

# ELON JOURNAL

OF UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH IN

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ELON  
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School of Communications



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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,
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- To advance the university's priority to emphasize undergraduate student research.

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The student-written articles that follow are the result of many solitary hours spent in research, as well as the untold hours in which students and teacher-mentors have worked together to revise a paper for public consumption. These mentor-mentee relationships often transform a student's future career path, making these endeavors truly life-changing.

Research is a powerful part of our educational experience and one we are proud to share with our students.

Dr. T. Kenn Gaither  
Interim Dean, School of Communications

## Editorial Board

Nearly 30 faculty members in Elon's School of Communications helped to select seven undergraduate research papers for the fall 2022 issue. The papers, written in senior-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, Israel Balderas, David Bockino, Lee Bush, Vic Costello, Brooks Fuller, Kelly Furnas, Jessica Gisclair, Dan Haygood, Denise Hill, Jenny Jiang, Laura Lacy, Byung Lee, Karen Lindsey, Derek Lackaff, Julie Lellis, Barbara Miller-Gaither, Phillip Motley, Tom Nelson, Jane O'Boyle, Glenn Scott, Jessalyn Strauss, Amanda Sturgill, Vanessa Bravo, Kenn Gaither, Diane Johnson, Hal Vincent, and Qian Xu.

Thanks also go to Tommy Kopetskie, who proofread articles, designed the online publication, and updated the publication's website.

## Editor's Note

Geopolitics and gender are dominant themes in the fall 2022 issue.

Three articles use qualitative content analysis in very different ways to understand political events both past and present. Elise Leary-Forrey examined the early days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine through global newspaper coverage, finding that U.S. headlines tended to have more of an economic focus, while international headlines stressed the military angle. Christian Harrison studied Twitter during the 2020 U.S. Senate race in Georgia, concluding that candidates most frequently used the platform for non-issue-related communication such as fundraising. Through a historical lens, Katie Dalrymple dissected Richard Nixon television campaign ads from his presidential campaign of 1968, using "videostyle" analysis to demonstrate how video production elements augmented his language surrounding dog whistle racism.

Student scholars in this issue also apply varied approaches to study gender. Two articles examine gender through an advertising context – Anna Sutton found that hard seltzer television ads are less likely to exhibit stereotypical gender archetypes than are beer ads, while Claire Grider concluded that social media ads for menstrual products are moving away from messages that communicate shame and more toward inclusiveness. Meanwhile, Corinne Rose applied feminist standpoint theory through in-depth interviews with professionals to explore how women in the data and communications fields experience discrimination.

In addition, Molly Healy's article explores representation through Saturday Night Live, comparing how the use of stereotypes and satirical racial humor varied over four episodes of the comedy show that featured Chinese guest hosts.

These students and their faculty mentors have produced thought-provoking work, which I hope you will enjoy in this issue.

Harlen Makemson  
Professor  
Editor, Elon Journal

# Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications

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# Three Little Words: Law and Order, Videostyle Framing, and Dog Whistle Racism in Richard Nixon's 1968 Campaign

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of an Honors thesis

## Abstract

*"Law and order" has been a GOP catchphrase since the early 1960s but was popularized by Richard Nixon in 1968. In a carefully crafted presidential campaign centered on the use of television, Nixon adopted and normalized the term "law and order." An employment of dog whistle racism, the phrase implicitly refers to law enforcement but suggests to a targeted audience of conservative, White voters that crime and violence is the fault of Black Americans. The goal of this study was to understand how Nixon used video production elements to augment his language surrounding dog whistle racism. The research used sociolinguistic analysis, a qualitative method of examining media, and is further situated in the method of videostyle framing. Adopting and modifying Johnston and Kaid's (2006) videostyle framing system, this research analyzed the verbal, nonverbal, and production components of Nixon's television spots. Ads that referenced law and order, even indirectly, displayed tones of "toughness" and "aggression," rather than positive ideals like "charisma" and "optimism." This research contextualizes the current applications of dog whistle racism in modern political communications.*

## I. Introduction

Accepting the Republican nomination in July of 2016, Donald Trump promised the convention he was the country's "law and order candidate." While President Trump's rhetoric proved to be more provocative than previous administrations, he adopted messages regarding crime that have been recycled by presidents from George W. Bush to Ronald Reagan.

Law and order has been a Republican Party catchphrase since the early 1960s and was largely popularized by Richard Nixon during his 1968 presidential campaign. In this election, Nixon sought to salvage his political career in the midst of nationwide Civil Rights atrocities and counter-movements. In an unprecedented fashion, Nixon and his campaign staff focused on his image, strategically tapping into the booming medium of television. Rhetoric was carefully crafted to complement this manufactured appearance, his key platform being law and order. Today, law and order is understood as dog whistle racism, a seemingly neutral phrase that is not outwardly racist, yet signals its racial implications to certain people. Dog whistles like Nixon's law and order are neatly packaged and presented as a sort of code that reaches a target audience, in this case conservative, White voters. These advertisements further send subliminal messages in their use

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of videostyle, the verbal, nonverbal, and production components that convey messages to viewers. Much like dog whistles, videostyle allows an advertisement to implicitly communicate a sentiment, often unspoken, without ever explicitly stating it.

The purpose of this research is to understand how Nixon used video production elements to augment his language surrounding dog whistle racism. Existing scholarship emphasizes Nixon's political attitudes and actions once in office, as well as his campaign's attention to his appearance on television. However, this study intends to specifically analyze these law and order television ads in order to more fully understand their racial implications in the context of 1968.

## II. Literature Review

### *Cultural Context of 1968*

The chaotic nature of 1968 cannot go overlooked, as it created the political maelstrom culminating in Nixon's presidency. One major stressor on U.S. politics and culture was the Vietnam War. Nixon's predecessor, Lyndon B. Johnson, escalated U.S. involvement in the overseas conflict despite wavering public opinion. By March of 1968, he had authorized the deployment of 525,000 men as Americans increasingly disapproved of the U.S. role in the war by this time.<sup>1</sup> Because of eroding public support, Johnson announced in that same speech that he would not seek the Democratic nomination in the upcoming election.

With the lack of accountability from the White House, outcry over the ethics of waging war in Vietnam rose to the forefront of national dialogue. The primary mouthpiece of dissent was student activism. Left-leaning students protesting Vietnam proved to be a cornerstone of the larger counterculture movement evident in the 1960s, ultimately muffled by the reactionary conservatism of Nixon at the end of the decade.

In addition to growing resentment over the Vietnam War, civil rights tensions were at a climax, as "riots had grown to dominate public discourse," and media attention.<sup>2</sup> Incidents of police brutality and general civil unrest amounted to a political landscape never before experienced in the United States. The assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968, revived national outrage surrounding racial injustice. Consequently, "America convulsed [and] riots broke out across the country."<sup>3</sup>

Intertwined with racial justice protests was the upheaval at the Chicago Democratic National Convention in August of 1968. By June, Sen. Robert Kennedy (brother of former president John F. Kennedy) was in position to receive the Democratic nomination. Two months before the Chicago convention, Kennedy was assassinated just hours after winning primaries in South Dakota and California. The violence and disorder at the Chicago DNC provided Nixon the perfect opportunity to preach about the country's need for law and order and establish himself as the candidate to quell the chaos.

With these events building before the November election, Nixon sought to overcome his prior political failures by reshaping his image. The new medium of television was the way to do so; in 1960, 87% of homes in the United States had a television and averaged five-and-a-half hours of viewing per day.<sup>4</sup> A previous landmark television event, Nixon's 1960 debate with John F. Kennedy, is situated in collective memory as a resounding failure. In the first presidential debate ever televised, it is misremembered that Nixon appeared sweaty and disheveled on camera, contributing to his loss in the election. In contrast, Joe McGinniss' book *The Selling of the President* offers insight on Nixon's staff and all that went into changing the politician's reputation. As McGinniss illustrates, repurposing Richard Nixon was tactical, incremental, and intentional. The tell-all suggests that throughout the campaign aides sought to avoid the facade of a new Nixon, but to show the old Nixon "with his strengths looking stronger and his negatives blurred by the years."<sup>5</sup> Scholar Jeremy Mayer's writing complements this sentiment, as he proposes that "the greatest obstacle Nixon had

1 Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks on Decision not to Seek Re-election," March 31, 1968. White House, District of Columbia, United States of America, MPEG-4, 40:38.

2 Jeremy D. Mayer, "Nixon Rides the Backlash to Victory," *The Historian* 64, no. 2 (2002): 1.

3 Ted Conover, "The Strike that Brought MLK to Memphis," *Smithsonian Magazine*, January/February 2018, 77.

4 Matthew Gentzkow, "Television and Voter Turnout," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 121, no. 3 (2006): 931.

5 McGinniss, 77.

to conquer... was his 'loser' image."<sup>6</sup> Though the campaign was successful, the election was extremely close, with Nixon winning the popular vote against Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey by less than one percentage point.<sup>7</sup>

## Dog Whistle Racism

This study focuses on the implications of a particular racial platform emerging from 1968: *law and order*. Scholars agree that law and order was a viable political strategy,<sup>8</sup> growing as a hot-button issue rivaled only by the Vietnam War and civil rights.<sup>9</sup> More notably to this research, law and order is a term unmistakably connected to dog whistle racism.

Ian Haney López's scholarship clearly articulates the definition and implications of dog whistle racism, but most importantly, its roots in the modern GOP. Haney López defines dog whistle racism as "coded talk centered on race."<sup>10</sup> Though he acknowledges it is a bipartisan tactic, he argues it is a weapon employed by Republicans in a way that is "not accidental, vestigial, or comical, and certainly not trivial."<sup>11</sup> Rather than publicly tossing around racial slurs or directly racist sentiments, phrases like "forced busing," "welfare queens," or "states' rights"—all terms popularized or repurposed in this era—are substituted to convey racist messages behind "thinly veiled references."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Professor Benjamin Bowser argues that the theoretical development of racism was still evolving, resulting in a perceived declining significance of race: "if you replace an overt system of racial hierarchy with a covert one, race's salience will appear to decline."<sup>13</sup> In this way, 1968 marked a shift towards covert racism, and a critical tactic for perpetuating this form of white supremacy was dog whistle racism.

There is no better articulation of dog whistle racism than GOP political strategist Lee Atwater's 1981 comments on the evolution Southern Strategy ultimately employed by Ronald Reagan:

You start out in 1954 by saying, "N—, n—, n—." By 1968, you can't say "n—" — that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, then we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me— because obviously sitting around saying, "We want to cut this," is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than "n—, n—."<sup>14</sup>

An understanding of dog whistle racism is critical for this research, as it frames the importance of Nixon's law and order messages and his intent to reach white voters. A platform of law and order alluded to increased policing, condemnation of Black "violence," and the prioritization of White safety without explicitly naming race. Even in the mid-60s, experts correctly identified law and order as "simply a code word for white racism,"<sup>15</sup> but as Nixon discovered, racism won votes.

As many scholars acknowledge, Nixon opted to adopt the racial tactics of candidate George Wallace, the infamous Alabama segregationist, in what became known as Nixon's Southern Strategy. Wallace

6 Mayer, 356.

7 John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, "1968 Statistics," The American Presidency Project, University of California Santa Barbara, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/elections/1968>.

8 Lee Bernstein, "We Shall Have Order: The Cultural Politics of Law and Order," in *America Is the Prison: Arts and Politics in Prison in the 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 20.

9 Stephen Earl Bennet and Alfred J. Tuchfarber, "The Social-Structural Sources of Cleavage on Law and Order Policies," *American Journal of Political Science* 19, no. 3 (1975): 419.

10 Ian Haney López, "Introduction: Racial Politics and the Middle Class," in *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.

11 Haney López, 2.

12 Haney López, 4.

13 Benjamin Bowser, "Racism: Origin and Theory," *Journal of Black Studies* 48, no. 6 (2017): 575.

14 Bowser, 578.

15 Bennet and Tuchfarber, 420.



“pioneered a kind of soft porn racism,”<sup>16</sup> and at the risk of losing votes to an independent candidate, Nixon “refashioned [this] racial demagoguery,”<sup>17</sup> to secure the loyalty of White conservatives—consciously racist or not. Similarly, Mayer notes his courtship of “white backlash” votes.<sup>18</sup> In the same vein, scholar Lauren Pearlman argues the platform allowed Nixon to “conflate race and crime” while his strategists “made a calculated appeal to white voters.”<sup>19</sup>

In addition to absorbing Wallace’s racial politics, Nixon pulled from the playbook of Republican Barry Goldwater, who laid the foundation of Americans’ obsession with law and order during his 1964 presidential campaign.<sup>20</sup> Goldwater’s narrative targeted “crime and social chaos” during the height of Cold War anxieties,<sup>21</sup> when obsession with national security translated to a fixation on “restor[ing] a sense of security and social order,” domestically.<sup>22</sup> Law and order was a strategy of political backlash that promised to restore safety for private citizens—or more accurately, White citizens.

Scholars also agree that law and order was the key platform attracting these reactionary and conservative voters to Nixon, simultaneously distancing Black and liberal votes. Nixon quickly co-opted the issue of law and order in an unprecedented fashion,<sup>23</sup> making it “the rhetoric of his campaign,” as well as “the cornerstone of his first term.”<sup>24</sup> Haney López, in his historical tracing of Republican racial politics, described the platform as follows:

Ultimately, the language of law and order justified a more quiet form of violence in defense of the racial status quo, replacing lynchings and mass arrests for trespassing and delinquency. By the mid-1960s, “law and order” had become a surrogate expression for concern about the civil rights movement.<sup>25</sup>

Despite white anxieties, crime rates were not any more statistically concerning than previous years, with only one percent of the population becoming victims of violent crime.<sup>26</sup> More specifically, the murder rate was one one-hundredth of that,<sup>27</sup> so the types of criminal activity targeted by law and order were far less pervasive than indicated. Therefore, the law and order platform sensationalized crime to covertly criminalize “political progress, urban riots, and... challenges to the status quo.”<sup>28</sup>

Historians overwhelmingly acknowledge that law and order was conceptualized by White Republicans to maliciously and covertly criminalize Black Americans. A 1975 study presented data demonstrating that “law and order and feelings about Blacks [were] inextricably interwoven,”<sup>29</sup> meaning the platform directly tapped into white anxieties and promised a tough stance on law enforcement across the country. As Mayer writes, and as is crucial for this research, “the role law and order played in Nixon’s victory cannot be underestimated.”<sup>30</sup> Nixon acknowledged this himself, famously saying: “it’s all about law and order and the damn Negro-Puerto Rican groups out there.”<sup>31</sup> This unapologetic emphasis on law and order gave Nixon a platform to stand on and reason for voters to listen. Nixon understood the racial implications of his law-and-order platform and chose to implement it despite the harm it would bring to Black Americans.

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16 Ian Haney López, “The GOP’s Rise as ‘the White Man’s Party,’” in *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 16.

17 Haney López, 17.

18 Mayer, 356.

19 Pearlman, 146.

20 May, 945.

21 May, 946.

22 May, 945.

23 Lauren Pearlman, “D.C. Should Not Stand for Disorder and Crime: Richard Nixon’s Law-and-Order Campaign,” in *Democracy’s Capital: Black Political Power in Washington, D.C., 1960s-1970s* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 140.

24 Bernstein, 19.

25 Haney López, 24.

26 May, 944.

27 May, 944.

28 May, 944.

29 Bennet and Tuchfarber, 425.

30 Mayer, 361.

31 Haney López, 24.



### III. Methods

The following methodology aims to answer this research question:

*RQ: How do Nixon's 1968 campaign television ads utilize videostyle to communicate dog whistles in a law-and-order context?*

This research was conducted as sociolinguistic analysis, a qualitative method of examining media,<sup>32</sup> further situated within the field of *videostyle framing* established by Johnston and Kaid's 2006 study.<sup>33</sup> Although videostyle coding has been a popular model for analyzing political ads for over twenty years,<sup>34</sup> Johnston and Kaid created a detailed framework in their research discerning image-centered presidential ads from policy ads. This analysis method is likewise applicable to Nixon's ads, as it emphasizes the examination of verbal, nonverbal, and production components. This method allows for the appropriate consideration to both text and imagery that may accompany law and order and employ dog whistle racism. Given the subtle nature of dog whistle racism, nonverbal and production components are equally important, if not more so, than the narration in these ads. Camera angles, the composition of still photos, and editing techniques can all strengthen the covert nature of dog whistle racism. In this way, Johnston and Kaid's framing methodology will help contextualize law and order.

This specific framework is supported by other research in the field—Valeria Sulfaro acknowledges the importance of semantics and visual imagery to cue voters and convey messages.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Angelos Kissas reiterates the importance of production strategies that are detailed in Johnston and Kaid's research: *cinéma-vérité* (literally “truthful cinema,” a French method that emphasizes realism) and *neutral reporter format*, where an “independent speaker-observer” narrates.<sup>36</sup> In addition to the importance of videostyle and production, both Sulfaro and Kissas further validate advertisements' impact on viewers. Sulfaro's writing describes the schema—or mental shortcuts for decision-making—that voters form to make judgments about candidates. She states that ads employ specific videostyle that “can evoke associations” regarding political issues, policies, and platforms without being specific.<sup>37</sup> Much like Sulfaro's research, Kissas proposes that political ads are “schematically morphed” to reach viewers.<sup>38</sup> While political ads may seem to be composed of simple text and imagery, they are crafted to align with certain schema that voters have previously developed. Furthermore, research shows that voters learn more about political issues from television ads than from televised news or debates,<sup>39</sup> and while certain advertisements may be perceived as attacks, negative ads have been confirmed to influence viewers' voting preferences.<sup>40</sup>

This research was conducted using a sample of 21 television commercials, 10 from Museum of the Moving Image's “Living Room Candidate”<sup>41</sup> database and 11 from the Congressional Archives of the University of Oklahoma's Carl Albert Center.<sup>42</sup> These 21 ads represent all of the relevant Nixon spots from 1968 available on both databases. While there were dozens of regional variations of the same Nixon commercials aired, these spots were selected because of their accessibility and the variety of topics they represent. The individual ads range in length, topic, and campaign platforms, including titles like “The First Civil Right,” “Order,” and “Vietnam.”

After acquiring the sample of commercials, a preliminary viewing was conducted to sort the spots into three categories based on their likelihood to display dog whistles. These watch-throughs were conducted to identify the main topic of the advertisement, as well as discern any initial dog whistle calls. Category One, ads mentioning law and order or those with racial references, contained seven ads. Category Two was

32 Jack Rosenberry and Lauren A. Vicker, “Qualitative Research Methods,” in *Applied Mass Communication Theory: A Guide for Media Practitioners*, ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2022), 228.

33 Anne Johnston and Lynda Lee Kaid, “Image Ads and Issue Ads in U.S. Presidential Advertising: Using Videostyle to Explore Stylistic Differences in Televised Political Ads From 1952 to 2000,” in *Journal of Communication* 52, no. 2 (2006): 284.

34 Johnston and Kaid, “Using Videostyle,” 285.

35 Sulfaro, 89.

36 Kissas, 395.

37 Sulfaro, 82.

38 Kissas, 394.

39 Johnston and Kaid, 20.

40 Johnston and Kaid, 23.

41 Museum of the Moving Image, “The Living Room Candidate: Presidential Campaign Commercials 1952-2020,” Database, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/>.

42 Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma, “Congressional Archives Carl Albert Center,” Database, <http://www.ou.edu/carlalbertcenter.html>.

designated for the five ads that potentially included dog whistles verbally or visually but would require closer analysis. Category Three was the group of spots that did not appear to make any reference to law and order or any subliminal racialized message. This sorting was not part of the formal coding process, but to aid the researcher in focusing on racial themes and the presence of dog whistles.

The coding process was conducted using an adjusted version of the codesheet created by Johnston and Kaid. Detailing more than 50 questions, the codesheet focused on all production components of the ad, like camera angles, live sound, and rhetorical appeals. Because their study focused on image versus issue commercials, the codesheet was modified and refined for Nixon and the tactics often used in his specific campaign. A few questions specific to Nixon and dog whistles were added, including questions about indirect references to law and order and the presence of non-White people and their role on-screen.

## IV. Findings

### *Common Strategies in Law and Order Advertisements*

The seven spots identified as containing dog whistles in the preliminary sorting stage revealed several consistent strategies related to law and order. The production elements were fairly consistent, as four of these ads used a compilation of still photographs, rather than the video footage that is standard in contemporary commercials. These series of photos are connected by sharp zooming and panning, creating not only a sense of motion, but emotion. Using these jarring movements not only dramatizes the subjects but builds a sense of chaos and anxiety, contributing to the fear tactic which conveys the need for law and order. By flashing pictures of screaming liberal protestors, cities in ruin, and handcuffed criminals all in less than one second, Nixon's law and order advertisements feel fast-paced and turbulent in a way that reinforces his presidency as a solution.

Two of the remaining ads, those using video, were interview-style footage of constituents describing their political concerns and how Nixon will remedy them. Very simplistic in production, these spots feature head-on video of exclusively White Americans discussing the political climate and Nixon's qualifications for office. While both end with brief, documentary-style footage of Nixon speaking to a crowd, his time on-screen is limited to just a few seconds. Only four spots of the entire research sample included video of Nixon, though none of these clips were footage of Nixon speaking directly to the camera or with other individuals. If video footage of Nixon appeared in an ad, it had narration or music overlaid, not his voice. The rest of his appearances were merely through still photographs. This aligns with previous literature that campaign staff hoped to reduce Nixon's time on-screen in an effort to reshape his image.

The tone across law and order advertisements was also consistent. The ads that referenced law and order, even indirectly, displayed tones of "toughness" and "aggression," rather than positive ideals like "charisma" and "optimism." Nixon was not known for charm, and this group of seven ads reflect his strategy of employing a stern and serious tone to warn voters about the dangers of rampant crime and a lack of order. Conversely, the ads lacking traces of dog whistles were more likely to present these more positive ideals about hope for America's future.

### *Presence of Non-White People in Nixon Ads*

Statistically, roughly half of the 21 total ads depicted non-White-appearing individuals—the researcher coded 10 ads including photo or video of non-White people, 10 with only White people, and one ad as uncertain. Additionally, images of individuals who appeared to be an ethnicity other than White only appeared in still photos, never video footage. It must be noted that this question of non-White presence required the discretion of the researcher, who acknowledges that it is short-sighted to assume a person's race based solely on appearance. However, the question was intentionally phrased to encompass all ethnicities and gauge the visual components of dog whistle racism. While dog whistle racism in the context of 1968 was largely reduced to racism against Black Americans, the researcher hoped to acknowledge any ethnicity outside of White and how it might be visually depicted.

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Of the seven ads sorted into Category One of dog whistles, four included photos of non-White people. This group of ads most directly addressed law and order, and seemed to depict non-White people with negative connotations. Both “The First Civil Right” and “Failure” use the same image of a liberal protest, where several Black and non-White Americans appear in the crowd surrounding a sign that reads “independent socialism,” (Figure 1). In 1968, socialism was largely considered a seditious threat to democracy, so to associate the sentiment with Black Americans is not incidental. Throughout the Civil Rights Movement, opposition from the right often used anti-communist sentiments to discredit progress for racial equality, particularly in the South where desegregation was conflated with an “outside, communist agenda.”<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, socialism was commonly equated with communist or Marxist ideology in the public mind, so Nixon’s choice to depict non-White Americans next to this banner is a subtle, but powerful message.



Figure 1, “The First Civil Right,” and “Failure”

“Crime” uses several blurred, hectic stills to place non-White people in the center of violence and chaos. Viewers see what appears to be an alleyway fight between two Black men, shortly followed by an image of a young Black man who is unconscious, or perhaps dead (Figure 2). While both images are ambiguous and disorienting, it nevertheless seems to centralize anyone other than White Americans at the heart of crime, violence, and dissent. Later in the ad, Nixon asserts that “we owe it to the decent and law-abiding citizens” to reduce crime and danger. At “decent,” and “law-abiding,” two different faces of White citizens appear, but just afterwards, a Black woman’s portrait takes up the screen. There is no overt language that says White Americans are decent and law-abiding citizens and non-White Americans are not, but this editing decision is notable.



Figure 2, “Crime”



There are more explicit commentaries on non-White Americans, like the image of a line of handcuffed criminals includes as many as two non-White detainees, holding their handcuffed hands in front of their face in shame. While the portrayal of Black and non-White Americans in Nixon's ads cannot be categorized as blatantly racist, the subtle editing decisions align with the covert nature of dog whistles.

The spots that only slightly referenced law and order, or those that did not mention it at all, seemed to portray racial and ethnic minorities in a more positive light. These images of non-White Americans were neutral, if not positive connotations. The people featured in both footage and photos were still overwhelmingly White, but featured racial and ethnic minorities in roles outside of poverty and crime. Examples of a more neutral depiction are in "Unite," a portrait of a Black man in a construction hat smiling at the camera, and later showing a wide shot of a racially diverse crowd. Positive depictions include two young, presumably Black scientists in separate ads: a woman in a lab studying test tubes in "Youth," (Figure 3) and a man in "Wrong Road" who appears to be an engineer or technician. Although several ads showed non-White individuals outside of a disparaging law and order context, these positive depictions indicate that Nixon's campaign had at least some awareness of the role racial minorities already played in American society.



Figure 3, "Youth"

### **Other Themes in Dog Whistle Ads**

The remaining advertisements containing dog whistles used similar production techniques that created patterns among Nixon's spots. A cumulative 12 ads made up the first two categories of preliminary coding, meaning they either contained notable dog whistles or potentially used dog whistles. Only three of these used video footage, the rest were comprised of still photos. In comparison to the ads that relied on photographs, those that used video offered very simplistic editing with no notable production effects. For example, "Lawless Society" contained verbal dog whistles like Nixon's promise to "restore respect for law," or the title's disparaging allusion to Johnson's Great Society, though it consisted of one video clip slowly zooming out from a flashing light atop a police car. In contrast, the rest of the ads that employed dog whistles in some capacity were created using a heavily edited sequence of photos. These series of photos were often linked together with cuts of varying speed. Most notably, different photos quickly cut to the next in a matter of seconds, often creating a fast-paced ad with a sense of anxiety or panic.

"Convention" is perhaps the best example, a spot that contains no narration and only the soundtrack of the song "Hot Time," a popular marching tune that evokes a patriotic tone. The spot is meant to criticize Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey, as his smiling face is juxtaposed with documentary photography illustrating the violent and lawless aspects of American society. The famous tune breaks down into a discordant wailing as the same photo of Humphrey is mirrored back and forth at least six times in two seconds before his portrait devolves into the photos of violent protests. The march revives as Humphrey appears again, this time his image shaking back and forth horizontally before cutting to a still photo of American soldiers huddled behind a barrier in Vietnam. The production effects mimic an explosion, as if the soldiers are ducking from a bomb. While Nixon's advertisements often used video footage in simplistic ways, the editing used to link still photographs boast high-quality production that accompanies their subtle use of dog whistles.

The title of one ad, “The First Civil Right,” is a dog whistle of sorts, implying that safety is the real concern and Civil Rights protests for racial equity are secondary or frivolous. Regarding safety, a primary concern in Nixon ads was the perceived threat to the safety of White women. The photo of a fair-skinned mannequin lying broken in a dark alley in “The First Civil Right” was a more indirect allusion to this theme, but “Concerns” and “Wisconsin Concerns” feature two different White women offering interviews of nearly identical sentiment. An older housewife states that she “[doesn’t] feel safe in [her] own kitchen unless the front door is locked” and a young Milwaukee mother doesn’t “even feel safe in [her] own house,” when her husband is away. Both statements indicate that the lack of order in the U.S. and seemingly pervasive crime inherently poses a threat to the safety of White women. There are no racial references made, but the subliminal meaning of the dialogue suggests that White women become victims, whereas Americans of other races pose the threat.

The other consistent theme across the ads containing dog whistles was the repeated mention of crime. As mentioned in prior literature, crime rates and the occurrence of violent crime was sensationalized under the law-and-order message. However, violence and crime were consistently mentioned to posit the lack of order throughout the country. “Crime,” “Wrong Road,” and “Decision,” all describe the violent and dangerous state of America, offering Nixon as the solution to “rebuilt respect for the law.” With crime as the natural antagonist for a law and order candidate, Nixon aimed to address it.

## V. Discussion

With a historical perspective, this research sought to understand why 1968 was an opportune time for dog whistles to resonate with voters. Fundamentally, the 1968 election was crucial because it marked the peak of growing disapproval of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Lyndon Johnson’s administration increasingly escalated the American presence in the conflict, which also instigated youth and liberal protests about conscripting young men and the ethics of the war. These protests often coalesced with those for Civil Rights and other qualms of the youngest generation, allowing the right to conflate all of these sentiments as anarchical protests that stood to endanger American society at large. Nixon and other conservatives saw the Vietnam War as squandered power and resources by way of ineffective military operations. Regardless of political affiliation, many Americans were unhappy with their country’s role in Vietnam.

Furthermore, the election was an example of a conservative, reactionary response to a decidedly progressive incumbent. Johnson’s presidency touted substantial liberal legislation. The Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, as well as other social welfare and environmental reforms, were considered to be some of the most progressive moves in U.S. history. Naturally, more moderate and conservative Americans were inclined to support a candidate that would maintain or reinstate traditional values. This was the ideal environment for dog whistles. Johnson had passed sweeping racial legislation, meaning Nixon’s dog whistles could entice voters who resented this progress. Without needing to be overtly racist, Nixon could pose law and order as not only a solution to the social leap by Black Americans, but a remedy to the violent and chaotic leftist protests.

In addition, the television boom of this era allowed campaign messages to reach voters in a new, effective manner. As TV became ubiquitous in the American household, campaign advertisements and broadcast content reached a massive number of voters in their living rooms. Though it was still a growing medium, even the most basic campaign ads proved effective in influencing voters to align with the candidates themselves and their policy second. In this way, Nixon’s use of videostyle in advertisements is directly linked to previous scholarship. Sulfaro indicates that specific visual tactics can “evoke associations”<sup>44</sup> to policy or political issues for viewers. Further, Kissas notes that these visual or production techniques can communicate “a template of shared values” to those watching.<sup>45</sup> Many of the observed strategies in Nixon ads—discordant music, aggressive frame cropping, and rapid cuts—evoke an association of chaos. By repeating visual strategies of quick cuts between photos or depicting liberal protests as violent, Nixon is able to disseminate cues about law and order and its racial implications without requiring critical examination from voters. These production techniques form templates about the country’s lack of order that voters can recognize across

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44 Sulfaro, 82.

45 Kissas, 388.

campaign ads, allowing them to grasp these indirect references to law and order. These visual patterns serve as shortcuts to inform voters of Nixon's platforms without requiring explicit explanations. Dog whistles also achieve this mental signaling to the groups they are targeting. When Nixon uses a serious, aggressive tone or asserts the rising crime rates, he subtly but effectively conveys that law and order is the only solution for safety.

Nixon's law and order advertisements revealed patterns and similarities in both content and production. The majority of spots were comprised entirely of still photos that used complex editing techniques to create a sense of motion or specific emotional tones, often fear or anxiety. The intricacies of these ads with documentary photography were more nuanced and required analysis that considered the visuals and production themselves as dog whistles. Those that consisted of video footage were more simplistic in nature, more often using verbal dog whistles rather than visual. When video was used, Nixon rarely appeared in it. In the four advertisements containing video of Nixon, live audio of his voice was not present; narration or music was overlaid instead. Nixon seldom made appearances in his ads at all, predominantly by way of still photos. Though Nixon did have air time and his recorded narration was a common component of the ads, it appears the production was crafted to avoid him speaking on-screen when possible. This limited time on-screen aligns with existing literature and internal campaign memos that aimed to reshape his image.

In addition to patterns in production, ads with commentary on law and order demonstrated consistent thematic content. While some advertisements directly referenced lawlessness or a lack of order, the mention of crime was a common, indirect reference to the law and order platform. By citing the rise of crime and its threat of violence, Nixon not only implied the nation's need for law and order but offered justification for the policy.

## VI. Conclusion

The goal of this research was to contextualize the use of video production elements and dog whistle racism in Richard Nixon's campaign advertisements. By assessing Nixon's political career before the 1968 election, the cultural tensions caused by Civil Rights and Vietnam protests, and the rise of television, dog whistle racism connects the political landscape of the 1968 election and the influence of television advertisements on voters. Throughout the 21 ads coded, videostyle techniques and dog whistles converged in Nixon's law and order platform, strategically conflating crime rates and perpetuating anxiety about the lack of order across the United States.

The main limitation of this research was the focus on television advertising rather than other campaign materials like radio and print ads or speeches. The spots analyzed in this study averaged a length of about one minute, meaning rhetoric is more condensed in comparison to long-form materials. Additionally, the quality of the footage made some coding difficult. Without archival access, the available video preserved from 1968 was sometimes flawed, which a study of more contemporary campaigns would circumvent. Regardless of its limitations, this research contributes to the fields of political communication and videostyle framing in an effort to better understand the covert nature of dog whistles and their evolution since the early 1960s. Further research in this field could form a comparative analysis of dog whistles and videostyle between Nixon and Trump ads. While the style of advertisements has evolved since 1968, spots from 2016 likely contain similar strategies evaluated in this research.

History demonstrates that while dog whistles were an effective rhetorical strategy in the post-Civil Rights era, they continue to be employed well into the twenty-first century. Donald Trump's 2016 and 2020 campaigns brought discussions of dog whistle racism beyond academia and into public discourse. The former president is known for tweets and speeches that disregarded political correctness, even stepping beyond dog whistles to make explicitly racist statements. Trump's 2017 Muslim ban and repeated references to Islamic terrorism brought media attention to his reliance on dog whistles. While Trump is a more extreme example, this harmful speech connects to the subtler rhetoric of Nixon and Ronald Reagan. After receiving an unsolicited endorsement from the Ku Klux Klan in 1980, Reagan delivered a speech at a Mississippi county fair invoking "states' rights" for the first time during his campaign. He later used epithets of "welfare queens" and "strapping young bucks" as dog whistles intended to criticize social welfare policy.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, this research is not merely a static case study of 1968, but a relevant assessment of modern political communication.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph Crespino, "Did David Brooks Tell the Full Story About Reagan's Neshoba County Fair Visit?" History News Network, 2007, <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/44535>.



Furthermore, this form of racism goes beyond any political affiliation or campaign; it is about justifying the policing of Black Americans. Law and order promised to maintain the status quo by increasing law enforcement, but a crackdown on crime meant justifying the policing of Black bodies in particular. Nixon's commitment to law and order led him to sign legislation permitting no-knock warrants in the early days of the War on Drugs, allowing police to forcibly enter homes unannounced. This exact legislation was used in March of 2020 to justify the murder of Breonna Taylor, who was shot six times in her bed after police battered down her door. The consequences of law and order still impact the contemporary political and cultural atmosphere, but most importantly, overwhelmingly falls on the shoulders of Black Americans.

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# Pushing Period Progressivism: An Analysis of Menstrual Product Advertisements

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

## Abstract

*The messaging surrounding menstruation has long incorporated misconceptions that are often inaccurate, insensitive, and bordering on absurd. This research seeks to define and better understand period stigmatization and how advertising for menstrual products contributes to it. This study analyzes past literature on the history of menstrual advertising, social perceptions of menstruation, and how women perceive themselves while menstruating. Then, this article examines the role of menstrual advertising in perpetuating social stigma surrounding periods by analyzing current social media ads. A contextual analysis of five of the most popular period product brands in 2022 finds that period advertising is adapting and changing in the modern world and embracing a more progressive tone as it shifts away from gender stereotypes, false ideas of femininity, and themes of shame from its past.*

## I. Introduction

Approximately 26% of the world's population experience menstruation. Women reportedly spend an average of seven years actively menstruating in their lifetime (UNICEF, 2018). Menstruation, or more commonly called someone's "period," is a common occurrence that most women have become accustomed to since their early teenage years. Whether they were taught about it in school, by their parent/guardian, friends, or other sources, adolescent girls typically are taught not only how to manage their symptoms while on their periods (i.e., pads, tampons, pain killers) but are also inherently taught the stigma surrounding menstruation (Chrisler, 2011).

Stigma refers to "any stain or mark that renders the individual's body or character defective" (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2011). Period stigma derives itself from a long history of misogyny; societal taboos stem from historical beliefs that menstruating women were unclean or tarnished. These taboos have integrated themselves into modern society to the degree that terms such as "period" and "tampon" are considered socially unacceptable specifically when mentioned in public spaces and around men. The stigmatization of periods negatively affects the attitudes and experiences of women all over the world. This stigma can lead to negative consequences concerning young girls mental and physical health, sexuality, and overall well-being (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2011).

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**Keywords:** social media, menstruation, advertising, social stigma  
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This article examines how menstrual product packaging and advertising perpetuates period stigma. Before discussing the research conducted, this paper examines previous literature and research on the stigmatization of menstruation and menstrual product advertising. It is important to note that the literature discussed in this study primarily used the terms women and womanhood to discuss menstruation. This literature is mostly from the 1990s and early 2000s and reflects the lack of gender inclusivity or awareness of people's experiences outside the gender binary common to that social climate. Following the literature review, this article considers the bounds and limitations of the gender binary while discussing experiences that exist outside of it and their representations through advertising.

## II. Literature Review

Past scholarship has examined the history of how society views menstruation, the stigmatization of menstruation, how this stigma affects women's perceptions of themselves, and menstrual product packaging and advertising. This review examines literature from communications-based research and theory, but also literature from sociological and psychological perspectives. Feminist theory, stigma theory, objectification theory, and terror management theory were used in this literature review to explore the positioning of menstruating in society. The literature reviewed for this paper directly examines young menstruating people (specifically cisgender women) in the United States.

### *Historical Views on Menstruation*

Menstruation has been painted in a negative light throughout history. Aristotle once wrote in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE that the reason women are inferior to men is because they menstruate, the Old Testament of the Bible refers to menstruating women being unclean, and the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, believed that women were inferior because of their reproductive biology (Andrist, 2008). Social scientists have indicated that menstruation has been portrayed as a social stigma and that it is something women must correct, or they forfeit their own femininity. Taboos surrounding menstruation have existed throughout history and have been documented in the Americas, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia with beliefs such as:

Drops of menstrual blood upon the ground or in a river kill plants and animals; wells run dry if a menstruating woman draws water from them; men become ill if they are touched by or use any objects that have been touched by a menstruating woman; beer turns sour if a menstruating woman enters a brewery and beer, wine, vinegar, milk, and jam go bad if touched by a menstruating woman (Chrisler, 2011, p. 203).

These taboos and fears surrounding menstruation extend even to biological functioning: "As recently as the 1930s, scientists were attempting to demonstrate that menstruating women exuded menotoxins (i.e., poisonous elements) in their menstrual blood, perspiration, saliva, urine, and tears" (Chrisler, 2011, p. 203).

In modern times these taboos might seem silly or absurd, but current stereotypes and stigma are rooted in these old beliefs. Today it is not uncommon for people to find actively menstruating individuals incapable of many tasks. Women today are not expected to play sports, swim, do extensive labor, eat certain foods, or engage in sexual intercourse while on their periods, and all these expectations come from centuries of misogyny and the social demanding of menstrual suppression (Andrist, 2008). These social contexts and cues impact not only how society views menstruating women but also how they view themselves.

### *Women's Perceptions of Themselves While Menstruating*

The average cisgender woman will menstruate around once every 28 days from around the age of 13-15 until menopause. Even accounting for pregnancies, the average woman will have between 350-400 periods in her lifetime (Ginsburg, 1996). Social perceptions of menstruation help to shape how women feel about themselves while on their period, and period advertisements aid this by providing mass messages about periods and about womanhood, femininity, and body image. Advertising can negatively affect how young girls feel about themselves, with lots of past and current menstrual advertising expressing themes of guilt, secrecy, and shame surrounding periods (Liu et al., 2021).

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### ***Silence and Shame***

Messaging surrounding menstruation can lead to young women feeling as if they must suppress and conceal all signs of menstruation so that they can fit into society. Women often feel as though they must hide the fact that they are on their period and instead portray an appearance society would view as clean and pure. They commonly feel as if they are weakened during their period, a mindset reinforced by the social expectations that women hide their period symptoms such as cramps, fatigue, and bloating, as well as any sign of bleeding (Liu et al., 2021). Often the message is sent to young women that “it is okay to menstruate as long as you do not mention it and no one knows you are doing it” (Chrisler, 2011, p. 202). The social expectation that a woman is silent about their period produces feelings of shame concerning all aspects of menstruation and this leads to feelings of embarrassment that encourages young girls to loath and regret their periods, even though menstruation is a sign of a healthy female body (Simes & Berg, 2001). This embarrassment and shame lead women to often obsess over being fresh, secure, and discreet on their periods sometimes to the degree where they do not properly or healthily take care of their physical and mental state while menstruating (Simes & Berg, 2001).

### ***Fear and Avoidance***

Society conditions women to fear the discovery by others that they are on their period (even people as close as their own family), but they also must fear the threat of how others will perceive their actions. The stereotype of the “erratic” and “out-of-control” premenstrual woman is a topic of great concern for many women every day, menstruating or not (Chrisler, 2011). PMS (premenstrual syndrome) has been coined as the “menstrual monster” in modern times and has sparked self-help books and seminars on how to teach women to overcome their unfeminine behavior and reject the consequences of their own hormones (Chrisler, 2011). The lack of menstrual education causes adolescent women to easily believe these stereotypes and messages about their periods, creating a false sense of shame and silence for a shared, natural experience. Young women often hear statements about women not being rational or logical while “suffering” from their periods, such as when Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor was nominated for the Supreme Court and many people made comments about how she would act when working on her period. Such as when G. Gordon Liddy said “Let’s hope that the key conferences aren’t when she’s menstruating or something, or just before she’s going to menstruate. That would be bad. Lord knows what we would get then!” (Chrisler, 2011, p. 204). Statements like this perpetuate the idea that women are not competent while menstruating and when left unchecked in society, women internalize them and begin to believe not only that others will perceive them as inept, but that they are inherently inept because of their periods.

### ***History of Period Advertising***

Menstrual product advertising poses a crucial point in the development of young women’s views, feelings, and perceptions of menstruation. According to the Grand View Research (2018), in 2017 the menstrual product market was valued at \$29.62 billion with an expected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.5% from 2018 to 2025. From new technologies and the ever-changing social landscape, menstrual advertisements are projected to become more personalized from the use of social media data and audience analytics. As this market grows, new menstrual campaigns should adapt and change to become more inclusive, and as it continues to grow, the relative modernity of menstrual advertisements must be discussed. According to Liu et al. (2021), until 1972, menstrual product advertisements were banned from TV and radio, and the word period didn’t occur onscreen until 1985. As evidenced by previously discussed literature, the history of periods and the social stigma connected to them is considerably longer than the history of menstrual product advertising. It wasn’t until 11 years ago that red liquid was used to advertise period products instead of the commonly used blue liquid. Fluid was often not shown at all as to not portray a too graphic view of periods (Stamper, 2011).

### ***Period Packaging and Advertising Issues***

In the last 30 years, menstrual product advertising has evolved. The colors, people, circumstances, and designs have changed, but the message that these products portray is deeply rooted in the shame and misogyny associated with periods. Ginsburg (1996) states that “the very design of menstrual products encourages their discretionary handling,” such as, “the packaging, the casings in which the products are

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individually wrapped, and the actual pads and tampons themselves” (p. 367). Ginsburg studied 150 boxes of tampons and pads and found that menstruation itself was rarely referred to on the packaging of period products. Menstrual product packaging appeared to lack any suggestion of how the product was intended for use and did this in two main ways. The packaging often had no reference to women visually, whether that be a drawing or picture, and featured no use of the color red (instead common colors were white and light pastel blues and pinks). In a similar study, menstrual product advertisements from 1985-2001 from magazines were analyzed, and five themes were revealed: silence and shame, embarrassment, ways to get caught, how to avoid getting caught, and always dirty (Simes & Berg, 2001). It is important to note that the themes found and described by Simes and Berg are consistent with themes found by other scholars from the late 1990s onwards, silence and shame being a considerably popular discussion point.

More recent menstrual product advertisements have begun to deviate from the themes of shame and silence. Period advertisements from the late 2010s highlight ideal body types, femininity, and traditional beauty norms less than previous advertisements (Liu et al., 2021). This move toward more inclusive, shameless period advertising can help to empower specifically younger consumers and begin to oppose menstrual stigma. This transition of messaging and progress is important to track and can give important insight into where the industry has left to go.

### **III. Methods**

This study aims to answer the following questions about period stigmatization:

RQ1: How do period advertisements amplify social stigma associated with menstruating?

RQ2: Does the use of color, body imagery, and text in period advertisements emphasize themes of shame and a societally constructed idea of femininity?

To further investigate the role of period advertisements in social stigmatization surrounding menstruation, this study analyzes a combination of social media and print advertisements from five popular period product brands: Always, Kotex, DivaCup, Tampax, and Playtex. These five brands were chosen from a study gathered by the Statista Research Department for their Feminine Hygiene Market report where the best-selling tampon brands of 2018 and the most used pad and napkin brands of 2020 in the United States were compiled by based on the United Nations data and Simmons National Consumer Survey (Statista 2020; Drug Store News 2018). A mixed methods analysis that combines qualitative contextual analysis with quantitative measurement of imagery on social media posts was chosen to explore this topic. The aim of this method is to analyze and contextualize the uses of color, body imagery, and text used in social media and print advertisements to further understand their role in the social stigmatization of periods.

For social media advertisements, Instagram and Facebook were chosen, as they are the most popular social media platforms for 13-to-17-year-old girls and adult women (Liu et al., 2021). On the two platforms public posts of images were indexed. The most recent 15 posts (starting from March 31<sup>st</sup>) from Always, Kotex, DivaCup, Tampax, and Playtex’s social media accounts were analyzed, for a total of 150 social media posts (75 from Instagram and 75 from Facebook). Only the images posted were analyzed for the qualitative textual analysis – this excludes any captions or hashtags, but does include any text on the posted image itself. If posts included multiple images, all images posted together were considered as one post from this page. Videos were also excluded in this research.

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**Table 1: Codebook for Quantitative Analysis**

Variables	Yes	No
Period Ads Containing Red	12	138
Period Ads Containing Pink	83	67
Period Ads Visually Referencing Female Reproductive Organs	6	144
Period Ads Visually Showing Period Product/Period Product Packaging	40	110
Period Ads Without Text	119	31
Period Ads Not Deliberately Depicting White Cisgender Women	58	92

## IV. Findings

From the 150 social media posts collected for this study, three key themes emerged: the use of color, the use of language, and racial, gender, and body-type inclusivity. These three themes aligned with the research questions presented for this study and will be further explored individually and in conjunction with the findings from Liu et al. in their past research on the evolving landscape of menstrual product advertising.

### *Use of Color and Imagery*

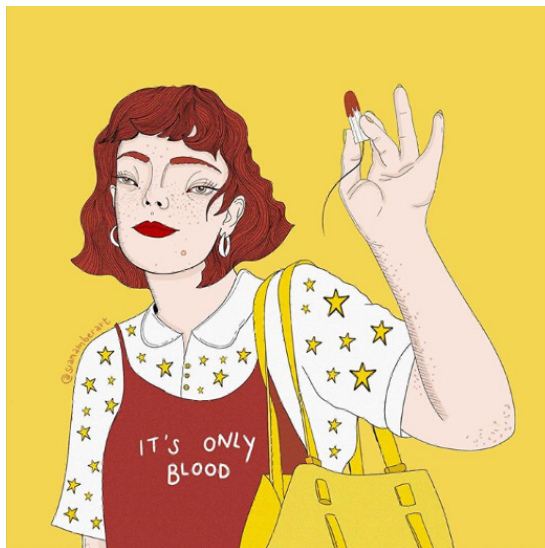


Figure 1: Tampax Facebook Post 5/20/20

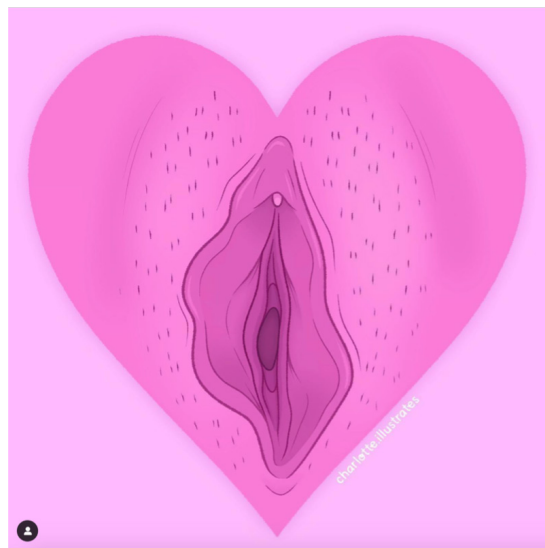


Figure 2: Always Instagram Post 2/14/22

### *Color*

Of the 150 social media posts from the five period-product brands analyzed, only 12 posts (8 percent) included the use of the color red. This is in stark comparison to the use of the color pink in the posts analyzed, nearly 55% of the sample. For many of these posts, pink was not only used as an accent or text color, but it was also commonly used as the background color or main color in the image.

From the sparse use of the color red by menstrual brands, it can be projected that the use of the color is still perceived as a taboo in 2022. These findings correlate to previous scholarship concerning the themes of silence and shame found from historical perceptions of menstruation. The use of the color red is increasing, as seen in Figure 1, and that should be noted. However, red continues to be one of the least likely colors to be used by menstrual companies even though it is the color most directly associated with periods. This data suggests that the color red still has a negative connotation.

It is important to reference past menstrual advertisements and reiterate how red liquid wasn't even used in menstrual advertisements until 2011 (Stampler, 2011). The use of a red liquid is also perceived differently than the direct reference to blood, as a red liquid that doesn't have the same color, texture, or consistency as period blood or period clots is a much safer, yet still progressive, decision for period brands. All five of these brands use blues, pinks, and purples as their main brand colors and very seldom incorporate red into their advertising.

## Imagery

Another visually powerful point made by these social media posts was the lack of images visually representing or referencing female reproductive body parts. Only 4% of the 150 social media posts visually referenced a vagina or uterus. Out of these six images, only one image referenced the vagina and vulva (Figure 2) and only three images referenced the uterus.

The glaring lack of imagery and text portraying and discussing the female reproductive system supports the projected stigmatization of menstruation and the lack of discussion of female reproductive health and education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By seldomly referencing the vagina, vulva, and uterus, period brands make it challenging for young menstruators to visually understand their own body, the intended usage of these products, and the natural occurrence of menstruation.

Notable imagery from the social media posts also includes the visual representation of the period products themselves or of the period product packaging. From the 150 posts, only 40 (approximately 26%) contained a visual representation of a tampon, pad, menstrual cup, or a clear image of the packaging for these items. This, along with the lack of visual imagery referencing the female reproductive system, creates a social silence around tampons, pads, and menstrual cups and how, when, and why they are used. It perhaps can be argued that it is not the place of period brands to educate on the use of their products, but considering society views menstruation as shameful and a taboo occurrence across history and across cultures, brands that are not actively working against period stigma may cause them to become inherently intertwined with it. It becomes paradoxical that products intended for menstrual use further and profit off its stigmatization.

## Use of Language



Figure 3: Kotex Instagram Post 1/18/22

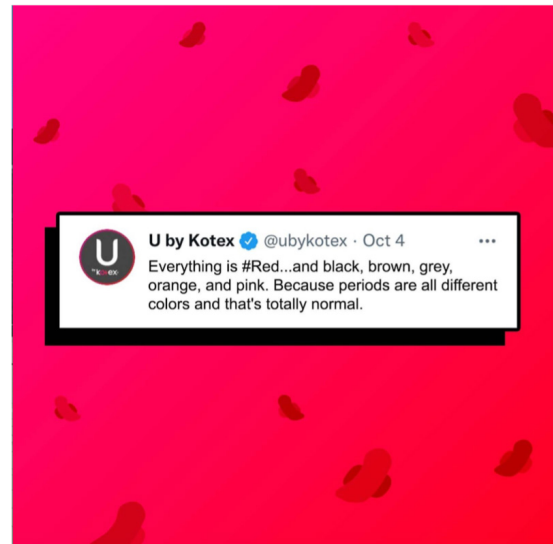


Figure 4: Kotex Instagram Post 11/12/21

## ***Femininity and Menstruation***

For this study, the captions associated with the images posted on Instagram and Facebook were not analyzed. However, the study did examine any typography that was part of an image or graphic posted. This section of research centers on text-focused images and analyzes the language, tone, and themes of these posts. Figures 3 and 4 were posted on the U by Kotex Instagram account. Figure 3 states “The feminine urge to end period stigma” over a picture of three female-presenting people. The term “feminine urge” became popular on the internet in late 2021 and is used satirically and earnestly on social media through memes (Kambhampaty, 2021). These memes portrayed a societally constructed and rigid version of femininity, and subsequently womanhood – two things not inherently tied to one another. Some use was ironic, but a considerable number of these memes were serious in nature, perpetuating damaging stereotypes around femininity and gender identity firmly within the binary.

The use of this language in Figure 3 is clearly meant to be serious and not satirical, but this specific language can be problematic. Although periods are directly correlated to the female reproductive system, this does not make them inherently “feminine.” By directly correlating femininity and periods, false ideas of womanhood, femininity, and menstruation are perpetuated alongside with furthering period stigma, marginalizing how menstruators who don’t identify as cisgender women experience menstruation. As previous literature discusses, the theme of fear and avoidance is prevalent in period advertisements. The fear and avoidance of menstruation is often experienced differently by those who do not identify as cisgender women because they don’t necessarily identify with femininity and womanhood in the same way and may experience fear or avoidance of menstruation and related discussions that stems from their separate gender identity.

## ***Normalizing the Messy Realities of Menstruation***

Figure 4 is an example of a more honest and progressive tone used by period brands that could further education surrounding the seldom-discussed realities of menstruation and people’s experiences outside of binary womanhood. This text-heavy post includes the colors pink and red as its background while stating a fact that many menstruators are well aware of – that period blood isn’t always red. Images such as these are integral to breaking period stigma as they openly show and speak on the reality of periods. Posts such as these help to educate and define what periods are to those that might be unfamiliar with more unspoken details concerning menstruation.

Similarly, Always posted images on Instagram that defined and spoke on what period poverty is (Figure 5). This recent campaign to #endperiodpoverty was used by both Always and Kotex during the bounds of this study and suggest that period brands are looking to more accurately define periods and educate all people on issues surrounding menstruation.

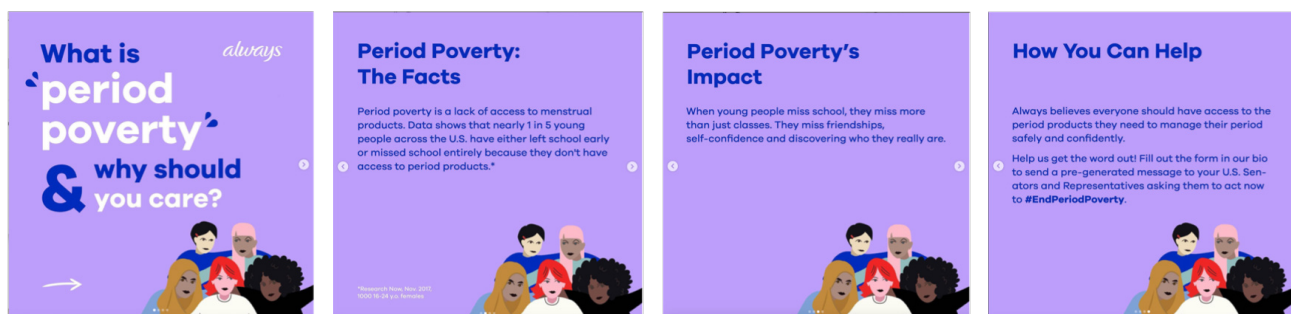
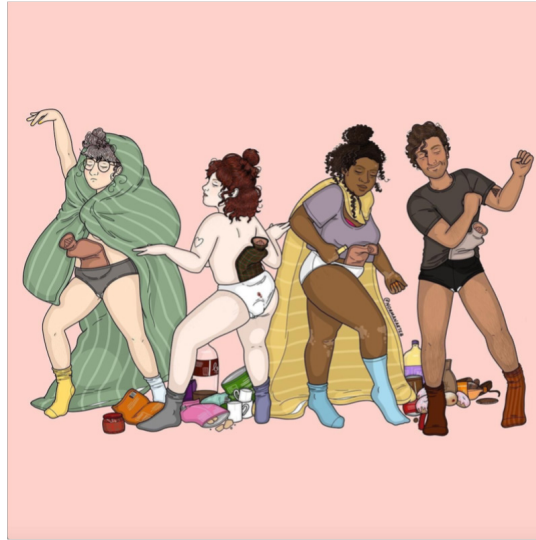


Figure 5: Always Instagram Post 2/16/22

As discovered by previous research on menstrual advertising (Lui, et al. 2021), text in menstrual ads often portrays themes of secrecy, shame, and purity. As an example, an advertisement by Kotex in 2013 included the copy: “Don’t worry. Even your biggest crush won’t know you’re on your period. Unless you tell him.” It is unlikely that similar language would be by one of the five brands today. However, through unclear language and a lack of direct speech on female reproductive organs and “gross” period details, the social media advertisements in this current sample do continue to emphasize secrecy and shame. At the same time, the brands exhibit an increasing social consciousness and expanding representation of menstrual experiences outside the cisgender, white female narrative and lens of heterosexuality.

### ***Racial, Gender, Body-Type Inclusivity***



*Figure 6: DivaCup Instagram Post 3/16/22*

Of the 150 social media posts analyzed for this study, 79 of them featured images of people (including artists’ renditions). More than half – approximately 53% - included some form of a menstruating person. For purposes of this study, people were defined for this data collection as any person depicted enough in the image to differentiate race and gender presentation. Out of the 79 posts featuring images of people, 58 of those period advertisements did not solely depict white-cisgender-presenting women (39% of total posts and 73% of posts depicting people). Only one post clearly depicted a non-female-presenting person while actively menstruating (Figure 6). It is important to note that none of the previous literature focused on gender inclusivity or experiences of menstruation outside the gender binary. Discussions of gender identity and the binary itself have only begun to gain social acceptability recently.

### ***Menstrual Externalities***

Figure 6 is the only post to clearly showcase a non-female-presenting menstruator. This image also depicts female-presenting menstruators of multiple races and body types. This image was analyzed further because of its clear statement of inclusivity and realism. Figure 6 not only shows multiple people on their periods, but it also shows what many might consider the hidden, secret, or even shameful reality of periods. All the people depicted are using a form of heating pad, are in comfortable loungewear, and are surrounded by what could be classified as a mess. Down to the details of the mismatched socks, piles of food, blankets, messy hair, and no pants, this image very clearly is meant to portray what is the reality of periods for many people. This less-polished narrative presents a more relatable portrayal of how many people experience menstruation. While it is expected that menstruation does not hinder any part of a person’s life and often accepted reality that life must go on, many experience difficulty and hindrance due to menstruation. This is seldomly discussed in society, because patriarchy decenters the non-cisgender male experience and devalues those outside its identity, especially when displaying perceived weakness.



Not only is Figure 6 more gender, race, and body-type inclusive than most images analyzed for this research, this post by DivaCup also works to break down the clean, polished ideal that menstruators feel the need to portray while on their periods. It is important to talk about how period stigma leads menstruators to hide the messy and unhinged aspects of periods, so they do not forfeit their perceived femininity based on what society (through period advertisements) tells them is “feminine.” Period advertisements such as Figure 6 suggest a push against gender stereotypes and reject the female beauty standard. As Lui et al. found in their study, advertisements that used “excessively feminine” images and text failed to empower women and instead brought upon feelings of shame and insecurity.

The use of male-presenting figures in period advertisements has also shifted in the last eight years. Compared to a Kotex advertisement from 2014 where men were “hailed” for buying period products for the women in their lives, current social media posts are focused more on including men as menstruators. The advertisement from 2014 helps to include non-menstruators in the menstruating experience and advertisements like this work to normalize period products in households and having open conversations about periods regardless of gender identity.

## V. Conclusion

The findings from this analysis of period advertisements suggests a shift away from the themes of menstrual advertisements of the 1990s and early 2000s. Themes of shame and a false idea of femininity can still be found in modern period ads, but a more progressive tone has begun to take over the social space of menstruating.

This research specifically has a few limitations. First, the sample is by no means exhaustive, nor does it reflect the entirety of period advertising on social media. Another limitation of note is that a considerable amount of the literature used for this study focuses on cisgender women and does little to dissect racial impacts or differences. This of course does not capture the expansive and diverse set of people who experience menstruation. This data and subsequent analysis do take gender and racial identities into consideration but menstrual product advertising, as shown in these findings, is not frequent enough or fully representative.

This research suggests that social media may have helped to create a space for period progressivism. Further research is necessary to determine more conclusive results about the association between period advertising and period stigmatization. Subsequent research on the subject could be conducted to measure the role social media has played in expanding and progressing advertising in the menstrual product industry

This article tracked the usage of color, text, and constructed personhood from limiting and stigmatizing usage to more expansive and inclusive construction. There is more representation and portrayal of reality necessary - and at a higher frequency - in menstrual product advertising to undo stigma and explore the inclusive menstrual experience. By portraying people of all identities, using clear imagery of the female reproductive system, showcasing pads, tampons, and menstrual cups, and using colors that aren't generally socially seen as “feminine,” period advertisements are beginning to break down period stigma instead of actively contributing to it.

## Acknowledgements

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# Campaigning on Twitter: A Content Analysis of Four U.S. Senate Candidates' Twitter Feeds

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of an Honors thesis

## Abstract

*The use of Twitter has become almost universal in political campaigns because the platform allows candidates to communicate directly with potential voters. As part of this shift in the political media environment, this study conducted a qualitative content analysis of the Twitter comments of four U.S. Senate candidates to examine how the candidates used Twitter to campaign. The results show that candidates most frequently used Twitter for non-issue-related communication, namely, to request donations, provide updates about campaign events, and urge supporters to vote. The study also found that negative messages played a large role in candidates' Twitter communication. Lastly, the two Republican candidates used Twitter to frame the election as having radical consequences for the future of the country.*

## I. Introduction

This study examines the topics and tones of the two 2020 Georgia U.S. Senate races to expand knowledge about what topics the candidates emphasize and how their agendas shift over the course of a campaign. No candidate in either race's November general election won 50% of the vote, meaning — per Georgia state law — each race's top two vote-getters advanced to a runoff on January 5, 2021. Moreover, the results of the 2020 election cycle revealed that control of the U.S. Senate depended on the two Georgia runoff races (NPR, 2021), making both closely followed contests.

The first contest pitted incumbent Republican Sen. Kelly Loeffler against Democrat Raphael Warnock, senior pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. Loeffler had been appointed to her seat in 2019 to replace former Republican Sen. Johnny Isakson who retired because of health reasons (NPR, 2019). The other race featured incumbent Republican Sen. David Perdue against Democratic challenger Jon Ossoff. Ossoff had previously lost the 2017 special election race for Georgia's 6th congressional district. Perdue was first elected in 2014 and was seeking reelection (NPR, 2021).

Political campaigns have evolved over the years to rely on social media for communications directly from the candidates to the voters (Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010). With this shift, Twitter has become a valuable tool for political campaigns, one that warrants scholarly attention. This study will use qualitative content analysis to examine the Twitter comments of the four candidates from September 5 to January 5, the

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day of the runoff election, to expand knowledge of how political candidates use Twitter.

## II. Literature Review

### ***Agenda-Setting Theory***

Lippmann (1922) argued that the public does not respond directly to events but instead lives in a pseudo-environment shaped by media coverage. Later, McCombs and Shaw (1972) extended Lippmann's idea and proposed agenda-setting theory, which posits that the media tells the public what to think about by heavily reporting on certain issues. Their study showed corresponding object salience between media coverage and the public, which became important evidence of the media effect in the 1970s (Lee & Xu, 2017). The theory states that the media sets the public agenda.

Today, political discussion is no longer limited to traditional agenda-setting structures (Boynton & Richardson, 2016). With the rise of social media, many researchers have examined the homogenization of agendas between social media and traditional media. Sayre, Bode, Shah, Wilcox, and Shah (2010) examined the relationship between the agendas of thousands of YouTube videos and California media on the issue of same-sex marriage. They found the social media outlet set its agenda on the issue independent of traditional media.

### ***Negative Tweets***

Scholars have established that negative ads are a significant aspect of candidates' overall approach to political campaign communication (Lau & Pomper, 2001; Skaperdas & Grofman, 1995), and they are often a core characteristic of competitive races (Shen, 2004). As campaign messaging has expanded onto Twitter, negativity has followed.

There are many possible reasons why candidates choose to go negative. Wattenberg and Brians (1999) posit that candidates use attack ads to win votes by drawing attention to issues they have credibility in handling and which their opponent does not. In other words, going negative can provide candidates the opportunity to undermine support for their opponents (Skaperdas & Grofman, 1995). Going negative, however, does not guarantee an increase in candidate support because it only provides reasons not to support the opposition (Damore, 2002). In fact, going negative can have a backlash effect and decrease voter support of the candidate (Fridkin & Kenney, 2004; Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, & Valentino, 1994; Lua & Rovner, 2009; Kahn & Greer, 1994). Overall, voters seem to be more tolerant of attacks that focus on a specific issue than they are of personal criticisms (Lua & Rovner, 2009).

Hale, Fox, and Farmer (1996) and Fridkin and Kenney (1999) suggest that the decision to go negative in a Senate race depends on state size, competitiveness, and candidate status. Lau and Pomper (2001, 2004) found that Senate candidates are more often negative if they are behind in the polls, or in close elections, challenging an incumbent, are Republican, male, or whose opponents also have high levels of negativity in their campaigns. Gandhi, Lorio, and Urban (2016) found that races with only two candidates are twice as likely to see the inclusion of negative ads than races with multiple candidates. In these two-candidate contests, Skaperdas and Grofman (1995) found the frontrunner typically uses few negative ads but the frequency increases as the polling gap narrows between the two candidates. Damore (2002) suggests that attacks are more likely to increase as election day approaches. Interestingly, Bode, Lassen, Kim, Shah, Fowler, Ridout, and Franz (2016) found that negative Twitter comments, unlike television advertising, are not clearly related to many of these classic indicators of negativity, and that negative tones on Twitter do not become more frequent as election day approaches.

As for negative messaging on Twitter, Tsugawa and Ohsaki (2015) found that negative tweets are likely to be reposted more rapidly and frequently than positive and neutral ones. Enders, Gainous, and Wagner (2022) report that the emotion most frequently conveyed by both parties in the 2018 midterm election was anger, although most tweets had a positive sentiment. Stein and Benoit (2021) found that retweets were significantly more likely to be attacks than tweets, and that challengers were significantly more likely to attack than their incumbent counterparts.



Past literature has also examined the effects of negativity on voter decision-making. Krupnikov (2012) argues that increased exposure to negative ads leads to a higher likelihood of candidate selection, the first step necessary for involvement in the political process. Other scholars (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Pinkleton, Um, & Austin, 2002) suggest that negative ads drive down voter turnout by turning people away from the political process altogether. Other scholars found no such relationship (Finkel & Geer, 1998).

### ***Campaigning on Twitter***

Social media has become almost ubiquitous among elected officials, with the typical congressperson maintaining an official account and a personal account on each platform (Pew, 2020). This is no surprise since social media has quickly grown in popularity. One in five U.S. adults used Twitter (Pew, 2022). Moreover, political messaging today to some degree caters to social media (Kapko, 2016). As Lipsitz, Trost, Matthew, and Sides (2005) note, "Voters want to learn more about issues, but they want this information distilled" (p. 350). With a 280-character limit per tweet, Twitter forces candidate to distill their messaging. As such, campaigns are increasingly making strategic use of social media to gain attention from the media (Parmalee, 2014) and from voters (Serazio, 2014). This was visible in the 2016 election cycle, which marked the first-time presidential candidates' social media outpaced their websites and emails as an online campaign news source (Pew, 2016).

Twitter has become a popular campaign communication medium because it provides advantages and opportunities that traditional media does not. For instance, as a real-time, direct communications medium, Twitter allows political candidates to respond to issues daily (Bode, et al, 2016), to gauge reactions to their messages in real time, and to respond to the electors' evolving views over the course of the campaign (Kapko, 2016). Twitter also provides a forum for candidates to promote themselves, provide updates, and interactively communicate with potential voters without having to pass through mainstream media's gatekeeping process (Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010). Despite Twitter's potential to be interactive, most candidates seem to adopt a "broadcasting" style of communication characterized by limited interaction with other accounts (Adams & McCorkindale, 2013; Aragón, Kappler, Kaltenbrunner, Laniado, & Volkovich, 2013).

When studying communication strategies, it is important to consider audience. Studies show that Twitter users tend to not be representative of the general population. Twitter users are younger, more educated, and more likely to be Democrats than the public at large (Pew, 2022). Moreover, an early, yet comprehensive study (Conover, Ratkiewicz, Francisco, Goncalves, Menczer, & Flammini, 2012) found there was limited connectivity between left-leaning and right-leaning users. Later, Barbera, Jost, Nagler, Tucker, and Bonneau (2015) found that Twitter users primary exchange information among those with similar ideological preferences when political issues are being discussed. Aligned with these trends, Bode and Dalrymple (2016) report that social media campaigns are more likely to target engaged partisans than traditional campaign media.

Scholars have also studied Twitter use as a metric of electoral success and public opinion. Jungherr (2015) found that Twitter was not an adequate predictor of election results or public opinion polls. Similarly, most scholarship found no link between Twitter use and electoral success (McGregor, Mourão, & Molyneux, 2017; Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013), while some found a correlation (LaMarre & Suzuki, 2013). Candidates' tweets seem to react to offline campaign results and events rather than predict them (Murphy, 2015).

### ***Research Questions***

This study will reveal the emerging themes of the two most anticipated and consequential U.S. Senate races of 2020 and discuss what this indicates in the evolution of politics and campaigns. This study also will examine how the agenda changed from the November 3 general election to the January 5 runoff election, providing a unique opportunity to expand on agenda-setting theory. The study asks three research questions:

RQ1: What were the most frequent topics mentioned by the candidates?

RQ2: How did the topics differ between Democrats and Republicans?

RQ3: Did the topics change after election day on November 3?

### III. Methods

To answer the proposed research questions, the study featured a qualitative content analysis of the four Georgia U.S. Senate candidates' Twitter feeds during the 2020 election. A random sample of 600 tweets (150 per candidate) from September 5, 2020, to January 5, 2021, the day of the runoff election, were examined. The incumbents, Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue, both had a personal account and an official account for their position as a Senator at the time of the election, but both primarily used their personal accounts to campaign. These two accounts were examined for the incumbents. The challengers, Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock, each only had one account with a noteworthy following at the time of the election. These were the two accounts examined for the challengers. During the above timeframe, the third tweet from each day that the candidates tweeted was coded for, as well as the second tweet from every fourth day.

The topics coded for, based on previous literature as well as the unique topics of 2020, were health care, civil rights/race, crime/law and order, jobs/the economy, COVID-19, voting, God/faith, the military, Senate majority, requesting donations, campaign update, and 2020 presidential candidates Donald Trump and Joe Biden. If a tweet contained an image or a video, the contents of that were also considered. For example, if a tweet contained a video of a candidate discussing health care, then that tweet was coded for mentioning health care.

The overall tone of the tweets and whether they were an attack were also examined. This study defines a tweet as having a negative tone if it includes criticism directed toward a person or group. These tweets were also coded as an attack against whomever the criticism was directed toward. For example, on December 1, 2020, Loeffler tweeted, "Rent is due today, and Nancy Pelosi & Chuck Schumer are focused on legalizing marijuana and outlawing the Tiger King." This tweet was coded as having a negative tone as well as being an attack on Pelosi and Schumer since the tweet was negative toward them and their names were mentioned.

These variables were tested with a pilot examination of 60 tweets, and then compared to those of a second coder to determine intercoder reliability. The variables had a Krippendorff's alpha (1980) of .88 or higher, reflecting a strong coding system. When the coding was complete, the data was transferred into Excel and analyzed. Like previous studies (Theilmann & Wilhite, 1998; Petrocik, 1996; Conover, Ratkiewicz, Francisco, Goncalves, Menczer, & Flammini, 2012; Meeks, 2016) the candidates' tones and Twitter topics were analyzed through the lens of political party identification.

## IV. Findings

**Table 1: Republicans' combined topic frequencies, before and after the November 3 election**

Topic	Before	After	Total
Negative Tweets	49	59	108
Campaign event/ rally	29	35	64
Donald Trump	42	22	64
Senate majority	6	45	51
Requesting donations	14	34	48
Republican in other GA race	0	45	45
Voting	6	36	42
Socialism	5	25	30
Supreme Court	14	11	25
COVID/ pandemic	9	13	22
Jobs/ economy	6	13	19
Defunding the police	6	11	17
Crime/ law and order/ police	11	4	15

**Table 2: Democrats' combined topic frequencies, before and after the November 3 election**

Topic	Before	After	Total
Voting	43	34	77
Requesting donations	37	28	65
Negative tweets	35	28	63
Campaign event/ rally	24	27	51
Health care	20	18	38
COVID/ pandemic	11	16	27
Senate majority	7	18	25
Democrat in other GA race	8	12	20
Civil rights	14	5	19
Donald Trump	9	4	13
Horserace	7	4	11
Supreme Court	11	0	11
Economy/ jobs	4	6	10

As seen in Table 1, the Republicans' most frequent topic was attack tweets, followed by campaign updates, support for Donald Trump, and the importance of the Senate majority. As seen in Table 2, the Democrats' most frequent topic was voting. While the Republicans only mentioned the act of voting, the Democratic candidates also mentioned voting rights and voter suppression. The other frequent topics for the Democrats were donation requests, attack tweets, and campaign updates.

## Negative Tweets

**Table 3: Combined attacks tweets from the Republican candidates, before and after Nov. 3**

Directed toward	Before	After	Total
Total	49	59	108
Opponent	34	37	71
Democrats	5	20	25
Chuck Schumer	2	5	7
Biden	5	2	7
BLM	4	0	4
Nancy Pelosi	3	1	4
Abrams	4	0	4

**Table 4: Combined attacks tweets from the Democratic candidates, before and after Nov. 3**

Directed toward	Before	After	Total
Total	35	28	63
Opponent	31	23	54
Trump	6	3	9
Republicans	2	2	4

As seen in Table 3 and Table 4, the candidates' most frequent attack targets were their opponents. As seen in Table 3, the Republicans' second most frequent target was the Democratic Party at large, followed by Joe Biden and Chuck Schumer. The Democrats' second most frequent target was Donald Trump, followed by the Republican Party.

## V. Discussion

This study expanded knowledge of political campaign messaging on social media by examining the tones and topics of the two 2020 Georgia U.S. Senate races, which were not decided at the November 3 election and continued for two months until their runoffs on January 5, 2021. The results reveal several overarching themes, the first being the predominance of negativity across both races. This is no surprise given the competitiveness of the races and the polarized climate in which they took place (Pew, 2019). Congruent with previous findings (Theilmann & Wilhite, 1998; Lau & Pomper, 2001, 2004) the Republicans were more likely to go negative than their Democratic challengers.

Another general theme was the use of Twitter for non-issues-related communication. More than half of all tweets were requesting campaign donations, providing campaign updates, or encouraging followers to vote. All four candidates heavily pushed these three topics during both races, with one exception; the Republicans rarely mentioned voting until the runoff election. There could be a few reasons for this. First, Georgia was historically a red state. Biden was the first Democratic presidential candidate to win the state since 1992, and no Democratic senator had been elected since 2000 (Nilsen, 2021). This being the case, Perdue and Loeffler may have not felt the need to urge their supporters to vote during the November general election since their party had won every Senate race in the state for the past 20 years. Another reason could be that Trump was claiming that the 2020 election had been rigged, and some predominant Republicans were urging Republicans to abstain from voting in the runoff (Semones, 2020). With Biden's success, Ossoff and Warnock's close polling numbers, and fragmented party support, Perdue and Loeffler may have felt the need to remind their supporters of the importance of voting.



When comparing the candidates from the two parties, the Republicans attacked a larger number of targets than the Democrats did. While the Democrats levied almost all their attacks against their opponents, the Republicans often attacked the Democrats at large, as well as other political actors, such as Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and the Democratic candidate in the other Georgia race. Interestingly, one of the Republicans even attacked non-elected actors such as activist Stacey Abrams and the Black Lives Matter movement.

Another way the campaigns differed was the Republicans tied their campaigns together more than their Democratic counterparts. They did so in two ways. First, they mentioned one another more often than the Democrats did. Perdue and Loeffler mentioned one another a combined 45 times, while Warnock and Ossoff's did so only 20 times. This finding corroborates Livne, Simmons, Adar, and Adamic (2011), who found that Republican candidates in House, Senate, and gubernatorial contests mentioned one another on Twitter more often than their Democratic opponents.

Second, the Republican candidates linked their campaigns together by painting the two races as having extreme consequences for the future of the country. Using the phrases "Hold the line" and "Save America," Perdue and Loeffler attempted to rally support by warning about the radical change that would occur if the Democrats won a majority in the Senate. Specifically, the Republicans warned that Democratic Party wanted to push socialism onto the American people, and that electing Warnock and Ossoff would allow them to implement this radical agenda. The two Republicans went about this in slightly different ways. During the runoff, Loeffler argued that Warnock was a socialist, a Marxist, and the most radical Senate candidate, but she also frequently mentioned socialism in tweets that are not directed toward Warnock. Perdue, on the other hand, attacked Ossoff for being a socialist and a radical, although in his other tweets he did not mention socialism generally as often as Loeffler did. Here are some sample tweets of Perdue framing the election outcome as having dire consequences:

- "@ScottforFlorida reminds Georgians that @KLoeffler and I are the firewall against Democrats' radical, socialist agenda that would destroy our country. 12/2
- "If we save the Senate, we save America. @KLoeffler and I need your help to make sure the road to Socialism NEVER runs through the state of Georgia" 11/16
- "In 50 days @KLoeffler and I will save our Senate majority. We will hold the line. We will make sure the road to socialism will NEVER run through the state of Georgia! But we need YOUR HELP to save America." 11/16
- "Georgia is the last line of defense against the Democrats radical socialist agenda. They want to fundamentally change the direction of our country. @KLoeffler and I need you to stand with us to stop them! Save Georgia, Save America." 11/13

Here are some sample tweets of Loeffler framing the election outcome as having dire consequences:

- "It's time to come together. It's time to hold the line against socialism. It's time to SAVE OUR COUNTRY." 12/22
- "America is counting on us to STOP socialism in its tracks and SAVE the American Dream." 12/30
- "My opponent would do nothing but rubberstamp the left's socialist agenda, because he's as radical as it gets." 12/23
- "Georgia is the firewall against socialism. @chuckschumer said, 'Now, we take Georgia, then we change America.' And he has his agent of change in @RevendWarnock — the most radical candidate in America." 11/18

This framing could be indicative of a new campaign tactic for Republicans: vote for us because Democratic governance will ruin the country. Another contemporary and predominant example of this framing is the establishment of the Save America Leadership PAC created by Donald Trump in 2020 (Ballotpedia, 2020) and the “Save America Movement” that Trump started after losing the 2020 presidential election (donaldjtrump.com).

While the Republican candidates framed the consequences of the elections in terms of what would occur if they lost, the Democrats framed the consequences in terms of what they could accomplish if they won. Specifically, they talked about legislation regarding affordable health care, the protection of voting rights, the promotion of civil rights, and COVID relief. Here are some sample tweets of Ossoff pushing the importance of winning the Senate majority:

- “We can make a public college and HBCU degree 100% debt-free. But only if we win the Senate.” 12/27
- “We can cut taxes for working families and small businesses. But only if we win the Senate.” 11/22
- “We can pass the John R. Lewis Voting rights Act. But only if we win the Senate.” 11/16
- “We can make voter suppression a federal Crime. But only if we win the Senate.” 11/11

Here are some sample tweets of Warnock pushing the importance of winning the Senate majority:

- “Health care is a human right. Pass it on.” 11/10
- “There’s 500,000 Georgians in the Medicaid gap. When we win, we’ll make sure every Georgian has access to quality, affordable health care.” 11/12
- “Small businesses have been hit hard during this pandemic because politicians like @kloeffer have failed to provide the critical aid that they need to survive. When we win on January 5<sup>th</sup>, we’re going to fix that.” 11/28
- “1.8 million Georgians have pre-existing conditions. The only way we can protect their health care is if we take back the Senate.” 11/20

## VI. Conclusion

This exploratory study used a content analysis to examine the topics and tones of Twitter messages in the two Georgia 2020 U.S. Senate races to better understand how candidates use Twitter to communicate with potential voters.

The results reveal several themes. First, all four candidates mostly used Twitter for non-issue-related communication, namely, to request donations, provide updates on campaign events, and urge followers to vote. This lack of issue-related tweets shows that the candidates did not rely heavily on Twitter to broadcast their policy positions.

Second, negativity played a large role in candidates’ communication. More than a quarter of all tweets had a negative tone, and Republican candidates used negative tones more frequently than the Democrats did. Most negative tweets were aimed at the candidate’s opponent, but the Republicans also frequently took aim at the opposing party at large. Other dominant topics for the Republicans included support for Donald Trump, voting, the dangers of socialism, and the Supreme Court. Frequent topics for Democrats included voting, health care, COVID, and civil rights. Lastly, while all candidates communicated the importance of these elections, the Republicans and Democrats did so differently. While the Democrats framed the election’s consequences in terms of what could be accomplished if they won, the Republican candidates warned of the dire consequences that would occur if they lost. After the general election, the two Republicans referred to

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themselves as the last line of defense against the Democrats' radical agenda, specifically the implementation of socialism. This study provided a unique opportunity to examine this novel Republican campaign message. Future studies could examine if Republican candidates continue to use this messaging to rally support.

While the present study is an important step in understanding how political candidates use Twitter to campaign, it has some limitations. First, 600 tweets is not a comprehensive data set. Moreover, while the study compared tones and topics from the general election to the runoff, it did not compare them regarding other factors such as polling or proximity to election day. Lastly, future studies could consider how political communication on Twitter interactions with political communication in traditional media.

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# Live From New York! An Analysis of Chinese Hosts on Saturday Night Live

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## Abstract

*Saturday Night Live has long served as a societal mirror that captures and creates popular culture. In recent years, the show has been criticized for its lack of diverse hosts, cast and staff. Out of 930 episodes, only seven have been hosted by an Asian host, four of whom identify as Chinese. This research examined those four episodes through quantitative analysis, finding that the qualities of each of the hosts' characters range from just below neutral to moderately positive. The use of stereotypes and satirical racial humor varied. Jackie Chan and Lucy Liu's episodes had the highest concentration of both overt and covert stereotypes, while Awkwafina had a similar number with a lower concentration. The infrequency of Chinese representation on the show is both a social issue and a barrier to research, and a small sample size does not allow for definitive conclusions to be drawn. Rather, this research paints a picture of how the four Chinese hosts are portrayed on SNL as influenced by their own unique identities and the year of their appearance.*

## I. Introduction

In the fall of 2019, Bowen Yang joined the Saturday Night Live (SNL) cast and became the first Asian cast member, 44 years after the show's inception (Griffith, 2019). The addition of Yang illuminated a greater issue – SNL's clear lack of diversity among cast members and hosts. By creating dozens of characters viewed by mainstream audiences every week, SNL plays a role in strengthening and weakening stereotypes depending on what actors play which characters. This role, along with its consistent format and leadership, makes the late-night comedy a prime archive to analyze.

Two years after Yang's historic addition, Marvel's first Asian superhero Simu Liu addressed the lively Studio 8H crowd. After telling the crowd how he landed the role in the first place, he paused to acknowledge his role in SNL's history. "I'm also the first Chinese host on SNL ..." Simu Liu said, taking a breath as the crowd erupted in cheers, "To be the fourth Chinese host on the show."

The moment revealed both the lack of representation and time that had elapsed since the other three Chinese hosts took the stage. The first Chinese host graced the stage 21 years earlier, actor Jackie Chan.

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He addressed the rowdy crowd as the first martial artist to host the show with no mention of his ethnicity. Seven months later, actress Lucy Liu stepped onto the same stage and delivered a monologue that sharply contrasted Chan's (Wang, 2018). It featured a satirical video montage of her time as the first Asian woman to host the show. Dressed in traditional Chinese clothing, Lucy Liu ironed cast member's clothes, served a dog for dinner, and painted producer Lorne Michaels's nails.

Almost two decades would pass before another Chinese host appeared on the show. Awkwafina's 2018 episode opened with her recounting waiting outside 30 Rock during Lucy Liu's episode. "So thank you Lucy for opening the door," she said. "I wasn't able to make it into the building back then, but 18 years later I am hosting the show."

The four Chinese hosts of Saturday Night Live represent a research sample that crosses decades and genders. Chan's appearance in 2000 as a middle-aged Chinese martial artist whose first language is not English contrasts with Simu Liu's appearance as a young Chinese actor in 2021. Comparatively, the episodes starring Lucy Liu and Awkwafina use their Chinese ethnicities in very different connotations. By analyzing the characters portrayed and the societal stereotypes that exist in American media, these four episodes give insight into how Chinese people are represented in popular American television.

## II. Literature Review

The absence of Chinese hosts on SNL is a symptom of a larger problem. Kim (2004) analyzed Asian American representation on TV in the decades since the 1960s. Before that decade, housekeeper and "help" roles were typically filled by Black Americans. The Civil Rights Movement and the NAACP changed that narrative. The movement opened a void for these domestic roles, and throughout the 60s and 70s, Asian Americans were primarily featured as servants in white households. Most notably, *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* starred Oscar Award-winning actress Miyoshi Umeki as the motherly figure in a bachelor father-son household.

With the backdrop of the Vietnam War, the following decades lacked Asian representation on the silver screen. Taking place in Korea, the wildly popular anti-war comedy *M\*A\*S\*H\** was one of the only shows that featured Asian characters on a regular basis. Despite its location, the show centered on the American and white soldiers, and included usually nameless Korean characters. One credited actress was Rosalind Chao, who played Soon-Lee Klinger in the last two episodes of the show. She appeared as an incarcerated Korean refugee who is put under the watch of Sgt. Maxwell Klinger, who ends the show by staying in Korea to find Soon-Lee's parents. Chao found later success in various television shows, including *Star Trek: Next Generation*.

Moving into the 90's, Margaret Cho's *All-American Girl* (1994) was the first American sitcom to feature an Asian American family. Despite the show's poor reviews, it paved the way for creating complex Asian characters. It was a far jump from the previous decades where the assigned tropes were often as "foreigner," or "domestic servant."

Kwak (2004) notes that Asian Americans have not had the same reckoning with humor that Latino and Black Americans have. She points to the "model minority" myth, a stereotype which is often attributed to Asian Americans in contexts of academic and economic success, in contrast to other minority groups. Kwak wrote that this myth may explain why the public often does not acknowledge the existence of anti-Asian discrimination. This complacency allows tired stereotypes to continue to exist, almost under the radar.

Wu (1997) also examined the personifications of Asian characters in American media. Through content analysis, he used a five-point scale to measure positive and negative traits. He measured this against European American characters and found a gap in the perceptions. Asian American characters skewed slightly towards negative traits such as "stupid," "poor," or "weak." European characters, on the other hand, skewed towards positive traits such as "smart," "rich," or "strong." The only negative traits attributed to European Americans were aggression and unhappiness, while Asian Americans were attributed entirely negative traits.

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In a journalistic context, Jenn Fang's 2018 article for Teen Vogue looked at the enduring practice of "yellowface" in American media. Yellowface is the practice of non-Asian, primarily white people, dressing and acting as Asian characters. It can be traced back to the mid-18th century, where white actors performed *The Orphan of China* in yellowface and popularized its use in American theater. The negative implications of yellowface are coupled with the underrepresentation of Asian Americans in American television and cinema. University of Southern California researchers found that only 4.4% of speaking characters are Asian, even though they are the fastest growing population in the U.S. (Fang, 2018) The practice of "yellowface" is still used in film, as seen in 2017 when Scarlett Johansson played *Ghost in the Shell's* Japanese protagonist, and in Matt Damon's portrayal of a Chinese warrior in *Great Wall* (2016).

### ***Stereotypes and Archetypes in Comedy***

According to Rohrbacher (2015), ten archetypes can be found in comedy. They range from The Anchor, a character who is rooted as a means for the audience to relate with, to The Buffoon, a character who exists to be laughed at. The archetypes provide a framework to understand different characters' purposes, rather than define the character. Many characters fall under multiple archetypes, while others fall under none.

<b>The Anchor</b> The anchor is intelligent and grounded. This character is often the pillar of their group and uses sarcasm as a comedic weapon.	<b>The Dreamer</b> The dreamer is an eternal optimist with a healthy dose of self-deprecating humor. While all characters have desires, this character is defined by desire.	<b>The Neurotic</b> The neurotic is defined by insecurity, filtered through intelligence. This character has a big brain that can process all possible outcomes at once, which can be quite overwhelming!	<b>The Rebel</b> The rebel has a God complex. Their disdain for life's rules drives them to danger and deceit. They think they can do anything they want and get away with it.	<b>The Innocent</b> Sweet and lovable, the innocent is made of love. Pure as the driven snow, they have no inherent negative qualities. They can be naive, but you can trust them with your life.
<b>The Eccentric</b> The eccentric is unique, which by definition means rare. Far from spacey, this character is hyper-connected to the world, invested, and curious.	<b>The Buffoon</b> Dimwitted is my favorite word to summarize this character. They're not dumb—no character is. To call any character that is judgmental and generally inaccurate. Buffoons are socially inept with often iffy intentions.	<b>The Cynic</b> The Cynic is a world-weary defeatist. While often negative, they are simultaneously wonderful friends, strong allies, and invested in life. The mistake actors make with this character is playing like they don't care about anything. Untrue.	<b>The Narcissist</b> They love themselves and things in exactly that order. Entitled is a very particular quality, which this character exhibits to an inordinate degree.	<b>The Player</b> This character lives in pursuit of just one thing: sex with no strings attached. They're fun, bold, and sexually charged, but generally lack substance, even more so than the narcissist.

Figure 1. (Rohrbacher 2015)

Media Action for Asian Americans (MANAA) put out a memo in 2017 describing common stereotypes of Asian people in American media and how to combat them (NTAC-AAPI 2017). Among them include the foreigner who cannot assimilate into modern society, predatory immigrants who steal jobs, unattractive male leads, and clichéd occupations like Korean grocers or laundry workers. MANAA created the list in response to the unbalanced portrayal of Asians in mainstream media. Some stereotypes are more covert than others but have been associated with Asian Americans due to their frequency in television and film.



## ***Saturday Night Live and Representation***

Awkwafina was the first Asian American woman to host Saturday Night Live in over 18 years during her 2018 episode, underscoring that Saturday Night Live has long struggled with diversity and inclusion, both within its cast and its selection of hosts. As Kilkenney (2022) noted, 90 percent of the show's hosts between 1975 and May 2016 were white. Although SNL has increased diversity in its regular cast, 63 percent of members were white in 2022.

This exclusion is not new for SNL. Gates (2013) examined Eddie Murphy's tenure on the show in the early 1980s and how African American humor is represented, which offers perspective on how minority cast members can be marginalized as comedians. According to Gates, Murphy was able to navigate around this by toeing the line of white, "mainstream" humor while incorporating black humor and social commentary. Murphy is undeniably talented and exudes star quality, but he also made it clear to the producers that he saw how Garrett Morris – the first African American cast member and Murphy's predecessor – was treated, and that he would not accept the same treatment. He was able to work with writers to put his own voice into sketches, so his characters were not all cookie-cutter stereotypes.

Bowen Yang's addition to the cast was similarly significant. He is the son of Chinese immigrants and the first Asian American to join the cast (Coleman, 2013). The news was unfortunately overshadowed by revelations of past racist jokes made by Shane Gillis, another new cast member. These revelations revealed the dissonance between where SNL is going in terms of diversity and what it still needs to address to get there. In a 2020 interview, Yang said that he had exhausted many of his Asian celebrity impersonations when auditioning. Yang expressed his disdain for the idea that he was the "token" Asian cast member (Framke, 2020).

Yang's inclusion on Saturday Night Live's cast raises the question of how the portrayal of Asian people has shifted on the show since Jackie Chan's appearance back in 2000. This study analyzed the episodes of the only four Chinese people to host the show: Jackie Chan, Lucy Liu, Awkwafina and Simu Liu. These four hosts represent Chinese women, men, immigrants, and American-born entertainers, giving a scope for the intersection of these identities. Though some hosts are given creative liberty, the roles assigned to them are crafted by SNL's writers. This paper will look at how their ethnicity is connected to those roles.

## ***Research Questions***

RQ 1: How does Saturday Night Live cast its Chinese hosts and are they portrayed through covert or overt stereotypes?

RQ 2: When a Chinese host's ethnicity is used for comedic purposes, how is it portrayed?

## **III. Methods**

To answer these questions, the researcher examined the SNL episodes of hosts Jackie Chan, Lucy Liu, Awkwafina, and Simu Liu. The sample was narrowed to hosts of Chinese ethnicity, as "Asian American" would exclude Canadian Simu Liu, and expanding the category to hosts of all Asian countries would potentially introduce a multitude of different stereotypes. The content analysis conducted only focuses on Chinese representation, though nuances from Asian-American culture are included, as Chinese people make up about 24% of Asian Americans (Pew, 2022).

The researcher chose to conduct a content analysis of the episodes. Content analysis was used to understand the presence of certain phrases, costume choices and characteristics. For this content analysis, the researcher began by watching the episode all the way through and taking notes on any themes. Then, each was rewatched, with the researcher noting the occupation, ambition, and characteristics of the roles. The character's role in the skit and any distinctive personality traits were coded. Examples of these are "loud," "silly," "reserved," "studious" or "serious." To determine the comedic role each character played, the researcher used Rohrbacher's ten comedy archetypes (Rohrbacher 2015). The researcher also noted if the character's ethnicity was a central part of the character.

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On third watch, the researcher examined the comedic purpose of the character: are jokes made at their expense? If their ethnicity is important to the sketch, is the connotation negative, positive, or neutral?

After watching each episode three times, the researcher identified categories from noted trends in characters. Looking at the personalities of each character, the researcher noted where they fell on Wu's positive–negative 5-point scale for each trait, with 1 being the most negative and 5 being the most positive (Wu, 1997). For example, if the character is depicted as being athletic and strong, they received a 5 on the scale from weak-to-strong. After examining the personality traits, the character's average score revealed how positively or negatively they were portrayed.

The next step the researcher took was examining the occupations and ambitions of the characters and comparing them to historical stereotypes. Examples of these are the passive domestic worker and the foreigner who cannot assimilate or speak English. MANAA defines common stereotypes, and the researcher used the list to identify them within the episodes. The number of explicit stereotypes were totaled between all episodes.

Finally, the researcher looked at the host's role in each sketch. If ethnicity is used for humor in the sketch, the researcher noted whether it was a positive, negative, or neutral. If the host was explicitly the butt of the joke, then the researcher flagged it for emphasis. The number of times hosts appeared with another Asian person was also noted.

In addition, the researcher (Z) trained another researcher to conduct the same study. The second researcher (X) read the same MANAA and Vogue articles on common Asian stereotypes, then conducted coding of the episodes, following the same steps. Throughout the findings, the first table is by Z and the second is by X.

## IV. Findings

Upon initial viewing, the progression in representation is clear. Jackie Chan starred in four sketches in his 2000 episode. Lucy Liu was featured in five. Awkwafina and Simu Liu (each appeared in seven. Chan did not play the lead role in any of his sketches. It's important to note that English is not Chan's first language, so perhaps there was a language barrier, leading to a greater use of physical comedy in his sketches.

	repulsive/ attractive	weak/ strong	powerless/ potent	stupid/ smart	unhappy/ happy	poor/ rich	dependent/ independent	disobedient/ obedient	aggressive/ meek	Irrational /rational	Average
Jackie Chan	3	4.5	4	3	3.5	2	3	3.25	3	1.25	3.05
Lucy Liu	3.8	3.2	2.8	1.2	2.8	3.6	3.2	2.8	3.4	2.4	2.92
Awkwafina	4.286	4	3.571	3.429	3	2.857	4.143	2.571	3.285	3.286	3.443
Simu Liu	3.857	3.143	3.143	3.571	3.143	3.714	3.571	3.143	3.571	2.714	3.357
Average	3.736	3.711	3.379	2.8	3.111	3.042	3.479	2.941	3.314	2.413	3.193

Figure 2, by researcher Z

	repulsive/ attractive	weak/ strong	powerless/ potent	stupid/ smart	unhappy/ happy	poor/ rich	dependent/ independent	disobedient/ obedient	aggressive/ meek	Irrational /rational	Average
Jackie Chan	2.25	3	3.5	3	4.25	2.75	3	3.25	3	2.75	3.075
Lucy Liu	3.4	2.4	2.4	1.6	3.4	3	2.6	3.8	3.2	2.8	2.86
Awkwafina	3.429	3.571	3.857	3.143	3.143	3.143	3.571	2.571	2.571	2.714	3.171
Simu Liu	3.857	3.571	3.429	3.571	3.286	3.714	3.286	3	3.286	2.857	3.386
Average	3.234	3.136	3.296	2.829	3.52	3.152	3.114	3.155	3.014	2.78	3.123

Figure 3, by researcher X

Using Wu's method, the researchers measured the traits of each character on a five-point scale to see how positively each was portrayed. Figures 2 and 3 displays these findings. Lucy Liu was the only host to fall below the neutral 3 on both studies, with a 2.92 and 2.86 as her average score. Lucy Liu fell in the stupid/smart category, with a 1.2 and 1.6 reflecting the other ditzy characters she portrayed.

While researchers differed somewhat on Chan in the irrational/rational category, he often played characters that exploded into aggressive or strange outbursts at times. However, he typically remained mellow, which perhaps explains the researcher's discrepancy. Chan also scored low in the poor/rich category, as most of his characters were in low-paying occupations such as dry cleaning and a worker digging a hole to the center of the Earth. Chan and Lucy Liu's characters can generally be sorted into two categories. They are either quiet and timid, following the shadow of the other characters, or they are aggressive and over the top. Awkwafina and Simu Liu's characters were more complex, making it harder to distinguish clear traits.

<b>Average</b>	<b>3.193</b>
Women (LL/A)	3.181
Men (JC/SL)	3.203

Figure 4

<b>Average</b>	<b>3.123</b>
Women (LL/A)	3.016
Men (JC/SL)	3.23

Figure 5

The average score (Figures 4 [Z] and 5 [X]) of the characters skewed just above neutral. The men scored a little higher than the women in both studies, by an average of 0.118. The lowest average scores by category in ascending order were "irrational/rational," "stupid/smart," and "disobedient/obedient."

	Innocent	Buffoon	Rebel	Anchor	Narcissist
Jackie Chan	1	1	1	0	0
Lucy Liu	0	2	1	0	2
Awkwafina	2	0	2	2	0
Simu Liu	1	0	0	2	0

Figure 6, Z

	Innocent	Dreamer	Rebel	Anchor	Eccentric
Jackie Chan	2	1	1	0	0
Lucy Liu	2	1	0	0	1
Awkwafina	1	0	2	3	1
Simu Liu	1	0	0	3	1

Figure 7, X

Figures 6 and 7 list the top five comedic archetypes the researchers identified in characters. For researcher Z, the buffoon and the narcissist only appeared in the earlier episodes, when Lucy Liu plays a ditzy lumberjack, and Chan plays an equally ditzy yoga instructor. The anchor only appeared in later episodes, such as Simu Liu's role as a frustrated game-show contestant. Both researchers only identified the anchor in Awkwafina's and Simu Liu's episodes. Additionally, Lucy Liu and Awkwafina were the only hosts to impersonate celebrities. They played Catharine Zeta Jones and Sandra Oh, respectively. Lucy Liu impersonated a white woman, while Awkwafina impersonated a Korean woman.

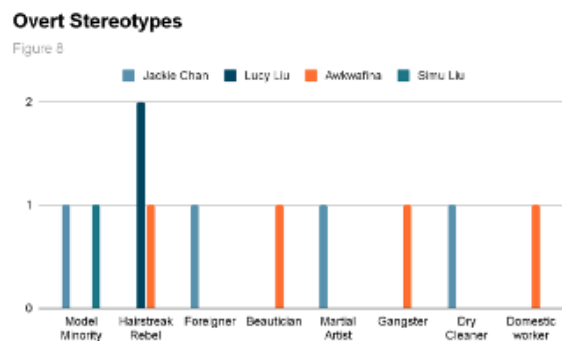


Figure 8

Figure 8 displays the overt stereotypes present in the episodes, using MANAA's list of common tropes. The researchers each identified the same stereotypes. All four of Jackie Chan's roles fell into a common stereotype, while only one of Simu Liu's seven characters were identified as stereotypes. Simu Liu played roles that were starkly different from his predecessors. He played a professor, a "finance bro," and a highly decorated army official. Lucy Liu's monologue was excluded from the analysis, as the intention of the skit was for her to impersonate as many Chinese stereotypes as possible, with upwards of eleven identifiable instances.

The researchers then noted how many sketches, including the monologue, referred to the host's ethnicity (Figures 9 and 10). An example of the overt references was when Jackie Chan played a man digging a hole from China and did not speak English. Examples of covert references were the Chinese decorations and gong noise in Chan's dry-cleaning sketch. Chan was the only host to not mention his ethnicity in his opening monologue. Instead, he talked about his martial arts background and being the first martial artist to host SNL.

	Overt	Covert
Jackie Chan	2	2
Lucy Liu	1	3
Awkwafina	2	1
Simu Liu	2	0

Figure 9, Z

	Overt	Covert
Jackie Chan	3	1
Lucy Liu	1	1
Awkwafina	1	1
Simu Liu	2	0

Figure 10, X

Simu Liu was the only host to appear in a sketch with another person of Asian descent. He and cast member Bowen Yang appeared in three sketches together. Jackie Chan, on the other hand, was the only cast member to appear alongside a non-Asian person playing an Asian person. Horatio Sanz appeared as martial artist Sammo Hung during Chan's monologue.

Appearances also played a role in stereotypes, particularly with the women. In Hollywood there is a common trope of "rebellious Asian women with colorful hair" that stems from the idea that Asian women must Westernize themselves to be seen as independent thinkers (Chen, 2018). Two of Lucy Liu's characters fell under this trope and embodied its rebellious nature. One of Awkwafina's characters fell under the trope, though not as overtly.

## V. Discussion/Conclusion

As evident from the data, Saturday Night Live casts their Chinese hosts in moderately positive roles. They aren't vilified or idolized, with many characters falling close to neutral. Roles have become more positive and more frequent over time. Despite the increased positivity, the hosts cannot escape stereotyping. Explicit stereotypes have declined over the years, but they still exist.

This progression could be due to several factors. For one, Bowen Yang was a writer when Awkwafina hosted and a cast member when Simu Liu hosted, meaning there was at least one Chinese person in the room when these sketches were created. Additionally, Asian representation has become a bigger conversation in Hollywood along with the societal reckoning with diversity, equity, and inclusion. It's important to note that these hosts do not represent Chinese people in general. Their individual identities also influence the characters they are written as.

Ethnicities have always been central to Chinese hosts' appearances on SNL, but it's shifted with each host. Chan was the only host to not mention his ethnicity during his monologue. Being Chinese was central to all his characters though, often through covert stereotypes such as "the IT guy" and nicknames such as "my Chinese checker." Even though his martial arts background took center stage, it still holds connotations associated with Chinese people.

Lucy Liu opened the show with an overtly stereotypical skit. She played on all the different tropes associated with Chinese people and announced her historic feat as the first Asian woman to host to thunderous applause. The audience's reaction reflected the excitement. Despite the tongue-in-cheek opening, Lucy Liu was cast in various tropes throughout the episode and boxed into two types of character – one docile and obedient, the other over-the-top with dyed-hair.

Awkwafina's connection to her ethnicity came up during her opening monologue where she praised Lucy Liu for opening the door for her. The roles she played were different and every character she played was not overtly linked to her ethnicity. Some of her roles aligned with common tropes, but for the most part her Chinese ethnicity was not central to the comedy. In MANAA's memo to Hollywood where they addressed Asian stereotypes, they said the way to combat tropes is by casting Asian people in a variety of roles. Awkwafina's episode is an example of that goal. It must be acknowledged that outside of SNL Awkwafina has come under fire for using a "blaccent" and appropriating black culture. This external publicity may have



influenced which roles were written for her.

There was a high level of polarity in Simu Liu's episode. For the most part, his ethnicity was not used as a defining feature in his characters. There were no covert references and the only times it was mentioned was when it was central to the sketch. His monologue highlighted his historic role as the first Asian Marvel superhero. Later in the show, he and Bowen Yang starred in a sketch where they celebrated the first time an Asian host and Asian cast member appeared in a sketch together. It devolved into a competition over who had more "First Asian" awards, poking fun at the vast number of "firsts" each actor had.

The use of ethnicity as a comedic device for Chinese hosts on SNL was different in each episode. When Jackie Chan graced that stage 22 years ago, his ethnicity was central to most characters he played. He relied on physical comedy and appearances, which could be due to the language barrier. Lucy Liu relied on stereotypes for her monologue, but scrapped them for the most part in the sketches she starred in. Covert instances of stereotypes were present, but the declining instances of them could mark a shift in their use. Every host aside from Jackie Chan acknowledged and celebrated ethnicity in the opening monologue.

Future research could extend the category to all people of Asian descent, which would include hosts Sandra Oh, Aziz Ansari, and Kumail Nanjiani. Researchers could also study impersonations of Asian people on Saturday Night Live, particularly before Jackie Chan's 2000 appearance. Finally, future studies would benefit with a larger, more diverse set of researchers, particularly Chinese researchers who understand the nuances of their ethnicity more than anyone.

## Acknowledgements

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# Media Framing Of Russia's Invasion Of Ukraine

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in an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

## Abstract

*Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the act of war was covered extensively by global media outlets, delving into how the conflict might affect diplomacy, economics, and national security. This article examines how the New York Times and international newspapers framed Russia's war with Ukraine in 2022, specifically the initial invasion and the first two weeks of the conflict. This study looked at headlines and lead paragraphs from almost 100 articles published by the New York Times and on the International Newsstream database of non-U.S. newspapers. The study found that the New York Times had more headlines with an economic focus, while the International Newsstream articles had more headlines that focused on the military. Additional themes of internal politics were prevalent in the New York Times, with many headlines referencing rising gas prices and the response of individual politicians. The discussion helps put in context the prominent journalistic themes during the first weeks of the war.*

## I. Introduction

The February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine was covered heavily in the global media. The conflict was portrayed in many ways, affecting diplomacy, economics, and national security. The way this conflict was represented in the media is worth noting as the military actions of nuclear powers like Russia have global implications. However, it is important to note that this conflict has been building for years, if not decades. To analyze the news and framing of this situation properly, one first needs to know the history between Ukraine and Russia. This history provides context for research that came out of Russia's first invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea and why Russia is framed the way it is in Western media.

The history of Russia and Ukraine as independent countries in the modern era begins in 1991 with the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. and Ukraine gaining independence on August 24 of that same year. Before this, Ukraine had been a part of the U.S.S.R. since the Red Army established control in 1919 (Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 2019). From 1919 to 1930, Ukraine kept much of its culture and language with schools and offices operating in Ukrainian. In 1930 came Russification, where non-Russian communities and territories assimilated to Russia's language and culture. In 1991 with the dissolution of the U.S.S.R., Ukraine became an independent country and moved away from the Soviet's communist economic model to a more capitalist economic model. Ukraine did this to be more closely associated with Eastern European countries and the European Union.

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**Keywords:** Russia, Ukraine, war, framing, misinformation

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On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, entering what some consider a continuation of the 2014 invasion and annexation of Crimea. The 2014 conflict began in November 2013 when then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich suspended preparations to implement an economic and political agreement between Ukraine and the European Union. This discussion resulted in mass protests from pro-European Ukrainians known as the Revolution of Dignity. This deadly clash between protestors and security forces resulted in the impeachment of President Yanukovich on February 22, 2014. The Russian army invaded Crimea the next day (Fisher, 2014). Then in 2021, Russia started amassing troops along the Russia-Ukraine border while Russian President Vladimir Putin questioned the sovereignty of Ukraine (Perrigo, 2022) and expressed that their joining of NATO would be a threat to Russian security (NATO, 2022). U.S. intelligence reports started saying Russia would invade Ukraine, which the Russian government denied. Then on February 24, 2022, Putin authorized a “special military operation” into Ukraine, launching airstrikes on the capital minutes later (Osborn and Nikolskaya, 2022). This research will examine how American and international media outlets depicted the situation in the news as it unfolded to understand what frames were most common.

## II. Literature Review

Given the current situation between Russia and Ukraine, past research on how social media and news coverage impact conflicts in this region and elsewhere can provide insight into how the current conflict is represented in the media. Social media has changed how wars and military conflicts are displayed and have shifted how information is presented. The previous research has highlighted the framing of military conflicts, the emergence of information wars, and the spread of misinformation.

### *Framing*

Framing theory originated in sociology in the 1960s and has since been adapted for the field of communications. It allows for a study of media effects on individuals to be studied on a holistic level (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). Framing is when reporters emphasize a particular angle. This can lead people to believe that this angle is the most important, even if that is not entirely true. Framing is used by news outlets to shape the story and narrative they want to communicate. Framing is the foundation for how people interpret information – as described by Entman, framing is the act of giving some aspects of a narrative more emphasis so that one can use it to define the problem, diagnose the cause, pass judgments, and then offer solutions (Entman, 1993). A story's frame is often stated in the first couple of paragraphs and then carries through the end, ultimately shaping the reader's perspective.

Many researchers examine the news by determining whether “the frames in their news reporting are negative, neutral, or positive, depending on the aspect of the crisis focused on, or the news source relied upon, and their temporal variations allow the author to compare the overall similarity in news coverage patterns between news agencies” (Watanabe, 2017, p. 144). The framing of any conflict often depends on which side one views the situation. For example, research by Makhortykh and Sydorova (2017) looked at two public VKonyakte groups, the Russian form of Twitter. One group expressed support for Ukraine's government, while the other comprised pro-Russia insurgents during Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. They found that the pro-Russia group was more active throughout the conflict while the pro-Ukrainian group was most active during the latter half of July and August. They also found that when one group was particularly inactive, the other was highly active and vice-versa. While there could be many explanations for this, the most obvious is that content slowed down at times of loss and picked up during times of success.

Roman, Wanta, and Buniak (2017) also found the issue of framing in press variation explicitly relating to the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2014. The coverage found that “the U.S. and foreign officials appeared in almost two-thirds of NBC soundbites, with American officials accounting for almost a half of the overall TV channel on-camera sources” (p. 371). At the same time, Russian television station *Channel One Russia* had about 8% of its soundbites coming from Ukrainian officials compared to the lone soundbite from a Ukrainian official featured on *NBC* during the entire conflict (Roman, Wanta, and Buniak, 2017). Researchers also found both the United States and Russia presented the conflict through frames that

largely matched their respective government's views. In America, war reporting in prominent newspapers closely followed the message from American political leaders (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005), while in Russia, state-owned and controlled media sources touted its government's lines. The use of framing an essential journalistic tool when trying to present a complicated issue, but it can also spread misinformation and contribute to information wars, particularly when news outlets rely heavily on their own government for sources.

### **Information Wars**

The rise of the digital era has made information sharing more accessible to the masses; however, as pointed out by Watanabe (2017), "the competition in covering the Ukraine crisis between the western and Russian media has been described as an 'information war' by media observers" (p. 138). This definition is supported by other researchers looking at the 2014 conflict in Crimea between Russia and Ukraine, as Russian state media used the argument that the current Ukrainian government was comprised of fascists and Nazis to justify their actions to the people of Russia (Watanabe, 2017).

The use of rhetoric and news sources to gain support and frame the war narrative is an example of nations using the internet to gain soft power. For decades, countries have focused on their hard power, a more militaristic approach to international politics, while soft power uses peaceful persuasion to gain influence. The use of soft power in wartime is a recent development and can be seen in Bayulgen and Arbatli's (2013) study of American news coverage in the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict. The study showed that close to 60% of news articles were anti-Russian compared to less than 10% that were anti-Georgian. The researchers noted that this discrepancy could be because American journalists relied heavily on pro-Georgia reports from the American government to write their news stories. Additional studies have shown that Russia's media use as soft power aided its 2014 annexation of Crimea. Russia took a two-pronged approach of attacking media equipment and news channels and influencing public opinion at home and abroad (Jaitner and Mattsson, 2015).

### **Misinformation**

The ability to spread propaganda is easier than ever, as many news outlets often repost the reporting of others, quoting other news outlets rather than the original source. News agencies such as the Associated Press and Reuters provide the bulk of the content many online publications (Watanabe, 2017). This reusing of quotes and articles means that the same information is being shared on multiple news outlets, raising the possibility of further misinformation.

An organization dedicated to limiting fake news, StopFake.org., found that in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, fake news was not exclusively a product of state-sponsored media or private media outlets, but also spread through individuals (Haigh, Haigh, and Kozak, 2018). Individuals distributing false information is highly relevant in the current war between Russia and Ukraine. Individual accounts circulate incorrect information on social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. Some accounts are posing as news sources, while others are just personal accounts reposting content they have found on the internet.

## **III. Methods**

Given the past research and the current conflict, this study asks whether there is a difference in American coverage of Russia's invasion of Ukraine compared to international coverage. The research will be conducted using a content analysis of news articles to answer this question. The New York Times is the American source, and international articles will be from the International Newsstream, a database of non-U.S. news sources. The New York Times was selected to represent the American media because it is consistently in America's top three highest circulated newspapers. While The Wall Street Journal and USA Today are also in the top three, USA Today has more of a popular culture focus. In contrast, The Wall Street Journal has a more economic focus (Misachi, 2017), making the New York Times the best option for this study. The need for articles to be written in English was a limitation within this study and the reason for selecting the International Newsstream.

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The research examined at the first two weeks following the initial invasion by Russia on February 24, 2022, ending on March 10, 2022. The keywords “Russia or Ukraine” in the advanced search function of each database was used to draw the sample, and each eighth article was selected. If the article was an opinion piece or video, the next article was selected, and the eight-count resumed. This study also excluded articles about the number of military casualties on either side. It is difficult to accurately count those numbers in the early stages of a conflict, and the Russian government has published no definitive numbers of Russian military casualties. The analysis included a minimum of 25 articles from each source within the timeframe.

After the sample was selected, each article’s headline and initial paragraphs were examined. This consisted of the article’s text shown above the first advertisement on the New York Times website, the first part of the article that appeared on the computer screen when using the International Newsstream. The headline includes the headline given on the New York Times website and the headline printed in the physical newspaper. This study will also analyze the Times’ sentence-long description of the article. The International Newsstream headline was defined as the article title on the search page.

Based on previous research completed by Makhortykh and Sydorova in 2017, and Roman, Wanta, and Buniak in 2017, the hypothesis for this research is that the articles will fit one of three frames: economic, militaristic, or diplomatic. Articles that match the economic frame will mention sanctions or the financial ramifications of the war. Articles about economic actions taken by independent companies will also fall under this category. The militaristic frame will include articles that discuss troop and weaponry movements, infrastructure damages, and NATO involvement. The diplomatic frame will consist of articles referencing peace talks, negotiations between world leaders, and articles referencing actions taken against Russian embassies by other nations or individuals. If these themes are found within the article, this study will categorize them accordingly. Articles that do not fit within one of the predetermined categories will be coded to see if any additional themes emerge.

## IV. Findings

This study analyzed 47 headlines and leading paragraphs from the New York Times and 45 headlines and leading paragraphs analyzed from the International Newsstream. All three hypothesized frames were present. Many articles fit two or more primary frames; when this was the case, the article was categorized according to the more dominant theme. Articles were placed in as many sub-categories as fit, even if they did not fit into one of the three primary categorizations.

Figure 1 below shows the breakdown of all the articles that fit one of the three hypothesized frames. The most common frame for the New York Times was the economy, while the most common frame for the International Newsstream was the military; each category consisted of 18 articles. The least common frame for both publications was the diplomatic frame, composed of six articles.

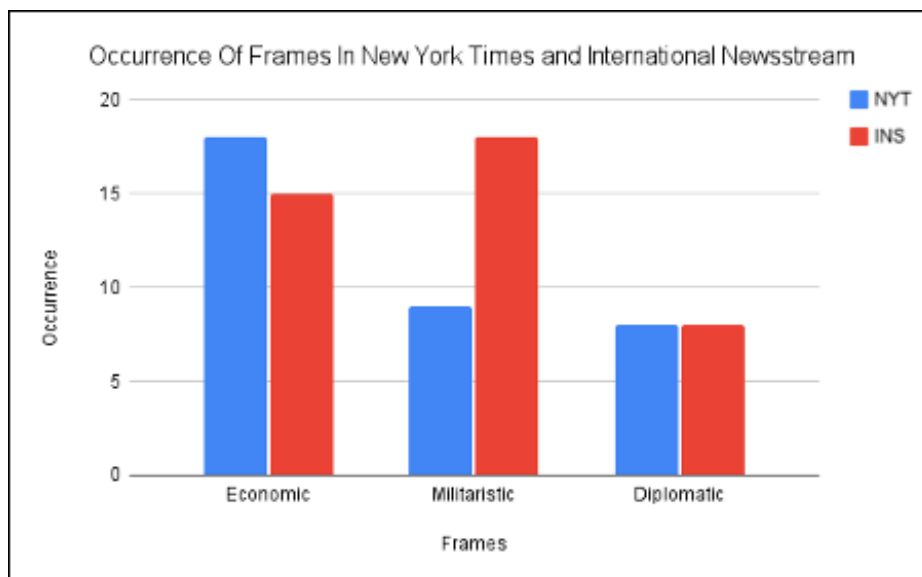


Figure 1: Occurrence Of Frames In New York Times and International Newsstream

There were 12 articles from the New York Times that did not fit any of the three predetermined frames and two from the International Newsstream that did not fit any frame.

The International Newsstream had double the number of articles that fit the militaristic theme as the New York Times. Those articles were often focused on the role of NATO in the conflict and the use of nuclear weapons (Figure 2). In comparison, there was no mention of nuclear weapons in any of the articles published by the New York Times, and the only mention of NATO in the New York Times articles explains what NATO is and answers the question of if Ukraine is a member of the organization (Figure 3).

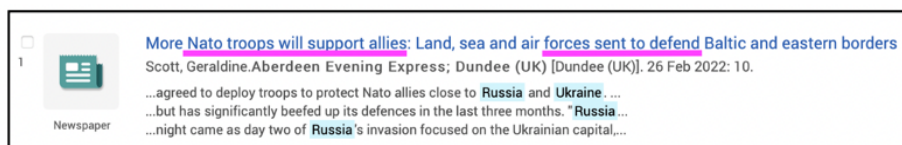


Figure 2: Sample militaristic frame headline from the International Newsstream



Figure 3: Mention of NATO in New York Times headline

A common theme in the New York Times was references from popular culture, specifically late-night television shows. As seen in Figure 4, late-night television host Stephen Colbert made jokes about the economic situation in Russia, which the New York Times then printed as news the following day. Popular culture was a common sub-theme as four articles mentioned popular culture or took quotes from popular culture. Popular culture references included but were not limited to social media, comical television programs, and celebrity opinions. Thus, popular culture tied for third place with sports as the most common subtheme found in articles from the New York Times, trailing oil, and geopolitics (Figure 5). For the International Newsstream sample, oil prices and nuclear weapons were the most prominent subthemes (Figure 6).

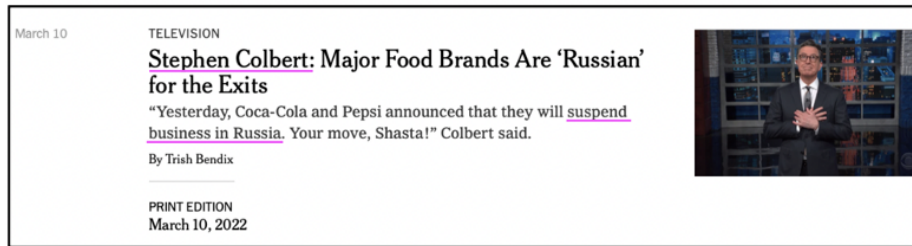


Figure 4: New York Times headline featuring popular culture references

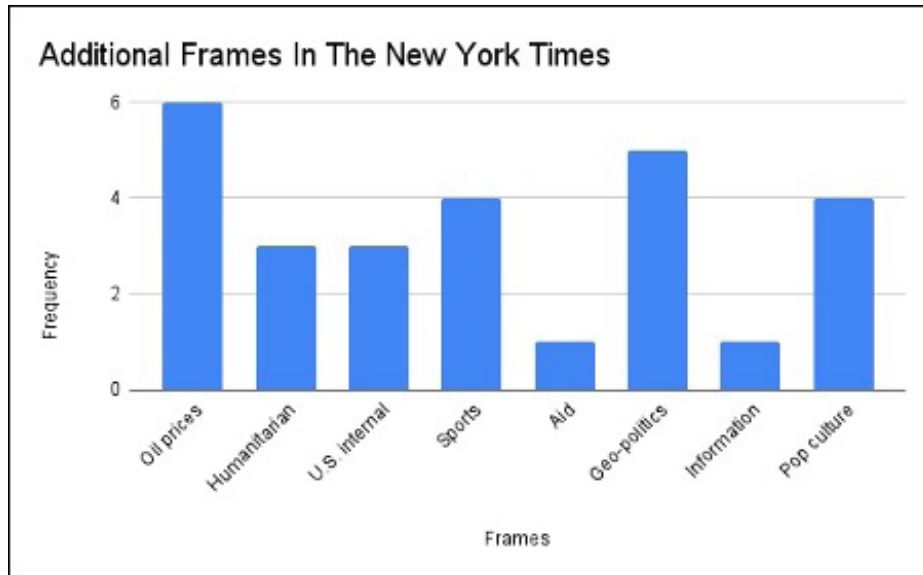


Figure 5: Additional frames in the New York Times

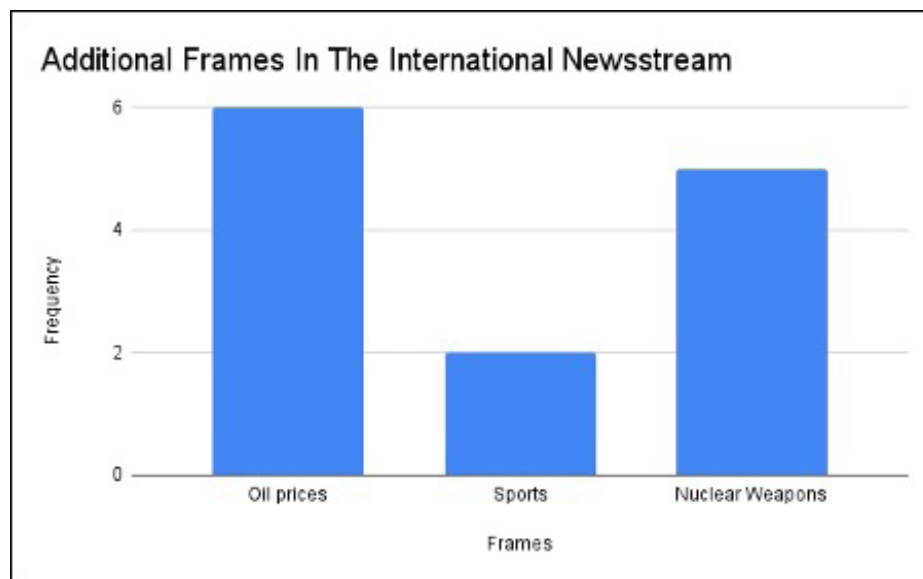


Figure 6: Additional frames in the International Newsstream

The New York Times articles also alluded more often to internal politics than did articles from the International Newsstream. For example, Sen. Lindsey Graham was quoted saying that someone should “take this guy out” in reference to Russian President Vladimir Putin (Figure 7). No headlines from the International Newsstream sample referenced political leader reactions.



Figure 7: New York Times headline about U.S. Senator's reaction to the war

The International Newsstream sample also noted the “Ghost of Kyiv,” a supposed fighter pilot responsible for bringing down multiple Russian warplanes over the Ukrainian capital city (Figure 8). The existence of the “Ghost of Kyiv” was later disproven in articles outside the scope of the study, but the headline exemplifies the information wars occurring during this conflict.



Figure 8: International Newsstream headline mentioning the “Ghost of Kyiv”

It is also interesting to note the differences in headline writing between the New York Times sample and those on the International Newsstream. The New York Times took a more local approach in reporting how the Ukraine war affected Americans. At the same time, articles from the International Newsstream focused more on the conflict itself and not necessarily the ramifications for the people living where they were reporting.

## V. Discussion

The findings of this study were in line with the original hypothesis that these news stories would fit within the three frames of economic, militaristic, and diplomatic. Few articles did not fit into any of the three predetermined themes. Sports were a surprising prominent sub-theme; however, given the time frame of the end of the Winter Olympics and the Paralympics, the mention of athletes makes sense. It is interesting to note that many of the Russian oligarchs who faced sanctions are owners or part owners of professional sports teams. So, the mention of those teams makes sense as a secondary theme to articles about economic sanctions.

The focus on the economic ramifications of the war being the prominent frame for New York Times stories was supported by past literature that concluded American newspapers closely follow the message of the American government (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005). The high number of articles fitting the economic frame from the New York Times is in line with the United States government's decisions in combating Russian forces in Ukraine. At the time of the study, the primary response from the U.S. was to target the Russians economically. The higher number of articles that mention the personal opinions and actions of U.S. politicians also supports the claim that American journalists follow the talking points of the American government.

This direction-taking style of journalism was previously expressed by researchers Bayulgen and Arbatli in 2013 when looking at the Russian-Georgian conflict. Their research found that less than 10% of

the articles were anti-Georgian, while the majority were anti-Russian. This study did not find any articles published by the New York Times or on the International Newsstream that were pro-Russia. The lack of pro-Russia articles could be attributed to Russia being more of an aggressor in this situation than in previous conflicts. In terms of the New York Times, it could be argued that the White House's position influenced the reporting because President Biden is more in favor of Ukraine than former President Trump.

This study seemed to include very little misinformation from either source. The most significant example of misinformation is seen with the "Ghost of Kyiv," mentioned in an International Newsstream article in early March. It was not until May 1<sup>st</sup> that the Ukrainian government said that the "Ghost of Kyiv" was not real. In a report from the New York Times that day, Emma Bubola wrote that the ghost "has turned out to be one of the more successful pieces of propaganda in an information war that, at times, Ukraine has fought as fiercely as it has on the battlefield" (2022). This news story highlights the presence of the information war co-occurring with the physical fighting in Ukraine, as expressed in previous research by Watanabe in 2017.

The most surprising result of this study was the lack of articles that fit the diplomatic frame. Given that countries, particularly ones that are members of NATO, did not want to engage in military action in Ukraine, this study expected to see more articles fit the diplomatic frame. One possible reason for this could be the study's time frame, as it only looked at the first two weeks of the war and did not examine coverage in the weeks leading up to the conflict.

## VI. Conclusion

Ultimately, framing is an important aspect of reporting, and news stories about the same topic can look vastly different depending on who is reporting. More importantly, this research tells us that the presence of misinformation and information wars continue to be a key part of military conflicts in our current digital age. It demonstrates that independent news outlets are not immune to misinformation and play a role in how conflicts are perceived.

The limitations of this study include the relatively small sample size considering the number of articles published each day about the war in Ukraine. Between 2,500 and 3,000 articles were available within the International Newsstream for each day within the study's time frame. In comparison, the New York Times had 828 articles within the time frame. Another limitation is that since the researcher did coding for this study individually, there is a chance that the coder missed specific themes or subthemes within the articles. Lastly, since this is an ongoing conflict, further research would need to be done to see if these themes are present in future war reporting and if they occur at the same frequencies throughout the conflict.

The results of this study can be used further to study the media response to the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war to determine if the predominant frames expressed carry throughout the war. Additionally, researchers could compare the results of this study to the results of similar studies during Russia's 2014 invasion and ultimate annexation of Crimea to determine if the media framing is the same. Lastly, researchers could take the data from this study and conduct a similar survey of the headlines coming out of Russian state media to see if the frames are the same or if there is any differentiation between headlines and article content.

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# Working in Media Analytics: A Feminist Analysis of Gender Inequality in the Data and Communications Industry

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## Abstract

*Nearly four out of ten working women in the United States report being discriminated against at work due to their gender. Data and media analytics is a male-dominated sector, with women accounting for less than 17 percent of all employment in data and analytics. It is important to understand gender-based impediments in this field and how women have overcome them. Through the lens of feminist standpoint theory, this study examines qualitative data from five in-depth interviews conducted with women working in the field of data and media analytics. The analysis yielded two primary findings: the usage of derogatory adjectives towards women in the profession, and a heavy focus on the conception of motherhood, thereby restricting women's purpose in life and employment. This study investigates approaches to prevent and combat gender discrimination going forward.*

## I. Introduction

Women make up more than 50 percent of the American workforce, but female employment in data and analytics professions is disproportionately low, even though many have degrees in these fields (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). In conjunction, there is a decrease in the number of women applying for statistical and analytical roles, as corporations have not done enough to ensure they are actively trying to fill executive and managerial positions with qualified females (Samuel, 2020).

When a management position is viewed as more suitable for a man, gender-stereotypical beliefs play an integral part in preventing women from being hired into these leadership positions. Despite efforts to equalize representation, roughly a quarter of male executives polled still believe that women will “never” occupy the desired minimum of 50% of senior management positions in their company[ies] (Wood, 2008).

Gender disparity in this field is pervasive and multifaceted, with variables ranging from pay discrepancies to preconceptions about applied, insight-driven work shaping how women approach data analytics careers. To pursue this line of work then, it is imperative to understand the extent to which these gender-based impediments affect women in media analytics, and perhaps more significantly, how previous women surmounted such disadvantages.

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**Keywords:** *media analytics, discrimination, workplace, gender disparity*  
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This paper analyzes the personal accounts of women working in the field to uncover ways in which gender discrimination may be acting on them. The ensuing sections will highlight central elements from the interviews and contrast them with research from related disciplines. The report commences by sharing future advice from interviewees to aid women of similar passions in moving forward with their career endeavors. According to this study's findings, gender discrimination continues to be widespread, yet women are more equipped with the tools they need to reform how corporations operate and to report aggressions when they happen.

## II. Literature Review

Scholarship related to gender discrimination is vast. This literature review focuses on variables impacting women's labor-force participation and advancement. Biased procedures that are counterintuitive to equitable and inclusive hiring, as well as polarizing interpretations of gender stereotypes, are identified in the literature as potential causes of gender discrimination in the workplace. The literature also reveals flawed systemic procedures within workplace culture that further prevent women from advancing in their career endeavors. A comparatively narrow body of research examines women's diminished role in data and media analytics professionals specifically.

Adverse effects of gender stereotypes have been substantiated through scientific study addressing many of the same questions. What perpetuates these stereotypes? How do they influence women's career ventures? Findings show that even small differences in gender perception increase the likelihood of chauvinism or inequity when it comes to women filling managerial positions (Wood, 2008). Previous research has found that gender stereotypes create barriers, such as structural misogyny, that are embedded in society's cultural frameworks (Sundstrom, 2019). This seemingly unconscious bias is replicated in larger institutions (Castaño, 2019). Furthermore, although corporate social responsibility initiatives include gender discrimination policies and are widely regarded as critical for company diversification, women continue to appear less suitable for managerial positions dependent on what has been deemed worthy personality attributes within the workplace culture (Castaño, 2019).

A longitudinal study conducted via in-depth interviews found that attitudes of middle managers about female promotion remained pessimistic over an eight-year span. Most respondents said it would take "more than ten years" for female managers to fill 50% of senior management positions (Wood, 2008). The findings additionally revealed that gender stereotypes have a negative impact on women's career advancement, with female talent being undervalued in management and leadership positions. This was consistent with the general perception that despite increased female participation in labor markets, gender stereotyping of management roles persists (Sundstrom, 2019).

Within conversations about the "glass ceiling," motherhood is coined as one of the main causes of economic disparities (Zagorsky, 2017). According to the World Policy Analysis Center, children have a significant impact on women in the United States due to a lack of national laws regarding maternity leave or guaranteed paid parental leave. As a result, childbirth frequently disrupts professional aspirations and comfortable working conditions for women, who often cut their work hours or take time off to care for both mother and child (Lettry, 2017). Many women will choose jobs based on criteria that are favorable to their familial life and increased involvement in the domestic sphere post-childbirth. Depending on the company's maternity leave provisions, 40% of women will not be eligible for the federally mandated 12 weeks of unpaid protected job leave established in the Family Medical Leave Act (Lettry, 2017). Irrespective of whether a woman qualifies, the United States does not provide paid maternity leave, leaving many women vulnerable to job loss and financial insecurity (OECD Development Centre, 2016). Furthermore, final salary is offered in part on the employer's anticipation of a reduction in availability given that women may be pregnant (OECD Development Centre, 2016).

Paternity leave is uncommon, despite being proven to have substantial advantages, including reinforced connection between child and father (Kramer, 2019). For example, researchers discovered that between 1994 and 2015, the average month recorded 273,000 women and only 1,000 men on leave following the birth of a child. Conclusively, the research reveals that while the US economy has grown since 1994, this

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does not manifest itself in role versatility among men and women, with women still outnumbering fathers in taking leave of absence (Zagorsky, 2017).

Additional research suggests that gender inequalities in the workplace are closely associated with low job satisfaction, with levels of burnout and stress as relative indicators (Keene, 2005). This type of research connects to feminist theory by addressing the issues of gender inequality and, more specifically, the multifaceted disposition of workers' lives (Dietz, 2003). These issues include employees' dedication to their jobs and subsequent responsibilities, as well as their social and familial obligations (Moreno et al., 2021).

In contrast, feminist standpoint theory, a distinguishable branch of feminist thought, is engaged with assertions that childbirth and family obligations are the underpinnings of patriarchal oppression (Wood, 2005). It is founded on Marxist analysis, which examines free-market capitalism via the juxtaposition between ruling and laboring classes (Schram, 1988). Similarly, feminist standpoint theory investigates how patriarchy exacerbates male and female divisions, perpetuating the myth that women are innately subordinate and thus should be mirrored in societal structures (Dietz, 2003). The Marxist premise that our surroundings and daily activities shape our identities and thinking processes is central to feminist standpoint theory (Schram, 1988). While Marxist analysis is focused on the working class, feminist standpoint theory is rooted in women's lived experiences (Dietz, 2003). The central thesis of feminist standpoint theory is that women's lives are methodically different from men's, resulting in systematic differences in experience and knowledge.

Women's participation in data reporting and analytics careers remains proportionately low, despite this new age of advanced technology. Additionally, compared with other professions, women hold leadership roles in these fields at low rates. As a result, researchers have questioned why dramatic shifts in overall opportunity for women have not yet translated into equivalent growth of, or advancement within, data and analytical occupations for women (Samuel, 2020).

In conclusion, previous research has explored gender discrimination and predetermined gender roles in a wide variety of contexts. Numerous studies have examined communications in relation to gender limitations; few studies have probed gender discrimination in the field of data and media analytics specifically. The current study intends to fill this gap by employing in-depth interviews with women in this sector of work.

### ***Research Question(s)***

1. To what extent do gender-based impediments affect women working in data and media analytics?
2. How do women combat these gender-based challenges?

## **III. Methods**

This analysis is based on five in-depth interviews with women working in the field of data and media analytics. Participants were gathered using a snowball sampling method, beginning with referrals from Media Analytics professors in Elon University's School of Communications, then following with referrals from interviewees. This method provides for the evaluation of personal narratives and testimonies related to women's personal career paths, the challenges they've faced or are facing regarding gender bias, and any advice they have for future women entering the sector.

Interviewees were kept anonymous, and a participant index was used. Contributors are referred to as Interviewees 1, 2, and so on to preserve privacy and to encourage candid responses. The speakers are listed sequentially in the index, alongside their corresponding demographic information. To ensure that the rights and protection of human subjects engaging in research efforts were safeguarded, IRB approval was granted by Elon University before interviews began.

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### ***Participant Index***

Interviewee One: Staff Consultant

Interviewee Two: Data Analyst

Interviewee Three: Campaign Insights Manager

Interviewee Four: Performance Marketing Manager

Interviewee Five: Assistant Professor

The interview guide flowed from general to specific, unaided to aided questions, and included a warm-up to establish rapport. There was additionally a closing section to thank participants for their time, seek to address further concerns and questions, and give them space to discuss anything not covered in the interview. The bulk of the moderator's guide flowed from the general/logistics of their job position, the path they took to obtain their job, discussions concerning discrimination, and advice to those wishing to pursue a similar profession.

A thematic analysis, with additional inspiration from grounded theory, was implemented to interpret the qualitative data for emerging concepts. Grounded theory is used with qualitative data to identify prevailing dynamics in the social domain under investigation (Coyne & Cowley, 2006). More specifically for this study, Chapman, Hadfield, and Chapman's work (2015) typifies the interrelatedness of grounded theory and thematic analysis to generate concepts that emerge from multiple instances of qualitative data. Parts of each interview transcript were assigned to words and phrases (buckets) that most appropriately encapsulated their meaning. Coded data was then combined to refine these initial groupings. Lastly, connections and themes among categories were established, putting the findings together into a logical theoretical structure (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

## **IV. Findings**

Two primary themes emerged from interview transcripts – a critique of harmful labels frequently applied to women, as well as a fixation on motherhood and childbearing. The first, prescribed to women to make them feel inferior or position them as “the other”; the latter effectively limiting women's purpose in life and employment. The section “Looking Toward the Future,” discusses solutions offered by women with expertise in the field to stop or reduce gender discrimination. Because they are founded on personal and lived experiences, these practical implementations are fundamental to this study.

The first question asked of respondents was to define gender discrimination in their own words. While the most straightforward response was “unequal treatment of women based on sex,” others pointed out that gender discrimination occurs in the workplace when individuals in positions of power look at someone and define their traits and abilities through the lens of their gender. This leads to pay disparities and, in many circumstances, heightened scrutiny of work performance. Interviewee Five said that as a black female, her race is most salient to her, followed by gender. In accordance, she noted that when she walks into a room, she is faced with a set of expected attitudes and behaviors on her part, shaping her understanding of gender discrimination to include invalidation and belittlement of her experiences, as well as discounting of what she can bring to the table. “CEO's and executives walk in the room and always think the white man is the one in charge,” she said.

According to participants, those who are impacted by gender discrimination often believe they need to distance themselves from being assertive. “Discrimination itself is more intentional,” said Interviewee Two. “It takes manifestation when women begin to question if they're too emotional or passionate to do A, B, or C.”

All women interviewed expressed that the topic of gender discrimination was important to them. While it was not something they contemplated daily, it commonly presented itself in the form of subtle microaggressions. Even so, none of the participants said they had ever faced gender discrimination in their present jobs. Over half said they had encountered it at their previous job, and just one said she had never directly experienced it but knew people who had.

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### ***“Bitch,” “Bossy,” and Everything In Between***

The usage of negative adjectives to describe participants was one trend that arose from the interviews. Women indicated that these terms, which were all derogatory in nature, came from both male and female employees, yet that they were most commonly wielded by male coworkers. The terms “bitch” and “bossy” were mentioned several times. While males were the only ones who used the adjective “bitch” (to the participant’s knowledge), both men and women used the phrase “bossy” to describe the interviewees. One respondent voiced her dissatisfaction with the absence of female empowerment in her workplace: “It’s especially crucial for female coworkers to support other female coworkers,” she said. “It hurt a lot to find out that other women I worked with saw me as ‘too much’ rather than just passionate about my work.”

Interviewee One reported that a particular coworker, an older man, would consistently refer to women on her team as “you women,” thereby reducing their identities to solely what he perceived their gender to be. “It always rubbed me the wrong way,” she said. Interviewee Four added, “While most people would describe guys as macho, tough adjectives, women in the industry are frequently referred to as sweet, sweetheart, and gentler words.” This, she pointed out, results in conflict and a perceived power struggle.

Interviewee Three also disclosed that in her prior work, she was frequently chastised for going above and beyond her responsibilities. After missing a staff lunch to attend a private event with the company’s Vice President, she was dubbed a “lost puppy,” implying she was following around upper management to gain “brownie points.”

In conjunction with derogatory language, participants also discussed the differences in treatment in the workplace. “This goes back to the idea of STEM. That this field is primarily technical work or requires higher mathematical abilities; it’s thought of as male-dominated,” Interviewee Five said. “And Black women have to work twice as hard. We have lower expectations and pay - fewer opportunities, really.”

Similarly, Interviewee Two noted that “communication roles are predominantly filled with women. But data and media analysis itself is really different because of the way women are perceived,” she said. “You need to back up everything that you’ve already done. To build trust and respect in the workplace, you really have to prove yourself in a way a male coworker may not.” This was often addressed in relation to presentation and verbal communication. “Women apologize way more for things that are not their fault,” Interviewee Two continued. “They minimize themselves and their intelligence in an attempt to take up less space. This gives the impression that women are not confident in their work.” The balance between friendly and emotional, then, is an ever-present struggle, she concluded.

### ***Manager or Mother? The Belief That All Women Will Have Children***

Over half of the women spoken with indicated their dissatisfaction with being asked the clichéd question, “When do you intend on starting a family?” At its core, the emphasis on children and marriage is harmful to women’s sense of purpose in life, according to participants. “There is more to me than the ability to procreate. I bring a lot to the table. I have valuable skills and abilities, as well as crucial insights. I’m not sure why there’s such a focus on my private affairs.”

Interviewee Four specifically remarked that taking time off for maternal needs post-childbirth is often frowned upon; “It’s a hard thing to balance if you’re out of the industry for too long. In general, data and analytics change quickly. Being gone for an extended period - it’s easy to fall behind.” Because of the nature of the work, she added, this occurs frequently in highly technical positions. As previously mentioned by Interviewee Five, media analytics is often believed to be in a similar if not overlapping domain of STEM. It relies on fast-paced data collection and continually improved methods of obtaining and understanding this data. Ironically enough, Interviewee One acknowledged that there is a significant quantity of data on gender discrimination and discrepancy itself, suggesting that these issues are pervasive and existent though unbeknownst to those who might not experience it directly.

This concept that it’s either family or promotion, Interviewee Five added, is a real concern. “We have a lot of men out there that were raised by single mothers. My hope is that maybe this will change some people’s ideas. A push for paternity leave perhaps,” she said. “But we’re asking a lot of our society because we’re breaking traditional roles. There’s this myth about work-life balance. It’s more of an integration. You can work and be a mother, but something will always be out of balance ... there’s a decision point then ... Which

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are you going to choose at what moment?"

### ***Looking Toward the Future***

When asked how to potentially combat gender discrimination in the field of media analytics, participants offered several suggestions. Primary among them is reporting incidents as they occur. "Don't be afraid to stick up for yourself and others," Interviewee One said. Similarly, Interviewee Four added, "First and foremost, stand up for yourself and surround yourself with those who boost you up. Address what you see. Know your worth for what you're willing to accept and what you're not."

Interviewee Two expressed that there is no clean, step-by-step solution. By formalizing a clear-cut approach, there is the potential to erase or minimize individual experiences. "Identities are not monolithic," she noted, "Data as a profession is different than healthcare or a stay-at-home mom." Replacing one identity with another can also be problematic. Interviewee Two went on to note that management and often male coworkers seem to assume, "because you're a white woman you must know what it's like for a black woman. Or because you're pretty and meet this beauty standard compared to another, you got this position." However, acknowledgment was the first step in her eyes. "We don't need across the board, checkmark, workshop shit. Take a good look at the industry and the specific company. Awareness in an intentional way you know? Even with the increased pressure for justice, one workshop or post, or share doesn't cut it."

Interviewee Three noted that because data is on the frontier of STEM, there is a perception that it is a male-dominated field, making it increasingly difficult to break into. "This mindset leaves no room for people to see it as a more equitable opportunity and job market," she said. "A lot of work has gone into getting women more involved in STEM. Misconceptions like this only serve to hold us back."

Similarly, Interviewee Five added, "There were always people saying to me 'you can work late because you don't have children,' or 'let Bob be the lead on the pitch because he knows this guy or plays golf with this guy...you're a woman you don't have anything in common with them.'" She also added there is a big push to find out what people get paid now, expressing one time where she was getting compensated less than her male colleague, though they held the same title. "We had the same degree. From the same school. He made more."

As it appears from participants, the biggest thing with any career is to be courageous and confident. "What I mean by courage," said Interviewee Five, "is the silent kind of courage. Ensure that your mere presence is changing things for other people. Call it out when it's not right."

To conclude, Interviewee Five finished with this; "Women in all fields still experience gender discrimination today. We've been fighting this battle for hundreds of years and I just hope that we don't give up on thinking change can happen. There are qualified women that need to be where decisions are made. Leadership positions. Boards of companies. And they're not going to stay if there's a bunch of dudes around treating them badly. I've worked in the industry for 20 years and I believe it's going to take another 20 to eradicate this phenomenon. But it starts with asking tough questions and continuing to do good research."

## **V. Discussion**

The study's findings demonstrate that there are a number of professional obstacles for women working in media analytics, yet they also provide some solutions for navigating beyond them.

One finding consistent with previous literature was the idea that full integration of women into management positions across all firms will take a considerable amount of time. Similar to Wood's 2008 research, where middle managers stated it would take "more than ten years" for female managers to fill 50% of senior management positions, participants in the current study noted that gender stereotypes have a detrimental influence on women's professional progression, with female talent discounted in management and leadership roles.

One of the largest takeaways from interviewees was the idea that motherhood promotes disparate treatment in the workplace. As previous scholarship noted, motherhood is cited as one of the key drivers of

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income inequality in discussions regarding the glass ceiling (Zagorsky, 2017). Although the US economy has grown since 1994, this has not translated to gender-role adaptability among men and women, according to interviewee replies. Participants, particularly Interviewee Five, pointed to the growth of single moms and the hope that this will change society's concept of work-life norms.

Diverging slightly from previous literature was participants' job satisfaction level. All of the participants said they expected to stay in this sector of work, with many reporting they wanted to get a master's degree if they didn't already have one and engage in future roles like predictive analytics, syndicated research, or senior strategy. While previous scholars have argued that gender inequalities in the workplace are closely associated with low job satisfaction (Keene, 2005), participants in the current study intend to remain with their present organization and were generally optimistic about their advancement in the company.

## VI. Conclusion

This study sought to understand how gender discrimination is manifested in the field of data and media analytics. Gender discrimination is still commonplace, according to the participant responses, and is most commonly seen in the form of microaggressions, which range from derogatory adjectives to the implicit idea that all women will or should choose child-rearing above job advancement. Women who took part in this study specifically attested that they had been deemed "too emotional" and chastised for being "bossy" or worse, "bitchy." While most reported that they did speak up after an incident, others voiced that they were afraid to seem overly sensitive or unable to work with others. Women who took part in the study were also given the opportunity to suggest insightful proposals for the future. According to participants, speaking up against injustices is a crucial first step, followed by asking challenging questions and engaging in open and informed dialogue.

This research had several limitations. One is sample selection. Since this study evaluated only a few women, a larger, more diversified pool of interviewees might provide further insights. Other techniques, such as a survey, could yield industry-wide information about gender discrimination. Future work may also consider focusing on a single area of media analytics, such as positions that only include senior analysts or digital marketing analysts.

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# Gender Portrayal in Television Beer Commercials Versus Hard Seltzer Television Commercials

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## Abstract

*The beer industry has taken advantage of television advertising for decades, reaching millions with attempts to one-up their many competitors. More recently, alcoholic “hard seltzer” advertising targets traditional beer consumers while also tapping into new demographics. This study examines a sample of television advertisements from Bud Light and Coors Light beers as well as White Claw and Bud Light Seltzers from 2016 to 2022. This qualitative content analysis compares gender portrayals in beer and hard seltzer commercials, a topic that has not previously been studied academically. Results find that traditional, stereotypical gender archetypes continue to apply, particularly in beer commercials. Meanwhile, seltzer ads are more likely to show men and women doing the same activities, and women buying products, therefore driving the plot.*

## I. Introduction

The beer industry has long been recognized for its prime-time television advertising slots. The many competing brands vie for consumers’ attention and loyalty. “Big beer” brands can be seen airing bold and memorable ads on some of television’s most-viewed programs, such as the Super Bowl. While the industry is known for its quick-witted and creative advertising, gendered stereotypes and character archetypes have developed within beer commercials.

In 2016, a new alcoholic beverage burst into the market and quickly gained popularity in the years following. Alcoholic “hard seltzer” targets traditional beer consumers while also tapping into new demographics. The product category has become so popular that many large beer companies have released their own lines. With this new type of carbonated beverage came a fresh advertising opportunity.

This article will analyze television commercials from a sample of both beer and hard seltzer brands, looking at the differences in gender portrayals between the two products. All advertisements in the sample are from the year 2016 to 2022, as cultural and societal norms related to gender representation have changed drastically throughout the years. The findings will look at thematic similarities and differences between commercial portrayals and patterns in gendered archetypes between the two beverage categories. The research examines how beer and alcoholic seltzer portray masculinity and femininity in both similar and different ways.

**Keywords:** *gender portrayal, alcohol advertising, television commercials, stereotypes*

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## II. Literature Review

For decades, television commercials have been recognized for their mass distribution to a diverse audience of viewers. One product category in particular, the beer industry, has taken advantage of the medium, reaching millions with attempts to one-up their many competitors. Companies battle with creativity and wit, trying to distance and differentiate their brand from the field with memorable content. This ongoing, industry-wide strive for customer loyalty comes with a large audience viewing the content. Beer commercials frequently show men and women as one-dimensional archetypes, feeding the nation's preconceptions and biases about gender norms (Hall & Crum, 1994).

In television advertisements across all industries, men are shown on screen two times more than women. In beer commercials, this holds particularly true (Hall & Crum, 1994). Though men are more often visible in advertisements, women have a greater chance of having their body parts displayed to the masses in these product endorsements. In a beer commercial, there is a 49% chance that a lingering camera will show a woman's chest (Hall & Crum, 1994).

When women are pictured in commercials in the beer industry, they are most often shown as a collection of body parts. Conversely, scenes with men are most commonly focused on faces. This concept is important to note because "intelligence and personality are communicated through pictures of faces, while only attractiveness is communicated through pictures of bodies" (Hellman et al., 2018, p. 330). This phenomenon suggests that men are valued for their holistic inner identities, while a woman's greatest asset should be seen as her physical attributes.

Additionally, while both men and women are most frequently depicted in leisurewear, the second most common male wardrobe is professional clothing; for women it is a swimsuit (Hall & Crum, 1994). These costume decisions in beer advertising further the idea that men are skilled, successful, and productive members of society, while women serve the primary role of onlookers and a focal point for the male gaze.

Television beer advertisements traditionally "portray men as active, autonomous, and capable, as ideal citizens" (Hellman et al., 2018, p. 173). Men are shown as protagonists driving the plot as well as steering their own lives. Men in beer ads are typically shown functioning in two capacities: work or leisure, particularly in outdoor activities. Beer is presented as a reward for a hard day of work; it is the transition between work and relaxation. The attainment of this reward suggests men are productive and accomplished. They are also often shown participating in leisure activities with other male friends. Beer is seen as social, a way to connect with pals and unwind (Postman et al., 1987).

Men in beer commercials can generally be boiled down into two archetypes: the loser and the buddies. The "loser" is often on the verge of embarrassment, frequently not knowing how to successfully communicate with a beautiful woman. The loser's masculinity is fragile but the buddies who accompany him (and usually provide him beer), act as a security for his manhood (Messner & Montez de oca, 2005). Buddies and beer allow the average man to become suave, charismatic, talented, and most importantly, manly (Hall & Kappel, 2018). An analysis study of beer commercials on broadcast television in 1987 found that these ads:

promote the view that to be a real man in American culture and accepted among other men one must drink beer. Beer is represented as the medium through which one demonstrates one's masculinity, is initiated into the adult world, communicates with other men, expresses feelings towards them, preserves and recaptures the history of one's group of male friends, and makes romantic contacts with women. (Postman et al., 1987, p. 48).

Despite the idea that men are capable and successful with a beer in their hand, ads can lead to negative perceptions of masculinity, particularly regarding trustworthiness. A study focusing on "male relational deception" in beer commercials found that both men and women felt a greater sense of distrust toward the gender after being exposed to beer ads. Participants shared that they felt that men, particularly in the context of romantic relationships, were shown as purposely deceptive, misleading, and dishonest (Lopez, 2010).

While men are portrayed as autonomous beings, women are frequently depicted in secondary roles, serving as eye candy or props for the male protagonists. Women in television beer commercials are primarily categorized into two archetypes: hotties and bitches. "Hotties" represent highly sexualized and objectified women. They are shown for their physical attractiveness, and often reduced to a collection of their body

parts. Hotties serve as prizes to validate masculinity (Messner & Montez de oca, 2005). The other character that a woman can play is a “bitch.” Bitches serve the role of limiting men’s freedom, particularly the freedom to drink beer with friends. Bitches are commonly the wives or girlfriends of male protagonists, serving as the advertisement’s villain by nagging, threatening, or reprimanding her male partner for drinking beer, having fun, socializing, and looking at the “hotties” (Messner & Montez de oca, 2005).

Researchers have additionally broken these stereotypical female characters into even more specific segments known as the prop, the party girl, and the skinny girl, all similar variations of the original archetypes and all serving little purpose other than to satisfy the dominant male beer drinkers (Hall & Kappel, 2018). In short, women in television beer advertisements are “viewed as ‘things,’ objects of male sexual desire, and/or part of the merchandise rather than people” (Hall & Crum, 1994, p. 330).

The one-dimensional portrayals of masculinity and femininity in beer commercials have an impact on society’s beliefs and behaviors. While advertising often reflects the trends and values already present, “research shows that the media affects behaviors as much as behaviors influence the media” (Hall & Kappel, 2018, p. 573). This means that the content of advertisements can shape viewers’ thoughts and perceptions. This can become meaningful when commercials have the mass audience that prime-time television or the Super Bowl attracts. Social scientists Matilda Hellman and Anu Katainen and communications professor Janne Seppänen share that “the scale and visibility of beer advertising is massive, having potentially a major impact on cultural representations of both alcohol and gender” (Hellman et al., 2018, p.164). While children are particularly susceptible to socialization, “the way that people learn about their culture, its values, belief systems, perspectives, and social norms,” this process continues throughout adulthood and is particularly influenced by the media (Pryor & Knupfer, 1997, p. 287). While kids are not specifically targeted by alcohol advertisers, they are susceptible to and often present for these messages.

Mass media such as beer commercials often perpetuate stereotypes and can define gender norms, including how individuals think people should look or behave within society (Pryor & Knupfer, 1997). While it is acknowledged that “the primary objective of TV ads is to create product awareness and to encourage product purchase, social scientists have often suggested that they may have more wide-ranging effects on viewers’ beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors” (Lavine et al., 1999, p. 1049). Despite the primary intentions of the beer advertisements being to sell and differentiate a company’s brew, the secondary effects can lead to damaging notions of masculinity and femininity.

The stereotyped gender displays often shown in beer advertisements can contribute to a large “range of social problems, including sexist attitudes and beliefs, sexual harassment, violence against women, eating disorders, and stereotyped perceptions of and behavior toward men and women” (Lavine et al., 1999, p.1049). Depicting men as dominant, powerful, and often attaining their desires can be harmful to women’s autonomy and safety. Commercials not only sell a product, but they frequently come with an unspoken promise. In beer advertisements, this promise is often that if a man buys the beer, he will get the girl (Hall & Crum, 1994). This leads to unrealistic and potentially harmful expectations. Beer advertisements commonly air during major sporting events and there have long been ties between watching sports and drinking. These advertisements create the link between sports, which are often violent contact sports, alcohol, and women. These subconscious associations can further notions of sexual and gender violence (Hall & Crum, 1994). Women are rarely shown as decision-makers in these advertisements, suggesting to society that a woman’s choice is less important than a man’s desire.

In addition to creating harmful sexual expectations, the one-dimensional, stereotypical portrayal of gender in television beer commercials can influence an individual’s concept of his or her own identity. Men are repeatedly shown that masculinity is defined by the work they do, the friends they have, the women they “get,” and most importantly, by the beer they drink. Young men begin to form their ideas on what it means to be a man with these concepts in mind, possibly feeling ashamed or attempting to change if they do not fit into these molds set by the beer industry. Men in beer ads are encouraged to prioritize drinking with their friends over emotional displays and meaningful relationships with romantic partners (Atkinson et al., 2019).

The objectifications of women in these advertisements leave many women feeling powerless and questioning their worth. The women displayed in beer commercials are commonly secondary or background characters with no real role in driving the plot and without the opportunity to make decisions. The women shown in these ads often do not align with how real women view themselves and their roles in society, this

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leaves females feeling disconnected from the product and can lead to them questioning their own identity (Schilb, 2017). Television beer commercials do not just sell a product, they sell a lifestyle. This way of life is often riddled with stereotypical portrayal of gender which can influence society's values, beliefs, and behaviors (Messner & Montez de oca, 2005).

### ***Background on the brands this paper will study***

This study examines a sample of television advertisements from Bud Light and Coors Light beers as well as White Claw and Bud Light Seltzers. Bud Light is owned by parent company Anheuser-Busch, founded in 1852 by German immigrant, Adolphus Busch, after he married Lilly Anheuser. By the 1870s, the company was using technology that allowed beer to be shipped long distances, popularizing the brand. In 1982, Budweiser Light was released and by 1984, it was known exclusively as Bud Light (Anheuser-Busch, n.d.-b).

Molson Coors Beverage Company, parent to Coors Light beer, had similar beginnings. Founded in 1873 by German immigrant Adolph Coors, the brand began in Golden, Colorado. In 1953 the company began advertising largely on television, focusing mainly on nature and Colorado scenery. In 1978, the company introduced Coors Light (Sealover, 2019). Bud Light and Coors Light, as well as their parent companies, have long been considered "big beer," leading the domestic beer industry and participating heavily in television advertising spots. Both companies have historically released advertisements that contained similar gender stereotypes as previously discussed. Notably, Bud Light came under fire for the 2014 Super Bowl ad campaign titled "Up for Whatever." The commercial's slogan, "the perfect beer for removing 'no' from your vocabulary for the night," was largely criticized for its association with sexual assault (Bates, 2015).

In more recent history, beer brands have begun to recognize the traditional gender stereotypes used in the industry's advertising are both problematic and alienating to potential female customers. In 2016, Coors Light introduced the "Climb On" campaign, which depicted both men and women conquering personal goals such as a marathon or a rodeo. The brand "used a qualitative, ethnographic approach to study the lives of women to find out what motivates and energizes them in beer and in life" (Redscout, n.d.). The campaign's tagline, "Whatever your mountain, climb on," proved to be successful in attracting new consumers, particularly women over 35 (Redscout, n.d.). While beer brands are recognizing and pivoting away from harmful gender portrayals, this paper will examine more modern television advertisements to better understand how masculinity and femininity are being depicted.

In addition to beer commercials portraying gender stereotypes, alcohol itself can be highly gendered. There is commonly a notion that beer is for men and wine is for women. In 1993, Coors Brewing Company released Zima, an alcoholic malt beverage available in fruit flavors. The drink was labeled a "girly-man drink" and called "bitch beer," perpetuating gender divides in alcohol products (McCarthy, 2019). In 1999, Anthony von Mandl attempted to make a similar drink that could be enjoyed by both genders. Through research, he found that 25% of men do not like the taste of beer (Hitt, 2020). He created Mike's Hard Lemonade in beer shaped bottles to entice men to consume his sweet malt beverage. Despite targeted marketing efforts, young men similarly dismissed the beverage as girly.

In 2016, von Mandl made another attempt at producing a gender-neutral malt drink; he called his invention White Claw. These alcoholic seltzers became wildly popular during the summer of 2019, causing a national shortage of the product. White Claw strategically developed marketing strategies to target both men and women; they avoid bright feminine colors, show women taking part in activities such as boating or playing frisbee, and show men doing traditionally masculine things while enjoying the beverage. In short, "White Claw's marketing is selling its fans a lifestyle, one that both men and women want to be a part of" (McCarthy, 2019).

Seeing White Claw and competitor Truly's success, in January 2020, Anheuser-Busch released Bud Light Seltzer. In just a few months and as the product market saturated, the new hard seltzer brand became the third most popular nationally (Valinsky, 2020). Danelle Kosmal, vice president of Nielson's beverage alcohol practice shared that "hard seltzer is one of the most gender-neutral products we have seen across the alcohol industry" (Heil, 2019). Bank of America Merrill Lynch analyzed millennial drinking preferences, finding that "there's a clean 50-50 split in younger consumers of hard seltzer," proving that the alcohol category is in fact as gender-neutral as it gets (Heil, 2019). While alcoholic seltzer is still young, this paper will analyze available television advertisements from White Claw and Bud Light Seltzer, looking at and categorizing gender portrayals.

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While extensive research has been conducted and presented on the depiction of masculinity and femininity in television beer commercials, there has been little research published about how this concept applies to alcoholic seltzer brands. The only notable source on the topic was published in the Summer 2022 edition of *Advertising and Society Quarterly*. This study found that White Claw strategically depicts men and women hanging out together in gender neutral settings, and since “White Claw has controlled nearly half (or more) of the hard seltzer market since its launch, its brand position on gender spilled over, creating the perception of ungendering the entire category” (Contois, 2022). While this study examines gender neutrality in hard seltzer advertisements, it fails to elaborate further on the portrayals of masculinity and femininity in the product category. Additionally, the article does not compare these gender representations to that of beer television commercials, displaying a clear gap in research and knowledge on the subject. This paper aims to expand on previous research, focusing on comparing gender portrayals in beer and hard seltzer commercials, a topic that has not been studied academically.

### III. Methods

This research asks the following question: How are men and women portrayed in beer television commercials versus hard seltzer commercials?

This study sampled advertisements from two beer and two seltzer brands. Bud Light and Coors Light beers are both owned by domestic companies with similar origins. Anheuser-Busch and Molson Coors own a number of America’s most popular “big beer” brands, driving the market and creating many of the industry’s advertisements. Both companies have an essential voice and ability to steer the market’s gender portrayal norms.

The study also examines White Claw Hard Seltzer and Bud Light Seltzer. White Claw is highly regarded as the most popular and pioneer seltzer, often credited for beginning the alcoholic seltzer craze in the summer of 2019 and popularizing the product category. Bud Light Seltzer is the market’s third most popular brand and is notable for its quick popularity, prime-time television commercials, and affiliation with Bud Light beer. The connection between the Bud Light beer and seltzer brands makes for a logical comparison of advertising content and may give insight into how gender representation is depicted across product categories.

The research method used in this article is qualitative content analysis. The television advertisements themselves serve as the content in this study. After an initial viewing of all the available advertisements from between 2016 and 2022, the sample for analysis was reduced to a few commercials from each brand using purposive sampling, meaning that the commercials were selected because they fit the needs of the study (Etikan, 2017). Each ad selected for analysis had actors rather than only showcasing the product. Purposive sampling allows a sample to be selected “based on the judgment of the researcher as to who will provide the best information to succeed for the objective study” (Etikan, 2017). This research method was important for this study’s effectiveness because purposive sampling allows “the ability to compare and contrast, to identify similarities and differences in the phenomenon of interest,” in this case comparing between beer and hard seltzer (Palinkas et al., 2015). The sample included four advertisements from Bud Light beer, three from Coors Light beer, three from White Claw Hard Seltzer, and three from Bud Light Seltzer. In total, this research analyzes 13 television advertisements.

Once the ads were selected, each video was watched several times and a narrative description was completed, translating the visual content into words. These descriptions focused primarily on how men and women were depicted. Noted were the relationships between characters, if they had speaking roles, how much of their face or body was shown on camera, their relevance to the plot, as well as additional notes. Content was examined scene by scene, with attention given to spoken dialogue, as well as unspoken body language, camera angles and facial expressions.

After notes were taken on all advertisements, a thematic analysis was conducted, which “provides a comprehensive process for a researcher to identify numerous cross-references between the evolving themes and the entire data” (Alhojailan, 2012, p. 45). Connections and overarching ideas among different commercials were coded. Archetypes and common stereotypes noted in previous literature informed the analysis, but new trends and insights were identified as well.

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## IV. Findings

In both the samples of beer and seltzer commercials, there are more portrayals of men. However, in each category, there is only one commercial that did not depict a single female. All seltzer commercials have at least one male, while there is one Coors Light beer commercial that features only a woman. The proportion of men to women featured is particularly skewed in the beer ads, especially by the Bud Light beer brand. For example, in Bud Light beer's "Between Friends," no scene features only women, while multiple scenes show only men. In the scenes where women are present, they are in the background, commonly interacting with men (Bud Light, 2017).

Not only are men depicted more in the sample of television commercials, but they are given more prominent roles and speak more often. Men have speaking roles in four of the seven beer commercials, all of which are Bud Light. While the remaining three Coors Light commercials do not have male characters speak, all have male voice-overs at some point during the commercials. Therefore, all seven beer ads feature a male voice. In comparison, only two of the beer commercials, both Bud Light, have a woman speaking. Both women who speak have minimal lines that do not drive the plot forward.

In the alcoholic seltzer commercials, three of the six have men speak and three of the six have women speak. All three of these are the same Bud Light Seltzer ads. While the distribution of character lines has the same ratio for both genders in seltzer ads, an additional two White Claw commercials have male voice-overs at the end. The one White Claw advertisement that does not have any speaking has a song with a male vocalist over the entire commercial. Women with speaking roles in the hard seltzer commercials have longer dialogues than those in the beer ads. Additionally, the two women who speak in the beer commercials are talking to men, yet in the seltzer ads, women talk to each other as well as the audience.

In addition to speaking, commercial characters also communicate with the audience and share their emotions through facial expressions. In television advertisements, these expressions are best understood when the camera zooms in to frame the face close enough for the audience to understand the feeling being conveyed. In the four Bud Light beer commercials, male faces are shown closely in 24 shots. Additionally, Coors Light ads frames 11 male facial expressions. In total, the beer commercials contain 35 close-up shots of men's faces. The Bud Light beer ads only zoom in on two female faces, and Coors Light only has six female facial close-ups. In total, the beer commercials show eight female facial expressions, 27 less than male counterparts in the same sample of seven commercials.

Conversely, White Claw Hard Seltzer shows eight close-up male and 12 female faces. Bud Light Seltzer zooms in on 25 male faces and nine females. Together, the sample of hard seltzer commercials contains 33 male and 21 female close-ups. While there are more male facial expressions due to Bud Light Seltzer's large number, there are only 12 more men's expressions shown, a significantly smaller skew than in the sample of beer advertisements.

In addition to the number of portrayals, the different alcohol categories also feature the genders doing different activities. Men in beer commercials are depicted golfing, partying, at sporting events, eating exotic cuisines, boxing, biking, riding bulls, and even brewing beer, in addition to several other "masculine" activities. In these same commercials, women are shown talking to men or silently nodding along, often only depicted by the back of their heads. The Coors Light advertisement "Whatever Your Mountain" shows women doing physical activities, yet depicts them doing yoga and running, while their male counterparts participate in more extreme, adrenaline-inducing adventures (Coors Light, 2016).

Traditional, stereotypical gender archetypes continue to apply, particularly in beer commercials. Bud Light beer's "Dilly," has a clear depiction of the "loser" archetype. In the advertisement, villagers present the king with presents, usually Bud Light, until one man brings mulled wine instead. The king and queen as well as the court look outraged as this "loser" stumbles over his words, attempting to explain that his offering is generous. The king orders a large male guard to show the loser to the "pit of misery," and the court toasts with their Bud Lights as he is escorted out (Bud Light, 2017b).

Another example of a "loser" shown by Bud Light beer is in their commercial, "Ghost of Spuds," in which the ghost Spuds MacKenzie, a dog used in a 1980s Bud Light campaign, visits a man sitting alone at home. When asked why he is there, Spuds responds, "my soul can't rest when people don't drink Bud Light with friends" (Bud Light, 2017b).

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While the sample from Coors Light contained less explicit examples of the loser archetype, the brand still incorporated similar messages into its advertisements. In the Coors ad, “The Official Beer of Going Golfing Just to Drink Beer,” a man is shown missing the ball on a golfing chip. It then reveals that he is holding a Coors Light in one hand and the club in the other. He then makes the shot and is immediately congratulated by his friends, all of which are also holding Coors (Coors Light, 2019a). None of the White Claw ads contain a “loser,” however, some of the Bud Light Seltzer commercials do. The most exaggerated example among the Bud Light Seltzer sample is in the advertisement, “Inside Post Malone’s Brain,” in which actors play different parts of musician Post’s body. The main control center calls down to the spleen, an older man sitting alone in a dark basement, before deciding they do not need to talk to him. The ad alludes to the fact that the spleen is never talked to as he yells out in desperation, begging for socialization and pleading to be a taste bud, a group of muscular men who get to enjoy the seltzer (Bud Light Seltzer, 2020).

The concept of “buddies” also continues to hold true, as the individuals with the products are always shown socializing, while those who doubt the alcoholic beverages are depicted as loners and “losers.” While appearing more frequently in the beer sample, the taste buds in “Inside Post Malone’s Brain” prove to be an example of how this concept is also portrayed in seltzer advertisements.

While women have very few speaking roles in the beer commercial sample, the archetypes of “hotties and bitches” can still be identified. In the seven beer ads, the two women who speak are both “bitches.” In the “Ghost of Spuds,” a female voice calls, “SPUDS!” from off-screen and he responds, “ugh my ex gotta go!” before disappearing (Bud Light, 2017b). In many of the beer ads, women are shown silently talking or dancing with men, serving as “hotties,” who are one-dimensional characters existing for the enjoyment of men but not driving the plot. While Coors Light features the only ad in the sample without a male, the commercial centers around a woman taking off her bra after a long day of work (Coors Light, 2019b). The camera lingers over her body, zooming in as she slips off her high heel shoes and follows the bra, rather than her face, after she flings it across the room. The woman also does not speak during this commercial.

Only one woman in the seltzer sample could be categorized as a bitch and while the ads follow many women, the camera tends to focus more on their faces than bodies. The women depicted in both White Claw and Bud Light Seltzer advertisements often do not align with traditional ideals of feminine beauty as much as in the beer commercials. Women in seltzer ads have a variety of body shapes and hair lengths, colors, and textures. In seltzer advertisements, women are shown doing activities such as playing volleyball or painting with men and are shown buying their own seltzer products. Women in seltzer ads appear to have more autonomy and exist with men opposed to for men.

## V. Discussion

In both beer and hard seltzer television commercials, there are stereotypical gender portrayals and a disproportionate representation of men. However, these patterns are far more common among the sample of beer advertisements. The difference in men and women with speaking roles was greater in beer commercials, suggesting the industry is more comfortable displaying that men have the dominant voice in society. As research has found that advertising not only reflects values, but can mold ideals and behaviors, the beer industry suggests that men should be in power while the seltzer sample advocates for a more equal distribution (Hall & Kappel, 2018).

Additionally, while both product categories show more male faces than female, the seltzer industry has a significantly more even ratio. White Claw Hard Seltzer even depicted more women’s facial expressions than men’s expressions in the sample. Showing facial expressions highlights emotions, allowing the audience to connect to the characters and understand what they are thinking and feeling (Hellman et al., 2018). Therefore, the seltzer sample displays the value of women’s minds, while the beer industry largely continues to focus on the beauty of their bodies.

The beer sample continues to enforce the ideas of losers, buddies, hotties, and bitches. While some of these archetypes can also be found in the seltzer sample, particularly the idea of buddies (as alcohol advertising is inherently social), only one seltzer ad displayed a loser or bitch, as opposed to nearly all the beer commercials. A Bud Light Seltzer ad showed a man in a towel holding a seltzer while a woman waved

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flirtatiously. This scene, as well as the casting of less traditionally feminine women, shows an effort in the industry to flip traditional gender roles (Bud Light Seltzer, 2021a). The loser archetype is prevalent in the beer commercials, perpetuating the idea that to be successful in love, friendship, and athletic pursuits, a man must drink beer. Men are also discouraged from showing emotion; two men in Bud Light beer ads are shamed for sharing their feelings and encouraged to share affection through beer rather than words. The beer sample supports the idea that to be masculine one needs to drink beer with friends and participate in the appropriate activities shown in the advertisements such as paintball, bull riding, clubbing, flirting with women, and watching sports. The beer sample reduces women to silent props or occasional intrusive obstacles to men's enjoyment and beer consumption.

While the seltzer sample still depicts a disproportionate gender representation and some stereotypical portrayals, the product category shows more themes of equality. Men and women are shown doing the same activities and women are shown buying products, and therefore driving the plot. Women are in scenes alone and their faces and emotions are often highlighted. Women in seltzer ads are shown to have a greater sense of autonomy and larger personalities. They are not only shown talking to men, rather they appear to take charge in activities and relationship dynamics. These findings are consistent with Contois' suggestion that "the alcohol industry has historically been one of the most gendered (and sexist) sectors in this space. Hard seltzers represent somewhat of a departure and have become a potential opportunity for gender-inclusive marketing" (Contois, 2022).

## VI. Conclusion

This research was conducted with a sample of 13 television advertisements from two beer brands and two seltzer brands. To get a more accurate representation of both industries' advertisements, a larger sample size of both commercials and brands would be needed. Additionally, while selecting both Bud Light beer and Bud Light Seltzer allowed a look into the differences and similarities in gender portrayal in beer versus seltzer ads regardless of company ownership, having two brands from the same corporation could have altered the results.

The television commercials were chosen with the criteria of brand and an air date after 2016; however, a more holistic selection process based on commercial content could have been used. While purposive sampling was relevant for this study design, the research method is sometimes coupled with bias. This research was also only conducted by one researcher, leaving room for additional bias. Having more researchers from diverse backgrounds and of different genders code and analyze the research may have yielded different results. As this research is qualitative, observations and findings, as well as sample selection are somewhat subjective. Having more researchers participate in thematic analysis of the content would also aid in finding more themes that the researcher may have not identified.

Understanding that similar gender portrayals and stereotypes are present in modern beer commercials and alcoholic seltzer advertisements helps demonstrate how television commercials are both reflections of society and have the potential to mold values, beliefs, and behaviors. The archetypes of losers, buddies, hotties, and bitches are more common throughout beer commercials, indicating that the new, more gender-neutral product of alcoholic seltzer also brings a new area of advertising that is closer to overturning these longstanding stereotypes. The more equal display of female faces in hard seltzer commercials suggests that the entry of this new product to the market brings a change of gender ideals with it. The hard seltzer industry is more eager to show female faces, which translates to highlighting women's intelligence and emotions rather than just their beauty and bodies.

Women in television seltzer advertisements are more likely to speak, have conversations without men, and have autonomy over their lives and decisions, and these themes are likely to be reflected off the screen. As advertising is closely tied to the values of the larger society, the fast-growing popularity of seltzer brands suggests that culture may similarly be shifting.

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