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**Spring 2021**

**VOLUME 12, NO. 1**



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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. Dr. Harlen Makemson, professor in the School of Communications, has overseen the publication since fall 2018.

The three purposes of the journal are:

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

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

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## 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.

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

More than 30 faculty members in Elon's School of Communications helped to select seven undergraduate research papers for the spring 2021 issue. The papers, primarily written in upper-level courses, are nominated for consideration by faculty mentors, then undergo a double-blind peer review process by the Editorial Board.

Professors who served on the Editorial Board for this issue were Bill Anderson, David Bockino, Vanessa Bravo, Naeemah Clark, David Copeland, Vic Costello, Brooks Fuller, Kelly Furnas, Kenn Gaither, Jessica Gisclair, Don Grady, Ben Hannam, Anthony Hatcher, Dan Haygood, Denise Hill, Jooyun Hwang, Jenny Jiang, Laura Lacy, Byung Lee, Derek Lackaff, Barbara Miller, William Moner, Phillip Motley, Tom Nelson, Jane O'Boyle, Glenn Scott, Kathleen Stansberry, Jessalyn Strauss, Amanda Sturgill, Hal Vincent, and Qian Xu.

Thanks also go to Associate Dean 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

Media has an ever-increasing influence on how we view and interpret the world. This trend may be accelerating, but it is not entirely new, as evidenced by the wide-ranging set of articles in the latest edition of the *Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*.

Take, for instance, the ways in which media practitioners address social movements or unrest. Amanda Willingham's study of how public relations agencies responded to recent developments in the Black Lives Matter movement reveal that some companies are struggling to effectively communicate about issues of equity, even after they have pledged support for such measures. Looking back more than 40 years earlier, Amanda Gibson's study shows a wide divide in how (or whether) journalists contextualized soccer's World Cup through coverage of human rights abuses in the host country, Argentina. In addition, Aleeza Zinn's historical approach demonstrates how *Vogue* magazine has increasingly addressed social issues in recent years.

Similarly, the manner in which advertisers reach the public has past and present contexts in this edition. Emily Weinberg analyzes how current companies express authenticity in brand storytelling, while Catherine Cole explores how fashion ads draw upon context from the Cold War. And, in the context of cinema, Mallory Siegenthaler explores the current work of acclaimed cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki, while Jonathan Sarver studies how the films *Spotlight* and *All the President's Men* convey journalistic lessons of the past.

Please enjoy the fine work of our student scholars.

Harlen Makemson  
Professor  
Editor, *Elon Journal*

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<b>The Clothing Manifesto: A Post-Communist Analysis of Nostalgia in Fashion Advertising</b> <i>Catherine Cole</i>	5
<b>Journalists' Dilemma: Human Rights Coverage During the Argentinian 1978 World Cup</b> <i>Amanda Gibson</i>	18
<b>Fundamentals of Journalism as Portrayed in <i>Spotlight</i> and <i>All the President's Men</i> and Taught in College Journalism Classrooms</b> <i>Jonathan Sarver Jr.</i>	33
<b>Naturalism in Cinematography: Examining the Work of Emmanuel Lubezki</b> <i>Mallory Siegenthaler</i>	40
<b>Identifying Cues that Indicate Authenticity in Brand Storytelling Advertisements</b> <i>Emily Weinberg</i>	53
<b>Corporate Commitment to Diversity, Equity &amp; Inclusion: Analyzing the Responses of PR Agencies and Other Companies after 2020 Black Lives Matter Events</b> <i>Amanda Willingham</i>	63
<b><i>Vogue</i> Magazine's Rise as a Source for Political, Social, and Cultural Topics</b> <i>Aleeza Zinn</i>	74

# The Clothing Manifesto: A Post-Communist Analysis of Nostalgia in Fashion Advertising

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

## Abstract

*Understanding audiences is crucial for successful ad campaigns. Thus, it is important for companies to strategically capitalize on their target audience's identity, which is often shaped by their environment. Past research has examined the impact of communism on advertising, however there is no existing research specific to the fashion industry. This research seeks to understand how Berlin's communist history impacts modern fashion advertising. The study examines markers for communism and capitalism in two multinational fashion campaigns, the Gucci's Spring Summer 2016 campaign and Levi's "Go Forth" campaign, both of which were shot in Berlin. Using a qualitative thematic analysis, this study finds that multinational fashion companies embrace the post-communist consumer identity through the combination of elements of nostalgia along with modern trends. These findings are significant for multinational fashion companies as they can better appeal to their target audience's identity through the use of nostalgia, and further develop strong affinity for the brand.*

## I. Introduction

Prior to the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, citizens of communist Eastern European countries lacked consumer choice and purchasing power. In the pursuit of creating a classless society, citizens were subject to serious government regulations, control, and surveillance. The Communist Party controlled all aspects of everyday life; media was state-owned, products were manufactured within the Soviet-bloc, and people were employees of the state. As a result of this hyper-controlled lifestyle, citizens of the Soviet-bloc were infatuated with Western culture and style.

Although the divide between communist and capitalist nations was strong throughout Europe during this time, it was particularly contentious within the city of Berlin, Germany. Following World War II, at the Yalta and Potsdam peace conferences, Germany was divided into four Allied occupation zones. The three Western zones became the Federal Republic of Germany and the Eastern zone became the German Democratic Republic. Notably, this division resulted in the split of the country's capital, Berlin (Hasic, 2019). The German Democratic Republic further amplified the divisiveness of the country in 1961 by constructing the Berlin Wall, a barrier physically dividing the city. This barrier created a massive cultural difference between the two sides, West Berlin representing freedom and prosperity, and East Berlin the Soviet struggle.

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The unification of Berlin fused two drastically different cultures. As a result, East Berlin citizens, particularly youth, were eager to experience new, multi-national products. Targeting this new market needed to be done strategically. According to Layton (2011), marketing is part of a multi-level system that must account for key factors including history, culture, politics, and institutions. Because Eastern Europe was a completely new market for multinational companies, they needed to tailor campaigns to the culture and identity of the people.

This trend later paved the way for examinations of the role of nostalgia in advertising (Grębosz-Krawczyk, 2018). Although the communist era is not historically referred to as a positive time in European history, it has a strong significance that continues to impact global communications efforts in the realm of advertising and marketing. The complex history of Berlin provides unique grounds for further analysis of this trend. This research draws upon campaigns from Gucci and Levi's, both shot in Berlin, to understand how multinational fashion advertisements reflect elements of nostalgia.

## II. Literature Review

### *Historical Significance of the Communist Era*

The communist era in Eastern Europe was a defining period for the region riddled with social, political, and economic restrictions. Although communism came to an end in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the implications of this era have lasting consequences, particularly in regard to interest in Western goods. Germany, and specifically the city of Berlin, provides a unique case study of this time period as West Berlin functioned as a democratic, capitalist society, whereas its eastern counterpart, East Berlin, was subject to an oppressive socialist regime. The contrast is deeply unsettling and could be seen through both state and local practices, including “the exchange of political prisoners and dissidents for western currency, West German state loans to the GDR, images on western television (whose airwaves easily crossed the otherwise impermeable border), and the coveted *Westpakete* (western packages)” (Berdahl, 2005, p. 238). These practices reflected the inequality seen between the East and West, further emphasizing the concept of the “golden West” where consumer choice ruled, and citizens enjoyed economic autonomy (Berdahl, 2005, p. 238).

East Germans' awareness of their Western counterparts' freedom further fueled desire for western goods. Ultimately, people wanted the products they could not obtain under the communist regime (Berdahl, 2005). The repression of consumer choice during the communist period intensified the interest in these goods and had profound effects following the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The communist era is notorious for suppressing consumer choice. Because of this, East Germans were particularly intrigued by western products. Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the process of democratization began in East Germany. With this opening, citizens quickly viewed consumer choice and access to goods as fundamental rights and entered a “collective shopping spree” (Berdahl, 2005, p. 235). This new-found freedom cultivated a sense of belonging among formerly ostracized East Germans; however, it was also a period of adjustment and learning. In fact, many Eastern Germans received formal training regarding consumption and self-presentation in the workforce. Notably, the selling point of this training was the “promise of ‘success’ based on culturally competent consumption practices” (Berdahl, 2005, p. 246). Adopting western style was viewed as a vehicle for success, which in turn pushed East Germans to conform to western ideals, and in turn lose a part of their identity in the pursuit of a sense of belonging.

The obsession with consumer choice created a massive opportunity for multinational brands to infiltrate the Eastern European market. In fact, “Because globally recognized, western brands were virtually non-existent in Eastern Europe before 1989, their market pull has been especially powerful there” (True, 1999, p. 369). It is not surprising that multinational companies have had a strong draw in these countries as they went years without any substantial product choice. As a result, young people in this region have strong preferences towards American brands such as Levis jeans and Coca-Cola (True, 1999). These distinctly American products have been highly revered as they represent the ideal version of freedom and democratic values, including consumer choice and individualism (Berdahl, 2005).

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### ***International Branding & Advertising in Eastern Europe***

With the infiltration of multinational brands into the Eastern European market, companies had to adapt their advertising and marketing strategies to appeal to the economies in transition. In market societies, production and consumption are embraced, thus making advertising an accepted cultural phenomenon among consumers (Kelly-Holmes, 1998). However, in the case of Eastern Europe, citizens were not socialized in a society where they possessed the same economic autonomy. As a result, advertisers were faced with the challenge of communicating with “unconsumerised” citizens and ultimately had to construct the framework for producing marketing texts within the newly transitioned countries (Kelly-Holmes, 1998). Although this was a new challenge in the industry, it also paved the way for new opportunities and strategies within the communications field.

In joining this market, global advertising has successfully linked ownership and consumption to new identities (True, 1999). The concept, and realistically the struggle with identity, was a significant element of the post-communist transition. Citizens of Eastern European countries were ostracized from Western culture during the process of assimilation. Following the events of 1989, the issue of German-German relations emerged. Although the country was now unified and no longer divided by the Berlin Wall, there was a strong sense of otherness among those formerly from East Germany. This resulted in the creation of new identities revolving around the need to catch up and blend in with Western culture (Berdahl, 2004). Thus, there was an opportunity for advertising and marketing efforts to target these individuals specifically in their quest to fit in. In fact, the financial opportunities that arose from advertising opportunities in Eastern Europe were astronomical. In Bulgaria “advertising expenditure rose from \$4.3 million in 1996 to \$322 million in 2006” (Ibroscheva, 2007, p. 410). The opportunity for multinational brands in Eastern Europe continues to climb and maintains a strong influence within the economy.

In terms of strategy, to successfully target citizens of Eastern Europe, advertisers needed to understand their ideology, which ultimately is what “allows us to participate meaningfully in a culture” (Kelly-Holmes, 1998, p. 342). East Germans’ desire to fit in with Western culture was so strong, providing easy grounds for multinational companies to secure a new customer base. In fact, “social and cultural transformations result from even the seemingly most trivial penetration of western imports and advertising media” (True, 1999, p. 363). Thus, it is evident that Western advertising captured the desire for cultural belonging and capitalized on a new market by increasing advertising efforts and understanding the complex history and systems at play within the region.

### ***Marketing as a System***

Marketing is a complex industry that is imperative for the success of brands. At its core, marketing is part of a greater multi-level system that both influences and is influenced by “institutional and knowledge environments in which they are active” (Layton, 2011, p. 260). In the case of Germany, specifically Berlin, there is an incredibly diverse environment of institutions and knowledge at play that must be considered when examining marketing strategies. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, citizens of West Berlin had access to a plethora of consumer goods, whereas their counterparts in East Berlin lived in an economy of shortages with little economic autonomy.

Additionally, East Berlin functioned primarily as a manufacturing economy in which production was valued significantly more than consumption. However, when East Germany was absorbed in 1989, factories were closed and many people lost their jobs. As a result, there were clear winners and losers of the transition. The winners prospered and assimilated well into a Western lifestyle, whereas the losers were unemployed, poor, and even homeless (Berdahl, 2005). This massive divide within the population of Germany emphasizes the various economic, social, and political systems at play within the country. All of these factors need to be considered when developing marketing and advertising efforts as marketing “constraints and opportunities created by religion, geography, history, and physical infrastructure” (Layton, 2011, p. 264). In this case, history is one of the most significant factors as it was ultimately the communist era that defines the unique landscape of the city of Berlin and its people.

### ***Nostalgia in Post-Communist Branding***

After examining Germany’s history and its implications on the marketing system, it is important to look even more specifically into the role of nostalgia in marketing. Nostalgia is a unique sensation in the post-communist case as “memory is an interactive, malleable, and highly contested phenomenon but also

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the process through which things become informed with a remembering- and forgetting- capacity” (Berdahl, 2004, p. 176). Often times, people will suppress their bad memories in favor of remembering the good. In fact, nostalgic branding capitalizes on memories associated with pride, love, and happiness. These emotions aid companies in building relationships with their consumers (Grębosz-Krawczyk, 2018).

Grębosz-Krawczyk’s theory on the impact of nostalgia on brand equity in a post-communist economy is particularly helpful in understanding this phenomenon. His research on nostalgia for transgenerational versus generational brands, specifically in the food and cosmetics industry, suggests that there is a higher level of brand equity among nostalgic transgenerational brands as they provide consumers with “the security references, identity, well-being, emotion and re-enchantment without positive connotations with communist period” (Grębosz-Krawczyk, 2018, p. 225). Although communism is reflected upon as a dark period in which the people were suppressed by the state, it was still a significant point in people’s lives and general history that cannot be ignored. Thus, brands and advertisers began capitalizing on this wave of nostalgia by using popular culture and symbols to trigger consumption behavior that was suppressed before the fall of communism (Moraru, 2010).

Looking specifically at the case of Germany, nostalgia from East Germans is particularly high. The process of reunification after 1989 was complicated and not as liberating as many had hoped. Ultimately, this longing for the past “is more than simply an escapist defense mechanism against the chaos and disenchantment of Reunification itself” (Betts, 2000, p. 734). Although there was great freedom that emerged from reunifying Germany, it was also a very divisive time in which East German citizens were particularly ostracized within their own country. They were seen as second-class citizens and looked down upon as a result of their time under the socialist state. Following the initial excitement of obtaining Western products, “formerly distained articles suddenly became material reminders of a vanished world, newly idealized ‘fragments of a crumbled identity’” (Betts, 2000, p. 741). Integrating into a society that pushed individuals to shed their identity and reimagine their beliefs was a taxing process; thus it is not surprising that amidst their struggle East Germans developed a sense of nostalgia for the past.

It has been more than 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, yet current advertising campaigns are highlighting images of the past, including planned housing projects, dull colors, and old transportation. Society is moving forward, however, there is clearly still a fondness for the past. It is important to understand why this dark period still impacts modern marketing and advertising, particularly in the fashion industry, which is often focused on new, emerging trends.

Berlin is a unique city. It is an emerging fashion capital filled with creative and eccentric ideas but also with a history of extreme division between the capitalist west and the communist east side of the Berlin Wall. Examining the city’s modern fashion advertising through a nostalgic and post-communist framework will yield interesting insights into how a communist past impacts an industry rooted in forward-thinking and modern trends. There has been no prior research conducted on nostalgia in post-communist fashion industries, and the findings of this study will provide useful insights about how nostalgia is reflected in campaigns.

Although there is no research regarding nostalgia in fashion advertising, Grębosz-Krawczyk’s work focuses on the role of nostalgia in transgenerational and generational brands, specifically in the food and cosmetics industries. Thus, this research will fill the existing gaps in post-communism advertising research by seeking to understand if the same nostalgic undertones in transgenerational brands are depicted in multinational fashion advertisements. This study will investigate these topics through a qualitative thematic analysis of campaigns by Levi’s and Gucci.

### ***The Case Studies***

This research will look at two fashion advertising campaigns, both of which were shot in Berlin. It will examine Levi’s “Go Forth” campaign and Gucci’s Spring Summer 2016 campaign. These two multinational companies were selected very specifically. Prior research frequently discusses Eastern European’s infatuation with Levis denim as the company was seen as a uniquely American brand (True, 1999). Under communism, jeans were much more than an item of clothing, they were a token of capitalism and those who wore them were considered enemies of the state (Panek, 2019). The symbolism behind this brand is fascinating and clearly indicates the fact that branding and marketing are rooted in various systems of society. Specifically, the “Go Forth” campaign declares Levi’s to be the “Uniform of Progress.” In the context of post-communism, examining this campaign is particularly compelling as it provides grounds for the analysis of nostalgia with branding, focusing on both the past and the more progressive present.

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On the other hand, Gucci's Spring Summer 2016 campaign combines trendsetting designer fashion with scenery highly reflective of the communist era. The fashion industry, particularly designer fashion, is notorious for having bold and eclectic advertising campaigns and the setting of Berlin in the Spring Summer 2016 campaign was no different. Following the end of communism, luxury brands such as BMW and Armani did particularly well in the Eastern European markets (True, 1999). Thus, examining a campaign by Gucci, a highly regarded and luxurious fashion brand, will provide interesting insights about the reflection of nostalgia in advertising across different price sectors of the fashion industry. The following two research questions will aid in the explanation of this phenomenon of intertwining the past and present in modern advertising campaigns.

RQ1: How does Berlin's communist past impact modern, multinational advertising, specifically within the cases of Levi's and Gucci?

RQ2: How do advertising campaigns by Levi's and Gucci reflect elements of nostalgia?

Research Question 1 will take a historical approach and focus specifically on how elements of the communist era continue to influence advertising. In order to understand advertising in the post-communist era, it is crucial to understand how the past shaped modern practices. Existing research suggests that there are many systems at play within the marketing sector and this research will specifically seek to understand their implications for marketing in Berlin.

Research Question 2 will focus specifically on the two advertising campaigns this study will analyze, Levi's "Go Forth" campaign and Gucci's Spring Summer 2016 campaign. By examining both of these Berlin-based campaigns from multinational brands, this research will examine how modern advertising campaigns reflect elements of nostalgia. Prior research suggests that people are more loyal to nostalgic brands, regardless of price (Grębosz-Krawczyk, 2018). With this knowledge, this research seeks to understand how nostalgia may be used as part of a campaign to sell modern products.

### III. Methods

This study used a qualitative thematic analysis of Levi's "Go Forth" campaign and Gucci's Spring Summer 2016 campaign, both of which are campaigns from the past decade. The analysis reviewed these campaigns for markers for communism and capitalism within fashion advertisements shot in Berlin.

This research investigated sixteen photos from the Gucci Spring Summer 2016 advertisement campaign, in addition to a video of Levi's launch of the European "Go Forth" campaign in Berlin. The Gucci campaign was retrieved from the "Stories" section of the Gucci website under the "Ad Campaigns" header. All photos and the video shot by British fashion photographer and director Glen Luchford for the Gucci campaign were available on this page. Only photos that included the models' faces were selected for analysis. Facial expressions were one marker this qualitative thematic analysis examined, thus making it an important element to have in the sample. Screenshot images were compiled of the photos and placed into Figure 1. The images were then further labeled for reference purposes.

The Levi's "Go Forth" 2011 campaign video was retrieved from Vimeo. The video was titled "Levi's® Launch of the European 'Go Forth' campaign in Berlin" and published by Cromatics, a German-based production company. The video is four minutes and 31 seconds long, and from this, 18 screenshots were taken for qualitative thematic analysis. Additionally, quotes were taken from speakers in the video to be coded in the analysis. Similar to the Gucci content, the screenshots were compiled into Figure 2 and labeled individually to be referenced throughout the research.

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Figure 1. Photos from Gucci Spring Summer 2016 Campaign

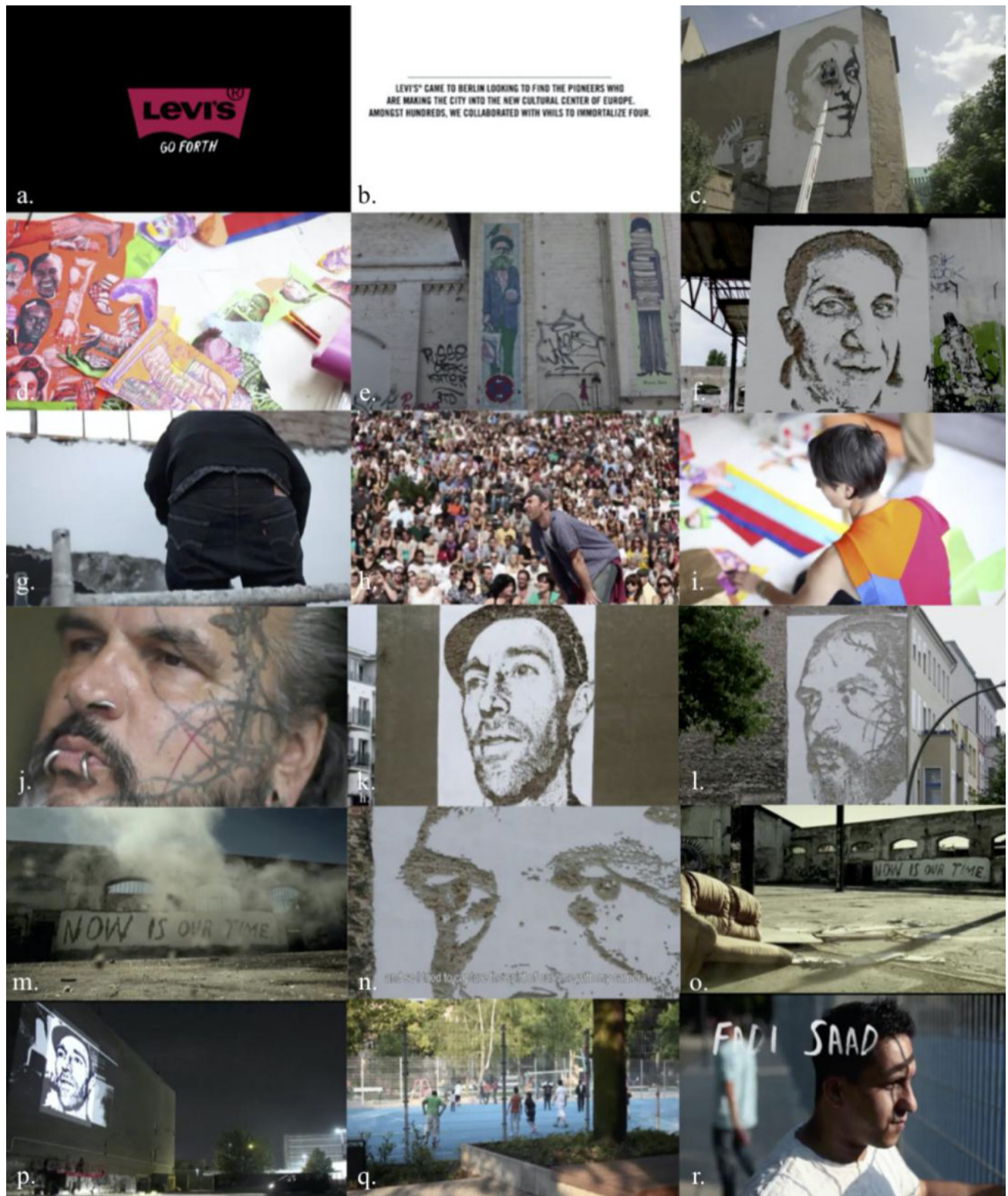


Figure 2. Screenshot from Levi's "Go Forth" Campaign video

## IV. Analysis

Data were examined qualitatively using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), identifying themes specifically related to the study's two research questions. Once initial codes were established, they were synthesized into potential themes. Using a constant comparative approach between the campaigns (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), these themes were then examined for their resonance and consistency with existing literature related to nostalgia and communist branding.

These themes were developed using markers for communism and capitalism from existing research on post-Cold War advertising in Romania (Moraru, 2010). Markers of communism included dull color schemes, urban settings, and facial expressions. Dull color schemes were represented by both black and white and shadows. Specifically, "Bichromatic white-black explains very well the restrictions ... Other times, the colors are replaced by shadows, characters are usually silhouettes" (Moraru, 2010, p. 60). Dull color schemes were also observed through "milky-yellow lighting" (Lewis, 2016). Urban settings were characterized by rigid streets, small parks, the construction site, small streets, and small apartment buildings (Moraru, 2010, p. 59-60). In addition, the urban settings theme examined transportation. Specifically, Dora trains from Berlin's U-Bahn system which were characterized by "1950s design: yellow exteriors, plush green leather seating and milky-yellow lighting" (Lewis, 2016). Finally, facial expressions were observed by all characters displaying "the same facial mimics one cannot see any smile, any personal touch on their faces, they are pictured only inside a serious, cold and hypercritical surroundings" (Moraru, 2010, p. 58).

After these markers were examined to determine elements of communism, the study then sought to understand the intertwining of nostalgia with modern trends in advertising campaigns. To do so, it compared modern capitalist markers including bright colors, creativity, and non-traditional societal roles (Moraru, 2010). Bright colors were defined as bringing rich expressivity. Creativity was viewed through a nostalgic lens in which elements of the communist era were expressed in a creative way that aligned with popular culture. Finally, non-traditional societal roles were seen as "the non-conformist teenager" or a female hero (Moraru, 2010, p. 57, 60). The contrast from this thematic analysis of communist versus capitalist markers in the two campaigns allowed for a deeper analysis of the role of nostalgia and the influence of communism on modern fashion advertising. Further, through this analysis, this research explored the campaigns to look for emergent themes related to communism, nostalgia, and modern branding through a constant comparison technique (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

## V. Findings

The Gucci Spring Summer 2016 campaign and the Levi's "Go Forth" campaign differ greatly in their creative strategies and advertising purposes. Creative Director Alessandro Michele and Photographer and Director Glen Luchford created the Gucci Spring Summer 2016 campaign to encapsulate the spirit of Germany's 1980's pop culture (Stansfield, 2016). Levi's developed the Berlin "Go Forth" campaign with Wieden + Kennedy Amsterdam to highlight "the pioneers who are making the city into the new cultural center of Europe" (Cromatic, 2012). Despite the differences, the campaigns both feature markers for communism and modern capitalism which will later provide grounds for the analysis of the role of nostalgia in multinational fashion advertisements shot in Berlin, Germany.

### ***Markers of Communism***

#### **Urban Settings and Transportation**

Of the 16 images from the Gucci Spring Summer 2016 (Figure 1), images d, f, and j all directly feature public transportation. Images d and f show women in front of a dated yellow bus and image j depicts a woman lying on a rooftop overlooking a train station with yellow Dora-style trains. These yellow buses and trains are seen in images d, f, and j can be characterized as "textbook examples of 1950s design" (Lewis, 2016). Further, urban settings are clearly visible in images a and c. In image a, a man and woman overlook a small, circular park in the middle of a roundabout and apartment housing projects line the background of the photograph. Similarly, in image c a woman leans against a wall, and uniform buildings sprawl across the background.

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The Levi's 2011 "Go Forth" Campaign is shot exclusively in urban areas within Berlin. Of the 18 screengrabs (Figure 2), images k, l, and p depict the faces of Berlin "pioneers" in the walls of buildings around the city and also have housing projects visible in the background. Additionally, the video highlights Faadi Saad, a Berlin resident who works with at-risk youth. In images q and r, he is seen observing a small, fenced-in park where Berlin youth congregate to play basketball. Overall, both the Gucci and Levi's campaigns heavily featured urban settings.

#### **Facial Expressions: Cold and Serious**

Images from the Gucci campaign (Figure 1) were selected based on the presence of models' faces for analysis. Of the 27 visible faces seen across the 16 different photos, only one model in image g is seen with a slight smile. The other 26 faces depict a lack of smile, a serious demeanor, and many look visibly upset. Image b shows a straight faced woman looking emotionless as she descends an escalator. Image h exhibits a woman leaning against a hand-dryer where she rests her somber face in her hand as an emotionless man reaches for her hair. This man is also supporting another sorrow looking woman on his shoulder to the right. More generally, models in this campaign look lifelessly at the camera. This is highlighted in image k where both women in the bathroom stare blankly ahead, and image l where all three models appear frozen, with the woman on the far right mid stand.

In Figure 2, images j, l, and n depict Sven Marquardt, a local photographer in Berlin. He is covered in tattoos on his face, has many piercings, and maintains a cold and serious facial expression across all three images.

#### **Dull and Muted Colors**

Eleven of the 16 images from the Gucci Spring Summer 2016 Campaign (Figure 1) have backgrounds with muted or dull colors. Dull lighting can be described as "milky-yellow" (Lewis, 2016). This is pictured in images d, e, f, n, o, and p. The yellow tile lining of the train station walls in images n and o, along with the bus stop location in images d and f creates very murky lighting. Images e, m, and p are shot in a dark hallway, giving them a similarly muted look. Images a, c, and j are all shot outside and have very dull, gray backgrounds.

The art of Berlin's pioneers, by Portuguese street artist Vhils, is featured in six of the 18 screengrabs in Figure 2 (images c, f, k, l, n, and p). Each of these portraits is on the side of various buildings in Berlin and produced in a very dull and muted, black-and-white color scheme. Additionally, images m and o, depict a wall in an empty, depressed lot saying "Now is our time." These images lack a presence of color and reflect the "milky-yellow" lighting.

#### **Wall Imagery**

Using the constant comparison technique for open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), both the Gucci Spring Summer 2016 campaign and the Levi's campaign provided grounds for a new marker of communism, the use of wall imagery. In the "Go Forth" video, Vhils explains his artistic motive stating, "I went to go into the walls and tried to dig and play with these layers of the past" (Cromatic, 2012). So, the images of Berlin's pioneers are carved into walls throughout the city that previously had political messages from the working class in the 1980s. Additionally, in Figure 2, images m and o depict a cement wall stating, "Now is our time." The area is barren, and image m further depicts the blast through the wall used in the artistic process.

The Gucci campaign (Figure 1) furthers the idea of wall imagery in fashion advertising. Images a and c are both shot on a rooftop and the models are standing by a cement wall. In image a, both the male and female models peer over the wall to the streets below, and in image c, the model leans against the cement wall with rows of housing projects seen behind her.

### **Markers of Modern Capitalism**

#### **Colors and Rich Expressivity**

The Gucci Spring Summer 2016 campaign (Figure 1) features a plethora of bright colors. Images i, h, and k are all shot in a nightclub bathroom with bright pink tile and pink and orange wallpapered walls. This campaign brings significant color to the images through the clothing line. Teal is a prominent color throughout the photos. Image m captures a man running through the hallway in a teal jumpsuit, image g shows a woman in a teal dress waiting next to another woman in an emerald green suit, image k shows a woman in a long teal gown in the bathroom, and image p shows a woman walking through a hallway in a sheer, teal skirt.

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Additionally, reds and pinks are seen throughout the line. A man is seen in bright red shorts in image e, a woman in a red top lies on a rooftop in image j, a woman wears a mid-length pink skirt in image l, and a man wears a red, patterned suit in image n. Finally, and most uniquely, there is a peacock in three of the 16 photos (images e, n, and p). This peacock is different shades of green, teal, and purple.

The Levi's Campaign (Figure 2) interviews Varicus and Gould, two Berlin artists who work on social issues such as migration. In the interview, the duo explains their work: "We do it in a very colorful way because we have a feeling that somehow the issues are transported" (Cromatics, 2012). This colorful work can be further examined in images d, e, and l, where shades of pinks, oranges, greens, blues, and reds can be seen in their work, both in the studio and in the streets. Additionally, in highlighting Joe Hatchiban, a Berlin resident who performs karaoke, the camera pans a colorful and excited crowd, seen in image h.

### **Creativity and Popular Culture**

The Gucci campaign (Figure 1) features elements of the communist era in a creative way, aligning with modern, popular culture. Image p shows a man and a woman walking past a store front with vintage advertisements on display in the windows. The woman is wearing a sheer, colorful dress, while the man is in a patterned suit walking a peacock on a leash. In image f, a woman is seen dressed in an extremely lavish and classic white jacket and skirt set while awaiting the dated, yellow bus. Similarly, image d shows a woman in a long, patterned jacket with matching luggage, examining her freshly painted nails also awaiting the same old, yellow bus.

Levi's interviewed Vhils about his concept for the street art in the "Go Forth" campaign in Berlin. He explains, "I went to go into the walls and tried to dig and play with these layers of the past" (Cromatics, 2012). Additionally, image e depicts Varicus and Gould's work. Their colorful artwork about various social issues is contrasted with graffiti and barren walls.

### **Non-Traditional Roles**

Figure 1 heavily features the non-conformist teenager role. In image e, a boy is seen skateboarding through a mall while holding a peacock. Additionally, image l shows a girl wearing a sheer bra top next to a couch where another girl sits with a boy in a patterned, blue suit. The "Go Forth" campaign also discusses the role of the non-conformist teenager. The video showcases Faadi Saad as one of Berlin's pioneers. However, the narrator explains his past as a former member of a gang (Cromatics, 2012).

### **Social Change**

Again, using the constant comparison technique for open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the Levi's campaign provided grounds for a new marker, social change. Through their artwork, Varicus and Gould shed light on issues such as torture migration. Similarly, Saad is "trying to bridge the social gaps of Berlin and help the at-risk youth avoid drugs and violence" by teaching children "how to cope and hopefully how to become role models themselves" (Cromatics, 2012).

## **VI. Discussion**

Using Moraru's markers for communism and capitalism, along with Braun and Clarke's theory for qualitative thematic analysis (2006), this analysis provides important insights into the impact of Berlin's communist past on multinational advertising. Both the Gucci Spring Summer 2016 campaign and the Levi's "Go Forth" campaign were shot in the city of Berlin within the past ten years. Additionally, both companies, despite Gucci being a luxury brand and Levi's a more accessible, but renowned denim company, are globally recognizable brands, making them optimal campaigns to examine.

As a result of its divided history during the communist era, modern Berlin still has many remnants of the past, making it a unique location for fashion advertising shoots. Through this qualitative thematic analysis, it is evident that urban settings and transportation from the past play a heavy role in the campaigns. In 2016, the city of Berlin made the decision to recommission several "Dora" trains, known for their yellow exterior and 1950s design. These trains were originally introduced during the Cold War and ran on the Berlin U-Bahn system but were retired when the Berlin Wall was erected in 1961 (Lewis, 2016). The Gucci campaign features these trains in Figure 2, image j, and similar buses in images d and f. The presence of this transportation in the campaign is a nod to the past and successfully intertwines bold, modern fashion

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with vintage elements of communism. Further, this reference to the past can be seen in both campaigns through markers of urban settings. Government-planned housing projects remain a dominant part of Berlin's architecture and can be identified numerous times in both campaigns. Murals in the Levi's campaign are painted on the side of these apartment buildings. Although the apartments were built during a tumultuous time, this period had a tremendous impact on the people of Berlin and shaped the city's identity. Thus, it is not a period to repress, but rather embrace, as portrayed in these fashion ad campaigns.

Through the constant comparison approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) this research determined the presence of wall imagery to be an emergent theme within the two campaigns. The Berlin Wall serves as a universal symbol for the era of Eastern European communism, and its fall is further symbolic of a period of reunification. In the Levi's "Go Forth" campaign, the film concludes with a scene of a wall in a barren lot stating "Now is our time." This is pictured in Figure 2 images m and o. The stark contrast between the gritty, abandoned surrounding area with the empowering message displayed on the wall ties together the past with the present in an extremely meaningful manner. The fall of the Berlin Wall represented a period of new beginnings and opportunities for East German citizens. With reunification, came "national legitimacy in which access to consumer goods and consumer choice are defined as fundamental rights and democratic individualism" (Berdhal, 2005, p. 235). The phrase "Now is our time" capitalizes on this legitimacy and individualism that now fuels the city's unique and creative environment, while also acknowledging the great strides it took to get there.

Although it is more subtle, the Gucci campaign (Figure 1) utilizes wall imagery as an acknowledgement to the past. In images a and c, models are seen leaning against a cement wall overlooking the city. The three models featured are all dressed in high-fashion outfits which contrast greatly against the bleak background. This juxtaposition further establishes the findings of this study: Berlin's communist past provides grounds for unique multinational fashion advertising. This setting brings rich history to light in a revolutionary and creative manner beneficial to the forward-thinking industry.

In featuring walls in fashion advertising campaigns, both Gucci and Levi's recognize Berlin's history while capitalizing on the city's strength and the will of the people to take control over their future. As multinational companies, it is important to connect campaigns to consumers identities (True, 1999). By understanding the audience, companies develop successful campaigns. Although the Gucci campaign aims to sell a luxury fashion line and Levi's highlights the working class, they both successfully understand their surroundings and use the uniqueness of the community to better their ad campaigns.

### ***Using Nostalgia in Fashion Campaigns***

The fashion industry is known for bringing creativity and expression to advertisement campaigns. Gucci's campaign is filled with vibrant colors, quirky outfits, and unique props, including a peacock. All this is contrasted with various locations throughout the city of Berlin selected to bring elements of 1980s popular culture to the shoot (Stansfield, 2016). In his research, Moraru defines creativity through a lens of nostalgia where elements of the communist era are expressed in a new manner that aligns with popular culture (Moraru, 2010).

Gucci creative director Alessandro Michele and photographer Glen Luchford bring creativity to the Gucci campaign through a nostalgic lens. There is a stark juxtaposition throughout the images between the markers for communism, including urban settings and transportation, with the bright colors and rich expressivity outlined by Moraru (2010). Images d and f (Figure 1) both depict women dressed in pristine and fashionable clothing while waiting for yellow, dated public transportation. Similarly, images n and o are shot in a dated U-Bahn train station lined with yellow tile walls while models sport the Gucci line. Further, in image o, one model is holding a leather purse with the notorious Gucci symbol front and center.

By using these locations for the shoot, Michele and Luchford reflect elements of nostalgia to create a unique fashion campaign. Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, there was a strong market pull for globally renowned western brands, as they were non-existent under communism (True, 1999). As a multinational luxury brand, Gucci utilizes nostalgia in its campaign as a means to reinvigorate consumer identity. Although this campaign was released over 25 years after the end of communism in Berlin, nostalgic undertones provide security, validate identity and ultimately, cultivate "re-enchantment without positive connotations with communist period" (Grębosz-Krawczyk, 2018, p. 225). By contrasting urban settings such as housing projects, transportation, and wall imagery with the bright and floral pieces from the Spring Summer 2016 collection, Gucci capitalizes on the opportunity to acknowledge the identity of many of its German consumers,

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while also promoting a new, fashion-forward line.

Unlike the Gucci campaign, the Levi's "Go Forth" video from Berlin focuses more on the stories of the city's pioneers than the actual product being marketed. This decision was strategic on behalf of Levi's as their brand alone has nostalgic meaning within the city (True, 1999). Using the historical significance of the brand, Levi's links the modern and progressive spirit of present Berlin with the complex and divided past to create a genuine, and engaging campaign. According to Grębosz-Krawczyk (2018), brands who capitalize on nostalgia have higher brand equity among consumers. For Levi's, ending the video with wall imagery finalizes the role of nostalgia in the campaign. The statement "Now is our time" appears on a cement wall following an explosion, as seen in Figure 2, image m. This is an extremely powerful ending to the "Go Forth" Berlin video, ultimately creating an engaging and symbolic campaign through the contrast of both communist and capitalist markers.

## VII. Conclusion

The communist era in Berlin has a lasting impact on modern identity and culture that advertisers, specifically in the fashion industry, seek to embrace in campaigns. This research illustrates how the contrast between communist and capitalist markers, outlined by Moraru (2010), work simultaneously to reflect elements of nostalgia and highlight modern fashion trends. Now, over 30 years later, multinational fashion brands such as Gucci and Levi's are invigorating consumer interest through the use of nostalgia.

Although the campaigns are inherently different, they both work to embrace the city's unique history. According to Layton (2011), marketing is part of a complex system influenced by the environment it operates in. These companies recognize the past experiences of the city and use the environment as a means to develop creative fashion campaigns that appreciate the identity of their consumers.

Based on the qualitative thematic analysis of the two campaigns, this research determined that Berlin's past does impact modern multinational fashion advertising, and that elements of nostalgia are reflected in campaigns through the use of communist markers including urban settings, transportation, dull colors, and wall imagery. However, this study does have limitations. This research only examined two campaigns, and thus the findings cannot be generalized to all fashion advertising. Future research could seek to examine other fashion ad campaigns and their use of Cold War cultural context.

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## Journalists' Dilemma: Human Rights Coverage During the Argentinian 1978 World Cup

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### Abstract

*A large body of literature shows the manner in which mega-events, such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup, are often covered by journalists without challenge (Roche, 2003; Rivenburgh, 2004). This study expands on that literature by investigating the manner in which journalists approached covering the crossroads of human rights conflicts and sport during the 1978 World Cup in Argentina. During the time of the World Cup, Argentina was run by a military regime in a country torn apart by violence. This study sought to find if journalists prioritized sports or human rights in their coverage over three time periods: two months before, the month during, and two months after the tournament. Using both a quantitative and qualitative comparative content analysis, the study examined news coverage in two newspapers, one from the United States and the other from France. The study found that, ultimately, French coverage of the Cup prioritized the political unrest within Argentina while American coverage focused primarily on the competition itself. Frames applied by journalists within the coverage included international reactions, subversion, and regime stability.*

### I. Introduction

The World Cup football championship brought a unique set of conditions to Argentina, the host country, as the tournament began in 1978 (Archetti, 2006). Even as the competition among 16 national teams began in the stadiums of Buenos Aires and other cities, with local fans bursting with national pride, the nation's leaders were involved in a cover-up they tried to hide from the world (Robben, 2005). The roars of the fans at Estadio Monumental stadium, for instance, could be heard at the torture camp just a short distance away where Argentine military held, tortured, and killed political prisoners known as the *desaparecidos*, the disappeared (Di Paolantonio, 1997). It was in these conditions that journalists found themselves on the fringe of a human rights issue and were presented with choices on how to cover the mega-event at hand – the highly followed international football tournament – and whether to dive deeper into the political issues around them. Sportswriters were forced to face the question of what their role entailed during the 1978 World Cup: Was their job to chronicle the wins and the losses and the drama of an eventual championship? Or was it to explore the evidence on the streets that suggested something much more sinister and dangerous at play? This study focuses on their dilemma.

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**Keywords:** journalism, framing theory, sports, human rights  
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## II. Literature Review

Mega-events are events such as the World Cup, the Olympic Games, and other sporting events that are meant to be global celebrations, promoting peace, prosperity, sportsmanship, and global status. For host countries, such mega-events yield the chance to show off successes and to impress other nations (Rivenburgh, 2004). In Argentina in 1978, government leaders understood the importance of presenting a façade of stability and peace to international journalists who arrived from countries around the world to cover the matches. Those same government leaders, however, were also making efforts to hide the human rights conflicts in which citizens were tortured because of their college educations, certain occupations, or political opinions differing from – and perhaps critical of – the existing government. This yielded a tale of two stories, where journalists were left to decide which one to tell: the story of human rights issues or the story of matches played between two goals. While some journalists and citizens remained silent in their reporting and actions, others used the mega-event as a site of contestation, to raise questions of sociological realities, political happenings, and human-rights violations (Archetti, 2005; Curran & Liebes, 1998; Smith, 2002). Journalists leveraged the power of the press in various ways, some to overlook or silently aid in the cover-up of these violations, others to issue calls of action to reform their own government's practices.

*Regime, junta, and government* are all used interchangeably in reference to the Argentinian dictatorship in power in 1978 as a result of a military coup two years earlier. This regime was responsible for not only hosting the 1978 World Cup, but also the disappearances and repression of its citizens. *Los desaparecidos* is a term referring to 30,000 people, often labeled by the government as subversives, who disappeared in a span of eight years mostly under the junta's rule. These Argentinians disappeared and were abducted, tortured, or killed in clandestine detention camps across the country (Robben, 2005). They were known as *Los Desaparecidos* because "the abducted were never publicly acknowledged as detainees once they disappeared into the hundreds of secret detention centers known as 'pits' (pozos) and 'black holes' (chupaderos)" (Robben, 2005, p. 129). While some of those who disappeared were eventually released back into society and lived in a state of exile, most were killed and their bodies dumped into Río De la Plata or the Atlantic Ocean during what were commonly known as "death flights" (Rein & Davidi, 2009). This was the junta's most common way of silencing the enemy – arresting individuals with few legitimate charges, if any, and refusing to tell family members where they were being kept. Most were never heard from again. Human rights activist groups, such as Abuelas de la Plaza (Grandmothers of the Plaza), formed to protest these kidnappings and demand knowledge of their family members' detention or death.

This paper uses the terms *mega-event* and *media-event* interchangeably, as their meanings are similar and highly relevant to this study. Throughout history, events like that of the World Cup and the Olympic Games draw international attention. Roche (2004) uses the term "mega-event" to describe the patterns of both the "Olympic movement and the amateur and professional sports movements were generally connected with the development of various forms of the press and journalism" (p. 165). The very definition of a mega-event implies that it will have "significant consequences for the host city, region or nation in which they occur, and second, that they will attract considerable media coverage" (Horne, 2007, p. 81). Roche (2003) classified this media coverage and analysis into three categories. The primary level of coverage is basic event coverage – the who, what, when and where of the event where coverage focuses primarily on the action of the event itself. The secondary zone of coverage also provides context to the event. This secondary mega-event coverage focuses on the impacts of the event politically, economically, and underlying factors of the event. The third level of coverage, which Roche calls the "event horizon" (p. 167), focuses on understanding of the past and future implications of said event.

These definitions of mega-events reveal the power these events afford a host country in managing its international image. Political leaders, aware of the increased media coverage their country will reap, can use such an event as an opportunity to manipulate their world image. Hiller (1998) expands on Roche's concepts to further explore the impacts on host cities of mega-events. His analysis uncovers the tourism impacts of mega-events and the national branding opportunities for host cities and nations. During these mega-events, the news media play the roles of historians, giving special attention and coverage to events that might not otherwise be given (Hiller 1998; Roche, 2003). In this sense, the media help play a role in defining the society, in which it can both "over-react to as well as exaggerate (amplify) social concerns or social issues and also, at times under-react and downplay (deny) others" (Horne, 2017, p. 20). Because mega-events are pre-planned, event coverage is often skewed to be positive. In some cases though, the journalists dispatched to cover an event find themselves coincidentally uncovering unfavorable truths from human rights violations to economic disasters (Alexander & Jacobs, 1998) – a consideration for this research.

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## ***Framing Theory***

Scholars have studied the way in which media organizations tell their stories, and how their story frames might affect audiences' perceptions of issues and events. The premise of framing theory, as presented by Entman (1991), Goffman (1974), and Scheufele (1999), among others, is that media narratives, or stories, will necessarily focus on certain issues and present them to an audience offering perspectives the storytellers choose. The "frames" they select will privilege certain assumptions, facts, and observations while downplaying or omitting others. The chosen "frame" subsequently affects the manner in which the audience processes the information and places importance on the issue. Scholars have defined media frames as "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p.143). The frame identifies what the controversy is and the main point of the issue at hand. Mass media have a "strong impact by constructing social reality" through the framing of stories (Scheufele, 1999, p. 105). The idea that journalists create these frames to help add context and levels of understanding allows the public to interpret and discuss public events.

These frames are not necessarily presented in malicious ways, but nonetheless they are present. In fact, the frames are largely invisible both to the public and the journalists applying the frames (Gitlin, 1980). Despite that, the "unspoken and unacknowledged" frames serve to "organize the world both for journalists who report it and in some important degree for us who rely on their reports." (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). Entman (1993), meanwhile, asserts that frames create a social hierarchy of issues: "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (p. 52). Because of the manner in which frames can assign importance to some issues more than others in the eyes of the audience, the notion of framing raises questions about the inherent capacity of journalists to present disinterested reports.

Though frames can sometimes be problematic, they are a necessary part of media communication in providing context and the creation of meaning behind stories. While journalism strives to be balanced and objective, scholars understand and explain the reality that fairness is an ideal more than a reality. Inevitably, journalists produce reports, even about mega-events, that differ in perspective and in weighing the relevance of circumstances and events. Framing theory brings a sophistication to the study of news coverage. It accepts that difference is predictable because journalists will frame the same sets of activities according to their own needs and values. Relying on this theory, this study identifies and analyzes the frames found in the coverage of the 1978 World Cup, with attention to how these frames assigned importance to human-rights issues.

## ***Mega-Event Coverage***

Hosting the games comes with a number of potential benefits. Rivenburgh (2004) explains that one goal of any host country is to create positive media coverage and promote a positive image of the country worldwide. However, changing a country's image through a mega-event like that of the World Cup is difficult, as the host country is dependent upon independent international media. The media has shown distinct patterns when reporting these events (Alexander & Jacobs, 1998; Szymanski, 2011). Gambarato and Teixeira (2017) argue that pre-planned events are often covered in a positive manner with more of a public relations slant, rather than as a neutral pursuit of the truth (Gambarato & Teixeira, 2017). Often, the months leading up to the mega-event involve reporting about "security, the costs surrounding the Games, commercialism, drugs, and – significant to the host's global image-making goals – a constant evaluation of hosting preparation" (Rivenburgh, 2004, p. 12). Early coverage of mega-events also includes that of local protests and efforts of the government to "clean up" lower-income areas as a way to put their "best foot forward" for the games.

However, once the games actually begin, media coverage focuses on the sporting spectacle itself, often leaving cultural norms and impacts of the games behind. Rivenburgh (2004) points out this is often because of "the fact that media personnel covering the [Olympic] Games are most often sports journalists who may be uncomfortable with providing cultural or political commentary" (p. 12). Similarly, Curran and Liebes (1998) suggest that these events are "generally reported uncritically by broadcasters" because sports journalists are so passionate about the competition itself, rather than the context and political impacts surrounding the mega-event.

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## **Journalistic Norms**

Journalism norms and standards across the globe differ, but as Alexander and Jacobs (1998) argue, media autonomy is a key aspect of democratic civil society. The mass media play a crucial role in constructing images of other societies, and contribute to people's understanding – or misunderstanding – of other countries (McNelly & Izcaray, 1986). Each country's journalists had their own perceived notions of the Argentine coup based on foreign policy of their home country before arriving in Argentina to cover the tournament. Bennett (2007) pointed out the failures of journalists to fulfill their "watchdog" role to hold government leaders and systems accountable. Rather, he finds that news organizations, in their coverage of international issues, often reflect the narratives and positions of their national government interests (Bennett, 2007). Other studies have shown that coverage of other countries can vary throughout a period of years, ranging from favorable to unfavorable, depending upon the conditions within a journalist's country (Gitlin, 1980; Saleem, 2007; Ovsiovitch, 1993). The coverage can depend upon economic relationships with the other and contexts related to national interest (Gitlin, 1980; Saleem, 2007; Ovsiovitch, 1993). When national interests are highly aligned with the country being covered, that coverage more likely will be positive. Yet when national interests are not at issue, the volume of the coverage will likely decrease, and news reports are more likely to carry a negative tone (Saleem, 2007; Ovsiovitch, 1993).

This study analyzes coverage from the United States and France. These countries and their subsequent publications were chosen because of their self-proclaimed standards of strong journalism (Benson, 2004; Strychacz, 1994), or their national interests in the host country Argentina. In France, citizens promoted a boycott of the Cup as a result of the human rights violations taking place, and welcomed many Argentine exiles (Franco & Pérez, 2007). While the U.S. did not have a team competing in the tournament, the American public carefully followed the World Cup results.

## **Purpose and Research Questions**

Politics inherently seep into sport. This study of 1978 Argentina analyzes coverage to evaluate the extent to which journalists looked beyond the dramatic on-field events of the soccer matches to tell the story of the disappeared and their families who clamored for news of their missing loved ones. At issue, then, is the ways that reporters assigned to the World Cup chose to focus on aspects the "proceso de reorganización," which refers to the regime's efforts to silence and rid the country of its critics.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions in regard to newspaper coverage of the 1978 World Cup:

RQ1: Does the coverage prioritize human rights or sport?

RQ2: What does the wording and location of the reference to the regime reveal about the importance of the issue to the journalist or publication?

RQ3: What types of media frames appear before, during and after the games in *The New York Times* and *Le Monde*?

RQ4: How does coverage from *The New York Times* differ from that of *Le Monde*?

## **III. Methods**

This study applied a content analysis as its primary research method. The content for the analysis came from newspaper articles published in the United States and France during three periods: a month before the tournament, during the World Cup, and a month following the championship.

### **Quantitative Content Analysis**

To delve deeper into *what* the journalists reported, this study used a quantitative approach. Quantitative analysis is the "the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics" that can be applied to "written text, transcribed speech, verbal interactions, visual images, characterizations, nonverbal behaviors, sound events, or any other message type" (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1, 24). This method

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has been demonstrated as reliable for other researchers to replicate results for future studies (Smith, 2002). The researcher read, analyzed, and systematically coded each article in search of keywords and phrases that signal certain frames and patterns. To answer RQ1 and RQ2, the quantitative method examined the number of articles overall in which the dictatorship was the primary focus of the article versus articles in which references to the dictatorship were embedded in coverage of the soccer matches. The analysis coded for the type of source and keywords to understand how journalists digested the events around them and reported on it, and then compared the differences in coverage between the countries. Keywords included *disappeared*, *Montoneros*, *dictatorship*, *military regime*, *Perón*, *violence*, *terrorism* among others. Additionally, the study also systematically identified the date of articles published compared to the timeline of the matches to see whether or how events had impacts on newspaper coverage from that country.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

This study then used a qualitative analysis as outlined by scholars like Lincoln & Guba (2014) and Boeije (2002) to address RQ3. The qualitative analysis sought to summarize the purpose of each article to understand the themes and patterns emerging from the coverage. This method implies that “individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction *between and among* investigator and respondents [data],” (Lincoln & Guba, 2014, p. 111), resulting in an informed and sophisticated discovery. Additionally, this study relies on thematic content analysis theory, which as explained by Joffe and Yardley (2012) is similar to a content analysis but pays greater attention to the qualitative details of content, and requires a more in-depth analysis. To do this, two rounds of coding were conducted that allowed the researcher to make inductions based on the manifest content. The analysis identified the topics journalists investigated and how they framed them. RQ4 was answered in the discussion section, through a comparison of both quantitative and qualitative findings.

### **Sample**

This research focused on the comparison of newspaper coverage from the United States and France. Although the United States did not have a team participating in the competition, its history of high standards of journalism as a model for other countries to follow makes coverage from the country relevant to the study, as it influenced other journalists around the globe (Stavitsky & Dvorkin, 2008). *The New York Times* was analyzed from the United States. French coverage comes from *Le Monde*, which is similar in approach to *The New York Times* (Benson, 2004). These publications were selected for the sample because they were among those with the most coverage about the competition that made reference to the dictatorship and human rights violations. The articles from the *Times* were read in English. The French paper, *Le Monde*, was translated using Google’s translation service from French to English prior to coding.

The sampling strategy involved selecting articles referring to the World Cup in any manner within three different date ranges: 1) May 1978; 2) the 25 days of the tournament (June 1 to June 25, 1978); 3) and the month after the matches (June 26 through the end of July). This study found 227 articles that fit the search criteria.

### **Procedure**

In both the qualitative and quantitative analysis, one unit of analysis was equivalent to one newspaper article. Several items in each article were coded.

The qualitative analysis used coding to measure several elements in terms of framing. Specifically, the articles were coded to see if political activity related to the regime was central to the article and the main message of the story. Coding was also used to understand frames used to describe the government and its resistance. These frames helped yield insight into the opinion of journalists towards the idea of a repressive government or one that is maintaining stability, and the resistance as terrorists or catalysts for change. The researcher also looked for narratives relating the political conflict to outside and international sources.

Headlines and bylines were also used to understand the frame presented by the reporter. The researcher used two rounds of qualitative coding. The first, open coding, sought to identify and record any topic found in the coverage relating to the dictatorship. In a second round of axial coding, the researcher sought to make connections and collapse some categories into more general groupings, that as a whole, reduced themes into more relevant categories and exhausted the range of framing activities (Glaser &

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Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

For the quantitative portion of the study, the researcher first coded for the type of story. There were three types of stories: tournament story, political story, and match/game story. Then, the dictatorship was coded to see whether it was mentioned, and if so, where it was located: in the lead, the top five paragraphs, the middle, or the end of the article. The number and type of words relating to topics was then coded, with 15 words being used to reference the junta and its activities. These words included *disappeared*, *kidnapping*, *abduction*, *government sponsored and military rule*, *terrorism*, *violence*, *torture*, *execute or assassinate*, *Montoneros*, *guerillas*, *leftist*, *human rights violations*, *image*, *Perón*. There was also another category for words that appeared often and that incorporated any areas that seemed relevant to coverage of the World Cup in reference to the political conflict occurring during the regime. Some words that appeared within the “other” category were “subversive,” “Jewish,” and “communism.” Additionally, the number of sources and type of source was coded. Sources ranged from Las Abuelas/Madres de la Plaza, to members of the military junta, government, citizens, fans or FIFA organizing committee. Finally, the date of each article was coded in relation to match days.

## IV. Findings

This study asked whether coverage from *The New York Times* and *Le Monde* prioritized human rights or sports. To answer RQ1, the researcher found that *Le Monde*’s coverage heavily focused on human rights issues and political happenings within Argentina surrounding the events of the World Cup. Meanwhile, the majority of coverage from *The New York Times* focused its coverage on the outcome of games, and surrounding implications of the Cup on the country.

### Framing the World Cup

This study found five frames within coverage from *Le Monde* and *The New York Times*. Frames ranged from the manner in which the sport was described to how the journalists approached covering the tournament in the context of the regime. The frames are detailed below.

#### *Frame 1: International Reactions to the Regime*

The first frame that was found within the coverage revolves around international reactions to the regime. This frame was presented within the news stories when journalists framed the World Cup or the regime in comparison to foreign sources. This type of frame was most commonly found in coverage from *Le Monde*. Journalists from the French paper put the Cup in context of human rights problems in the country. Additionally, they outlined the Cup in terms of foreign government relations with Argentina. An example from *Le Monde* reported on the U.S. ambassador’s relationship with Argentina. Meanwhile, *The New York Times* used this frame when analyzing President Jimmy Carter, seen as a champion of human rights, to suggest he was not acting proactively to the situation in Latin America.

#### *Frame 2: Regime Stability*

This frame appeared when journalists presented the regime in a positive light, blaming past presidencies and left-wing guerillas for the violence and instability in Argentina. By using this frame, the journalists presented President Videla and his military regime as a solution to the violent problem in Argentina, and a method for providing stability and peace within the country. This frame commonly appeared in the coverage leading up to the games, rather than during the games themselves. Journalists from *The New York Times* presented information in this frame far more frequently than those of *Le Monde*.

This frame mostly appeared in the days leading up to the start of the Cup. Journalists from *Le Monde* acknowledged the negative perceptions of the regime, but instead focused on the positives and progress the regime has made to improve conditions in the country in an article published on June 2, 1978:

It is also not a city under siege, even if the extraordinary security measures taken on the occasion of the Global may give the opposite image, and even if serious incidents are far from being excluded in the days to come. It is no longer a city where armed bands carry out in broad daylight, with all impunity, kidnappings of citizens; nor the city where corpses are found every day in the streets, in the surrounding woods or on the neighboring beaches... The number of habeas corpus applications for missing persons a good indicator - has declined dramatically in recent months.

The frame, though, did continue throughout the Cup, focusing on Argentine police efforts to arrest militants, and seeks to provide evidence to the guilt of the “militants” rather than the regime. This is seen in another *Le Monde* article published June 20, 1978:

In their pockets, police found compromising documents, including plans to sabotage of World Cup stadiums. Among the three men is Mr. Carlos Pablo Bergeldors, an engineer who had participated in the construction work of some stadiums. The party Argentinian communist denounces there a plot.

*The New York Times* applied this frame in a way discussing the regime’s ability to stage the World Cup successfully to bring Argentine citizens together:

The patriotic zeal that seems to have gripped all Argentines is transported from the stadiums to the streets every time Argentina wins a match. There is a never-ending honking of horns and beating of drums as fans dance and parade into the early hours of the morning, wrapped up in huge white and sky-blue Argentine flags.

### *Frame 3: Instability from Violence and Terrorism*

This frame highlighted the actions of what the regime called subversives. The regime blamed violence in Argentina on former President Juan Perón and his followers, now called Montoneros. Journalists referred to these subversives as “left-wing” guerillas causing violence and kidnappings in the street. *The New York Times* often used this frame to help show the regime in a better light. *Le Monde* occasionally used this frame to show the bigger picture of instability within the country, while recognizing that violence and kidnappings were occurring by both the left-wing subversives and the regime itself. In one *New York Times* article, journalist Juan de Onis wrote in favor and practically praised the regime lead by President Jorge Videla. Instead, he criticized past leaders for the violence that exists in the country:

Government forces have crippled the left-wing guerrillas whose assassinations, kidnappings and assaults on police and army garrisons helped bring down the elected Peronist government in 1976. Moderate officers, including President Jorge Rafael Videla, whose term was extended last week until 1981, now talk less about “annihilation” and more about “rehabilitation” and “dialogue” so as to rally civilian support for what seems to be a long period of military rule.

Other journalists from *The New York Times* used this frame to show violence created by subversives, or Montoneros, as seen in the article published on May 10, 1978:

They said they had been warned by an anonymous call that there was a bomb in the building. A bomb squad located the device in a car parked in the garage underneath the complex, and it exploded while being carried to an armored vehicle.

*Le Monde* was less likely to use this frame, unless providing it in a larger context and acknowledging regime’s contribution to violence as well. An example of this is shown in an article published on June 5, 1978 in which the journalist addresses the violence that subversives have been part of in the past but frames it as a method of resistance to the regime. Additionally, the frame applied here shows the subversives as providing instability, but working towards trying to create peace for the sake of the Cup:

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The declared objective is to “maintain the armed resistance,” given the refusal of the authorities soldiers from Buenos Aires to respond to the “proposal for a temporary truce” which had been made to them. Limits are, however, provided for “military resistance operations” that may be to undertake the sympathizers of the movement: “It is strictly prohibited, specifies the declaration, to carry out any type of action whatsoever within 600 meters of the stadiums; are prohibited operations that may harm the physical integrity of Argentinian or foreign journalists, or that of players or representatives of football teams.

#### *Frame 4: Silencing the Opposition*

This frame presented information regarding the regime’s methods for silencing the subversives, or rather the violence against those who spoke out against the regime. These tactics included torture, kidnapping, and other forms of violence to act against the “left-wing” guerillas. In this frame, journalists acknowledged the regime at fault, rather than the subversives as the instigator of the problem. This frame rarely appeared in coverage from the United States. On the other hand, the French paper, *Le Monde*, went as far as to interview sources who had been tortured and silenced at the hands of the regime. This frame appeared heavily throughout all time periods the study analyzed and increased during the actual 25 days of the tournament. One article, published on June 7, includes the perspective of a doctor treating tortured patients of the horrors experienced at the hands of the regime:

Anyway, I believe that torture, especially in the particularly savage and murderous forms practiced in Argentina, is the worst threat to man and that, as such, no doctor has the right to remain neutral. As doctors, we probably don’t get involved in political imprisonment or apartheid. But institutionalized torture, the assassination of honest citizens, political refugees, entire families, are horrors which should indignant one doctor more than many others.

Another article goes quotes a source who had been held captive and tortured. The man, a self-proclaimed Peronist and Christian, details a method of torture called the “submarine,” in which a plastic bag is placed over an individual’s head to prevent them from breathing:

This method was applied (and is still applied) to most of the people who are there... and are still there. I suffered from the most ruthless and savage methods. So did the two French nuns. I had the opportunity to speak to Sister Alice Domont when she was transferred to the third floor of the officer’s room where I was detained myself.

#### *Frame 5: Aspects of the Game*

The fifth frame featured coverage that emphasized the action of the game through play-by-plays and interviews with coaches, or that focused on spectators who were watching matches of the World Cup. Though the United States did not have a team competing in the Cup, coverage from *The New York Times* focused heavily on the outcome of the games and the action itself. Similarly, *Le Monde* applied this frame to cover the outcomes of games and focused on the activity through the lens of players, coaches or spectators. In an article published on June 19, journalist Catherine Humblot provided the perspective of fans watching in a sports café:

The boss, who isn’t really a boss (but it serves to drink while yelling clichés on sport, football and television) turns into referee of the match taking place on TV. Two screens placed on benches broadcast the same mages, but the soundtracks are different. At the same time, we hear the swell of the crowd when teams arrive and start playing, are added, overlapped, other voices, voiceovers consumers who give their opinion on football, on the referee, on the price of Platini..., coffee reflections commensurate with the daily violence that mingle with the confidences in voice of the arbitrator, to those, direct, of the boss-arbitrator, false and real consumers in the bistro.

#### *Frame 6: Argentina’s Image*

The final frame dealt with concern for Argentina’s image. This frame differs from international reactions to the regime, as this frame addresses directly concern for the government’s image, rather than

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international interactions with the government. *Le Monde* applied this frame most heavily and consistently throughout the three time periods this study analyzed, as seen below:

The general admitted that Argentina's international image is a cause for concern for the government. The existence of campaigns in Western Europe and North America "creates quite difficult situations," he said. The government is committed to erasing the causes that could produce this unfavorable image and develop, on the other hand, the psychological action adequate to put an end to this campaign, which really affects Argentina, concluded the General Viola (L79).

*The New York Times* addressed the use of the World Cup for image purposes as well. Juan de Onis addressed this in an opinion piece describing what the hope for a positive image is supposed to hide:

The World Cup represents the highest level of competition in what is perhaps the world's most popular sport. It should not be transformed into a public-relations tool designed to diminish public concern over the imprisonment and torture of innocent men and women. It is imperative that those who believe the ideals fostered by sport cannot be separated from a commitment to human rights make known to the Government of Argentina that it cannot enhance its international prestige by hosting or winning soccer matches as long as its practice of political imprisonment and torture continues.

### ***Le Monde Activity Compared With The New York Times***

Quantitatively, it was clear that *Le Monde* consistently covered the political issues surrounding the 1978 tournament. Evidence of this can be seen in Table 1. A majority of coverage from *Le Monde* was focused on politics, even during the duration of the World Cup matches. In fact, stories categorized as "mainly political" increased during the duration of the event. While an increase was also observed for *The New York Times*, overall, the American publication had few stories that focused on politics.

**Table 1: Type of Story**

#### **Le Monde:**

	<b>Political</b>	<b>Tournament</b>	<b>Match</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Before</b>	25 (80.6%)	6 (5.1%)	0 (0.0%)	31
<b>During</b>	27 (54.0%)	17 (34.0%)	6 (12%)	50
<b>After</b>	13 (92.8%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (7.2%)	14
<b>Total</b>	65 (68.4%)	23 (24.2%)	7 (7.3%)	95

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

	<b>Political</b>	<b>Tournament</b>	<b>Match</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Before</b>	4 (50.0%)	4 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8
<b>During</b>	6 (15.7%)	21 (55.2%)	11 (28.9%)	38
<b>After</b>	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.6%)	0 (0.0%)	3
<b>Total</b>	11 (22.0%)	27 (54.0%)	11 (22.0%)	50*

\*one story was uncategorized

**Table 2: Is human rights conflict central to the story?**

**Le Monde:**

Time Period	Number of Articles
Before	28
During	22
After	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>

**The New York Times:**

Time Period	Number of Articles
Before	3
During	2
After	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>

While some articles might have been politically oriented, fewer had the regime as a central focus. Again, 61 percent of *Le Monde* coverage centered on the regime and political unrest in Argentina. This was a stark difference from *The New York Times*, in which less than 9 percent of articles were focused on the regime. It is interesting to note that both newspapers had multiple journalists on the ground in Argentina covering the World Cup and surrounding issues.

The study also revealed a large difference between the publications in the number of articles focusing on human rights conflict (Table 2). To understand the level in which human rights was prioritized, the study also sought to analyze keywords related to the regime and understand the meaning of the prevalence of these words throughout the coverage. The study found that *Le Monde* was more direct when mentioning human rights conflict, using words that directly addressed the issues happening in Argentina, including “disappeared,” “government rule,” and “torture.” In fact, as shown in Table 3, *Le Monde* increased the use of direct language during the event. (The percentages in Table 3 represent the frequency the particular word was found in each period, in relation to the total use of the word over the entirety of the study).

**Table 3: Keywords used in Coverage in Reference to Regime****Le Monde:**

	<b>Before</b>	<b>During</b>	<b>After</b>	<b>Total Mentions</b>
<b>Disappeared, Kidnapping, Abduction</b>	42 (37.8%)	58 (52.3%)	11 (9.9%)	111
<b>Government Rule/ Junta</b>	29 (51.8%)	26 (46.4%)	1 (1.8%)	56
<b>Terrorism, Violence</b>	7 (63.6%)	1 (9.1%)	3 (27.3%)	11
<b>Execute / Assassinate</b>	15 (62.5%)	9 (37.5%)	0 (0.0%)	24
<b>Montoneros, Peronist</b>	7 (24.1%)	20 (67.0%)	2 (6.9%)	29
<b>Guerillas, Leftist</b>	4 (36.4%)	6 (54.5%)	1 (9.1%)	11
<b>Human Rights Violations, Torture</b>	42 (38.5%)	55 (50.5%)	12 (11.0%)	109

**The New York Times**

	<b>Before</b>	<b>During</b>	<b>After</b>	<b>Total Mentions</b>
<b>Disappeared, Kidnapping, Abduction</b>	6 (60.0%)	4 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10
<b>Government Rule/ Junta</b>	0 (0.0%)	7 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7
<b>Terrorism, Violence</b>	7 (63.6%)	4 (36.4%)	0 (0.0%)	11
<b>Execute / Assassinate</b>	2 (50.0%)	2 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4
<b>Montoneros, Peronist</b>	16 (76.2%)	5 (23.8%)	0 (0.0%)	21
<b>Guerillas, Leftist</b>	7 (53.8%)	6 (46.2%)	0 (0.0%)	13
<b>Human Rights Violations, Torture</b>	2 (33.3%)	4 (66.6%)	0 (0.0%)	6

The study sought to identify the significance of the location of the first mention of the regime or human rights within a story (RQ2). As shown in Table 4, *Le Monde* addressed issues with the regime early and often in coverage. For *The Times*, any mention at all within the coverage was rare.

Table 4: Location of Mention of Regime

**Le Monde:**

Location // Time	Before	During	After
Lead	11 (35.5%)	15 (30.0%)	7 (50.0%)
Top 5	16 (51.6%)	10 (20.0%)	3 (21.4%)
Middle	3 (9.6%)	5 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)
End	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
No mention	1	20 (40.0%)	4 (28.5%)
Totals	31	50	14

**The New York Times**

Location // Time	Before	During	After
Lead	2 (25.0%)	1 (2.6%)	0 (0.0%)
Top 5	2 (25.0%)	1 (2.6%)	0 (0.0%)
Middle	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.1%)	0 (0.0%)
End	1 (12.5%)	1 (2.6%)	0 (0.0%)
No mention	3 (37.5%)	34 (87.2%)	3 (100.0%)
Totals	8	39	3

**V. Discussion**

This paper sought to answer whether coverage of the 1978 World Cup prioritized human rights or sport. Based on the findings, *Le Monde* clearly focused on human rights coverage, while *The New York Times* covered the outcome of the matches. Based on previous research, it is clear that journalism often reflects foreign policy of the country at that time (Bennett et al., 2007). The findings suggest that this notion was true for both coverage from *The Times* and *Le Monde* and suggests why the French paper was able to address human rights issues more freely. While President Jimmy Carter was considered to be a champion of human rights, not all elements of the United States government were supportive of his efforts. Meanwhile, France was seeing the repercussions of the regime at home as many Argentine exiles fled to Paris and even used the city as headquarters for staging a boycott for the World Cup in the months leading up to the event (Franco & Pérez, 2007). Because of this, French journalists perhaps went to Argentina with an informed opinion of the regime, or at least were exposed to the actions of the regime, and therefore were more prepared to cover it months before being on the ground in Argentina.

Additionally, previous research surrounding mega-events like that of the World Cup indicate that coverage of these events generally remains neutral, or at least, does not challenge the events (Archetti, 2005; Curran & Liebes, 1998; Smith, 2002). The findings of this study support this claim in respect to coverage from *The New York Times*. However, findings on coverage from *Le Monde*, suggest that this may not always be true, especially in a country in which people (such as in the boycott group) had educated themselves on political activities in Argentina. *Le Monde* journalists were well exposed to the human rights issues in Argentina before arriving there to cover the Cup.

This study also sought to understand the relevance of the location of the mention of the regime as to how important the human rights were to the publication. *Le Monde* consistently mentioned these in a news story's lead, or the first five paragraphs, implying that the human rights were of utmost importance when covering the World Cup. Meanwhile, *The New York Times* mentioned the issues in the beginning of a story less than in 20 percent of all coverage, indicating less importance was placed on human rights and more on the sport itself.

The frames used by journalists during the three time periods studied (before, during, and after the games) align well with ideas proposed by previous research that sought to analyze the issues occurring around the World Cup. This study sought to understand these issues through the lens of journalists and newspaper coverage and found that the frames aligned with historical truths of Latin American instability (Robben, 2005), Argentine political power, and the Cup as a way to manipulate image (Roche, 2004; Horne, 2007; Rivenburgh, 2004).

## VI. Conclusion

This study sought to understand the way politics seep into sports coverage. Evidence suggests that coverage comes down uniquely to each news organization, as it exists inside a country where foreign policy influences thinking. Additionally, coverage is dependent upon each specific journalist and their unique circumstances.

This study found that coverage from the French paper, *Le Monde*, heavily prioritized human rights issues within its coverage of the 1978 World Cup. The U.S. paper, *The New York Times*, focused on the context of the tournament and the sport itself. Coverage from *Le Monde* consistently dove deeper than that of *The Times*, and even covered politics more during the period when the games were played. This trend was surprising, as mega-event literature suggests that the period during the event typically goes unchallenged (Roche, 2004). *Le Monde* thread politics throughout all coverage, even coverage where sport was central. Additionally, lengthy, in-depth political stories were often run side-by-side to shorter game stories.

These findings add to scholarship on mega-events and specifically a journalist's role in covering them. The findings suggest that foreign policy towards the host country is heavily reflected within the newspaper's coverage of the event. Additionally, this study provides a deeper understanding to which the journalists framed information as a way to contextualize the larger issues surrounding the World Cup.

This study was limited in its scope as it was only able to analyze two newspapers. Other countries' databases did not date as far back as those in France and The United States, and thus did not provide articles from the 1970s. Future studies could expand on this study by including, for instance, elite papers from World Cup competitors such as Argentina and Germany.

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## Fundamentals of Journalism as Portrayed in *Spotlight* and *All the President's Men* and Taught in College Journalism Classrooms

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### Abstract

*Past scholars have examined the fundamentals of journalism that were portrayed in Spotlight (2015) and All the President's Men (1976), and the importance these films had to American freedom of press. This study delves further into the two films, and compares their portrayals of journalism and its fundamentals to how they are taught in college journalism classrooms. The research for this study comes from five in-depth interviews with college journalism professors from four different American universities. The films served as a backdrop to a deep discussion about their methods for teaching specific aspects of reporting to their students. After conducting the interviews, it was determined that there was a clear parallel between the portrayals of journalism fundamentals in both films and their place in these five professor's classrooms. Additionally, there was clear consistency among all five interviews when it came to the most important fundamentals to teach journalism students in college classrooms.*

### I. Introduction

The events portrayed in the films *Spotlight* (2015) and *All the President's Men* (1976) are not only major moments in American history, but are based on monumental moments for the journalism industry. As big as these events were for journalism, the fundamentals that the reporters in each film displayed allow for the films to be useful teaching tools in college journalism classrooms. Concepts such as interview techniques, pitching stories and anonymous sourcing shine through in both films, and are topics that come up in journalism classrooms, which could provide a sense of familiarity for a journalism student experiencing these films for the first time. The basis of this research will be in-depth interviews with five journalism professors at universities across the United States. The films ultimately served as a backdrop for a much larger discussion with these professors. The discussions center on how each professor goes about teaching some of these fundamentals, regardless of whether or not the films were actually used as a teaching device.

Director and writer of *Spotlight* Tom McCarthy wanted to create a film that accurately portrayed the events he was portraying. McCarthy told *The Seattle Times*: "We just committed fully at a very early stage to be as faithful to the world of these reporters as possible" (2015). *The Seattle Times* also quoted him as saying that he wanted to avoid "sensationalizing" the events in the film. Based on the account of McCarthy, it appears that he almost wanted to take a journalistic approach to making a movie. Likewise, following the

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journalism fundamentals proved to be crucial for this research project. To prepare for the interviews with these five professors, this researcher watched both films in their entirety, taking note of any journalism fundamentals that managed to shine through, and centered the interview questions on those moments.

## II. Literature Review

Past scholars have examined the fundamentals of journalism that were portrayed in both films, each director's approach to making these films, and the importance these films had to American freedom of press. Also relevant to this study is literature on journalism pedagogy, technology, and the practice of hands-on learning for journalism students.

Drohan (2016) examined different scenes in the movie *Spotlight* and applied them to First Amendment protections and Freedom of Press, and those same scenes can also inspire one of the key questions in the interviews that were conducted for this project. In her conclusion, Drohan wrote:

While it's clear that newspapers as institutions also hold great power by their ability to set agendas through selection and placement of stories, the argument is strongly made in the film and other texts that it's more dangerous to a democratic society to censor the press than it is to give them full freedom to decide what they should or should not print and trust that the journalists working in a professional environment know their responsibility and honor the journalistic values that at the core of the profession (Drohan, 2016, p. 218-219).

Another source that informs this research was Matthew Ehrlich's book *Journalism in the Movies* (2004), where he examined the portrayal of journalism in a number of films, ranging from *Citizen Kane* to *Network*. Since the focus of this research is on nonfiction journalism films, the section that best aided in preparation for this analysis was on *All the President's Men*. Ehrlich makes several points on the reporting process of *The Washington Post's* Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein and their efforts to uncover the scandal that would lead to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. Ehrlich wrote:

The tedium of investigative reporting was shown through the reporters' constant phone calls and note taking, which [Alan] Pakula filmed in long takes and tight closeups. The filmmakers also shot on location at the Watergate and in the Library of Congress, spending \$90,000 for the overhead shot of Woodward and Bernstein sifting through library clips to try to link the White House to a smear campaign against Ted Kennedy (Ehrlich, 2004, p. 114).

The gap in technological tools between journalists in both *All the President's Men* (set in 1972-1973) and *Spotlight* (set in 2001) and journalists today is noticeable. Rather than utilizing internet databases or smartphones, Woodward and Bernstein were forced to sift through physical documents due simply to the fact that it was the early 1970s. This technological gap is worth exploring with today's journalism professors.

When looking further at the technological gap between journalists today and the journalists in the two films, another notable gap is the use of social media. Social media was not a tool that was used at all by either of the sets of journalists in both films. In 2013, Parmalee examined how social media has changed the way that journalists do their job now. In his conclusion, Parmalee wrote:

While daily work practices have changed, Twitter use does not seem to have altered other aspects of newspaper journalism, such as adherence to the norms of objectivity and gatekeeping. Participants said formal guidelines, advice from colleagues and their own sense of a journalist's role in society were the reasons they did not stray from traditional norms (Parmalee, 2013, p. 303).

When it comes to student journalists developing their skills, Valencia-Forrester (2020) noted that the most important way is through hands-on experience. In her article, she stressed how important it is for journalism students to participate in hands on experience to become better journalists and strengthen their job prospects. She mentions how it translates to the workplace:

The changing nature of the industry and its subsequent requirements on its workers mean that practice-based, experiential education is essential for tertiary journalism programmes to produce work-ready graduates. Practice-based education is increasingly being utilised in tertiary education and appears well aligned with the particular needs of students today (Valencia-Forrester, 2020, p. 708-709).

While Valencia-Forrester makes a good point on the importance of students being able to enter the workplace with experience already under their belts, it does not change the fact that the students must have the skills and fundamentals as well. The research conducted in this paper focuses heavily on the fundamentals of journalism, rather than the ways by which the students develop them.

### III. Methods

This study works to expand knowledge on journalism education in universities with insight from professors. To examine the fundamentals of journalism that are taught in college classrooms, five in-depth interviews were conducted to determine the following: which fundamentals were the most important to each professor, how the fundamentals portrayed in each film compared to their teaching of those same fundamentals, and what are the methods that these professors go about teaching these fundamentals to college journalism students. Some of the elements discussed in the interviews included, but were not limited to: interview techniques, technology, anonymous sources, ethics and story pitching. The researcher's university's institutional review board approved this study as exempt.

Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and all conducted over Zoom. *Spotlight* and *All the President's Men* served as a backdrop for the interviews, and questions covered journalism fundamentals from each of the two films. Each professor had the opportunity to give their opinion of the ways in which each film went about portraying and addressing these fundamentals, while also talking about their own approach for teaching on these topics.

These five professors came from different areas of the United States: two teach at southeastern universities, two of them teach at a midwestern university, and one of them teaches at a southern university. Additionally, all five professors have experience as professional journalists. One of the professors was the author of one of the works in the literature review, Dr. Matthew Erlich. The quotes attributed to Ehrlich in the findings are all original quotes for this study. Most of the interview subjects for this research were found through references from either the faculty mentor for this paper or through the interview subjects themselves.

Due to time constraints with a few of the interview subjects, not every single fundamental outlined in the films were covered in each interview. However, there were three elements covered in each interview, and those are the ones outlined in the findings below.

### IV. Findings

The main findings in these interviews focused on three fundamentals of the journalism profession and their depictions in the films: Interview Techniques, Story Pitching and Technology, and are discussed in the sections below.

#### ***Interview Techniques***

In *Spotlight*, one notable scene sticks out regarding interview techniques. Near the beginning of the Spotlight Team's investigation of systemic child abuse in the Catholic Church in Boston, the reporters interviewed Phil Saviano, the head of a support group for people that have been sexually abused by Catholic priests, and a survivor himself. Throughout the course of the interview, each reporter did a series of things, which included asking follow-up questions, asking clarifying questions about the details of Saviano's story, and trying to make the subject feel comfortable during the interview process. Additionally, after the interview was over, the Spotlight team debriefed in order to assess how trustworthy Saviano was as a source for their investigation. All of these topics were brought up in the interviews with the interview subjects in this

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study. Some of the professors provided insight into how they teach interview techniques in their respective classrooms. Among all of the interviews, two key ideas that were brought up are forming relationships with the interview subjects, and how to structure interview questions.

One interview subject said that, when it comes to a reporter approaching an interview, the tone and strategy can vary based on the situation and type of story that is being reported on. University of South Carolina professor Dr. Kevin Hull, who specializes in sports reporting, talked about the importance of making the interview subjects feel comfortable:

I think approaching interviews as a partnership is something that I think early journalists don't really think about. That you get so focused on asking your questions and making sure that you're okay and you get everything you need, but you have to make sure that the person that you're talking to is comfortable as well.

Additionally, Hull noted that it is important for a journalist to structure the interview questions in a way that the interview subject would be able to answer difficult questions more easily. For instance, he said that starting interviews with easy questions will help build the relationship between a reporter and the interview subject, and then the reporter can begin shifting into more difficult questions. In the interview, Hull elaborated on this further when he said:

Obviously you want to build up to that question, you want to, tell me a little bit about yourself, tell me a little bit about your story first, tell me about your childhood, and how you got in this situation... We've kind of developed this sort of connection through these four or five kinda softballish type questions, and then we can kind of go right into the big big questions, which are what the story is really about.

Another important aspect of interviewing for news stories is assessing the trustworthiness of the source, as shown in the film. Dr. Anthony Hatcher, who is a professor and chair of the Journalism department at Elon University and regularly uses *Spotlight* in his classroom, said that his own experience as a journalist reflects that importance. "I've interviewed people who sounded authoritative. And then when I looked him up, it's like, you're not the authority on this," Hatcher said. "You don't know what you're talking about. You don't have the right credentials." He would go on to say that fact checking is a key component in avoiding situations like the one he described, and that is one fundamental that he teaches in his classrooms.

### **Story Pitching**

In *All the President's Men*, the Watergate story was thrust upon Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein (1976). However, *Spotlight* was different. Early on in *Spotlight*, the head of the team, Robby Robinson, explained to editor-in-chief Marty Baron the selection process that his team goes through to find the right story to investigate. Robinson talked about how it can be a time-consuming process due to the scale of the team's investigations. Ultimately, it was Baron who nudged Robinson towards pursuing the allegation of systemic cover-ups of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church in Boston. One of the preliminary steps a reporter takes when working on a story is pitching an idea to the editor. In the interviews with professors, each of them provided their ways of finding the right kind of stories to pursue. Some important methods that some of the professors brought up were finding stories that pushed a reporter out of his/her comfort zone, as was done in *Spotlight*, and looking at the larger implications of an investigative story.

In Dr. Matthew Ehrlich's interview, he said that he regularly uses *All the President's Men* as a teaching device in his classrooms. At the beginning of the interview, he said that he is retired and is no longer a full-time professor. However, he did outline several methods for teaching his students how to find good stories to pursue as reporters. One piece of advice he gave was to breach one's comfort zone in order to find a good story. In his interview, he said: "In a classroom setting with students, a lot of times it's like, 'Don't always pick the story of least resistance.' Actually, do try to push yourself a little bit. Try to get interviews with people that you wouldn't normally come across in your everyday circles." When it comes to what it personally takes for a student journalist to find a good story, he said:

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Try to find stories that not everybody else is already doing. So that takes some pushing, and it takes on the part of the students not only a little bit of assertiveness, but also being curious and researching beyond again, just the stories that seem to be the easiest ones to do.

When a journalist tries to pick a story to pursue, he/she might look at the long-term objective and impact of the story. In *Spotlight*, Boston Globe editor Marty Baron urges the Spotlight Team to pursue the systemic abuse of children by priests in the Catholic church in Boston, rather than pursue a specific person to bring down (2015). Professor Brant Houston, who specializes in investigative reporting and teaches at the University of Illinois, said the following:

What's developed over time in investigative reporting, is looking at the systemic problems. Not doing what they talked at one point in the old days [as] inappropriately 'taking scalps.' That's getting bad people fired. That might happen, but what you're really looking at is, why has a particular problem, an issue, systematically got out of control? Where has actually the system broken down?

Houston essentially echoed Baron's sentiment by saying that it is important to look at the bigger picture when pursuing an investigative story. In *Spotlight*, Baron says the consequences of going after one person in particular is that the broken system will continue to operate the same way that it was before.

### **Technology**

In terms of technology, the field of journalism has come a long way since the events that took place in *Spotlight* and *All the President's Men*. In both films, reporters spent a painstaking amount of time sifting through physical documents in order to conduct their research, and both of the teams conducted their investigations prior to social media in America. Today, journalists have a number of technological tools at their disposal in order to help them tell a complete and accurate story. Each professor in this study talked about the ways in which reporting is different today because of technology, and just how big of a role technology plays in each of their respective classrooms. One key takeaway on this topic is that the importance of in-person interaction and note-taking are still key components to journalism, despite the increase in technology at a reporter's disposal.

Professor Deborah Nelson teaches journalism at the University of Maryland and is a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter. Nelson said that the use of social media can prove to be a beneficial tool for reporters. Specifically, she said that social media platforms have been useful to her students on a reporting project in finding people that are affected by eviction, but she also noted that it is important to teach students to not invade people's privacy while using these tools.

While there is more technology at a reporter's disposal now than there was in the eras of *All the President's Men* and *Spotlight*, that does not mean that some of the techniques shown are outdated, especially when it comes to notetaking, according to some of the interview subjects for this study. Hatcher advises his students how to conduct interviews: "Record your interviews, but also take notes during your interviews ... I don't know how many of them do it, but I really stress that while you're interviewing somebody, especially if you're sitting down in person." In terms of the type of notes that the student reporter should take, Hatcher said that it is helpful to use an audio recorder and look at the recorder for a timestamp on a particular quote, which will make it easier to find that moment in the recording after the interview is over.

### **The Most Important Fundamentals**

At the beginning of each interview, before either of the films were even mentioned, each professor was asked to elaborate on what he/she believed to be the most important fundamentals to instill in students in a college journalism classroom. Nearly all of the professors gave the same answer, which was that accuracy was one of the most important fundamentals of journalism that they teach.

While most of the professors brought up accuracy as the key component of any journalism classroom, Brant Houston brought up three elements of investigative reporting as a response to this question. In the interview, Houston said: "One [component] is documents, or data. A second one is interviewing people. And the third one is observation -- that is getting out in the field. And with those three things, or at least two out of three, you can establish some real credibility." In addition, Houston also noted that being fair and balanced in

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one's reporting is another important fundamental that he teaches in his classroom.

Ehrlich did not disagree with the idea of being balanced but, rather, said that there is a certain point where a reporter will try to be balanced when it is not necessary to do so:

The overarching mission of journalism is truth telling. So, making sure that the facts are correct, making sure that the reporting is trying to be fair without going overboard in presenting false balance, or always assuming that every perspective on a story is equally valid. Because we are seeing increasingly that that's not the case.

In addition to accuracy and fairness, some other fundamentals that the five professors mentioned in response to this question were ethics, examining why a story is important and making sure to verify information before rushing to break a news story.

## V. Conclusion

Based on the interviews with these college professors for this study, there are a number of key takeaways that can be drawn about *Spotlight* and *All the President's Men*, as well as the way that journalism is taught in college classrooms. Not every professor employed the films in their respective classrooms, but there are fundamentals and lessons that the professors teach that are consistent with the ones that are portrayed in the films. Additionally, when setting aside the films entirely, the professors all gave fairly similar answers in regard to how they go about teaching fundamentals such as interview techniques and story pitching. However, the one limitation of this study is the limited number of interview subjects. A larger number of respondents would provide a broader perspective on a number of different areas of teaching journalism.

It was clear based on interviews that the fundamentals portrayed in the two films were consistent with what these professors teach in their classrooms. In a few instances, some of the professors expressed praise of the films and their honest portrayals of journalism. In fact, Ehrlich said the following about both *Spotlight* and *All the President's Men*:

I think they show in a fairly accurate, straightforward manner, what journalism at its best can do, and not necessarily save the republic. You know, the criticisms which I talked about a little bit in the book, *Journalism in the Movies*. Part of the criticisms of *All the President's Men* is that it makes Woodward and Bernstein too heroic, and it makes journalism too all powerful. And it may, in fact, have encouraged journalists to be too cocky, and thinking that they could accomplish more than they could reasonably accomplish and kind of be too big for their britches. And I would argue that the movie actually suggests that journalism can, you know, turn attention to things that are really important and cannot be cowed by people in power, who want to squelch it ... or demonize journalism.

Finally, when examining what these journalism professors deemed to be the most important fundamentals to teach in their classes, the responses were remarkably similar. First and foremost, the most important takeaway for journalism students to take from their classes is being accurate in their reporting. All five professors stressed how important it is that the reporters relay correct information to their audiences.

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## Naturalism in Cinematography: Examining the Work of Emmanuel Lubezki

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### Abstract

*Films would not have the same emotional and visual impact on viewers without a cinematographer. Cinematographers are responsible for eliciting audience emotion through various camera techniques. They do not receive significant recognition from the general audience for their contributions to films. Emmanuel Lubezki is a contemporary filmmaker with many credits and awards to support his mastery in cinematography. This study analyzes six films that Lubezki shot for three distinct directors. These films each earned him an Academy Award nomination for Best Cinematography. The findings suggest a feeling of naturalism to Lubezki's visual style across all film titles.*

### I. Introduction

In Alfonso Cuarón's dystopian thriller *Children of Men* (2006), Theo Faron (played by Clive Owen), sits in the back of a car alongside two other characters. In front are the driver, Luke (played by Chiwetel Ejiofor), and Julian (played by Julianne Moore). They are on a paved road in a wooded area. Theo and Julian banter with each other, then blow a ping pong ball back and forth. The passengers are laughing. However, they are interrupted when a flaming car rolls down the hill and crashes into the road. A crowd of people rush down the hill and start attacking the car. Luke puts the car in reverse and presses the gas pedal. The crowd runs after the car. A motorcyclist catches up to the car and shoots Julian in the neck, killing her. In defense, Theo swings the car door open, flipping the motorcycle. Soon, the car passes a group of police cars going the other direction. However, one police car turns to chase them. The police catch up and stop the car to interrogate the group. Luke pulls out a gun and shoots the two officers. The car drives off as the officers' bodies remain in the street.

As described, this scene seems like a typical car chase scene with multiple fast cuts and insert shots. While this scene has the complexity and flair of a blockbuster film, the execution is far from typical. This scene was captured in one seamless take—a shot duration of nearly four minutes. The visual style is similar to that of a documentary. The camera has a handheld feeling of movement, simply following the action without the use of multiple cuts. This long, documentary-style take is the work of Emmanuel Lubezki. His desire to push technical and visual boundaries has earned him a place as one of the most influential contemporary cinematographers.

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A cinematographer works closely with the director to shape the visual look and film of a film, or film language. The cinematographer is responsible for crafting the film's visual style in addition to making technical decisions concerning the camera and lighting equipment. Lubezki has been nominated for an Academy Award in Cinematography eight times. In 2014, he won for the first time for *Gravity* (2013). The next year, Lubezki won again for the cinematography of *Birdman* (2014). And the following year, he won his third Academy Award for his work on *The Revenant* (2015). His three-year run of winning the Oscar for Best Achievement in Cinematography was a first in the award's history (Busch, 2016). Lubezki's historical victories demonstrate his mastery of cinematography.

This paper intends to explore Lubezki's visual philosophy through his use of composition lighting, camera angle, camera movement, and shot duration. These decisions are made in tandem with the director so that, along with the narrative, the film has a significant visual impact on viewers. For a film to be impactful, the visuals must contribute to the story and characters. This visual impact would not be significant without the contributions of a cinematographer.

## II. Literature Review

### *Components of Cinematography*

A film without cinematography is simply a screenplay. Johanna Heer, an Austrian cinematographer, describes the craft as “a fascination with drama. The camera transforms the script onto the frame” (Heer, 1982, p. 48). Cinematographers transform a screenplay through the key components of cinematography. The cinematographer takes *mise-en-scène*, camera movement, and lighting into consideration when developing the visual style of a film.

*Mise-en-scène* is a term traditionally used in theater but has found another meaning in film. The term “*mise-en-scène*” translates to “staging in action” (Columbia University, n.d.). Early cinema was shot much like a stage production, so the term followed. Everything within the frame is considered to be a film's *mise-en-scène*. This component is important because it “gives a fuller illusion of life to the cinematic rendering” (Greven, 2015, p. 77). The visual components within a frame help render an alternative world in film. Famed director Martin Scorsese said, “cinema is a matter of what's in the frame and what's out” (Brody, 2011, para. 6). Components such as location, set design, and costumes are important aspects of the production that ultimately end up in the frame.

Additionally, the key aspects of cinematography are included in the *mise-en-scène* as well. The camera placement, camera angle, and composition should complement the production design and wardrobe, furthering the story. The cinematographer, with the director, makes these decisions relating to the camera placement, angle, and composition in order to show the spaces and details of the film's world.

Camera movement is how the camera moves through the cinematic space. It allows the audience to feel like they are immersed and moving with characters. Movement can also help convey the emotions of the characters or contribute to the pacing of the story. The movement can be as simple as the camera remaining in one position and tilting up and down or panning left and right. However, it can also include crane or dolly movements where the entire camera's placement shifts. The first significant camera move was operated by Eugenio Promio, who would mount the camera on a moving train, or other moving automobiles (Columbia University, n.d.). It would allow spectators to have the sensation of moving with the objects. But now, with more advanced technology, cinematographers can control movement through robotic machines or computer-generated imagery, or CGI (Columbia University, n.d.). Since films are a two-dimensional medium, camera movement helps establish a three-dimensional world through its exploration of space.

The most important role of a cinematographer is arguably determining the lighting of a film. Described as being “painters with light,” cinematographers must determine the quality, quantity, source, direction, and hue of light in a scene (Clarke, 2017, p. 110). Light is how filmmakers traditionally exposed celluloid film to create an image. However, it is also effective for dramatic storytelling. The lighting contributes to the tone of a scene or movie, creating a dramatic—or undramatic—atmosphere (Columbia University, n.d.). For example, the film noir genre enforced its dramatic tone with low key lighting (Columbia University, n.d.). These films are generally pretty dark, but the objects and people in the light are brightly lit. Film noir filmmakers play with light

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and shadows creating a dramatic effect. This creates great contrast and a feeling of suspense and drama. Contrastingly, high key lighting is when everything is evenly lit providing very little contrast between light and dark. It occurs frequently in the comedy genre of film and television.

The role of a cinematographer cannot be reduced to simply capturing images. Johanna Heer writes, “a cinematographer who is exclusively interested in visuals never can be a good cinematographer. The cinematographer has to have an awareness, an interest, a concern for the philosophy, the ideas, the politics of the film as these areas are naturally also portrayed and conveyed in the cinematography” (Heer, 1982, p. 69). In addition to visual acuteness, a cinematographer must understand dramatic structure and storytelling.

### ***The Director-Cinematographer Relationship***

To the general audience, the role of cinematographer is often overlooked. Most of the praise goes toward the actors and director. While the director is responsible for envisioning the world, the cinematographer helps execute that vision. The American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) is an exclusive organization of cinematographers dedicated to “the purpose of advancing the art and science of cinematography and bringing cinematographers together to exchange ideas, discuss techniques and promote the motion picture as an art form” (Birchard, n.d.). The ASC attributes the overall look of the film to the cinematographer (Misek, 2010). The cinematographer sets the look of the images based on the director’s vision.

The film industry is a collaborative workforce, so the cinematographer and director must inspire and understand one another to create a strong, cohesive piece. Johanna Heer argues that the director-cinematographer is a “delicate bond” that must “be experienced as an equal relationship” (Heer, 1982, p. 69). The ASC stresses three words to explain the craft of cinematography: loyalty, progress, artistry (Birchard, n.d.). The loyalty aspect is important when collaborating with the director.

Within the collaboration framework, the lines of film auteurship can also become blurred. As part of film criticism, the Auteur Theory “holds that a director’s film reflects the director’s creative vision, as if they were the primary ‘auteur.’ In spite of—and sometimes even because of—the production of the film as part of an industrial process, the auteur’s creative voice is distinct enough to shine through all kinds of studio interference and through the collective process” (Chaudhuri, 2013, p. 80). Sometimes it is easy to determine the director of a film based on visual auteurship. However, it is also possible to determine the cinematographer based on the visual look. This idea is true for Lubezki’s filmography. The modern cinematographer is no longer just a technician or craftsman, but “a skilled professional making a valuable contribution to the cinema – a contribution that could best be described as aesthetic” (Keating, 2010, pp. 15-16).

### ***Lubezki’s Partnerships***

Terrence Malick, Alfonso Cuarón, and Alejandro González Iñárritu have one thing in common: their frequent collaboration with cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki. These directors are arguably considered to be auteur filmmakers. However, Lubezki has been able to meet their visions while maintaining his distinct aesthetic preferences.

Terrence Malick and Emmanuel Lubezki have collaborated on four feature-length films: *The Tree of Life* (2011), *To the Wonder* (2012), *Knight of Cups* (2015), *Song to Song* (2017), and *The New World* (2005). Lubezki earned Oscar nominations for Best Cinematography for his work on *The Tree of Life* and *The New World*. Malick’s films are known for the use of natural settings (Trumbore, 2011). His films are less plot-driven and pose more philosophical questions (Graham-Dixon, 2017). Because of the poetic nature of Malick’s films, Lubezki has more ability to showcase his visual preferences. Lubezki enjoys working with Malick and said, “he is somebody looking to tell stories with a pure filmic approach where the movies are not based on theatre, but are much more purely cinematographic” (Lubezki, 2011, p. 22).

Lubezki describes Malick’s storytelling approach as being built up of “those little moments” (Lubezki, 2011, p. 22). While shooting *The Tree of Life*, Lubezki felt like the pair were making a documentary film. The sets are full of “chaos” but in a positive way (Lubezki, 2011). Malick attempts to create organic, spontaneous moments in life so that the camera perceives just that.

Alfonso Cuarón and Emmanuel Lubezki have collaborated on six films: *Love in the Time of Hysteria* (1991), *A Little Princess* (1995), *Great Expectations* (1998), *Y Tu Mamá También* (2001), *Children of Men* (2006), and *Gravity* (2013). Lubezki earned Oscar nominations for *A Little Princess* and another for *Children of Men*. He won his first Oscar for his work on *Gravity*.

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Unlike Malick, Cuarón's stories vary from project to project. Lubezki describes him as being a reptile: "When he changes his skin, every time he finishes a movie, his next will be completely different from the previous one. This movie (*Gravity*) was very different and I was excited to work on it" (Thompson, 2018, para. 3). Cuarón has an affinity for a long shot duration. While *Gravity* and *Children of Men* have different film languages, they both employ long takes.

Cuarón's films *Y Tu Mamá También* and *Children of Men* have the documentary sensation similar to Lubezki's work in the Malick films. The camera takes an objective perspective. Cuarón describes the camera as "not trying to make a judgment or a commentary, that everything there would be just the commentary itself" (Thompson, 2018). The films were inspired by Gillo Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* (1967), which Cuarón said they "loved for its naturalism and documentary feel" (Udden, 2009). Lubezki mostly used available light, handheld camera movement, and allowed light to enter the barrel of the lens similar to a documentary. However, they had the camera equipment and post-production resources of a blockbuster film (Udden, 2009).

A less frequent, but recent, collaborator of Lubezki is Alejandro G. Iñárritu. Lubezki was the cinematographer for Iñárritu's *Birdman* (2015) and *The Revenant* (2016). For both of these collaborations, Lubezki won Oscars for Best Cinematography. Iñárritu's film world "is one where almost no one can escape the wrath of life unharmed" (Ruimy, 2016, para. 3). Iñárritu's characters suffer from the brutality of humanity, so the cinematography must reflect those hardships.

When Lubezki first started working with Iñárritu, he employed, "rhythmic long takes and surrealist imagery... What they created was a new language for cinema, one in which the cinematographer had as much of a role in the creative process as the director" (Ruimy, 2016, para. 5).

Similar to his long takes for Cuarón, Lubezki shot *Birdman* as if it was one continuous take. They did not shoot the full movie in one take, but most of the sequences range from 10 to 15 minutes (Picone, 2015). In *Birdman*, Lubezki allowed for lens flares, adding another point of visual interest in the frame.

While Lubezki has his aesthetic preferences, he is also able to adjust them accordingly. "The director is the author of the movie, so in the end I'll do whatever he wants me to do," Lubezki said. "But my job is to tell him what I see, and tell him honestly. Especially before you're doing the shooting, you have to be absolutely sincere" (Ordo, 2015, para. 17).

This study examines Lubezki's works and observes how his preferred approaches to cinematography. This study expands knowledge about the craft of cinematography, and also takes a critical look at one of the most successful cinematographers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Research Questions**

The following research attempts to answer these questions:

RQ1: How does Lubezki approach the basic aspects of cinematography?

RQ2: What is Lubezki's distinct visual style?

RQ3: How does Lubezki's visual style vary when working with different directors?

## **III. Methods**

This study is a critical film analysis of six films that credit Emmanuel Lubezki as the cinematographer. These films were selected because Lubezki collaborated with the three directors—Malick, Cuarón, and Iñárritu—discussed in the literature review and they include his Oscar nominations for Best Cinematography. Because of Lubezki's critical recognition, it only seems sensible to analyze these films to fully understand his aesthetic preferences.

This paper will only examine the films' cinematography, analyzing the key aspects of cinematography: mise-en-scène, camera movement, and lighting. In addition to analyzing the cinematography, this paper will take into account the context in which they are used. The directors' own visual preferences will also be mentioned to explore Lubezki's consistencies and differences. Table 1 displays the movie, year, and director of the films studied.

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**Table 1. Movie Title, Year, and Director**

Movie	Year	Director
<i>The New World</i>	2006	Terrence Malick
<i>Children of Men</i>	2007	Alfonso Cuarón
<i>The Tree of Life</i>	2012	Terrence Malick
<i>Gravity</i>	2013	Alfonso Cuarón
<i>Birdman</i>	2015	Alejandro González Iñárritu
<i>The Revenant</i>	2016	Alejandro González Iñárritu

## IV. Discussion

### *Lubezki’s Cinematography Techniques*

#### **A. *Mise-en-scène***

Terrence Malick’s *The New World* (2006) is described by film critic Mark Cousins as “having paradise and watching it slip away” (Cousins, 2007, para. 5). Because of this, Lubezki makes sure that nature and the environment are dominant within the frame.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

As seen in Figures 1 and 2, the characters Pocahontas and John Smith, the two protagonists of the film, are taking up a significant amount of space within the frame. Malick wants to tell a story about the developing relationship between these two people. He wants to portray the idea that the world is what connects them. Lubezki is responsible for getting this idea across, so the environment is always shown, even during intimate character moments, similar to Figures 1 and 2. The use of a wider lens allows Lubezki to capture more of the natural landscape, which contributes to the story of English settlers discovering this “new world.” Viewers are captivated by the landscape, similar to how John Smith and the settlers felt upon discovery. Landscape and nature create the *mise-en-scène* in this film.

Similarly, in Malick’s *Tree of Life* (2012), Lubezki highlights nature in each frame. Because this is an abstract, philosophical film, Lubezki had the freedom to shoot cinematic landscapes including only nature within the frame as shown in Figures 3 and 4.



Figure 3.

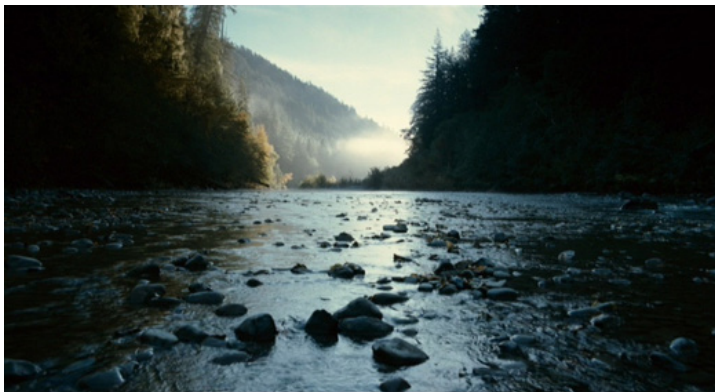


Figure 4.

While both films are high-budget studio productions, Lubezki's work with Cuarón differs between the two films *Children of Men* (2007) and *Gravity* (2013) (Isaacs, 2016). *Children of Men* takes place in a dystopian universe. To capture this world, Lubezki ensures that the objects within the frame add to the fact that the characters are living in a dystopic environment.



Figure 5.

Because the dystopic world is important to the narrative, Lubezki often isolates Theo from the chaotic environment to show his sense of loneliness. In Figure 5, Lubezki uses surface division to show Theo's isolation from the rest of the group. The wall divides Theo mentally and physically from his peers. Instead of simply showing Theo in the frame, Lubezki ensures that Theo's group appears in the background separated by a physical wall to have a deeper visual and emotional impact on viewers.

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In contrast to the previous films, Lubezki relied on visual effects artists to capture the world in *Gravity* since it takes place in space. Benjamin B., senior European correspondent for *American Cinematographer*, notes that Lubezki creates a “beautiful but dangerous environment of space with a groundbreaking level of realism and detail” (B., 2013, para. 2).



Figure 6.

While realism and detail are often attributed to Lubezki’s style, the environment captured in Figure 6 is not real. Except for the actors, the entire image is made up of CGI, which contrasts the documentary feel of *Children of Men*. The increased presence of virtual space presents a new role for the cinematographer. A cinematographer must learn how to adapt to working with visual effects artists. During the *Gravity* production process, Lubezki said, “I had to learn to use some new tools that are part of what cinematography is becoming” (B, 2013, para. 4). With the use of visual effects, critics question the artistry in cinematography now that CGI is becoming more prevalent to build a world.

Despite the prominence of CGI, Lubezki must still be strategic in his camera placement and movement. Realistically, space simply looks empty and black, so Lubezki had to find a way to make space visually interesting. To pique interest, he used Earth as the background and framed the actors and subjects in front of it. The use of Earth as the background provides visual consistency and guarantees visual interest throughout the film.

Lubezki’s only films with Alejandro G. Iñárritu earned him two Academy Awards for Best Cinematography. *Birdman* (2015) follows the story of washed-up actor Riggan who hopes to jumpstart his career again through a Broadway production. This film is a character study, so the camera focuses on Riggan and attempts to capture his inner feelings.



Figure 7.

Lubezki’s use of wide lenses for close-ups creates a claustrophobic feeling for both Riggan and the audience, as in Figure 7. It conveys the feeling that the world is closing in on him and a sense of hopelessness. “The wide lenses allowed me to be very, very close to him but still feel the [others] around him,” Lubezki said. “In a normal movie, a close-up is a couple feet from the actor. Here the camera is probably 3 inches from his eye; you can see microscopic performance” (Ordo, 2015, para. 8). The camera closely follows the performance of Riggan allowing the audience to study the character and his acting with a careful eye.

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Figure 8.

*The Revenant*, shown in Figure 8, tells the story of frontiersman Hugh Glass and his quest for vengeance and survival. Lubezki focuses on both Hugh and the environment in this film. Both character and environment are important in telling the story. In Figure 8, Hugh is the main point of focus, but the environment is still visible and apparent. “We wanted a strong, visceral, immersive and naturalistic experience for the audience – not just to follow the journey of the central character, but to make it feel as if it was actually happening in front of their eyes,” Lubezki said, “We wanted the audience to feel the sheer cold, to see the breath of the actors on the lens, and experience the powerful emotions in the story” (*British Cinematographer*, 2017, para. 5). In both of his films with Iñárritu, Lubezki uses a wide lens and gets close to the actor to capture every little movement and expression of the character.

### **B. Camera Movement**

There is one thing in common through Lubezki’s work as a cinematographer. The camera is never still. The camera is always moving in some way. For Malick’s films, Lubezki’s camera operator Jörg Widmer said, “When actors move their hands and touch each other, you can follow the hand, and then you come back to a close-up, so if it’s all in the movement it looks so natural. It’s like the flow of water. It’s really a very immediate way of telling a story. So, you can totally react to whatever they do” (O’Falt, 2020, para. 21). Lubezki establishes a sense of freedom by reacting to character movements rather than anticipating them.

Lubezki followed this same philosophy in *The Revenant* but with minor adjustments. Iñárritu wanted the film to look like it was unfolding in real-time (Salisbury, 2016). Lubezki used handheld movement that typically reminds viewers of a raw, documentary feeling. “Alejandro likes the camera to look slightly accidental, as if you have maybe missed something, or you arrive slightly late – it gives the audience a feeling of the suddenness of events,” Lubezki said, “It’s very different to the style in a Terry Malick movie, where the camera is more lyrical, conscious and descriptive” (*British Cinematographer*, 2017, para. 11). When working with both Malick and Iñárritu, Lubezki uses the camera to react to the character’s movements. However, in *The Revenant*, the movement is a little rougher and sharper. While in Malick films, the movement is more refined.

In his films with Cuarón and Iñárritu, Lubezki shot long takes of continuous movement. The long take in *Children of Men* was described in the introduction of this paper. This camera movement was achieved through an electronic camera rig. The camera was able to follow the action of the vehicle by using this electronic rig. Cuarón’s *Gravity* does the same thing and opens up with a 13-minute-long continuous take (B., 2013). It is a view of Earth from space. The camera slowly gets closer to the space station as it reveals the astronauts. Benjamin B. writes, “the 3-D feature is enhanced by long takes and fluid camerawork that immerse the viewer” (B., 2013, para. 2).

Iñárritu’s *Birdman* is intended to look and feel like one continuous shot the entire time. Lubezki had to strategically shoot the film in order to allow the editors to cut seamlessly between each shot. He only included movements that felt motivated given the context of the story. In an interview, Lubezki said, “I also wanted to be sure that we weren’t doing that just to do it, the camera movement was organic to the story. I hate the word organic, but it was really part of the story, part of the energy of the characters ... We added a couple of cuts, but the movements help get the audience into the world of the characters, so the movie feels immersive and immediate” (ARRI, 2014, para. 7). In these films, Lubezki created a more immersive experience through his use of long takes and motivated camera movement.

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### C. Lighting

The hue, quality, direction, and type of light are all important decisions that a cinematographer must make when lighting a scene. However, this study is not a technical study of Lubezki's methods, so the research only includes a general discussion of lighting. When Lubezki lights a scene, he usually opts for available—natural—or practical lights—lights visible within the frame. He only seems to add artificial lighting when needed.

In both *The New World* and *Tree of Life*, Lubezki used available light and practical light. Since both films stress the role of nature, it is a logical choice to use sunlight as the main source of light.



Figure 9.

Figure 9 shows Mrs. O'Brien—played by Jessica Chastain—in *Tree of Life*. She is positioned right beside a window. Aside from the fact that she is looking out the window, she is positioned there because it provides light on her face. Lubezki uses the sunlight coming through the window to light the right side of her face. However, he does not add any fill light to light the left side of her face. It remains dark like the rest of the room. The high contrast in the lighting on Mrs. O'Brien's face is typically used to show a character's uncertainty in life.



Figure 10.

In *Children of Men*, many scenes take place outside or in buildings with large windows; therefore, Lubezki has the opportunity to use available light often. Because there are many car scenes in this film, the easiest way to avoid moving lights with the vehicle is to light with the sun. In Figure 10, Theo's face is dark because the sun is behind him. However, the sun lights the outline of the car and the field behind him. Because Lubezki aims the barrel of the lens at the sun, the light creates a lens flare, which adds another point of visual interest and sense of naturalism.

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Figure 11.

*The Revenant*, as shown in Figure 11, only used available light, which limited the number of daily shooting hours (*British Cinematographer*, 2017). Lubezki had to consider the sun's position, quality, and hue of light at each point in the day to create the look of this film. On set, Iñárritu had the actors rehearse until the perfect light presented itself, which then prompted Lubezki to roll the camera (Salisbury, 2016). In Figure 11, Hugh is lit from behind by the sun. The sun creates an outline around Hugh's profile and adds several highlights to the high points of Hugh's face. Similar to Figure 10, Lubezki aimed the lens barrel at the sun, thus outlining the character and creating a lens flare. The sun's high position in the sky lights the entire landscape as well as Hugh. Lubezki captured the vast environment in which Hugh is surrounded. Through this lighting, Lubezki emphasizes Hugh's isolation in the wilderness.

In *Birdman*, many of the scenes take place inside, so the opportunities for available light are more restricted. However, this film is centered on a Broadway production. This allowed Lubezki to utilize stage lighting and practical lighting to capture the image.



Figure 12.

Figure 12 shows Riggan in a stage production. The theater lights in the background are not doing much to light the scene, but they do create an atmosphere. The light exposing the characters is coming from off the screen, but it is clear that it is a stage spotlight. The spotlight lights the side of the characters opposite to the camera. Similar to Figures 10 and 11, the light hits the highest points of the face and body, creating an outline around the characters. These three stills also show a visual preference that Lubezki uses: the lens flare.

In contrast to the previously described lighting techniques, *Gravity* uses artificial lighting. This decision is logical considering the film is shot in studio spaces and visual effects make up a large part of the mise-en-scène, such as in Figure 13.



Figure 13.

Lubezki lit the exterior space scenes by using nearly 2 million lights, which is a laborious and innovative practice (Picone, 2014). “In space, there is no atmosphere or water vapor to reflect and refract particles of light. All light from the sun and spacecraft are direct and unfiltered, a unique look rarely as realistically portrayed as in *Gravity*,” New York Film Academy writer Jack Picone said. “By using 1.8 million individual LED lights, the film was able to make space look more like space, even on a subconscious level the audience may not fully realize, which furthers the immersion into the world of the movie” (Picone, 2014, para. 6).

Although *Gravity* relies heavily on the work of visual effects artists, Lubezki is still able to maintain his preferences for naturalism. In this film, Lubezki employs his signature use of lens flares to make the environment and its light seem real. He strategically uses artificial lighting to achieve the most natural-looking light. Space films have a little more freedom in lighting since many people do not know what the available light looks like in space, but Lubezki stays true to his aesthetic style, opting for naturalism.

### ***Lubezki's Cinematography Style***

While Lubezki collaborates with varying directors on differing stories, there is one commonality among his films: a sense of naturalism. His visual style changes depending on the film's story, but there are key components to his approach to the craft that remain the same. As previously stated, Lubezki often employs long takes, lens flares, and handheld movement often associated with documentary filmmaking. Although Lubezki employs CGI and new technology to supplement his cinematography, he makes sure that his images are realistic and give off the sense of being natural.

Lubezki's 2015 Oscar win for *Birdman* proved that “a return to muscular methods in natural conditions can reinvigorate an aesthetic” (Clarke, 2017, p. 121). Even with the expanding digital capabilities for film, Lubezki's realistic approach to cinematography is still relevant and appreciated in contemporary cinema.

Lubezki's ability to capture human emotion and seemingly organic moments while employing the craft of cinematography is why he is considered an influential contemporary cinematographer. He has a deep understanding of how light works and how to use film aesthetics, such as *mise-en-scène*, movement, and lighting to elevate a director's vision and narrative.

## **V. Conclusion**

This study has its limitations, such as the sample size. The study only observes six films, but Lubezki has served on 46 titles as the cinematographer. This study also does not take into consideration other genres of work he has worked on, such as commercial work. This research uses criticism from professional filmmakers and film critics and does not present any general audience opinions, which presents another limitation of the study. There are multiple approaches for a study of Lubezki's work, and this one analyzes only the top critically acclaimed films. This study should be considered as a general, introductory analysis of Lubezki's work.

It is clear that Lubezki has proven himself a master in cinematography. He can work with directors well, furthering the film's narrative and causing an emotional impact. With his use of *mise-en-scène*, camera movement, and lighting, he is able to create a sense of realism and naturalism when capturing a film's world and its characters. Since many of these films are character-driven, Lubezki is influenced to capture images that truly capture the characters' emotions and journey. He knows how to tell a story in the most natural,

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organic manner. It is arguable that Lubezki has his own signature and sense of auteurship based on the consistencies of his preferences through these six films. He will continue to provide a sense of naturalism through his preferred cinematography techniques in his future work.

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# Identifying Cues that Indicate Authenticity in Brand Storytelling Advertisements

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## Abstract

*Authentic brand storytelling advertisements have proven to be successful in elevating a brand's likability and consumer purchase intent. However, cues within these ads that indicate authenticity to consumers have yet to be identified. This research used focus groups to uncover consumer definitions of authenticity and identify what cues in brand storytelling advertisements signal authenticity to audiences. This study uncovered four patterns in advertisements that lead to perceived authenticity: consumer relatability, messaging indicating action, an appeal to empathy, and company self-awareness. This study benefits marketers and the advertising industry by identifying cues that help creators develop authentic brand stories.*

## I. Introduction

Advertising has long been a productive communications tool within companies' marketing portfolios to drive consumers to purchase products or think in certain ways about brands. From sales announcements to comical or dramatic scenarios, ads fill our screens, televisions, and mailboxes, exposing the average American to approximately 5,000 ads per day (Simpson, 2017). Due to this oversaturation, traditional advertising methods have become less effective in connecting with consumers. Brands needed to better relate with their audiences and differentiate themselves from competitors, particularly due to the shift in purchasing power to millennial and Generation Z buyers. These two demographic groups care deeply about brand values and want to support companies that share their views. Further, they do not want to support brands that do not reflect their values. A study done by *PR Daily* found that 83% of Millennials want to purchase from companies that align with their values (Kitterman, 2020). In order to relate to these audiences, companies had to find a way to communicate their brand values and-positions on social issues to their consumers. This resulted in the rise of using brand storytelling as a more genuine form of advertising.

This kind of advertising uses a creative approach and a narrative structure to tell a story or convey a non-product focused message. These ads can be used to reveal a more in-depth and meaningful expression of a brand, often taking a stance on social issues. Rather than directly selling a product, these ads indirectly sell their brand through stories that reinforce the company's values or role in driving social change forward. This phenomenon was first introduced in the 1960s during the creative revolution as advertisers began to use a "soft sell" approach that indirectly promoted their products with more subtlety and nuance. Over time, this

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strategy continued to grow as companies took greater creative liberties to tell deeper and more meaningful stories behind their brands.

A company that has been an industry leader in this phenomenon is Nike, with its brand stories featuring Colin Kaepernick kneeling in protest of police brutality. The series of ads were released in 2016 and featured the tagline, “Believe in something, even if it means risking everything,” (Papenfuss, 2019). These advertisements surprised the industry with their willingness to confront a major controversial issue. The ad focused on the story, emphasizing Nike’s belief in equality and only acknowledged the brand and logo at the end. While it was met with some controversy, Nike saw a \$6 billion increase in revenue and a 5% increase in its stock price in the quarter after the advertisement was released. This further underscored the power of storytelling, communicating brand values, and a belief in a narrative structure. Other brands would follow Nike’s lead and create similar storytelling ads.

While this kind of advertising can be extremely effective, authenticity is a key determinant in whether or not this communication will be well received. The messaging is reflective of a brand’s identity, so it needs to be genuine and representative of the brand’s or company’s beliefs and values. Authentic brand storytelling can drive brand loyalty and increase sales, while inauthentic brand storytelling can be detrimental to a company, often damaging its reputation and consumer support. The need for authenticity is generally understood by advertisers, yet many brand storytelling advertisements or films fall short. This research seeks to identify the cues in brand storytelling ads that indicate authenticity and the patterns in these communications that make them successful.

## II. Literature Review

Prior research has been conducted on brand storytelling effectiveness and why its ability to showcase brand values is beneficial. Furthermore, researchers have examined what authenticity means and why consumers look for authenticity in the brands they purchase. Scholars highlight this important connection between brand storytelling and authenticity and the role this plays in the ultimate effectiveness of advertisements.

### ***Conceptualizing Brand Storytelling***

Brand storytelling has made a significant impact on the advertising industry and the way in which marketers convey their brand messages to audiences. This kind of communication follows a narrative form in order to communicate a brand’s values or positioning, often focusing on the ethical, social, or moral meaning behind the brand (Rush, 2015). By transporting audiences into a narrative-based world, consumers are generally more engaged, thus are more likely to create a positive association with the brand and to be more favorably disposed to brand purchase (Chiu, Hsieh, & Kuo, 2012). The fact is that consumers are more likely to purchase a brand to which they feel emotionally attached.

Storytelling provides the ability to form emotional connections by humanizing the traditional advertisements consumers typically view. In being genuine, emotional, and even nostalgic in their brand communications, advertisers are able to get consumers to connect (Rush, 2015). According to *Ad Age*, people no longer want to feel sold to, but rather they want to do business with companies “that are authentic, that stand for something meaningful, and that demonstrate these ideas in everything they do,” (Heidersbach, 2019). The narrative form of storytelling allows companies to demonstrate their deeper values to a consumer.

It follows then that marketers are more successful when the consumers’ needs and wants drive their advertising strategies (Ambiola, 2009). Storytelling allows brands to show consumers their story, values, and product benefits in a way that does not seem forceful. Being able to communicate a deeper side of brands beyond product attributes or benefits advertising gives businesses a compelling competitive advantage in the market by allowing them to differentiate themselves (Ambiola, 2009). However, the most important part of brand storytelling is relying on ethos (Rush, 2015). If a brand is not viewed as credible, its storytelling will not achieve the previously-referenced positive effects, making authenticity vital in these advertisements.

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## ***Effectiveness of Brand Storytelling***

Brand storytelling is a key communication tool for establishing deeper connections with audiences. Consumers naturally seek out brands that provide more than just products or services. The narrative structure of these advertisements tends to be an effective form of communication because it ties messaging in with emotions, providing deeper meaning (Smith & Wintrob, 2013). Furthermore, purchasing decisions involve key character traits such as curiosity, honesty, and flexibility. The ability for storytelling to communicate these traits makes a brand more personable, and can move the brand higher as a consumer's purchasing choice. More importantly, it makes a brand easily recognizable and memorable (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010).

By connecting brand elements, such as a name or logo, with important values, it is more likely for the brand to resonate in consumers' minds (Hart, 2017). However, brand story advertisements are not effective by themselves. These ads must build off the brand positioning already held by a company, and be supported by various materials promoting the same messaging (Ganassali & Matysiewicz, 2020). While brand storytelling is supported by a substantial amount of research showing its effectiveness, there is a need of authenticity for brand storytelling to resonate.

## ***Defining Authenticity***

Authenticity derives from the Greek roots "autos" meaning "self," and the "hentes" meaning "doer," implying something that is in the control of its original creator (Spiggle, Nguyen, & Caravella, 2012). In a more modern sense, the word has come to be synonymous with words such as real, genuine, and actual (Tran & Keng, 2018). Thus, being authentic translates to trustworthiness, as it indicates a lack of falsity.

It is very difficult to provide a set of rules for what makes something authentic because the way we perceive authenticity is subjective. People assess authenticity based on their own personal experiences and views (Lewis & Bridger, 2000). However, general cues that reinforce a continuance of historic practice are believed to be authentic (Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008). People trust the things they know, so a connection to the past can help indicate truth. This suggests that authenticity leads to believability, which is why it is so important for advertisers to create authentic communications.

## ***Connection of Authenticity in Brand Storytelling***

As covered previously, brand storytelling can be a very effective advertising tool, but in order for it to be successful, authenticity needs to be clear in its communication. In recent years, there has been a rise in consumers who are purposefully searching for authentic brands (Tran & Keng, 2018). People are now taking a brand's values into consideration before making a purchasing decision. Values can be conveyed through brand storytelling. However, small inconsistencies in these ads can undermine an audience's perception of their authenticity. Therefore, the message being communicated must be genuine and not simply a marketing tactic (Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008).

As the desire for authenticity from consumers grows, it is important for marketers to downplay their commercialization and put a greater focus on who they are. By emphasizing their long-term values, brands are able to position themselves as "authentic," separating themselves from purely financial motives (Beverland, 2005). Brand storytelling acts as a vehicle for showcasing these values to an audience. In fact, it has been shown that displaying authenticity to viewers helps a brand legitimize its products and services and be perceived as having increased market value (Tran, & Keng, 2018).

This relates to the individual way people judge brands. Consumers like to feel emotionally connected to their purchases. They seek out advertisements that ensure their purchasing choices lead to self-authentication (Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008). Therefore, inauthentic brand communication will not translate to driving consumer purchase intention. On the contrary, brand storytelling that feels authentic allows consumers to form a personal expression of identity by choosing a brand that expresses its values, providing community membership with other consumers who share these virtues (Beverland, 2005).

However, authenticity or inauthenticity is not necessarily explicitly clear in every brand story. As noted earlier, consumers determine authenticity based on their own prior experiences in a subjective manner (Chiu, Hsieh, & Kuo, 2012). According to one study, some researchers use the term "believability" when discussing the extent to which advertising inscribes confidence in its authenticity (Chiu, Hsieh, & Kuo, 2012). Therefore, advertisers must work to create brand communications that feel authentic to as many people as possible, which is why having a brand's core values rooted in the story is so important.

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### ***Elaboration Likelihood Model***

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is a theory often used in advertising research to understand how perceptions of audiences change based on the information they are receiving from actual advertisements. There is an expected association between a consumer establishing a belief and positive cues in communications (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In brand storytelling, cues are expressed to consumers based on their brand values in attempts to convince audiences of their messaging. Based on the ELM theory, the brain interprets incoming information subjectively, which then determines how a consumer personally interprets the message.

The greater elaboration of the message, the more likely it is that an attitude will change or develop (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Authentic messages are likely to be received positively, helping shape a favorable belief about a brand. This creates a connection between a consumer and a company, increasing both brand loyalty and purchasing intention.

Beyond this, the model shows that the quality of an argument is the biggest influence on changing attitudes. The model also explains how for both the peripheral and central routes, if the communication presented is not deemed relevant by the viewer, then persuasion will not be successful (Manca et al., 2020). Authenticity is a key factor in both relevance and quality in communication. According to ELM, if visuals take a central route to persuasion, durable behavior change can take place (Manca et al., 2020). Thus, strong, authentic advertisements can follow this model and are likely to be persuasive to audiences.

Prior research has shown the important connection between brand storytelling and authenticity and why it is vital for brands to be genuine in their advertisements. However, previous research is lacking in identifying what cues might be included in brand storytelling that indicate this authenticity to consumers. This study attempts to identify these cues and develop a guide for future advertisers to use in creating authentic brand stories.

### ***Purpose and Research Questions***

In order to identify these cues, the researcher conducted focus groups to provoke in-depth discussion to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What do consumers perceive authenticity to be?

RQ2: Are there patterns or cues included in brand stories that convey authenticity to audiences?

Through scholarly research, brand stories have been determined to be an effective form of advertising, but scholars have yet to identify what cues in these advertisements indicate authenticity to audiences. To identify what patterns are included in successful stories, the researcher first needs to uncover what consumers actually identify authenticity to be. This research is important to the marketing industry as brand storytelling is becoming an increasingly popular form of advertising, and it is necessary for marketers to understand how to properly portray their messaging. Furthermore, younger generations are evolving into the purchasing majority, so this research will specifically identify which cues signal authenticity to college-aged consumers and young professionals.

Implications of brand storytelling can be significant. Advertisements that are received positively can greatly increase the company's position in the industry, sales, and consumer loyalty. However, if an advertisement is perceived negatively, a company's reputation can be severely damaged causing it to decrease in both likeability and purchases. Identifying cues in brand communications that portray authenticity can act as a guide for marketers to follow when creating their advertisements. This will help ensure that creators are making brand communications that will resonate with audiences and come across as genuine. If successfully created, these brand stories can help differentiate a company among competitors and increase its consumer base.



### III. Methods

This research was conducted via three focus groups consisting of three to four participants each. Prior research has determined that focus groups of less than eight participants are effective for generating meaningful research (Asquith, 1997). Participants for this study were female, 18-22 years in age, and studying various majors at multiple universities. Convenience sampling was used in this study, with all participants being contacted individually by the researcher to participate in the focus group. A qualitative approach was used allowing the researcher to gather in-depth learning from focus group participants' conversations, including personalized reactions to various brand storytelling approaches and techniques. These participant exchanges generated an understanding of their individual interpretations of authenticity and its meaning (Lederman, 1990).

Each focus group began with a discussion centering on the participants' personal favorite brands, the brands' appeal, and what could cause participants to break their brand loyalty. Next, participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions that gauged their general interest in what they look for in advertisements, their liking of brand storytelling, and their interpretation of authenticity. For purposes of this study, brand storytelling advertisements were defined as any video advertisement with a narrative structure, surrounding a social issue theme and not direct product promotion.

Three brand stories were then shown to the group. The first ad was *Why Patagonia is Fighting for Public Lands* from Patagonia, which featured the founder's story about the need to protect public lands. The second ad was *The Best a Man Can Get* from Gillette, a piece that called out society for toxic masculinity, challenging audiences to take a deeper look at their own actions as males in society. The final advertisement was *You Can't Stop Us* from Nike. This story featured dozens of athletes fighting through hardships, with a voiceover describing how we are all united through hard challenges including a national pandemic and police brutality. All three of these advertisements followed the accepted guidelines of brand storytelling and all were centered on a social-change message.

After each advertisement, participants were asked to complete Likert-scale questions regarding how much they enjoyed the advertisement, how likely they were to purchase from the company, and how authentic they felt the ad to be (1 - least likely to 5 - most likely). The moderator then prompted the participants with open-ended questions to further gauge their perceptions of the advertisement and how authentic they felt it to be. These questions launched further discussions on authenticity cues and how the messaging resonated with participants. Some sample questions include: *How would you personally define authenticity? How important is it for you to purchase from a brand that you view as authentic? What about this advertisement felt authentic to you? Which of the shown advertisements felt the most authentic and why?* At the completion of each focus group, participants were asked to compare all three advertisements in terms of likability and their perception of authenticity in order for the researcher to identify any patterns or connections between the cues included and perceived authenticity.

All responses were recorded with permission from participants involved. All participants were protected under Institutional Review Board guidelines and signed a confidentiality agreement so their names will not be disclosed in this research.

Some limitations of this research included the sampling approach. All participants were located using convenience sampling, which limited the study to people only directly reachable by the researcher. Thus, the sample lacked diversity in location, race, and gender. Furthermore, this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing all focus groups to be held virtually. This could have had an impact on the conversational flow of the group and participants' willingness to answer questions.

### IV. Findings

The focus groups provided a number of insights about authenticity and the cues that convey it in brand communications. To begin, participants showed a pattern in how they defined authenticity. Participants used synonyms such as "genuine," "real," and "original" when describing something as being authentic. Regarding company authenticity, respondents emphasized the idea that all actions a company take should be reflective of its primary message or mission. Participants reinforced this by saying a company's values should

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be consistent throughout all parts of its business, from the actions taken by the CEO to the manufacturing of products to distribution. As one participant stated: "(as a company) ... you should have one mission, one purpose, and everything you do, every action you take, should further that purpose." This supported the idea that for a company to be authentic, consumers believe its actions need to be consistent with the messaging they are conveying.

A second way audiences define authenticity was the idea of uniqueness. Respondents said they felt authenticity was about creating something new and "not following what everyone else is doing." Being able to differentiate their brand from competitors and develop a unique identity was key in the way participants viewed authenticity. These perceptions on authenticity are important when considering the following conclusions.

When identifying cues that indicate authenticity, four major patterns emerged: the ad's ability to relate to consumers, messaging that indicated action, the use of empathy to connect with consumers, and a company's own self-awareness.

First, participants felt the advertisements were most authentic when they could relate to the content. A vital part of this was identifying with the individuals playing a role within in the brand story. The more diverse the storytelling pieces were, the more genuine audiences perceived it to be. For example, in the Nike commercial, people of all races, genders, abilities, and sports were represented. Respondents felt this was an indication of authenticity as it was inclusive to all groups, ensuring that every audience member could feel represented and connect to the people on the screen.

Ability to relate extends beyond physical appearance. Many participants felt Yvone Chouinard, the founder of Patagonia, was the most authentic of the individuals in three ads because they perceived him to be an everyday person rather than a celebrity or public figure. Although Chouinard is a notable member in business, he was not recognizable to any of the members in the focus groups, all of whom perceived him as an "every day consumer." None of the focus group participants were in his age demographic, but they could relate to him as being a typical consumer, unlike the celebrities in the Nike commercial or the actors in the Gillette ad. One respondent said: "He didn't sound scripted. It seemed like he was just having a conversation, which is authentic." Participants felt Chouinard was a person with whom they could have a genuine discussion rather than a company representative trying to sell them a product. Another respondent even said Chouinard reminded her of her grandfather, which she felt made the commercial more believable to her.

In contrast, some participants had more difficulty relating to the Nike commercial due to the lack of normalcy represented. One respondent noted: "You can't really relate to these big names; like people are going through a lot and (its tagline is) 'You Can't Stop Us,' but sometimes you can stop us." The inability to relate to professional athletes during a time of a national pandemic made the ad seem less authentic to some. Overall, the ability for audiences to connect with the people appearing or speaking in commercials is a significant indicator of authenticity. As mentioned in the literature review, authenticity is an individualized perception. Therefore, if consumers cannot personally relate to the ad, it is unlikely they will find the messaging to be genuine.

Beyond relatability, specific messages contained within the advertisements that encouraged action were a significant cue of authenticity. For example, the Patagonia ad ended with a phone number allowing consumers to learn more about public lands. Along with this, the Gillette ad ended with a website link that led to a site providing more information about the nonprofits to which it is donating. Participants felt that both of these action items demonstrated that the companies were contributing or making a difference beyond just mere words. One participant asserted: "Spreading the message is good, but what's behind it is most important." This comment reinforced the idea that a message without action would not represent a true brand value of the company. Another participant echoed this same thought: "Any time a commercial is calling for action, that isn't just 'buy our product,' it feels pretty authentic." This emphasized how providing an audience with actual next steps to follow, that are not based around monetary goals, makes the message seem real. Overall, participants agreed that if companies can show how they are supporting the issues they are communicating, then their advertisements feel much more authentic. In contrast, the Nike commercial ended with an inspirational tagline, "You Can't Stop Us," but lacked any overt call to action for audiences to follow through on its messaging. While the ad was still perceived positively, participants agreed it was less authentic than the other two. Therefore, companies demonstrating actionable follow-through beyond standard advertisement messaging is a key indicator for authenticity.

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A third pattern identified through this research was the brand story's appeal to empathy. In order for audiences to trust an ad, they need to feel an emotional connection to the message. Throughout all the focus group discussions, participants referenced "feeling moved" or "touched" when discussing authenticity. In reference to the Patagonia advertisement, one participant shared: "Having him with soft music in the background pulled on my heart strings." The production technique of embedding the story within an inspirational soundtrack helped the ad appeal to participants' emotions, thus increasing its believability. A second participant echoed this saying, "I feel like if [the ad] pulls at your heart strings, I find that to be more authentic." The ability to move a viewer helps the messaging of the advertisement resonate, so it is more likely to feel real to the audience. This pattern was clear in responses from multiple participants. Another said: "I liked the one that was emotional, showing the boys that are younger being influenced by what we see and watching them grow up to be the men of tomorrow. I think that one was very powerful." Referring to the Gillette ad, the storytelling piece felt genuine to respondents because of its strong emotional appeal.

Respondents also recognized that the use of empathy can be an effective marketing and communication technique used in advertising. Marketers understand this emotional connection can drive people towards action. However, because the ads shown in the focus group were encouraging positive action, participants felt it was a genuine use of emotion. One respondent said in regard to the Gillette ad, "Since the message was about changing your mindset, they used emotion in a way that would get you to do that. Sometimes companies use emotion to prey on you to buy their products, but I think they did it in a responsible way." As referenced earlier, if an advertisement has an action item promoting a positive change, it is likely to be well received by consumers. In the Gillette example, the combination of action and emotion worked together to create an authentic advertisement.

Lastly, participants revealed that a company's own self-awareness is a key indicator for authenticity in advertising. Many advertisements that tell stories about brands often reflect major societal topics, so, it is important for companies to approach these issues from a place of understanding and recognize their role in the issues. Participants felt the Nike advertisement was authentic due to its ability to bring light to current problems such as COVID-19, racial biases and gender inequality, even if it might offend some viewers. One participant said: "Showing everything that's going on and not picking and choosing; not excluding one because someone might not agree, is staying true to themselves." Respondents felt this demonstrated the messaging was truly authentic because the brand is being transparent on the number of issues occurring in society rather than trying to "sugarcoat" or hide negative topics. For example, Nike did this in a way that did not interfere with its goal of uniting audiences. Another participant said: "I think it is really important the commercial is centered around COVID which can bring a lot of people down, but this commercial was very uniting and empowering." By incorporating a major issue such as a global pandemic, Nike showed its audience that the brand is not afraid to speak out on certain topics even if it could be perceived negatively. In this case, respondents translated the messaging as being authentic because it showed awareness and addressed this major issue.

This also extends to a company holding itself accountable for their prior actions. The Gillette advertisement was based on the company's original slogan, "The Best a Man Can Be" and challenged society to consider whether or not men had truly been acting in the best of their abilities. Participants felt that the brand's recognition of a fundamental issue among its primary audience demonstrated authenticity in its messaging. One participant said: "We don't see many things directed towards men to hold themselves accountable. It was refreshing to see, and it made me want to keep watching." Another participant agreed saying, "It shows humility and shows their ability to recognize past occurrences where men weren't living out their brand." Gillette's taking on such an important topic despite the potential for alienating its primary audience, demonstrates the brand's concern and care about the cause rather than simply driving profits.

Gillette also took this one step further by directly acknowledging its own role in perpetuating toxic masculinity. In the brand story ad, the brand shows one of its original advertisements being broken through, recognizing its prior role in supporting and perpetuating the issue. The exchanges among the research participants indicated that they appreciated this level of accountability, which further solidified the authenticity of the brand and its messaging. One respondent emphasized that "recognizing what they did that is wrong in the past is showing how authentic they are with what they're trying to do in the future. They want the people who buy their products to think that way also." Gillette's self-awareness of the role it can play in changing masculine culture helps its messaging appear real and more authentic.

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Overall, there is no established checklist for companies to use to make an authentic brand storytelling advertisement. However, if brands incorporate speakers who can relate to the intended audience, messages that drive action, appeals that encourage empathy, and approaches that reflect the brands' self-awareness, then those brands and their messaging are likely to resonate with audiences as being genuinely authentic.

## V. Discussion

This research discovered an apparent connection between authenticity and the likability of advertisements. The factors that led to audiences enjoying an ad, such as relatability and the emotional connection, are also factors that contribute to perceived authenticity. This important association reveals the importance of authenticity in brand storytelling, as positive brand attitudes drive purchase intention (Chiu, Hsieh, & Kuo, 2012). However, it is important to note that audiences are aware that brand storytelling ads are still a marketing technique. Even if a brand story comes across as authentic, it does not mean that consumers will automatically perceive the entire brand to be authentic. One participant shared: "A lot of brands are good at marketing and can trick us into thinking they are authentic but might not be." Participants agreed that the authenticity of a brand goes deeper than just the advertisements they see. As referenced previously, the actions that a company takes need to be consistent with its overall messaging. One respondent referred to this saying; that authenticity is "big picture," meaning it is about more than only the advertisements. Therefore, even if an advertisement is both liked and considered genuine, it does not necessarily translate to consumers believing that the entire company is authentic.

Beyond this, patterns within the focus group discussions reflect that actively supporting authentic brands is much more challenging than avoiding purchases from inauthentic brands. Participants emphasized that they want their purchases to come from authentic brands, but they do not go out of their way to weigh the brand's or company's authenticity before purchasing. One participant explained: "I don't do the research to actually investigate the companies, but if something bad is made public then I would 100% not buy from them." Therefore, while authenticity plays a major role in affecting purchasing habits, it does not have as strong an impact on purchasing as negative publicity, which demonstrates being out of authentic alignment. It is more common for negative events to be seen in the media than positive events, therefore, it is likely that more consumers will know of a company's bad reputation than another company's positive one. Another respondent asserted: "(We) have so many options, so it's really easy for a company to do something that would immediately make me want to stop buying from them, and usually it's ethical types of things." This reinforced the idea that an inauthentic action from a brand would lead to a loss in purchases and consumer loyalty.

A primary example of this can be seen in the 2017 Pepsi advertisement featuring Kendall Jenner easing tensions between protestors and police officers by sharing a can of Pepsi. This advertisement was insensitive to the highly prevalent issue of police brutality and minimized the severity of the situation (Lewin, 2017). The aftereffects were significant, greatly hurting Pepsi's brand image and causing a loss in revenue. This is a strong example of consumers no longer wanting to support a brand that is inauthentic in its messaging.

Another trend uncovered during the research was that while participants might want to purchase from a brand seen as authentic, monetary limitations might inhibit their ability to support authentic brands. As mentioned before, participants defined authenticity to be a company being consistent with their values in all aspects of a business, including production and distribution. Fast fashion companies tend to often face public backlash for poor working conditions in the production of their goods. However, since all participants were college aged, their relative lack of spending money often limited their purchase choices, causing them to purchase from these brands rather than ones they know will be authentic in all of their manufacturing and marketing activities. One participant said: "I find it hard to be picky because I have little funds I can spend. As we get older we will have more disposable income to afford those more authentic products." Another participant shared frustration with the inability to purchase from brands she knows to be authentic: "Sometimes with a college income, we want to support these brands, but they might be more expensive, which is the one thing that would hold me back." The limit on spending money was the only reason brought up during the focus group discussions for not supporting an authentic brand.

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This research supported the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). As introduced in the literature review, there is a connection between positive cues in advertising and a consumer developing a belief system (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The cues included in brand storytelling advertisements can help persuade audiences to develop a view that is consistent with the brands' messaging. Most brand storytelling ads promote a major social or political change. For example, the Patagonia ad in this research promoted the need to protect public lands. Based on the ELM, the positive cues in this ad would help shape an audience's view on land protection. This is a strong reason why brand storytelling has become such a phenomenon over the past few years. As referenced earlier, a strong emotional connection to an ad helps increase its perceived authenticity. Based on this idea, brand stories can encourage audiences to develop positions on various social and political issues, which in turn promotes deeper emotional connection to the brand.

## VI. Conclusion

This research sought to identify what cues in brand storytelling advertisements indicate authenticity to consumers. With the recognized effectiveness of authentic advertisements and no existing guide for what makes an advertisement authentic, this research attempted to address this gap in the prior research. Specifically, this study revealed several cues that should help brands connect with consumers through their communication of sincere, compelling, and empathetic stories. While explicit directions or guides were not developed in this study, an overarching understanding of what consumers feel to be authentic was identified. Focus-group participants all agreed that authenticity was extremely important to their purchasing decisions, and four factors –relatability, messaging encouraging action, empathy and brand self-awareness – were important indicators of an authentic brand storytelling ad.

Future research could take these four identified cues and test for their presence through content analysis. The findings could be further enhanced by analyzing various brand storytelling ads to determine the connection between these cues and the level of the advertisements' success. In addition, conducting a similar study with a larger and more diverse subject group, and one-on-one interviews, could reveal a deeper understanding about authenticity and its connection to brand storytelling.

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# Corporate Commitment to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion: Analyzing the Responses of PR Agencies and Other Companies after 2020 Black Lives Matter Events

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## Abstract

*Communications and public relations is a predominantly White dominated industry with shockingly low representation of people of color. After the resurgence of Black Lives Matter in June 2020, companies and agencies quickly took a stance, with many showing their support after intense pressure from stakeholders. Organizations such as the Diversity Action Alliance are building off of this momentum and aim to accelerate diversity and representation in the communications and public relations industry by holding these companies and agencies accountable. This study looks at the websites of organizations that signed on with the Diversity Action Alliance to evaluate how they publicly present their Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Based on quantitative data as well as a qualitative content analysis, this paper found that a large number of these companies did not have any diversity related content on their websites in October 2020. Of those that did, only about half had comprehensive information that described tangible steps they were taking to combat racial inequity in the industry.*

## I. Introduction

Key players in the communications industry have the power to influence culture and shift the public narrative, so it is important that the people creating campaigns for audiences accurately represent them. Strategic campaign teams that are not diverse cannot truly understand the needs of their clients and are therefore limiting productivity and generation of ideas. In the ongoing struggle for racial equality, especially after the murder of George Floyd in June 2020, organizations have realized that it is beneficial to promote an inclusive workplace, and many are claiming to be advocates for diversity on social media and their websites. In June 2020, Ben & Jerry's and Nike, longtime activists for Black Lives Matter and other social issues, were quick to release messages of support, while newcomer advocates like McDonald's spoke out for the first time. While this is a step in the right direction, it is hard to measure the effectiveness and merit of what companies are doing and if their commitment to combat racial justice is sustainable.

Industry groups such as the Diversity Action Alliance (DAA) are aiming to hold their members accountable in their Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DE&I) initiatives. Results from these groups' studies will

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give organizations a clear picture of current DE&I practices and provide benchmarks in an effort to create more corporate diversity in the next five years. Current signatories of the DAA include a mix of Fortune 500 companies, public relations and communications agencies, communications schools and industry groups.

Consumers seem to be more aware of what companies are doing and often are critical of the information (or lack thereof) that companies release. The information provided on a company's website can give clients and consumers a better understanding of the steps they are taking to fight racial injustice and can have a large role in influencing public perception of the company. This paper will synthesize DE&I statements and commitments publicly shared on the websites of public relations agencies and large companies that have signed on to the DAA in 2020, looking for similarities in how content is shared and key commitments toward change. This will provide insight into how these core players can further charge towards a more diverse, equitable and inclusive public relations and communications industry.

## II. Literature Review

### ***Need For a More Diverse Industry***

Minority representation in the public relations and communications industry is low. The Myers Report surveyed 700 advertising and communications professionals in early 2020. Of the respondents, 76.2% of junior level employees, 81.1% of mid-level employees and 82.9% of senior executives were White. Only 7.1% of junior level employees, 3.0% of mid-level employees and 3.8% of senior executives were Black (MediaVillage, 2020). These statistics are not representative of the U.S. population, which is comprised of approximately 40% of people with diverse non-White backgrounds. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019), 60.1% of Americans are White and 13.4% Black.

Edwards (2013) explains how public relations is a cultural intermediary, which shapes the "presentation and representation" of culture (p. 243). Agencies have the power to shift the narrative, because the relationship between a source and its publics allows for the constant exchange of messages, which can be interpreted in different ways. PR provides social meaning and is a medium that shapes people's values and understandings of not only specific brands, but of the world.

Often, if a certain project or client involves an ethnic minority group, the viewpoints of diverse employees in an agency are welcome. However, when it comes to higher profile campaigns, the involvement of minorities is limited (Edwards, 2013). This strategic use of ethnicity places the responsibility of a few to provide the perspective of all minority groups. Minorities in public relations are not representative of the entire U.S. population. Given that this industry has such a large influence on culture, the people creating the campaigns for audiences must accurately represent them. Teams that are not diverse may not truly understand the needs of its clients, and thus are limiting productivity and generation of ideas.

When diversity programs are in place, much of the focus is on recruiting and hiring diverse employees to fill a quota, which Brunner (2008) describes as "knee-jerk diversity." However, "retaining and truly appreciating what diverse employees bring to the workforce" is the more important piece, as well as creating a welcoming and inclusive culture where people of color feel valued (Brunner, 2008, p. 157). If public relations by its very definition involves the relationship between an organization and its publics, diversity within the organization is essential to building and maintaining these relationships.

### ***Black Lives Matter 2020 - Brand Statements***

The Black Lives Matter movement saw a large resurgence in June 2020 after the murder of George Floyd. Companies, and brands were almost forced to respond. Some were quick to make statements acknowledging Black Lives Matter, and others waited to release statements only after competitors and consumers weighed in. This time, a "social issue" became everyone's issue, and companies that usually stay quiet actually spoke up.

In early June 2020, Edelman, a global communications firm, released a special report of its Trust Barometer which surveyed 2,000 random people on their views of brands and racial justice in America. Sixty percent of consumer respondents said that brands should publicly speak out on systemic racism, and more than half believed that taking a stand on racial justice is a moral and societal obligation for brands (Edelman,

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2020). It is also significant that these numbers were noticeably higher from people of color. The data from the Edelman Trust Barometer shows that consumers want more from a brand than just its product. Many base their loyalty on the brand's issue stances, so it would be beneficial for brands to align themselves with their consumers.

According to Pasztor (2019), "Findings reveal three primary approaches in how organizations frame diversity: first, as an organizational asset promoted and preserved through its human resources and corporate values; second, as a driver of business excellence and competitive advantage; and finally, as a structural mechanism supported by diversity and inclusion initiatives such as employee mentoring, networking, diversity training, and institutionalized governance" (p. 455). To a degree, this shows that incorporating diversity rhetoric into one's mission statement provides a benefit to an organization, with the primary goal of advancing its reputation.

Companies include diversity practices on their corporate websites because this is one of the places that key stakeholders look to understand the organization. In a study in 2012, many corporate mission statements were found to have similar language and failed to explain robust diversity initiatives (Pasztor, 2019). A vague diversity statement does not necessarily translate into tangible action. The priority has seemed to be on a diversity-focused reputation without clear objectives on how to achieve it. Releasing clear content to the public is necessary for a company to inform its stakeholders about what the organization stands for. However, the most important part is the action the company chooses to take in order to make a difference.

### ***Diversity Action Alliance***

The Diversity Action Alliance (DAA) is "a coalition of Public Relations and communications leaders joining forces to accelerate progress in the achievement of meaningful and tangible results in diversity, equity and inclusion across our profession" (DAA, 2020). It has already partnered with over 100 top public relations agencies, Fortune 500 companies, and communications schools who are committed to changing the future of the industry.

The DAA has a clear commitment that incorporates three main components, with the goal of making an "impACT" on the industry: Adopt (best practices), Champion (the cause), and Track (diversity data). Below are the key action steps of each component as listed on the website (DAA, 2020):

#### **ADOPT - Organization Commitment**

- Accelerate progress in representation by hiring and promoting people of color, and other diverse talent, at all levels.
- Attract and retain diverse talent through internal and external announcements of diverse executive-level hires.
- Bolster the pipeline of people of color through an annual review of internal metrics, and leverage best practices to address any identified issues.

#### **CHAMPION - Personal Commitment**

- Actively sponsor diverse talent, including people of color.
- Role model positive change internally and externally through my words and actions.
- Drive and embed inclusivity as part of my organization's culture, helping to empower people of color in their career.
- Visibly hold myself and the leaders in my organization accountable for progress.

#### **TRACK - Organization Commitment**

- Benchmark and track inclusion to improve the culture of inclusion within our organization.
  - Share key representation metrics with the Diversity Action Alliance for benchmarking and for anonymous reporting of the aggregate progress within the communications profession.
-

This study will examine the DAA companies' websites for statements on diversity and actions taken. There is a gap in research on diversity practices by public relations professionals. Thus, this study asks:

RQ1: How do companies present DE&I content to public stakeholders?

RQ2: What themes are present when comparing websites?

### III. Methods

A qualitative content analysis of the websites of 86 companies listed as signatories by the Diversity Action Alliance (identified in Appendix A) was conducted to examine content describing public diversity, equity & inclusion practices. The organizations analyzed consist primarily of public relations agencies and Fortune 500 companies with large communications efforts, such as Exelon and Johnson & Johnson. By signing the DAA, these companies have committed to making real change, but an important factor is how they communicate this information to their publics. Excluded from analysis were 29 DAA signatories, in categories such as specialty diversity organizations, employee engagement firms, and universities.

For the purpose of this study, any content or statements that may have been released on social media channels were not analyzed. Websites are the primary location where potential clients, future employees, and key stakeholders look to gain information about the company. This is an analysis of the information publicly available on company websites and does not include information or DE&I initiatives that are not accessible through the website itself.

Each website was thoroughly analyzed and coded based on key criteria, some of them based on elements listed in previous studies, and some on emergent themes observed in a pilot analysis of a small sample.

1. The presence of a clear statement or press release in May or June of 2020 after the murder of George Floyd – a message addressing racial injustice in the U.S. and inequalities in the public relations/communications industry.
  2. The presence of at least one follow-up statement or press release from July-October 2020 providing actionable steps the company is taking to combat racial injustice in the industry.
  3. The presence of diversity, equity & inclusion goals embedded in the values or mission statement of the company.
  4. The presence of the company's involvement with the Diversity Action Alliance or mention of itself as a signatory.
  5. The presence of commitments that align with the ADOPT, CHAMPION, and TRACK components of DAA goals. It was observed that a website either mentioned all three components or none at all, therefore they were combined into one metric.
  6. Overall ease of finding diversity, equity & inclusion or racial injustice focused content on the company website on a scale of 0 to 5.
    - **0 = No DE&I content was present.**
    - **1 = Poor.** Many clicks required to locate DE&I information. Content was present on the website but it was extremely difficult to find.
    - **2 = Below Average.** Multiple clicks to locate DE&I information.
    - **3 = Average.** Three clicks to locate DE&I information.
    - **4 = Good.** Two clicks to locate DE&I information.
-

- **5 = Excellent.** Only one click to locate DE&I information, meaning content was prominent on the homepage of the website or very easy to find.
  - Location of information also noted (home page, “about” section or another clearly marked tab, blog or news section, career section).
7. Overall comprehensiveness of diversity, equity & inclusion or racial injustice focused content on a scale of 0 to 5.
- **0 = No DE&I content was present.**
  - **1 = Poor.** DE&I content was present on the website but it was extremely vague (e.g. only provided a short statement with no action steps).
  - **2 = Below Average.** DE&I content was vague (e.g. a statement with minimal action steps that did not align with ADOPT, CHAMPION, TRACK goals and benchmarks).
  - **3 = Average.** DE&I content was sufficient (e.g. company had either a statement or resources that addressed components of ADOPT, CHAMPION, TRACK goals and benchmarks but provided minimal detail on how these would be achieved).
  - **4 = Good.** DE&I content was detailed (e.g. company had either a statement or resources that fulfilled components of ADOPT, CHAMPION, TRACK goals and benchmarks with moderate detail on how these would be achieved).
  - **5 = Excellent.** DE&I content was extremely detailed (e.g. company had either a statement or resources that fulfilled all components of ADOPT, CHAMPION, TRACK goals and benchmarks and provided specific action steps with clear detail on how they would be achieved).

## IV. Findings

**Table 1. Website Statements**

86 websites	Statement May-June 2020	Statement July-Nov 2020	DE&I goals in mission	DAA mentioned	ADOPT CHAMPION TRACK commitments
Yes	44 (51%)	36 (42%)	38 (44%)	10 (12%)	44 (51%)
No	42 (49%)	50 (58%)	48 (56%)	76 (88%)	42 (49%)

### **Statement Made in May/June 2020**

As seen in Table 1, 44 of the 86 companies (51%) published a press release or statement in May/June 2020 on their website following the murder of George Floyd and resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. During this time, consumers were extremely cognizant of what companies were saying in response to the national conversation against racial injustice. Some PR agency statements were very comprehensive and included specific action steps. For example, Golin released a [statement](#) on June 4, 2020 that advocated its solidarity with the Black community and listed five immediate actions the agency would take to tackle race inequality, including additional “fast-tracked” DE&I efforts. Others were somewhat vague and gave their support of Black Lives Matter without tangible evidence that they would make an organizational change. For example, Taft Communications considers DE&I to be one of their client focuses. They released a statement also on June 4, declaring, “At Taft, we pledge to do more within our own organization. We will speak out on issues of justice. We will find ways for each of us — as individuals and as a team — to make a positive impact in this tumultuous world.” However, the company had not released any additional information at the time of this study. There was no place on the website to find out about DE&I practices for the agency itself as well as specific deliverables that align with the DAA’s ADOPT-CHAMPION-TRACK goals.

**Statement Between July-Nov 2020**

Fewer companies, only 36 out of 86 (33%), made statements between July and November 2020. Most were subsequent statements to their initial one in May or June and provided a robust plan on their steps towards DE&I. A few of these statements were the first time the company released diversity-related content.

**DE&I Goals in Mission**

Thirty-eight of the 86 websites (44%) had DE&I goals in their mission statement or company values. If a company signs the Diversity Action Alliance, it is assumed that diversity is something its management strongly believes in. However, these results indicate that a minority of DAA members prominently describe diversity as something important to them on their websites. Most DAA companies (51%) had released statements or press releases that described their commitment to DE&I, but this was not incorporated into mission statements or publicly acknowledged as a core value of the company.

**Diversity Action Alliance (DAA) Mentioned**

Only 10 of the 86 websites (12%) had any mention of the Diversity Action Alliance. This does not mean that the remaining 76 companies do not prioritize DE&I principles; many websites had extensive DE&I information and commitments. However, it is interesting to note that DAA membership is not something that is widely shared. As the number of signatories grows in the coming years, it will likely be a key indicator of organizational diversity efforts across industries.

**ADOPT-CHAMPION-TRACK Commitments**

Although few websites explicitly mentioned the DAA, 51% of the 86 websites made clear commitments that aligned with the DAA’s ADOPT-CHAMPION-TRACK framework. Under the ADOPT section, these companies committed to hiring and promoting diverse talent. Under the CHAMPION section, companies committed to changing their work culture to be more inclusive. Some examples made were anti-bias training workshops, diversity work groups, business resource groups, etc. Under the TRACK section, companies committed to creating benchmarks to track diversity numbers in their organizations. A handful of organizations made their numbers clearly available on their websites, with the results showing that significant changes need to be made in order to accelerate diverse talent into leadership positions.

**Table 2. Website Components on DE&I**

Ranking Scale	Ease of Finding Info on DE&I	Extent of DE&I Info
<b>0 = Not Present</b>	30 (35%) = not present	30 (35%) = not present
<b>1 = Poor</b>	6 (7%) = many clicks to locate info	11 (13%) = extremely vague
<b>2 = Below Average</b>	8 (9%) = multiple clicks to locate info	4 (5%) = vague
<b>3 = Average</b>	15 (17%) = 3 clicks to locate info	8 (9%) = sufficient
<b>4 = Good</b>	10 (12%) = 2 clicks to locate info	15 (17%) = detailed
<b>5 = Excellent</b>	17 (20%) = 1 click to locate info	18 (21%) = extremely detailed

**Ease of Finding Information on DE&I**

It is significant to report that 30 out of 86 companies (35%) had no DE&I-related content on their websites at all (Table 2). These companies received a ranking of 0. The 55 remaining companies that had some DE&I-related content were ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning that many clicks were required to find the information as it was “hidden” on the website, and 5 meaning that the information was very easy to find, commonly right on the home page.

Seventeen companies were ranked as excellent, including WE Communications, Finn Partners Inc., and Padilla, which had DE&I information visible directly on the home page of the website. Ten company sites only required two clicks to find DE&I information, and 15 sites required three clicks to find the information. On five company websites, DE&I information was extremely difficult to locate. Some examples were Southwest

Airlines, which had its DE&I information buried in the Careers section, and Weber Shandwick, which had its information several pages deep in the News section.

Overall, 11 companies had their information located directly on the home page, 18 in the about section or another clearly marked tab, 19 in the blog or news section, and eight in the career section.

### ***Extent of DE&I Information***

It was notable that 30 out of 86 companies (35%) had no DE&I related content on their website at all (Table 2). The 55 remaining companies that had some DE&I related content were ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning that their DE&I content and commitments were extremely vague, and 5 meaning that the information was detailed and comprehensive with clear company goals and benchmarks.

Eighteen companies were ranked as excellent and had an entire section of their website dedicated to DE&I. Most of these were large Fortune 500 companies with thousands of employees such as Levi's, Target and Proctor & Gamble. Johnson & Johnson had some of the most comprehensive information available. It is clear that DE&I is not a new initiative for these companies, and they have been working many years on their culture. Nine companies were extremely vague concerning DE&I. For example, Peppercom received a ranking of 1 because the agency released a statement that "unequivocally denounced racism," but failed to provide further detail about how the company would participate in ending these systemic injustices. Peppercom's only action step was, "We'll be engaging with an organization that supports bringing equality and justice to the Black community and examining how else we can have impact in the immediate future." Presence of an updated statement or DE&I content was not found anywhere else on the website at the time of this study.

## **V. Discussion**

### ***Presence of DE&I on Company Websites***

Given that all of the companies have signed the DAA, it is clear that they want to be perceived as being committed to diversity. However, for many of them, the word diversity was nowhere to be found on their websites, much less any information about what they are doing or what they plan to do. Half of these agencies did not release any sort of acknowledgement in response to Black Lives Matter or racial inequalities in the industry in 2020.

Based on websites alone, DE&I does not appear to be a priority to many DAA signatories. A lack of DE&I information on the website makes it appear as if the company is not doing anything. It is highly possible that they might be working internally on DE&I goals, but if it is not mentioned on the website, key stakeholders will not be informed, and thus assume that it is not taking any action. This could be detrimental to a company's identity. For communications professionals who are searching for jobs, the website may be the first place they will look when researching the company. Potential clients will also look at the website to determine if they want to partner with an agency. Failure to provide any information about DE&I, especially in the wake of a national movement against racial injustice, is harmful for a company's image and gives the perception that it is not a priority. DAA signatories have already made the commitment to accelerate DE&I progress in the industry, so it would be beneficial for these agencies to publish their goals and commitments in order to remain transparent.

Roughly half of the companies did have information that aligned with the DAA's ADOPT-CHAMPION-TRACK commitment. Although this framework was never explicitly mentioned in any of the websites, 51% of DAA companies outlined company goals that align with it (generally: hiring and promoting diverse talent, creating an inclusive culture internally, tracking and releasing diversity numbers). Regardless of all of the other variables examined, having these commitments be accessible on the website is important, because it provides substantial meaning and action behind words. Companies that release specifics are attractive to stakeholders because of their clear goals and detailed action.

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## ***Trends Among Agencies***

DE&I seems to be a new challenge that many public relations and communications agencies are still trying to navigate. Increased pressure from stakeholders who now engage publicly with consumers online has made them realize that they need to make a change if they want to keep up with the evolving world. These agencies may have lacked prior DE&I efforts, which might be why they did not release any information until 2020.

The findings in this study show that most of the larger agencies seem to have slightly more DE&I content on their websites, which makes sense as they seem to set the industry standards. However, the comprehensiveness and location of this content is widely varied.

BCW, one of the largest communications agencies in the world, did not provide any clear information on its website. The initial BCW statement, released on June 11, 2020, was very comprehensive and outlined the specific actions the agency would take, however, as it was incredibly difficult to locate, this sent mixed messages. Inclusion & Diversity is identified as one of BCW's "Strategic Solutions," otherwise known as an area that the agency specializes in. After clicking on this section to get more information, there was a link to its June 11 DE&I press release at the very bottom of the page. DE&I goals were not embedded in the company mission statement, and the information was hard to find, which ultimately results in confusion or lack of awareness of public stakeholders.

Another example of poor accessibility was Ketchum, another of the largest global communications agencies. The first thing visible on its home page was "We're On This Revolutionary Road Together," with information about the company's new D&I officer. In the linked article, Ketchum addresses its commitment to DE&I, however, it is notable that comprehensive information is not available anywhere else on the website. Ketchum's official statements are available on a blog page (several clicks were required to find it), but the language and action steps used are quite vague.

Agency websites are typically minimalistic, which allows them to showcase their creative work. This may be why DE&I content is most commonly located in the news or blog sections of the website, in order to keep in line with the overall style. However, people looking at the website would not be able to find DE&I easily without scrolling past all of the current blog posts on other topics. Assets such as blog posts or press releases are published chronologically, so the location of content about racial injustice as a blog post seems to categorize it as a passing trend, as opposed to something the company sustains long term. The fact that 51% of companies released a statement but only 44% had DE&I goals in their mission statements or corporate values also speaks to this fact.

There is no sense of consistency throughout DE&I content on any agency website. Some agencies have robust information but it is challenging for the average person to easily locate on the website. Others only have a single vague statement of support towards Black Lives Matter on their home pages.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This study has limitations, as it includes only a small sample of the world's numerous companies and PR agencies. However, it gives insight into the current state of diversity, equity & inclusion in the industry and how organizations are communicating their responses to the public. Even companies that have clearly committed to DE&I, as verified by their Diversity Action Alliance membership, do not have websites that fully reflect their goals. After the fight for racial justice in America was heightened during mid-2020, companies were forced to quickly react. The findings of this study show that some companies published comprehensive information about their DE&I efforts, while others failed to release anything. Moving forward, it is essential for companies to be proactive instead of reactive when it comes to racial injustice. This is not a cultural trend that will fade away over time. Specific action plans and organizational changes must be communicated with stakeholders. People are expecting that companies be transparent, and ultimately business will be jeopardized if a company does not make it clear that DE&I is a priority to them. Saying nothing at all, even by companies that have signed the Diversity Action Alliance, makes a bigger statement than they likely intended. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

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## Appendix

### A. *DAA Signatories Included in Study (86)*

Axis	History Factory	Padilla
Accenture	Horizon Therapeutics	Peppercom
Affect	Hotwire Global Communications	PepsiCo
BCW	ICF Next	Procter & Gamble
Beehive Strategic Communication	IPG's Constituency Management Group	Prosek Partners
C Plus C	Idea Grove	Quad
Citizen Relations	Ink Communications Co.	Racepoint Global
Current Global	JPA Health	Ragan Communications
Day One Agency	Johnson & Johnson	Red Havas
Development Counsellors International	KWT Global, LLC	Rogers & Cowan PMK
DiGennaro Communications	Kaplow Communications	SHIFT Communications
Edelman	Ketchum	Southwest Airlines
Enbridge	L3Harris Technologies	Stagwell Group
Evoke KYNE	LaForce	Story Partners
Exelon Corporation	LaVoie Health Science	Taft Communications
Experian	LaunchSquad	Target
Finn Partners, Inc.	Levi Strauss & Co.	Tenneco
Finsbury	LinkedIn	The10Company
FleishmanHillard	Litzky PR	Vault Communications
Furia Rubel Communications	MSL Group	WE Communications
G&S Business Communications	Makovsky	Walker Sands
Gagen MacDonald LLC	March Communications	Weber Shandwick
Genpact	Mars, Incorporated	Westinghouse Electric Company
Germinder & Associates, Inc.	Medtronic	Zeno Group
Glen Echo Group	Mower	rbb Communications
Golin	MullenLowe PR	
Hill + Knowlton Strategies	National Association of Manufacturers	
Havas Formula	Novant Health	
Hawthorne Strategies	Orangefiery	
Highwire PR	PAN Communications	



**B. DAA Signatories Eliminated from this study (29)**

ACLU	JWM Talent/Monday Talent
Brilliant Ink	Jacobs Consulting & Executive Coaching
Butler University College of Communication	Joyful Planet, LLC
Cal State Fullerton	Judith Cushman & Associates
Cheer Partners	PRowl
Cherlene Wheeless LLC	Page
Duke University	ROI
Forum-Group	Temple PRSSA
Foxtel	UF PRSSA
Glen M. Broom Center for Professional Development in Public Relations	University of Colorado Boulder
High Note Consulting	University of Florida Public Relations Department
Institute for Public Relations	University of Georgia
Integral	University of Tennessee Knoxville, College of Communication and Information

## **Vogue Magazine’s Rise as a Source for Political, Social, and Cultural Topics**

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an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

### **Abstract**

*With 11.1 million monthly readers of its print product – and 52.7 million social media followers online – Vogue is more than just a magazine, it is an iconic trendsetter and influencer. This study qualitatively analyzes election-year issues of Vogue magazine over the past 20 years to determine how the magazine has integrated cultural, political, and social topics into its content. This study looks at the September issues of Vogue because they act not only as the physically largest issue, but also the most important annual issue in the fashion industry. Through looking at both visual and written content, this study tracks the increase of progressive and diverse content within the pages of Vogue, demonstrating how the fashion magazine has responded to social progress and now sets the agenda for social, political, and cultural discussions. The findings show a wide variety of individuals featured in articles and in photoshoots, with noticeable increases in progressive content in recent issues of the magazine.*

### **I. Introduction**

*Vogue* is more than just a magazine. *Vogue* is an iconic trendsetter within the realms of fashion, lifestyle, and beauty, and increasingly within political, social and cultural topics. *Vogue* has an extensive reach that spans across multiple platforms. *Vogue* and its parent company *Condé Nast* view the magazine as a “cultural barometer for a global audience,” with 27 editions of the magazine internationally, including the one published in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. edition of the magazine reaches 11.1 million monthly readers in print, 13 million unique users on the digital site, and garners 180 million video views. *Vogue* also has 52.7 million social media followers.<sup>2</sup>

This study examines September print issues of *Vogue* in election years since the year 2000, tracking how the magazine has become increasingly culturally, politically, and socially active. September, which falls just before the elections in November, marks the beginning of a new fashion season and is traditionally associated with change and new beginnings, as fall approaches.<sup>3</sup> The September issue of not only *Vogue*, but many major fashion publications, is the largest and most important issue of the year.<sup>4</sup> In focusing on the

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1 “Condé Nast Vogue Brands,” <https://www.condenast.com/brands/vogue>.

2 Ibid.

3 Laird Borrelli-Persson, “Vogue Fun Facts by the Numbers,” <https://www.vogue.com/article/vogue-covers-models-facts-history>.

4 Jessica Schiffer, “The Real Reasons September Issues Are Such a Big Deal,” <https://www.whowhatwear.com/history-of-the-fashion-magazines-september-issue>.

**Keywords:** magazines, politics, culture, qualitative content analysis

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September print issues of *Vogue*, this article details how the magazine has evolved by studying its most prominent and forward-looking issue of the year.

## II. Literature Review

There has been discussion of the media's impact on agenda setting, and how "an independent press is charged with providing a public good: an agenda that fosters enlightened democratic participation and citizenship."<sup>5</sup> Agenda setting suggests that the media's "issue priorities influence the public's issue priorities."<sup>6</sup> This literature review reveals several themes related to this theory, including *Vogue's* influence as a fashion and lifestyle magazine, how the fashion industry is inherently connected to cultural, social, and political discussions, and the extent to which stereotypical women's magazines are feminist entities. These themes fall under the notion within agenda setting that the media impacts the public's view and "subsequent assessment" of media topics.<sup>7</sup>

### The Influence of *Vogue*

Women's magazines have long aimed to connect "the serious and non-serious, the personal and the political."<sup>8</sup> *Vogue* in particular has been considered the "world's most influential fashion magazine," with its powerful reach spanning internationally and having the ability to influence the content of other industry publications.<sup>9</sup> The content of *Vogue* is often visually focused, with many photographs, videos, and graphics accompanying or being featured in a piece. This has allowed the magazine to reach an even larger audience, and achieve such a level of "global prestige."<sup>10</sup> From the way models look, to photography, writing, and styling, as well as the newest fashion trends, "*Vogue* sets the standard" on a global scale.<sup>11</sup> The U.S. version of *Vogue* in particular carries extensive influence, as the birthplace of the global fashion magazine.<sup>12</sup>

Fashion magazines in general are considered to be "the voice of the fashion industry," and through the visual and textual aspects of their print editions, they become "cultural zeitgeist[s]."<sup>13</sup> The September issue of *Vogue* in particular follows this notion, for the content it produces is the most influential issue of the year and not only physically holds weight—it tends to weigh around 5 pounds—but also holds conceptual weight within the industry as a trendsetting entity.<sup>14</sup> The September issue focuses on "transitions" and always "marks a shift," not only in regard to the clothing trends for the upcoming seasons, but also in terms of what holds cultural importance at the time.<sup>15</sup> Beyond the September issues, however, the fashion industry and fashion publication industry are inherently linked to political, social, and cultural topics. When *Vogue* produces political content, it is able to reach an audience that may not have sought out political stories otherwise, and guides the audience's opinion on the topic.<sup>16</sup> Such content allows for the "potential to address and unite transnational publics around global issues like racial diversity and healthy body size."<sup>17</sup>

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5 Joseph E. Uscinski, "When Does the Public's Issue Agenda Affect the Media's Issue Agenda (and Vice-Versa)? Developing a Framework for Media-Public Influence," *Social Science Quarterly* 90, no. 4 (2009): 796-815. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42940641>.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Janell Ross, "The Remarkable Political History of Women's Magazines," <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/08/14/womens-magazines-go-political-but-really-theyve-been-political-since-1792/>.

9 Giseline Kuipers, You Fai Chow & Elise van der Laan, "'Vogue' and the Possibility of Cosmopolitanism: Race, Health and Cosmopolitan Engagement in the Global Beauty Industry," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37, no. 12 (2014): 2158-2175.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Helen Kopnina, "The World According to 'Vogue': The Role of Culture(s) in International Fashion Magazines," *Dialectical Anthropology* 31 (2007), <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.elon.edu/stable/29790799>.

14 Ned Martel, "Vogue's September issue boosts spirits, economy," <https://ezproxy.elon.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.elon.edu/docview/1037652231?accountid=10730>.

15 Alaina Demopoulos, "How Coronavirus Will Shake Up Glossy Magazines' September Issues," <https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-coronavirus-will-shake-up-glossy-magazines-september-issues?ref=scroll>.

16 Giseline Kuipers, You Fai Chow & Elise van der Laan, "'Vogue' and the Possibility of Cosmopolitanism: Race, Health and Cosmopolitan Engagement in the Global Beauty Industry," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37, no. 12 (2014): 2158-2175.

17 Ibid.

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## Fashion's Connection to Political and Cultural Topics

Fashion is greatly intertwined with culture, for both realms grapple with questions of “cultural diversity, expressions of body, gender, and sexuality, globalization vs. localization.”<sup>18</sup> *Vogue* has used brand power to discuss cultural, social, and political topics. *Vogue Italia*'s 2008 “The Black Issue” featured solely Black models in an effort to diversify the magazine, and also criticized how the fashion industry is generally made up of predominantly white people.<sup>19</sup> In 2012, all *Vogue* editors signed the *Vogue* Health Initiative, which “pledged not to work with underage models and to ensure healthy working conditions for models.”<sup>20</sup> Overall though, the fashion publication industry has progressed slowly and continues to be “criticized for diffusion of unrealistic and unhealthy body standards; exploitation of young models; and the reproduction of racial and ethnic stereotypes.”<sup>21</sup>

In recent years, fashion publications and the fashion industry have outwardly expressed political views. There was a noticeable rise during the 2016 presidential election, when popular fashion publications like *Vogue*, *Glamour*, *Marie Claire*, and *Teen Vogue* made political endorsements for the first time.<sup>22</sup> These magazines, among other fashion publications, “are now unashamedly political, securing access to top-ranking leaders.”<sup>23</sup> The criticisms the fashion publication industry has received and the actions it has taken—or even not taken—still continue to demonstrate how the industry is intrinsically connected and related to social, political, and cultural issues.

Fashion and politics have become intertwined, including the sense that what one wears speaks to the type of candidate or political figure they are. When comparing First Ladies Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama, for example, the clothes each woman wore were directly correlated to their message.<sup>24</sup> In Clinton's case, her famed “pantsuit” demonstrated that she was an equal with her husband, President Bill Clinton.<sup>25</sup> Obama, however, often wore dresses and casual clothes that alluded to her “personal style.”<sup>26</sup> Obama's choice of clothes reinforced the idea that she and her husband were not “vying for the same political power” and represented traditional gender roles, which separated “the political/power and domestic/glamour spheres respectively.”<sup>27</sup>

The clothes one wears are directly correlated to social and cultural discussions. Clothes make a statement, and for women in particular, the choice of clothing “can alter the course of her life.”<sup>28</sup> There are social repercussions with wearing a miniskirt, for example, versus a pantsuit. Due to social constructs and today's male-dominated, “victim-blaming” society, items such as miniskirts have been associated “with asking for it.”<sup>29</sup> Such socially created ideals under the male gaze have led women to approach dressing as “a professional and political minefield.”<sup>30</sup> The fashion industry has even increasingly begun “weaving politically motivated messages into their work.”<sup>31</sup> Luxury, high-fashion brands such as Dior and Prabal Gurung directly incorporate “language of the resistance” onto their clothing, further emphasizing how fashion has a place within social and political movements.<sup>32</sup>

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18 Helen Kopnina, “The World According to ‘Vogue’: The Role of Culture(s) in International Fashion Magazines,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 31, no. 4 (2007): 363-381.

19 Giseline Kuipers, You Fai Chow & Elise van der Laan, “‘Vogue’ and the Possibility of Cosmopolitics: Race, Health and Cosmopolitan Engagement in the Global Beauty Industry,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37, no. 12 (2014): 2158-2175.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Rebecca Seales, “How Women's Magazines like Vogue Got Political in 2016,” <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38287698>.

23 Ibid.

24 Stefanie Schäfer, “Phenomenal Woman: Michelle Obama's Embodied Rhetoric and the Cultural Work of Fashion Biographies,” *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 60, no. 2/3 (2015): 235-54.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Lauren Duca, “Fashion IS Political, Period,” <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/fashion-is-political-period>.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

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## **Fashion Publications and Feminism**

The question of whether or not fashion is feminist is continuously asked, and the answers vary and are subjective.<sup>33</sup> A central point of discussion follows the notion that if the “culture of femininity” portrayed in fashion is led by women, then fashion falls under a feminist view.<sup>34</sup> Whereas when a field is dominated by men but is targeted towards women, the product is de facto not feminist.<sup>35</sup>

While the fashion industry/fashion magazines and feminism may appear contradictory, the notion of “feminist fashion” has risen within popular publications such as *Cosmopolitan*.<sup>36</sup> Particularly since 2008, *Cosmopolitan* has written articles for women with a more feminist eye. While the publication used to focus on how women could “please one’s man,” it shifted its direction to being female centered.<sup>37</sup> Critiques of the magazine, however, question what the publication is doing to change the non-feminist structures within the industry.<sup>38</sup>

While the fashion publication industry as a whole may have detached women’s identities from the men in their lives years ago, one study argues that magazines like *Vogue* and *Cosmopolitan* still objectify women because the publications “operate for profit,” noting that many of the advertisements and the beauty standards presented promote an “unsisterly synthetic sisterhood.”<sup>39</sup> However, the fact that a magazine is for-profit may not be the only reason it is considered not feminist. The stigma that comes with a woman being interested in fashion may actually be the stronger pull as to why fashion magazines are not often considered feminist, despite the millions of successful, progressive women reading publications like *Vogue*, and the fact that it is “edited by the most powerful woman in the fashion industry, Anna Wintour.”<sup>40</sup>

When fashion magazines such as *Vogue*, *Glamour*, and *Marie Claire* took a political stance during the presidential election in 2016, conventional critics condemned them, arguing that the fashion magazines were out of place to politicize their content.<sup>41</sup> Readers, however, appreciated the industry for “considering [their] core concerns.”<sup>42</sup> The level of shock with which commentators and critics portrayed in response to the politicization of fashion magazines is “a sign of how badly women are under-estimated,” and are assumed to be unaware of political issues.<sup>43</sup> Stereotypically, when women express their interest in fashion, “it is often weaponized as a means of denying [them] access to political conversations.”<sup>44</sup> Though the two topics are not mutually exclusive, they are treated as such.<sup>45</sup>

The unwarranted perception that having an interest in fashion correlates to a lack of “critical thought” is intrinsically rooted in misogynistic views of how society functions.<sup>46</sup> Fashion increasingly promotes feminist ideals and has been disbanding the idea that having an interest in fashion is synonymous with a lack of passion towards the future of politics, culture, or social topics.<sup>47</sup>

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33 Eugenia Paulicelli and Elizabeth Wissinger, “Introduction,” *Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1/2 (2012): 14-27.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Miglena Sternadori and Mandy Hagseth, “Fashionable Feminism or Feminist Fashion?” *Media Report to Women* 42, no. 4 (2014), 12–21.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Sara Tangdall, “The Influence of Popular Culture on Women’s Identities: A Diachronic Discourse Analysis of Vogue Magazine,” *Southern Journal of Linguistics* 41, no. 2 (2017), 47–94.

40 Ibid.

41 Rebecca Seales, “How Women’s Magazines like Vogue Got Political in 2016,” <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38287698>.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Lauren Duca, “Fashion IS Political, Period,” <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/fashion-is-political-period>.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

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### **Research Questions**

RQ 1: How has *Vogue* magazine's presidential election-year September issues integrated more politically, socially, and culturally charged articles?

RQ 2: How has *Vogue* woven political, social, and cultural messaging through its fashion content in presidential election-year September issues?

RQ 3: How has *Vogue* magazine created diverse and progressive photoshoot spreads within the presidential-election year September issues?

### **III. Methods**

This study examined the presidential election year September issues of *Vogue* magazine from the last 20 years, including a qualitative content analysis of the September issues from the years 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020. The September issue of *Vogue* magazine is deemed the most important, and often the largest, issue of the year.<sup>48</sup> The purpose of this issue of the magazine is to make a statement about the upcoming year in fashion and to set trends—not just fashion trends, but social and cultural trends—moving forward.<sup>49</sup> Individuals are generally more socially and politically engaged during election years,<sup>50</sup> and this study will analyze if this holds true for the fashion magazine.

Critics suggest that the magazine lacks substance and creates frivolous, shallow content.<sup>51</sup> This study looked at whether or not *Vogue* has increasingly featured more diverse, substantial content, or if the magazine's critics have been correct. Through a qualitative content analysis of the article topics and models used in photoshoots, this study aimed to track if *Vogue* magazine's content has progressed. For the purpose of this research, the word "progress" refers to content dealing with social, cultural, and political issues or topics.<sup>52</sup>

This study qualitatively tracked how article topics and individuals featured addressed politics (i.e. content about the government or governmental figures), social issues (i.e. climate change, civil rights, healthcare, etc.), or cultural topics (i.e. features on people from various countries, excerpts on religion, literature, etc.). The qualitative content analysis approach allows focus to be placed on the "substantive meanings of the given text" while still considering the frequency of topics.<sup>53</sup> This study draws upon the qualitative content analysis method of "three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing."<sup>54</sup>

Each page from each issue was analyzed for its relation to political, cultural, and social topics. In addition, in order to account for the visual aspects of the magazine, this study examined the portrayal of diverse body types of models. Traditionally, fashion models have been "largely white, waifish and woefully young."<sup>55</sup> In order to determine whether or not *Vogue* has progressed past these non-inclusive barriers, this study analyzed how spreads presented more diverse, non-white, and plus-size models. Advertisements were also considered when examining the visual and contextual aspects of the magazines. The content considered during analysis of the advertisements include the model, product, and copy, and were tracked to gauge progress from non-inclusive to progressive content.

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48 Matthew Schneider, "The Stars of September," <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/09/style/diversity-september-issue-magazines.html>.

49 Ibid.

50 Mohamed Younis, "In U.S., Attention to Politics Shows Typical Election Year Surge," <https://news.gallup.com/poll/320738/attention-politics-shows-typical-election-year-surge.aspx>.

51 Cathy Horyn, "What's Wrong With Vogue?," <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/01/fashion/01ANNA.html>.

52 Tara McKelvey, "What Does It Mean to Be a Progressive in the US?" <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-35467470>.

53 Siegfried Kracauer, "The Challenge of Qualitative Content Analysis," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1952): 631-42.

54 Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, "Drawing Valid Meaning from Qualitative Data: Toward a Shared Craft," *Educational Researcher* 13, no. 5 (1984): 20-30.

55 Hunt, Kenya. "Is The Fashion World Finally Getting Diversity?" <https://www.elle.com/uk/fashion/longform/a37245/fashions-ever-evolving-new-diversity/>.

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## IV. Findings

Analysis of the election-year issues of *Vogue* magazine demonstrate a gradual but steady increase in politically, socially, and culturally charged content. The most recent September issue looked at, 2020, had a noticeable increase in progressive and diverse content.

### ***Written Content: Letter From the Editor***

The first form of article in each of the issues is the “Letter From the Editor,” in which the editor-in-chief of the magazine, Anna Wintour, introduces the issue and its articles. The first “Letter From the Editor” considered from the year 2000 does not include any mention of the election, politics, social, or cultural issues. There is one mention of a photoshoot spread entitled “Conservative Party,” but it is referring to the season’s latest trend of refined, conservative clothing.<sup>56</sup> The letter from the 2004 issue describes the shift of how models are no longer seen as partiers or socialites, but are respected working women who use modeling to also pursue other interests.<sup>57</sup> This was the one mention of a socially charged topic, but there was no mention of politics or cultural issues.

Wintour wrote in the 2008 issue of how fashion directly relates to history and how clothes can “remind you of the world” through their unique cultural references.<sup>58</sup> In addition, the editor-in-chief recognized the current political and social issues of the time, including the recession. Wintour wrote that the editors were “always conscious that fashion may not be, in this period of economic and political uncertainty, at the forefront of our reader’s minds,” so the features had an economical focus.<sup>59</sup> The 2012 “Letter From the Editor” reverted back to not mentioning current events. The issue was the 120th anniversary of *Vogue*, and Wintour wrote about various impactful editors who have shaped the magazine and donned a “sampling of life and culture as we are experiencing it at that time.”<sup>60</sup> Wintour did not, however, mention any current issues in particular.

The 2016 issue directly addressed the presidential election and cultural discussions of the time. Wintour wrote of the presidential election “taking place against national and international backdrops that are fraught and charged, what with the rightly felt anger at racial and gender inequality and injustice and the need to honor and protect a world where diversity is a welcome and positive force.”<sup>61</sup> The 2020 “Letter From the Editor” directly discussed cultural, social, and political topics to a heightened degree in comparison to the past issues. Wintour wrote about the general theme of the month’s magazine, which was “hope.”<sup>62</sup> Every global edition of *Vogue* celebrated this same theme, “from Britain to Russia, from Mexico to Australia.”<sup>63</sup> Wintour wrote about the “battle against COVID-19,” the fight for racial justice, and the critical presidential election.<sup>64</sup>

The latest two issues studied—2016 and 2020—clearly addressed cultural, social, and political topics, and the 2020 issue in particular made clear that the entire issue was dedicated to progress and diversity. Throughout all of the issues, the “Letter From the Editor” was generally a reliable portrayal of the magazines as a whole.

### ***Written Content: Lifestyle Articles***

The 2000 September issue focused primarily on celebrities, socialites, and trends. One article, however, did highlight screenplay writer Christina Wayne, detailing how she is a hardworking woman of color in Hollywood under the age of 30.<sup>65</sup> The lifestyle articles in the 2004 issue touched on more progressive topics, including “A Family Affair” about the filmmaker daughters of politician John Kerry and their work on and documentary of the campaign trail.<sup>66</sup> There were features on international movies such as Zhang Yimou’s *Heroes* and José Rivera’s *The Motorcycle Diaries*.<sup>67</sup> In addition, political activist, feminist, and musician Laura

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56 *Vogue*, September 2000, pp. 60-78.

57 *Vogue*, September 2004, pp. 112-126.

58 *Vogue*, September 2008, pp. 312-320.

59 *Vogue*, September 2008, pp. 312-320.

60 *Vogue*, September 2012, pp. 264-302.

61 *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 320.

62 *Vogue*, September 2020, pp. 86.

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*

65 *Vogue*, September 2000, pp. 446.

66 *Vogue*, September 2004, pp. 559.

67 *Vogue*, September 2004, pp. 564.

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Dawn Galphin shared her work creating anti-Bush campaigns and speaking at the Women’s March for our Lives and Planned Parenthood events.<sup>68</sup> The featured book of the month was about Mumbai and described the various problems with class and economic divisions.<sup>69</sup>

From a contributor questionnaire about the presidential race, to a female reporter’s assignment on an electricity plant inception ceremony in Tajikistan, the lifestyle articles in 2008 showed yet another increase in diverse topics.<sup>70</sup> “Modern Manners: Party Lines” aimed to help navigate political discussions for the modern hostess, which was progressive in that it addressed the importance of the election, but regressive by emphasizing that political discussions are often not “the mood you want at your party” and giving tips on how to change the subject.<sup>71</sup> The 2012 issue shifts to include more direct political content, with a nine-page spread on Chelsea Clinton and her readiness to tackle the political scene and “change the world.”<sup>72</sup> Clinton detailed the many microaggressions she received as a successful woman in politics.<sup>73</sup> The 2012 issue also features various socially and culturally charged articles. Tennis player Sloane Stephens shared her rise as a female athlete of color; writer Marie NDiaye wrote about her book *Three Strong Women* set in Senegal; and Somalian model Ubah Hassan described her story as a refugee and how through Oxfam she was able to return to her home and provide aid.<sup>74</sup>

Lifestyle articles in the 2016 issue placed an emphasis on female empowerment. Black writer Nina Lorez Collins wrote about her filmmaker and activist mother Kathleen Collins; Kate Darling, “MIT researcher leading a groundbreaking new field of ethics,” shared her research on humans’ interactions with robots; the three lead actresses of *Good Girls Revolt* described the show’s premise of “young women on the edge of a revolution”; actress, playwright, woman of color, and UNICEF goodwill ambassador Sarah Jones wrote about her one woman show set in “a future free of sexism, racism, and all unpleasant emotions.”<sup>75</sup> The “I’m With Her” spread features Hillary Clinton’s campaign strategist Huma Abedin, who is praised for her political work but if not in politics, she “would work in fashion.”<sup>76</sup> The issue also shared diverse painters, actors, and athletes’ stories, along with a feature on Annie Novak, model and environmental activist who manages a rooftop farm in New York City.<sup>77</sup>

The 2020 September issue had the largest amount of progressive lifestyle articles. “The State of Hope” spread directly addressed current issues with “rising numbers of Covid-19 infections, horrifying instances of police brutality, and an election season as divisive as any in history.”<sup>78</sup> The article featured various “leaders, innovators, and creative talents”—including Governor Andrew Cuomo; Afro-Latina trans woman, artist, activist Sage Grace Dolan-Sandrino; Apple CEO Tim Cook; philanthropist Melinda Gates; and tennis champion Serena Williams—to discuss the issue’s theme of hope in addressing the aforementioned problems.<sup>79</sup> The issue includes diverse stories, from the author Raven Leilani’s complex novel about a Black girl leaving the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to actor Jonathan Majors describing his Jim Crow-era HBO show *Lovecraft Country*, to a feature on Atlanta mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms and how she has been managing a city with “police violence, social unrest, and rising COVID-19 numbers.”<sup>80</sup>

### **Written Content: Fashion Articles**

The 2000 September issue lacks progressive fashion articles and leans toward traditional gender roles in clothing, albeit with a few diverse articles. One multi-page spread highlights various “real,” working women who also have an interest in fashion, including individuals such as Columbia University student Anna Paquin, tech mogul Sarah Glaser, TV news reporter Andrea Thompson, and Janet Langhart, the wife of the former Secretary of Defense.<sup>81</sup> “The Mother of Invention” is also for the “real” woman, detailing the difficulties

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68      Ibid.

69      *Vogue*, September 2004, pp. 602.

70      *Vogue*, September 2008, pp. 384, 463.

71      *Vogue*, September 2008, pp. 482.

72      *Vogue*, September 2012, pp. 824-831.

73      *Vogue*, September 2012, pp. 828.

74      *Vogue*, September 2012, pp. 580, 586, 596.

75      *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 388, 432, 648, 664.

76      *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 724.

77      *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 731, 721, 738.

78      *Vogue*, September 2020, pp. 112.

79      Ibid.

80      *Vogue*, September 2020, pp. 136, 172, 194.

81      *Vogue*, September 2000, pp. 306-380.

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of shopping while pregnant, and shares designers who make maternity lines for women.<sup>82</sup>

Similarly to the 2000 issue, 2004 features 20 working women in “What Women Want: Reality Check” on their work-life style.<sup>83</sup> The features include an Executive Vice President of a Real Estate, a U.S. Attorney, a businesswoman, the President of Chicago’s Peoples Energy Corporation, and an M.D. OB-GYN.<sup>84</sup> The working woman theme carries throughout the issue, including in an advice column describing black tie outfits—“you may be the president of a bank or a brain surgeon or First Lady by day...”<sup>85</sup>—and in two articles about suits for women—“Hey, Ladies” and “Leg Room.”<sup>85</sup>

The 2008 September Issue does not integrate many political, social, or cultural topics into the fashion articles. Of note, “Vogue Moment: American Woman” features Michelle Obama on the campaign trail with husband Barack and describes her “classic American style.” “Sari, Right Number” features a young, female designer who makes clothes for the “college undergrads and young professionals,” and “The Masters” shares the tale of an African designer who incorporates traditional African prints into clothes for the modern woman.<sup>86</sup> In comparison, the 2012 fashion articles place more of an emphasis on feminism and diversity in fashion.

The 2012, 120th anniversary issue of *Vogue* offers many retrospectives on past issues. Famed *Vogue* editor André Leon Talley reminisces on an image by photographer Helmut Newton, detailing how “the image liberates women [...] in a way that, until that point, we would only have seen men look at women. This story and the specific image indicate how *Vogue* has embodied female empowerment and beauty throughout the years.”<sup>87</sup> A spread focusing solely on famed models celebrates the “ethnic multiplicity, the panorama of diversity, that makes American beauty so distinctive” in the pages of *Vogue*.<sup>88</sup> The spread features a few models in particular with El Salvadoran, Korean, African, Taino Indian, Hindu, Puerto Rican roots.<sup>89</sup>

Another spread in the 2012 issue aims to appreciate various sizes in the fashion industry, but uses harmful language insinuating that certain body types are preferred from others. “Post-waif: The Sexy Model Returns” deems models of a certain size—“underfed waifs”—now unattractive, unlike the “sexy” models who are not the sample size.<sup>90</sup> The article does address, however, that “in the upside-down, topsy-turvy world of fashion, these so-called bigger girls rarely require anything larger than a size 4.”<sup>91</sup> This spread, while aiming to recognize models of various sizes, still admits to the size disparities in the fashion industry. The 2016 issue addresses this same topic, stating “we’re in the midst of a movement that celebrates all diverse shapes and sizes.”<sup>92</sup> The article features high fashion plus-size models such as Ashley Graham and Candice Huffine, along with quoting designer Carly Cushnie that it’s “not really about the male gaze anymore—it’s about dressing for your own pleasure.”<sup>93</sup>

The 2016 issue also highlights women in the behind-the-scenes aspects of the industry. Designer of color Simone Rocha makes clothes with a “feminist feminine fashion vision.”<sup>94</sup> Another spread addresses how “fashion photography has long been hyperglossed and male-dominated,” but features three young, female fashion photographers who embody a “thoroughly provocative female gaze.”<sup>95</sup> “Making the Cut” highlights young “headliners” of the day, and features a diverse group of actors and celebrities like Zendaya, Sasha Lane, Willow Smith, and Jaden Smith.<sup>96</sup>

The most recent issue in September 2020 integrates a significant amount of cultural, political, and social topics into the fashion articles. In the spread “Protective Measures,” eight models—six of whom are models of color and two of whom are plus-size models—wear a culturally relevant face mask, while the article details the necessity of the accessory.<sup>97</sup> Another spread, “Vogue Voices,” poses the question of “What is the

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82 *Vogue*, September 2000, pp. 668.

83 *Vogue*, September 2004, pp. 400.

84 *Vogue*, September 2004, pp. 402-450.

85 *Vogue*, September 2004, pp. 484, 512, 531.

86 *Vogue*, September 2008, pp. 481, 562, 500-514.

87 *Vogue*, September 2012, pp. 598.

88 *Vogue*, September 2012, pp. 742.

89 *Ibid.*

90 *Vogue*, September 2012, pp. 754.

91 *Ibid.*

92 *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 510.

93 *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 520.

94 *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 472.

95 *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 534.

96 *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 692.

97 *Vogue*, September 2020, pp. 148-155.

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future of fashion?” to 100 designers, models, photographers, activists, and CEOs.<sup>98</sup> The article includes many people of color within the fashion industry, including model Ugbad Abdi, who says “brands should understand the importance of assembling a team that is diverse and inclusive, both in front of and behind the camera.”<sup>99</sup> Aurora James, a designer noted for creating the 15 percent pledge which “calls on the world’s biggest retailers to devote shelf space to Black-owned businesses and suppliers,” has her own multi-page spread.<sup>100</sup>

### **Visual Content: Fashion Photoshoots**

One photo spread, “Madly Max,” in the 2000 September issue sets a dystopian scene and mixes various cultures’ styles to create rugged, sci-fi looks.<sup>101</sup> The clothing emulates costumes from the film *Mad Max* with the use of raw fur and draped clothing.<sup>102</sup> The original *Mad Max* placed minimal emphasis on women, and therefore this photoshoot reclaims the narrative for women by placing female models at the forefront of the scenes.<sup>103</sup> The 2004 issue’s photo spread “Sparkle All Day: Day Dreams” places models performing domestic chores while wearing glamorous sequin and sparkle clothing.<sup>104</sup> The piece appears to be a form of cultural satire, playing on the stereotypical suburban housewife character while the models are dressed in powerful and intriguing clothing. Another spread, “Be Boyish: About a Boy,” shows models dressed in suits, suit vests, and trousers.<sup>105</sup> The models embrace the stereotypically deemed “men’s clothing” through power stances and stereotypical masculine poses.<sup>106</sup>

The 2008 photo spread “Noble Endeavor” similarly features female models embracing stereotypical men’s clothing, with “an anti-establishment attitude.”<sup>107</sup> The models wear plush red velvet clothing with embroidery, white blouses, and clothes that emulate those of medieval male royalty. Photo spreads in the 2012 issue also promote female empowerment in various forms. “Space Odyssey” places female models in futuristic spaceships and neo-modern settings, portrayed as the commanders or leaders of the expedition.<sup>108</sup> The clothes create a “jedi-warrior attitude.”<sup>109</sup> Continuing with the female-forward theme, “Her Brilliant Career” shows outfits for various career positions such as broadcast journalist, lawyer, investment banker, venture capitalist, architect, professor, CEO.<sup>110</sup> The spread is for the modern woman, who has “an office wardrobe that works as hard as she does.”<sup>111</sup>

The 2016 September issue includes spreads similar to those from 2004 and 2008. “Major General” places female models in “field jackets and military coats,” emulating the stereotypically male role of army general.<sup>112</sup> “Mad About the Boy” features models in stereotypical menswear clothing, including khaki trousers and tweed blazers.<sup>113</sup> The photoshoot includes models of color, leaning back and sitting with legs widespread, which is a typical male stance of “manspreading.”<sup>114</sup> Rare amongst the aforementioned studied *Vogue* magazines, the 2016 spread “Pomp and Circumstance” includes a photoshoot solely of women of color with various hair types, showcasing accessories for every hair type.<sup>115</sup>

The 2020 issue features significantly more models of color and includes various spreads solely with women of color, including the magazine’s covers. “*Vogue* covers talk to us about who we are and the world we live in,” and with the “plagues of coronavirus, racist violence, and presidential incompetence” two Black artists painted the covers of the 2020 issue.<sup>116</sup> The other September issues mentioned all feature either white

98 *Vogue*, September 2020, pp. 156-157.

99 Ibid.

100 *Vogue*, September 2020, pp. 164-165.

101 *Vogue*, September 2000, pp. 594.

102 Ibid.

103 Noah Berlatsky, “The Radical Evolution Of Gender Roles In The Mad Max Films,” <https://theestablishment.co/the-radical-evolution-of-gender-roles-in-the-mad-max-films-d109f772fea3/index.html>.

104 *Vogue*, September 2004, pp. 678.

105 Ibid.

106 *Vogue*, September 2004, pp. 696.

107 *Vogue*, September 2008, pp. 723.

108 *Vogue*, September 2012, pp. 784-797.

109 *Vogue*, September 2012, pp. 784.

110 *Vogue*, September 2012, pp. 882.

111 Ibid.

112 *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 746-757.

113 *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 766.

114 Olivia Petter, “There’s an Entirely Reasonable Explanation for ‘Manspreading,’” <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/manspreading-scientific-explanation-revealed-men-behaviour-public-transport-etiquette-a7862771.html>.

115 *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 722.

116 *Vogue*, September 2020, pp. 104.

models or celebrities. The 2020 spread “It Takes an Industry” tributes people all across the fashion world, from patternmakers to magazine-store owners, by photographing these individuals in the season’s latest clothing.<sup>117</sup> Of the 67 individuals photographed, 59 were people of color, and there is a wide range of different body types and ages.<sup>118</sup>

### **Visual Content: Advertisements**

The 2000 September issue includes various regressive ads, of which do not occur in the later issues. A cigarette ad features a white male in a cowboy hat as the “true American” who smokes, while another ad for breast implants features a white woman with the motto “I am confident, I am beautiful,” because of the breast implants.<sup>119</sup> One progressive, multi-page spread ad for the clothing brand Lane Bryant, however, features three models of color, two of whom are plus size.<sup>120</sup>

Throughout the 2004 and 2008 issues many ads feature suits for the working woman, including brands such as Ellen Tracy, Max Mara, Liz Claiborne, Oscar de la Renta, Isabel Marant among others.<sup>121</sup> Another 2004 ad for TSE Cashmere portrays a woman in a business dress—presumably the mother figure—walking out of the bathroom while a man in a t-shirt—presumably the father figure—plays with a child in the bathtub.<sup>122</sup> This ad normalizes the reversal of stereotypical gender roles in which the mother leaves to go to work and the father stays at home.<sup>123</sup>

Progressive beauty ads increase significantly throughout the 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020 issues. Ads for makeup companies such as L’Oreal, Urban Decay, Clinique, and Maybelline all feature foundation shades for models of color.<sup>124</sup> A Secret deodorant ad from the 2016 issue features a Black model wearing a spacesuit, with the copy: “Graduate top of your class in robotics. Complete 1,000 pilot hours. Be selected to go to space. Have people ask how you’ll cope in space without makeup.”<sup>125</sup> The ad insinuates the double standard for women, and how despite the career successes people will still ask about appearance, and Secret deodorant is there for these “stressful moments.”<sup>126</sup>

## **V. Discussion**

The evident progression of the September issues of *Vogue* demonstrates more than an increase in political, social, and cultural topics. These findings show how *Vogue* has gradually become what it claims to be, a “cultural barometer for a global audience.”<sup>127</sup> When looking at the magazines from the early part of this century, it may be hard to believe that the content *Vogue* published was truly setting the agenda for its audience—the “Letters from the Editor” from the 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012 September editions, which set the tone for the magazine, did not mention any such progressive topics. The content of later years, however, does demonstrate a progressive agenda, proving that *Vogue* has grown into a politically, socially, and culturally charged publication leading the way. Of note are articles like the “I’m With Her” spread featuring Hillary Clinton’s campaign strategist Huma Abedin, along with the 2020 covers painted by two Black artists which aim to “talk to us about who we are and the world we live in.”<sup>128</sup>

Especially prevalent in the later issues of *Vogue* are features of unique individuals across a variety of industries and fields. Articles such as “Vogue Voices” from the 2020 issue and features on filmmaker and activist Kathleen Collins, MIT researcher Kate Darling, and actress and philanthropist Sarah Jones in the 2016 issue demonstrate how *Vogue* curates its interviews to promote an array of progressive individuals, to

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117 *Vogue*, September 2020, pp. 256.

118 *Ibid.*

119 *Vogue*, September 2000, pp. 388, 654.

120 *Vogue*, September 2000, pp. 434.

121 *Vogue*, September 2004, pp. 224, 571, 330; *Vogue*, September 2008, pp. 310, 336.

122 *Vogue*, September 2004, pp. 550.

123 *Ibid.*

124 *Vogue*, September 2008, pp. 618; *Vogue*, September 2012, pp. 22, 726; *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 88, 591; *Vogue*, September 2020, pp. 124, 246.

125 *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 647.

126 *Ibid.*

127 “Condé Nast Vogue Brands,” accessed September 30, 2020, <https://www.condenast.com/brands/vogue>.

128 *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 724; *Vogue*, September 2020, pp. 104.

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steer the conversation in a particular direction.<sup>129</sup> Audiences do gravitate towards publications like *Vogue*, for Condé Nast reported that subscriptions increased by 85 percent from March 2019 to March 2020, in addition to a 35 percent increase in weekly average digital readership in the United States.<sup>130</sup> In today's media-heavy world, *Vogue's* content has prevailed as a source for social, cultural, and political discussions, and has garnered a large following to boot.

## VI. Conclusion

The analysis of the *Vogue* issues reveal a noticeable increase in progressive and diverse content as the years advance. The most recent years 2016 and 2020 include spreads that directly integrate cultural, social, and political topics. All of the issues feature content that touches on female empowerment in terms of careers and gender roles.

There are noticeable direct relations to cultural, political, and social topics in the written work, whereas the visual spreads and advertisements did not directly integrate as many diverse ideals. However, as the magazines progressed, more photoshoot spreads directly correlated to social and cultural topics.

This study reveals how *Vogue* has become a more socially, culturally, and politically aware magazine, delivering readers with an intersection of fashion and current events. While the study analyzed the largest and arguably the most culturally attuned issue of the year—the September issue—during the past six presidential election years, future analyses of the subject may look at the November issue to see if there are similar trends. Looking at an entire year's worth of *Vogue* magazines, rather than one issue from every four years, may also further demonstrate how the magazine has evolved to become more progressive and feature more diverse individuals.

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129 *Vogue*, September 2020, pp. 156-157; *Vogue*, September 2016, pp. 388, 432, 664.

130 Elizabeth Paton and Jessica Testa, "What's the Point of a Fashion Magazine Now?," <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/09/fashion/magazines-coronavirus.html>.

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