourdain committed suicide, somewhat prevalent the

following two days, and prevalent again on day five before trailing off the remainder of the month. One such tweet said, “If you are feeling lost please reach out. Be it to your family, your friends, or to [a] professional” (@MikeCullen73, 2018). On the other hand, a theme assuring others that they are not alone and that their life matters was not very prevalent the day Bourdain committed suicide, somewhat prevalent the following day, and prevalent the third day. For the remainder of the month, the theme was for the most part not prevalent at all.

Additionally, encouragement to use the suicide hotline was a prevalent theme on the day Bourdain committed suicide, a highly prevalent theme the second day, and a prevalent theme the third and fourth days. On June 12, a new but similar theme appeared: reports citing a rapid increase in calls to the suicide hotline in the aftermath of Bourdain’s suicide. A related theme encouraging friends and family to reach out to loved ones and to look for warning signs of suicide was prevalent for the first two days of the time period, very prevalent the third day, and either somewhat prevalent, or not very prevalent, for the next eight days.

Category 3: Suicide as an epidemic

Themes related addressing suicide as an epidemic tended to start strong and decrease over time. However, the themes occurred at slightly different frequencies and times compared to themes in previously mentioned categories. On the day of Bourdain’s suicide, several media outlets conducted interviews with mental health experts. This theme was only somewhat prevalent on the first day and not prevalent at all for the rest of the time period, with the exception of June 12. Additionally, suicide described or mentioned in the context of a public health crisis was a prevalent theme on the day Bourdain committed suicide, highly prevalent the following day, not very prevalent on day three, very prevalent on the fourth day, and not prevalent at all after June 14. These types of tweets included comments critiquing and calling for changes to the health care system, and medical experts offering facts and opinions about suicide as an epidemic.

One theme also mentioned the increasing rates of suicide, which was prevalent on the second day of the time period, and somewhat prevalent on day four. For instance, one tweet said, “#suicide is a real public health issue and the rise is staggering. We must monitor this closely...” (@seemakh89125928, 2018). Furthermore, Bourdain’s suicide sparked concern of a contagion or “copycat effect.” Lastly, a theme encouraging or calling for prevention strategies first occurred on June 11 and was not very prevalent or not prevalent at all for seven days, but became somewhat prevalent the following two days.

Category 4: Discussing suicide as a society

Category four, themes related to addressing and discussing suicide as a society, varied in frequency and timing. However, most of the themes occurred at the beginning and carried into the middle of the time period at a higher level than many other categories. For example, a theme expressing discomfort with other user comments was prevalent on the day after Bourdain committed suicide, not very prevalent on June 17 and June 29, and not prevalent at all for the rest of the time period. One tweet said, “u r a walking contradiction. Do more research before you speak about #suicide...” (@CarBombBoom13, 2018). Also, a theme related to continuing the conversation of suicide and encouraging others to talk openly about the subject was not prevalent at all on many days, but occurred more in the beginning and middle of the time period.

Related themes had low levels of prevalence but were sometimes part of the discussion in high-engagement tweets. One such theme called for including the topic of addiction in the conversation surrounding mental health, while another theme encouraging kindness was present in the beginning and middle of the month. Additionally, a theme calling to end stigma was seen primarily early in the month. One such tweet said, “as mental illness is stigmatized, referred to as being crazy or weak, #suicide rates will not decrease” (@sharon_chmara, 2018).

On a slightly different note, one theme mentioned Bourdain’s fame and fortune as a failed buffer from depression, and other tweets more directly addressed suicide’s ability to affect any person, regardless of social stature. This was highly prevalent on the first day Bourdain committed suicide, somewhat prevalent the following day, and prevalent for the next three days. In addition, user sharing of personal experiences related to suicide was somewhat prevalent on days two through four of the study. For example, one tweet that referenced a video about Bourdain’s suicide said, “This really hit home with me & my experience with depression & feeling suicidal” (@RedGeekMusings, 2018).

Category 5: References to other individuals or groups

Category five varied in terms of frequency, timing, and patterns more than any other. For example, during the specified time period, Kate Spade was not prevalent at all for only two days. Every day through June 21, Spade was a highly prevalent theme (with the exception of June 20 when it was just prevalent), reaching up to 34 mentions in one day. The theme was somewhat prevalent on three days in late June and not very prevalent for the rest of the time period. Spade was one of the three most frequently mentioned themes throughout the entire time period. Another theme in this category addressed journalists and journalistic organizations, usually in context of reporting on Bourdain's suicide appropriately. The only tweet in the sample expressing criticism of coverage was on June 27.

Additional themes in this category included Bourdain's criticism of Hillary Clinton just prior to his death, and conspiracy theories alleging that Bourdain had been working on a pedophile case and was actually murdered. One additional related theme focused on celebrities who committed suicide in recent weeks or even years ago. References to celebrities (other than Kate Spade) occurred at the beginning, middle, and end of the month, but never reached high levels of prevalence.

V. Discussion

Overall, the number of tweets pertaining to Bourdain and suicide drastically decreased after only a few days. Immediate reactions to Bourdain's suicide dominated early periods of the month following his death, but the themes became more reflective and big-picture as time passed. The immediate shock seemed to ignite initial Twitter interest, but Bourdain's death quickly became old news. The data suggests though that his suicide was the spark for a small subgroup to continue more reflective conversation surrounding suicide. This finding supports previous research that the proximal model of the diffusion of innovations theory corresponds well with social media, as conversation and information about Bourdain continued to spread even when news reports waned (Rane & Salem, 2012).

Results of this study align with previous scholarship that found tweets related to the immediate aftermath of a breaking news story experience high rates of re-tweets, but engagement declines as a story develops over time and new information is released (Highfield, 2015). In Bourdain's case, breaking news tweets became less prominent as further details such as his method of suicide were released over time. However, tweets expressing sadness or memories of Bourdain had a less steep dropoff in prominence. Emotional responses to Bourdain's suicide likely took longer for users to process; therefore, the data suggests emotional responses to news may outlive the news itself.

After June 12, the number of re-tweets related to suicide and Bourdain dropped significantly, and the majority of users seemed to move on from the event and engage in other online conversations. Only a small population continued the suicide conversation, and it is likely this subgroup of users had not yet finished emotionally processing the event. As a result, these users continued to re-tweet positive remembrances of Bourdain perhaps as a coping mechanism in addition to engaging in reflective, insightful conversation surrounding suicide. This supports previous scholarship that interaction through content is a proven mechanism for feeling close to others (Novak & Hoffman, 2012). These users likely found solace and healing through a community of like-minded users. Additionally, such users likely looked for meaning and encouraged change in these conversations as a way to create positive outcomes of his death and further aid their healing process.

As an example, the data suggests themes related to support for those struggling with mental health and/or suicidal thoughts remained fairly constant in the aftermath of Bourdain's suicide. Immediately after Bourdain's death, tweets addressed those in immediate danger (experiencing suicidal thoughts) and encouraged them to seek help.

Generally, tweets encouraging others to look out for family and friends at risk were prevalent at some level throughout the time period. This supports previous research indicating that users share articles if they believe it will benefit the online community (Novak & Hoffman, 2012). However, the data also suggests Twitter users began to cast a wider net in seeking help and resources. Those already experiencing suicidal thoughts were likely seen as high risk following the initial shock after Bourdain's suicide. But as time passed and only a passionate group of users remained in the conversation, tweets more often encouraged others to

look for warning signs rather than directly address those clearly in need. Thus, the small population of users continuing the suicide conversation encouraged others to help people outside their typical social circles, trying to address society's suicide epidemic on a larger scale.

Tweets embracing support networks, or encouraging individuals in need to consult the suicide hotline, also suggest a somewhat consistent concern for at-risk individuals throughout the period studied. The data suggests that the societal effects of Bourdain's suicide became more concerning and relevant to those continuing the conversation over time than the initial event of Bourdain's suicide itself. Though themes such as positive remembrance of Bourdain continued throughout the time period, Bourdain himself, as an individual, found less resonance in the conversation.

Calls to the suicide hotline likely spiked because more people sought help and information after Bourdain's suicide sparked their emotional distress. Carpentier and Parrott (2016) also saw an increase in information seeking after Robin Williams committed suicide. Thus, Bourdain's death became a spark for initiating conversation about trends related to suicide. Conversation online, therefore, evolved into more reflective, insightful conversation about how to address suicide as a society.

Several themes emerged in the evolution of the conversation, some remaining relevant throughout the entire time period. For example, Kate Spade was a constant topic of discussion, but the way her name was evoked in the conversation changed over time. Initially, when news of Bourdain's death first broke, Spade was mentioned in the context of tragedy—one of two high-profile figures that committed suicide within days of one another. Over time, Spade's name began accompanying Bourdain in tweets referencing their deaths as sparks to address suicide in general. Thus, Spade was part of the initial reaction to Bourdain's death, but also seen as a mechanism for addressing suicide from a public health perspective.

Other themes carried relevance only at specific times. For example, tweets complimenting journalists who covered Bourdain's suicide appropriately is an example of an early, dominant theme in the immediate reaction to his death. Once awareness had spread, users were likely satisfied with the information they had acquired and no longer had a need for breaking-news information related to the suicide. As a result, the theme was fleeting.

VI. Conclusion

Because audiences react differently based on the medium, analyzing tweets limits the wide range of potential responses present in other forms of social media (Highfield, 2015). Furthermore, the research provides an in-depth exploration of the most recent high-profile celebrity suicide but does not compare Bourdain's death with other celebrity suicides. Because the study focused on one suicide, the findings may not hold constant in similar situations.

It is clear though that Bourdain's death grew into something bigger than himself. The research revealed a concerned, empathetic group of users interested in continuing the conversation about suicide beyond the shock of his death. A number of themes from these users revealed a search for meaning and encouragement of change. The study reflects one potential avenue of the healing process by exploring online expression of grief following a celebrity suicide. By understanding how these online conversations flow, professionals perhaps can help guide healthy conversations or integrate prevention. An understanding of emotional processing through social media conversation following a celebrity suicide is a vital step in implementing effective preventative measures in the online sphere. Future research might build on this study by comparing the thematic components of high-engagement tweets after several celebrity suicides such as Robin Williams, Kate Spade, Sawyer Sweeten, Simone Battle, and others.

Acknowledgements

Thank you Dr. Daniel Haygood for your support, direction, and enthusiasm for the research. Thank you Dr. Kathleen Stansberry and Steven Barone for your data organization expertise. Thank you Laura Elizabeth Shea for your encouragement and suggestions. Last, but not least, thank you Jim and Diane Barone for your love and support.

References

- Altheide, David L. (1996). *Qualitative Media Analysis*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Bulck, H. V., & Claessens, N. (2013). Celebrity suicide and the search for the moral high ground: Comparing frames in media and audience discussions of the death of a Flemish celebrity. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 30(1), 69-84. doi:10.1080/15295036.2011.645496
- Carpentier, F. R., & Parrott, M. S. (2016). Young adults' information seeking following celebrity suicide: Considering involvement with the celebrity and emotional distress in health communication strategies. *Health Communication*, 31(11), 1334-1344. doi:10.1080/10410236.2015.1056329
- CDC Newsroom. (2018, June 07). Retrieved November 27, 2018, from <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2018/p0607-suicide-prevention.html>
- Highfield, T. (2015). Tweeted joke life spans and appropriated punch lines: Practices around topical humor on social media. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 2713-2734. Retrieved September 25, 2018, from <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc>
- Hoffner, C. A., & Cohen, E. L. (2017). Mental health-related outcomes of Robin Williams' death: The role of parasocial relations and media exposure in stigma, help seeking, and outreach. *Health Communication*, 33(12), 1573-1582. doi:10.1080/10410236.2017.1384348
- Holmes, S. (2005). 'Off-guard, unkempt, unready? Deconstructing contemporary celebrity in Heat Magazine. *Continuum*, 19(1), 21-38. doi:10.1080/1030431052000336270
- Hujanen, J., & Pietikäinen, S. (2004). Interactive uses of journalism: Crossing between technological potential and young people's news-using practices. *New Media & Society*, 6(3), 383-401. doi:10.1177/1461444804042521
- Humphreys, L., Gill, P., Krishnamurthy, B., & Newbury, E. (2013). Historicizing new media: A content analysis of Twitter. *Journal of Communication*, 63, 413-431. doi:10.1111/jcom.2013.63.issue-3
- Kalsnes, B., & Larsson, A. O. (2017). Understanding news sharing across social media. *Journalism Studies*, 19(11), 1669-1688. doi:10.1080/1461670x.2017.1297686
- Katz, E. (1963). The characteristics of innovations and the concept of compatibility. Rehovoth Conference on Comprehensive Planning of Agriculture in Developing Countries, Rehovoth, Israel.
- Long, C. R., & Greenwood, D. N. (2009). Psychological predictors of media involvement: Solitude experiences and the need to belong. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0093650209338906>
- Noar, S. M., Willoughby, J. F., Myrick, J. G., & Brown, J. (2013). Public figure announcements about cancer and opportunities for cancer communication: A review and research agenda. *Health Communication*, 29(5), 445-461. doi:10.1080/10410236.2013.764781
-

- Ma, L., Lee, C. S., & Goh, D. H. (n.d.). Understanding news sharing in social media: An explanation from the diffusion of innovations theory. Retrieved from <https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/OIR-10-2013-0239>
- Meltwater [Computer software]. (2015). Retrieved from https://www.meltwater.com/competitive-intelligence/?source=adwords&utm_source=adword&gclid=EAlaIQobChMI7dzR7vr53gIVDrCzCh3vIQVrEAAYASAAEgKHBfD_BwE
- Novak, T.P., & Hoffman, D.L. (2012). Relatedness need satisfaction during social media goal pursuit: The influence of online social identity and motivations. *Conference of The International Communication Association*. Retrieved September 27, 2018, from <https://www.icahdq.org>.
- Patten, D. (2018, June 11). Anthony Bourdain's suicide mourned by Rose McGowan in new letter; Didn't take "doctor's advice" in depression battle. Retrieved November 27, 2018, from <https://deadline.com/2018/06/rose-mcgowan-anthony-bourdain-suicide-statement-depression-1202407718/>
- Radford, S. K., & Bloch, P. H. (2012). Grief, commiseration, and consumption following the death of a celebrity. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 12(2), 137-155. doi:10.1177/1469540512446879
- Rane, H., & Salem, S. (2012). Social media, social movements and the diffusion of ideas in the Arab uprisings. *Journal of International Communication*, 18(1), 97-111. doi:10.1080/13216597.2012.662168
- Rogers, E. M. (1995). Diffusion of Innovations. Retrieved from <https://www.d.umn.edu/~lrochfor/ireland/dif-of-in-ch06.pdf>
- Rosenberry, J., & Vicker, L.A. (2017). *Applied mass communication theory: A guide for media practitioners*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Schaefer, J. A., & Moos, R. H. (1998). The context for posttraumatic growth: Life crises, individual and social resources, and coping. In R. G. Tedeschi, C. L. Park, & L. G. Calhoun (Eds.), *Posttraumatic growth: Positive changes in the aftermath of crisis* (pp. 99–125). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Severin, W. J., & Tankard, J.W. (2001). *Communication theories: Origins, methods, and uses in the mass media*, 5th Edition. Retrieved from <https://www.pearson.com/us/higher-education/program/Severin-Communication-Theories-Origins-Methods-and-Uses-in-the-Mass-Media-5th-Edition/PGM83105.html>
- Stelter, B. (2018, June 09). CNN's Anthony Bourdain dead at 61. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/08/us/anthony-bourdain-obit/index.html>
- [@cc_mhcc]. (2018). : Compliments to @cnn, especially @brianstelter, on how they're handling the death of Anthony Bourdain. Avoiding "commit," providing resources, making clear the impact of his #suicide on others without sensationalizing and, most importantly, celebrating his life. #mentalhealth [Tweet]. Retrieved from http://twitter.com/cc_mhcc/statuses/1005267933847748610
- [@CarBombBoom13]. (2018). u r a walking contradiction. Do more research before you speak about #suicide which is a symptom and permanent solution to mental illness. This kind of archaic thinking is what continues to fuel the #stigma attached to mental illnesses. Fuck you very much @Bourdain <https://t.co/> [Tweet]. Retrieved from <http://twitter.com/CarBombBoom13/statuses/1005644676085448704>
- [@MikeCullen73]. (2018). So saddened to here of the passing of Anthony @Bourdain. If you are feeling lost please reach out. Be it to your family, your friends or to professional @beyondblue @LifelineAust #SuicidePrevention #suicide #ripanthonybourdain [Tweet]. Retrieved from <http://twitter.com/MikeCullen73/statuses/1005060006260006912>
-

[@picardonhealth]. (2018). Celebrity chef and storyteller Anthony Bourdain dead by #suicide at 61 <https://t.co/vU5o7z55Ku> via @CNN #mentalhealth [Tweet]. Retrieved from <http://twitter.com/picardonhealth/statuses/1005051577655267328>

[@RedGeekMusings]. (2018). I highly recommend watching @joerogan's discussion on 'Suicide and Anthony Bourdain' <https://t.co/wwsa4MqSs7> via @YouTube This really hit home with me & my experience with depression & feeling suicidal. #depression #suicide #PTSD #MentalHealthAwareness #MentalHealthIsHealth [Tweet]. Retrieved from <http://twitter.com/RedGeekMusings/statuses/1011655724307570691>

[@seemakh89125928]. (2018). RT @dsayed1: A painful reminder that #mentalhealth issues can effect anyone. I admired @Bourdain sense of adventure. #suicide is a real public health issue and the rise is staggering. We must monitor this closely, especially in the hopeless #ChronicPain patient. # [Tweet]. Retrieved from <http://twitter.com/seemakh89125928/statuses/1005745686409723904>

[@sharon_chmara]. (2018). as mental illness is stigmatized, referred to as being crazy or weak, #suicide rates will not decrease. Stigma hinders those in need of help from seeking mental health services. Mental illness shouldn't be minimized bc it's not visible. □Anthony Bourdain <https://t.co/eWPQ4mNpcD> [Tweet]. Retrieved from http://twitter.com/sharon_chmara/statuses/1005471218554822656

Dissecting the Sundance Curse: Exploring Discrepancies Between Film Reviews by Professional and Amateur Critics

Lucas Buck

*Cinema and Television Arts
Elon University*

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

Abstract

There has been a growing discrepancy between professional-critic film reviews and audience-originating film reviews. In fact, these occurrences have become so routine, industry writers often reference a “Sundance Curse” – when a buzzy festival-circuit film bombs with the general public, commercially or critically. This study examines this inconsistency to determine which aspects of a film tend to draw the most attention from each respective type of critic. A qualitative content analysis of 20 individual reviews was conducted to determine which elements present in a film garnered the most attention from the reviewers, and whether that attention was positive, negative or neutral. This study indicates that audience film reviewers overwhelmingly focused on the “emotional response” gleaned from their movie-going experience above all other aspects of the film, whereas professional critics focused attention to more tangible – above-the-line contributions, such as direction, performances, and writing.

I. Introduction

As one of the most talked-about films of the 2018 Sundance Film Festival, the A24-released *Hereditary* became the breakout horror film of the year, opening in nearly 3,000 theaters and raking in \$79 million while produced on just a \$10 million production budget (Cusumano, 2018). Despite the obvious box office success, *Hereditary*’s word-of-mouth power seemed to have mostly been driven by glowing critical reviews, rather than by the opinion of audiences who paid to see the film. Indeed, *Hereditary* entered theaters as critics raved, marking the film with a 90% critic score on review aggregation site CinemaScore. Opening night audiences, on the other hand, awarded the highly-anticipated film a D+ on the same site (Thompson, 2018).

While *Hereditary* went on to become its distributor’s highest-grossing film to date, the discrepancy between lavish reviews by critics and outraged critiques by audiences is too drastic to be ignored (Cusumano, 2018). This film has not been the only offering in recent years to exemplify the ever-increasing divide in opinion between members of the press and the public. A multitude of films, primarily in the horror genre, display similar critical discrepancies and indicate a fundamental difference in opinion as to what makes for a quality film. Occurrences like this have become routine; industry writers now bemoan the speculative “Sundance Curse” in the event a buzzy festival-circuit film bombs with the general public, commercially or

Keywords: cinema, criticism, qualitative content analysis, film reviews
Email: lbuck4@elon.edu

critically.

To understand this phenomenon, this study conducted a qualitative content analysis to examine film reviews that do not converge. Ultimately, this content analysis sought to understand whether this disparity in opinion is based on knowledge of the medium by the different types of movie critics, or if it is simply due to cases of false advertising where audiences may have entered the theater with incorrect, preconceived notions about the film in question due to misleading trailers or marketing campaigns by distributors.

Specifically, the methodology involved conducting a qualitative content analysis of the reviews of five individual movie titles that display this discrepancy between professional critical reviews and audience scores. These titles were chosen from films that show a drastic difference between audience average scores and critical scores – at least a 30% gap. The positive reviews written by professional critics were obtained from *Variety* magazine, due to its prominence, reputation, and influence in the entertainment industry. In addition, the coding exercise examined each title's first three audience reviews on the industry-standard review aggregator *Rotten Tomatoes* to gauge initial audience reactions.

The goal of this study was to look for defining characteristics, phrases, and mentions within each review to determine what aspects of each film the professional critics focused on, and which aspects were deemed more important by audiences. With four reviews being included in the coding for each of the five titles, the total amounted to twenty reviews being coded.

II. Literature Review

The advent of Internet pop culture communities and streaming websites were instrumental in the development of general movie-going audiences becoming more acutely aware of the world's cinematic catalog. With this development came a new balance of power; rather than relying on critics to curate choices for them, audiences became more well-versed in navigating the staggering variety of films released each year. The idea of a figure who acts as a "vanguard" to culture – especially culture prized in being obscure or esoteric – is critical to the identity of film critics from a historical perspective. As a tastemaker or vanguard, the critic is at once the discoverer and the sharer of any cultural content that thrives on the illusion of exclusivity (Taylor, 2015). This exclusivity, powerful in its comparison to an in-the-know community, was once a more tangible aspect of media and art consumption in the age of print media – a time in which the distributors of opinion-based content held significant sway due to their market share and lofted status (Porton, 2013).

The explosion of Internet globalism and people's near-universal participation in various subcultures goes counter to the role criticism has previously played in a society of well-standardized art and creative content (Taylor, 2015). Today's Internet-enabled "sharing" culture, fostering the demolition of barriers between critics and the general public, has shifted the epicenters of cinephilia so that "everyone seems to be claiming cultural authority and specialized cultural knowledge at the same time, and both are so readily available" (Taylor, 2015, p. 25).

Being a vanguard also implies inherent risks with the championing of any work. As criticism boils down to both professional expertise and subjective opinion, the vanguard must toe a precipitous balance: curating an output of criticism toward any work that is capable of resonating with the less niche-savvy public, while at the same time not sacrificing their own status as gatekeeper-of-the-esoteric by stooping to pander to the public's whims (James, 2015). Such is the fear of a traditional critic: to preserve the exclusivity and artistic standards of the film medium while avoiding "catering to the adolescent taste and the Hollywood hype machine" (McNeil, 2015, p. 61). In some regards, presumption on the part of the critic was a driving force behind the degradation of what it takes to become a "critic" in the Internet Age – disregarding explicit aesthetic standards for more elusive insider knowledge, "specialized cultist knowledge and liberated camp taste" (Taylor, 2015, p. 26).

Thus, from the ashes of the old model of critical culture, audiences have arisen as the new authoritative voice in criticism (Elsaesser, 2015, 195). Gone are the days in which power existed solely in the pages of an A-list magazine or major newspaper; more and more, the driving power behind criticism is sourced from online review aggregates that consider audience reactions similarly to those of the more typical critics (Weinstein, 2012).

This new phenomenon in film reviewing has led to a leveling of the playing field; rather than

presenting themselves as authoritative figures, modern film critics present themselves “as audiences, trying to understand (a film’s) characters and, with or through them, the society that we live in” (Elsaesser 197). Additionally, film studios and production companies have even begun to consider the importance of audience viewpoint and the authority of audience tastes in modern review aggregators in the development, production, and marketing of their own content.

Though more films are being made now than ever before, critics of the old variety note that “the abundance of websites calling (the public’s) attention to small, off-the-radar movies may be the single best way of preserving the culture” (Panayides, 2015, p. 232). Indeed, the critic’s most basic, existential function, “to explain using expert knowledge, remains timeless – and a true critic, one who illuminates instead of just offering opinions, is as rare and valued in the age of the Internet as he or she ever was” (Panayides, 2015, p. 233).

The most popular of these film review aggregator sites, the Warner Brothers-owned Rotten Tomatoes, commands a unique place in the film market; it receives over 9 million unique viewers any given month (Wasserman, 2015). The practice of Internet browsing by its very nature does not facilitate sustained attention on any long-form piece of journalism, underscoring the unprecedented expediency and convenience at which anyone can view the critical consensus of any particular film (Young, 2010). The method by which Rotten Tomatoes portrays its consensus is taking effect on the industry via its power to sway word-of-mouth opinion depending on its “Tomato Meter” score, which congregates the percentage of reviews that were at all positive or negative (or “Fresh,” in the website’s own terminology) (Weinstein, 2012).

It is clear that audiences and professional critics have become almost equally influential voices to the consequences of film criticism, bolstered by ease of access to an entire history’s worth of film projects and the instant sharing culture that exists due to widespread Internet use. However, when films such as 2018’s *Hereditary* become notorious for the widespread chasm between the reaction from professional critics and audience reactions, a clear gap is brought to light. Despite the supposed elevation of audiences in the critical realm, there are varying standards used to determine the quality of a film, depending on whether the review comes from professional critics or general audience members (Cusumano, 2018). To help understand the reasons for the gap that happens sometimes between professional film reviews and audience film reviews, this study seeks to provide answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: Which components of a film are professional critics most likely to respond to, both positively and negatively?

RQ2: Which components of a film are audience critics (amateurs) most likely to respond to, both positively and negatively?

RQ3: Why do certain variables elicit stronger responses in amateur critics than in professional critics?

III. Methods

To determine why a strong discrepancy exists sometimes between the average of audience reviews and the average of professional critical reviews, a qualitative content analysis of reviews about five films was conducted. These films were selected based on the notable difference between average audience scores and average professional critic scores. The “gap” between each respective average score is at least a 30% difference, according to the scores accrued on Rotten Tomatoes, in comparison to the professional critics’ average rating.

For each film chosen, four reviews were selected for coding. The review from a professional critic was sourced from *Variety* magazine, due to its prominence, reputation, and influence in the entertainment industry. In addition, each title’s three first-listed audience reviews on the industry-standard review aggregator *Rotten Tomatoes* were also coded, to gauge initial audience reactions. Within each review, salient phrases, key words, characteristics, and examples were coded to glean which aspects of each film the professional reviewers chose to focus on or found more glaringly positive or negative, as opposed to what captured the attention of standard audiences.

The five films coded in this qualitative content analysis are *Hereditary* (93% critic score vs. 60% audience score), *Blockers* (84% critic score vs. 51% audience score), *The Witch* (91% critic score vs. 57%

audience score), *It Comes at Night* (87% critic score vs. 44% audience score), and *We Are What We Are* (82% critic score vs. 49% audience score). Each film being analyzed was released post-2010. The average difference between audience and critic scores in this sample is 33%.

The coding categories were salient phrases and keywords in each review, and a reviewer's reactions to aspects such as characters, performances, casting, direction, cinematography, music, sound design, plot (by act), set design, writing, camp factor (aspects that are meant to be enjoyed ironically), emotional appeals (emotional responses), action, pace, and marketing. Each aspect was coded as present or absent in the review and, when present, the review's positive or negative take on the respective aspect was also coded. The length of the review also was recorded.

IV. Findings

Each film's reviews were analyzed to account for the presence or absence of sixteen individual variables related to the composition of each film. If the variable was found to be present, it was further sorted into a "positive" connotation, "negative" connotation, or "neutral" connotation. Figure 1 consolidates the data from the five separate qualitative coding sheets.

Unsurprisingly, the reviews that came from a professional source (in this case *Variety*) were always longer than their audience-sourced counterparts. As such, they tended to cover a more complete spread of the available variables. Reviews sourced from Rotten Tomatoes were significantly smaller on average; while the word count of each *Variety* article averaged to around 1,001 words, the average Rotten Tomatoes word count came out to 305 words.

While the narrative structure and content of the *Variety* reviews varied considerably – some espoused mostly plot and subtext-focused interpretations, whereas other chose to spend more time invested in the technical and performance aspects of the film – a common thread between the professional reviews was that they on average provided more complete coverage of the available variables, while non-professional reviewers would more often fixate on a more limited scope of factors in order to issue praise or criticism. For example, the *Variety* review for one of the films included in this study, *The Witch*, included details on individual performances, the effectiveness of the production design, and the bleak thematic content within the screenplay, while one of the featured audience reviews found on Rotten Tomatoes simply mentioned how they reacted to the film (specifically, how "boring" they found it).

What Critics Addressed in Reviews

Variable	Review Source	Positive Responses	Negative Responses	Neutral Responses	Absent Response
Writing	Audience	3	6	1	5
	Professional	4	1	0	0
Plot [related to structure and clarity]	Audience	3	2	5	5
	Professional	1	0	3	1
Characters [Relative to character depth, arcs, and growth]	Audience	2	3	2	8
	Professional	1	0	4	0
Performances [By actors]	Audience	7	3	0	5
	Professional	4	0	1	0
Casting	Audience	2	1	0	12
	Professional	2	0	1	2

Direction [choices that led to overall takeaway]	Audience	5	1	0	9
	Professional	5	0	0	0
Cinema-tography	Audience	4	0	1	10
	Professional	2	0	0	3
Music	Audience	0	0	0	15
	Professional	2	0	0	3
Sound Design	Audience	0	0	0	15
	Professional	0	0	0	5
Production Design	Audience	1	0	0	14
	Professional	4	0	0	1
Camp Factor [Aspects of the film meant to be enjoyed ironically]	Audience	1	3	5	6
	Professional	1	0	1	3
Emotional Response [empathetic reaction noted in review]	Audience	5	8	1	1
	Professional	2	1	2	0
Action	Audience	1	1	1	12
	Professional	4	0	0	1
Pace	Audience	1	3	1	10
	Professional	1	0	1	3
Marketing Effectiveness	Audience	0	1	1	13
	Professional	0	0	0	5
Length	Audience	0	0	0	15
	Professional	0	0	1	4

Figure 1

Unsurprisingly, the variable that most captured the amateur reviewers' attention from the films was "Emotional Response." This label describes anything included in a review to indicate how the film affected reviewers viscerally or mentally, including their feelings and reactions toward the film. Of the 15 amateur reviews, 14 contained some reference to reviewer' emotional responses. Five of those 14 responses indicated positive emotions toward the film, eight of the responses indicated negative emotions, and one response indicated a neutral emotional response.

The variables of "Writing," "Characters," "Performances," "Direction," and "Emotional Response" were represented in all five coded professional film reviews. Performances appeared to be the variable that best indicated audience excitement and positivity, since seven of the variable's 10 occurrences were coded as "positive" reinforcement. The variable that tended to turn an audience reviewer against a film the most, was the most widely-cited variable – emotional response. Of the 14 reviews that indicated audience critics' emotional response, eight of them indicated a "negative" emotional response to the respective films.

V. Discussion

As discussed in the previous section, the reviews written by Rotten Tomatoes audience reviewers tended to be about one-third the length of the typical *Variety* review, and thus they usually were not able (or chose not) to cover the full berth of available variables. The data suggests that professional critics tend to give a more well-rounded and nuanced approach to understanding a film.

Audience reviews suggest that general consumers – not professional critics – will allow their overall impressions of a film to be heavily dictated by one or two prominent variables that they notice. For example, if a film contains an outstanding performance from one of its cast members (as was the case for *Hereditary* star Toni Collette, who was widely acclaimed for her performance), an audience reviewer will be more affected by this variable than, for instance, widely-acclaimed writing or direction, as was the case for *The Witch*, which took home awards for both categories (Best First Screenplay at the 2016 Independent Spirit Awards, Best Director at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival) (Thompson, 2018).

While emotional response tended to be the most easily-observable of these factors, it was also the most subjective, as one's emotional response is entirely dependent on an individual's values, beliefs, experiences, and knowledge of film repertoire. Amateur reviewers tended to judge a film's quality on how it made them feel – in other terms, whether or not they felt that, as a whole, the film left a “good” or “bad” impression.

For horror films such as *Hereditary* and *The Witch*, the disturbing nature of the narratives may have left an unsuspecting audience member with feelings of unease or disgust. While a seasoned film critic might have recognized this visceral response as the mark of an effective movie in terms of writing, direction, and performances, a less-experienced amateur critic may interpret those negative feelings as an indicator of a “bad” movie. Perhaps in a future iteration of this research, more specific emotional keywords could be coded for as a subset of the emotional response variable, such as fear, joy, anger, disgust, and sadness toward the film in question. This would not have been possible with the current methodology, since the reviewers do not necessarily indicate which emotion the film in question triggered for them. Future research could incorporate individual in-depth interviews into the data collection process.

While the data collected from professional film critics also indicated the significance of emotional response, they equally valued the merits of other variables, namely writing, characters, performances, and direction. In other words, professional film critics seemed to equally value the parts of a film over the sum; they took good directing, writing (character writing as well as action), and cast performances as seriously as the emotional response that was elicited due to these components. This is indicative of the “gatekeeper” knowledge of professional film critics that was discussed in the Literature Review section.

While modern audiences have likely seen far more films in their lifetimes than counterparts in previous generations, they lack the formal education, insider industry experience, and knowledge of the filmmaking process that many professional critics take for granted as part of their skillset. As such, their opinions – while not necessarily invalid – are likely to be emotionally driven, rather than influenced by the quality and/or originality of the film's construction.

Another interesting finding is the lack of attention to some variables. For example, sound design (an element crucial to any film) seemed to be taken for granted, or perhaps the audience and critics merely found the sound design in each film similarly unremarkable. A film's music similarly did not tend to invoke much attention; of the fifteen audience reviews, none mentioned a film's score. The music most likely had an impact on the film's emotional response, especially for the films belonging to genres that rely heavily on music to define dramatic beats and create tension and fear. However, this methodology is unable to discern exactly how little or how much a film's music may have had on the emotional response of the reviewer. Two of the five professional film reviews referenced the respective film's score in a positive manner, while the remaining three reviews contained no mention of a film's music. While a film's score is inherently an artistic contribution to the film, it may be viewed as a “technical” aspect by members of the audience, and thus above their immediate awareness in terms of a film's overall quality and impression.

This mindset can be observed in the reactions to “Production Design” (this includes set design, set dressing, lighting, costumes, and props). While four of the five reviews by professional critics positively referenced the respective film's production design (with one review making no reference to production design), only one audience review referenced that factor. Production design, as an element of the film that

generally is not as apparent to a casual audience as other aspects like performances, seems to have been noted much more frequently by professional critics, who have the industry and filmmaking knowledge to notice when set design elevates the film.

There were other limitations to this study. Only a small number of featured audience reviewers from each title were selected for coding, simply due to time and resource constraints. More detailed results would have undoubtedly brought a more nuanced look at this topic.

VI. Conclusion

In summary, this study indicates that, compared to audience reviewers, professional critics tend to compile a more comprehensive consideration of the film. Professional critics provided equal attention to above-the-line variables such as writing, characters, performances, and direction. All professional reviews also featured commentary on each film's emotional response, though this variable was treated generally as a culmination of all other above-the-line variables, rather than as a consequential stand-alone element. Amateur film critics treated emotional response as the single most important factor in a film, as it was the most-mentioned variable present in the coded selections.

Ultimately, this indicates the extent of the knowledge gap between professional and amateur critics. Professional critics, tasked with discerning quality content from the vast swathes of new releases, generally are more well-versed in the filmmaking process and the application of elements such as writing and performances. Members of the audience usually have not studied these aspects in the same way as professionals, and thus gravitate toward their own emotional response as an indication to the film's overall quality. Whereas professionals incorporate the building blocks of a film into their consideration, audiences are left focused on the sum of a film's parts - especially with regard to the film's overall emotional impact.

Acknowledgements

The researcher thanks Dr. Vanessa Bravo for her guidance and resources during the research and writing process.

References

- Cusumano, K. (2018, June 9). Why did audiences hate *Hereditary*, the supposed horror movie of the year? *W Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.wmagazine.com/story/hereditary-movie-cinemascore>
- Elsaesser, T. (2015). The social function of criticism; or, why does the cinema have (to have) a soul? In M. Frey & C. Sayad (Eds.), *Film criticism in the digital age* (pp. 195-208). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- James, N. (2015). Who needs critics? In M. Frey & C. Sayad (Eds.), *Film criticism in the digital age* (pp. 225-230). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- McNeil, D. (2015). 'The last honest film critic in America': Armond White and the children of James Baldwin. In M. Frey & C. Sayad (Eds.), *Film criticism in the digital age* (pp. 61-78). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Panayides, T., Lee, K.B., & Longworth, K. (2015). Excerpts from Cineaste's 'Film criticism in the age of the internet: A critical symposium.' In M. Frey & C. Sayad (Eds.), *Film criticism in the digital age* (pp. 231-242). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
-

- Porton, R., Kenigsberg, B., Klinger, G., Koresky, M., Reardon, K., & Tracy, A. (2013). Film criticism: The next generation. *Cinéaste* 38(2), 35–40.
- Taylor, G. (2015). Thumbs in the crowd: Artists and audiences in the postvanguard world. In M. Frey & C. Sayad (Eds.), *Film criticism in the digital age* (pp. 23–40). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Thompson, A. (2018, June 6). Toni Collette is explosive, but 'Hereditary' is horrific: How genre bias can kill Oscar chances. *IndieWire*. Retrieved from <https://www.indiewire.com/2018/06/hereditary-toni-collette-oscar-awards-1201971449/>
- Wasserman, M., Zeng, X.H.T., & Nunes Amaral, L.A. (2015). Cross-evaluation of metrics to estimate the significance of creative works. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 112(5), 1281–1286.
- Weinstein, J.L. (2012, February 17). Movie review aggregators grow in popularity, but do they matter? *TheWrap*. Retrieved from <https://www.thewrap.com/rotten-tomatoes-metacritic-movie-review-intelligence-35256/>
- Young, J.O. (2010). Art and the educated audience. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44(3), 29–42.
-

From Femininity to Feminism: A Visual Analysis of Advertisements Before and After the Femvertising Movement

Lindsey M. Case

*Strategic Communications and Communication Design
Elon University*

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

Abstract

Since its inception, advertising has become a crucial way in which brands ensure that their products, positions and interests are communicated to key audiences. Recently, there has been a movement in support of female empowerment advertising — labeled “femvertising” — across the United States. This article explores the messages and design of print advertisements before and after this movement, evaluating the evolution of companies in their representation of and marketing to women. Comparing the typography, photography, and themes of communications content from the 1960s, 70s or 80s to ads published in the past five years provides a context for the way in which societal shifts influence brand positioning and consumer perception. Through a qualitative visual analysis, the study identifies key trends in femvertising, including a decline in product prominence, an increase in depictions of diversity, as well as an emphasis on the sentiment of strength across campaigns. Advertisers may find these insights valuable in defining messaging that aligns with modern feminist feedback and builds favorability with female audiences.

I. Introduction

Messages are infused into culture with every article read, video watched and BuzzFeed quiz taken. Since its inception, advertising has become a crucial way in which brands ensure that their products, positions and interests are communicated to key audiences. However, paid media is now straying from being used exclusively for product promotion. Companies are leaning into their influence of culture through advertisements, whether in relationship to gender equality, human rights, environmental concerns or other topics worthy of advocacy. As an area in which mass media has been historically criticized, the representation of women has become an important point of discussion in the advertising industry. More brands are choosing to break the boundaries of female stereotyping and sexualized depiction that previously ruled.

The recent movement in support of female empowerment advertising — labeled “femvertising” — has swept across the United States (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017). A number of brands that market products toward women are recognizing the importance of supporting this wave of feminism that stands for fairness, acceptance, and strength. The spread of these values does not only benefit female figures, but benefits society by fostering a culture of inspiration and inclusivity.

Keywords: femvertising, female empowerment, stereotypes, advertising, visual analysis
Email: lcase2@elon.edu

This research seeks to understand how femvertising is reflected in basic components of advertising design, typography and imagery. This paper analyzes creative content to understand the changes in themes and values that have been brought forth by the femvertising movement.

II. Literature Review

Origins of Femvertising

Depictions of women related to Westernized beauty ideals, male desires and mothering stereotypes have long dominated advertising, perpetuating the subordinate status of women in society. As early as the 1950s, scholars began to assess the prevalence of gender bias in marketing communications content, specifically in relationship to women in stereotypical roles (Levy, 2008). Further discourse arose surrounding the “abundance of negative and/or gratuitously sexy images of women” that marketed products most often to men (Taylor, Miyazaki, & Mogensen, 2013, p. 213). However, the 1960s, 70s, and 80s also brought forth a restructuring of the labor force and family model that began to empower women outside of the home. Modern feminist movements began to vocalize disapproval of stereotyping and objectification of women, as well as anger toward the way in which advertising had long represented females as dependent on males and sexually exploitable (D’Enbeau, 2011). The actions and advocacy of these leading ladies set the stage for women to be portrayed in more positive roles and representations, subsequently affecting advertising for decades to come (Grau & Zotos, 2016).

These early conversations and critiques eventually culminated in “femvertising.” Coined by SheKnows Media at Advertising Week 2014, the movement’s label is an abbreviation of “female empowerment advertising” and refers to ads that directly contradict stereotypical depictions of women in advertising (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017). The start of femvertising is considered to be Dove’s iconic “Evolution” campaign (Davidson, 2015), which preceded a number of ads calling attention to gender stereotypes and empowering women: Always’ “Like a Girl” and Under Armour’s “I Will What I Want” are other notable examples (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017). Brands are leaning into messaging that supports feminist political protest, body positivity and the reclaiming of female sexuality (D’Enbeau, 2011). Increasingly, appeals to individuality and intelligence appeared and built favorability with younger audiences (Taylor, Miyazaki, & Mogensen, 2013).

While some companies may argue that social stances pigeonhole a brand unnecessarily, the research suggests otherwise. A survey on the relationship between femvertising and brand awareness found that more than half of females said they would buy a product if they approved of how the company and its advertisements portrayed women. (Castillo, 2014). Relationship building with buyers is becoming increasingly important; femvertising is proving itself a valuable avenue in relating to female consumers.

Responses to Femvertising

Audience feedback thus far has been supportive of femvertising initiatives. More than 90% of women are aware of at least one female empowerment campaign, which builds brand awareness and favorability in association with pro-woman messaging (Castillo, 2014). Furthermore, professionals in the advertising and academic spaces have noted benefits for brands breaking away from stereotypes. First of all, for women, this has offered the opportunity to reclaim traits or topics that were misconstrued in male-dominated media. Feminism focuses on equality and choice — to be a mother or not, to be sexual or not — and female consumers are being affirmed in their right to choose what paths or products contribute to this liberation (D’Enbeau, 2011). Additionally, for society as a collective, femvertising is forcing a conversation that encourages both marketers and consumers to understand stereotypes that emerge in both social and branded interactions (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017).

Scholars of media and marketing observed criticism of femvertising. One article notes that femvertising is primarily a means of reaching female consumers, potentially invalidating its sociocultural benefit (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017). With tactical roots in promotion, femvertising is more about boosting sales rather than benefitting a social cause, these critics charge (Lazar, 2006). Furthermore, concern has arisen due to the way in which words like “natural” and “real” are often used in an inauthentic context (Gill

and Elias, 2014). Such images may still be enhanced with Photoshop, or the models with makeup, making the content significantly less natural than implied.

Mirroring Versus Molding Society

From a theoretical approach, the nature of advertising is frequently disputed from a “mirror” versus “mold” perspective. The “mirror” concept suggests that advertising simply reflects the state of society; the other implies that media acts as a “mold” with the power to shape reality for audiences (Grau & Zotos, 2016). In relationship to this discussion, “femvertising can be considered novel in that it focuses on questioning female stereotypes acknowledged to be (at least partly) created by advertising” (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017, p. 796). Brands now face a paradox: to either mirror or mold, to invest in the empowerment of women, or reflect the more conventional roles that women continue to fulfill in some instances. In instances where femvertising is not a component of the marketing communications strategy, it appears companies still err on the side of the traditional (Eisend, 2010). This is reasonable in the context of advertisers producing content based on cultural values, because “as individuals, they are not immune to [socialized] gender stereotypes” (Grau & Zotos, 2016, p. 766).

Historically, it appears as though “portrayals in advertising have followed changes in society” rather than altering the social climate through creative (Akestam, Rosengren & Dahlen, 2017, p. 796). However, femvertising has put a twist on this, making it so brands are acting as activists for the empowerment of women. Expectancy theory, initially proposed by Victor Vroom, suggests this is crucial as roles and opportunities become less gendered. The concept states we internalize and expect out of others what is exemplified to us; therefore “advertising portrayals build social reality” (Sheehan, 2004, p. 80). If more feminist media consumption is equitable to a more pro-woman worldview, then advertising does include a molding component. Under expectancy theory, media hold power in defining consumer identity and confidence (Sheehan, 2004). The prolonged promotion of beauty stereotypes, gender roles and social expectations can all lead to a distorted sense of self, an increase in dissatisfaction, and may discourage women from striving for new opportunities that are outside of self-expectations (Eisend, 2010).

Previous research related to the portrayal of women in advertising focuses on the ways in which stereotypes, sexualization, and society confirm each other. However, this research differs in its desire to understand how corporations have caught on to the empowerment of women, and how the advertising efforts of brands have transformed under the influence of femvertising. From a comparative perspective, this study analyzes text and imagery to explore messages that ads communicate in support of women. By looking at how brands have shifted in portrayals of women, we can better understand the impact of female empowerment movements on consumer culture.

Research Questions

The following research revolves around three questions:

RQ1: How does the typography and written messaging differ in advertisements pre-and-post the femvertising movement?

RQ2: How does the photography and visual messaging differ in advertisements pre-and-post the femvertising movement, specifically in how female subjects are depicted?

RQ3: What themes are brands advertising in order to align themselves and their products with female empowerment?

III. Methods

This research sought to examine how brand messaging has changed as a result of social trends toward female empowerment. The methodology consisted of a qualitative visual analysis to examine the connotations in graphic and textual components of advertisements featuring female subjects and directed toward female consumers. A side-by-side display was used to directly compare and contrast appeals over time between two advertisements coming from the same brand.

Methods of visual analysis used in this research were based on Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's book, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996). Kress and van Leeuwen explain their approach as a social semiotic theory. When interacting with visual works — in this case, advertisements — the consumer interprets a sentiment and message. Audiences “seek to make a representation of some object or entity” in order for the work to align with social, cultural and personal experiences (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 6). *Reading Images* discusses the two components of this process: 1) objective interpretation of shape, form, alignment, proximity and elements of visual syntax that are presented in the work; as well as 2) subjective interpretation that is specific to the culture, context and connotation of the work received. In order to address both of these components, the researcher specifically analyzes text as depicted in the ad, imagery as depicted in the ad, and their synthesized implications on the traditional or progressive portrayal of women in culture.

Print ads for brands of current Fortune 500 companies were chosen in order to ensure pervasive campaign reach and relevance. Advertisements were selected across personal care brands (Kotex and Pantene), apparel brands (Kids and Nike) and home goods brands (Tide). Since these categories are often criticized for stereotyping women, this diversity of perspectives was important in addressing how these trends have shifted over time. Additionally, the modern advertisements were selected from campaigns published in the past five years; the historic ads were chosen from campaigns of the 1960s, 70s or 80s.

IV. Findings

The following findings are organized to describe, compare and contrast the print advertisements of five prominent brands. Looking at how the representation of women in ads has shifted over time, the analysis is segmented by brand and evaluated for typography, imagery and theme.

Kotex, 1972 and 2017



Figure 1. “The beltless, pinless fuss-less generation.” 1972.

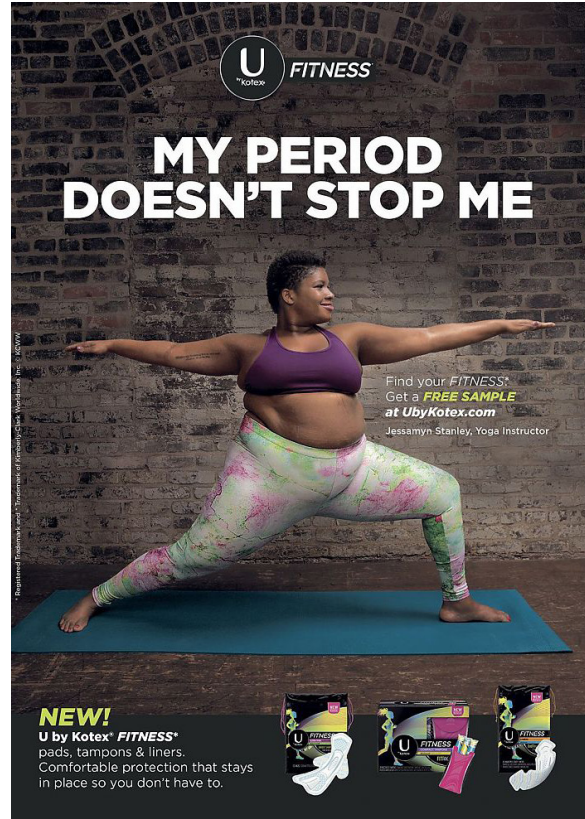


Figure 2. Jessamyn Stanley, “Doesn’t stop me.” 2017.

Based on the language in Figure 1, it is clear that “New Freedom by Kotex” is a feminine care line geared toward youth. It enthusiastically welcomes young women “to the beltless, pinless, fuss-less generation!” before reiterating “freedom” from previous menstrual difficulties. The advertisement takes an informative, yet storytelling approach, which sells readers on the idea of liberation by buying New Freedom by Kotex. In terms of imagery, the dominant graphic in Figure 1 is the young woman brightly dressed in iconic 1970s apparel, waving her arms and kicking her feet. Her activity acts as an outward representation of the freedom that New Freedom by Kotex users gain. The other image is the specially designed New Freedom by Kotex box, which mimics the vibrant colors that the young woman is wearing. Two more female figures are shown on the packaging, looking stylish and relaxed, also a testament to the easygoing consumer that Kotex is striving to attract with this product. Thematically, Figure 1 breaks from stagnant, secretive messaging that surrounded feminine care, and positions New Freedom by Kotex as a stylish solution. The messaging insinuates that this product is easy to use and wear, so that young women can maintain an easy-going spirit.

“U by Kotex” is another specialty line of feminine care products, this time for the modern day. The language of the caption in Figure 2, “my period doesn’t stop me,” is bold and framed in a manner that demands attention. It is this sentiment, in connection with the release of a fitness-oriented collection of hygienic items, which states U by Kotex’s support for ownership and independence over periods. Additionally, the image of Jessamyn Stanley is the central focus of Figure 2. U by Kotex’s choice to feature a diverse, active, body-positive representative for this line was a decision that enabled the brand to relate with women and minorities, as well as join in the discourse encouraging women to be comfortable with their body types. Stanley’s warrior pose is confirmation that her period doesn’t inhibit her; her strength makes body ownership the leading theme. With this campaign, U by Kotex takes a clear stance for female empowerment — for women to have control over what they do and when they do it. The poignant language and imagery selected for this ad reinforce the values of being strong and independent.

In a comparison of the advertisements for New Freedom by Kotex and U by Kotex, the parallel in appeal is interesting. In both, Kotex targets young consumers with ideals of freedom and uniqueness. Where U by Kotex differs is in representation. Ms. Stanley — a body positivity advocate — is a more significant voice than the model that simply represents a stylish and carefree lifestyle. Aligning Kotex with feminist causes takes a social stance and is likely attractive to its intended female audience.

Pantene, 1987 and 2017



Figure 3. Kelly LeBrock, “Because I’m beautiful.” 1987.



Figure 4. Selena Gomez, “Up for anything.” 2017.

The language in Figure 3 is front, center and clear: “Don’t hate me because I’m beautiful.” Quoted from Kelly LeBrock, an actress and model, and used as the tagline of Pantene’s mid-1980’s campaign, this statement insinuates that there’s no use being jealous of beauty; instead, invest in Pantene. The body copy suggests that the juxtaposed black and white photo below is a “before” shot, preceding a morning of preparation with Pantene. Going into depth about the strong and restorative formula of the brand, women are left with assurance that their hair can be “beautiful, just like [LeBrock’s]” if they purchase Pantene. The imagery highlights the flowing locks of LeBrock, whose look is complete with makeup and couture accessories. The smaller image (caption: “This is my hair in the morning.”) is simple, and shows the beautifying wonders of Pantene. In relation to the depictions of styled, stunning hair — the selling point — Pantene’s golden packaging is given a subdued position. The ad suggests that women who use other hair care products are less beautiful, employing inadequacy and the opportunity for beauty as sales appeals.

Contrastingly, Figure 4 featuring Selena Gomez utilizes its language to let readers know that “strong is up for anything.” Subsequent text defines this strength at “97% less breakage” with the use of Pantene, but the message extends from defining strong hair to describing strong women. The ad reiterates that “strong is beautiful” — a sentiment that can be applied broadly beyond the context of hair care. Gomez, smiling and enthusiastic, is the image that captures viewers’ attention first. Elements of Pantene’s packaging and Pro-V formula are incorporated around and behind her; this creates a dynamic environment for the ad to exist. Overall, the ad exemplifies a strong woman being supported by Pantene, working hand-in-hand with the ad’s messaging. Thematically, the typography and photo put Gomez in an excellent position to highlight not only strength, but also ease and enjoyment — critical components of a positive hair care experience. She appears styled but relaxed, a vision illustrating for audiences what is achievable with a little help from Pantene. Through this ad, the brand associates itself with rising potential for those who are ready for anything.

For using two famous subjects, the tone of Pantene’s ads could not be more contrary. Figure 3 has received critique for the way in which its slogan puts down women, and for its insinuation that an edited and over-glamourized figure simply used Pantene to achieve her looks. With Figure 4, however, Pantene transitioned away from the concept of “opulence is beautiful” and toward “strong is beautiful,” a more inspiring message for potential buyers of the brand. Pantene’s 2017 campaign focused on empowering women to be strong and themselves, an appeal rooted deep in femvertising.

Keds, 1963 and 2016



Figure 5. “Get that great Keds Fall feeling.”
1963.



Figure 6. “Never underestimate a pretty face.”
2016.

Keds uses typography as a more minimized component in Figure 5. Viewers are invited to “Get That Great Keds Fall Feeling,” falling in line with the autumn-themed “Walking Tweeds.” Small text along the bottom of the page describes the European origins and high-quality craftsmanship that go into the shoes. The most prominent imagery in Figure 5 is the large yellow-and-black-checked shoe, as well as the young woman sauntering across the page. Additionally, the product is stylized to create a connection between Keds and high-end fashion. Collectively, the minimalist design hints at a couture brand experience, and the woman seen wearing Keds is portrayed in high-esteem. The graphics shown are aloof and stylized, leaning into the concept of Keds as an exclusive retailer. Aligning the brand with a proper vision potentially lends itself to selective clientele. With its formal tone and artistic framing, Keds aimed this campaign to communicate with a mature audience.

While the previous ad was clearly to promote a product, Figure 6 takes a social stance: Its leading typographic feature daringly reminds readers to “never underestimate a pretty face.” Furthermore, in an interesting play on the traditional lockup that Keds uses, “Ladies First Since 1916” was added particularly for the pro-woman messaging of this campaign. Immediately, the text shows an intentional charge toward female empowerment. The ad features a model in a clean and casual outfit — wearing Keds, of course — that is creatively supplemented with a lion on the front page of a newspaper. This works hand-in-hand with the “pretty face” statement, which challenges the audience to not underestimate either the lion, or the woman behind it. It’s worth noting that assigning such a fierce figure to the female further develops the undertones of pride and power that are assigned to a petite person in gold Keds. Thematically, the ad is humorous with the intention of being poignant, inviting viewers to think twice about first impressions. Messages of strength and success reach out to empower female consumers, and again, the benefits of a brand binding itself to a social stance are apparent.

It’s also interesting to note the way in which these ads shift from product-focused to sentiment-focused marketing messages. This is reflective of the demand shoppers are currently making for companies to take a stance. Keds, in Figure 6, strategically and innovatively gave a voice to feminism.

Nike, 1980 and 2014

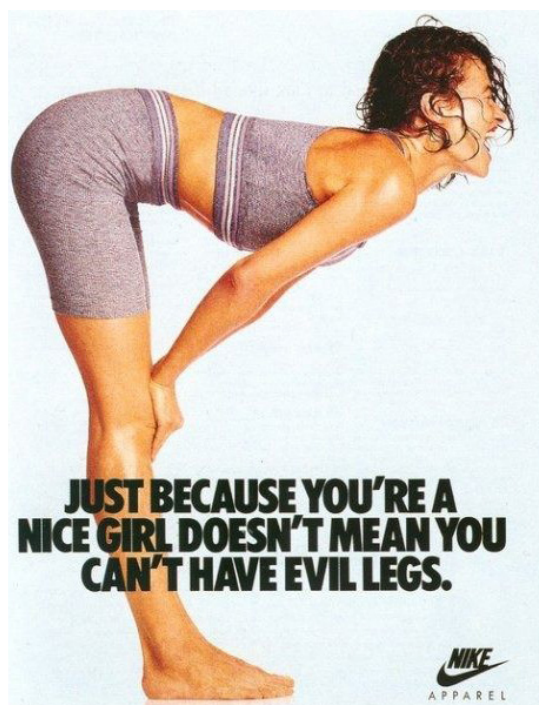


Figure 7. “Just because you’re a nice girl.”
1980.



Figure 8. “A run with the girls shouldn’t hurt the girls.” 2014.

The typography on Figure 7 is crisp and bold, allowing attention to fall to the photography and words themselves: “Just because you’re a nice girl doesn’t mean you can’t have evil legs.” “Evil” refers to fit and toned rather than mean, stating that it is okay to work hard for great legs. However, this statement also poses a relationship between personality and physique. Pop culture references to “mean girl” and “nice girl” archetypes suggests a negative correlation between fitness and kindness, which Nike implies are best to break. Furthermore, the stance of the woman being photographed is unclear. She may be stretching out after an intense workout; from another angle, she seems to be relaxed and laughing vibrantly. Ultimately, while further context is needed to clarify Figure 7’s sentiment, the casual stance and affable countenance does not seem to correlate with the actions of a serious, breaking-a-sweat athlete. Finally, Nike’s chosen model for this messaging fits the slim, Caucasian stereotype that one would expect of mass advertising.

In comparison, 34 years later, Figure 8 charges audiences to think deeply about their workout experience. The primary typography featured says that “a run with the girls shouldn’t hurt the girls” — in one sense referring to friends, and in the other referring to one’s breasts. This advertisement for Nike’s Pro Bra line encourages women to consider quality in their athletic apparel. To accompany this message, an image of a concentrated athlete owns the spread. She is sporting Nike apparel, but appears absorbed in her workout. Overall, the choice of the model reflects on Nike’s values of diversity, while her positioning showcases the intention of this apparel for individuals on the move. Figure 8 comes back to the theme of support, with the Nike and the Pro Bra collection created to give women the boost they need. For high-achieving athletes, an opportunity to train harder and perform better is always desirable. Nike highlights the Pro Bra in a way that recognizes and solves a common pain point for women, so female athletes can focus on their training instead of their chest.

The activity and intensity in the 2014 Nike ad reflects a societal shift in which respected female athletes have become more common and celebrated. In a male-dominated industry, creating a campaign around sports bras shows Nike’s commitment to female consumers. Figure 8 illustrates a woman who is invested in fitness, addressing the perception of females as competitors and continuing the necessary conversation about equality in sports.

Tide, 1978 and 2016

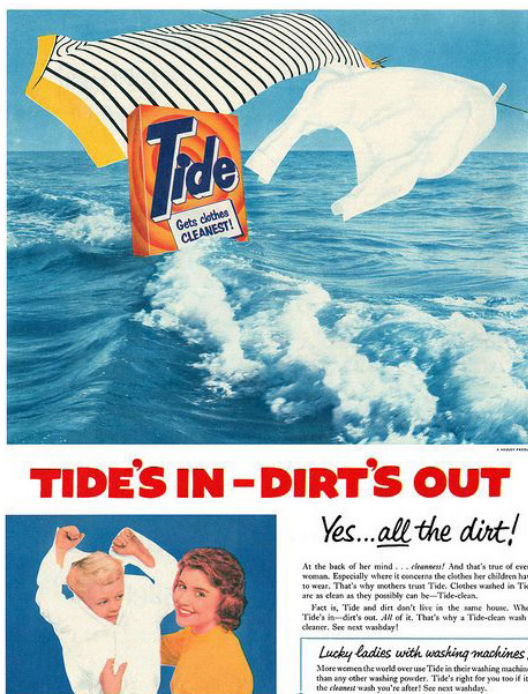


Figure 9. “Tide’s in — dirt’s out.” 1978.



Figure 10. Simone Biles, “Small but powerful.” 2016.

“Tide’s In — Dirt’s Out” is the bold headline that acts as a precursor for the primary focus in this ad. The typographic hierarchy in Figure 9 calls viewer attention to phrases such as “All the dirt” and “Tide — clean clothes are cleanest of all.” Collectively, the verbiage of this campaign is fixated on the cleaning power of Tide, while also using female-centric references and pronouns throughout the body copy. “Mothers trust Tide” only confirms this advertisement’s intended audience, comprised of housewives. The dominant imagery is a box of laundry detergent riding the tide while clotheslined apparel flies in the background, connecting back to the product’s purpose and brand’s namesake. Beach visuals bring forth a more relaxed tone. However, a female subject is featured in the bottom left quadrant, smiling with her son. Again, this creates an association between Tide and successful motherhood; the son’s bright white shirt illustrates cleaning capabilities. Thematically, Figure 9 is casual but clean, with cues suggesting that women who use Tide have more time to invest in leisure and their families. Happiness goes hand-in-hand with ridding your home of dirt and trusting Tide.

In contrast, Tide’s 2016 campaign surrounding the Olympics takes on an energetic tone. The language in Figure 10 announces that Tide Pods, like gymnast Simone Biles, are “small but powerful” and “the results are beautiful.” Connecting cleaning results with athletic strength brings a connotation of intensity and vigor to the audience. In terms of imagery, Biles is the focal point, appearing in a gymnast’s stance with a container of Tide Pods. However, beyond her posing, the logos in the bottom right hand of the layout are important to investigate. Tide made an intentional placement of its logo next to the “My Black is Beautiful” mark, undeniably aligning the brand with the racial equality movement. Biles, as an Olympic athlete and woman of color, is a perfect face for Tide in building a socially aware voice. The theme of this advertisement emphasizes strength, on behalf of both empowered women and the product. The ad focuses on the message of “small but mighty” and leans into a supportive, solid attitude that encourages target audiences — including young female consumers and socially conscious homemakers — to be determined, drive for success and turn to Tide for a confirmed clean when need be.

Showing female figures across two eras, Tide juxtaposes family-focused with individual-oriented. Figure 9 comments on the needs of mothers for efficient, effective laundry solutions, and while that desire is still prevalent in Figure 10, it is extrapolated in a way that notes that all populations require detergent that can pack a punch. Featuring a model mother versus a world-class athlete expresses the way in which Tide’s global perspective has expanded as an organization — working hand in hand with supporting “My Black is Beautiful” and placing the brand in a more progressive light.

V. Discussion

Comparing portrayals in advertisements gives insight into the appeals used by companies to communicate with women. The following are trends in femvertising that emerged through this comparative research process.

Strength as a Relevant and Recurring Theme

All five modern ads that were analyzed promoted a sentiment that relates back to strength, power or energizing women. Some ads did this through a direct call to action — “Strong is Up For Anything” in Figure 4 and “Small but Powerful” in Figure 10 stand out as messages that charge audiences to be adventurous and ambitious. However, in instances where empowerment was more subtle, design decisions were made that revealed the pervasiveness of femvertising. In Figure 2, Stanley stands strong in a warrior’s pose; in Figure 6, the king of the jungle is selected as a symbol of prowess and grace. Additionally, Figure 8 showcases an intense athlete. Each of these brands has taken strides to feature females in a way that highlights strength as a factor in femininity.

Stereotypes are Being Supplemented, Not Replaced

Motherly messages (Figure 9), easy-going energies (Figure 7) and glamorous get-ups (Figure 3) are clearly present in ads from the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Each of these archetypes does its part in earning advertising the criticism it has historically received for perpetuating stereotypes and misrepresenting women. While the femvertising movement has improved the way females are featured in marketing and media, the progressive campaigns this study looked at also confirm that stereotypes have not entirely disappeared.

Figure 10 illustrates an Olympian, seemingly thrilled to be working out with a pack of Tide Pods; Figure 4 turns to a styled and overjoyed celebrity to sing the praises of drugstore shampoo. While more examples are emerging of ads in which women are empowered, those instances do not negate the ways in which women are still propped up and stereotyped for the purpose of sales. This is particularly highlighted by the continued depiction of traditional beauty standards — bare skin and thin figures are still disproportionately represented in this collection of content. Overall, this research indicates the ways in which advertising has both molded pro-woman conversations, while reflecting the sexist and stereotypical undertones that plague Western populations. The ad industry can only do so much pushing before society has to lead suit and fight collectively for female empowerment.

Product Features are in Less Prominent Places

While advertisements of earlier decades nearly all focused around promoting a product, verbiage that connects to social issues ahead of sales is increasingly apparent in modern marketing materials. For example, the earlier Keds ad is dominated by the new style of shoe that has been released; attention is almost exclusively dedicated to the item for sale. On the other hand, the later Kids ad includes a pair of shoes, but the prevailing message is one that puts women at the center of the conversation, and notes human nature's ability to be both delicate and dominant. In the earlier Kotex ad, significantly more space is used discussing product benefits, while later, photos at the bottom suffice. In the 1978 Tide ad, the most prominent selling point is one of cleanliness; nearly 40 years later, an ad for the same product speaks much more to the beauty of power and strength. Overall, the value of product features to advertising is decreasing, and the importance of brand positioning is increasing. This suggests that values alignment is essential to modern advertising success and establishing consumer loyalty, specifically when it comes to connecting with female consumers.

Diversity Dominates Later Ads

A total of ten female figures are shown across the ten ads. In consideration of the five retro ads, all five women are white and homogeneous. Comparatively, three of the five modern layouts include black women, with another representing Latina populations. This increase in diverse subjects is not specific to the femvertising movement, but rather a cultural demand for representing different styles, personalities and ways of life in mass media. Femvertising supports this motion by stressing the importance of exposing audiences to minority groups, based on gender, race, sexual orientation, body size and other previously underrepresented identifiers.

VI. Conclusion

This research takes a comparative lens to nearly five decades of women depicted in advertising. Looking at ten ads from five brands, the researcher sought to understand the ways in which messaging and appeals have evolved alongside feminist critique and calls for female empowerment. Ultimately, the analysis suggests that brands and society continue to mirror and mold each other. We cannot entirely separate changes in society from creative decisions (Akestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017). However, in instances where social change is leading the way, the femvertising movement has been a driving factor in more progressive marketing to women.

A few limitations in this research should be addressed. First, in the selection of individual brands and advertisements, samples were constrained by what was available online through search engines and advertisement databases. This proved especially restrictive in finding ads from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Additionally, based on time constraints, the scope of the research was confined to a limited number of industries and brands. With additional time and resources, this study could cover more content, including expanding beyond print ads. Finally, the researcher was the only individual analyzing ads and drawing conclusions, so diversifying researchers could be valuable in revealing interpretations across identity groups and backgrounds.

Opportunities for continued research are plentiful. While this research aimed to make generalizations across categories and products, a stratified study that delves deep into the way in which women are represented in a particular industry, or the evolution over years of a particular brand's positioning, could prove valuable in understanding where and why stereotypes prevail.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express her appreciation to Daniel Haygood, associate professor at Elon University, for his supervision of this research, as well as his support of her personal and professional endeavors over the past three years. Additionally, the author is grateful to her parents — Chris and Carrie Case — for their encouragement of her passions and empowerment of the women around them.

References

- Akestam, N., Rosengren, S., & Dahlen, M. (2017). Advertising “like a girl”: Toward a better understanding of “femvertising” and its effects. *Psychology & Marketing*, 34, 795–806.
- Castillo, M. (2014). These stats prove femvertising works. Retrieved from <https://www.adweek.com/digital/these-stats-prove-femvertising-works-160704/>
- Davidson, L. (2015). Femvertising: Advertisers cash in on #feminism. Retrieved from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11312629/Femvertising-Advertisers-cash-in-on-feminism.html>
- D’Enbeau, S. (2011). Sex, feminism, and advertising: The politics of advertising feminism in a competitive marketplace. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 35, 53-69.
- Eisend, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of gender roles in advertising. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 38, 418-440.
- Gill, R., & Elias, A. S. (2014). ‘Awaken your incredible’: Love your body discourses and postfeminist contradictions. *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, 10(2), 179-188.
- Grau, S. L. and Zotos, Y. C. (2016). Gender stereotypes in advertising: a review of current research. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(5), 761-770.
- Huhmann, B. A. & Limbu, Y. B. (2016). Influence of gender stereotypes on advertising offensiveness and attitude toward advertising in general. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(5), 846-863.
- Kress, G. & van Leeuwen T. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Lazar, M. M. (2007). Discover the power of femininity! *Feminist Media Studies*, 6(4), 505-517.
- Levy, J. C. (2008). Advertising to women: Who are we in print and how do we reclaim our image? *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 2(4), 75-86.
- Nielsen Company. (2018). Time flies: U.S. adults now spend nearly half a day interacting with media. Retrieved from www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2018/time-flies-us-adults-now-spend-nearly-half-a-day-interacting-with-media.html
- Sheehan, K. (2004). *Controversies in contemporary advertising*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Taylor, K. A., Miyazaki, A. D. and Mogensen, K. B. (2013). Sex, beauty, and youth: An analysis of advertising appeals targeting U.S. women of different age groups. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, 34(2), 212-228.
-

Framing of the U.S. Embassy Move to Jerusalem: A Comparative Qualitative Study

Dana Chwatt

*Strategic Communications
Elon University*

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

Abstract

President Trump's declaration to make Jerusalem the capital of Israel and then later move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was met with disagreement from many in the international community. In this study, a qualitative content analysis was performed to investigate the news media coverage surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict, and more specifically around President Trump's announcement. Two publications were examined, one serving a primarily Jewish population, and the other serving a primarily Arab population. Sixteen articles from The Jewish Star and 15 articles from The Arab American News were thematically studied. It was hypothesized that the media coverage serving the Jewish population would be in favor of the move and more positive than that of the Arab coverage; the results were consistent with the hypothesis. Not only did the study examine possible bias in the two publications, but also how coverage was framed. Themes that emerged from both publications reinforced the problem at the core of the Israel-Palestine conflict: the preservation of identity, culture and religion of both peoples.

I. Introduction

The Israeli and Palestinian people have long been in conflict in the Middle East. Despite efforts toward a two-state solution – creating two independent states alongside one another – no such resolution has come to pass. Both sides have been at odds over a number of key issues, including who would have control of Jerusalem. Both sides view the city as their own capital. Jerusalem is one of the oldest cities in the world and is a holy site for Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. In December 2017, United States President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and in May 2018 the American embassy in Tel Aviv was moved to Jerusalem. The move generated substantial backlash from the Palestinians as well as local and international critics. Not only were Palestinians angered by the move; much of the international community also rebuked Trump's announcement (Landler, 2017).

This study presents a thematic analysis of news articles from two publications, one serving an area with a high Jewish demographic, and one serving an area with a high Arab demographic. The research uses framing theory to examine how the embassy announcement was covered by different publications with two different perspectives. "Framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience influences the choices people make about how to process that information" (Davie, 2014, p. 1). In other words, the way

Keywords: Israeli Palestinian conflict, newspapers, media framing, content analysis
Email: dchwatt@elon.edu

in which the news media presents a topic directly relates to the way the public perceives that issue. This study hypothesized that the publication serving a Jewish population (*The Jewish Star*) would frame the embassy move positively, and that the publication serving an Arab population (*The Arab American News*) would be against the move.

II. Literature Review

This section examines existing literature on news media's role in shaping public opinion through agenda setting and framing. Public attitudes can be shaped by how the news media portray an issue or topic. When an event or conflict occurs far from home, the public relies on the media to understand and form an opinion about the topic. International news coverage shapes our opinions and perceptions of foreign nations.

Agenda Setting

In 1972, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw first presented the concept of agenda setting. "They originally suggested that the media sets the public agenda, in the sense that they may not exactly tell you what to think, but they may tell you what to think about" (Davie, 2010, p. 1). In their first article, the authors state, "Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position." (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176). This theory holds significance because many news stories take place far from where the readers reside, and by the media choosing whether or not to cover a certain topic, issues may appear as more or less important to the reader.

The news media not only determine which topics are covered, but also the way in which a particular issue is portrayed. The agenda setting theory sheds light on how media cover controversial issues, including the Israel-Palestine dispute. In the view of some scholars, "The media have clearly played a pro-active role in the Middle East conflict, the coverage of which is obscured by the contrasting images of Jew and Muslim in western thought" (Egorova & Parfitt, 2004, p. 3).

Agenda setting is based upon two principles. "The first is that the media filters and shapes what we see rather than just reflecting stories to the audience. [...] The second assumption is that the more attention the media gives to an issue, the more likely the public will consider that issue to be important." (Karell, 2018, p. 2).

Previous research has established that there is a relationship between media coverage of nations and how the public viewed those nations. "The news media can show the public both how vitally important countries are to the United States and how negatively the countries should be viewed" (Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004, p. 1). Agenda setting theory is evident in the way international news is perceived by the public. Few have first-hand experience in foreign countries, making coverage of international news an important agenda-setting duty of the media (Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004).

Framing

Goffman maintained that "framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience (called "the frame") influences the choices people make about how to process that information..." (Davie, 2014, p. 1). Frames organize the structure and meaning of a message. In understanding how the news media set an agenda, researchers must examine how a specific topic or issue is framed within the media coverage, which in turn shapes our understanding of the topic itself. Previous scholars have identified "four structural dimensions of news discourse" (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 59). Syntactic structures look for patterns in the way words and phrases are used within the context of a news story. Script structures look at the overall newsworthiness of the topic as well as the intention of the journalist to communicate an event to the public that goes beyond their own experience. Thematic structures refer to a journalist and or publication to impose an underlying theme to a news story. Rhetorical structures refer to the stylistic choices a journalist makes, such as the use of metaphors, catchphrases and wording, in order to make a story seem more provocative. (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Framing of International Conflict

The type of framing a journalist uses greatly influences whether the public will sympathize with a particular side or simply feel removed from these far away events. (Evans, 2010). Numerous scholars have

focused on media bias in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The main argument of Neureiter's (2016) article, which examined sources of media bias around the Israel-Palestine conflict, was that the portrayal varied depending upon the country that provides the coverage. Neureiter suggested that the biggest implication of media bias surrounding a group of people is population: "The more populous an ethnic community becomes, the more likely it is to make its voice heard and to effectively promote its interests. Such ethnic interest groups then possibly influence both foreign policy-making and public opinion on certain issues" (p. 79). These intersections, scholars argue, mold opinion and biases, not only within the media, but also within the public.

In previous research, a number of frames were commonly found in U.S. news media surrounding international issues: "conflict, economic consequences, human impact, and morality" (An & Gower, 2009 p. 108). This study aims to identify which frames are present in more narrowly targeted news coverage.

III. Methods

A qualitative content analysis was performed to investigate the news media coverage surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict, and more specifically around President Trump's announcement to move the Israeli Embassy to from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. To better understand how a particular target audience may affect the way the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is framed, this study examined content from two news sources. One was *The Arab American News*, a newspaper located in Dearborn, Michigan, where more than one-third of the population is Arab, according to Census Bureau estimates. The other was *The Jewish Star*, the highest-circulated Jewish newspaper in the greater New York City area, one of the most populous Jewish areas in the United States. These two periodicals were chosen and examined to obtain insight into the local-level framing of the Israel-Palestine conflict and, more specifically, the relocation of the U.S. Embassy.

The study analyzed the content of all articles that were published in the *Arab American News* and *The Jewish Star* between December 1, 2017 (right before Trump's announcement to move the embassy) and June 1, 2018 (two weeks after the actual move of the embassy) which contained the topic "U.S. Embassy move from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem." Articles were accessed through the NewsBank database. A total of 15 articles from the *Arab American News*, and 16 articles from *The Jewish Star* were analyzed. A qualitative thematic analysis examined quotes contained in the articles, as well as overarching rhetoric and themes. The qualitative analysis allows for the identification of framing around the embassy move narrative. It is important to note that qualitative research is not generalizable, but instead provides insight into the framing process in these particular instances.

IV. Findings

Publication #1: The Jewish Star

An analysis of 16 news articles from *The Jewish Star* publication revealed four key themes: religious significance, historical significance, aligning values, and the law. *The Jewish Star* also published complete transcripts of Vice President Mike Pence's speech to the Knesset (Israeli Parliament), and of Trump's Jerusalem speech.

The theme encompassing support for the move of the embassy on religious grounds were prevalent in four of *The Jewish Star* articles. For example, a commentary by Ammiel Hirsch noted that Jerusalem was "the place where our people was formed, where the Bible was written. Jews lived free and made pilgrimage to Jerusalem for a thousand years. Our national existence changed the world and led to the creation of two other great faiths" (Hirsch and Wise, 2017). Articles centered on this theme argued that Jerusalem is not only a historic part of the Jewish identity, but also the most central part of the Jewish religion.

Similarly, in another news article, the president of Christians in Defense of Israel said Jerusalem "has historically and biblically always been the capital of Israel, and I think Christians are united by and large by this move" (Savage, 2017). Many evangelical Christian organizations are in support of the move because the Bible states that Jerusalem is Israel's capital.

A second theme, found in nine *Jewish Star* articles, encompasses the support for the move on the basis of its historical significance. For example, the editor of *The Jewish Star* wrote in an editorial, “All the United States has done is to recognize what has been the truth on the ground for 70 years” (Tobin, 2018a). Another article noted that the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new embassy was planned for Israel’s Independence Day: “Selecting May 14 might soften the blow to the Palestinians,” one writer suggested, because Israelis will already be celebrating that day (Dunetz, 2018). The American Israel Public Affairs Committee also was quoted in a news article talking about the significance of the move occurring on Israel’s Independence Day, and in the same news article, The American Jewish Congress applauded the Trump administration for its “historic commitment to relocating the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Israel’s rightful capital of Jerusalem” (“Jewish organizations,” 2017).

Previously, Israel was the only country in the world whose capital city was not recognized by the United States, and four news articles noted this fact. One said Trump’s announcement, “is more than an important benchmark—it is a milestone that corrects a historical wrong” (Savage, 2017), while quoting the Jewish Council for Public Affairs saying, “We agree with the president that Israel, like all countries, has the right to determine the location of its capital” (Savage, 2017).

Other coverage emphasized that the relocation of the embassy was an important event that acknowledges the history of the Jewish people in Israel. In a news article, Daniel B. Shapiro, who served as U.S. ambassador to Israel during the Obama administration, was quoted saying, “The presence of a U.S. Embassy in parts of Jerusalem no one disputes are Israeli territory is one way of acknowledging the centuries of history that link the Jewish people to the city” (“U.S. embassy relocates,” 2018).

A third theme focused on alignment of values that the United States and Israel share. Some of these values include liberty, religious freedom, and safety, among others. The published transcript of Vice President Mike Pence’s speech to the Knesset included: “We stand with Israel because your cause is our cause, your values are our values, and your fight is our fight. We stand with Israel because we believe in right over wrong, in good over evil, and in liberty over tyranny” (“Pence vows,” 2018).

Another value that was stressed in eight articles was that of a promise kept. During his presidential campaign, Donald Trump made a promise that he would move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. One article included, “Thank you, President Trump for keeping the promise so many other presidents broke” (Dunetz, 2018). Within the 16 articles, “thank you” appears ten times in reference to Trump’s decision.

Religious freedom was another shared value noted in coverage. One article said, “recognition [of Jerusalem as the capital] reinforces Israel’s role in guaranteeing religious freedom in Jerusalem for all faiths” (“U.S. embassy relocates,” 2018). In addition, safety and protection of the people was prominent in the coverage. People in support of the embassy move cite the effects that years of waiting for such an event have had, and two news articles discussed those effects. For example, one article suggested that “The problem with waiting was that holding off only served to reinforce Palestinian rejectionism” (Savage, 2017).

Another theme, noted in five articles, related to U.S. law. For instance, one news article wrote that the move “represents the fulfillment of the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995, which mandates that the United States move its embassy to Jerusalem” (“U.S. embassy relocates,” 2018). Other articles noted that the move was a result of a bipartisan effort in the U.S. government. For example, one article used a 2017 quote from Democratic Sen. Bob Menendez, senior member of the senate Foreign Relations Committee, who supported moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem.

Coverage in *The Jewish Star* was not exclusively positive; some consistent themes emerged against the move of the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. One was that the move would discourage peace talks between the two sides because there is no overall peace plan in place. For example, one news article quoted Rabbi Rick Jacobs, President of the Union for Reform Judaism, who said that although the U.S. Embassy “should, at the right time, be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem,” the decision should not have been made “absent a comprehensive plan for a peace process” (Hirsch & Wise, 2017). Likewise, another article noted, “some Jewish leaders, while recognizing the importance of the Jerusalem move, said the timing was not right” (Savage, 2017). Coverage in *The Jewish Star* also noted backlash by the United Nations, which voted to condemn the U.S. decision, and concerns about protests from the Palestinian Authority.

President Trump himself was also a focus of coverage. As Jonathan S. Tobin noted in a commentary, some American Jews were unhappy about the move of the embassy solely because it was implemented by Trump. While Tobin found some of the president’s “personal behavior and style” regrettable, he also argued

that, “only someone like Trump, who distrusts the experts and disdains the established rules of politics, would have ignored the predictions that the world would end if the embassy were moved.” (Tobin, 2018b). Other articles saw the move through a political lens: “Trump wants to help (Israel Prime Minister) Netanyahu stay in office and the move will certainly help him politically” (Dunetz, 2018).

Publication #2: The Arab American News

In analyzing 16 news articles from *The Arab American News*, four key themes emerged: religion, international criticism, critique of the U.S. / Trump administration, and consequences of the announcement in the Middle East.

Many Palestinians believe that Jerusalem is an essential part of the Muslim religion, a prominent theme that was reflected in the newspaper’s coverage. One news article wrote that Jerusalem “is an integral part of the Palestinian identity” (Elassar, 2018), while an opinion piece lamented that many U.S. leaders had not “acknowledged that Jerusalem is the commercial, cultural, educational and religious center for Palestinian life” (Zunes, 2017).

The Arab American News also made note of the international community’s disapproval of the move in seven articles. In particular, four news articles noted Turkey’s objections and threats “to cut diplomatic ties with Israel if Trump recognizes Jerusalem” (“Trump tells Arab,” 2017). Four news articles pointed out that the Russian government “feared the embassy move would increase tensions across the Middle East” (“Israeli forces kill,” 2018). Two articles also noted the United Nations’ opposition to the move.

Some Palestinians believe that the embassy decision might conflict with international law, and three articles in *The Arab American News* mentioned this concern. An opinion piece noted that the move “raises serious questions” legally, while also risking “a violent and destabilizing reaction targeting U.S. interests globally” (Zunes, 2017). In another article, a Palestinian negotiator was quoted saying, “This [embassy] move is not only illegal but will also thwart the achievement of a just and lasting peace” (“U.S. Embassy road,” 2018). Still another opinion piece said “Not only did the U.S. pull out of the ‘peace process,’ it is expected to do its utmost to jeopardize any Palestinian initiative aimed at holding Israel accountable for its 50-year-old illegal military occupation” (Baroud, 2018).

Twelve of the 16 articles included critique of the U.S. government. One commentary on the embassy decision lamented that “U.S. foreign policy has been bankrupt for years. It was never fair, nor did it ever intend to be so” (Baroud, 2017), while another wrote that the change in policy meant “the United States could no longer serve as an honest broker in any peace process with Israel” (“Israeli forces kill,” 2018). Other related articles laid blame directly on Trump for his “dangerous and provocative move regarding Jerusalem— like so many of his reckless policies both abroad and at home” (Zunes, 2017).

Some articles in *The Arab American News* portrayed the embassy decision as part of a broader political calculation by the U.S. president. “Trump appears intent on satisfying the pro-Israel, right-wing base, including evangelical Christians, that helped him win the presidency,” asserted one article (“Trump tells Arab,” 2017). Another article suggested that “any rioting and acts of terrorism by Muslims in reaction to Trump’s decision would only reinforce his narrative and his agenda for restricting immigration and bombing Muslim countries.” (Zunes, 2017).

Another primary theme of coverage, the effect the embassy move might have on security and stability in the Middle East, was addressed in 10 articles. One article addressed “outrage from Palestinians and the Arab world and concern among Washington’s western allies” (“U.S. vetoes U.N. call,” 2017), while another news article noted “potential damage to U.S. relations with Muslim countries” (Reuters, 2017). Yet another article expressed concern that the move would “surely create further destabilization in a region that has been taken on a destructive course for years” (Baroud, 2017). This destabilization, according to another opinion article, raised concerns that extremists “will likely take advantage of popular outrage over the decision to encourage violent attacks, including terrorism, targeting U.S. interests” (Zunes, 2017).

None of the 15 *Arab American News* articles supported the embassy move, but a number of articles had content that remained relatively neutral. These articles addressed Trump’s campaign promise being fulfilled, other nations potentially getting on board, and the move as a fulfillment of the 1995 law. One news article did see something of a silver lining: “a negotiated settlement between Israel and the Palestinians on defining Jerusalem’s borders” (“U.S. Embassy road,” 2018).

V. Discussion

An analysis of *The Jewish Star* found that all 16 articles were in support of the U.S. Embassy move. *The Jewish Star* comes from the most populous Jewish area in the United States, an interesting point to consider in light of previous scholarship indicating that “the more populous an ethnic community becomes, the more likely it is to make its voice heard and to effectively promote its interests” (Neureiter, 2016, p. 79). The language used in *The Jewish Star* is not only pro-move of the embassy; it is also pro-Israel and pro-Trump in many ways. Previous studies also acknowledge the “existence of an interrelationship between demographics, public opinion, foreign policy/interstate relations, and media bias” (Neureiter, 2016, p. 79), a conclusion that is further supported by findings in this study. This foreign policy decision by the Trump administration is one that has received countless criticism and backlash, but all of *The Jewish Star* articles support the move. This would seem to indicate the presence of media bias in the publication because there were no alternative viewpoints offered. Although the articles from *The Jewish Star* did mention reasons why the move might not be wise, it is evident that such reservations are not representative of the general trend of the publication. The 15 articles from *The Arab American News* generally reflected strong sentiment against the U.S. Embassy move, further supporting past scholarship on how demographics can shape media coverage and public opinion.

An interesting finding was the juxtaposition of how *The Jewish Star* and *The Arab American News* each viewed the significance of the date of the move. *The Jewish Star* cited the fact that the embassy move was occurring on Israel’s 70th birthday, and as a result some of the articles from *The Jewish Star* suggested that the embassy move to Jerusalem was a great birthday present to Israel. One article asserted that the choice of that day would “soften the blow” to the Palestinian people since the Israeli people would be celebrating anyway. On the other hand, Israel’s birthday is also the anniversary of the Palestinian people losing their nation, and an article from *The Arab American News* stated that it was insensitive making the move on that day because it might hinder peace efforts.

Another interesting juxtaposition between the two publications is the way they cast the significance of the embassy relocation in the light of decades past. In five articles from *The Arab American News*, Trump is condemned for breaking decades of U.S. policy. On the other hand, *The Jewish Star* thanked Trump for breaking from decades of precedent and fulfilling the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995.

VI. Conclusion

Although the study sought a fair and even examination of both publications and the content within them, there were some limitations. Photos were not included in the analysis due to a desire to focus on how the embassy move was framed solely within text. A future study could contribute to the understanding of the way in which each publication framed the issue by examining photos, design choices, and article placement. Future scholars also could focus on publications that are more widely read in the United States, as well as international publications.

In this study, it is evident that religion and identity are key issues in this conflict based on the way each publication framed its coverage. Both publications point out multiple times the significance of Jerusalem to religion and identity. Israelis and Palestinians want to preserve their identities, religions, and cultures, and both believe that Jerusalem is fundamentally at the core of those. Both peoples will do everything they can to preserve Jerusalem as “theirs,” and until a compromise or a defeat, a two-state solution might be impossible. This fact alone underscores what is perhaps the ultimate problem within this conflict: It is not merely a conflict over land; it is a complex conflict that includes preservation of religion and identity that dates back centuries.

References

- An, S., & Gower, K. K. (2009). How do the news media frame crises? A content analysis of crisis news coverage. *Public Relations Review*, 35(2), 107-112. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.01.010
- Baroud, R. (2017, December 15). What Trump has done: The entire U.S.-Middle East political framework just collapsed. *The Arab American News*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Baroud, R. (2018, January 5). Will 2018 usher in a new Palestinian strategy? *The Arab American News*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Berger, R. (2013). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219-234. doi:10.1177/1468794112468475
- Davie, G. (2010, March 9). The agenda-setting function of the mass media [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://masscommtheory.com/theory-overviews/agenda-setting-theory/>
- Davie, G. (2014, February 18). Framing theory [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://masscommtheory.com/theory-overviews/framing-theory/>
- Dunetz, J. (2018, February 28). HaShana B'Yerushalayim: THIS Year in J'salem. *The Jewish Star*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Dunetz, J. (2017, December 5). Trump recognizing Jerusalem as capital of Israel, begins process of moving U.S. embassy. *The Jewish Star*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Egorova, Y., & Parfitt, T. (2002). *Jews, Muslims and mass media: Mediating the 'other'*. New York, NY: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Elassar, A. (2018, May 18). Jerusalem, home to Muslim, Christian and Jewish landmarks, is an integral part of the Palestinian identity. *The Arab American News*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Evans, M. (2010). Framing international conflicts: Media coverage of fighting in the Middle East. *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, 6(2), 209-233. doi:10.1386/mcp.6.2.209_1
- Hammond, J. R. (2017, February 24). The role of the US media in the Palestine conflict. Retrieved from <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2016/09/20/the-role-of-the-us-media-in-the-palestine-conflict/>
- Hayom, I. (2018, February 28). Embassy row: Joy over early move. *The Jewish Star*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Hirsch, A., & Wise, S. (2017, December 20). Some Reform leaders DO have Israel's back. *The Jewish Star*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Israeli forces kill dozens in Gaza as U.S. Embassy opens in Jerusalem. *The Arab American News*. (2018, May 14). Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Israeli minister: U.S. may soon recognize Israel's hold on Golan. (n.d.). *The Arab American News*. Retrieved May 23, 2018, from NewsBank Inc.
- Jewish organizations cheer the embassy move. (2018, May 16). *The Jewish Star*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Karell, D. (2018, February 20). The agenda-setting theory in mass communication. Retrieved from <https://online.alvernia.edu/agenda-setting-theory/>
-

- Khalifeh, H. (2018, May 18). Gaza massacre, Jerusalem embassy move ignite diverse local and global protests. *The Arab American News*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Landler, M. (2017, December 06). Trump recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's capital and orders U.S. embassy to move. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/world/middleeast/trump-jerusalem-israel-capital.html>
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176-187. doi:10.1086/267990
- Myers, M. (2000). Qualitative research and the generalizability question: Standing firm with Proteus. *The Qualitative Report*, 4(3), -. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol4/iss3/9>
- Neureiter, M. (2016). Sources of media bias in coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict: The 2010 Gaza flotilla raid in German, British, and US newspapers. *Israel Affairs*, 23(1), 66-86. doi:10.1080/13537121.2016.1244381
- Pan, Z., & Kosicki, G. (1993). Framing analysis: An approach to news discourse. *Political Communication*, 10(1), 55-75. doi:10.1080/10584609.1993.9962963
- Pence vows: Next year in Jerusalem! (2018, January 24). *The Jewish Star*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Reuters. (2017, December 2). Trump likely to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital next week. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Sales, B. (2018, May 16). Oy, the traffic! Not in my backyard? *The Jewish Star*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Savage, S. (2017, December 7). Trump draws broad Jewish and Christian support on Jerusalem. *The Jewish Star*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Tobin, J. S. (2018, February 28). The embassy will move . . . and the world won't end. *The Jewish Star*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Tobin, J. S. (2018, May 16). The significance of Jerusalem embassy move. *The Jewish Star*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Trump tells Arab leaders he will move embassy to Jerusalem, breaking with U.S. policy. (n.d.). *The Arab American News*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- U.S. embassy relocates to Jerusalem. Here's what you need to know. (2018, May 16). *The Jewish Star*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- U.S. embassy road signs go up in Jerusalem. (2018, May 7). *The Arab American News*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- U.S. vetoes U.N. call for withdrawal of Trump's Jerusalem decision. (2017, December 18). *The Arab American News*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
- Wanta, W., Golan, G., & Lee, C. (2004). Agenda setting and international news: Media influence on public perceptions of foreign nations. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81(2), 364-377. doi:10.1177/107769900408100209
- Zunes, S. (2017, December 22). Both parties pushed Trump toward reckless action on Jerusalem. *The Arab American News*. Retrieved from NewsBank Inc.
-

Risk and Reward: An Analysis of #BoycottNike as a Response to Nike's Colin Kaepernick Advertising Campaign

Anna Cosentino

*Media Analytics
Elon University*

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

Abstract

In September 2018, Nike released its most controversial marketing campaign yet. It featured Colin Kaepernick, an NFL player known for kneeling during the national anthem to protest police brutality and racism. Some people immediately reacted to the campaign's launch by posting pictures on Twitter of burning Nike shoes, along with the hashtag #BoycottNike. This paper examines the Twitter conversation around #BoycottNike through sentiment analysis, topic modeling, and analysis of tweet engagement. The analysis revealed that despite the initial negative Twitter reaction surrounding #BoycottNike, sentiment became more positive over time. Topic modeling revealed that conversations about the Kaepernick campaign were at times framed through an overtly political lens.

I. Introduction

From Charles Barkley declaring he is not a role model, to Tiger Woods sharing his experiences with racism in golf clubs, Nike has employed star athletes to both address timely social issues and power its marketing efforts. In 2018, Nike released arguably its most controversial and risky ad campaign yet, featuring Colin Kaepernick as the face of the brand. The campaign honored the 30th anniversary of its slogan, "Just Do It," but also took a clear stand on police brutality.

Kaepernick has made a name for himself in recent years, not just as a successful NFL player, but also as a social activist. He began kneeling during the national anthem before games to protest police brutality and racial discrimination in 2016. As other players began to join him, the protest became highly publicized, and President Donald Trump publicly stated that any kneeling player should be fired. The protest continues to be highly debated. In 2019, Kaepernick and the NFL settled a collusion case that charged the league was conspiring to keep him off the field.

Nike's campaign depicts Kaepernick with the words "Believe something. Even if it means sacrificing everything," alluding to the risk he took by standing up to the NFL. As soon as Kaepernick revealed his Nike partnership, some people took to Twitter with the hashtag #BoycottNike, with some posting pictures of themselves burning Nike apparel. The immediate backlash on Twitter made it clear that the company risked alienating customers who hold opposite views, raising concerns about whether the campaign would hurt

Keywords: Nike, Colin Kaepernick, NFL, national anthem, police brutality, racism, Twitter, sentiment analysis
Email: acosentino@elon.edu

the company's profitability. This study will analyze tweets using #BoycottNike to gauge the degree of online pushback to the campaign.

II. Literature Review

A significant amount of previous research has been conducted on celebrity and activist advertising. Though this paper focuses on one specific advertising campaign, this review will discuss Nike's advertising history to establish its tendency to create campaigns with a social impact. It will also discuss celebrity endorsement advertising, brands as activists, and anti-brand activism and boycotts, establishing the current knowledge surrounding the approach of the Kaepernick campaign as well as its outcomes.

Nike's Advertising History

Nike has long been known as a brand that takes risks in its advertisements in order to address current social issues. Armstrong (1999) analyzed Nike's advertisements to identify how it communicates with black audiences. By examining symbolic messages in Nike basketball advertisements that had high visibility with black consumers, Armstrong found that consumers respond to advertisements that include culturally relevant symbols and interactions. Ads that showed people hanging out at a barber shop or playing basketball and had a message of overcoming adversity helped Nike create ads that black consumers could relate to. Lucas (2006) completed a similar study but analyzed Nike's messaging to girls and women participating in sport. She studied the "If you let me play," "There's a girl being born in America," and "The Fun Police" campaigns to understand how Nike positioned itself to encourage girls to get involved in athletics. Each of the ads was labeled an "ad with conscience." Lucas found that in each ad, Nike shared the message that girls should be encouraged to play sports, especially if they wore Nike products. Both of these studies explain how Nike has established its reputation of being a social activist by appealing to underrepresented audiences, but the studies fail to analyze how celebrity endorsement plays a role in building this reputation.

Celebrity Endorsement

Leveraging the endorsement of celebrities in marketing can be an effective strategy to gain trust from an audience and shape a brand. Seno and Lukas (2007) identified celebrity endorsement as a practice of co-branding for the company and the endorser. Through a review of previous research, Seno and Lukas found that celebrity endorsement is a reciprocal relationship – endorsement not only affects the image of the brand but also that of the celebrity – especially when there is consistency between characteristics of the endorser and the product that is being endorsed. This means that audience perceptions of the company and of the celebrity begin to converge. In the case of the current Kaepernick and Nike study, one can assume that Kaepernick's partnership with Nike has caused people to hold parallel perceptions toward the player and the company.

Cunningham and Regan (2011) also examined the idea of celebrity-brand congruence, but sought to understand how race and political activism play a role in perceptions of athlete-product fit. They found that political activism and racial identity, taken individually, did not have any direct effect on perceived trustworthiness to an audience. However, a combination of strong racial identity and non-controversial activism positively correlated with trustworthiness and athlete-product fit. Lear, Runyan, and Whitaker (2009) expanded upon these ideas and applied them directly to retail product advertising. Using print media in sporting magazines, the researchers found that the use of sports influencers has increased in recent years. Additionally, when analyzing Nike's partnership with Tiger Woods, they found that Nike had a large return-on-investment from the sponsorship despite the marital infidelity scandal surrounding Woods. This finding suggests that Nike will have the same success with Colin Kaepernick.

Brands as Activists

Nike's use of sports celebrities that are from minority groups, such as Serena Williams and Tiger Woods, has helped it create the image of an activist brand. Many researchers have studied this emergence of brands as activists to understand the effect that activism has on business goals and outcomes. Mohr, Webb, and Harris (2005) examined corporate social responsibility (CSR) participations to understand the effect of

those activities on customer buying behavior. The results showed that although most consumers do not use CSR as a purchase criterion, a small subset of consumers do choose to give their business to companies that have a strong sense of CSR.

Schmidt, Shreffler, Hambrick, and Gordon (2018) expanded upon the findings of the Mohr study by focusing on brand sponsorship of activists. They found that brand image and purchase intent are negatively impacted by risky activism of brand spokespeople. Colin Kaepernick, Brandon Marshall, and Carmelo Anthony were used to identify the effect. For Kaepernick, his activism against police brutality resulted in public backlash and a loss of sponsorship from brand partners. Additionally, they claim that Kaepernick's protests caused a slight decrease in Nike's brand image and the purchase intentions of Nike products, however that decrease did not have an overall detrimental effect. Schmidt's study asked similar questions as this research but fails to analyze the social media backlash to Nike's sponsorship of Kaepernick.

Anti-brand Activism

The negative effect of activism can lead to consumer anti-brand activism in extreme cases. Romani, Grappi, Zarantonello, and Bagozzi (2015) revealed that brands' moral misconducts can induce hateful feelings from consumers and motivate anti-brand boycotts. Neilson (2010) studied how participants in boycotting differ from those in "buycotting" (rewarding businesses for favorable behavior). She found that women are more trusting and more likely to buycott than boycott. However, there are no gender associations with boycotting. Klein, Smith, and John (2004) also examined boycotting behaviors but focused on motivations for boycott participation. Four factors were identified to predict boycott participation: the desire to make a difference, the opportunity for self-enhancement, counterarguments that deter boycotting, and the direct cost of boycotting.

Existing literature has created a thorough understanding of the various concepts used in this research. It has examined Nike's ability to reach minority audiences through sponsorship of underrepresented athletes, creating Nike's reputation as an activist. Research has also shown how the use of celebrity endorsement results in the co-branding of the brand and the celebrity. Finally, it has established that when these endorsers are activists, consumer purchase intents from a small subset of individuals can be affected, and that when there are extreme differences in brand and consumer values, activism can result in boycotts. Existing literature has clearly established how celebrity endorsement and brand activism shape the perceptions of a company, but it has not used social media to understand consumer reactions to brand activism. This research will build upon these ideas to examine the impacts of Nike's 2018 campaign with Colin Kaepernick. Within the context that Nike as a brand is also an activist, it will study how Nike's sponsorship of Kaepernick has affected its brand perception on social media.

III. Methods

In order to understand the Twitter conversation around #BoycottNike, content and sentiment analyses were performed. Tweets containing #BoycottNike were mined from the Twitter API using R and the twitterR package. The tweets were collected from September 3, 2018, the day of the campaign launch, through September 15, 2018, and the tweets were analyzed for sentiment – the positivity or negativity of a text – using the Syuzhet package in R. This package calculates sentiment from text using dictionaries containing words with predefined sentiment values. Each tweet was assigned a numerical value, negative values indicating negative sentiment, 0 being neutral, and positive values indicating positive sentiment.

Topic modeling, a type of statistical modeling used to identify the "topics" that occur in a collection of texts, also was performed on the tweets in R using the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) probabilistic model. This model finds collections of words that appear together frequently and identifies topics based upon the probability that words will appear together. These topics reveal the main areas of discussion around #BoycottNike. Retweets, favorites, and replies also were analyzed for volume and to understand the spread of the message.

Google Trends, a tool that analyzes the popularity of top search queries in Google Search, was used to understand brand awareness. "Nike," "Kaepernick," "Nike Stock," and "Nike Ad" were used as search terms in Google Trends, and search volume and top related queries were recorded from August 3, 2018, to October 15, 2018, a month before and after the Twitter data collection.

IV. Findings

A total of 79,184 tweets were collected after running the R script each day from September 3, 2018, to September 15, 2018. After cleaning the results, a total of 20,629 valid tweets were collected and used in the analysis. Once the data was collected, its volume, engagement (favorites and retweets), topical content, and sentiment were analyzed. Analysis of tweet volume and engagement aimed to identify the spread of the hashtag. Topic analysis was used to identify what conversations were centered on, and sentiment analysis was used to understand the attitude towards the campaign and surrounding #BoycottNike.

Tweet Volume, Favorites, and Retweets

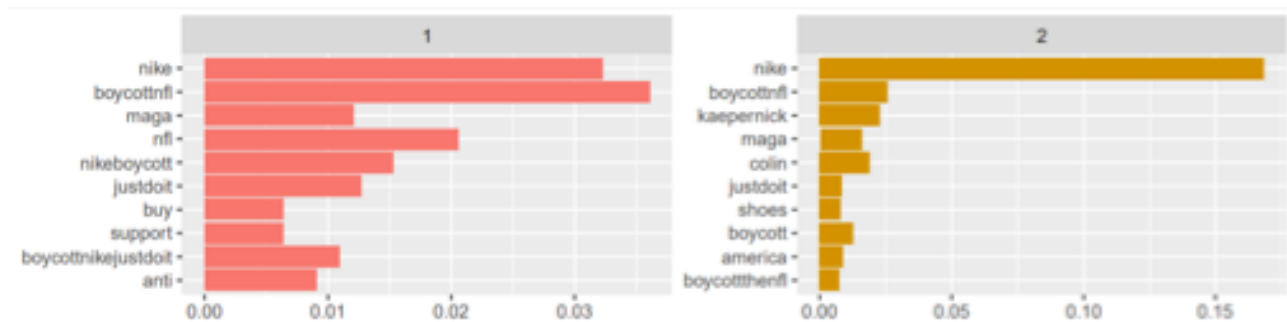
After data cleaning, the remaining tweets had a total of 120,720 favorites (an average of nearly six per tweet), and 56,128 retweets (an average of just under three per tweet). The vast majority of tweets were published on the day of the campaign release and the day following. More than 40% of the total number of tweets were published the day after the ad release. Each day from September 5, 2018, to September 9, 2018, contributed between 1% and 5% of the total tweet volume.

The majority of tweets did not receive any engagement (retweets or favorites); 58% of tweets had no favorites and 74% of tweets had no retweets. Tweets in the 95th percentile had, on average, only four retweets and eight favorites. However, a few had more than 1,000 retweets and favorites. On average, tweets had 1,669 retweets and 3,499 favorites; however, these averages are heavily skewed by outliers. In general, there was very little variation in the average number of retweets and favorites per tweet over time. However, the number of favorites per tweet slightly decreased as time progressed, while the number of retweets remained more constant.

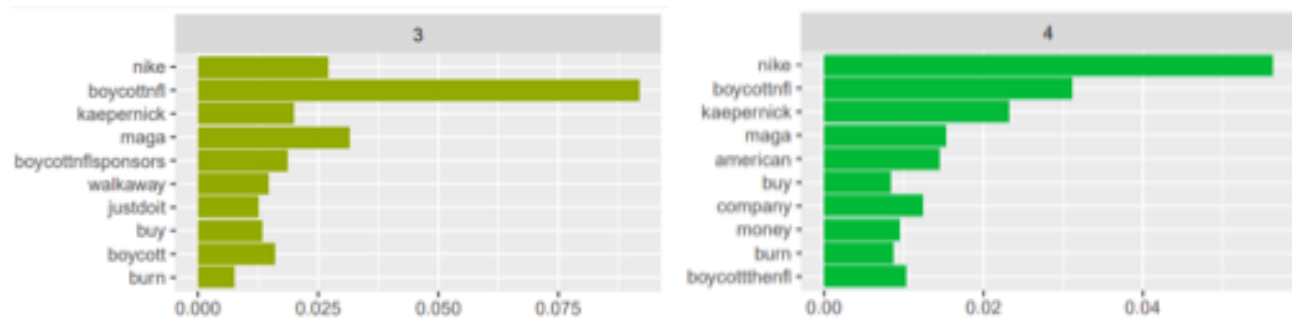
Topic Modeling

Topic modeling analysis was employed to identify collections of words that appear together frequently, revealing the primary areas of Twitter discussion around #BoycottNike. The nine most common topics are visualized in the following charts. Each chart groups words that are commonly seen together into topics. Every topic is dominated by “nike” and “boycott,” as expected since every tweet included in the analysis contains #BoycottNike. However, after these terms, there are differences among the topics.

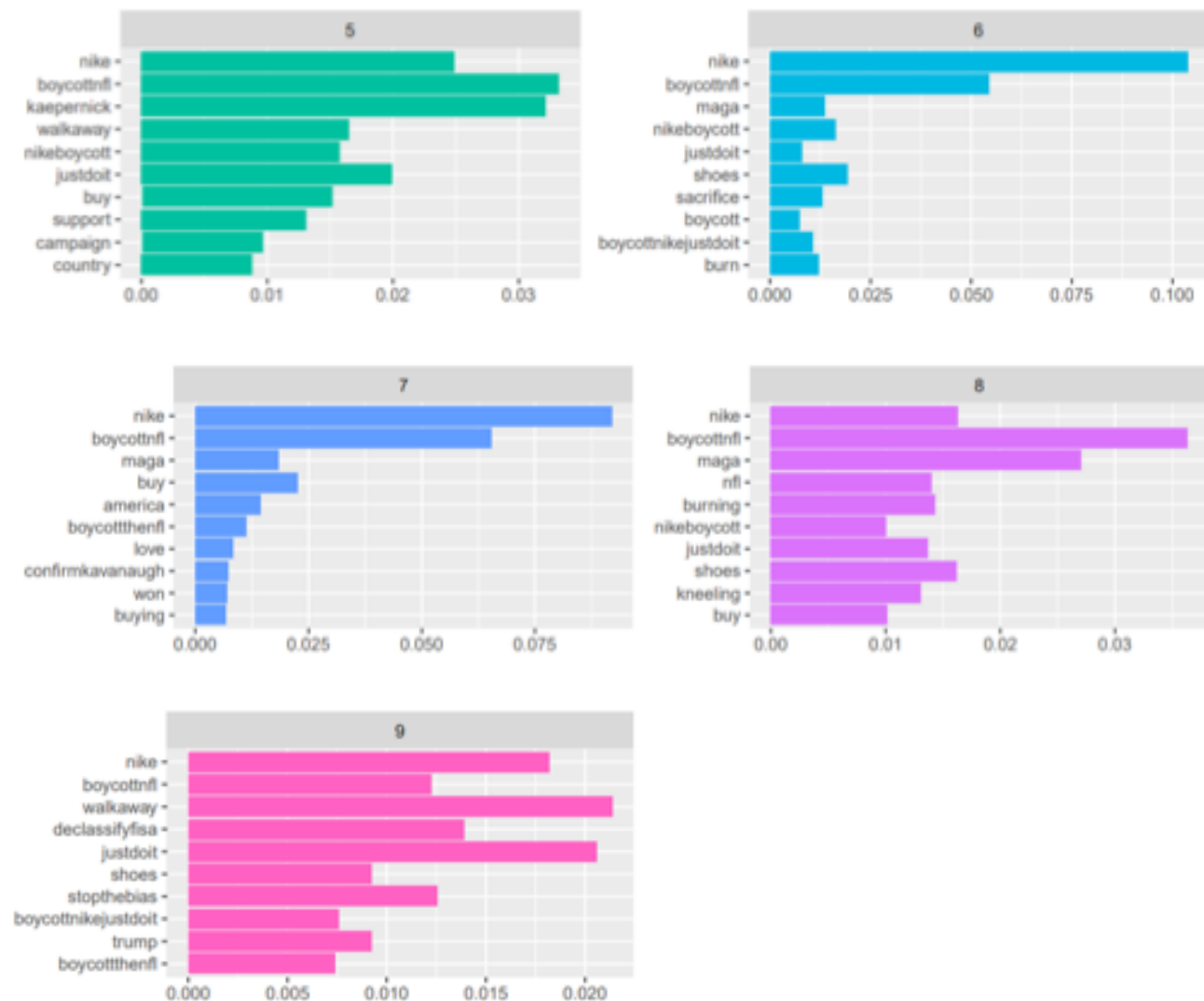
Topics 1 and 2 both appear to be a general discussion regarding the controversy, but topic 1 has more emphasis on boycotting Nike, while topic 2 is more focused on Kaepernick himself.



Topic 3 revolves around boycotting the NFL and its numerous corporate sponsors, while topic 4 is focused on monetary implications of the campaign and uses the term “American.”



Among the remaining topics, three are generalized discussions with slight differences in emphases, such as “walkaway” (topic 5), “sacrifice,” (topic 6), and “burning” (topic 8). Finally, topics 7 and 9 are the most overtly political, bringing in discussion of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, declassifying information related to investigations surrounding the Trump presidential campaign, and bias.



Sentiment Analysis

This analysis revealed that the overall sentiment of the conversation surrounding #BoycottNike was negative, as the total of all the sentiment scores was -290.3. However, most tweets had a neutral sentiment (a score of zero) with average and median sentiment scores of zero; 68% of the tweets had a sentiment score between -0.6 and 0.6.

Average Sentiment Per Day

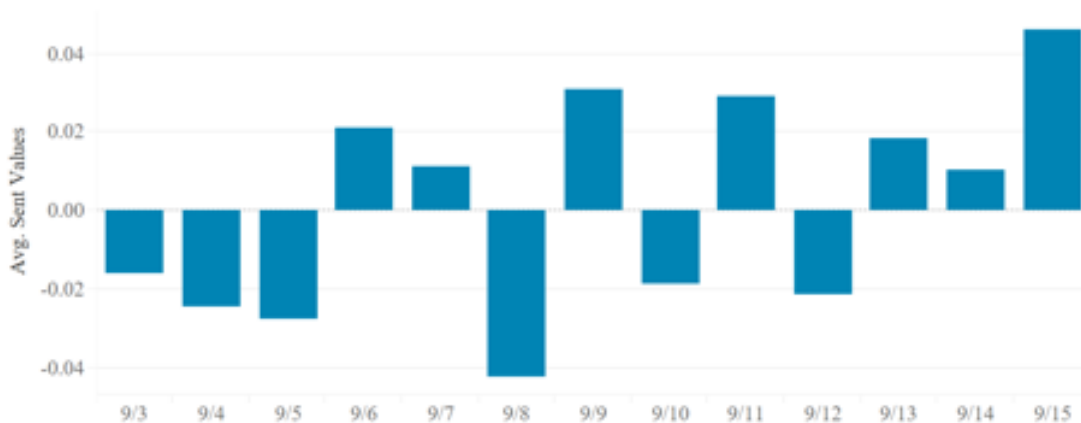


Figure 1

Initially, the average sentiment was negative with a two-day shift to positivity on September 6 and 7 (Figure 1). However, September 8 had the most negativity. After this point, the sentiment began to become more positive overall. Throughout the time period, the majority of the tweets were neutral, with positive/negative tweets each making up about 25% of the volume (50% collectively).

When looking at the spread of the tweets, there is a relationship between the number of retweets a tweet received and its sentiment (Figure 2). Tweets at or below the 10th percentile for number of retweets greatly ranged in sentiment. However, as the percentile increases, the range of sentiment narrows, ending with very neutral content above the 90th percentile.

Sentiment Value per Retweet Count Percentile

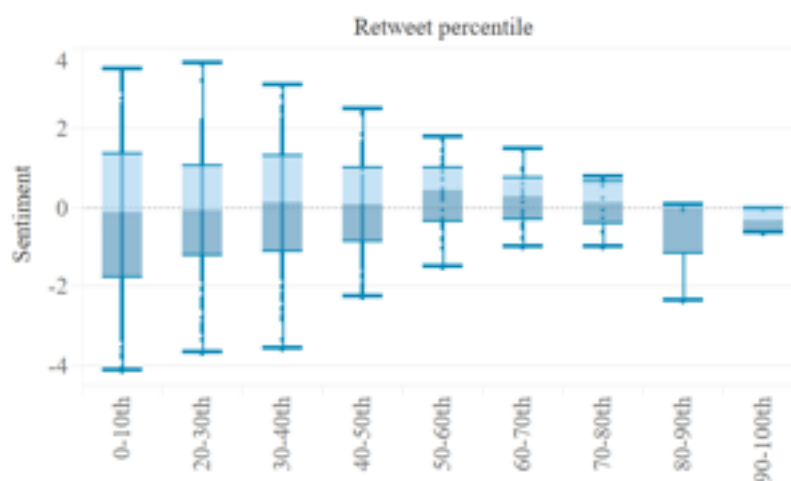


Figure 2

Google Searches

Google search volume for “Kaepernick,” “Nike,” “Nike Ad,” and “Nike Stock” is visualized in Figure 3. The values represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart. A value of 100 indicates the peak popularity of a term within the time period, while a value of 50 indicates that the term is half as popular. Zero means that there was not enough data for the term.

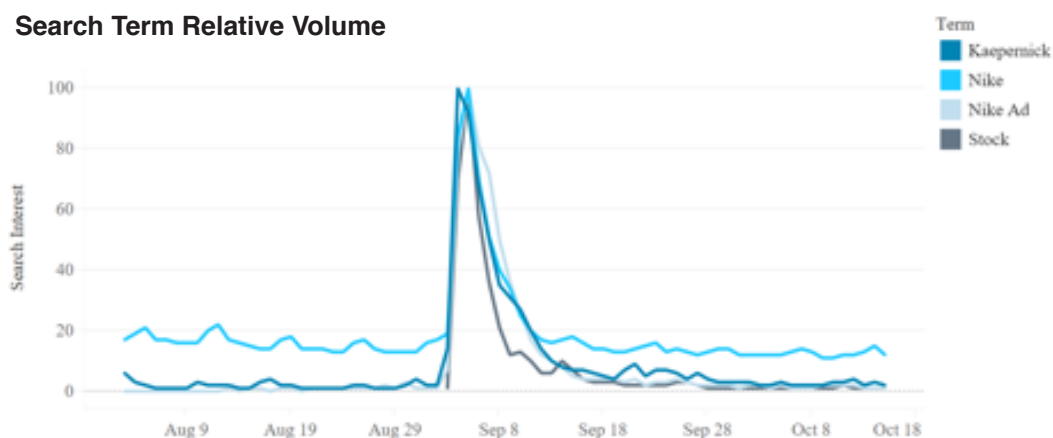


Figure 3

The search volume of each query peaked on September 3, 2018, the day that the campaign was announced, with a steep decline over the next week, before returning to a similar popularity as before the campaign.

The study also identified “related search queries” – queries that users who searched for the indicated term also entered – with the largest increase in search frequency between August 3 and October 15, 2018 (Figure 4). It shows that Nike terms were added to the list of queries searched with “Kaepernick,” and terms related to Kaepernick and the campaign were added to the queries searched with “Nike.” Queries relating to Nike ads and stock were also centered on Kaepernick. Each of these related queries were deemed “breakout,” meaning that they saw an extreme increase in search volume, suggesting that they were not subjects of interest before the launch of the Kaepernick campaign.

<i>Kaepernick</i>	<i>Nike Ad</i>	<i>Nike Stock</i>	<i>Nike</i>
colin kaepernick commercial	colin kaepernick nike	nike boycott	colin kaepernick commercial
kaepernick nike contract	nike ad meme	has nike stock dropped	kaepernick nike contract
kaepernick nike deal	nike meme	nike controversy	kaepernick nike deal
nike ad	kaepernick nike ad	nike kaepernick	nike ad
nike ad kaepernick	kaepernick nike	kaepernick	nike ad kaepernick
nike and kaepernick	nike colin	colin kaepernick	nike and kaepernick
nike colin kaepernick ad	kaepernick	nike stock news	nike colin kaepernick ad
nike commercial	colin kaepernick	nike ad	nike commercial
nike kaepernick commercial	colin kaepernick ad	colin kaepernick nike	nike kaepernick commercial
nike stock	kaepernick ad	nike stock drop	nike stock

Figure 4

V. Discussion and Conclusion

The release of Nike's Just Do It campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick immediately resulted in social media backlash, but the immediate negative sentiment of the Twitter conversation was not lasting. Though the overall sentiment of tweets using #BoycottNike in the days following the campaign's launch was negative, it began to change after the first three days, and the vast majority of the tweets were neutral, with extreme outliers skewing the overall sentiment. Those tweets with extreme positivity or negativity did not receive high engagement; tweets that were more neutral spread at a greater rate.

It is possible these findings could be influenced by a lurking variable. For example, those tweeting neutral content could have had a larger follower base, but further examination would be needed to reach a conclusion. In addition, television and newspaper coverage of the tweets that contained images of burning shoes may have led to public perception that social media reaction was extremely negative, when in reality it was often neutral.

In terms of the topic model analysis, although we cannot infer the sentiment related to each sub-topic, it reveals that discussions of Nike stock and political controversies were often intertwined. The Twitter discussion was not solely focused on Nike as a company, but often as part of a larger political discussion. Negative sentiment may have, in part, been a reflection of the current political climate.

The campaign clearly caused a spike in interest in Nike and Colin Kaepernick, as shown through the analysis of Google Trends data. There were extreme spikes in the volume of search terms related to the campaign the day of the launch. Even if news of the campaign spread due to a few extremely negative social media reactions, the search volume of terms related to the Kaepernick campaign indicates a large increase in Nike's brand awareness.

This increased brand awareness seems to have helped Nike, as reported by many major news sources. The author examined 16 news articles found through Google News Search that focused on the Kaepernick campaign and found only one that predicted a negative financial outcome for Nike; two articles published close to the campaign's launch predicted positive outcomes from the beginning. Fifty-six percent of the articles discussed the increase in Nike sales following the campaign launch, and 38% discussed the stock increase in the days following. The social media backlash was mentioned in 31% of the articles, but each asserted that it would not have an overall negative effect on the company. Additionally, four of the financial articles cited other causes for the initial dip in Nike's stock immediately following the campaign launch, taking the blame off Kaepernick.

The various analyses in this research reveal that sentiment around #BoycottNike was not as negative as originally thought, and that the campaign was successful in not only increasing sales, but also in raising Nike's stock prices and boosting brand awareness. Though these are interesting findings, there were several limitations in this study. Rate limits on the Twitter API limited the number of tweets that could be collected for analysis. Also, sentiment analysis can have difficulty interpreting sarcasm and slang, reducing its accuracy on media. There are much more advanced methods of completing sentiment analysis that could be used in future studies but that are beyond the scope of this study. Future research could also benefit from completing a social network analysis to identify the most influential players in the discussion, analyzing more keywords and hashtags to understand more sides of the story, and comparing tweets from media outlets to those from individuals.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Dr. David Copeland for helping throughout the entire process of completing this research. From brainstorming topics to reviewing data visualizations and grammar, he played a significant role. Additionally, thank you to Dr. Brian Walsh as he is the professor who originally taught the author how to use R to address a question like this.

References

- Alexander, N. (2009). Defining brand values through sponsorship. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 37(4), 346-357. doi:10.1108/09590550910948574.
- Armstrong, K. L. (1999). Nike's communication with black audiences: A sociological analysis of advertising effectiveness via symbolic interactionism. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 23(3), 266-286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723599233003>.
- Bain, M. (2018, September 05). Nike's stock drop is a mere dip in this year's climb. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/1379671/nikes-kaepernick-stock-drop-is-an-insignificant-dip/>.
- Barca, J. (2018, August 30). Colin Kaepernick vs. the NFL will get its day in court." *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jerrybarca/2018/08/30/colin-kaepernick-vs-the-nfl-will-get-its-day-in-court/#2a78b0d92db8>.
- Cunningham, G. B., & Regan, M. R. (2011). Political activism, racial identity and the commercial endorsement of athletes. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 47(6), 657-669. doi:10.1177/1012690211416358.
- DeCambre, M. (2018, September 04). Stocks kick off September with a loss as Nike shares weigh on Dow; Amazon briefly touches \$1 trillion. Retrieved from <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/stocks-kick-off-september-with-a-loss-as-nike-shares-weigh-on-dow-amazon-briefly-touches-1-trillion-2018-09-04>.
- Don't blame Kaepernick, but Nike shares just dropped 4%. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://fortune.com/2018/09/25/nike-stock-today-earnings-report-colin-kaepernick-ad-campaign/>.
- Dudharejia, M. (2018, October 22). 4 Branding lessons from Nike's Colin Kaepernick ad. Retrieved from <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/321130>.
- Franck, T. (2018, September 11). Nike's Kaepernick campaign 'a stroke of genius,' says analyst, upgrading stock to buy. Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/09/11/nikes-kaepernick-ad-campaign-a-stroke-of-genius-analyst-ups-stock.html>.
- Garcia, T. (2018, September 24). Nike preview: Back on track and getting a boost from Colin Kaepernick campaign. Retrieved from <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/nike-preview-back-on-track-and-getting-a-boost-from-colin-kaepernick-campaign-2018-09-21>.
- Klein, J., Smith, N., & John, A. (2004). Why we boycott: Consumer motivations for boycott participation. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(3), 92-109. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30162004>.
- Larkin, M. (2018, September 20). Nike stock news: Nike sacrificing nothing from Colin Kaepernick campaign. Retrieved from <https://www.investors.com/research/the-income-investor/nike-stock-online-sales-colin-kaepernick-ad-campaign/>.
- Lear, K. E., Runyan, R. C., & Whitaker, W. H. (2009). Sports celebrity endorsements in retail products advertising. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 37(4), 308-321. doi:10.1108/09590550910948547.
- Linnane, C. (2018, September 17). Nike's online sales jumped 31% after company unveiled Kaepernick campaign, data show. Retrieved from <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/nikes-online-sales-jumped-31-after-company-unveiled-kaepernick-campaign-2018-09-07>.
- Lucas, S. (2000). Nike's commercial solution: Girls, sneakers, and salvation. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 35(2), 149-164. <https://doi.org/10.1177/101269000035002002>.
- Mohr, L. A., Webb, D. J., & Harris, K. E. (2001). Do consumers expect companies to be socially responsible? The impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on buying behavior. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 35(1), 45-72. doi:10.1111/j.1745-6606.2001.tb00102.x.
- Neilson, L. A. (2010). Boycott or buycott? Understanding political consumerism. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 9, 214-227. doi:10.1002/cb.313.
-

- Colin Kaepernick's "Just Do It" campaign boosts Nike sales. (2018, September 07). Retrieved from <https://www.nasdaq.com/article/colin-kaepernicks-just-do-it-campaign-boosts-nike-sales-20180907-00585>.
- Nike sells out products after Kaepernick ad. (2018, September 20). Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/video/2018/09/20/nike-sells-out-products-after-kaepernick?videoId=465766257>.
- Nike stock closes at all-time high 10 days after announcing Colin Kaepernick ad campaign. (2018, September 13). Retrieved from <https://finance.yahoo.com/video/nike-stock-closes-time-high-233521519.html>.
- Nike store foot-traffic spiked 17% in the week after Kaepernick ad. (2018, October 05). Retrieved from <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/nike-store-foot-traffic-spiked-17-week-kaepernick-ad-154831380.html>.
- Nike's Kaepernick ads generated \$163.5M in buzz. (2018, September 6). Retrieved from <https://sports.yahoo.com/nikes-kaepernick-ads-generated-163-215223946.html>.
- Nike's stock fell 3% on Colin Kaepernick's endorsement deal. Here's why investors will shrug it off. (2018, September 4). Retrieved from <http://fortune.com/2018/09/04/nike-stock-market-buy-sell-kaepernick-boycott/>.
- Ramakrishnan, R. (2018, September 05). Was Nike's Colin Kaepernick deal solely responsible for the stock's recent woes? Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2018/09/05/was-nikes-colin-kaepernick-deal-solely-responsible-for-the-stocks-recent-woes/#55ab26227159>.
- Romani, S., Grappi, S., Zarantonello, & Bagozzi, R. (2015). The revenge of the consumer! How brand moral violations lead to consumer anti-brand activism. *Journal of Brand Management*, 22(8), 658-672. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2015.38>.
- Schmidt, S.H., Shreffler, M.B., Hambrick, M.E., & Gordon, B.S. (2018). An experimental examination of activist type and effort on brand image and purchase intentions. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 27, 31-43.
- Seno, D., & Lukas, B. A. (2007). The equity effect of product endorsement by celebrities. *European Journal of Marketing*, 41(1/2), 121-134. doi:10.1108/03090560710718148.
- Tucker, R., & Enquirer, C. (2018, September 16). Nike stock hits new record following Kaepernick 'Just Do It' ad controversy. Retrieved from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2018/09/16/nike-sales-brisk-despite-kaepernick-controversy/1307506002/>.
-

Portrayals of Black Women in TV Shows That Aired in 1997 Versus 2017: A Qualitative Content Analysis

Meagan Henderson

*Strategic Communications
Elon University*

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

Abstract

While television became a popular medium in the 1950s, representation of black women on television didn't begin to take hold until the beginning of the 1980s. This paper analyzes whether five television shows aired in 2017 portray black women characters in more positive ways than five television shows aired in 1997. This is accomplished through a content analysis of black female characters from five shows in each year. For each show, five episodes were coded, for a total of 50 episodes. A black woman character was chosen from each of the 10 shows, and these characters were analyzed by two different coders regarding appearance (skin tone and hair style), presence of positive portrayals (independence, education, career success, strength), and presence of negative portrayals (as identified by Versluys & Codde, 2014). Although some black women characters have embraced their identity in recent TV shows, and some have been portrayed as having positive traits, the results of this study indicate that the portrayals of black women on TV still rely on stereotypes and misrepresentations.

I. Introduction

Malcolm X once said: "The most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman" (Rodriguez, 2016). Society has not always accepted black women, treating them differently compared to other groups, whether it was because of their physical appearance or the stereotypes that were attached to them.

As time has passed, black women have begun to embrace their true identity, rather than hide it in the shadows. Embracing one's appearance has become the expectation. For instance, the natural hair movement has replaced perms, and all shades of black skin are now accepted as beautiful (Patton, 2006). This change for black women may look like a small step forward, but it has, in fact, impacted the future of this group.

As black women have transitioned into the acceptance of their identity, so has society. TV shows have diversified content due to the growing popularity and acceptance of black female culture. Black women are given roles that do not diminish who they are, but in fact, break down and challenge stereotypes. These

Keywords: television, stereotypes, black women, qualitative content analysis
Email: mhenderson9@elon.edu

shows have also begun to address social issues such as colorism, an issue that is deeply rooted in the black community, as well as discrimination and inequality.

In order to analyze this progression, this research compares the portrayal of black women in TV shows that were airing in 1997 versus ones that aired in 2017. The shows in these two timeframes will give insight into how the roles of black women have changed throughout time. This research will focus on TV shows that have a black woman in at least one prominent role and that address controversial issues. It will also describe how some TV shows embrace the identity of black women, as well as the adversities that come with being one in this society. It will also discuss how these shows' conscious decisions to embrace the identity of black women will perhaps impact future generations. Lastly, this paper will not only demonstrate in what ways shows use their platform to embracing black women's identity, but also why some of these shows fell short.

II. Literature Review

There has been a shift in the portrayals of black women on TV shows over the generations (Goldman & Waymer, 2015). Even though some of the older, unflattering stereotypes are still evident in some TV shows today, the roles that black women are transitioning into have reflected positive advances. Studies in the recent past have examined the history of black women on television and the typical portrayals that have been attached to them (Smith-Shomade, 2002; Collins, 2005; Versluys & Codde, 2014; Goldman & Waymer, 2015). In addition to the history of some of the portrayals, research has addressed the effects that result from them (Smith-Shomade, 2002; Collins, 2005).

Television became popular in the 1950s, but it was not until the 1960s that television made it a point to show diversity on the screen, which resulted from the pressure from the NAACP and the progressive wave from the Civil Rights Movement (Versluys & Codde, 2014). However, the production of TV shows in the 1960s was still predominantly white-dominated, which limited the way in which black people were portrayed on television (Versluys & Codde 2014).

Representation of black women on television began to increase at the beginning of the 1980s (Smith-Shomade, 2002). The roles that black women acquired were often in supporting roles to white or black male leads (Goldman & Waymer, 2015). As several sitcoms featuring black people began to appear in the 1990s, it became evident that the roles of black women were shown in both flattering and unflattering images (Goldman & Waymer, 2015). Although the rise of successful black television shows during this time period indicated a huge step towards greater racial equality in the media, there were two recurring issues about black advancement in television. The first issue was the imbalance of black representation in comedies and dramas. Black women appeared in only a few dramas and were mostly limited to sitcoms and music videos. The second issue with television shows from the 80's and 90's was the lack of positive black women characters (Versluys & Codde, 2014). By the time the 2000s rolled around, black women were presented with more opportunities to be part of the main cast of sitcoms (Goldman & Waymer, 2015). As a result of the increase of black women in the main roles of sitcoms, they began to gain more freedom in television than ever before (Smith-Shomade, 2002).

Television has been criticized for its representations of blacks, especially in regard to the portrayals of black women (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). Black women characters are often limited to certain roles that are often discouraging (Ford, 1997). The uniqueness of the black woman is that she stands in the crossroads of two of the most well-developed ideologies in America regarding women and regarding the negro (Goldman & Waymer, 2015). A black woman is considered a double minority because she withstands the challenges of being a woman and being black in America (Smith-Shomade, 2002). Television shows have been known to be insensitive to realistic portrayals of black women, which resulted in television playing an important part in the dissemination of these stereotypes. (Staples & Jones, 1985; Goldman & Waymer, 2015).

Throughout U.S. television history, three main stereotypes of black women that continuously appear are the Mammy, the Jezebel, and the Sapphire (Smith-Shomade, 2002; Collins, 2005; Versluys & Codde, 2014). These stereotypes became the foundation of how black women are portrayed in television. Throughout the course of history, however, other distortions of the image of black women have occurred, one of which was developed by black women themselves (Versluys & Codde, 2014).

“The Mammy” stereotype can be traced back to before the Civil War (Versluys & Codde, 2014). She is often seen as the contented domestic worker, meaning she is expected to be submissive to the white family or employer. Her physical appearance is seen as unattractive, and she usually is obese and dark-skinned (Collins, 2005). The mammy’s main goal is to take care of her family and to be of service to her employers (Goldman & Waymer, 2015). The “Black Lady” role is the modernized Mammy and is used as a template for middle-class womanhood (Collins, 2005). This more modern role still has limiting characteristics. Unlike the mammy, she is allowed to use aggression, but only if used to gain economic success or for the benefit of others. She is known to have more attractive physical traits and is seen as more professional than a content domestic worker (Goldman & Waymer, 2015; Collins, 2005).

The Jezebel stereotype was invented to rationalize the concept of slavery by shifting the perspective of the sexual exploitation of black women by white slave-owners (Versluys & Codde, 2014). This stereotype put the focus on black women seducing white men and took away the focus of white men abusing black women (Versluys & Codde, 2014). This role in television portrays black women as being hypersexual, promiscuous, and sometimes labeled as gold diggers (Goldman & Waymer, 2015).

The “Sapphire” is one of the most prominent negative black women stereotypes. She is seen as aggressive, sassy, and hostile. The sapphire’s sassiness and rudeness contradict the feminine nature expected of women (Goldman & Waymer, 2015). Her skin is usually a darker skin tone, and she is known for mocking black men for what she considers to be their inadequacies (Collins, 2005). An example of this stereotype would be the character Pam, of the hit 90’s TV show *Martin*. Versluys believes that this role was created to emphasize the superiority of the “white Victorian woman” by showing the contrast between the “uncivilized” loud black women, and the respectable morally behaved white women (Versluys & Codde, 2014).

Black women created their own portrayal of themselves, known as the strong black woman, with hopes to degrade the three previously discussed stereotypes that were created by whites (Versluys & Codde, 2014). This strong black woman portrayal on television is known to have self-sacrificial strength while providing unlimited support to friends and family. She does not depend on men financially and, therefore, can take care of herself, and her personality is focused on her positive traits (Versluys & Codde, 2014; Goldman & Waymer, 2015).

TV shows perpetuate ideas about race and ethnicity that place black women at a clear disadvantage (Little-Field, 2008). It is also possible that the way that television portrays black women seeps into other areas of their lives, such as how they are treated on a daily basis or how they view themselves (Versluys & Codde, 2014).

Throughout history, black women have conformed to the white standard of beauty and used this to evaluate their own attractiveness (Smith-Shomade, 2002; Patton, 2006). Lighter skin tones were looked at as more beautiful than darker skin tones and perms were created to straighten black women’s hair to reflect white women’s hair (Patton, 2006). These white beauty standards for black women were evident in TV shows, such as when darker-skinned women play roles that reflected the Mammy and Sapphire stereotype (Goldman & Waymer, 2015). These recycled stereotypes caused a division among light skin black women and dark skin black women because these portrayals had a greater impact with darker skin black women (Versluys & Codde 2014).

Scholars have recognized that television has the power to change unjust and negative representations of black women (Staples & Jones, 1985; Versluys & Codde, 2014; Goldman & Waymer, 2015). Recognizing these recycled stereotypes, which has shifted portrayals of black women, is important. This study analyzes the evolution in the representation of black women on television shows to add to the literature in this field. It does so by examining how portrayals of black women in TV shows from 1997 compare to similar portrayals in TV shows in 2017. In addition to identifying similarities and differences between the two time periods, this study will also address how some of the shows may have fallen short in embracing black women.

III. Methods

This research analyzed five television shows that aired in 1997 (*Moesha*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *Living Single*, *Martin*, *Family Matters*), and five television shows that aired in 2017 (*Being Mary Jane*, *Scandal*, *Grownish*, *How to Get Away with Murder*, *Insecure*). One black actress who held a lead role or supporting role

was chosen for each of the 10 shows. Two coders watched five episodes from each TV show (for a total of 50 episodes) and noted the portrayal of the black women in each episode.

The black women characters chosen for the study represented a variety of backgrounds. The title character of *Moesha* was a teenager struggling with coming of age. Vivian Banks, from the hit show *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, was the upper-class mother of three children, a wife, and aunt. Pam, from the series *Martin*, was the best friend of the title character's romantic partner. Khadijah James from *Living Single* was one of six single friends featured on the show. Harriette Winslow from *Family Matters* was a middle-class mother and wife.

The black women characters chosen from 2017's episodes had a variety of life experiences as well. Olivia Pope from *Scandal* held various high-level jobs in Washington D.C. On *Insecure*, Issa Dee was a 29-year-old trying to figure out what she wanted out of life. Annalise was a lawyer and professor on *How to Get Away with Murder*. Zoey Johnson from *Grownish* had just started college. The title character from *Being Mary Jane* was a newscaster.

Two coders (the author of this study and a college student trained by the author) viewed each episode in the sample using the categories of analysis. In addition to noting skin color (light, brown, or dark), and role (lead or supporting), the code sheet was used to record both positive aspects (such as portrayals of the black actress as independent, educated, or a successful career woman), and negative ones (such as an angry, over-sexual, loud, or housewife/ submissive character).

The coders also recorded the presence or absence of characteristics that reflected the "The Mammy," "The Sapphire" and "The Jezebel," three major stereotypes that black women were given over the years (Collins, 2005). These stereotypes were the foundation of the negative portrayals for black women in TV shows. By coding the characteristics of these black female roles to see if the negative stereotypes were as apparent as they were in the past, it was possible to determine if these shows have reflected and embraced the identities of black women as they have evolved in society.

In total, 10 actresses were coded and 11 categories of coding, for a total of 110 coding instances. The overall intercoder reliability was 93.6 percent – the coders agreed in 103 out of the 110 instances. In eight categories of coding, the percentage of agreement was 100 percent; in one category, it was 90 percent; and in another category, it was 80 percent. Only in one category (whether the black actress was independent), the percentage of agreement was low (60 percent). The reasons for the disagreement between the two coders in this particular category are explained in the Findings section.

IV. Findings

Appearance was examined by the coders because of the importance it has when it comes to black women identities. Therefore, the two coders examined the shade of the black women's skin tone (light, medium/brown, dark) and the black women's hair (weaved, straight or natural). This way, the coders were able to note if there was a shift, through time, in the acceptance of black women's original beauty versus the beauty expectations of white society. Two of the black women were coded as having light skin, two were coded as having medium/brown skin, and six were coded as having dark skin. However, it should be noted that Vivian Banks, from *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, had been played by a dark-skinned woman in the first three seasons of the show. For this study of 1997, the lighter-skinned actor who played Vivian Banks in the last three seasons was the one coded. Regarding hair style, only two characters wore hair in its natural state (Issa Dee from *Insecure*, and Zoey Johnson from *Grownish*), both in shows that aired in 2017. The rest of the characters either wore their hair straight or wore weave.

The negative portrayals all had characteristics of the three popular stereotypes that are seen throughout the history of black women representations in film and television (Collins, 2005). Characters considered as "over sexual," reflecting the Jezebel stereotype, demonstrated characteristics such as promiscuity. Out of the 10 black women characters, only two were portrayed as over sexual. Both of these characters (Olivia Pope and Mary Jane) were from 2017 shows.

Two characteristics were coded in relation to the Sapphire negative stereotype. "Aggressive" portrayals were coded if the majority of the character's role in interactions with other characters came off as aggressive, defensive, or mean. Four characters (Pam, Annalise, Olivia Pope, and Mary Jane) were

portrayed as such. Three out of the four characters were from 2017 shows. “Loud” or outspoken portrayals were identified in seven out of 10 characters by one coder; five out of 10 characters by the other coder. In both cases, the majority of the characters who were portrayed as loud were from 1997.

The mammy stereotype – portrayals of black women as submissive and focused solely on taking care of their family or boss – was reflected if a character was a stay-at-home mom or was portrayed in a manner that reflected family over career. Both Vivian Banks from *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* and Harriette Winslow from *Family Matters* fit into this category. Despite Vivian Banks being a professor, and Harriette having a career in management, in most cases audiences saw these women at home.

Coders also examined whether these black women had positive portrayals as educated, successful, and independent. In terms of education, all but two characters had a college degree (Moesha was still a high schooler; Pam’s education is unknown). For success, the characters had to have a well-paying or high-level job. One coder found that four out of the 10 women were successful, with the majority being characters from the 2017 shows. The other coder found that five out of the 10 characters were successful (three characters from 2017 and two characters from 1997).

The coders disagreed on the number of characters that were independent, which for this study was defined as the character supporting herself financially. While one coder found that six out of the 10 characters were independent, the other coder found that all 10 were independent. Coder 1 considered that four women were not independent because, while they do not seem to be financially unstable, they do not make their own money. For example, Zoey Johnson (the only character from a 2017 TV show who was not considered independent by coder 1) was a freshman in college. Moesha was a high schooler. Vivian Banks and Harriette Winslow had money, but their husbands were the ones who worked outside their homes in salaried jobs.

V. Conclusion

After analyzing the black women portrayals in these TV shows, it is apparent that although black women in society have begun to accept and embrace their identities, some TV portrayals may still be perceived as negative (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). There were some instances in the 10 TV shows analyzed, especially in the ones that aired in 2017, that indicate that there is, indeed, a slight shift away from negative portrayals; however, there are other instances that suggest either no shift or a negative shift.

Black women are seen, sometimes, playing roles that are successful or independent. The shows that aired in 2017, in particular, portrayed these women as more independent and as having their own successful careers rather than just being a housewife. For example Olivia Pope, Annalisa Ketting, and Mary Jane Paul each are successful in their fields. Nearly all the characters were portrayed as educated as well. When it comes to appearance, a slight positive shift can be seen among these more recent characters, given that some are embracing their natural hair, rather than wearing straight hair to follow dominant societal norms.

There was one slight negative shift, nonetheless, and it was the two characters from 2017-aired shows that were being shown as “over sexualized.” It is unknown if the writers of the show were choosing to embrace the idea of women being openly sexual as a positive characteristic, in that women decide what to do with their bodies without inhibitions, or if, this is simply the Jezebel stereotype still being used to portray black women as sex objects. It was also surprising to see such a diverse group of black women playing all these characters, which is a positive thing. In fact, the skin color of these actresses ranged from very light to very dark, with numerous variations within the spectrum.

Overall, this qualitative content analysis offers support for the notion that black women roles in TV are not as unflattering as they used to be in the past, but the portrayals of black women’s personalities can still reflect those older stereotypes . The TV industry does have a good amount of catching up to do with the portrayals of black women, even in recent times. As of right now, only about 5 percent of TV show screenwriters are black (Sun, 2017), while the black population in the United States is about 13 percent. Therefore, as the number of black screenwriters might increase in the near future, the positive portrayals of black women and black men may also rise. If this is so, the future black generations could finally begin to see an accurate representation of their identities on the TV screen.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Dr. Vanessa Bravo for being patient and her guidance through this research process. Additionally, she extends a thank you to the faculty who chose to publish the research, as well as her friends and family for encouraging and pushing her to step outside her comfort zone. The author is humbled and incredibly grateful for this opportunity.

References

- Collins, P. (2004). *Black sexual politics: African Americans, gender, and the new racism*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ford, T. E. (1997). Effects of stereotypical television portrayals of African-Americans on person perception. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 60(3), 266-278.
- Goldman, A., & Waymer, D. (2015). *Black women in reality television docusoaps: A new form of representation or depictions as usual?* New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Littlefield, M.B. (2008). The media as a system of racialization: Exploring images of African American women and the new racism. *American Behavioral Scientist* 51(5), 675-685.
- Monahan, J. & Brown Givens, S. (2005). Priming mammies, jezebels, and other controlling images: An examination of the influence of mediated stereotypes on perceptions of an African American woman, *Media Psychology*, 7(1), 87-106.
- Smith-Shomade, B.E. (2002). *Shaded lives: African-American women and television*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Staples, R., & Jones, T. (1985). Culture, ideology and black television images. *The Black Scholar*, 16(3), 10-20.
- Sun, R. (2017). Just 4.8 percent of TV writers are black, study finds. *Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/just-48-percent-tv-writers-are-black-study-finds-1053675>
- Patton, T. (2006). Hey girl, am I more than my hair?: African American women and their struggles with beauty, body image, and hair. *NWSA Journal*, 18(2), 24-51.
- Punyanunt-Carter, N. M. (2008). The perceived realism of African American portrayals on television. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 19(3), 241-257.
- Versluys, E. (2014). *Stereotypes of African American women in US television. Analysis of Scandal and Hawthorne*. Master's thesis. Retrieved from https://lib.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/002/162/804/RUG01-002162804_2014_0001_AC.pdf
-

Pope Francis or @Pontifex? The Engagement from Pope Francis's Presence on Twitter

Leah Kay

*Media Analytics
Elon University*

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

Abstract

The Catholic Church has been spreading its gospel to followers around the world for almost 2,000 years, but in 2018, Pope Francis engaged followers in new ways – specifically on Twitter. This study seeks to understand how Pope Francis employs Twitter to engage with his followers. This papacy has used many modern ways to communicate both with Catholics and non-followers. Since 2013, Twitter has been a primary social media outlet for the Pope. Through the analysis of Pope Francis's top 100 favorited and top 100 retweeted tweets, the author found that he engaged his audience using three main themes: humanity, inspiration, and religiosity. The study concluded that the Pope is concerned with spreading these themes to all people, effectively adapting his three-pronged message to Twitter for widespread dissemination.

I. Introduction

Since Martin Luther's 95 Theses came off the printing press in 1517, the use of mass media to spread religious ideology has been in place. In fact, religious leaders have long used mass media to increase awareness, and ultimately religious identity and membership. The Catholic Church has been spreading its gospel to followers around the world for almost 2,000 years, but in 2018, Pope Francis engaged followers in new ways – specifically on Twitter. The unprecedented use of Twitter by Pope Francis allows for two-way dialogue between him and his followers, inviting audiences to engage through a daily 280-character statement. More people are using Twitter, and more people are interacting with the Pope through his Twitter account. The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of Pope Francis's use of Twitter to engage with his audience.

II. Literature Review

Twitter is an online social networking site that involves "both mass and interpersonal communication" (Johnson & Yang, 2009, p. 2). Numerous scholarly studies examine general Twitter uses, habits of leaders on the social media platform, the Pope's ideology and use of online media, and overall audience perceptions of Twitter

Keywords: social media, Pope Francis, Twitter, Catholic Church
Email: lkay2@elon.edu

and social media presence.

General Twitter Uses & Habits of Leaders on Twitter

Leaders of all different levels and professions are now using social media. More specifically, leaders are heading to Twitter to spread their messages to their followers and opponents in just 280 characters. In 2014, the top most followed world leaders on Twitter included Barack Obama, Pope Francis, the Indonesian President, and the Indian Prime Minister (Hildebrandt, 2014). These leaders are delivering messages to their audiences in a unique manner, in contrast to older media methods such as newspapers or television. Today, Twitter is a leader in social media, with 326 million active users worldwide (Statista, 2018). Religious leaders have plugged into the trend; previous studies have noted that “influential pastors and Christian speakers such as Joyce Meyer, Joel Osteen, and Max Lucado were generating more reactions on Twitter than [Justin] Bieber” (Horner, 2014, p. 59). Popular Christian blogs are directing the church to use Twitter to further reach their congregants and other followers (Horner, 2014).

Recognizing the increase of Christian leaders' engagement rates on Twitter, Hjarvard (2011) writes about the mediatization of religion. Mediatization is a “new theoretical framework to revisit and reframe old, yet fundamental questions about the role and influence of media in culture and society... mediatization denotes the social and cultural process through which a field or institution to some extent becomes dependent on the logic of the media ...” (Hjarvard, 2011, p. 119). Religion and specific religious groups are becoming not only integrated and influenced by media, but also reliant upon it in both communal and daily practice, particularly in Western societies, as Hjarvard (2011) notes: “Media not only transmit communication, but also serve a cultural function by creating and sustaining communities... [making] the influence of media on social interaction – including religion – more pronounced” (p. 127).

Pope Francis's Ideology and Use of Social Media

Before Pope Francis began his papacy, the Catholic Church previously moved to develop a strong presence on online media platforms, doing so to “modernize its message for its more than one billion followers worldwide” (Ferguson, 2011, p. 52). A primary reason for it to create a presence online was because of the scrutiny placed on the Catholic Church by various news media. Today, the Vatican – the home of the Roman Catholic Church and Pope Francis – has its own website (“The Holy See”) and news outlet (“Vatican News”).

Similar to other world leaders' goals, there is no doubt that there is intention and agenda-setting in Pope Francis's use of Twitter. However, with his modern approach of using social media to deliver his message, the Pope is engaging with more users and becoming one of the most followed world leaders on Twitter – clearly proving this strategy is effective (Hildebrandt, 2014). To understand his use of Twitter, it is important to unpack the general ideology of Pope Francis. He has numerous critics, and there has been a decline in the membership of the Catholic Church since his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI's papacy (Gallup, 2018). Pope Francis holds more liberal social views than many other papacies, including Benedict and John Paul II. Journalist John Allen Jr. wrote that “Francis stands for greater mercy and compassion for people who don't live up to those ideals, which was the heart of his famous ‘Who am I to judge?’ sound bite about gay persons in July 2013” (Allen, 2016, p. 2). At times, the Pope is often perceived as conservative, as he largely follows church precedent when it comes to sexual matters, but Allen's article shows that is not always the case.

Another interesting insight into the current Papacy is the documentary, “Pope Francis: A Man of His Word,” released in May 2018. This documentary takes audiences into never-seen-before aspects of the Pope's life in the Vatican highlighting three distinguishing features of his papacy: Pope Francis is the first Jesuit pope, the first pope to hail from the Americas (specifically Argentina), and the first pope to adopt the name of St. Francis of Assisi. Director Wim Wenders interviewed Francis in candid settings where the Pope frankly spoke his mind, giving audiences direct access to the leader whose words and decisions have stirred controversy and admiration in the Catholic Church. The documentary covers other aspects of the papacy, such as Pope Francis's emphasis on his three T's: *trabajo* (work), *tierra* (earth), and *techo* (roof), each of which he believes is fundamental to the rights of all people (Garcia, 2018).

In conjunction with the Pope's more liberal social views, he has also adopted Twitter, becoming more modern in his methodology to reach a larger audience and grow Catholicism. Although Pope Francis could mobilize his followers on different social media platforms, Chen, Weber and Okulicz-Kozaryn note that Twitter has a significant global reach, and “has such a large influence on people that it can be used as a measure of

culture... [that] satisfies “the need to belong” (Chen et al., 2014, p. 2). In addition, Twitter allows community building and open discussion for “people with similar religious orientation” (Hjarvard, 2011). As Everton (2018) notes, people are more likely to join a religious group if they are familiar with others involved in the group; if they do not know anyone, they will likely not join. Religious followers “are drawn structurally closer to groups they are more likely to conform to the norms and practices of those groups,” such as those following Pope Francis on Twitter (Everton, 2018, p. 4).

Audience Perception and Use of Twitter

Among U.S. adults, 40% of those aged 18-29 use Twitter, and 27% aged 30-49 use the platform (Statista, 2018), so it is not a mystery as to why it is significant for the Pope to be tweeting. When users sign up for a Twitter account, they are motivated to connect with others, gain information, and share with people what they are doing. Johnson and Yang (2009) employ uses and gratifications theory to explore Twitter’s unique strengths and its ability to connect users throughout broader communities, noting that “audience members are active and goal-oriented in their selection of media” (Johnson & Yang, 2009, p. 8). Uses and gratifications theory helps explain why people follow the Pope on Twitter and engage with his messages.

The Pope facilitates dialogue with his followers and between followers with his content. This a primary aspect of the dialogic theory of public relations, as he creates effective communications’ paths within and beyond the Catholic Church (Revolv, n.d.). This two-way communication method increases the “likelihood that publics and organizations will better understand each other and have ground rules for communication” among Catholic organizations worldwide (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 33). Through Twitter, the Pope invokes “‘trust,’ ‘risk,’ and ‘vulnerability’” to encourage followers to engage in a virtual dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 24).

III. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The mediatization theory, uses and gratifications theory, and dialogic theory of public relations informed the current study concerning the Pope’s Twitter engagement. This study proposes two research questions (with four hypotheses) about how Pope Francis cultivates engagement on Twitter.

RQ1: Does the message theme in Pope Francis’s tweets influence the number of favorites or Retweets he receives?

H1: The theme of the messages in The Pope’s tweets influences the number of favorites he receives.

H2: The theme of the messages in The Pope’s tweets influence the number of retweets he receives.

H3: The more favorited tweets are, the more frequently they are retweeted.

RQ2: What kind of language does Pope Francis use in his Tweets?

H4: The type of words The Pope chooses to use in his Tweets creates more engagement.

IV. Methods

The author conducted an in-depth content analysis – both quantitative and qualitative – of the Pope’s Twitter account, @Pontifex that sought to reveal patterns in the content of his tweets and the way he spreads his message through an unconventional platform – at least for a prominent religious figure of such high stature.

The Pope’s tweets were collected through RStudio using the program “rTweet.” This program formulates and sends requests to Twitter to stream its APIs (Application Program Interfaces) to retrieve and iterate Twitter data and eventually clean the data structures. By retrieving Pope Francis’s Twitter data, the author was able to see all of his tweets from the creation of his Twitter account, the location they were sent

from, any hashtags used, how many favorites and retweets were received, the exact time tweets were sent out, and much more. In addition to those details, the author was able to see the frequency of particular words Pope Francis uses in his tweets.

The author analyzed the Pope’s top 100 favorited and top 100 Retweeted tweets (out of 1,710 tweets in total) through a thematic analysis. Pope Francis started tweeting on March 17, 2013 as @Pontifex, and the data was collected for tweets until October 4, 2018. The author sorted all of the tweets from most to least favorites, and then from most to least retweets.

Each of the 200 tweets (favorites and retweets) were coded into three different themes: humanity, religiosity, and inspirational. These categories were based on Pope Francis’s ideology and common topics he often discusses.

For example, a Tweet reading “Let us work together to find concrete solutions to help the poor, refugees, victims of modern forms of slavery, in order to promote peace” was coded in the “humanity” category. A tweet reading “Love can recognize good things even in bad situations. Love keeps a tiny flame alight even in the darkest night” was coded into the “inspirational” category. Finally, a tweet that reads “May the Lord grant us the wisdom to seek that which is worthwhile and to love, not with our words but with our actions” fit in the “religiosity” category.

For the numeric analysis, the author collected Pope Francis’s Twitter data from “rTweet” and used a package called “TidyText” in RStudio to clean the data. The researcher then looked at the frequency of the top 100 most-used words. Using the same process for coding the top 100 favorites and Retweets, the author coded the top 100 words into the three themes of “humanity,” “inspirational,” and “religiosity.”

V. Findings

To test whether the themes of the messages in the Pope’s Tweets influenced the number of favorites he received (Hypothesis 1), the author analyzed a sample of 100 tweets. To test whether the difference of averages of the top 100 favorited tweets by theme were generalized to the population, the author ran an ANOVA test. The test showed a p-value of 0.45, much higher than the significance level of 0.05, so the null hypothesis was accepted. This means that the Pope’s message was popular regardless of its theme, so any particular theme in the message did not necessarily garner more favorites over other types (see *Figure 1*).

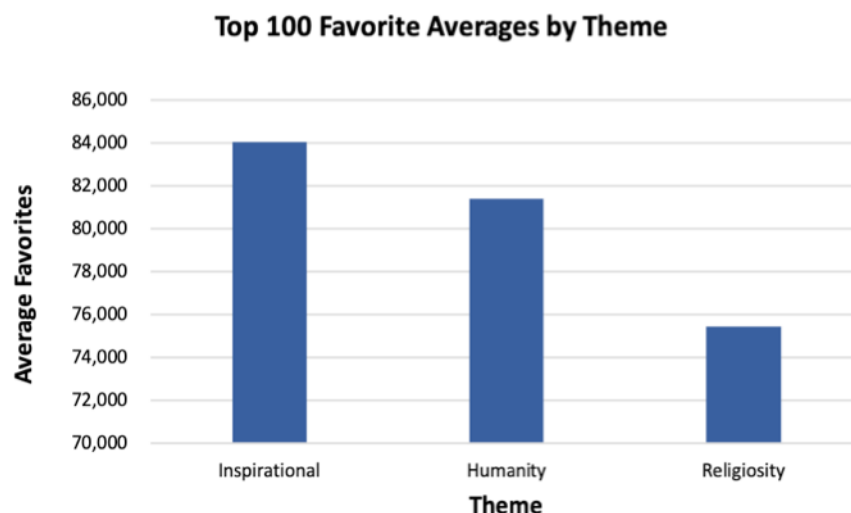


Figure 1 – Top 100 favorited tweets’ averages by theme. Inspirational tweets had the highest average of 84,073, then humanity at 81,404, with religiosity following at 75,459

The author found that inspirational-themed tweets garnered the highest average of 84,073 favorites. Humanity-themed tweets had an average of 81,404 favorites, and religiosity-themed tweets followed with 75,459 average favorites. These numbers are predictive of the population, with a confidence level above the 95% threshold.

Hypothesis 2 stated that the Pope's message type would influence the number of retweets he received. As with Hypothesis 1, the author ran an ANOVA test. The test showed a p-value of 0.074, higher than the significance level of 0.05, so the null hypothesis was accepted (see *Figure 2*).

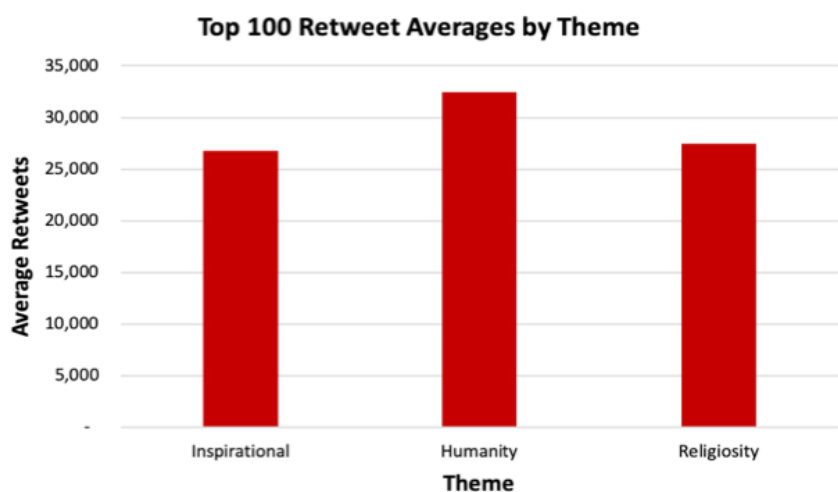


Figure 2 – Top 100 Retweet averages by theme. Humanity had the highest average of Retweets with 32,463 and then 26,785 for inspirational, and 27,476 for religiosity.

The analysis of a sample of 100 tweets showed that “humanity” received 32,463 retweets, followed by 26,785 for “inspirational,” and 27,476 for “religiosity.” This means that the Pope’s message was popular regardless of its type, so any specific type of theme in the message did not necessarily garner more favorites over other types. To examine whether people tended to retweet the Pope’s message when they also favorited his message (Hypothesis 3), the author calculated a correlation coefficient to measure the strength of a linear association between two variables. The coefficient was 0.79, a high positive relationship.

To see the causal relationship of these two variables at the population level, the author regressed the number of retweets on the number of favorites. The relationship is shown in the formula of:

$$\# \text{ of retweets} = 2,362 + .25x \# \text{ of favorites}$$

The regression analysis showed that the p-values of the intercept and the retweet coefficient are lower than 0.05, the significance level, so the null hypothesis was rejected. In this sample, when a message was favorited by four or more people, it was retweeted by 10 additional people (see *Figure 3*). Further, when a message was favorited by four or more people, it tended to be retweeted by one additional person. The author found that the Pope’s messages were popular regardless of its type, so the theme of the messages did not necessarily garner more favorites or retweets over the other types.

Top 100 Most Used Words' Frequencies by Theme

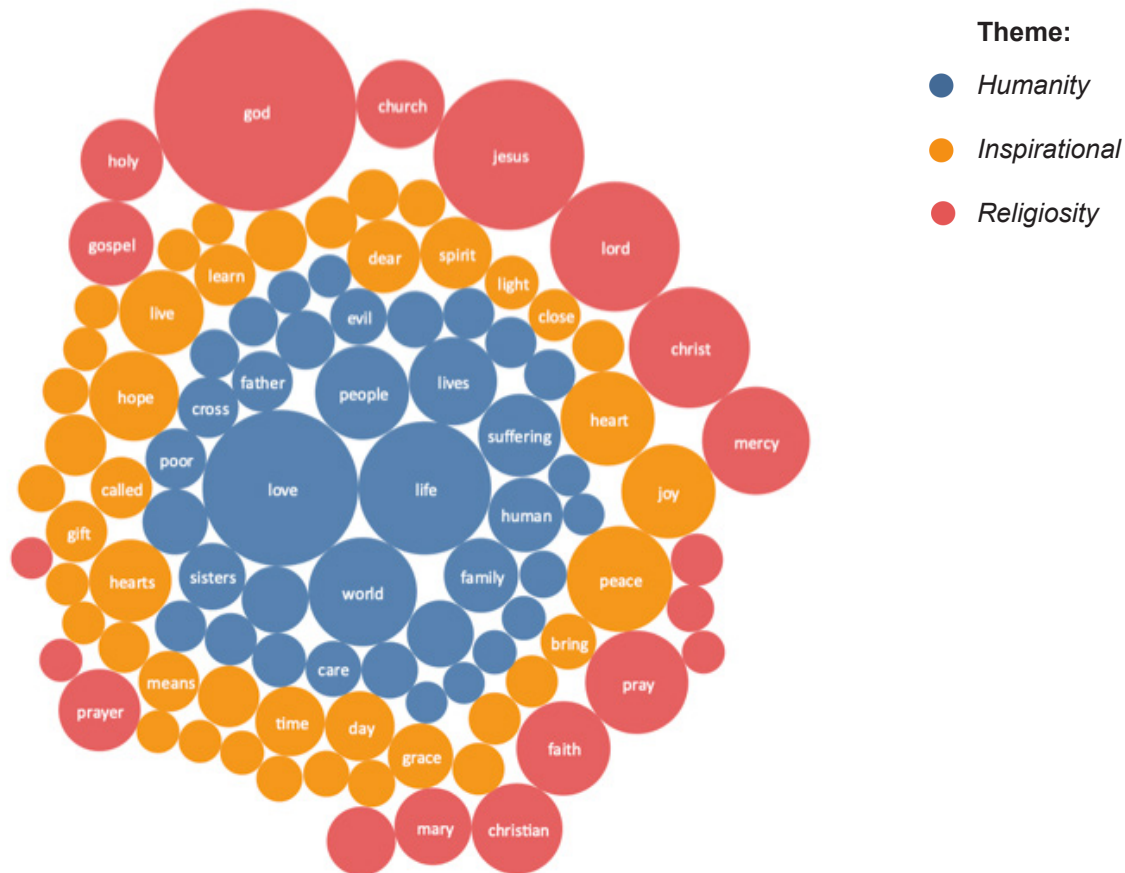


Figure 4 – Top 100 most used words' frequencies by theme (colors) and size of circle is frequency

The top three most-used words were “God” (419 times), “love” (249 times), and “Jesus” (233 times). However, words such as “world” (121), “prayer” (69), and “human” (58) were used frequently as well. Pope Francis's Twitter had an overall engagement rate of .19%, which is on the higher side for an influencer, who should expect 0.9 to 3.3 reactions for every 1,000 followers on Twitter (Mee, 2018). In this study, words that related to religiosity and humanity were used more frequently.

VI. Discussion

Horner (2014) found that about 30% of tweets written by religious leaders were inspirational in nature and “meant to encourage or challenge their followers” (p. 65). The “inspirational” category was also apparent in the current study, but themes of humanity and religiosity were also commonly used by the Pope. It suggests that he has equally significant investment in humanity, inspiration, and religiosity for his followers.

The results also shed additional light on several theories used to underpin this study. The mediatisation theory is evident in the high engagement of the Pope's Twitter feed, as he is consistent and reliant on using the platform for his messages for his followers. More specifically, it shows how mediatisation is becoming more pronounced in religion's influence on culture and society. The high engagement rate of Pope Francis's Twitter also reflects uses and gratifications theory, as followers continue to seek satisfaction from his messages. Finally, the study's results suggest that the dialogic theory of public relations is apparent in the way the Pope uses specific words to connect with his followers, facilitating online conversation.

VII. Conclusion

Twitter is one of the predominant social media forces in the world today. When Pope Francis chooses to send out a tweet, he is reaching a broader audience and engaging them with the Catholic Church. As a result, the Pope has taken advantage of the success of Twitter to spread his messages of inspiration, religion, and humanity. In the future, researchers could investigate whether or how the Pope continues to use these themes on Twitter to deliver his messages to his followers. In addition, it will be interesting to see if – and how – Pope Francis uses other social media platforms.

The current study could also be expanded by future researchers, measuring other religious leaders and their social media engagement rates and audience perceptions. Comparing the top 100 favorites and retweets of additional religious leaders would provide further understanding of the importance of Twitter to spread religious messages.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express gratitude to Dr. Byung Lee, Dr. Anthony Hatcher, and Dr. Kathleen Stansberry, faculty members at Elon University, for their guidance in writing and reviewing this paper in various capacities.

References

- Allen, J. (2016, March 12). At three-year mark, Francis a 'both/and' pope in an 'either/or' world. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved November 26, 2018, from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/world/2016/03/12/three-year-mark-francis-both-and-pope-either-world/m8OJTZEhPMWJBdXKJAXR2O/story.html>
- Chen, L., Weber, I., & Okulicz-Kozaryn, A. (2014). U.S. religious landscape on Twitter. In L. M. Aiello & D. McFarland (Eds.), *Social informatics. Lecture notes in computer science 8851*, (pp. 544–560). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-13734-6_38
- Everton, S. F. (2018). *Networks and religion: Ties that bind, loose, build-up, and tear down*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108241748>
- Ferguson, S. (2011). The Roman Catholic Church in America through online media: A narrative analysis. *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications* 2(2), 51–61.
- Forbes, B. D., & Mahan, J. H. (Eds.). (2017). *Religion and popular culture in America* (3rd edition). Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Gallup. (2018, April 9). Catholics' church attendance resumes downward slide. Retrieved November 26, 2018, from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/232226/church-attendance-among-catholics-resumes-downward-slide.aspx>
- Garcia, M. (2018, May 21). 10 Revealing facts from 'Pope Francis: A Man of His Word.' Retrieved November 26, 2018, from <https://www.biography.com/news/pope-francis-a-man-of-his-word-documentary-movie-2018>
- Hildebrandt, F. (2014, July 2). This chart shows which world leaders are the most powerful on Twitter. Retrieved November 25, 2018, from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/florian-hildebrandt/social-media-governance_b_5544536.html
- Hjarvard, S. (2011). The mediatization of religion: Theorising religion, media and social change. *Culture and Religion*, 12(2), 119–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2011.579719>
- Horner, Z. (2014). How Christian leaders interact with Twitter. *Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, 5(2), 59-70. Retrieved from <https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/communications/journal/wp-content/uploads/sites/153/2017/06/06HornerEJFall14.pdf>
-

- Johnson, P. R., & Yang, S.-U. (2009). Uses and Gratifications of Twitter: An examination of user motives and satisfaction of Twitter use. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication*.
- Retrieved from http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p376367_index.html
- Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2002). Toward a dialogic theory of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 28(1), 21–37. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111\(02\)00108-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(02)00108-X)
- Kim, H., & Asim, M. (2013). Religion on social media networking. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication*.
- Mee, G. (n.d.). What is a good engagement rate on Twitter? Retrieved November 26, 2018, from <https://blog.scrunch.com/what-is-a-good-engagement-rate-on-twitter>
- Pew Research Center. (2014). Religion in America: U.S. religious data, demographics and statistics. Retrieved November 25, 2018, from <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>
- Revolv. (n.d.). Dialogic public relations theory. Retrieved November 27, 2018, from <https://www.revolv.com/page/Dialogic-public-relations-theory>
- Statista. (2018a, February). U.S. Twitter reach by age group 2018. Retrieved November 25, 2018, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/265647/share-of-us-internet-users-who-use-twitter-by-age-group/>
- Statista. (2018b, October). Twitter: number of active users 2010-2018. Retrieved November 25, 2018, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users/>
-

Appendix A

Top 100 Favorited and Retweeted tweets

Humanity		Religiosity		Inspirational	
Favorites	Retweets	Favorites	Retweets	Favorites	Retweets
58761	24752	63380	29053	64322	33928
108771	25369	63381	26279	60069	21658
62902	20464	114838	25424	143809	24350
61972	34171	67575	32358	62215	35061
95097	23447	62255	20368	61886	19494
61723	19671	81787	19087	64124	28973
61022	20129	85429	48808	70665	33256
58569	20868	81006	30310	65580	22727
62419	23275	61989	20311	64727	43512
74002	23062	61598	34040	80739	23823
122244	25299	76114	26852	65079	26794
68330	26514	74836	20807	82929	32397
69720	19160	62098	21894	64309	25774
61239	33181	59348	23903	67847	32355
125796	26023	74135	20548	59475	23288
78579	22495	68506	22283	71939	21569
82209	39383	80361	19037	74950	24293
58797	35378	82404	21020	72738	33072
100238	34755	98489	28790	105588	21304
63432	29492	89405	63562	78351	21515
109867	25352	76820	19938	83184	20892
98102	68545	68202	38860	82621	19239
96332	22383	64861	23172	92868	
81242	20950	63996	29186	62946	
68079	24589	69234	21034	117603	
180136	31008	60436		62486	
75930	29952	75598		69333	
62284	26872	159808		82057	
102627	45424	61000		64025	
63684	29184	71524		76373	
61630	28454	89348		102507	
72262	19913	61381		246979	
84527	24524	58999		150094	
75223	36360				

Appendix A (continued)

20231		
29590		
33125		
62623		
32454		
31521		
23144		
30164		
35499		
38083		
43561		
69634		
63658		
25932		
68456		
38755		
59149		
33449		
21127		

□

Appendix B

Top 100 Most Frequently Used Words

Humanity		Religiosity		Inspirational	
Word	Count	Word	Count	Word	Count
love	249	peace	115	god	419
life	181	heart	93	<u>jesus</u>	233
world	121	joy	91	lord	172
people	93	hope	83	<u>christ</u>	150
lives	79	live	75	mercy	119
human	58	hearts	71	pray	109
family	57	dear	55	faith	91
brothers	47	spirit	53	<u>christian</u>	85
encounter	46	day	50	church	80
sisters	46	time	50	gospel	74
children	43	grace	44	holy	70
poor	38	called	40	prayer	69
cross	37	forgiveness	40	<u>mary</u>	61
father	37	gift	40	<u>christians</u>	49
mother	36	journey	40	holiness	28
suffering	36	learn	39	sin	23
evil	33	tenderness	39	faithful	19
families	33	means	38	mission	19
person	33	bring	32	saint	18
care	32	light	30		
witness	30	close	29		
friends	28	future	28		
humanity	27	living	28		
society	27	remember	28		
charity	26	strength	28		
loves	26	word	28		
afraid	25	follow	27		
dignity	25	<u>laudatosi</u>	27		
service	24	join	23		
unity	21	path	23		
victims	21	power	23		
suffering	36	courage	22		
born	19	death	22		
feel	19	trust	22		
experience	18	grow	21		
helps	18	free	20		
poverty	18	merciful	20		
protect	18	common	19		
		eyes	19		
		forget	19		
		loving	19		
		share	19		
		concrete	18		

□

“I Wanted To Be Like Her”: A Study of Eating Behaviors and Attitudes in Television Shows Targeted to Teenage Girls

Devin Kiernan

*Strategic Communications
Elon University*

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

Abstract

Diet culture is common among teen girls, creating high risk for eating disorders. According to National Eating Disorder Association, 20 million women will have an eating disorder at some point in their lives. And it is especially common for those going through significant transitional periods – like high school –to develop an eating disorder. While prior studies have examined the link between body image and hours spent viewing television, there is a gap in the literature about what eating behaviors and attitudes are depicted in television programming targeted to teenage girls. A framing analysis was conducted for episodes of three popular television shows on Freeform, a network marketed toward teenagers. The study found that the female characters on the shows were rarely seen eating, exhibited patterns of emotional eating, made references to being fat, and shamed other characters for their unhealthy eating habits. This creates a cause for concern as teen girls may be developing eating habits as portrayed on television.

I. Introduction

The president and CEO of the National Eating Disorder Association (NEDA) has noted that “among ‘normal’ dieters, 35 percent will progress to pathological dieting and of those, 20-25 percent progress to full-blown eating disorders” (Hamilton, 2014). According to NEDA, 20 million women will have an eating disorder at some point in their lives (National Eating Disorder Association, 2018). It is especially common for those going through significant transitional periods (i.e., high school to college, college to adulthood) to develop an eating disorder (Ross, 2018).

Eating disorders, however, are not merely caused by being a teenager. Other environmental factors contribute, such as the type of media one consumes. On average, American teenagers spend nine hours a day using entertainment media, excluding time spent in school (Shapiro, 2015). Given this statistic, it can be assumed that during those nine hours teenagers are getting messages, both subtle and explicit, about how the world works and their place in it.

This is especially true in television programming targeted to teenage girls. Within a day of its airing, the series finale of Freeform’s *Pretty Little Liars* became the most tweeted about television episode of 2017 (Elizabeth, 2017). Due to this level of popularity, it is clear that *Pretty Little Liars* and shows like it have an effect on their audiences. The characters become role models and friends for their viewers and their

Keywords: television, teen girl culture, parasocial relationships, socialization, eating disorders, diet culture
Email: dkiernan2@elon.edu

behaviors are modeled off screen. However, the viewer hardly ever sees them eat. When they do eat, their behaviors contribute to the prevalence of diet culture and disordered eating. Shedding light on these nuances may help to further discern risk factors for eating disorders and control underlying messages before they cause further damage.

When teen girls are struggling to find their identity in a culture that expects them to have it all, exposure to negative messages about dieting and weight loss can be extremely dangerous. The following research has the goal of identifying and analyzing patterns surrounding eating habits in television shows targeted for teenage girls.

II. Literature Review

During adolescence, the media may shape the thoughts and behavior of viewers. Because of such influence, it is especially important to pay attention to the content of the messages the viewer is receiving. Research has shown that teen girls learn behaviors based on the media figures they identify with or idolize. The women they see on their TV screen become models for how to succeed in the world. Teen girls try to live up to the standards these characters set, particularly in regard to physical appearance. These expectations can lead to negative thoughts and feelings and make teen girls all the more susceptible to disordered eating behaviors. When a teen girl attaches to a character she identifies with, and that character exhibits patterns of disordered eating, the teen girl may be likely to model those same patterns.

Girl Culture and Television Viewing Habits

"Kate Moss was so cool, I wanted to be like her, under control." This quote comes from a 14-year old girl named Kara. She used a highly regulated diet as a substitute for the control she felt she lost in the constantly changing world of an adolescent teen. By losing weight, Kara felt powerful and superior (Heilman, 1998, p. 193).

This is not an uncommon feature in the life of teenage girls. In fact, in a study of young girls' appearance management behavior, half of the respondents admitted to managing their appearance somewhat, with the likelihood of this behavior increasing as the girls approached their teen years (Trekels & Eggermont, 2017). Further studies of self-portrayals of teen girls noted that all girls surveyed admitted that managing their bodies was their "primary project" (Meyers, 2007, p. 29).

The hypercritical eye girls have towards their bodies may be attributed to the "Supergirl" construct that has become a trademark of Western womanhood. No longer is it enough to just be beautiful or just be smart – a girl must do it all. A study of British teenage girls and their transition to womanhood showed that they were expected to excel in school and be sexually attractive. In interviews, the girls shared their deep anxieties about themselves in the form of eating disorders and feelings of inadequacy. Today, perfection is deemed to be obtainable, meaning "anything less than perfection is failure" (Michel & Reid-Walsh, 2008, p. 10). The expectation of perfection puts further pressure on girls to look like the women they see on television.

The social climate teen girls live in is even more concerning when coupled with their television consumption habits. Most girls are motivated to watch by having something to talk about with friends (Martinez de Morin, Medrano & Ugalde, 2017). The desire to be a part of a larger cultural conversation also motivates teenagers to binge-watch (Conlin, 2016; Matrix, 2014). Twenty-five percent of English-speaking Canadian households have signed up for the streaming service Netflix. That figure increases to 33 percent for households with teens. As television viewing habits shift from appointment-based live viewing to on-demand, teens watch more television and in larger doses (Matrix, 2014). Research suggests that binge-watching produces stronger reactions to the content on-screen, therefore increasing the likelihood that teen girls will be influenced by the characters on their favorite shows (Conlin, 2016). In fact, when examining tweets containing the hashtags #PrettyLittleLiars, #TheSecretLifeOfTheAmericanTeenager, or #TheBoldType (the series analyzed in this study), it becomes clear that the women watching these shows are often binge-watching, some spending entire days in front of the screen.

With U.S. teens spending such a great deal of time watching television, they are receiving numerous messages about how to function in society. Giles notes that in their teen years viewers search out heroes, idols, and role models (Giles, 2003), who come to be known as secondary attachments (Erickson, 1968).

These are attachments to adults other than one's parents, and they either come in the form of a romantic attachment or an identification attachment. The latter produces concern for adolescent girls who become attached to celebrities that have unrealistic beauty standards. Prior research has indeed shown that girls accept the appearance of women in the media to be a personal standard (Trekels & Eggermont, 2017). This finding shows how teen girls use television as a means to develop into a woman, learning what it is an acceptable body standard and how to behave to be the perfect woman.

Parasocial Relationships and Socialization

Television exhibits such influence on teenage girls due to the sense of intimacy cultivated between character and viewer. Studies have found that viewers develop a level of trust in the television they watch, leading them to endorse or model behaviors they observe (Ragsdale, Bersamin, Schwartz, Zamboanga, Kerrick, & Grube, 2013; Churchill & Moschis, 1979). This phenomenon is especially true for early maturing teen girls. Television becomes a "super-peer" they turn to when they may not feel comfortable confiding in their real-life friends, or when their friends do not have the answers to their questions (Brown, Halpern & L'Engle, 2005, p. 426).

This phenomenon can be attributed in part to the development of a parasocial relationship, which has been defined as a relationship between audience and performer in which the audience member's long-term involvement with a character extends beyond the viewing experience (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rosaen & Dibble, 2015). In other words, the viewer has a one-sided relationship with a character they perceive as real. These relationships stem from cues such as a character's looks, behavior, emotional state, and nonverbal behavior. Most often audience members attach to characters because they identify with one or more of these traits, leading to the adoption of certain attitudes and beliefs (Sun, 2010).

Those most likely to develop parasocial relationships have ritualized viewing habits and are cultivating their own identities (Ryan & Macey, 2013; Theran, Newburg, & Gleason 2010). Prior research indicates that teen girls fit these criteria and are especially likely to develop such feelings towards television characters (Theran, Newburg, & Gleason 2010; Ugalde, Martinez de Morin & Medrano, 2017). One study, in particular, noted that stars such as Angelina Jolie, Reese Witherspoon, and Jennifer Aniston heavily influenced girls. These women were old enough to be the subjects' mothers, thus indicating idol or role model status (Theran, Newburg, & Gleason, 2010).

Once a parasocial relationship is established it manifests in specific ways. Most apparent is its similarity to social relationships based in reality, such as peers, parents, and siblings (Giles, 2003; Nabi & Oliver, 2010). They can result in feelings of love and admiration, but also feelings of loneliness and alienation (Ryan & Macey, 2013; Sun, 2010). Twitter research shows that many fans of the shows analyzed in this study have strong reactions to what the characters are doing, as if the characters are present in their own lives. For example, @AnaTheAwesome tweeted: "Me rn [two crying emojis] because of the season 3 finale #SecretLifeOfTheAmericanTeenager" and @Maddclaire19 tweeted: "If Jacqueline gets fired, I will literally stab every single person alive in this entire world #TheBoldType."

When one develops a parasocial relationship with a character, that character has persuasive influence in the same way one's peers do (Basil & Brown, 1995; Nabbi & Oliver, 2010). In many cases, this results in the adoption of the behaviors of that character. For example, one study participant said of Bill Cosby's character on *The Cosby Show*, "I try very hard to make my own character like him...I feel that Cosby and I share that characteristic of trying to be different" (Giles, 2003, p. 195). Such an attitude indicates how the characters one identifies with influence how they live their lives. The same pattern can take place when teen girls identify with a female character and that character shows patterns of disordered eating.

When a viewer finds identifying characteristics with television characters, that similarity can also serve to affirm beliefs he or she may have (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991; Eyal & Rubin, 2003). This phenomenon is known as homophily and it can explain why parasocial relationships have such influence, as the viewer accepts the characters thoughts and behaviors as truth. Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT) suggests that parasocial relationships can lead to the viewer taking actions that model the characters they identify with and/or idolize. SCT holds that the characters one finds similarities with, finds physically attractive, or are deemed "socially desirable" are likely to be mimicked in the viewer's own life. Conversely, those actions deemed undesirable become "disincentives" for viewers (Malacane & Martins, 2017, p. 28). Therefore, when a teen girl sees the most popular character on her favorite show skip a meal, or otherwise promote diet culture, she is likely to repeat those behaviors in her own life.

Disordered Eating and the Media

Because of such influence, television programming today can be dangerous. Media depictions of women portray the body as a “malleable entity modifiable by sweat, starvation, surgery, and drugs,” and thinness has become a prerequisite for attractiveness, creating a culture in which those whose bodies do not adhere to this ideal are deemed “problematic” (Ogle & Thornburg, 2003, p. 47). These portrayals have led to an increase in dieting, with 75 percent of female teenagers dieting before the age of 16 (Michel & Willard, 2003). A positive correlation has been found between television consumption and the adoption of weight loss programs and internalization of the thin ideal (Becker, Burwell, Gillman, Herzog, & Hamburg, 2002; Boothroyd, Barton, Booth, Evans, Jamieson, Jucker, Thornborrow, & Tovee, 2016).

Approximately half of U.S. high school students report restricting food intake as a means of controlling weight, most commonly among girls. Some strategies they employ include increasing exercise, eating less, eating food low in calories, and eliminating certain foods from their diets altogether (Bas & Kiziltan, 2007). This behavior falls under the definition of dysfunctional or disordered eating: eating behavior that “is regulated by external and inappropriate internal controls, and seeks to reshape the body or relieve stress” (Berg, 2002, p. 32). It is this restrictive behavior that leads to eating disorders (Bas & Kiziltan, 2007).

Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS) is the category to which eating disorders are assigned if they fail to fulfill diagnostic criteria for anorexia or bulimia. It comprises a large group of diverse disorders defined by the criteria they do not meet (Norrington & Palmer, 2005). Strict dieting, such as the behaviors seen on television programming, among teen girls may fall into this category (Bas & Kiziltan, 2007). Largely, those who suffer from eating disorders have a skewed perception of their own bodies, which could be attributed to the fact that many teen girls see the body types of women on television as standard. These feelings tend to develop between the ages of 14 and 18, with 85 percent of cases appearing during adolescence (Michel & Willard, 2003). This is especially concerning given the research regarding teen girl culture, viewing habits, and parasocial relationships, as girls may be learning this behavior from those characters they idolize on the screen.

Taken together, teen girls may be at high risk for developing eating disorders due to the significance of the mediated relationships they have with television characters. While previous research has shown that beauty standards portrayed in the media influence girls' thoughts and feelings about their bodies, there is a gap in the literature in regards to eating habits of television characters. This research seeks to fill that gap by examining the extent to which teen television shows discuss and/or depict dieting and women's relationship to food.

III. Methods

This study examines how television shows depict girls' eating behaviors and attitudes toward eating. Specifically, three subcategories were evaluated. First, instances of restrictive eating were examined. As referenced in the literature review, in many cases of EDNOS and anorexia, this is a typical behavior (Bas & Kiziltan, 2007). The next subcategory was body image, since many girls begin dangerous diet regimens due to their negative views of their own bodies and feeling they need to regulate them. The final area this study focused on were instances of disordered eating. This may include negative comments related to food or eating, instances of eating to serve an emotional need, or other eating habits that may stray from what is considered a normal, balanced diet.

A framing analysis was conducted using three television shows on Freeform, a popular channel targeting teens and young adults. A framing analysis identifies the culturally determined definitions of reality and will shed light on how food functions and what it means in the life of teenage girls. When selecting the television shows to study, a stratified sample was used, selecting only shows that aired on Freeform, which ended no more than five years ago, and included a cast of primarily teenagers or young adults. The shows chosen were *The Secret Life of the American Teenager* (2008-2013), *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-2017), and *The Bold Type* (2017-Present). Every 10th episode from each season was selected in the study. However, since *The Bold Type* has only released two seasons with 10 episodes per season, every 2nd episode was included for that show. A total of 38 episodes were analyzed ($n=38$).

Pretty Little Liars follows the characters Aria, Emily, Hanna, and Spencer as they are terrorized by

a mysterious villain that goes by “A,” reminiscent of their friend Alison, who is missing and assumed dead. The show features the girls solving the mystery surrounding Alison’s disappearance while dealing with boys, college applications, and parents. It is important to note that Hanna and a recurring character, Mona, both developed eating disorders prior to the show’s pilot episode (the time in which these characters were suffering from eating disorders is never featured in the show, but it is alluded to early on). Additionally, the character Spencer exhibits many characteristics of what is considered the “perfect” girl -- a high achieving academic, but still beautiful and popular (Rimer, 2007). When analyzing *Pretty Little Liars* it is important to note that the series is quite dramatic and the circumstances the main characters deal with are far from ordinary. The dramatic plot of the show may explain why food is ignored in some episodes. However, given that the entire series functions in this way, the restrictive eating behavior and attitudes present are nonetheless noteworthy.

The Secret Life of the American Teenager stars Amy, a high school student that becomes pregnant at 15. The show takes place over Amy’s four years of high school and depicts the lives of her friends as well. Stereotypical portrayals of teenage girls appear in several characters. For example, the character Grace is an innocent, religious, and beautiful girl who dates a boy on the football team. The character Adrian, in contrast, is the “bad girl,” sexy and wild, who falls in love with the rebel. Sex and relationships are common themes throughout all five seasons of the show.

The Bold Type tells the story of three young-adult women, Kat, Jane, and Sutton, and their careers at a popular women’s magazine in New York City. It may be important to note that *The Bold Type* is the most recent of the three series and takes on a far more openly progressive voice. The show tackles relevant issues today such as sexual harassment and gun rights. The women navigate their careers and relationships throughout the series. Some themes include friendship, love, and independence.

The visual and spoken elements of the episodes were identified through emergent coding. The frames that appeared consistently across shows were foods being shown or discussed but not eaten, not eating at mealtimes, references to restrictive eating, emotional eating, shame for “bad” eating habits, and references to being fat. Each instance was counted and described. For the purpose of this study, only the eating behaviors of female characters were analyzed, as those are the characters teen girls are most likely to identify with and imitate. Beverages were excluded in this study.

IV. Findings

Within each of the shows analyzed, patterns of restrictive eating, poor body image, and disordered eating behaviors were apparent.

Television Show	Food shown or discussed, but not eaten	Not eating at mealtimes	Reference to restrictive eating	Emotional eating	Shame for “bad” eating habits	Reference to being fat
<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>	20	26	3	1	1	1
<i>The Secret Life of the American Teenager</i>	18	22	2	1	2	1
<i>The Bold Type</i>	19	8	1	3	—	—
Total	57	56	6	5	3	2

Figure 1: Occurrences of disordered eating behaviors/attitudes throughout *Pretty Little Liars*, *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, and *The Bold Type*.

Foods Shown or Discussed, but Not Eaten

As Figure 1 indicates, the most common pattern that occurred across the 38 episodes studied was food being shown or discussed, but not eaten, with 57 instances total. In many cases, characters would express that they had plans to get lunch or dinner, but these meals were never depicted. It may have been assumed that the characters did go out for a meal, however the viewer never sees the characters eating.

The majority of these instances occur in relatively normal settings. In season two, episode eight of *Pretty Little Liars*, Emily is in the hospital after learning she has an ulcer. The doctors have given her the “O.K.” to eat, but even though Emily asks a nurse for dinner, the viewer never sees her eat. Another instance occurs in season one, episode two of *The Bold Type* when Sutton’s coworker suggests they take their lunch break at Shake Shack, though their lunch break is never portrayed. In both scenarios, episodes in which no larger plot occurrence would interfere with the characters ability to eat, meals are referenced, but not shown.

Other instances involved the characters buying or making food, but never actually eating it. This was particularly true in *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*. Several episodes depicted characters making sandwiches or cookies, but none of the female characters ever ate them. For example, in season three, episode 23, Grace becomes obsessed with her new nickname “sweetie” and makes cookies to highlight how sweet she is. While all of the men she offers the cookies to eat them, she does not. Even when characters showed an interest in eating, they sometimes denied themselves. In season two, episode seven, Grace has just returned from Med Camp, a summer camp in for students interested in the medical field. After eating healthy all summer, she scolds her brother Tom for eating ice cream. Later on, Grace shows interest in eating the ice cream, but as soon as she begins to bring the spoon to her mouth her restraint kicks in and she puts it down.

Other episodes depicted characters making snacks, but not eating them. This happened frequently in *Pretty Little Liars* and *The Bold Type*. In season three, episode 23 of *Pretty Little Liars*, Aria and her boyfriend, who happens to be her former English professor, order a pastry to split. Aria feels paranoid about being out in public together, and the scene concludes with neither one eating the pastry. Another instance of snacks not being eaten involved the characters of *The Bold Type*, Jane, Sutton, and Kat, having a movie night with popcorn and pizza. This takes place after a day at the office when the girls are catching up on their lives. In the scene, food was present, but the viewer never sees the girls eat it.

Not Eating At Mealtimes

The second most common pattern that occurred throughout the 38 episodes was food not being eaten at mealtimes. There were 56 instances of this pattern. Skipping meals mostly took form in three ways: making meals, but not eating them; picking at meals, but not eating them; and replacing breakfast with coffee. In season one, episode ten of *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, Amy starts her first day at a new school and does not eat breakfast. In that same episode no one is seen eating during school lunch hour, Amy's sister Ashley does not eat her lasagna at dinner, and Amy does not eat her hamburger at dinner. Of course, this episode reflects a major change in Amy's life -- and creates gossip for her peers-- as she begins a new school to deal with her pregnancy, which may explain erratic eating patterns. Nonetheless, not eating at mealtimes indicates a lack of importance given to nutrition, and if it is a reaction to a such a major change, it creates a pattern of emotional eating.

Additionally, *Pretty Little Liars* often featured characters preparing breakfast, but not eating it. Season one, episode 20 begins with Aria's father and Hanna's boyfriend making the girls breakfast, but the girls never eat it. When meals did make it to the table, they were mostly picked at. In season two, episode 18, Hanna tries to cope with her friends hiding things from her. At dinner she has a salad in front of her, but she just moves it around on her plate, without ever taking a bite.

Also relevant in *Pretty Little Liars* is the pattern of drinking coffee for breakfast. In numerous episodes, the characters did not eat breakfast before leaving for school, but they did have coffee. For example, in season one, episode 20, Hanna's mother, who appears content that Hanna and her boyfriend are getting along well, comes into the kitchen at breakfast time and pours herself a coffee before heading to work, without eating the breakfast that her daughter prepared. While beverage intake was not measured in this study, the importance of this phenomenon will be further elaborated on in the discussion section.

References to Restrictive Eating

There were far fewer instances of references to restrictive eating. Over the 38 episodes, six references to restrictive eating occurred. When characters spoke about restricting eating, their references were casual and received no concern from the other characters. For instance, in season two, episode eight of *Pretty Little Liars*, Emily is concerned about being in shape for college swimming recruiters. She refers to limiting her sugar intake and refuses to drink orange juice. In season three, episode 23, while searching through body bags in a morgue and reflecting on how, despite one's best efforts to be healthy, everyone ends up dying, Hanna mentions the "good" behavior of "not eating that second pudding." A similar attitude was depicted in *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*. When Amy mentions she did not eat breakfast, it is treated casually, and when Grace states she "didn't eat ice cream all summer" because it "wasn't allowed at camp," she is depicted as caring for her health.

Even more extreme references were treated as normal. In *Pretty Little Liars*, Mona, who developed an eating disorder to transform her public persona, mentions that when she was trying to lose weight last summer she only ate three almonds a day and she belittled Hanna for not doing the same. This weight loss tactic was clearly accepted by the other characters and Hanna was admonished for not going to such an extreme.

Emotional Eating

There were five instances of emotional eating within the 38 episodes. In these instances, the characters either were under some sort of emotional distress or were celebrating something. For example, in season five, episode 14 of *Pretty Little Liars*, the viewer sees Hanna eating ice cream after another character's funeral and in season two, episode six of *The Bold Type*, the viewer sees Jane, Sutton, and Kat eating ice cream to celebrate Jane's award. *The Bold Type* also included stress eating in season two, episode two, when Sutton snacks on M&Ms during a high-stakes photoshoot she is in charge of, and drunk eating in season two, episode six, when Sutton eats a Hot Pocket, a brand of microwaveable turnovers and pocket sandwiches, after a night out.

Shame for “Bad” Eating Habits

Shame for “bad” eating habits rarely occurred. There were three instances total. In season one, episode ten of *Pretty Little Liars* Mona scolds a girl for eating a cookie at a birthday party. In *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, the shaming took on a more health-related attitude. In season one, episode 20, Amy tries to be healthy for the sake of her baby. She says to her sister Ashley, who was about to eat a waffle for breakfast, “Ashley, yogurt is much healthier than chocolate waffles.” Later on in the episode, Amy also mentions that she wants “to be careful about what [she eats]. [She doesn’t] want to gain weight.”

References to Being Fat

There were two explicit references to being or feeling fat. In *Pretty Little Liars* season one, episode 10, Hanna asks her friends if her face looks fat. In *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, Lauren and Madison both say that they feel fat.

Eating Not Discussed or Depicted At All

Three episodes aired in which food was not discussed or depicted at all. These episodes both took place over the course of an entire day or more, meaning the characters were not seen eating once in a more than a 24-hour period.

V. Discussion

Given the previous research on teen girl culture, parasocial relationships, and socialization, it is clear that girls watching programming such as *Pretty Little Liars*, *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, and *The Bold Type* can form attachments with the female characters they view as similar to themselves, or as role models. Those viewers are more likely to model those characters’ behaviors in the real world (Erickson, 1968; Giles, 2003; Malacane & Martins, 2017). In the especially stressful teen years when girls are learning their place in society, seeing girls on television that they identify with can be a source of comfort and provide answers on how to be what society regards as acceptable (Brown, Halpern, & L’Engle, 2005). However, when the beauty standards of the characters they watch are that of Hollywood, and therefore designed to attract viewers, teen girls can adopt an unrealistic standard of beauty for themselves (Trekels & Eggermont, 2017).

The women that teenage girls see when they watch *Pretty Little Liars*, *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, and *The Bold Type*, do not prioritize eating. Although the characters in these series, particularly in *Pretty Little Liars*, may lead lives that stray from what society considers “normal” and therefore may be influenced to ignore healthy eating habits, they still neglect food and frame eating as unimportant. Rarely are they seen eating meals or even snacks, and when we do see them eat something it might be a result of emotional eating. This teaches girls that eating is acceptable when emotions are in extremes, but not as part of a daily routine. More concerning is the substitution of meals with coffee and alcohol. While beverages were not included in this study, it became clear that grabbing coffee or drinks with a group of girls was a means of regular socialization, while meals were not. This gives the viewer permission to replace food with drinks in social settings.

The concept of food not being a priority is concerning by itself, but it becomes dangerous when coupled with the presences of explicit references to restrictive eating, being fat, and shame for diverting from a “healthy” diet. While there were fewer instances of these patterns, they are much more straightforward. It takes little effort for a teen girl to understand that the way to be like the women they see on the screen is to limit their caloric intake and avoid foods that will make them fat.

Such eating behaviors and attitudes promote a diet culture. Teen television programming sends its viewers the message that regulating food intake is normal and even honorable. This promotion of diet culture is incredibly intriguing for women that struggle with body image (Ross, 2015). While being conscious of one’s diet can be beneficial and aid in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, such behaviors also can turn into disordered eating and eventually full-blown eating disorders (Bas & Kiziltan, 2007; Berg, 2002).

VI. Conclusion

This study sought to fill a gap in the research by examining eating behaviors and attitudes toward eating in television shows targeted to teen girls. Episodes of *Pretty Little Liars*, *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, and *The Bold Type*, television shows with a largely female cast that aired on the teen network Freeform, were examined. A framing analysis brought to light seven patterns regarding eating behaviors and attitudes. There were far more instances of food being depicted than eaten, and of skipping meals, than in most other categories examined; however, these were more subtle than instances in other categories, in which a direct remark is made regarding a character's looks or eating habits.

The lack of eating in the television shows studied creates a cause for concern as teen girls look to the characters in shows to tell them how to behave in society. Teens who identify with these characters are more likely to model such eating behaviors and attitudes in their own lives. By not giving due attention to food consumption and by creating a negative attitude around food and appearance, teen television programming promotes diet culture. Diets often develop into eating disorders. With 20 million women suffering from eating disorders at some point in their lives, teen television only triggers the disease further (Hamilton, 2014).

It is important to note limitations of this study. Examining more television shows across networks over a longer time period would determine whether or not the patterns found are widespread. Additionally, interviews and surveys of teenage girls could be used to determine what programs they watch, how often they watch, and whether or not they feel influenced by the characters on such shows. It may also be important to speak with the producers and directors of teen television shows to examine the choice to not heavily feature food and whether it is an inherent bias reflective of the society. While there is room to deepen the research, this study does bring to light several concerns about what teenage girls are exposed to when they watch television.

To prevent the damage that television can do to the teenage girl's psyche, producers and directors should educate themselves on how the messages they send can be negatively interpreted. The creators of teen television programming must learn what triggers may exist for eating disorders and how to avoid them in their work. Hopefully, such a strategy will lead to programming that portrays more realistic and nutritious eating behaviors and attitudes.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge Dr. Naeemah Clark for all of her insight, critique, and support. She was been instrumental in this process.

References

- An, S., & Gower, K. K. (2009). How do the news media frame crises? A content analysis of crisis news coverage. *Public Relations Review*, 35(2), 107-112. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.01.010
- Bas, M., & Kiziltan, G. (2007). Relations among weight control behaviors and eating attitudes, social physique anxiety, and fruit and vegetable consumption in Turkish adolescents. *Adolescence* 62(165), 167-178.
- Basil, M., & Brown, W. (1994). Interpersonal communication in news diffusion: A study of "Magic" Johnson's announcement. *Journalism Quarterly* 71(2), 305-320.
- Becker, A.E., Burwell, R.A., Gillman, S.E. Herzog, D.B., & Hamburg, P. (2002). Eating behaviors and attitudes following prolonged exposure to television among ethnic Fijian adolescent girls. *British Journal of Psychiatry* 180, 509-514.
- Berg, F. (2002). *Women afraid to eat: Breaking free in today's weight-obsessed world*. Hettinger, ND: Healthy Weight Network.

- Boothroyd, L.G., Jucker, J., Thornborrow, T., Jamieson, M.A., Burt, D.M., Barton, R.A., Booth, D.M., Evans, E.H., & Tovee, M.J. (2016). Television exposure predicts body size ideals in rural Nicaragua. *British Journal of Psychology* 107(4), 752-767.
- Brown, J.D., Halpern, C.T., & L'Engle, K.L. (2005). Mass media as a sexual super peer for early maturing girls. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 36(5), 420-427.
- Churchill, G.A., & Moschis, G.P. (1979). Television and interpersonal influences on adolescent consumer socialization. *Journal of Consumer Research* 6(1), 23-35.
- Conlin, L. (2016). Time-shifting vs. appointment viewing: The role of fear of missing out within TV consumption behaviors. *Communication and Society* 29(4), 151-164.
- Trekels, J., & Eggermont, S. (2017). Aspiring to have the looks of a celebrity: Young girls' engagement in appearance management behaviors. *European Journal of Pediatrics* 176(7), 857-863.
- Elizabeth, D. (2017). "Pretty Little Liars" breaks Twitter record for most tweeted about TV episode in 2017. *Teen Vogue*. Retrieved from <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/pretty-little-liars-twitter-record>
- Erickson, E. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Eyal, K., & Rubin, A. (2003). Viewer aggression and homophily, identification, and parasocial relationships with television characters. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 47(1), 77-98.
- Giles, D. (2003). *Media psychology*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Hamilton, C. (2014). Who's the biggest loser? All of us. Retrieved from <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/blog/whos-biggest-loser-all-us>
- Heilman, E.E. (1998). The struggle for self: Power and identity in adolescent girls. *Youth & Society* 30(2), 182-208.
- Hoffner, C., & Cantor, J. (1991). Perceiving and responding to mass media characters. In J. Bryant and D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Responding to the screen: Reception and reaction processes* (p. 63-101). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Horton, D., & Wohl, R.R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance. *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 19(3), 215-229.
- Malacane, M., & Martins, N. (2016). Sexual socialization messages in television programming produced for adolescents. *Mass Communications and Society* 20 (1), 23-46.
- Martinez de Morin, J., Medrano, M., & Ugalde, L., (2017). Adolescents' TV viewing patterns in the digital era: A cross-cultural study. *Communicar* 25(50), 67-75.
- Matrix, S. (2014). The Netflix effect: Teens, binge-watching, and on-demand media trends. *Juennesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 6(1). Retrieved from <http://jeunessejournal.ca/index.php/yptc/article/view/229>
- Meyers, S. (2007). Reimagining girlhood: Girl's writings and self-portrayals. *Feminist Collections: A Quarterly of Women's Studies* 28(4), 29-33.
- Michel, D., & Willard, S. (2002). *When dieting becomes dangerous: A guide to understanding and treating anorexia and bulimia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Mitchell, C., & Reid-Walsh, J. (2008). *Girl culture: An encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Nabi, R., & Oliver, M. (2009). *The Sage handbook of media processes and effects*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- National Eating Disorder Association. (2018). *What are Eating Disorders?* Retrieved from <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/what-are-eating-disorders>
- Norring, C., & Palmer, B. (2005). *EDNOS eating disorders not otherwise specified: Scientific and clinical perspectives on the other eating disorders*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
-

- Ogle, J.P., & Thornburg, E. (2003). An alternative voice amid teen 'zines: An analysis of body-related content in Girl Zone. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* 95(1), 47-56.
- Ragsdale, K., Bersamin, M.M., Schwartz S.J., Zamboanga, B.L, Kerrick, M.R., & Grube, J.W. (2013). Development of sexual expectancies among adolescents: Contributions by parents, peers, and the media. *The Journal of Sex Research* 51 (5), 551-560.
- Rimer, S. (2007). For girls, it's be yourself, and be perfect too. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/01/education/01girls.html>
- Rosaen, S.F., & Dibble, J.L. (2015). Clarifying the role of attachment and social compensation on parasocial relationships with television characters. *Communications Studies* 67(2), 147-162.
- Ross, A. (2018). How America's diet culture hinders those with eating disorders. *The Daily Beast*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-americas-diet-culture-hinders-those-with-eating-disorders>
- Ryan, K.M., & Macey, D.A. (2013). *Television and the self: Knowledge, identity, and media representation*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Shapiro, J. (2015). Teenagers in the U.S. spend about nine hours a day in front of a screen. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jordanshapiro/2015/11/03/teenagers-in-the-u-s-spend-about-nine-hours-a-day-in-front-of-a-screen/#257e9529a7c9>
- Sun, T. (2010). Antecedents and consequences of parasocial interaction with sport athletes and identification with sports teams. *Journal of Sport Behavior* 33(2), 194-217.
- Theran, S.A., Newburg, E.M., & Gleason, T.R. (2010). Adolescent girls' parasocial interactions with media figures. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology* 171(3), 270-277.
-

Improved Racial Diversity on the Runways of Fashion Week

Erin McDowell

Strategic Communications
Elon University

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

Abstract

Diversity is a contentious issue in the fashion industry, and most notable and newsworthy during what is known as Fashion Month. In most fashion designers' shows, representation of white, thin models is the norm. However, in recent years, the number of people of color and the number of plus-size models appear to be increasing in the model lineups of Fashion Week shows. This study analyzed the change in diversity, both in race and body size, in the Fashion Week runway shows of three brands — Calvin Klein of the United States, Chanel of France, and Versace of Italy — between 2013 and 2018. Using a content analysis, the study found that the percentage of white models decreased between 2013 and 2018, indicating that Fashion Week shows became more racially diverse. This study found no occurrences of plus-size models in the sample, so body size diversity in runway shows still needs improvement.

I. Introduction

Diversity is a contentious issue in the fashion industry that is most notable and newsworthy during what is known as Fashion Month, which occurs twice per year, when every participating brand unveils its latest collections in a runway fashion show as part of either New York, Paris, London, or Milan Fashion Week. Each designer is responsible for producing two shows per year, a Fall/Winter Ready-to-Wear collection and a Spring/Summer Ready-to-Wear collection. Designers often choose models for the first 10 looks of the show that embody their brand and how the designer wishes to represent themselves and their new collection to the public (Okwodu, 2015). In most fashion designers' shows, representation of white, thin models is the norm. However, in recent years, the number of people of color and the number of plus-size models appears to be increasing in the model lineups of Fashion Week shows. In 2017, the number of non-white models at New York Fashion Week doubled since the previous season, with the overall percentage of nonwhite models landing at 36.9 percent (Eckardt, 2017).

Studying diversity in the fashion industry is vital to seeing how such an influential industry can affect and be affected by culture's norms of what is desirable, attractive, and beautiful. Runway shows in particular represent how fashion designers choose to represent themselves and their target audience. By choosing racially diverse models, designers and brands can create a more accepting environment for people of color in the fashion industry. By including plus-size models in fashion shows, designers and brands can similarly show there is more than one acceptable body type, which is generally tall and thin. Though the fashion industry still

Keywords: Fashion Week, diversity, runway models, fashion industry, Chanel, Calvin Klein, Versace
Email: emcdowell2@elon.edu

has a long way to go in terms of diversity, more brands have recently committed to greater racial and body size representation (Safronova, 2017).

This study analyzed the change in diversity, both in race and body size, in the Fashion Week runway shows of three brands between 2013 and 2018. The brands are three iconic brands of their respective countries — Calvin Klein of the United States, Chanel of France, and Versace of Italy. In this study, the researcher defined plus-size models as models size 8 and up, and non-plus size models as size 6 and below, though most runway models range from size 00 to 4.

II. Literature Review

To investigate how diversity in Fashion Week runway shows has shifted, the researcher analyzed diversity in the fashion industry as a whole, diversity at New York, Paris, and Milan Fashion Week, and how diversity trends differ by brand.

Diversity in the Fashion Industry

During the mid-2000s, runways were a glaring example of the lack of diversity in the fashion industry, where a majority of the models were white and extremely thin (Givhan, 2017). There were no editors-in-chief of major fashion publications who were black. Additionally, plus-size women were not represented in the fashion industry outside of specific retailers that catered to plus sizes.

Diversity in the fashion industry has an effect on how the public views and analyzes the concept of beauty and what physical qualities are most attractive. “These media representations trickle-down into the communities of consumers and leaves an impression of what ‘beauty’ is supposed to look like. By not featuring women of color, it implies that beauty is exclusive to White models” (Adodo, 2016, p. 7).

For decades “the fashion world has been the target of enduring criticism for using models who are largely white, waifish and woefully young” (Hunt, 2018, para. 4). However, more fashion campaigns in recent years are featuring plus-size models, older models, and models of color. The definition of diversity has also changed from simply referring to race, to now including age and body size.

Diversity at Fashion Week

New York Fashion Week is leading the industry in terms of runway model diversity. Spring 2018 was the most racially diverse New York Fashion Week in recent history. After examining 94 major New York shows and tallying 2,601 runway appearances, The Fashion Spot found that 63.1 percent of castings were white and 36.9 percent were non-white (Thai, 2017).

Though racial diversity in runway models has improved, many designers still choose to display a majority white model cast in their runway shows. In the fashion industry, an “appeal to aesthetics” exists where designers can choose to show mostly white, thin models and claim that as the “look” they were going for in their collection. Racial discrimination extends into the area of “lookism,” which “skirts dangerously along racial protections in labor law” (Wissinger, 2012, p. 127). Designers and brand executives have the power to choose how diverse their model castings will be, with no regard for racial quotas imposed in other business models of employment. This creative control leads to real-world consequences and income disparity for non-white models who are, on average, cast less often and therefore make less income as a whole than their white model counterparts.

Diversity has changed both in model casting and the designers present at New York Fashion Week, with more models of color and plus-size models on the runway than in previous years and a fresh crop of young, racially diverse designers. New York Fashion Week was the most diverse of any show during the 2017 Spring/Summer season. The 2017 Spring/Summer season “was the season of the best castings—most diverse, most beautiful, and most relevant—of any city, period” (Singer, 2017, para. 4). A similar study showed that “during the fall season there were lower numbers of models on the runway for the majority 23 of the designers than the spring season. This concludes that more [models of color] are on the runway during the spring seasons for the designers selected for this study” than in the fall seasons (Adodo, 2017, p. 23).

The New York Times found New York Fashion Week to be the most diverse city for runway models. In

Fall 2017, 31.5% of models at New York Fashion Week were non-white (Safronova, 2017). All of the New York shows that the report analyzed included at least one model of color. According to the study, New York showed the most model diversity, whereas Milan was the least diverse Fashion Week amongst the four cities.

Diversity by Brand

Calvin Klein's brand image has changed in terms of diversity since Raf Simons took over as CCO in 2016, which was reflected in Calvin Klein's runway shows. Simons was quoted as saying that "being in this position with this brand, which has always stood for diversity anyway, I wanted to show that. [Diversity] is a big part of our dialogue right now. I think it should have always been a big part of the dialogue" (Anderson, 2017, para. 2).

Chanel went above and beyond in terms of diversity in its Fall 2016 show. Twenty looks from their Fall/Winter show featured models of color, which is considered a highly diverse Fashion Week runway lineup. "Chanel isn't just for Inès de la Fressange—esque French [girls] or the Fifth Avenue doyennes—the Chanel girl is international, multicultural, and completely modern" (Okwodu, 2016, para. 2). For reference, Inès de la Fressange is a French fashion icon known for her chic yet conservative style.

The literature review showed a snapshot of diversity in the fashion industry. The author aimed to analyze the trend of how diversity has progressed in the industry by formulating the following research questions and hypotheses.

Research Questions

RQ1: How have the brands used models by race?

RQ2: How have the brands used models by body size?

III. Methods

The researcher conducted a content analysis on New York, Paris, and Milan Fashion Week shows over six years between 2013 and 2018. Among many brands, Calvin Klein, Chanel, and Versace were chosen based on their recognition as "legacy" or iconic brands of their corresponding countries — Calvin Klein with the United States, Chanel with France, and Versace with Italy. The author analyzed the racial and body size diversity trend in their Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter Ready-to-Wear collections.

Images of models from 36 shows were gathered from the Vogue Runway archive, which stores every look from each Fashion Week show from 1992 up until 2019. The first 10 looks of each show provided the sample.

The researcher categorized each look into one race group such as black, white, Asian, or Latinx, and into a body size group like a slender or plus-size models.

IV. Findings

This section is organized based on the analysis of racial diversity and body size diversity in the 36 Fashion Week shows.

Racial Diversity

To answer RQ1 on the shift in racial diversity, the author analyzed the race of 360 models. The percentage of white models did not change until 2015, and then decreased over time, indicating that Fashion Week shows became more racially diverse in recent years.

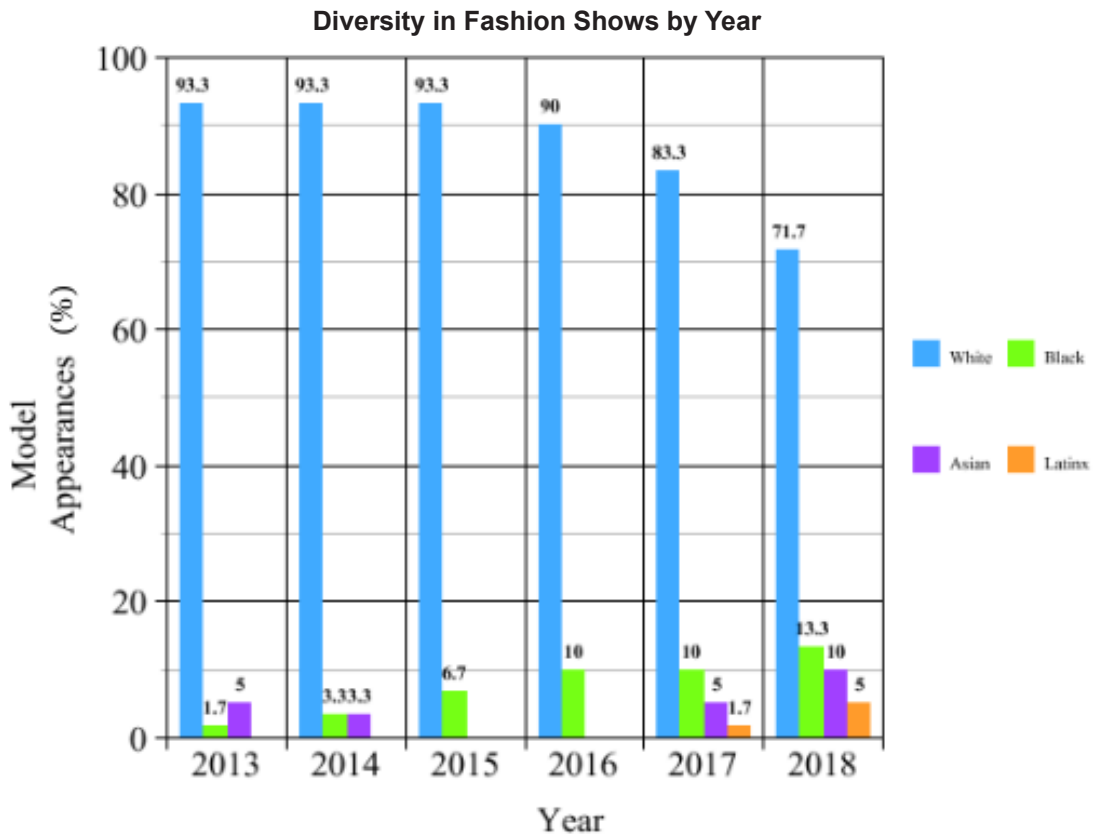


Figure 1. White models decreased over time from 2013 to 2018.

The percentage of white models decreased by 21.6% between the years 2013 and 2018. The percentage of black models increased by 11.6% during the same period. The percentage of Latinx models increased by five percent from the years 2013 to 2018. The percentage of Asian model appearances fluctuated. Asian models saw a nearly two percent decrease in appearances between the years 2013 and 2014, and remained at zero in the years 2015 and 2016. In 2017, Asian models appeared five percent of the time, and increased to 10% in 2018.

To further analyze the ratio of white models to non-white models in the years 2013 to 2018, the researcher compared the total number of white model appearances to the total number of non-white model appearances.

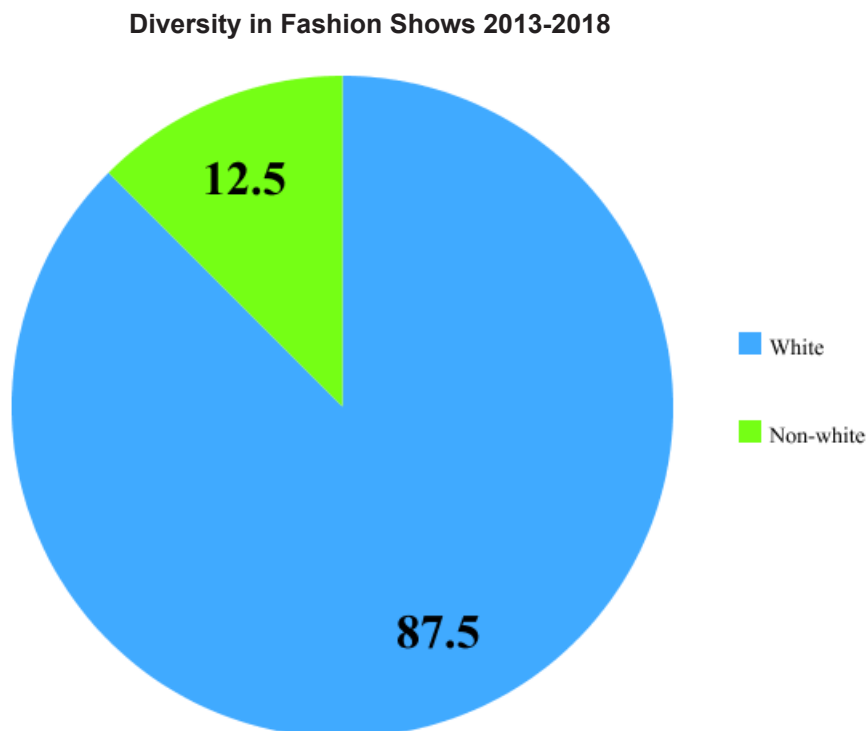


Figure 2. White models were the majority throughout 2013-2018.

Although racial diversity increased between the years 2013 and 2018 (as shown in Figure 1), over the 5 years the total number of white models outnumbered the total number of non-white models by 75%.

To see whether this racial difference can be generalized to the population, the author did a chi-square test. The expected numbers of white and non-white models were determined to be 105 and 15 respectively, according to the numbers found in the research. The p-value of the chi-square test is 0.00024, lower than the significance level of 0.05. This suggests that the racial difference in representation exists at the population level.

The study also analyzed how the racial diversity of models differed by brand. Chanel was the most diverse brand with 82.5% white models, 10% black models, 6.7 percent Asian models, and .8 percent Latinx models, as shown in Figure 3 below. Among the three, Chanel featured the highest number of appearances of black and Asian models.

Versace was the least diverse brand with 93.3% white models, 4.2 percent black models, .8 percent Asian models, and 1.7 percent Latinx models. Versace's percentages of Asian and black models were significantly lower than Chanel and Calvin Klein. However, they featured the highest percentage of Latinx models studied in the sample.

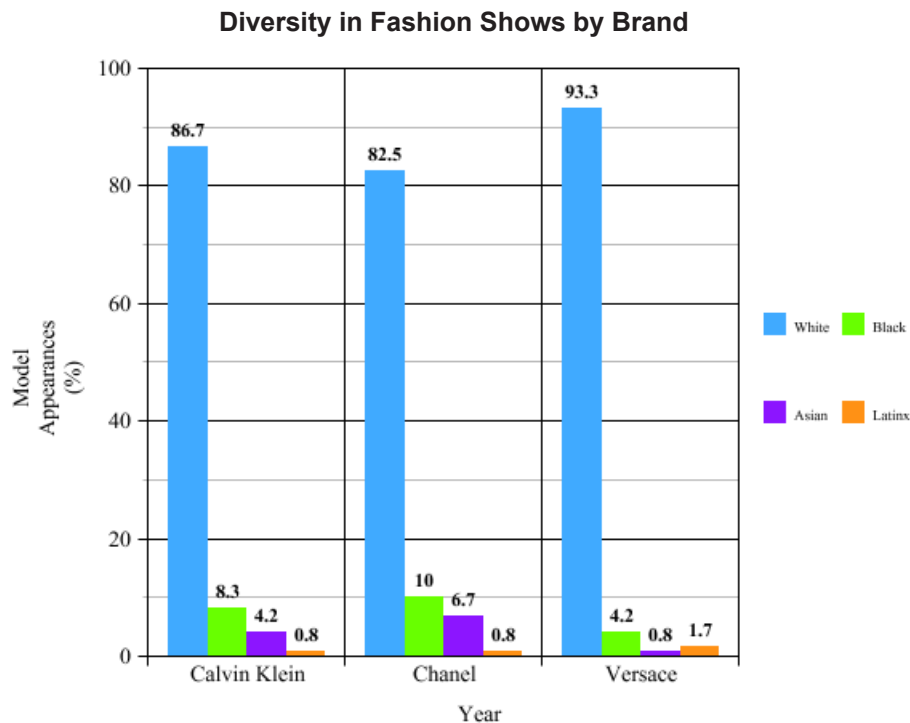


Figure 3. Chanel was the most diverse designer with the lowest percentage of white models.

Body Size Diversity

RQ2 asked how body size diversity varied in New York, Paris, and Milan Fashion Week through the inclusion of plus-size models. The study did not find any plus-size models included in the sample.

V. Discussion

Throughout all elements of the fashion industry – particularly advertising campaigns, commercials, and runway shows – white and thin models are the norm. However, in recent years, the number of people of color and the number of plus-size models appears to be increasing in the model lineups of Fashion Week shows, perhaps due to the public's critical eye for designers who fail to include diverse models in their shows and campaigns.

In total, the study discovered that racial diversity increased throughout the 36 shows and 360 looks. The percentage of white models decreased by 21.6% between the years 2013 and 2018, while the percentage of black models increased by 11.6%, and the percentage of Latinx models increased by five percent. The percentage of Asian models fluctuated over the years, but saw a five percent increase between 2013 and 2018. The researcher was unable to analyze any change in the appearances of plus-size models because no plus-size models appeared in the study. Newer brands like Chromat and Yeezy, which cater to plus-sizes, have shown plus-size models in their runway shows (Safronova, 2017). However, the three major brands analyzed in this study have continued to use primarily thin, white models.

Racial diversity has progressed in Fashion Week runway shows. The literature review indicated that more designers are also committed to including larger models, however, body size diversity did not exist in the analyzed Fashion Week runway shows.

The study was dependent on the researcher's ability to correctly identify each models' race, which was determined by looking at the models and reviewing information online pertaining to each model's race. Models of color were determined by visible cues, which is a limitation of this study. The study was also limited

to the first 10 looks. Had the researcher analyzed the numbers of each type of model in the entire show, the study may have produced different results. Also, the study did not analyze races/ethnicities other than black, Latinx, Asian, and white. Finally, the study was limited to only three brands. These three brands are not known for including plus-size models, unlike newer brands like Chromat and Yeezy (Safronova, 2017). Due to the limited scope of the content analysis, the percentage of plus-size models in this study may not be representative of the actual industry as a whole.

VI. Conclusion

This study sought to examine how models' racial and body size diversity has shifted in Fashion Week runway shows. The study found that racial diversity increased from the last six years, with the percentage of white models decreasing and the percentage of black, Asian, and Latinx models increasing steadily.

The study also found that Chanel, which showed at Paris Fashion Week, was the most diverse brand with the lowest percentage of white models and highest percentages of black and Asian model appearances. Both Chanel and Calvin Klein had the same percentage of Latinx models. Versace was found to be the least diverse brand with the highest percentage of white models and lowest percentages of black and Asian models. However, Versace had the highest percentage of Latinx models among the three brands.

Even though the three brands showed some progress in racial diversity, they should make further efforts to embrace more models from minority groups. Increasing model diversity is a useful strategy for designers to extend their reach to a wider audience, and in turn a larger market. The same can be said about the body size diversity. Consumers want to feel represented in the brands they buy. Representation of different races and body sizes on the runway is the starting point for greater representation of minorities in the fashion industry.

Acknowledgments

The author is thankful to Dr. Byung Lee, associate professor of communications at Elon University, who was instrumental in supervising and offering his professional advice concerning this research study. The author is also thankful for the numerous reviewers who assisted in revising this research article.

References

- Adodo, S. (2016). *The fashion runway through a critical race theory lens* (Master's thesis). Retrieved October 7, 2018, from https://etd.ohiolink.edu/!etd.send_file?accession=kent1461576556&disposition=inline
- Anderson, M. (2017, April 27). Calvin Klein's ads are about to get way more diverse - and we're here for it. Retrieved October 5, 2018, from <https://www.revelist.com/style-news/calvin-klein-diversity/7642>
- Eckardt, S. (2017, September 22). This New York Fashion Week was likely the most diverse ever. Retrieved October 5, 2018, from <https://www.wmagazine.com/story/new-york-fashion-week-spring-2018-models-diversity>
- Givhan, R. (2017, September 06). Fashion is finally figuring out diversity - in ways that actually matter. Retrieved November 10, 2018, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/fashion-is-finally-figuring-out-diversity--in-ways-that-actually-matter/2017/09/06/a16333a6-88f0-11e7-a94f-3139abce39f5_story.html?utm_term=.ba00bf5ea306
- Hunt, K. (2018, October 22). Is The Fashion World Finally Getting Diversity? Retrieved November 10, 2018, from <https://www.elle.com/uk/fashion/longform/a37245/fashions-ever-evolving-new-diversity/>
- Okwodu, J. (2015, Oct 21). Our runways, ourselves: the search for diversity during Fashion Month. Retrieved October 07, 2018, from <https://www.vogue.com/article/runway-diversity-spring-2016>
-

- Okwodu, J. (2016, March 8). Chanel's runway brings the diversity to Paris Fashion Week. Retrieved October 7, 2018, from <https://www.vogue.com/article/runway-diversity-chanel-fall-2016>
- Safronova, V. (2017, March 16). Diversity, of all kinds, is on the rise at fashion shows. Retrieved October 04, 2018, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/16/fashion/new-york-fashion-week-2017-diversity.html>
- Singer, S. (2017, September 14). Runway diversity (at last!) and the rise of the new guard were the big stories at New York Fashion Week. Retrieved October 7, 2018, from <https://www.vogue.com/article/new-york-fashion-week-spring-2018-runway-diversity-rising-guard>
- Thai, C. (2017, November 20). Diversity report: every runway at New York Fashion Week featured at least 2 models of color for spring 2018. Retrieved October 5, 2018, from <http://www.thefashionspot.com/runway-news/765783-diversity-report-every-new-york-fashion-week-spring-2018/>
- Wissinger, E. (2012, January 30). Managing the semiotics of skin tone: race and aesthetic labor in the fashion modeling industry *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 33(1), 125–143.

Vote for Me: How North Carolina Politicians Use Facebook to Engage with Online Users During a Campaign

Stefanie R. Milovic

*Strategic Communications
Elon University*

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

Abstract

Historically, politicians have looked for efficient and innovative ways to engage with the public and cultivate supporters, focusing a great deal of attention on social media platforms in recent decades. This study examines trends in social media engagement rates, specifically on Facebook, between campaigning state politicians and online users. Data was collected from the Facebook pages of 12 North Carolina state senators (three Democratic incumbents, three Democratic challengers, three Republican incumbents, and three Republican challengers). Units of analysis were the posts published by these politicians on their official Facebook pages during a two-week period. Through both “a priori” and emergent content analysis, three specific findings surfaced: challengers post more on Facebook than incumbents, Democrats post more on Facebook than Republicans, and most politicians react but do not respond to user comments. The research also found that these politicians reply similarly in length and structure to user comments, and most online users reply positively or do not reply to politicians’ responses. The findings suggest that state politicians should devote more time responding to user comments and forming online relationships.

I. Introduction

Politicians have historically looked for efficient and innovative ways to engage with the public and key voters in their state. These promotional methods have gradually changed over time, beginning first with posters and flyers, transforming to billboards and yard signs, and finally to social media. Most political campaigns today are a hybrid mix of all these methods and more.

While academic research has been conducted in general on politicians’ use of social media, there is little to no research on the online relationship between state politicians and Facebook users, as well as the impact of this online engagement. Due to this lack of research, controversy surrounds social media practices for campaigning politicians. One such example is the argument about whether or not politicians should respond to online user comments. Without research, campaigning politicians may make decisions about social media engagement solely based on personal opinion.

Therefore, this research seeks to address this gap by examining the Facebook pages of campaigning North Carolina state politicians. This research will qualitatively examine the online activity of these politicians and quantitatively gauge the politicians’ social media engagement with users. Using content analysis, this research

Keywords: social media engagement, state politicians, online users, incumbents, challengers, response rate
Email: smilovic@elon.edu

explores the Facebook posts, user comments, and replies from 12 campaigning North Carolina state senators during a two-week timeframe.

II. Literature Review

Public expectations of politicians on social media

Social media has become a common tool for campaigning politicians. With 2.23 billion monthly active users on Facebook, 1 billion on Instagram, and 336 million on Twitter, these social media platforms are widely and often used by millions of potential voters in the state of a campaigning politician (Statistica, 2018).

Considering the sheer number of people on social media, public expectations have risen for campaigning politicians online. Not only is it expected that politicians are on social media, but the voters expect an acknowledgement or response to public feedback. In fact, research has shown that the reputation of politicians can actually be hurt by ignoring public feedback on social media (Stoddart, 2013).

Perhaps the greatest public expectation of politicians on social media is the need for authenticity. With politicians increasingly being presented as targets for parody, voters must be inspired by campaigning politicians. To do so, politicians must remain genuine and conversational with voters, including in online persona ("Not Another Political Zombie," 2009). Experts encourage politicians to meet public expectations by regularly responding to and prioritizing these online conversations, so voters do not feel ignored and alienated by the politician (Crawford, 2009).

Impact of social media on politics and politicians

Social media has transformed the relationship that politicians have with voters. More specifically, political leaders have talked about how social media has given them the opportunity to strategically connect more with voters (Stoddart, 2013). Tools like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube allow campaigning politicians to speak directly to voters for little to no cost (Murse, 2019). Social media provides politicians the key opportunity to share with voters their promotional events and posts, thereby helping them reach a larger audience (Murse, 2019).

Perhaps the greatest reason for politicians to engage on social media is the hope of influencing voting behavior. For example, social media is one of the best methods for campaigning politicians to reach and engage with young people as they are more likely to use the Internet for political purposes (Raine, Cornfield, & Horrigan, 2005). Even internationally, such as in the 2010-2011 national elections in the Netherlands, research has shown that politicians with higher social media engagement received more votes relative to others in their political party (Effing, Van Hillegersberg & Huibers, 2011). Social media is an effective way to spread the message of campaigning politicians, but research has shown that social media engagement alone is insufficient to "...convince supporters of an opposing party to change their attitudes" (Utz, 2009, p. 229). Instead, social media is more useful in promoting campaign messages, raising awareness of politicians, and convincing voters to get out to vote.

Although the impact that social media has on voting is recognized, social media also has considerable impact on politicians' political stances. After all, social media tools like Facebook and Twitter give campaigning politicians the opportunity to immediately see how potential voters may be reacting to a controversy and adjust their campaigns accordingly (Murse, 2019). The public strongly believes in the power of social media to grab the attention of politicians and push them to pursue important issues. For example, a Pew Research Center poll found that "69% of U.S. adults say social media is very or somewhat important for getting elected officials to pay attention to issues" (Anderson, Toor, Rainie, & Smith, 2018).

Little research exists that examines the online relationship between state-level politicians and voters. This relationship however is not unlike that between corporations and customers. In these buyer-seller relationships, social media have established a new model of customer engagement: connection, interaction, satisfaction, retention, and loyalty (Sashi, 2012). From a reputation standpoint, companies are increasingly implementing "social customer care" -- a form of customer service by responding to and engaging with customers over social media (Hyken, 2017). Experts are encouraging companies to respond to all social media comments, whether positive or negative. Furthermore, research has shown that: "...the simple act

of replying to a customer on social media increases customer advocacy by 20 percent” (Baer, 2017). The politician/voter relationship has a similar dynamic, and politicians’ campaign methods can often follow the marketing methods of businesses.

Politicians’ two types of communications models for social media

With the growth of social media, potential voters have developed an expectation that all politicians can be found on these platforms. It is important to note, however, that the politicians’ approach to using social media can be broken into two general categories: the broadcast-only model and the social listening model.

Politicians that use the broadcast-only model rely on social media to publicize their platform, stances, events, and more, but often do not respond to the public and keep comments hidden. Of the politicians that use the broadcast-only model, most politicians enact the first model of public relations. The category, known as “press agent / publicity,” is described as a one-way communication model that “...uses persuasion, half-truths, and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the [person] desires” (Roberts, 2016, p. 69). This communication style is seen as comparably selfish, as it solely serves the politician and allows no venue for public interaction or consultation (Stoddart, 2013).

Politicians that use the social listening model rely on social media as a two-way communication platform to publicize their stances and events, but also to listen to and respond to public comments and messages. In general, most politicians that practice social listening are using the fourth public relations model, known as the “two-way symmetrical model,” defined as using “communication to negotiate with the public... seeks to resolve conflict and promote mutual benefits, understanding and respect between the organization and key publics/stakeholders” (Roberts, 2016, p. 69). This communication model suggests a direct line of communication between the politician and voters.

Of the politicians that use the social listening model, three categories exist: background listening, reciprocal listening, and delegated listening (Crawford, 2009). Background listening refers to politicians, in this particular case, reading their social media comments but not responding. Reciprocal listening refers to the politician noting and directly responding to potential voters’ comments and messages. Delegated listening refers the politician’s indirect response to potential voters’ comments and questions by outsourcing the Facebook profile to a paid media person or team to respond on the politician’s behalf (Crawford, 2009). Although no research has specifically been conducted on the number of politicians using each social listening model, research has shown that it is common for campaigns to “...hire staffers to monitor their social media channels” (Murse, 2019).

Different politicians use different social listening models, yet communication experts generally agree that politicians should practice the social listening model, specifically reciprocal listening. These experts criticize the broadcast-only model as alienating voters, making them feel ignored by their own campaigning representatives (Stoddart, 2013). Comparably, politicians that use social media tools like Twitter to converse with voters rather than broadcast messages appear to gain more political benefit from social media than others (Grant, Moon & Grant, 2010).

Research Questions

This research seeks to explore campaigning politicians’ use of their official Facebook pages to respond to and engage with online users. Therefore, the following research questions have been identified:

RQ1. Do North Carolina state senators engage with and respond to online user comments on their Facebook social media posts?

RQ2. What similarities and differences can be found in social media engagement habits among Democrat incumbents, Democrat challengers, Republican incumbents, and Republican challengers?

RQ3. What types of comments do campaigning politicians respond to, and how do campaigning politicians respond to these comments?

RQ4. How do online users reply to politicians’ responses on their comments?

III. Methods

This research used content analysis methodology to examine Facebook posts generated by campaigning politicians during a two-week period. This research pays special attention to posts that have any public comments by online users or the politician. Underpinning this study is uses and gratifications theory, which seeks “to explain how individuals use mass communication to gratify their needs...to discover underlying motives for individuals’ media use...[and] to identify the positive and the negative consequences of individual media use” (“Uses and Gratifications Approach,” 2017). Uses and gratifications theory is applied to this research for examining how online users comment on politicians’ social media posts, as well as the motivations behind why the politicians are more likely to reply.

The study examined three Democratic Party incumbents, three Republican Party incumbents, three Democratic Party challengers, and three Republican Party challengers for a total of 12 politicians running for state senate in North Carolina. The term “incumbent” is defined in this research as a person who currently holds the office position. The term “challenger” is defined in this research as a newcomer opposing the person who currently holds the office position.

To strengthen objectivity in choosing which candidates to monitor, the selection of politicians was randomized. For example, in the first category of “Democratic Party incumbent,” a random number generator was used to select a state senate district; the random number generator was repeated until the district had a Democratic Party incumbent that won the 2018 midterm elections. The same process was then repeated until all 12 politicians were selected for data collection and analysis. The names and categories of all 12 politicians are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Politicians and units of analysis selected for the research.

Category of Politician	Name of Politician	Total # of Facebook Posts over 2-Week Timeframe
Democrat Incumbent #1	N.C. Senator Mike Woodard	9 posts
Democrat Incumbent #2	N.C. Senator Dan Blue	4 posts
Democrat Incumbent #3	N.C. Senator Valerie Foushee	4 posts
Democrat Challenger #1	N.C. Senator Sam Searcy	17 posts
Democrat Challenger #2	N.C. Senator Wiley Nickel	52 posts
Democrat Challenger #3	N.C. Senator Toby Fitch	39 posts
Republican Incumbent #1	N.C. Senator Kathy Harrington	2 posts
Republican Incumbent #2	N.C. Senator Bob Steinburg	66 posts
Republican Incumbent #3	N.C. Senator Bill Rabon	2 posts
Republican Challenger #1	N.C. Senator Vickie Sawyer	10 posts
Republican Challenger #2	N.C. Senator Carl Ford	30 posts
Republican Challenger #3	N.C. Senator Todd Johnson	9 posts
TOTAL: 12 politicians	NA	TOTAL: 244 posts

An important point to consider in the selection process is that this research solely uses North Carolina politicians who ran for state senate in the 2018 midterm election. As considerable research already exists on federal politicians, this research is made unique by focusing on state politicians. The research only considers politicians running for state senate, rather than state house, as campaigning state senators have a wider audience base and are more likely to have a higher number of voters in the district engaging online with the politician.

Code

The coded units of analysis for this research are the Facebook posts published between October 24, 2018 and November 7, 2018 on the official Facebook pages of all 12 politicians. These dates represent the last two weeks of the campaigning period leading up to and immediately after the 2018 midterm elections.

All units of analysis are coded through a priori coding where the code is established prior to data collection and used uniformly for each unit of analysis. The code for each unit of analysis goes as follow:

- 1) Number of likes and followers on the Facebook page;
- 2) Type of post (informational, motivational, congratulatory, multimedia, event);
- 3) Number of online user reactions by user “liking” or “reacting” to the post;
- 4) Number of online user comments on the post;
- 5) Number of online user shares of the post;
- 6) Reaction rate (defined as the percentage of user comments the politician “liked” on Facebook);
- 7) Response rate (defined as the percentage of comments the politician publicly responded to on Facebook);
- 8) Number of words in the politician’s response to the user comments;
- 9) Type of politician’s response to user comments (generic response, detailed response, referral, citation to external source, other contact method); and
- 10) Sentiment of the users’ replies to politicians’ responses (positive, negative, neutral, no response).

IV. Findings

In answering the first research question, it is important to note the key difference between reaction and response rates from the campaigning politicians. Whereas the majority (eight) of the 12 politicians reacted to user comments on their Facebook posts, only a few politicians (three) actually responded to user comments. All three politicians who responded to user comments also reacted to user comments. Based on these results, the research indicates that campaigning state politicians are two times more likely to react to user comments than not react at all. Similarly, data suggests that these very same campaigning state politicians are nearly two times more likely to react to user comments than to respond to user comments. The reaction and response rates for each analyzed politician can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Reaction and response rates to online user comments by campaigning politicians.

Politician	Average number of user comments per post	Reaction rate	Response rate
Democrat Incumbent #1	3 comments	0%	0%
Democrat Incumbent #2	3 comments	67%	0%
Democrat Incumbent #3	3 comments	79%	0%
Democrat Challenger #1	7 comments	64%	0%
Democrat Challenger #2	14 comments	84%	12%
Democrat Challenger #3	0 comments	0%	0%
Republican Incumbent #1	4 comments	10%	0%
Republican Incumbent #2	2 comments	52%	32%

Republican Incumbent #3	10 comments	0%	0%
Republican Challenger #1	7 comments	0%	0%
Republican Challenger #2	4 comments	43%	0%
Republican Challenger #3	16 comments	50%	20%
Average of all 12 politicians	6 comments	37%	5%
Average of all eight politicians who reacted to user comments	7 comments	56%	8%
Average of all three politicians who responded to user comments	11 comments	62%	21%

As Table 2 indicates, the average reaction rate among all 12 politicians is 37%, and the average reaction rate among all eight politicians who reacted at least once to user comments is 56%. Of the politicians who reacted to user comments, it is important to note that these eight politicians reacted to more than half of all comments (56%) they received. On the other hand, the average response rate among all 12 politicians is 5%, and the average response rate among the three politicians who responded at least once to user comments is 21%. Of the politicians who responded to user comments, these three politicians responded to a fifth of all comments (21%) they received.

There seem to be no trends between number of user comments and reaction or response rates. Additionally, the data suggest that no other relationships exist between the reaction rate and the number of social media posts the politicians published. Comparably, a slightly positive relationship appears between the response rate and the number of social media posts the politicians published. The more social media posts the politicians publish, the higher the response rate.

In terms of the second research question, the similarities and differences in the data among Democratic incumbents, Democratic challengers, Republican incumbents and Republican challengers require cross-section analysis.

In regard to politicians' reaction rates to user comments, each of the four categories has two politicians that reacted to online users, and one politician that did not react to users. Of the politicians that reacted to users, this data indicates that Democrats have the highest reaction rates by a considerable margin (a combined average of 73.5% compared to the Republican combined average of 39%). It is also important to note that challengers (both Republican and Democratic) have higher reaction rates (combined average of 60%) compared to incumbents overall (52%).

Considering politicians' response rates to user comments, three categories had one politician that responded to online users (the Democratic incumbent category has no politicians that responded to users). Further comparisons are difficult to determine with only three politicians to draw from.

The third research question examined the types of comments politicians responded to, and how they responded. Emergent coding revealed five categories of comments that were most likely to merit a candidate response: campaign support, support for the political party, support for the politician, legislative and ballot questions, and comments against the opposition. Numerically, politicians seem to respond most often to comments in the categories of support for the political party and support for the politician. With the exception of one post, politicians only responded to questions and positive comments, rather than to negative comments.

Campaigning politicians also respond to user comments in a variety of ways, qualitatively characterized through coding by six emergent categories: contact information, detailed response, generic response, expression of thanks, citation of external source, and referral to a different person or page.

Numerically, politicians appear to respond most often with an expression of thanks, generally targeted toward user comments supporting the political party or politician. In terms of response rate, the data indicates that politicians most often respond with contact information (targeted toward user comments about campaign support) and with detailed responses (targeted toward legislative and ballot questions).

Furthermore, all responses by the politicians were quantitatively coded to determine the number of words per response. The average number of words in the politicians' responses to each category of user comment can be found in Table 3. This data suggests that word count in politicians' responses may drastically vary based on the category of user response. For example, the category of "legislative and ballot questions" receives an average response of 32 words whereas the category of "support for the candidate" receives an average response of seven words. This indicates that politicians may provide more detailed responses to legislative questions and more simple expressions of thanks to voiced support. However, there appears to be little to no difference in word count on all response categories among Democratic incumbents, Democratic challengers, Republican incumbents, and Republican challengers.

Table 3. Number of words in politicians' responses based on category of user comment.

Category of User Comment	Average # of Words in Politicians' Responses
Campaign support	6 words
Support for the political party	14 words
Support for the politician	7 words
Legislative and ballot questions	32 words
Comments against the opposition	14 words

Research question four used qualitative sentiment analysis to analyze how online users reply to politicians' responses on their comments. Six different categories of sentiment emerged: positive, positive Facebook reaction, negative, negative Facebook reaction, neutral, and no response. The categories of "positive Facebook reaction" and "negative Facebook reaction" represent emergent coding to delineate a user's Facebook reaction in "liking" politicians' replies from no response altogether. Similar to the third research question, it is also important to note this data is composed of only three campaigning politicians who responded to user comments.

A sentiment analysis of all user replies to politicians' responses point toward a possible interesting trend across both political parties. As Table 4 demonstrates, nearly half of online users do not reply at all to the politicians' responses. Nearly all other users reply positively, or positively react, to the politicians' responses. Across all three politicians, only one user replies negatively, and only one user replies in a neutral manner to the politicians' responses.

Table 4. Sentiment of user replies to politicians' responses.

Politician	Positive	Positive Reaction	Negative	Negative Reaction	Neutral	No Response
Democrat Challenger	11 comments	8 comments	0 comments	0 comments	1 comments	13 comments
Republican Incumbent	3 comments	8 comments	1 comments	0 comments	0 comments	12 comments
Republican Challenger	2 comments	1 comment	0 comments	0 comments	0 comments	4 comments
Total number of replies	16 comments	17 comments	1 comments	0 comments	1 comments	29 comments

V. Discussion

The findings of this research have interesting implications for the future of politicians' relationships with online users over social media. The research findings are broken down into five key themes and takeaways.

The number of times that politicians post on social media provides useful, yet predictable findings. Based on the data of these 12 politicians, challengers post more often on Facebook than incumbents. Democratic candidates, incumbent and challenger, appear to post more often on Facebook than their Republican counterparts. These two discoveries are not surprising as they align with previous research. Social media, for example, is used to increase voter outreach and engagement (Vergeer, Hermans & Sams, 2011). This particularly makes sense for a challenger, as this type of candidate is often lesser known than the already established politician. In addition, young people are the most active demographic on social media and more likely to affiliate with the Democratic party. Millennials and Generation Z are rapidly getting more involved with politics as demonstrated by the triple in growth of political activism among 18 to 24 year-olds since fall of 2016 ("So Much for Slacktivism," 2018). Therefore, it makes sense that campaigning Democratic Party politicians spend more time and energy engaging with online users. Furthermore, previous studies have found that candidates from progressive parties represented the most active users of Twitter as a campaign tool (Vergeer, Hermans & Sams, 2011).

These findings also point toward a possible trend in regard to politicians' reaction rates to user comments. These findings show that eight of the 12 politicians reacted to one or more comments, indicating that politicians are spending time to engage with users on social media. Previous research suggested that politicians were more likely to use the broadcast-only model of social media (Stoddart, 2013) although communication experts agree that the social listening model is the better choice (Grant, Moon & Grant, 2010). The findings of this research suggest that the majority of politicians are reacting to user comments, thereby engaging with potential voters. This finding may indicate that campaigning politicians are increasingly employing the social listening model.

It is important to note politicians' hesitation in responding to user comments. Whereas the 12 politicians' reaction rate averages 37%, the same 12 politicians' response rate averages 5 percent. Within this data sample, only three of the 12 politicians actually responded to user comments. This research suggests that politicians are far more hesitant in responding to online users than reacting to the comments. One possible rationale for this stems from politicians' concerns of negative comments and the time needed to respond to user comments.

Another interesting implication within these research findings is that politicians received nearly all positive comments and questions. Furthermore, the sentiment of all user replies to politicians' responses are 51.6% positive compared to 1.6% negative. Therefore, if fear of negativity is the primary driver behind politicians' lack of response rate, this research indicates that positive comments far outweigh the negative overall. These findings supplement previous research in debunking the myth that most people commenting on politicians' Facebook posts are negative, offensive, and/or trolls (Stoddart, 2013). Subsequently, this research and indications of positive responses over negative responses may help convince campaigning politicians to consider responding to user comments more often.

Lastly, research findings have indicated key differences in length between politicians' responses to user comments. These findings suggest that politicians compose shorter responses when replying to supportive comments and longer responses when replying to questions. Whereas politicians respond with an average of six words to user comments expressing campaign support, these same politicians respond with an average of 32 words to user questions on legislation and ballots. It is interesting to find that the varying response length is fairly uniform among the three politicians which, with future research, might lead to a theory that campaigning politicians -- regardless of political party or incumbency -- have similarly-structured responses to users.

Limitations

First and foremost, this research only considers campaigning North Carolina state senators that won the 2018 midterm elections. Future research may examine campaigning state politicians outside of North Carolina to compose nationwide generalizations from data. Future research may also analyze campaigning state politicians that have lost recent elections to compare their online reaction and response rates with politicians that have won.

Second, this research only pulls data from 12 different politicians. While these politicians represent 24% of the entire North Carolina senate, only three politicians responded to user comments, giving a very small data sample for research questions 3 and 4. In addition, this research only covers the social media use of politicians on their official Facebook page. This research is unable to record and analyze politicians' reaction and response rates to Facebook messages sent by online users. Furthermore, politicians' reaction and response rates to user comments may have been different on other social media platforms. Future research may consider comparing reaction and response rates across multiple social media channels.

VI. Conclusion

This study provides insight specifically into the social media world of campaigning state politicians and how these politicians engage online with Facebook users. The research not only points to trends in political communications, but it provides a set of recommendations and structure for future campaigning politicians to consider and implement.

Using data from 12 of 50 North Carolina state senators elected and re-elected in midterm elections 2018, this study shows how politicians are increasingly getting involved in basic social media engagement habits by liking and reacting to user comments on Facebook. On the other hand, it suggests that these very same politicians remain hesitant about responding to user comments. The data also tends to show that Democrats post more than Republicans, challengers post more than incumbents, and Democrat challengers post the most on Facebook overall.

When specifically considering politicians' responses, politicians who respond to comments pay special attention to questions and craft longer, more detailed responses. These same politicians pay attention to other comments as well, particularly supportive comments, but to a lesser degree than user questions, as characterized by the shorter, more generic responses from politicians. In return, most Facebook users do not reply to politicians' responses, but when they do, the replies are overwhelmingly positive.

Due to the lack of previous research on state politicians' communications strategies, this paper is useful in contributing to the field of political communications, specifically concerning online engagement trends. This study may prove important by providing direction for future political campaigns in developing plans to engage with users on social media.

Acknowledgements

Writing a research paper is truly a process with an endless cycle of writing and rewriting. Therefore, the author would like to thank Dr. Daniel Haygood for his support throughout the year. The author would also like to thank Dr. Lee Bush, her thesis mentor, for teaching her how to write (and rewrite) professionally.

References

- Anderson, A., Toor, S., Rainie, L., & Smith, A. (2018). Activism in the social media age: Public attitudes toward political engagement on social media. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/07/11/public-attitudes-toward-political-engagement-on-social-media/>.
- Baer, J. (2017). 4 reasons to answer every complaint on social media. *Adweek*. Retrieved from <https://www.adweek.com/digital/jay-baer-guest-post-4-reasons-to-answer-every-complaint-on-social-media/>.
- Crawford, K. (2009). Following you: Disciplines of listening in social media. *Continuum*, 23(4), 525–535. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10304310903003270>.
- Dodd, M.D. & Supa, D.W. (2014). Conceptualizing and measuring ‘corporate social advocacy’ communication: Examining the impact on corporate financial performance. *Public Relations Journal*, 8(3), 1-23. Retrieved from <https://bellisario.psu.edu/assets/uploads/2014DODDSUPA.pdf>.
- Effing, R., Van Hillegersberg, J., & Huibers, T. (2011). Social media and political participation: Are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube democratizing our political systems? In E. Tambouris, A. Macintosh, H. de Bruijn (Eds.), *Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, 6847, (25-35). Berlin: Springer. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-23333-3_3.
- Grant, W.J., Moon, B., & Grant, J.B. (2010). Digital dialogue? Australian politicians’ use of the social network tool Twitter.” *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 45(4), 579-604. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2010.517176>.
- Heine, C. (2017). How Airbnb and Lyft are taking action against Trump’s immigration ban. *AdWeek*. Retrieved from <https://www.adweek.com/digital/how-airbnb-and-lyft-are-taking-action-against-trumps-immigration-ban/>.
- Huckfeldt, R. & Sprague, J. (1987). Networks in context: The social flow of political information. *Citizens, Politics, and Social Communication*, 81(4), 1197-1216. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511664113.007>.
- Hyken, S. (2017). Social customer care is the new marketing. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shephyken/2017/04/22/social-customer-care-is-the-new-marketing/#6a87e959196c>.
- Murse, T. (2019). How social media has changed politics. *ThoughtCo*. Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-social-media-has-changed-politics-3367534>.
- Not Another Political Zombie. (2009). Retrieved from <https://newmatilda.com/2009/02/25/not-another-political-zombie/>.
- Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 3rd quarter 2018. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/>.
- Number of monthly active Instagram users from January 2013 to June 2018. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/253577/number-of-monthly-active-instagram-users/>.
- Number of monthly active Twitter users in the United States from 1st quarter 2010 to 3rd quarter 2018. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/274564/monthly-active-twitter-users-in-the-united-states/>.
- Rainie, L., Cornfield, M., & Horrigan, J. (2005). The Internet and campaign 2004. The Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_2004_Campaign.pdf.
- Roberts, J. (2016). Four models of public relations. In *Writing for strategic communication industries*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University, Retrieved from <https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/stratcommwriting/chapter/four-models-of-public-relations/>.
- So much for slacktivism, as youth translate online engagement to offline political action. (2018). Retrieved from <http://civicyouth.org/circle-poll-so-much-for-slacktivism-as-youth-translate-online-engagement-to-offline-political-action/>.
-

- Sashi, C.M. (2012). Customer engagement, buyer-seller relationships, and social media. *Management Decision*, 50(2), 253-272. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00251741211203551>.
- Stoddart, A. (2013). Politicians should use Twitter to engage more, and broadcast less. Retrieved from www.democraticaudit.com/2013/09/28/politicians-need-to-use-twitter-to-engage-more-and-broadcast-less/.
- Uses and Gratifications Approach. (2017). Retrieved from https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/communication-theories/sorted-by-cluster/Mass-Media/Uses_and_Gratifications_Approach/.
- Utz, S. (2009). The (potential) benefits of campaigning via social network sites." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14(2), 221-243. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2009.01438.x>.
- Vergeer, M., Hermans, L., & Sams, S. (2011). Online social networks and micro-blogging in political campaigning. *Party Politics*, 19(3), 477-501. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1354068811407580>.

Portrayals of Italian Americans in U.S.-Produced Films

Kristina Piersanti

Strategic Communications
Elon University

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

Abstract

Mass media play a major role in creating long-lasting portrayals of different minority groups. It is widely known that the public's perceptions of different cultures and ethnic groups can be influenced by the images and stories that they see on television, making the viewers think that these portrayals are accurate. This study focuses on the portrayal of Italian-Americans in U.S.-produced films from the 1970s to today. A qualitative content analysis was conducted to code nine movies (three films from the 1970s, three from the 1990s and three from this decade), for personality traits, occupation, and common stereotypes portrayed by the main Italian-American characters. Findings of this study indicate that, after 1990, the mafia and organized crime stereotype did not remain relevant. Even though this is positive, Italian-Americans continue to be negatively portrayed on screen in other ways. As one stereotype disappears or shifts, a new one is introduced, creating a different portrayal of Italian-Americans, but not necessarily a better one.

I. Introduction

This study analyzes how the Hollywood film industry has represented and portrayed Italian-American characters in U.S. films from the 1970s to today. This topic is important because throughout history the on-screen portrayal of Italian-Americans has been generally negative (Messina, 2004), causing harmful stereotypes to be associated with this ethnic group.

The public's perceptions of different cultures and ethnic groups can be influenced by the images and stories that they see on television, making the viewers think that these portrayals are accurate (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004). But in reality, these pop-culture depictions might not correspond with authentic representations of the Italian-American identity. "In the electronic world, the media has more influence on cultural ideas and ideologies than do schools, religions, and families combined" (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004, p.13), as such, media representations matter and can have a lasting impact. Directors and movie producers, one would expect, might want to move away from false representations, stereotypes and prejudice toward specific communities, but for that to happen it is important to systematically showcase these misrepresentations are still occurring.

The purpose of this research is to describe how Italian-American characters have been portrayed in U.S. films through time, to understand what stereotypes are presented about them, and to determine if these stereotypes have drifted away in recent movies, or if they have stayed the same through several decades.

Keywords: cinema, stereotypes in media, Italian-Americans, qualitative content analysis
Email: kpiersanti@elon.edu

First, the paper will review the literature about media portrayals, cultivation theory, the main media portrayals of Italian-Americans in U.S. films in the past, and the different kinds of stereotypes associated with this ethnic group. Next, the paper's methodology (a qualitative content analysis) will be described, and finally the findings section will answer the research questions and link the results back to the literature.

II. Literature Review

This study is about how Italian-Americans have been portrayed in U.S. films. For that reason, it is important to understand what previous research has found regarding the impact of media portrayals, media portrayals of ethnic groups in films, how cultivation theory explains the impact of media portrayals, the concept of stereotypes, and finally, what past studies have found about the portrayal of Italian-Americans in U.S. films.

The mass media have played a major role improving or destroying the image of different people, places, and parts of the world (Kamalipour & Carilli, 1998). Mass media's influential impact is responsible for the creation of specific portrayals of different groups and cultures (Kamalipour & Carilli, 1998). A media portrayal is a description or representation of someone or something in the media, such as in TV shows, films, or news (Portrayal, 2016). African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latinos, Italian-Americans, and Native-Americans are ethnic groups that are commonly portrayed in the media with less respect than the portrayals of whites, without an accurate depiction of who they really are (Kamalipour & Carilli, 1998).

Fictional media at times represents a "public textbook" on ethnicity and the understanding of different cultures (Cortés, 1984, p. 64). "Social and behavioral scientists have assessed the impact of ethnic portrayals in film and TV and demonstrated that they really do teach..." (Cortés, 1984, p. 63). With entertainment media, people are more likely to learn about different ethnic groups and change their impressions about them, and these portrayals affect their personal perceptions and attitudes toward these groups (Cortés, 1984). Even though this process has the ability to cause positive outcomes, it can take a turn for the worse and result in the formation of negative connotations, especially since film, TV, and other media, have had a tendency to unfairly portray certain ethnic groups (Kamalipour & Carilli, 1998).

Cultivation theory

When people watch movies and TV they learn, gain knowledge, and shape different values, perspectives, and beliefs about what they are hearing and seeing on the screen in front of them (Bryant & Zillman, 2002). By assessing the amount of TV content that individuals watch on an average day and the impact it has on viewers' perceptions and attitudes, cultivation theory posits that "the more hours that people spend 'living' in the world of television, they are more likely to see the 'real world' in terms of the images, values, portrayals, and ideologies that emerge through the lens of television" (Bryant & Zillman, 2002, p. 47). The more time people spend watching portrayals of characters on TV and in films, the more likely people will form attitudes about them, believing that this is how a certain group acts in real life (Messina, 2004). Not everyone has relations or direct contact with all ethnic groups in regular social settings, so TV and movies may become the "best" tool to learn about these groups. In that way, film and television can make a big impact in shaping ethnic stereotypes (Lee, Bichard, Irey, Walt & Carson, 2009).

Stereotypes

There are positive and negative stereotypes. A basic definition of a stereotype is that it is a "conception, image, or belief about individuals and/or specific social groups" (Silverman & Silverman, 2012, p.1), and once these views or beliefs are established, they may be hard to change. Each ethnic group may have stereotypes that have stuck with them for a long time, because once stereotypes are formed, it is hard to get people to change how they think (Lee, Bichard, Irey, Walt & Carson, 2009). Entertainment films may create and reinforce public images of ethnic groups such as Italian-Americans, for example, and these stereotypes can form negative representations (Cortés, 1987; Messina, 2004).

U.S. Film Portrayals of Italian-Americans

For decades, Italian-Americans have been a popular film subject, filling the screen with exciting,

violent, and loud drama content (Cortés, 1987). In a study of 1,078 Hollywood films from 1931 to 1998 that featured Italian-American characters, 73% portrayed those characters negatively. The study concluded that, “for years Americans’ views of the ethnic group have been impacted by what they’ve seen on TV and the negative stereotypes that have been repeated in many different variations” (Messina, 2004, p. 90). Rather than moving away from these negative stereotypes, the media instead reinforces them by not including positive portrayals of Italian-Americans, as authorities, professionals, or executives (Messina, 2004).

Over the years there have been movies, such as *Saturday Night Fever*, *My Cousin Vinny*, and *Jungle Fever*, that have each depicted Italian-American characters as “crazy”—crazy in the sense they struggle to assimilate into American culture (Kamalipour & Carilli, 1998). Other feature films have portrayed the characters as uneducated but “street smart,” slobs, and tricksters – people that lie in order to succeed, and who are manipulative and disloyal (Cortés, 1987; Kamalipour & Carilli, 1998; Cavallero & Plasketes, 2010). But the main stereotype that has created inaccurate perceptions of Italian-Americans is their portrayal as gangsters (Dibeltulo, 2014). This negative stereotype has become the most prominent representation and has had the most impact (Cavallero & Plasketes, 2010). These criminal and gangster portrayals have made the whole ethnic group look like they were involved in the mob/mafia, when in reality there is a lot more diversity within the community (Messina, 2004).

Many films that focus on Italian-Americans heavily concentrate on the male characters (Reich, 2011). Italian-American male characters are commonly stereotyped as gangsters, Italian buffoons, or as a street tough, whereas Italian-American women have been portrayed as “the serious bombshell,” or “the overbearing” Italian mama (Szczepanski, 1979; Reich, 2011). Nancy Sovaca, an American film director, explains, “Being Italian American is not an excuse for irrational behavior and lunacy, as is literally signified in *Moonstruck*’s title and personified in that film’s characters” (Reich, 2011, p. 301). Just because a person, especially a woman, is Italian, does not mean that she acts loud and obnoxious, or that she argues all the time. But films have helped create this stigma by frequently portraying female characters acting in this type of manner. Along with this, Italian women are also commonly represented as housekeepers, by often showing them doing daily household tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, and serving for their family (Reich, 2011).

While this literature review hones in on negative portrayals and stereotypes of Italian-American characters in film, it is important to recognize that positive portrayals have started to emerge. Even though many stereotypes still appear, Italian-Americans are not viewed as outsiders anymore, and instead they have become members of “white” society (Cavallero & Plasketes, 2010). In films, Italian characters are now depicted as white-collar office workers, shop owners, and small business owners, and movies have started to move away from discrimination, and instead, sometimes, they celebrate Italian ethnicity (Cavallero & Plasketes, 2010).

Within such a context of change, this current study contributes to the literature by analyzing how the behaviors, stereotypes and portrayals of Italian-American characters in films have shifted or changed from the 1970s to today. The study does so by focusing these specific research questions:

1. What is the content/topic of each film analyzed in this study?
2. What are some of the common stereotypes portrayed by the Italian-American characters? (This might include, based on the literature, organized crime, loud/obnoxious characters, big families, pizzeria/barber occupations, among other portrayals).
3. What is the character’s occupation and how is that occupation portrayed?
4. What are the common personality traits of the Italian-American characters portrayed in the films?
5. How have the behaviors and stereotypes of Italian-American characters in film changed –or not– from the 1970s to present day?

III. Methods

This study is a qualitative content analysis of nine films to analyze if the representation of Italian-Americans in U.S. films has stayed the same, over time, or has drifted away from stereotypes since the 1970s until today. Content analysis is a research method for “analyzing written, verbal, or visual communication”

(Elo & Kynagäs, 2007). It is a systematic process of describing and coding occurrences that can then allow researchers to group words, phrases, and data into classified categories; this suggests that they all have something in common to one another (Elo & Kynagäs, 2007). Through this process, content analysis provides new insights about the phenomenon under study (Elo & Kynagäs, 2007).

In the past, there have been many movies that are either centered around Italian-American characters or that have characters of this ethnicity who are in supporting roles. To see how the portrayals of Italian-Americans changed—or not—through time, the researcher decided to analyze films from every other decade, starting with the 1970s and ending with the 2010s.

The researcher went to www.Oscars.org, looked at all the films that were nominated or won Oscar awards from the 1970s forward, and identified the movies that included Italian-American characters. Out of those films, movies were chosen for the study that had been nominated for one or more of the following categories: Best Picture, Best Actor/Actress in a leading role, and Best Actor/Actress in a supporting role.

There are two important things to note in this selection process. First, the researcher noticed that she would be analyzing both *The Godfather* and *The Godfather Part 2* for the 1970s. Since the entire trilogy has the same genre, topic, and similar plotlines, the researcher decided to remove *The Godfather Part 2* and analyzed *Saturday Night Fever* instead. In this way, the researcher was able to analyze a different topic and point of view of Italian-Americans during this decade. Another consideration is that in the 2010s there was only one movie in the population that was recognized by the Academy. In this case, to complete three movies per decade, the researcher added *Unbroken* (2014) and *Little Italy* (2018), films that do not meet the Oscar criteria of the other movies but portray Italian-Americans nonetheless. The sample, then, consists of nine movies in total: three from every other decade since the 1970s (in other words, from the 1970s, 1990s, and 2010s). Table 1 provides the name of the movie and the year it was released.

Table 1. Movie title and Year

Movie	Year
The Godfather	1972
Rocky	1976
Saturday Night Fever	1977
The Godfather Part 3	1990
Goodfellas	1990
My Cousin Vinny	1992
Unbroken	2014
Brooklyn	2015
Little Italy	2018

The films were watched from beginning to end and coded using instruments developed by the researcher. The categories coded were the movie's genre (found on <https://www.imdb.com/>), main topic, setting where the movie takes place (the Bronx, Brooklyn, slum, Little Italy), the common personality traits of the Italian-American characters portrayed in the films, the characters' occupation and how that is portrayed, the physical attributes (shape/dress appropriateness) of the characters, the common stereotypes portrayed by the characters (organized crime members, loud/obnoxious, big-family members, other portrayals, etc.), and a category for "other," to code any other aspect that seemed interesting or relevant for the study. As a result of this process of coding for "other" aspects, two new categories emerged as well: gender portrayals and religious portrayals.

As this qualitative coding was conducted only by the author of the study, intercoder reliability was not measured, but this is appropriate when the qualitative analysis follows the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this method, the researcher assigns labels to themes in the content (in this case, the movies' content), and then the researcher clusters those labels into categories for analysis, as it was the case for this study.

IV. Findings

While there were some differences in the ways in which Italian-American characters were portrayed through the decades, since the 1970s to today, one commonality was found throughout the nine films: There were more negative than positive portrayals of the Italian-American characters' personality traits, stereotypes, and occupations, regardless the decade. The results for each coding category are described next.

Genre, Topic & Setting

Many of the films fell into the drama and crime genres, followed by comedy and romance. One-third of the films were about crime, gangsters and the mafia (*The Godfather*, *The Godfather part 3*, and *Goodfellas*). The other topics in the films concentrated on Italian Americans' involvement in sports (*Rocky*) and in war (*Unbroken*), two college students getting accused of murder (*My Cousin Vinny*), disco and dance competitions (*Saturday Night Fever*), an immigrant moving to the United States and finding love with an Italian (*Brooklyn*), and best friends as pizza restaurant rivals while their kids start to fall in love (*Little Italy*). These films mainly take place in Brooklyn, either in the suburbs or a neighborhood, and in New York city. The film *Rocky* is set in the slums of Philadelphia, a poor area with graffiti and small apartments; *My Cousin Vinny* is set in Alabama, but it references that the Italian-American characters are from Brooklyn, and *Little Italy* is set in "Little Italy," Canada.

Physical Attributes

Italian-American characters in each of the films are portrayed very similar to one another. The characters either dress business casual (wearing suits, dress pants and coats), or they wear casual clothes such as collared shirts or T-shirts. One noticeable aspect was how frequently the characters wear black clothes, including leather jackets, suits, coats, etc. The characters come off as having a "tough look" and serious appearance, based on the type of clothes they wear. Women sometimes are portrayed wearing tight clothing or accessories that make them stand out. For example, in *My Cousin Vinny*, Vinny's fiancé, Mona Lisa, wears tight dresses, big heels, and clothes with shoulder pads everywhere she goes when she is in Alabama. The men either slick or part their hair back, and the women have big hair and wear a lot of makeup. The Italian-American characters are portrayed, in general, as being very into their appearances, dressing fashionable, and liking to look presentable in public.

Occupation

Italian-American characters have a variety of occupations in the films analyzed, but many of those occupations are with the Mafia, with the family business or in working-class jobs, for the most part (see Table 2 in the Appendix).

In both movies of the *Godfather* and in *Goodfellas*, being involved in the "family business," the mafia, and in criminal activities is portrayed as dangerous; they are the people that you do not want to associate or get involved with. In *Goodfellas*, the criminal activity that the men participate in suggests that Italians have no humanity and no moral tenets, but live an easy, "glamorous lifestyle," making tons of money through the drug trade but having poor taste (for example, with over-the-top decorations in their apartments and houses).

As for *Rocky*, he is a boxer trying to figure out his life and make something out of it. In the movie *Brooklyn* and in *Saturday Night Fever*, both main characters hold jobs (a plumber and a paint hardware store clerk) that are viewed as being the best careers that they will have. Having a job is deemed to be important to Italian-Americans, no matter the type of job it is, especially since it will help to support their families. Vinny, in *My Cousin Vinny*, is a lawyer. Granted, he has only been recognized as one for six weeks, and he is portrayed as a joke, but he has a job nonetheless. On the other hand, the families in *Little Italy* are pizza restaurant owners and cooks, involving the participation of the whole family. This is portrayed as typical and normal, especially since they live in Little Italy, but it also shows that they are passionate about and take pride in what they do.

Personality

Table 3 in the Appendix summarizes the personality traits that were commonly found amongst all the Italian-American characters. Most of them are presented as being caring and loving toward their family

members. They also have loud personalities, no matter the situation they are in, making them come off as demanding and eager to cause a scene. In the mafia and gangster movies, betrayal and untrustworthiness is very common; those involved never know when something bad will happen to them, or they think they are on good terms with the bosses, but in reality, they are not.

Stereotypes

The stereotypes of the Italian-American characters are a mixture of both negative and positive portrayals (see Table 4 in the Appendix). One main stereotype commonly portrayed is being involved in the mafia and in organized crime. This also leads the characters to being stereotyped as aggressive, violent, and protective of their loved ones. Another common stereotype is that Italian-Americans are more street smart than book smart, being considered as “dumb” and bums. For instance, in *My Cousin Vinny*, it took Vinny six times to pass the bar exam. Also, because of his fiancé’s appearance and accent, she is portrayed as if she does not know anything about anything. But, really, she surprises the audience and is knowledgeable about the whole case, and she even helps prove the defendants are innocent because of her knowledge of auto mechanics, including tire marks. Even in the movie *Brooklyn*, the only member of the family who has good grammar and writing is the baby of the family, showing that not all members of an Italian-American family are given the opportunity to have an education.

All the characters are also featured either cooking, eating (mostly spaghetti or some type of meat), and drinking. No one ever eats alone, and eating tends to serve as a social event and coping mechanism. For example, in *Goodfellas*, when the men went to go visit one of their friend’s mother, she constantly asks if she can feed them, making a full meal of pasta. Even in *The Godfather Part 3*, when people were murdered, they ate pasta and other food to help cope with the massacre that they were just involved in. Whether this stereotype can be labeled as negative or positive is up for debate, but it is a common trait that is constantly featured in these types of films. In the movie *Rocky*, the boxing opponent mentioned that “if he can’t fight I bet he can cook.” This suggests that all Italians can cook, and it is one thing they have going on for themselves if all else does not. One stereotype that was also found within many of the movies is emphasis placed on how important family is in Italian culture and the love, care, and support that comes with it.

Gender Portrayals

Regarding the roles of men and women in these movies, many of the male characters are portrayed as either the “bad guy,” an authoritative figure or the head of the household, whereas the women are mainly featured in the household setting, either cooking homemade food, worrying about their children, and/or staying out of their husbands’ business. In *Saturday Night Fever*, for instance, Tony’s dad is laid off from work, and the mother insists that she will get a job. This comes off as unacceptable and offensive to the husband, since “for 25 years in construction work I always brought home the paycheck.” Italian men are portrayed as liking feeling superior to their wives, especially when it comes to supporting the entire family, and that women are best at their job in the household. For example, as Tony was starting to clear the table, his father got mad at him. “Girls do that,” the father says.

In *Little Italy*, women are still portrayed as belonging in the kitchen, being part of the family pizza-making business, but, interestingly, they have more authoritative power than their husbands. They are constantly knocking sense into them and their immature ways, along with making their husbands afraid of them if they do something wrong; the males know that they never want to get on their wives’ bad side. This movie also portrays women, especially the daughter Nikki, wanting to make something out of themselves and experience other places beyond the bubble of their family pizza shop in Little Italy.

In the majority of the movies, women hold the portrayal of being motherly, constantly focusing on their children and doing everything possible for them. For example, even though Louis, in *Unbroken*, constantly gets into trouble with the police for stealing and drinking, his mother still provides him with affection and is his number one supporter for all his accomplishments. The same goes for the movie *Little Italy*. The mother figure only wants is her daughter to be happy and close to home, so she goes out of her way to introduce her to a man that could potentially be her boyfriend.

Other Observations

Besides noticing that the characters have thick Italian accents and speak Italian (short phrases and some slang) to one another, the impact that the Catholic religion has in the characters' lives is strong. Some of the characters are seen wearing gold crucifix chain necklaces and going to church as a family. In *Little Italy*, the Virgin Mary is featured a lot, and in *Saturday Night Fever*, Tony's brother is a Priest, which is an honor for the family.

V. Conclusion

Based on the results of this qualitative content analysis, it is possible to conclude that some of the stereotypes and behaviors of the Italian-American characters have changed since the 1970s, but some have still continued to stay the same over time, causing this ethnic group to continue to be negatively portrayed on screen.

As previous scholarship indicated, the portrayal of Italian-Americans as gangsters and involved in the mafia has had the most impact on creating inaccurate perceptions of this ethnic group. Many scholars believe that *The Godfather* created a lot of harm to the Italian-Americans' image (Messina, 2004). In 2000, a study by the Commission of Social Justice found that 74 percent of the surveyed respondents believed that most Italian-Americans have some sort of connection to the Mafia (Messina, 2004). This was not based on facts, and the FBI reported in 2004 that only 2 percent of every 10,000 Italian Americans were involved in organized crime (Messina, 2004). A Cultivation effect seems to be in place here among the influenced audiences, especially for this stereotype, creating attitudes and behaviors toward this community that are based on what viewers inaccurately see on the screen, solidifying wrong beliefs about who Italian-Americans are (Messina, 2004).

This study found that after the year 1990, the mafia and organized-crime stereotype did not remain relevant or a common movie topic. It basically disappeared from the screen in more-recent movies. This helps weaken the prevalence of some negative personality traits and behaviors of the movie characters found before 1990, including being aggressive, violent, maniacs, hysterical (in the case of women), and prone to betrayal.

However, as one stereotype disappears or shifts, a new one is introduced, filling the empty space, creating another portrayal of Italian-Americans, but not necessarily a better one. This finding is in agreement with Cavallero and Plasketes (2010): "If the Italian was not seen as a gangster or a knife-wielding, mustachioed foreigner who had taken away American jobs from the earlier immigrants, then he was depicted as a restless, roving creature...very slow to take to American ways..." (p. 53).

Another negative portrayal found among many of the characters was their lack of intelligence, being considered as street-smart fools rather than book smart; this added comedy to the portrayals. This stereotype was noticed during the 1970s and all the way through the movies coded for the 2010s decade, along with characters having a loud personality, being hot tempered, and the concept of food involved in most aspects of their daily lives.

Even though the characters hold different occupations in the films, they are often portrayed negatively. In *Saturday Night Fever* and *Brooklyn*, for example, the occupations of the characters suggest that there are not any other jobs that they are qualified to do. In the movie *Little Italy*, the men of the family hold the position of pizza owners, portraying the families as just knowing how to make good, authentic Italian pizza, and being pros at it. Even though this is the most typical stereotype, especially for a movie plot located in "Little Italy," the movie also positively portrays and celebrates Italian ethnicity with their traditions and passions. The only movie that had a positive portrayal of Italians being successful in a white, "superior" society was *My Cousin Vinny*, but it took the whole movie for people to realize how competent and reliable the main character could be as a lawyer.

Even though Italian-Americans are mostly portrayed negatively, there were some instances where portrayals shifted toward being positive, for instance, when showing that Italians provide a loving and supportive family, but also the positive changes that gender roles have had in society. Italian-American women have been portrayed as "the serious bombshell," or "the overbearing" Italian mama who is always

involved in household matters (Szczepanski, 1979; Reich, 2011). Even though some of these aspects were portrayed by the Italian-American women in the films this study analyzed, it was also apparent that, in more recent movies, women had more of a voice regarding different issues, and they started becoming just as equal, or more authoritative, compared to their husbands. In *Little Italy*, for example, the women stay on top of their husbands' every move and decision, along with knocking sense into them.

In summary, the results of this study support the view that, over the past decades, Italian-American characters have been stereotyped negatively, which is a form of subtle racism (Messina, 2004). Even though there have been some positive portrayals more recently, they are overpowered by the negative stereotypes that continue to linger or that evolve into new, negative roles. Representing Italian-Americans as "the other" has remained a common practice in Hollywood (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004).

In the coming decades, it would be interesting to see if these stereotypes continue to stay the same, as some of them have since the 1970s, or if new ones develop. Italian-Americans "need to be represented fairly, honestly, and accurately in public and academic cultures" (Messina, 2004, p. 111) for others to understand their complexity beyond a simplistic film setting.

Limitations and further research

As any research project, this one had limitations that open opportunities for further research. For example, while conducting this content analysis, the author of this study realized that some of the films analyzed, including some of those which use the mafia portrayals and other common stereotypes, have been directed by Italian-American filmmakers. A future interesting avenue of research would be to investigate, perhaps through in-depth interviews, what has triggered these directors to portray Italian-Americans in this way, and to find out if they knew how much of an impact this stereotyping would have their own ethnic group.

Another promising topic for further research would be to look into whether Italian Americans are accepting of different ethnic groups or not, and to what extent. In the 2018 film *Little Italy*, an Asian American is portrayed as wanting to be Italian, and he assimilates to Italian American culture by trying to look and act like them. He changes his name to Luigi, has slicked back hair with a big belly, and wears a gold chain and an Italian belt that says, 'I am Italian.' He also incorporates a thick Italian accent into his dialect and says slang phrases in Italian. By assimilating into the culture and by imitating the physical attributes, he is more accepted in the community and does not look like an outcast. From this example, Italian-Americans are portrayed as being accepting of different ethnic groups, but it would be interesting to see if the effect of imitation, in this specific way, is seen as positive or negative by Italian-Americans.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Dr. Vanessa Bravo for all her help and guidance throughout the course of this paper. Her critiques, edits, and comments have been beneficial in helping produce this article, and the author could not thank her enough.

References

- Benshoff, H.M., & Griffin, S. (2004). *America on film: Representing race, class, gender, and sexuality at the movies*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Bryant, J., & Zillman, D. (Eds.). (2002). *Media effects: Advances in theory and research*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cavallero, J.J., & Plasketes, G. (2004) Gangsters, Fessos, Tricksters, and Sopranos: The historical roots of Italian American stereotype anxiety. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 32(2), 50-73, doi: 10.3200/JPFT.32.2.49-73
- Cortés, C. (1984). The history of ethnic images in film: The search for a methodology. *MELUS*, 11(3), 63-77. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/467134>
-

- Cortés, C. (1987). Italian-Americans in film: From immigrants to icons. *MELUS*, 14(3/4), 107- 126. doi:10.2307/467405
- Dago. (n.d.) Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dago>
- Dibeltulo, S. (2014). Family, gang and ethnicity in Italian-themed Hollywood gangster films. *Film International*, 12(4), 25–43. [https://doi.org/10.1386/fiin.12.4.25pass:\[\]1](https://doi.org/10.1386/fiin.12.4.25pass:[]1)
- Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 62(1), 107-115. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04569.x>
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing.
- Kamalipour, Y. R., & Carilli, T. (1998). *Cultural diversity and the U.S. media*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Lee, M. J., Bichard, S. L., Irey, M. S., Walt, H. M., & Carlson, A. J. (2009). Television viewing and ethnic stereotypes: Do college students form stereotypical perceptions of ethnic groups as a result of heavy television consumption? *Howard Journal of Communications*, 20(1), 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10646170802665281>
- Messina, E.G. (2004). Psychological perspectives on the stigmatization of Italian Americans in the American media. *The Psychotherapy Patient*, 13(1-2), 87-121. doi: 10.1300/J358v13n01_04
- Portrayal. (2016). *The American Heritage dictionary of the English language* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Reich, J. (2011). Nancy Savoca: An appreciation. In C. Albright & C. Moore (Eds.), *American woman, Italian style: Italian Americana's best writings on women* (300-304). Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13wzxj1.32>
- Silverman, R. E., & Silverman. (2012). Stereotypes. In M. Kosut (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of gender in media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. https://ezproxy.elon.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/stereotypes_social_psychology?institutionId=3606
- Szczepanski, K. (1979). The scalding pot: Stereotyping of Italian-American males in Hollywood films. *Italian Americana*, 5(2), 196-204. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29775974>
-