

# MARKETING MANAGEMENT JOURNAL

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## ISSUE 2

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## **Editorial: Marketing Management Journal Introduction to the Special Section**

### **The Current Issue:**

In the present issue, Tim Aurand served as the Special Section Editor. These articles highlight “The Use of Social Media and Strategic Marketing Initiatives: Insights into State-of-the-Art Marketing Communication Practices.” Overall, we received a high number of quality submissions for the Special Section and five manuscripts were accepted for publication.

### **Special Recognition Awards:**

The Journal has two annual awards. The first award is “The Reviewer of the Year Award.” The Editor of the Journal selects this award. With the help of Gail Zank, former Editor, I am happy to announce Dr. Haeran Jae as the Reviewer of the Year. She is an Associate Professor of Marketing at Virginia Commonwealth University. Thank you for your excellent service to the Journal!

The second award is the “MMJ Outstanding Article of the Year.” The Journal’s Editorial Review Board voted on this award. The ten manuscripts for consideration were published in 2016 (Volume 26) and were accepted for publication under the Editorship of Gail Zank. Voting for this award occurred this year between August 16<sup>th</sup> and September 10<sup>th</sup>. While the results were close, the Outstanding Article of the Year is “Mentoring’s Impact on Salesperson Job Satisfaction Dimensions” by Nathaniel Hartmann (University of Hawai’i at Mānoa), Brian N. Rutherford (Kennesaw State University), Scott B. Friend (Miami University), and G. Alexander Hamwi (Missouri State University).

### **New Members of the Editorial Review Board:**

During the course of the first year of my Editorship, I am proud to announce several new members of the Editorial Review Board:

Scott Ambrose – Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

Nwamaka Anaza – Southern Illinois - Carbondale

Duleep Delpchitre – Illinois State University

Laura Munoz – University of Dallas

As submissions continue to increase in number and quality, I will continue to add new members to the Editorial Review Board. As can be seen, new Editorial Review Board members have strong records of research accomplishment and are able to review multiple topics and methods.

### **The Upcoming Special Section:**

The topic for the Special Section that will appear in Volume 28, Issue 2, is titled, “The Evolution of Marketing – Changes in the Purchase and Consumption of Products and Services through Technology.” The Special Section is based on the dramatic change in the

purchase and consumption of goods and services that we have experienced in the recent decade. In part, this is due to the advent and rapidly expanding uses for mobile technology, as well as the transformation of numerous cultural norms. While technology has an obvious impact upon nearly every aspect of the purchase and consumption of goods and services, other factors such as social norms, significant shifts in demographic profiles, consumer psychographics, and socio-economic changes are also factors impacting our society's consumption. In this Special Section, both business-to-business and business-to-consumer manuscripts will be given equal consideration. Also, primary consideration will be given to empirical work, both qualitative and quantitative in scope. The submission deadline for the Special Section is March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018. We look forward to receiving submissions for this section.

# MARKETING MANAGEMENT JOURNAL

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# MANUSCRIPT AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

## MARKETING MANAGEMENT JOURNAL

January 2017

### Scope and Mission

The mission of the *Marketing Management Journal* (MMJ) is to provide a forum for the sharing of the academic, theoretical, and practical research that may impact the development of the marketing management discipline. Manuscripts that focus upon empirical research, theory, methodology, and review of a broad range of marketing topics are strongly encouraged. Submissions are encouraged from both academic and practitioner communities.

### Submission Guidelines

Manuscripts that do not conform to submission guidelines will not be distributed for review. Authors should submit manuscripts via email to [mmjjournal@gmail.com](mailto:mmjjournal@gmail.com). Each submission should consist of two files:

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2. A file containing the manuscript title, an abstract of no more than 150 words, keywords, and manuscript. Author identification or affiliation should not appear anywhere in this file.

Manuscripts should be submitted using 12-point Times Roman font and should not exceed 30 typewritten pages inclusive of body, tables and figures, and references. Margins must be one inch. Preparation of the manuscript should follow style guidelines in the most recent *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition. Tables and figures used in the manuscript should be included on a separate page and placed at the end of the manuscript. Authors should insert a location note within the body of the manuscript to identify appropriate placement. Tables and figures should be constructed in table mode of Microsoft Word.

The MMJ editorial board interprets the submission of a manuscript as a commitment to publish in MMJ. Editorial policy prohibits publication of a manuscript that has already been published in whole or in substantial part by another journal. Each manuscript is first assessed by the editor to determine its potential for successful completion of the review process. A manuscript that goes beyond the initial review goes through a double-blind review conducted by members of MMJ's review board. Feedback from reviewers and the editor team's evaluation are used to make a decision on whether a manuscript will be accepted for publication in MMJ.

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The Spring issue each year will be published online on the MMA website upon completion of the issue. The fall issue will also be published online on the MMA website upon completion. A print edition containing the spring and fall issues of a volume will be printed upon completion of the fall issue. Each author of an article published in MMJ will receive one copy of the issue in which the article appears. General access to MMJ is available online at: <http://www.mmaglobal.org/publications/mmj/current-past-issues/>.

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# SKIP IT OR VIEW IT: THE ROLE OF VIDEO STORYTELLING IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

*KESHA K. COKER, Ball State University*

*RICHARD L. FLIGHT, Southern Illinois University - Edwardsville*

*DOMINIC M. BAIMA, Tooth of Time Traders at Philmont Scout Ranch*

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*Given more consumer control over exposure to content on social media, marketers are seeking ways to engage consumers with videos. One way to overcome challenges with content engagement is to focus on video execution style. Based on the narrative processing framework, this research examines the role of video storytelling in social media. The study exposed respondents to YouTube ads with either a straight-sell ( $n = 133$ ) or storytelling ( $n = 140$ ) execution style. Results show the superiority of storytelling video ads over straight-sell video ads on several consumer responses: attitude toward the brand, positive word of mouth, sharing, promoting, and viewing (rather than skipping the video ad). Purchase intention did not differ between video execution styles. Additional findings suggest order effects and social media usage effects based on video execution style. Implications for both marketing theory and practice, limitations, and future research on video storytelling in social media are discussed.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Video has emerged as a popular tool in the digital world. As noted by some authors: “If text was the medium of the analog era, video is the medium of the digital age” (Berthon, Pitt, & DesAutels, 2011, p. 1047). Video seems appropriate since it is well aligned with social media’s “ability to grab our attention, fire up our imagination and share our own story out to the larger world around us” (Mancuso & Stuth, 2014, p. 18). Video has been credited with being a quick attention grabber in digital marketing (Lessard, 2014). In 2016, over 8 billion videos were viewed on Facebook per day; more than 300 hours of YouTube videos were uploaded per minute; and over 10 billion videos were viewed daily on Snapchat (Simply Measured, 2016). In 2016, 60% of more than 5,000 marketers used video content and 73% indicated increased use of video content in social media marketing (Social Media Examiner, 2016). Even more impactful is the acknowledgement by marketers that video is a more effective conversion tool than other content formats (Lessard, 2014). These trends show the potential of video for marketers using social media.

With the potential of video for social media marketing come challenges for marketers. Brands face the challenge of using video such that they become part of the conversation. A greater challenge for brands is holding consumers’ attention long enough so that they *actually* tune in to the video on social media. This task is particularly challenging given that consumers actively try to avoid ads and marketing messages, e.g., using various tools, such as DVRs and digital streaming services (e.g., Netflix). Avoidance of marketing messages is further facilitated by digital media that allow consumers to skip ads. YouTube allows viewers to skip some ads and has even launched a subscription service called YouTube Red to deliver an ad-free entertainment experience for viewers. Given that the consumer has more control over exposure to content on social media, marketers are tasked with finding ways to keep consumers engaged with video content. To compound this challenge, social media users may suffer from shorter attention spans and may split attention among various activities while using social media.

To overcome challenges in engaging social media users with video, marketers may need to reconsider their conversation style on social media. Though some control over marketing is lost in the co-creative nature of social media marketing, marketers can control how they

present the brand in video format on social media. They can start by strategically examining a video's production elements, including length, format, and execution, which may affect user processing of the message. This starting point in crafting a video strategy on social media brings to the forefront video execution style, which is "the way a particular appeal is turned into an advertising message presented to the consumer" (Belch & Belch, 2015, p. 301). A popular execution style in promotions is the straight-sell or factual execution style, which uses "a straightforward presentation of information concerning the product" with a strong emphasis on product features, attributes, and benefits (Belch & Belch, 2015, p. 312). Despite its popularity, the straight-sell execution style may present challenges in getting consumers to tune in to the video ad on social media. Since social media has been viewed as a means through which brands can "tell their story" (Judson, Devasagayam, & Buff, 2012, p. 131), this situation highlights the potential of an alternative execution style that is gaining ground in the marketing world – storytelling.

Though much has been done on storytelling in marketing, past research has not adequately examined consumer responses to video storytelling on social media. In fact, research to date on storytelling lacks focus on the co-creative side of social media marketing (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Furthermore, "much has been written about the power of stories in branding, but very *little empirical evidence* [emphasis added] exists of their effects on consumer responses" (Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, & van Riel, 2013, p. 283). Thus, there is a paucity of research on the effects of storytelling on consumer behavior amplified by social media, e.g., word of mouth and ad avoidance. To address this gap, this research examines the role of video storytelling execution styles on consumer responses to branded video content on social media.

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Storytelling has been part of the fabric of human civilization for ages (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010). Storytelling entails "conveying messages and sharing accumulated knowledge and wisdom to help navigate and explain the

world around us" (Mancuso & Stuth, 2014, p. 18). Stories are "the products of human tendency to see causality in the world" (Hirschman, 2010, p. 581). They are "fictions filled with character, plot, points of view, and an implied purpose called a meaning" (Twitchell 2004, p. 484). Stories are in the "narrative" form, structured in temporal format ("beginning, middle, and end") in related episodes (Escalas, 2004, p. 169).

Story ads place the brand within "narrative elements (e.g., goals, actions, outcomes)" (Escalas, 2004, p. 171). This format of advertising, also known as narrative advertising, has been conceptualized as creating consumer empathy toward ad characters through consumer-character identification and vicarious participation in the experiences of the character in the story (Boller & Olson, 1991). Stories are pleasurable for viewers because viewers can be both parties in the storytelling experience – the protagonist and the audience (Megehee & Woodside, 2010). For the brand, storytelling works to "help build awareness, comprehension, empathy, recognition, recall, and provide meaning" (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012, p. 189). When brands side with protagonists to achieve their goals, the outcome is favorable consumer-brand relationships (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008).

To understand how storytelling works in marketing, it is helpful to start with how consumers process information in story format, i.e., narrative processing. Among other message formats, stories can be used to enter the consumer's thought processes and to bring meaning to everyday objects (Twitchell, 2004). Though other formats may tap into certain memory systems (semantic or episodic, per Tulving, 1972), storytelling taps into "a broad array of unconscious consumer brand knowledge from episodic and implicit/procedural memory" (Koll, von Wallpach, & Kreuzer, 2010, p. 589). Past research suggests that such access is possible since consumers tend to think in narrative terms rather than in argumentative terms (see Woodside et al., 2008), especially when they are trying to ascribe meaning to events (see Escalas, 2004). Thus, "a substantial amount of information stored in and retrieved from memory is episodic – stories that include inciting incidents,

experiences, outcomes/evaluations, and summaries/nuances of person-to-person and person-and-brand relationships within specific contexts” (Woodside, 2010, p. 533).

Narrative advertising is expected to “prime narrative thought” (Escalas, 2004, p. 171). This situation contrasts with that of argumentative ads (also known as expository or factual ads) that tend to encourage more analytical processing and more counterarguing than narrative processing (Wentzel, Tomczak, & Herrmann, 2010). Specifically, stories help consumers focus on story elements and allow consumers to be immersed in the story, rather than directing their attention to brand attributes, thinking about attribute arguments, or “tuning out the ad” (Escalas, 2004, p. 171).

The literature suggests that narrative processing can also facilitate connections between the audience and the story. Good or “memorable” stories have tensions with incidents that cause the protagonist (or main character) to create and achieve goals, ultimately having experiences that cause the viewer to feel emotional and involved in the story (Woodside et al., 2008, p. 101). Indices or touch points in the story connect to people’s lives, making the story more relatable to experiences stored in memory (Woodside, 2010). The greater the touch points, the more memorable the story compared to other formats, such as a lecture or attribute-based argumentative formats commonly used in advertising (Woodside, 2010).

Narrative processing also facilitates connections between the brand and consumer. Stories give meaning to the consumer’s life and help them construct the consumer’s self (Cooper, Schembri, & Miller, 2010; Schembri, Merrilees, & Kristiansen, 2010). Based on the narrative self-brand connection (SBC) framework (Escalas, 2004), narrative advertising enables narrative processing, which results in a “matching process,” where consumers compare and match their personal experiences with that of the ad story (Escalas, 2004, p. 171). This matching process strengthens SBCs, which in turn produce positive consumer responses. Research shows these effects to hold, with narrative storyboard ads leading to higher SBCs, and in turn, more

favorable attitudes toward the brand and higher purchase intentions (Escalas, 2004).

## HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The current research expands on the narrative processing framework from the literature and applies it to the context of video ads used in social media marketing. Given the positive effects of storytelling on consumer behavior, it can be proposed that storytelling may increase consumer engagement with the video on social media. The central premise is that in the realm of social media marketing, the storytelling execution style associated with narrative advertising would be more effective than a traditional straight-sell execution style, which resembles a lecture style or a hard sell on product attribute information using an argumentative style (Woodside et al., 2008).

The following section presents hypotheses on the effects of video storytelling on six types of consumer responses. Though attitude toward the brand and purchase intention have been examined in past research on storytelling, these constructs are re-examined in the realm of video storytelling on social media marketing. The remaining constructs examined are consumer behaviors amplified by social media marketing, i.e., positive word of mouth, sharing, promoting, and skipping versus viewing behavior.

### Attitude toward the Brand

Past research suggests that activation of persuasion knowledge may affect narrative processing of ads. The persuasion knowledge model posits that consumers activate persuasion knowledge as a defense mechanism when they think they are trying to be sold something, i.e., when they sense persuasive attempts by marketers (Friestad & Wright, 1994). In the realm of storytelling, research has shown that when cues for manipulative intent are made less salient, narrative ads generate a higher level of positive affect, stronger SBCs, and more positive attitudes than fact-based expository ads (Wentzel et al., 2010). However, when cues for manipulative intent are made more salient, consumers process narrative ads and expository ads in a similar manner, becoming suspicious of

the narrative ad and activating persuasion knowledge (Wentzel et al., 2010).

The emotional link between the audience of an ad and the brand is strengthened because stories are memorable and easily absorbed (Yu & Chang, 2013). This finding is consistent with recent research that shows the power of video storytelling in generating emotional experiences with the storyteller in peer-to-peer communities on social media (Pera & Viglia, 2016). Furthermore, the level of consumer affect during ad storyline elements (introduction, premise, development, and conclusion) has a positive relationship with evaluation of both the ad and brand (Burton, McAlister, & Hoyer, 2015).

Given past research, it can be argued that video ads with a storytelling execution style may be less likely to activate persuasion knowledge since the consumer will be less likely to believe that the ad is trying to persuade them to do something. Thus, it is possible that the storytelling execution style may result in a more favorable change in attitude toward the brand than the straight-sell execution style. Since the emotional connection to the brand is best captured by attitude toward the brand as an affective component, a video ad with a storytelling execution style should generate a more favorable change in attitude toward the brand than one with a straight-sell execution style. Therefore:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** A video ad with a storytelling execution style will generate a more favorable change in attitude toward the brand than one with a straight-sell execution style.

### Purchase Intention

Research shows that “consumers are engaging in twice the amount of content online year-over-year leading up to a buying decision” (Pulizzi, 2012, p. 119). With consumers searching for and consuming more content before making their purchase decisions, marketers should explore communication strategies that connect with consumers and keep the product/brand on the top of the consumer’s mind. Such strategies should help the marketer’s content stand out from the rest and increase the likelihood of purchase by the consumer.

The literature suggests that consumers are more engaged and better remember information when an ad is presented in the form of stories. Based on the narrative SBC framework, SBCs are associated with a higher likelihood of purchase (Escalas, 2004). Research also suggests that “a well-crafted firm story may create positive associations with a brand and ultimately increase consumers’ willingness to pay for it” (Lundqvist et al., 2013, p. 291). Since sales may suggest return on investment from social media, it seems appropriate to re-examine the role of storytelling on purchase intentions related to video on social media. It is proposed that brands that use video storytelling in social media should see higher purchase intentions from consumers than those that use video ads with a straight-sell execution style. Therefore:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** A video ad with a storytelling execution style will generate greater purchase intention than one with a straight-sell execution style.

### Positive Word of Mouth

Word of mouth marketing has proven itself to be a robust tool for marketers in the age of social media. By crafting brand messages in the form of stories, the marketer may facilitate word of mouth for the brand on social media. Consumer engagement with brands extends beyond the purchase into more participatory and involved interactions with the brand on social media (Parent, Plangger, & Bal, 2011). Since word of mouth communication is most often in the form of stories (Delgadoillo & Escalas, 2004), a video with a storytelling execution strategy should facilitate word of mouth about the brand on social media. Such word of mouth may also be conceptualized as sharing content and promoting the brand on social media. Thus, similar outcomes are expected for sharing-related behaviors, i.e., word of mouth about the brand, sharing the video content, and promotion of the brand. It follows that:

**H<sub>3a</sub>:** A video ad with a storytelling execution style will generate greater positive word of mouth about a brand than one with a straight-sell execution style.

**H<sub>3b</sub>:** A video ad with a storytelling execution style is more likely to be

shared than one with a straight-sell execution style

- H<sub>3c</sub>:** A video ad with a storytelling execution style will increase promotion of the brand more than one with a straight-sell execution style:

### View It

An important question facing marketers today is: how to increase viewing behaviors (and reduce skipping behaviors) for content shared on social media? The idea that consumers would view the ad (and not skip it) can be tied to persuasion knowledge. Wentzel et al. (2010) found that in the absence of manipulative cues, consumers' reactions were more favorable to narrative ads than to fact-based expository ads. Since storytelling videos are intended to tell a story, they may not lead consumers to think they are being persuaded, resulting in persuasion knowledge not being activated, or at a minimum, the activation is delayed. Since argumentative ads may be more likely to be tuned out (Escalas, 2004):

- H<sub>4</sub>:** A video ad with a storytelling execution style is more likely to be viewed than one with a straight-sell execution style, which is more likely to be skipped.

## METHODOLOGY

### Experimental Design

This study uses a two (execution style: straight-sell vs. storytelling) by two (brand: Extra Gum vs. Mazda) within-subjects experimental design. The experiment was administered using an online survey that was distributed to respondents via email. Respondents were given one week to complete the survey and were instructed to take the survey on a desktop or laptop computer with audio and video capability to ensure they could see and hear the videos. Respondents took an average of 9 minutes to complete the survey, with about one minute for the stimuli and the remaining time for completion of the survey.

The stimuli used in this study were four 30-second video ads. Each respondent saw two video ads; one with a straight-sell execution

style and another with a storytelling execution style for one of two brands. Two of the video ads were for Mazda and two were for Extra Gum. These brands were chosen because they did not seem to have very strong cultural followings, such as Coca-Cola, and they both use storytelling and straight-sell execution styles in their ads. Though multiple video ads were considered, the content in each video ad used in this study was deemed to achieve face validity by meeting the definitional requirements of both straight-sell and storytelling execution styles. Per Belch and Belch (2015), the video ads with the straight-sell execution style included features, facts, and information (e.g., long-lasting flavor of Extra Gum). Per Twitchell, (2004, p. 484), the video ads with the storytelling style featured "a character, plot, points of view, and an implied purpose called a meaning" (e.g., Sarah and Juan and how Extra Gum brought meaning to their lives). Moreover, each brand represents both low and high involvement products so, when combined, the effects of involvement contingent on decision-making processes can be reduced.

The first video ad with a storytelling execution style was for Mazda; "A Driver's Life-Driving Matters" (Mazda USA, 2015). This video advertised the 2016 Mazda MX-5 Miata. The video ad starts by showing a young man learning how to drive to get his driver's license and his progression through life with Mazda cars, including his family and work, before finally ending with a new red Mazda sports car. The second Mazda video ad used a straight-sell execution style. The ad was titled "Go Ahead and Judge" (Autoport Magazine, 2015) and advertised the 2016 Mazda CX-5. The video shows tight shots of the details of the car while the narrator talks about the features including an unlimited mileage warranty.

The Extra Gum video ad with a storytelling execution style was called "The Story of Sarah and Juan" (Extra Gum, 2015). The video ad was released in 2015 and advertises Extra Spearmint Gum. The video ad shows the progression of a relationship between a young couple. The video ad shows a young man artistically drawing on Extra Gum wrappers. At the end of the ad, he frames the wrappers to show relationship milestones and a new

milestone with a story yet to be told, i.e., proposing to his girlfriend. The ad ends with the campaign theme: “Give Extra, Get Extra.” The second Extra Gum video ad used a straight-sell execution style and was called “Fruit Universe” for Extra Fruit Sensations gum (Maplethorpe, 2008). The ad uses very bright colors and bold graphics to show the earth being created. The ad focused on Extra Fruit Sensations gum and its long-lasting flavors.

As part of the research method, the sample was randomly assigned to one of four treatments to form the two by two design. Two groups saw video ads for Mazda, while two saw video ads for Extra Gum. The respondents were also randomly assigned to view the video ad with a straight-sell or storytelling execution style first and the other second. The reason for random assignment into these four treatments is to allow for between-group analyses and to control for order and product effects.

### Sample

This sample comprised upper-division college students from a midsized Midwest U.S. university. College students were deemed to be appropriate for this study because they are users of social media and view videos online. From 377 respondents that initially began the survey, 104 were eliminated from the final analysis due to incomplete responses, if they indicated that a video did not play on their computer, or if they failed the validity check. To verify that the video ads were viewed, respondents were asked to describe each video ad they watched. If they could not accurately do so or if they left this item blank, their observation was removed.

The final sample size for further analysis comprised 273 respondents. In this final sample, 51 respondents saw view the Mazda straight-sell video and 82 respondents saw the Extra Gum straight sell video; 74 respondents saw the Mazda storytelling video while 66 respondents saw the Extra Gum storytelling video. Therefore, 133 respondents saw a straight-sell video ad first while 140 respondents saw a storytelling video ad first for between-group comparisons.

The sample comprised 60.8% females (39.2% males), mostly between 18 and 24 years old

(95.2%). The sample’s social media usage was consistent with expectations for a representative sample for this study. On average, respondents actively use five social media sites, with Facebook (95.2%), Snapchat (90.1%), Instagram (80.2%), Twitter (73.6%), Pinterest (50.5%), and LinkedIn (50.2%) being most popular. In addition, most respondents are active in watching digital video content on social media, preferring YouTube (90.5%) followed by Facebook (83.9%) and Twitter (46.5%).

### Measures

Established scales were used to measure the key constructs in this study. Each scale demonstrates sufficient reliability ( $\alpha = .70$  or greater, Churchill 1979). Tables 1 and 2 show the measurement scales used in this study.

*Attitude toward the Brand* was measured twice, both pre-and post-exposure, using the four-item, 7-point, scale by Mitchell and Olson (1981). As a key measure in this study, attitude toward the brand was operationalized as the *change* in attitude toward the brand, pre-and post-advertisement exposure. Given that pre-existing interest for each brand may be a confounding issue, the use of change in attitude is appropriate. As such, the data provide attitude to the brand based on both the initial and subsequent exposure to the video ads. It should also be noted that for this analysis the first video ad seen was used to capture change in brand attitude. By doing this, the anticipated halo effect is eliminated. Such an effect would complicate the interpretation of the findings by magnifying the effects of the second ad seen by the respondent for the same product. In other words, if the respondent saw a straight-sell video ad first, their pre- and post-brand attitude scores were used to measure the effect of the straight-sell execution style on brand attitude. Similarly, if they saw a storytelling ad first, then this exposure effect was measured and used to calculate the storytelling effect on brand attitude.

*Word of Mouth (WOM)* as it pertains to the brand was measured by adapting the positive word of mouth scale by Alexandrov, Lilly, and Babakus (2013). The three-item positive WOM scale was used in this study. *Share* as it pertains

**TABLE 1:**  
**Multi-Item Measurement Scales**

| Construct and Item  | M    | S.D. |
|---|------|------|
| <b>Attitude toward the Brand</b> , $\alpha_s=.95$ (Mitchell & Olson, 1981; $\alpha_o=.82$ ) |      |      |
| Bad / Good  | 4.86 | 1.46 |
| Dislike Very Much / Like Very Much  | 4.68 | 1.36 |
| Unpleasant / Pleasant   | 4.78 | 1.40 |
| Poor Quality / High Quality   | 4.78 | 1.45 |
| <b>Positive Word of Mouth</b> , $\alpha_s=.94$ (Alexandrov et al., 2013; $\alpha_o=.86$ )   |      |      |
| I would say positive things about this brand.   | 4.96 | 1.31 |
| I would recommend this brand to others.   | 4.64 | 1.43 |
| I would recommend this brand to someone who seeks my advice.                                | 4.65 | 1.42 |
| <b>Share</b> , $\alpha_s=.93$ (Chen & Godes, 2014; $\alpha_o=.96$ )                         |      |      |
| Don't tell friends about the ad / Tell friends about the ad                                 | 4.04 | 2.05 |
| Don't forward this ad / Forward this ad   | 3.40 | 2.05 |
| Don't share this ad / Share this ad   | 3.24 | 2.10 |

**Notes.** All constructs were measured on 7-point scales.  $\alpha_s$  = Cronbach's alpha in current study.  $\alpha_o$  = Cronbach's alpha in original study. M = Mean. S.D. = Standard Deviation.

**TABLE 2:**  
**Single-Item Measurement Scales**

| Construct and Item  | Straight-Sell |      | Storytelling |      |
|---|---------------|------|--------------|------|
|   | M             | S.D. | M            | S.D. |
| <b>Purchase Intention</b> (Bower, 2001)   |               |      |              |      |
| I do not intend to buy in the future /<br>I intend to buy in the future   | 3.55          | 1.89 | 3.89         | 1.82 |
| <b>Promote the Brand</b> (Reichheld, 2003)  |               |      |              |      |
| How likely are you to recommend the brand<br>( <u>Mazda or Extra Gum</u> ) to a friend or colleague,<br>based on the ad you just watched? (0 -10) | 4.94          | 2.53 | 5.68         | 2.54 |
| <b>View It</b>  |               |      |              |      |
| If you had the opportunity to skip or view this<br>ad, please rate how likely you are to: Skip it /<br>View It                                    | 2.14          | 1.59 | 3.46         | 2.21 |

**Note.** Purchase Intention and View It were measured on 7-point scales. Promote the Brand was measured on an 11-point scale. M = mean. S.D. = standard deviation.

to the video ad was measured using a three-item, 7-point scale adapted from Chen and Godes (2014). *Promote* as it pertains to the brand was measured following Reichheld (2003) using a single-item, 11-point scale (0-10). To operationalize this scale in the analysis, respondents were not re-grouped as promoters (those scoring 9-10) or detractors (those scoring 0-6), as tradition suggests. Instead, the response provided (0-11) was used as a single-item variable.

*Purchase Intention* was measured using a single item adapted from Bower (2001). To measure *View It*, a single-item, 7-point, bipolar scale was created by the authors to measure how likely the video would be viewed instead of skipped. Note that the anchors for the scale used were *Skip It* (1) and *View It* (7), so a relative low score would be interpreted as likely to skip the video ad whereas a relative high score would be interpreted as likely to view the video ad.

## RESULTS

### Treatment Effect Predictions

To test hypotheses regarding treatment effects ( $H_1$  to  $H_4$ ), between-groups ANOVA calculations with their respective student *t*-tests were used. To reiterate, this analysis reflects respondents' first view and does not include the potential confounding effect of viewing two execution styles or by a halo effect that could exist in response data from a second ad exposure. The following summarizes results from hypothesis testing.

Results show that *Attitude toward the Brand* increases significantly (pre-exposure mean = 4.76 to post-exposure mean = 5.07,  $t = 3.35$ , sig. = .001,  $n = 140$ ) for video ads with the storytelling execution style. On the other hand, attitude toward the brand decreases significantly (pre-exposure mean = 4.86 to post-exposure mean = 4.47,  $t = 2.89$ , sig. = .004,  $n=133$ ) for video ads with the straight-sell execution style. Therefore,  $H_1$  is supported.

The average *Purchase Intention* score after seeing video ads with the straight-sell execution style is 3.55 ( $n = 133$ ) and the average score after seeing video ads with the storytelling execution style is 3.89 ( $n = 140$ ). The

difference in purchase intention between the video ads with the straight-sell execution style and those with the storytelling execution style is not significant at the .05 level ( $t = 1.31$ , sig. = .096) and does not lend support for  $H_2$ .

The average *Positive Word of Mouth* score after seeing the video ads with the straight-sell execution style is 4.47 ( $n = 133$ ) and the average score after seeing video ads with the storytelling execution style is 4.81 ( $n = 140$ ). The difference in positive word of mouth about the brand between the videos with the straight-sell and those with the storytelling execution style is significant at the .05 level ( $t = 2.17$ , sig. = .015) and supports  $H_{3a}$ .

The average *Share* score after seeing the video ads with the straight-sell execution style is 2.81 ( $n = 133$ ) and the average score after seeing video ads with the storytelling execution style is 3.67 ( $n = 140$ ). The difference in sharing intention between video ads with the straight-sell execution style and those with the storytelling execution style is significant at the .001 level ( $t = 4.14$ , sig. < .000) and supports  $H_{3b}$ .

The average *Promote* score after seeing the video ads with the straight-sell execution style is 4.94 ( $n = 133$ ) and the average score after seeing the video ad with the storytelling execution style is 5.68 ( $n = 140$ ). The difference in promotion of the brand between the videos with the straight-sell execution style and those with the storytelling execution style is significant at the .01 level ( $t = 2.36$ , sig. = .009) and supports  $H_{3c}$ .

The average *View It* score after seeing the video ads with the straight-sell execution style is 2.14 ( $n = 133$ ) and the average score after seeing video ads with the storytelling execution style is 3.46 ( $n = 140$ ). The difference in viewing intention between video ads with the straight-sell execution style and those with the storytelling execution style is significant at the .001 level ( $t = 5.54$ , sig. < .000) and supports  $H_4$ .

### Additional Findings

Additional examination of the data was done by observing execution style order and social

media use. Regarding execution style order, it is possible that each of the response variables (purchase intention, positive word of mouth, share, promote, and view it) would strengthen after exposure to the second video ad. Interestingly, the data (see Table 3) show this effect when the video ads with the storytelling execution style follow those with the straight-sell execution style, but not if the video ads with the storytelling execution style appear first. In fact, when the video ads with the straight-sell execution style appear second, the overall response reverses and the positive impact gained by the storytelling execution style is lost. The relative difference in response variable change was calculated and found to be significant in each case. The change in Purchase Intention when straight-sell preceded storytelling was .90 while the change was -.15 when storytelling preceded straight-sell. Not only is the sign reversed in our sample but also the difference is significant at the .001 level in a paired t-test ( $t = 5.19$ ). The same pattern of

significance is repeated for Positive Word of Mouth ( $t = 5.62$ ), Share ( $t = 8.87$ ), Promote ( $t = 5.73$ ), and View It ( $t = 10.12$ ).

Finally, there were differences among respondents by social media use. Respondents were asked about their usage of eight different social media sites; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Reddit, and Tumblr. Social media usage was approximated by summing the number of social media sites used. Therefore, a respondent that uses many different sites (up to eight) is assumed to be a heavy user of social media as opposed to someone that is a light user. This proxy measure for social media use is then correlated with key outcome variables and reported in Table 4.

As the data suggest, there is little correlation between social media use and purchase intention, sharing, promotion, and likelihood to view in the straight-sell condition. This finding

**TABLE 3:**  
Mean Response Scores by Video Ad Execution Style Order

|                        | SS <sub>1</sub> | ST <sub>2</sub> | Diff. <sub>A</sub> | ST <sub>1</sub> | SS <sub>2</sub> | Diff. <sub>B</sub> | <i>t</i> | sig.   |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------|--------|
| Purchase Intention     | 3.55            | 4.45            | .90                | 3.89            | 3.74            | -.15               | 5.19     | < .000 |
| Positive Word of Mouth | 4.47            | 5.11            | .64                | 4.81            | 4.63            | -.18               | 5.62     | < .000 |
| Share                  | 2.81            | 4.28            | 1.47               | 3.67            | 3.30            | -.37               | 8.87     | < .000 |
| Promote                | 4.94            | 6.40            | 1.46               | 5.68            | 5.50            | -.18               | 5.73     | < .000 |
| View It                | 2.14            | 4.77            | 2.63               | 3.46            | 3.11            | -.34               | 10.12    | < .000 |

**Notes.** Change in attitude toward the brand for SS and ST are reported in the Results section. SS = video ad with straight-sell execution style, ST = video ad with storytelling execution style. SS<sub>1</sub> = straight-sell first. ST<sub>2</sub> = storytelling second. ST<sub>1</sub> = storytelling first. SS<sub>2</sub> = straight-sell second. Diff.<sub>A</sub> = Difference between SS<sub>1</sub> and ST<sub>2</sub>; Diff.<sub>B</sub> = Difference between ST<sub>1</sub> and SS<sub>2</sub>. *t* is calculated based on the average difference between execution order (Diff.<sub>A</sub>-Diff.<sub>B</sub>) for each variable.

**TABLE 4:**  
Correlation of Response Scores by Social Media Use

|                        | Straight-Sell |      | Storytelling |       | Diff. | <i>z</i> | sig. |
|------------------------|---------------|------|--------------|-------|-------|----------|------|
|                        | <i>r</i>      | Sig. | <i>r</i>     | Sig.  |       |          |      |
| Purchase Intention     | .097          | .108 | .072         | .235  | .025  | .206     | .419 |
| Positive Word of Mouth | .128          | .035 | .113         | .062  | .015  | .124     | .450 |
| Share                  | .044          | .472 | .235         | <.000 | .191  | 1.596    | .055 |
| Promote                | .072          | .238 | .150         | .013  | .078  | .645     | .259 |
| View It                | .006          | .922 | .158         | .009  | .152  | 1.252    | .105 |

**Notes.** Diff. = Straight-sell *r* – Storytelling *r*. To test the difference between correlations, each correlation coefficient (*r*) was converted to a z-score using Fisher's r-to-z transformation (Cohen & Cohen, 1983; Preacher, 2002). It should be noted that this test is somewhat sensitive to sample size and with a modest increase in sample size from 133 and 140, the variables of view and sharing easily become significant.

suggests that heavy and light users alike react similarly to video ads with straight-sell execution styles. Meanwhile, video ads with a storytelling execution style produce a stronger reaction from heavy social media users suggesting that social media use is positively related to video sharing, brand promotion, and likelihood to view (versus skip) the video ad. As such, execution style has an interaction effect on the relationship social media use has with sharing-related behaviors and likelihood to view (see Table 4).

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research produce implications for both marketing theory and practice, with more practical implications for marketing managers using video in social media marketing. In its totality, this research adds clarity and support for a video storytelling execution style in social media marketing.

The theoretical significance of this research is the extension of the narrative processing framework to social media marketing. This research answers the call in the literature to provide empirical evidence of consumer responses to storytelling in marketing (e.g., by Lundqvist et al., 2013). Furthermore, this research adds to the growing body of empirical research on video storytelling in social media marketing in the literature, e.g., video digital storytelling in consumer-to-consumer interactions, e.g., by Pera and Viglia (2016).

The practical significance of this research is found in its identification of effective video execution styles in social media marketing. To marketers, the choice of execution style becomes a strategic one with implications for several consumer responses. First, in support of H<sub>1</sub>, findings suggest the benefits to marketers of a video storytelling execution style over a straight-sell execution style include more favorable changes in attitude toward the brand. Given first exposure to these types of ads, it would seem as though the storytelling execution style is more successful at creating a stronger affective response or emotional connection with the brand. In the context of the current research, this emotional experience is with the brand as the storyteller in the video ad. Another plausible explanation is unlike the

storytelling video ad, the straight-sell video ad may have elevated cues of manipulative intent due to its strong emphasis on product features and attributes. It is then possible that the outcome was increased activation of persuasion knowledge, resulting in brand attitude decreasing from pre-exposure to post-exposure for straight-sell ads.

Second, compared to the video ad with the straight-sell execution style, the video ad with the storytelling execution style generated other favorable responses related to “shareability”: greater positive word of mouth about the brand (supporting H<sub>3a</sub>), higher intention to share the video ad (supporting H<sub>3b</sub>), and higher intention to promote the brand in the video ad (supporting H<sub>3c</sub>). Thus, marketers seeking sharing-related behaviors to capitalize on word of mouth on social media should carefully consider the type of video execution style. Marketers can use stories to build community and enhance brand meaning, while proving to their consumers that their product will add value to their life (Hirschman, 2010). This approach also has the potential to be effective in a social community where consumers are connected to large networks with opportunities to be brand influencers, sharing brand messages with others. When consumers share the message, they help generate positive publicity for the brand and move beyond being influencers to being brand advocates. Providing consumers with quality content in the form of video storytelling should make the content “shareworthy” such that they want to share and talk about the brand and its messages on social media.

Third, compared to a video ad with a straight-sell execution style, a video ad that uses a storytelling execution style is more likely to be viewed (than skipped), lending support for H<sub>4</sub>. This finding is important because there is no reason for marketers to create and pay for content if such content is just going to be skipped over by consumers. Given consumers’ ability to skip videos and scroll past them, marketers need something that will catch the attention of their target market. A storytelling execution style may be instrumental in increasing viewing (and reducing skipping) behaviors related to videos on social media.

Findings also suggest no significant difference in purchase intention between the video straight-sell and storytelling execution styles, lending no support for H<sub>2</sub>. It would seem as though marketers may need more than execution style to increase purchase intention following viewing of video content on social media. Perhaps, the brand's relevance to the consumer's lives and stage in consumer decision-making, and brand loyalty (participants may already have their preferred brand of gum or automobile) may be factors to further explore to get at purchase intention following viewing of video with branded content on social media.

Finally, additional findings reveal an interesting situation for marketers wishing to incorporate video storytelling into social media marketing. First, order effects exist such that positive outcomes arise from showing a video ad with a storytelling execution style *after* a video ad with a straight-sell execution style. This managerial implication seems pertinent to brands that are seeking to appeal to the rational side of consumers first and then following up with appealing to the emotional side of consumers. For example, brands like Coca-Cola may have started with straight-sell execution styles earlier in the brand's life to convey product features. However, as the brand and product became more well-known overtime, the brand may have moved on to the storytelling approach in marketing communications. Thus, if the brand wishes to use a straight-sell and storytelling execution style for its videos on social media, then it would be wise to start with the straight-sell approach and follow up with the storytelling approach, in that order.

Additional findings also suggest that social media usage plays a role in the effectiveness of video execution styles. Social media usage did not seem to matter for video ads with straight-sell execution styles. However, it does matter where the storytelling execution style is used. Compared to light social media users, heavy social media users seem to respond more favorably to the videos with the storytelling execution styles, engaging in more sharing-related behaviors, with greater intentions to view (and lower intentions to skip) the video ad. This additional finding has implications for segmenting the target audience by social media

usage and for using the right social media platform for videos.

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Many of the limitations in this study can be addressed with future research. First, previous knowledge of the brand and ad campaign may influence respondents' answers. Future research can expand on this conjecture and see if brand and ad campaign familiarity play a role in affecting consumer responses to the video ad execution styles examined in this study.

Second, the level at which the straight-sell ad focuses on selling and not on telling a story is difficult to measure and interpret. The decision currently is left up to the researcher. Future research can expand on the criteria that consumers use to determine the difference between a straight-sell and a storytelling execution style. Future research may examine videos that are extreme cases of straight-sell versus storytelling execution styles.

Finally, this study used videos that were essentially "ads." Therefore, they fit the typical 30-second format for many ads. The deeper question that arises is: would a storytelling execution style for videos be more beneficial if the marketer produces content that departs from the traditional ad format, both in duration and content? For example, a company that focuses on consumer stories in longer videos, rather than touting its brand in a traditional ad format, may benefit even more from storytelling effects found in this study. Future research may explore storytelling in longer formats that resemble more of short films than traditional 30-second ads. Such formats may resemble Chipotle's series of longer-format video ads on YouTube.

These limitations aside, this research holds potential for future research on video storytelling in social media marketing. This research shows the power of video storytelling in the age of social media marketing, where storytelling by brands is expected to create more organic interactions with customers well into the future.

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# EMPATHY FOR EMOTIONAL ADVERTISEMENTS ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

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*This study examines the impact of emotionally driven advertisements on empathy as felt by consumers on social networking sites (tested using Facebook, in the current study), and analyzes the role of social identity as a mediator between empathy and engagement. The study follows an experimental design conducted on college students. The results suggest that emotional appeal has a positive impact on empathy as well as attitude toward ad, which in turn have a positive impact on engagement. The results also suggest that social identity mediates the relationship between empathy and engagement on social networking sites. Findings of this study can be of help to marketers for creating strategies involving emotionally driven advertisements for social networking sites.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Emotions have long been used in advertising. A direct attention to emotions through emotional appeals can make people notice advertising and thus brands. Advertisements are created with the hope to stir emotions so that their message is strengthened and consumers are motivated to purchase the product advertised (Stewart, Morris, & Grover, 2007). Advertising evokes a diverse range of emotions (e.g. humor, sad, happy, love), and response to these emotions plays an important role in creating a relationship between consumers and products (Stewart et al., 2007). Advertisements are meant to strike a chord on some level with the target audience so that they can relate to the situation portrayed in the ad, and empathize with the content of the ad. Empathy in advertising specifies “the extent to which viewers participate vicariously in events, feelings, and behaviors that are shown in a commercial” (Schlinger, 1979, p. 47). Empathy plays an important role in advertising because it triggers consumers’ certain stimuli, and thus maximizes advertising effectiveness (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994). Empathizing with an ad makes consumers imagine being a character in the advertisement and creates an emotional connection between the consumer and the ad. This emotional connection, in turn, creates a positive impression about the product being

advertised and also helps consumers remember the ad for a longer period of time (Friestad & Thorson, 1993).

Based on that, advertisers use different media to increase consumer empathy toward advertising. Currently, one of the widely used media for advertising is social networking sites (SNS) because consumers are increasingly acclaiming SNS as a part of their everyday routine. This is evident from the number of users of SNS. According to Statista (2016a), Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter reported an estimated 1.59 billion, 1 billion, and 320 million active users, respectively, as of April 2016. These huge numbers have also prompted companies to change their advertising strategies with an increasing focus on social networking users. As per recent statistics, spending on advertising on SNS reached \$25.14 billion in 2015, and is forecasted to hit \$41 billion by 2017 (eMarketer, 2016).

However, it is not only the rapid growth of SNS, but also studies showing that active SNS users apprehend high feelings of empathy (Vossen & Valkenburg, 2016), that make SNS appealing to advertisers (Collins, 2014; Knoll, 2016). Previous research has shown that empathy could be facilitated by the use of SNS because it allows consumers to access others in similar situation easily and frequently (Caplan & Turner, 2007). This gives advertisers a platform to use emotional appeals with an expectation to create empathy amongst SNS users. Consumers spending more time on SNS

are also the best at passing around empathy online (Vossen & Valkenburg, 2016). If consumer A passes his feeling of empathy to other SNS users from his friends' list, for example user B and user C, who in turn pass it to more users from their respective friends' list, and so on; more and more consumers will generate empathy toward the advertisement. Research has also found that the expression of empathy can be influenced by similarity and group membership (Müller, Leeuwen, Baaren, Bekkering, & Dijksterhuis, 2013). Social identity, which is an individual's perception of self-concept based on his/her association with a particular social group (Tajfel, 1981, 1982), with friends on SNS can thus be related to empathy.

The fact that SNS is a social setting where consumers are virtually present with their online friends, their social identity with those friends can impact their emotional feelings (Coleman & Williams, 2013). Numerous studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of emotional advertising appeals (Lwin & Phau, 2013; Taute, McQuitty, & Sautter, 2011), however, relatively little is known about the response of consumers to these emotionally driven advertisements on SNS. Social identity can change the way consumers respond to the emotions that they feel while watching emotional advertisements.

Based on previous discussion, the present study experimentally tests the responses to emotional advertising on social media. The effect of sad vs. humorous emotional advertising appeals, as they relate to empathy and customer engagement, is tested. Previous studies have demonstrated the consequences of customer engagement, which includes the concepts of satisfaction, loyalty, commitment, trust, and consumer value (Barger, Peltier, & Schultz, 2016). In this study, consumer engagement in a virtual brand community is seen as a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimensions as a result of specific interactive experiences between consumers and the brand, and/or other members of the community (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013). In context of emotionally driven advertisements on SNS, this study investigates if social identity

mediates the relationship between empathy and consumer engagement.

The findings of this study could help marketing strategy managers to analyze and to determine the use of appropriate stimulus (sad/humorous) based on the specific level of empathy that managers desire to develop amongst consumers. Using the correct emotional provocation (sad/humorous), marketers can trigger consumers' empathy while watching an emotionally driven advertisement, which can lead to their attitude formation, which in turn can lead them to respond in a certain way to specific advertising stimuli amid specific exposure incident (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Since the formation of a particular attitude toward an ad is followed by highly interactive consumers' response on SNS (Brodie et al., 2013), the marketers can follow and measure this response through "likes," "shares," and/or "comments" made by the consumers on SNS.

Since emotions are viewed as a social phenomenon (Olderbak, Sassenrath, Keller, & Wilhelm, 2014) understanding the impact of emotions (through emotionally driven advertisements) in a social setting can also help marketers increase advertising effectiveness in two ways. First, advertising appeals have a positive impact on customers' empathy as well as customers' attitude toward an ad, which in turn have a positive impact on customer's engagement. Second, when an individual has positive attitude toward an ad and engages in an active behavior on SNS by sharing and socializing his/her personal experiences, then he/she could influence others (i.e. friends, community) about the value-in-exchange and value-in-use of the advertised brand (Schau, Muñoz Jr, & Arnould, 2009), reinforcing the advertising effectiveness.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual model tested with this research is presented in Figure 1. As shown, it is proposed that type of emotion: sad or humorous, in advertising, affects consumers' empathy toward those ads, which influences their engagement for the ad. Next, the model proposes that the relationship between empathy and engagement is mediated by social identity of consumers with their friends group on social

networking sites (SNS). In the following sections, previous literature will be reviewed to obtain a better understanding of the concepts used in the study, and then specific hypotheses regarding the relationships shown in Figure 1 will be presented.

### Social Identity

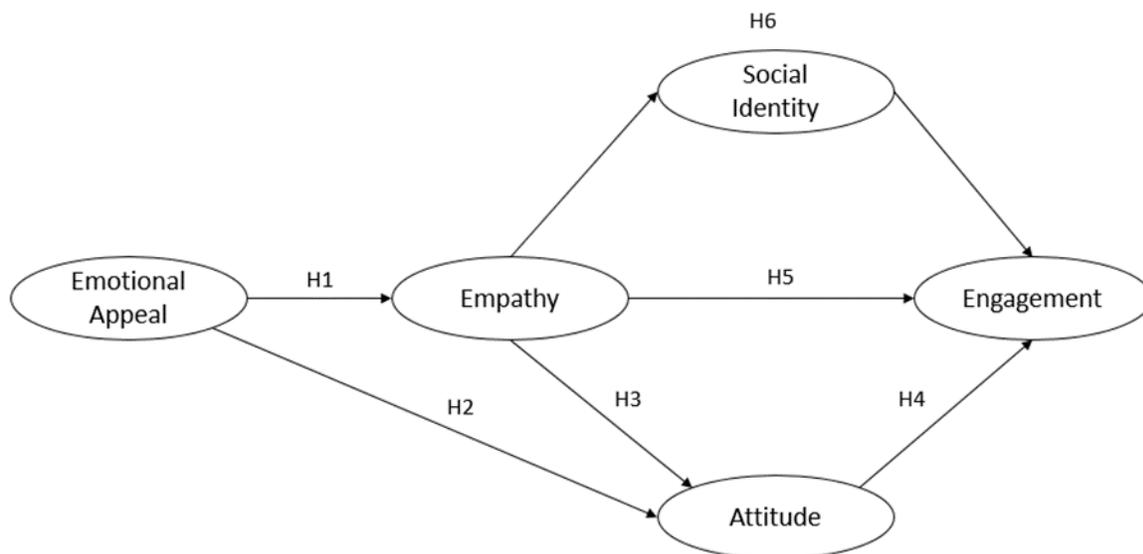
One of the theoretical backbones that underlie the present research is the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). According to Social Identity Theory, people put themselves and others into social groups by various categories, like gender, age, associations (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). An individual's internal structures and processes are guided by these underlying social categories. Individuals "come to perceive themselves more as the interchangeable exemplars of a social category than as unique personalities defined by their individual differences from others" (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987, p. 50). Since individuals think of themselves as identical to their social group, they also think of the other members of their group as identical to each other. This clearly shows how one's image of himself and of his social group corresponds when social identity is psychologically pertinent. Social identity is the part of a person's self-concept that is arrived at due to

his/her perceived association with a particular social group.

Based on that, the relevant social group in the current study is the friends group that consumers have on their SNS. Previous research has shown the influences of friends on users' purchases in the context of social media (Jung, Shim, Jin, & Khang, 2016), and positive perception of certain promotional message, when this message is sent by a friend rather than a company (Wallace, Buil, & de Chernatony, 2014). When a consumer watches an advertisement on SNS, he/she feels as if the ad is being watched in a social environment, due to the fact there are others virtually present on the platform (Chu, 2011). Indeed, the influence of social group is the main effect of counteracting the avoidance of advertising in SNS (Kelly, Kerr, & Drennan, 2010).

However, the friends group on SNS can be diverse and can have different sub-categories (in-groups) as far as identifying with them is concerned. But even with these in-groups, people tend to integrate their multiple identities in a complex, differentiated and inclusive identity structure, typically referred to as social identity complexity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). When multiple in-groups are sensed to be overlapping by an individual, he/she manages

**FIGURE 1:**  
**Conceptual Model**



to simplify the identity structure and forms single in-group identification for the different sub-categories. Hence, social identity in this study considers a unified identification with all the sub groups present in one's social network.

### Consumer's Empathy

Due to social identity, consumers' group membership in SNS can influence the feeling of empathy (Vossen & Valkenburg, 2016). The underlying mechanism behind the feeling of empathy draws from Appraisal Theory (Scherer, 1997), which argues that emotions are based on evaluative interpretations of the situation (appraisals). Based on that, empathy is generated when an individual appraises a specific situation in the same fashion that the other person appraises the same situation (Wondra & Ellsworth, 2015). This means that an individual can understand and feel another individual's position from the viewpoint of that individual, and can also interpret his/her cognitive and emotional reactions to that situation.

According to Appraisal Theory, empathy could be influenced by the psychological states of the observer, and could buffer or magnify the outcome of empathetic feeling on the appraisal process (Olderbak et al., 2014). It could include stable differences between observer and target in judgments and beliefs based on social conditions (social class, race, education level, culture), personal setting (salience emotions and affects), group of reference, and short-term dissimilarity in judgments and beliefs based on the current context. Research has empirically demonstrated that the environment and environmental activities can impact one's empathy (Wondra & Ellsworth, 2015).

Hence, empathy lets individuals appraise a situation as if they were really present at that place and got affected by the situation. It concerns the recognition and understanding of someone else's feelings (Taute et al., 2011). These feelings could be positive, negative, or neutral, depending on the situation of a person. Accordingly, empathy can be defined as an act of a person to identify, understand and imaginatively share another person's emotions, thoughts or feelings. In the present study,

empathy is presumed to be generated by using emotional appeal in SNS ad.

## HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### Emotions, Empathy, and Consumer's Attitude

Previous research has linked emotions with advertising response, and this response is generally shown to be affected through empathy. In addition, Bagozzi and Moore (1994) tested the relationship between emotions and prosocial behavior with empathy as a mediator. They showed empathy was greater in the strong versus the weak emotional advertisement. Research has also shown that audience can respond in a wide variety of ways to negative and positive emotions used in advertising appeals (Zhang, Sun, Liu, & Knight, 2014). Small and Verrochi (2009) showed that individuals show more sympathy and are inclined more to donate when the charity advertisements show victims having sad expressions, as compared to the advertisements showing victims with happy or neutral expressions. As the literature suggests, it seems plausible that sad emotions lead people to empathize more with the situations directing their responses in favor of the cause. On the other hand, though positive emotions (e.g. humor) also lead people to generate response, yet they are less contagious as compared to negative emotions (e.g. sad). Based on these arguments, we formally hypothesize the following:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Consumers exhibit more empathy toward advertisements that use a sad emotional appeal than ones that use a humorous emotional appeal.

In addition, emotional appeals are used in the advertising to impart certain attitudes in the consumers so they will act in a certain way. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) suggested that positive emotional appeal is likely to enhance the persuasive impact of an advertising message, which have a positive influence on attitude toward the ad. The underlying mechanism in the attitude process draws from Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977). According to TRA, an individual's actual behavior is a consequence of his/her behavioral intentions, which are formed

by his/her attitude and the relevant subjective norms concerning the behavior. Based on the discussion above, the present study defines attitude toward ad as a propensity to respond in a certain way to specific advertising stimuli amid specific exposure incident (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Based on these arguments, we formally state:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Consumers exhibit a positive attitude toward advertisements that use a sad emotional appeal than ones that use a humorous emotional appeal.

Previous research on responses to emotional advertising appeals shows that empathy relates positively to attitudes toward an ad (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Consumers' attitudes toward advertising on SNS have also been studied, and it has been found that consumers respond favorably toward the SNS ads that provide entertainment or informational value (Taylor, Lewin, & Strutton, 2011). In another study on the roles of consumers' sympathy and empathy in attitude formation, Escalas and Stern (2003) showed that empathy leads consumers to have a positive attitude toward advertising dramas. Empathy, being a feature of entertainment experience enables consumers "to live in the character" (Langfeld, 1967, p. 137), and it has been shown that the more intense the empathetic feeling is, the more positive attitude is formed toward the advertisement (Chebat, Vercollier, & G elinas-Chebat, 2003). Along the same lines of reasoning, we think that since empathy is created by the use of emotional appeals in the current study which makes the feeling more intense, it should lead to a positive attitude formation toward the ad. Hence, the following is hypothesized:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Empathy for SNS ads is positively related to attitude toward these ads.

### **Attitude toward Ad and Customer Engagement toward the Ad**

An important benefit of advertising over internet is that companies can interact with their consumers and can also judge their behavioral responses. Internet can provide a variety of information about consumers' activity ranging from observing and attending, to clicking on ads and buying the products (Rodgers, Ouyang, & Thorson, 2017). Lavidge and Steiner (1961)

applied the hierarchy-of-effects model to advertising and showed that attitude toward ad is positively related to behavioral intentions. This relationship, shown in their seven-step model, is agreed upon by advertising researchers. The hierarchy-of-effects model assumes a fully mediated relationship between attitude toward ad and behavioral intentions (Smith, Chen, & Yang, 2008). According to TRA, those behavioral intentions are the measure of the willingness of an individual to try. In other words, the more an individual intends to enroll in a behavior, the more chances are that he/she will actually execute it. In the present study, TRA is used in the model for consumers' online behavior for SNS ads.

In addition, TRA has received much attention in SNS studies in the past (Kwon & Wen, 2010), because revealing personal reaction to an SNS ad by "liking," "sharing," or/and "commenting" can be considered as a volitional behavior which in turn can result in a particular outcome (Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015). Specifically, for this study, this response can in turn lead to engagement in the product or brand being advertised. Brand engagement is defined as "a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object in focal brand relationships" (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011, p. 259). This psychological state creates "an individual difference representing consumers' propensity to include important brands as part of how they view themselves" (Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009, p. 92). Brodie et al. (2013, p. 108) defined customer engagement in a virtual brand community as "a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral dimensions, as a result of specific interactive experiences between consumers and the brand, and/or other members of the brand community". This study used this definition because the core process of engagement is highly interactive, experiential, and based on a number of sub-processes, including "learning," "sharing," "advocating," "socializing," and "co-developing" (Brodie et al., 2013), which is a common behavior in SNS. By sharing personal experiences and influencing others and advocating focal brands, consumers may influence value-in-exchange and value-in-use (Schau et al., 2009). Based on that, the

behavioral intentions (consumer engagement) can be judged through response provided by the consumers on SNS through “likes,” “shares,” and/or “comments.” Combining the internet users’ behavioral responses toward advertising and the relationship between attitude toward advertising and behavioral intentions, the following hypothesis is developed:

- H<sub>4</sub>:** Attitude toward SNS ads is positively related to customer engagement in ad.

### The Mediating Role of Social Identity

Consumers’ responses to SNS advertising have been studied in the past, but it really picked up pace from the seminal article by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), in which they highlighted the importance of advertising on social media. (Zeng, Huang, & Dou, 2009) found that the intentions of an SNS user to accept advertising on his/her social network are influenced by both social identity and group norms. In-group attitudes as well as empathy have been showed to be influenced by group membership (Dovidio et al., 2010). Different emotional reactions to in-group and out-group members are motivated by the need to secure a positive social identity. Derks, Bos, and Von Grumbkow (2007) found that while having daily conversations, people adjust their emotions according to different social environments. This was found to be true for computer and face-to-face media, implying that social contexts remain relevant for computer-mediated communications as well as face-to-face media.

Social identity is powerful enough to make individuals behave according to the norms of the group that they identify themselves to. These norms can also shift people’s empathy. Ickes, Gesn, and Graham (2000) conducted a meta-analysis to challenge the old belief that women feel more empathic as compared to men. They showed that women may not actually empathize more than men, but they might do so because they are expected to be more empathetic by the society, according to the traditional gender roles. Women seem to be following social identity while experiencing empathy. In a different study, Thomas and Maio (2008) conducted an empathy test on two groups of men. One of the groups was told that

women found men acquainted with their feminine side to be more attractive, and the other group was not given any such information. Performance of the men who were provided such information improved on a later empathy test, pointing out that people behave according to the demand of the situation, and thus also changes their identities accordingly.

Due to the fact that individuals behave in different situations according to the identities that they manifest in those situations, they also exhibit emotions consistent with their identities (Coleman & Williams, 2013). Since empathy is an important part of emotional development (McDonald & Messinger, 2011), it is predicted that social identity will have a similar impact on feeling of empathy generated from an emotional ad appeal. Hence, the following is hypothesized:

- H<sub>5</sub>:** Empathy toward SNS ads is positively related to customer engagement in ad.  
**H<sub>6</sub>:** Social identity (with SNS friends group) positively mediates the relationship between emotional advertising appeals and empathy.

## METHODOLOGY

### Experimental Design and Procedure

A 2 (emotions: humor vs. sad) × 2 (social identity: high vs. low) between-subjects lab experimental design was adopted to conduct the study. Emotions were manipulated by showing humorous vs. sad ‘Text and Drive’ PSA advertisements to the participants. Social identity was manipulated by asking the respondents to imagine that they come across the advertisement while surfing internet (non-Facebook) vs. asking the respondents to imagine that they are watching the advertisement on Facebook which was shared/liked by some of their friends. To enhance the feeling of internet (non-Facebook) vs. Facebook, a picture of Google search website was used as the background for internet advertisement, and a picture of Facebook wall was used for Facebook advertisement. The focus of the study was Facebook because it is generally considered the most popular SNS today. In the United States itself, Facebook

accounts for 43.2% of all social media site visits (Statista, 2016b).

A total of 210 senior undergraduate students (112 males and 98 females) participated in the study, from a sampling frame of 337 students enrolled in three different courses at a mid-western public university. These students were invited in exchange for course extra credit. Students were considered an appropriate population for this study because as of February 2016, 26.6 million U.S. Facebook users were found to be between 18 and 24 years old, and 33.2 million users were between 25 and 34 years (Statista, 2016b); and most students correspond to these age brackets. In our sample, 90.5% respondents were in between 18 to 23 years of age, while 7.6% belonged to the 24 to 29 years old age bracket, and 1.9% were in the 30 to 35 years old range.

The experiment was conducted online (through Qualtrics), and the participants were provided with the link to participate, where they were required to watch the assigned advertisement, followed by a series of questions which measured their response to those advertisements, and some general questions. Participants were sent emails with formal invitations to participate in the study. After a few days, reminder emails were sent to these participants. In total, 337 students were invited to participate in the study, out of which 250 participated. Out of these 250, 35 cases were seen to have taken unreasonably more or less time to complete the survey. Further investigation of these 35 cases revealed that these cases had more than 50% of missing data, and hence were deleted (Hair et al. 2010). Out of the remaining 215, five participants claimed of not using Facebook and hence were removed, resulting in a total of 210 usable responses. So the final response rate obtained was 62.3%.

### Pretest and Manipulation Check

Perdue and Summers (1986) suggest conducting manipulation checks during pretest phase, if the participants and procedures of the pretest are similar to those of the main study, as they were in this case. Hence, participants' responses to six "Text and Drive" Public Service Advertisements (PSA) were evaluated.

Humor was used in the first three PSAs: "Todd's texting troubles," "Afterlife," and "It's not safe," to impact the attitudes of the participants toward texting and driving. On the other hand, disastrous outcomes were used for the remaining three PSAs: "by TranterGrey Media," "Highway Patrol," and "Goosebumps," to yield sad emotions in the participants toward texting and driving.

These PSAs were tested to determine whether the manipulations (humor or sad) were realistic. A convenience sample of 45 students in marketing class reviewed and evaluated the PSAs in return for extra credit. Seven-point Likert scales (anchored strongly disagree/strongly agree), with two items: "the advertisement was sad" and "the advertisement was funny" were used to collect their responses for sad and humorous advertisements, respectively. The responses for sad advertisements were reverse coded so as to anchor them as strongly agree to strongly disagree. The respondents rated PSA "It's not safe" as the most humorous (mean = 5.13) and PSA "by TranterGrey Media" as the most sad (mean = 2.22). The difference between these two means was statistically significant,  $t(44) = 8.231$ ,  $p < .001$ , supporting the manipulation. Hence, these PSAs were further used in the study as representative of two types of emotions: humorous and sad.

### Measures

Empathy was measured using the scale items developed by Escalas and Stern (2003): "While watching the ad, I experienced feeling as if the events were really happening to me;" "While watching the ad, I felt as though I were one of the characters;" "While watching the ad, I felt as though the events in the ad were happening to me;" "While watching the commercial, I experienced many of the same feelings that the characters portrayed;" and "While watching the commercial, I felt as if the characters' feelings were my own." A five items scale was modified for the present study to measure social identity (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992): "In general, belonging to social groups is an important part of my self-image;" "The social groups I belong to on Facebook are an important reflection of who I am;" "I think it is accurate if I am described as a typical member of the group that

I belong to on Facebook;” “I often acknowledge the fact that I am a member of the group on Facebook;” and “I would feel good if I were described as a typical member of the group on Facebook.” Seven-point Likert scale with endpoints as “very strongly disagree” and “very strongly agree” was used for both the measures.

Nine-point semantic differential scale items: anchored by the descriptive pairs unfavorable/favorable, negative/positive, bad/good, and no liking/liked a lot (Coulter, 1998) were used to measure attitude toward ad. Engagement in ad was measured by asking “How likely are you to like/share/comment on the advertisement on your Facebook?” Seven-point semantic differential scales with items: anchored by unlikely/likely, definitely not/definitely, and probably not/probably (Taute et al., 2011) were used to collect their responses. Demographic questions were also included at the end of the survey.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### Measure Validation

As suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), validity of the measures was tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Although the chi square statistic was significant ( $\chi^2 = 169.62$ , d.f. = 108,  $p = .00$ ), other fit indices were also considered. The comparative fit index (CFI = .98), goodness-of-fit index (GFI = .92), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = .97), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = .05), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR = .04) indicated a satisfactory overall fit.

CFA results are shown in Table 1. These results add support for the convergent validity for all the measures. For the underlying constructs, all estimated loadings of indicators come out to be positive and significant. As reported, composite reliability of all the constructs is more than the .7 benchmark (Nunnally, 1978), with

**TABLE 1:**  
**Measurement**

| Construct           | Items   | Factor loadings | Composite reliability |
|---------------------|---|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Empathy             | While watching the ad, I experienced feeling as if the events were really happening to me               | 0.78            | 0.95                  |
|                     | While watching the ad, I felt as though I were one of the characters.                                   | 0.83            |                       |
|                     | While watching the ad, I felt as though the events in the ad were happening to me.                      | 0.84            |                       |
|                     | While watching the commercial, I experienced many of the same feelings that the characters portrayed    | 0.89            |                       |
|                     | While watching the commercial, I felt as if the characters' feelings were my own.                       | 0.76            |                       |
| Attitude towards Ad | Unfavorable/Favorable   | 0.88            | 0.85                  |
|                     | Negative/Positive   | 0.68            |                       |
|                     | Bad/Good  | 0.81            |                       |
|                     | No liking/Liked a lot   | 0.93            |                       |
| Social Identity     | In general, belonging to social groups is an important part of my self-image.                           | 0.69            | 0.94                  |
|                     | The social groups I belong to on Facebook are an important reflection of who I am.                      | 0.83            |                       |
|                     | I think it is accurate if I am described as a typical member of the group that I belong to on Facebook. | 0.93            |                       |
|                     | I often acknowledge the fact that I am a member of the group on Facebook.                               | 0.80            |                       |
| Engagement          | I would feel good if I were described as a typical member of the group on Facebook.                     | 0.82            | 0.96                  |
|                     | Unlikely/Likely   | 0.91            |                       |
|                     | Definitely not/Definitely   | 0.96            |                       |
|                     | Probably not/Probably   | 0.96            |                       |

minimum value being .85. As Table 2 shows, the average variance extracted (AVE) across the constructs is more than the .5 threshold (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The data also supported discriminant validity of the measures. The estimated AVE of each measure were compared with the squared inter-construct correlation (Fornell and Larcker 1981). In all cases, the AVEs were found to exceed the squared inter-construct correlations, confirming the discriminant validity of the constructs. The descriptive statistics and correlations for the constructs are provided in table 2.

**Hypotheses Testing**

Hypotheses were tested using AMOS 22.0 (see Table 3). Results of the model demonstrate acceptable fit (CFI=.98, IFI=.98, TLI=.97, RMSEA=.05,  $\chi^2/df$  ratio=1.53,  $\chi^2 = 189.77$ ,  $df=124$ ,  $p=.00$ ). Emotional appeals negatively influence empathy ( $t=-2.73$ ,  $R^2=-.20$   $p<.01$ ). In other words, emotional appeals have a positive impact on empathy, but as emotional appeal changes from sad to humorous (sad appeals were coded as 1 and humorous as 2),

consumers have less empathy, thus supporting H<sub>1</sub>. H<sub>2</sub> is also supported with emotional appeal positively related to attitude ( $t=3.86$ ,  $R^2=.26$   $p<.001$ ). Consistent with prior research (Taute et al., 2011), empathy significantly influences attitude toward ad ( $t=5.44$ ,  $R^2=.43$   $p<.001$ ), and attitude toward ad significantly influences engagement in the ad ( $t=4.10$ ,  $R^2=.30$   $p<.001$ ), supporting H<sub>3</sub> and H<sub>4</sub> respectively. It was hypothesized that empathy should be a significant predictor of engagement (H5), which is confirmed as indicated by the significant positive relationship between these two measures ( $t=2.70$ ,  $R^2=.21$   $p<.01$ ).

To find further support for H<sub>1</sub>, one-way ANOVA was conducted on emotional appeals. Results showed that the participants who were exposed to sad appeal exhibited higher empathy than participants who were exposed to humorous appeal ( $F(1, 208) = 7.237$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $M_{Sad} = 4.387$  vs  $M_{Humor} = 3.857$ ;  $\sigma_{Sad} = 1.492$  vs  $\sigma_{Humor} = 1.357$ ), with an effect size of .183.

To establish the role of social identity as a mediator, four conditions were tested separately

**TABLE 2:**  
**Descriptive Statistics: Construct Means, Standard Deviations, AVEs, and Correlations (N= 210)**

|    | Construct           | Mean | SD   | X1   | X2   | X3   | X4   |
|----|---------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| X1 | Empathy             | 4.12 | 1.45 | 0.67 | 0.14 | 0.06 | 0.12 |
| X2 | Attitude towards Ad | 6.64 | 1.78 | 0.38 | 0.69 | 0.01 | 0.16 |
| X3 | Social Identity     | 3.72 | 1.49 | 0.25 | 0.11 | 0.67 | 0.07 |
| X4 | Engagement          | 4.48 | 2.47 | 0.34 | 0.40 | 0.26 | 0.90 |

Note: Average variance estimates are on the diagonal  
 : Correlations are below the diagonal  
 : Squared correlations are above the diagonal

**TABLE 3:**  
**Hypotheses testing: H<sub>1</sub> – H<sub>5</sub>**

| Hypotheses                                 | SEM       |         |
|--|-----------|---------|
|  | Estimates | t-value |
| Base Model                                 |           |         |
| Emotional Appeal → Empathy (H1)            | -0.20**   | -2.73   |
| Emotional Appeal → Attitude toward Ad (H2) | 0.26***   | 3.86    |
| Empathy → Attitude toward Ad (H3)          | 0.43***   | 5.44    |
| Attitude toward Ad → Engagement (H4)       | 0.30***   | 4.10    |
| Empathy → Engagement (H5)                  | 0.21**    | 2.70    |

\*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

without taking the whole model into account (table 4): (1) Influence of empathy (predictor variable) on the mediator social identity; (2) influence of social identity on engagement (dependent variable) ; (3) influence of the predictor variable, empathy on the dependent variable, engagement; and (4) the impact of empathy on engagement (which should either be no longer significant or should be reduced in strength), after controlling for the mediator variable, social identity (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

As it can be seen in table 4, the first three conditions were met by the model. That is, empathy positively affects social identity ( $t=3.30$ ,  $R^2=.26$   $p<.001$ ), and social identity positively affects engagement ( $t=2.26$ ,  $R^2=.16$   $p<.05$ ). Furthermore, empathy has a positive impact on engagement ( $t=4.71$ ,  $R^2=.36$   $p<.001$ ). For the fourth condition, impact of empathy on engagement reduced ( $t=4.71$ ,  $R^2=.36$  versus  $t=4.10$ ,  $R^2=.31$ ) after controlling for social identity, which demonstrates partial mediation by social identity (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010).

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Although prior research has studied the impact of different emotions on consumers (Zhang et al., 2014), it remains unclear how consumers perceive and react to emotional appeals in a social setting (Ngai et al., 2015), and how firms can use this information to improve their advertising strategies (Knoll, 2016). This study addresses this gap by examining the impact of sad and humorous advertising appeals on

consumers using four different scenarios in an experimental study grounded in the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985) and Appraisal Theory (Scherer, 1997).

Based on that, the goal of this study was to determine the effect emotional advertising appeals (sad vs. humorous), as they relate to empathy and customer engagement. In line with previous research, it was found that negative emotions (leads by sad emotional appeals) lead to more empathy as compared to happy emotions (leads by humorous emotional appeals) (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994; Small & Verrochi, 2009). The findings support the theoretical assumptions posed by prosocial behavior theoretician that consumers can respond, in a wide variety of ways, to negative and positive emotions used in advertising appeals (Zhang et al., 2014). These findings also indicate that emotional appeal has a direct and indirect effect (through empathy) on consumers' attitude toward ads. Those findings support the arguments from the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977), that suggest that an individual's behavioral intentions are formed by his/her attitude. Defining attitude as the propensity to respond in a certain way to specific stimuli, our results demonstrated that empathy significantly influences attitude toward ad, which is consistent with findings of Taute et al. (2011) and Lwin and Phau (2013).

In addition, the findings of the present study show that social identity partially mediates the relationship between empathy and engagement. As expected, the findings indicate that

**TABLE 4:**  
**Hypotheses testing for Mediation: H<sub>6</sub>**

| Hypotheses                                  | SEM       |         |
|---|-----------|---------|
|   | Estimates | t-value |
| Main effect                                 |           |         |
| Empathy → Engagement                        | 0.36***   | 4.71    |
| Social Identity Mediation (H <sub>6</sub> ) |           |         |
| Empathy → Social Identity                   | 0.26***   | 3.30    |
| Social Identity → Engagement                | 0.16*     | 2.26    |
| Empathy → Engagement                        | 0.31***   | 4.10    |

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

consumers' social identities with their friends' group becomes salient after feeling empathetic toward an emotional ad and before engaging (i.e. liking/sharing/commenting) with that ad on social networking site. These findings support theoretical assertions from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985) which suggest that individuals think of themselves as one and the same to their social group, and they see members of their group as indistinguishable to each other. Social identity is powerful enough to make individuals behave according to the norms of the group that they identify themselves to. These results also complement a previous research that has shown how consumer's purchases are influenced by friends in the context of social media (Jung et al., 2016; Schau et al., 2009), which includes a high valuation of promotional message, when the message is sent by a friend rather than a brand (Wallace et al., 2014).

Finally, the contributions of this research advance current research in the area of advertising on social networking sites by offering a significant finding. The present research demonstrates that emotional appeal (with greater incidence of sad appeal) has a positive impact on empathy as well as attitude toward ad, which in turn have a positive impact on engagement. Also, the result that social identity mediates the relationship between empathy and engagement on social networking sites demonstrates that individuals tend to adjust their emotional responses according to different social environments with a strong emphasis on the norms of the group they feel belong to.

These findings are congruent with the postulates of Appraisal Theory (Scherer, 1997) which suggest that empathy, as emotional response, could be influenced by the psychological states of an observer (in this case generated by using emotional appeal in SNS ad). Also, the findings are consistent with the claims of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985) that suggest that any emotion, perception, and attitude could be buffered or magnified depending upon the influence of the social group of reference.

## Managerial Implications

The findings of this study are managerially useful. The finding that sad emotional appeal has a greater effect on empathy than humorous appeal on SNS, which leads to attitude formation and finally engagement, indicates that sad advertising executions are more effective to create engagement toward emotional ads, than humorous advertising executions. To expand the possibility that consumers will engage in an ad, advertisers should create ads that effectively generate empathy amongst consumers, and should find ways to boast their social identities, which will make them express their feelings on SNS. Based on this recommendation, the main focus for marketing managers should be to encourage interactivity amongst consumers by creating online brand communities, posting advertisement, and leading interactive activities on those communities, such as contests, positioning hashtags, among others. Using this strategy, marketing managers could generate more participation among consumers about the promotional message, which then can enhance social identity of the advertisement audience, which in turn can enhance their engagement in those ads. As a chain reaction, more and more consumers can be inclined to buy a product/service, followed by sharing it on SNS, because it will serve as a reinforcement to their individual identity. The consumer inclination to buy a product/service, because of their feeling of empathy with the SNS ad, combined with their fortified social identity, suggests that an advertising strategy that is well-conceived and designed in a way that increases likes, comments and shares on SNS will eventually be successful.

## Limitations and Future Research

The current study has several limitations. First, the experimental manipulations that were conducted might not have evoked much involvement from participants, as would have been in a real setting, and thus their responses to the manipulations may be substantially weaker than their actual experience. Second, a manipulation check for social identity was not conducted, which if done, could have given a better perspective on the scenario. Third, though a random assignment was done while

conducting the experiment, yet interviewing and debriefing the participants afterwards could have revealed any suspicions or unexpected thoughts that they might have developed about the purpose of the study. Fourth, the current study focusses only on one SNS (Facebook). Future research can be conducted on other sites like Instagram or twitter, which might yield different results, based on the style or format of their application. Fifth, though a demographic distinction of SNS consumers has been made in the current study, yet it would have helped to get a psychographic distinction of the consumers as well. Finally, we used the same items to measure social identity, as well as engagement, for all the participants (i.e. the ones watching the ad on Facebook and the ones watching on internet). Since the items for both these constructs included references to Facebook, they might have influenced the response of the participants who watched the ad on Facebook. Further research can be conducted to take care of this issue by modifying the items according to the context in order to avoid any possible bias in participants' responses.

Based on the results of the study, it is found that people process emotional information differently for different type of appeals used (sad vs. humor), while watching emotional advertisements, and to some degree, use such information to form attitudes toward the ad, or/and empathize with the ad, and accordingly engage in the ad. Social identity plays an important role as consumers' engagement with ads on SNS can occur depending on their shared identities with the group members. Further study and replication would be required, however, and should enhance our understanding of how and under what conditions do these emotions enhance or repress the effect on advertising responses on SNS. This should advance advertising managers' recognition and appreciation of expansive value of emotional appeals and thus enhance advertising effectiveness.

Though use of student sample should not pose much threat to generalizability, since the participated students' age group is the most vulnerable to the type of PSA used (text and drive), and also to the type of social setting

used (Facebook), yet future research could be conducted on the general population considering that students might not actually represent the consumer population (Greenberg, 1987). Further research can also be conducted by testing the same hypotheses using qualitative research, as qualitative research can reveal some important motives behind engaging or disengaging on social networking sites. Interviews can be conducted with participants, and their internal feelings toward this whole idea of emotional advertisements on social networking can be understood in depth.

Future research can also be conducted using data from different countries as culture might play a role here in two different ways (Hofstede, 1991). First, consumers from different countries might be more empathetic toward different emotional appeals depending on their cultures. Second, social identity might change the role depending upon independent versus interdependent consumers (Hofstede, 1991).

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## SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT MITIGATES AD DECAY EFFECTS FOR SUPER BOWL ADVERTISEMENTS

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*The confluence between social media engagement and brand television advertising during the 2016 National Football League Super Bowl championship broadcast was the focus of this study. The impact of social media upon recall of mass media, be it free recall or aided recall, was investigated and analyzed. While limited to only the mass media surrounding one Super Bowl and the associated social media, it was learned that social media's positive impact upon recall was limited to corrected aided recall, and not free recall. Further research involving other, traditional mass media, social media, metrics, and audiences is suggested in order for firms to maximize the Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI) of their promotional campaigns.*

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### INTRODUCTION

In what has become akin to a national holiday, an average of nearly 112 million Americans tuned in to watch the Super Bowl on February 7, 2016, making it the third most watched broadcast in television history (Pallotta and Stelter, 2016). The actual number of people who saw the 50th playing of the championship football game, however, was undoubtedly much larger. The numbers provided by research giant Nielsen do not include viewers outside of their homes, such as individuals watching at a party, bar or restaurant, and those viewing the event online. These basic metrics do not end with viewers, but carry over to advertising dollars with companies paying lavish amounts – \$5 million for a thirty-second spot – to run television commercials during the game, an increase of nearly 14% from 2015. The \$345.4 million total spending on Super Bowl commercials in 2016 was up from \$331.8 million spent the prior year, excluding the development and production costs associated with creating the ads making the total outlay even greater (Vrancia, 2016).

Companies continue to pour advertising money into the event, in spite of the rising costs. As reported in USA Today, Kantor Media notes the top five Super Bowl advertisers over the past decade are Anheuser-Busch InBev, Pepsi Co, Coca-Cola, Fiat Chrysler, and General Motors (Woodyard, 2016). Some of these

companies use the Super Bowl to anchor their annual media campaigns. For other companies, however, Super Bowl commercials are a significant amount of the annual advertising budget, as was the case with the two spots aired in 2007 by shirt maker Phillips-Van Heusen. The first-time Super Bowl advertiser spent about \$5.2 million for the event as compared to a total spend of \$2 million for 2005 and \$700,000 during the first three quarters of 2006 (Thompson, 2007).

But why all the interest from advertisers and what makes advertising during the Super Bowl relevant? The Super Bowl attracts more media attention for its commercials than any other annual event in the United States (Tomkovick, Yelkur and Christians, 2001). A company advertising during the Super Bowl is guaranteed a large audience by teaming up with the National Football League (NFL), arguably the most successful sports franchise in the United States. In fact, twenty (20) of the fifty (50) most valuable sport teams in the United States are NFL franchises; the next most successful sport is Major League Baseball with twelve (12) teams (Badenhausen, 2015).

Commercials during the Super Bowl have become a cultural phenomenon that has remained powerful in a backdrop of changing media channels and varying consumer attitudes towards television advertising. “Super Bowl ads get people talking – good or bad,” says author and branding consultant Erika Napoletano. “Every commercial finds its lovers and haters, and either way, they’ll talk” (Woodyard, 2016). The ad viewing during the game has become a

fundamental part of watching the event with prior publicity, postgame discussions, and analysis by a variety of means, most notably the *USA Today* Ad Meter (Chong, Filbeck, and Tompkins, 2007). “Several studies have proven that 50% of the Super Bowl audience tunes in just to watch the ads,” writes advertising executive and Super Bowl commercial veteran Rob Siltanen. “The PR value and the ‘replay value’ of a great Super Bowl spot alone can be worth the game’s high media cost” (Siltanen, 2014).

In analyzing the relationship between the Super Bowl advertising and stock prices, Raithel, Taylor, and Hock, (2016) found such large expenditures can be worth the money in selected circumstances, such as when the advertisements enhance customer-based brand equity. Super Bowl advertising, however, is not without a substantial amount of risk. A poorly received ad or a commercial that receives a low rating can result in substantial losses. New research from Stanford University suggests that not all Super Bowl ads generate sales gains, especially when there are two brands of the same product type advertising during the same game. “When two major soda brands both advertise, they receive no profit gain to offset their advertising investments,” reports Stanford Marketing Professor Wesley Hartmann (Parker, 2015). A past analysis conducted by research firm Communicus has suggested that 80% of the commercials do not result in increased sales (Neff, 2014). Though a company may not receive an increase in sales if they advertise when a competitor advertises during the Super Bowl, they do run the risk of losing market share if they do not advertise when a competitor chooses to advertise during the Super Bowl.

Paralleling the growth of Super Bowl viewership has been the popularity of social media in the United States. Social media has transformed the ways in which consumers are able to communicate. Nearly 70% of adults are now regular social media users, up from about 25% only a decade ago, with the number spanning all key demographic characteristics, including income, gender, location, and race (Pew, 2017). Dominated by Facebook and its 191 million domestic users (Statista, 2017), the social media landscape includes a host of smaller firms, such as Twitter, Instagram,

Snapchat, and Pinterest. Essentially a platform for connecting people with other individuals, news, information, and entertainment, social media networks have strong implications for advertising, especially when used as part of an integrated plan with more traditional forms of marketing. Companies now utilize social media for a growing number of marketing objectives, including research, branding, promotions, and customer relationship management (Ashley and Tuten, 2015).

The focus of this study is to better understand how traditional media and social media can work together to better benefit brands. All advertisements experience ad decay, which is a decreased awareness in the consumer’s mind and thus lose its effectiveness over time. The current study investigates if social media engagement with the advertisements has the potential to slow down the rate of ad decay in consumers’ minds. Does interacting with an advertisement on social media (i.e., viewing the advertisement again, liking or sharing the advertisement content) help to reduce the effects of ad decay? This study seeks to investigate the relationship between traditional advertising during the Super Bowl broadcast and social media engagement with the advertisements prior to and after the Super Bowl.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Various hierarchical models of communication have been developed to better understand the response route a consumer goes through in moving from the initial learning stage, such as seeing an ad for the first time, to the final stage, such as purchasing the product. These models simultaneously look at how the marketing efforts influence the consumer response. The AIDA model represents the steps that a salesperson goes through during the personal selling process (Strong, 1925). The model views the response process as grabbing the prospect’s attention, stimulating his interest in the product, building the individual’s desire that ultimately leads to the consumer taking the action of buying the product.

The innovation adoption model is an outgrowth of previous research done on diffusion of innovation, which represents the series of steps

a consumer passes through when adopting a new product (Rogers, 1962). The model views the consumer response route beginning with awareness and proceeding to the stages of interest, evaluation, and trial, ultimately ending with the adoption of the product. The information processing model views the consumer as a processor of persuasive communications (McGuire, 1978). The consumer responds using the following route: presentation, attention, comprehension, yielding, retention, and behavior. These various models demonstrate there are several steps that a consumer passes through in order to reach the ultimate goal of purchasing a product. Advertising and marketing can exert an influence on the steps outlined in each of these models. A critical follow-up to all of the above models focuses on whether the advertising message can be recalled by the consumer.

If advertising is to have a positive impact upon the marketing function and be financially effective, its message must be retained over an extended period of time. If the ad is forgotten before a meaningful psychological impact is accomplished the ad impact will be minimal (White and Miles, 1996). Laskey and colleagues argue, “the effectiveness of a commercial depends on whether consumers remember the message, understand it, are persuaded by it, and, of course, ultimately buy the advertised product” (Laskey, Fox, & Crask, 1995, p. 33).

Marketers implicitly assume the effects of television advertising dissipate over time but debates remain regarding the rate of *decay* and impact upon viewer recall. The assumption that advertising can influence consumer decision-making over an extended period of time and not immediately drop to a level that would exist without advertising is well accepted. The total effect of advertising as it is spread out over time is referred to the *decay effect* (Lee et al., 1989). Because there is typically a lag between consumers’ exposure to advertising and their opportunity to purchase the advertised brand, significant research regarding advertising decay, and methods by which decay can be minimized, has been conducted but with varied results. But the fact that decay has a significant impact upon the timing and spacing of advertising cannot be argued (Strong, 1977).

Memory fades due to the passage of time (Thorndike, 1914). Appel (1971) finds that advertising effectiveness also changes over time and there is an increase in recall followed by steady decline. Time-dependent decay and consumer response to advertising is of obvious interest to marketers resulting in mathematical models such as those produced by Zielske and Henry (1980) suggesting that about 9% of the people who can recall an ad in week  $t$  will have forgotten the ad by week  $t + 1$ . This assumption is also inherent in the MEDIAC model among others (Gensch, 1973; Little and Lodish, 1969; Ward, 1976). Krugman (1972) argues that continued advertising is needed as consumers filter advertising messages but must have them available when ready to make a purchase. Greenberg and Suttoni (1973) find that ads for infrequently purchased products decay slower than those for more frequently purchased items. Up to 90% of advertising effects dissipate after 3-15 months (Assmus, Farley, and Lehmann, 1984).

Other researchers have studied advertising decay in the form of recency planning (Ephrussi, 1997), and adstock modeling (Broadbent, 1979; Goerlich, 2001). Even econometricians have tried to derive advertising lag from econometric analysis (Bass and Clarke, 1972; Berkowitz, Allaway and D’Souza, 2001). Some have used laboratory and case studies to measure how long lasting advertising is and how it relates to specific cognitive processes (Cook and Flay, 1978; Hutchinson and Moor, 1984; King and Tinkham, 1990).

Information presented in an ad may be retained by consumers at various levels of memory but the information content of the ad retained by the market declines over time (Assael, 1992). While Keller (1987) found through a laboratory experiment that advertising retrieval cues facilitated access of elements from ad memory and subsequently affected brand recall and evaluations, it has also been found that competitive ad interference and consumer processing goals during the ad exposure also affected both consumer ad memory and brand evaluations (Groza, 2015). Previous work by Bagozzi and Silk (1983), Bettman (1979), Percy and Rossiter (1980) and Sawyer (1974) link ad recall to the amount of ad interference

caused by competitive ads within the same category.

Tellis et al. (2000) developed a model for the effects of television advertising for a toll-free referral service at the hourly level. They find that while ads do stimulate direct response, ad effectiveness dissipates very rapidly and that ad effectiveness varies by ad creative, the station on which the ad is aired, and the time of day it is aired. However, it was found that much of an ad's effect dissipated within eight hours of exposure and that prior studies exaggerate the duration of an ad's effectiveness. Tellis et al. (2005) again find that advertising decays very rapidly with most effects dissipating within eight hours and peak carryover effect occurring in the current hour for daytime advertising but in latter hours for morning advertising.

Hill et al. (2008) in their work with respect to advertising effectiveness and presidential campaigns find that 50-75% of advertising effectiveness dissipates within the first week and nearly all is gone by the end of the second week. Gerber et al. (2007) find similar results surrounding political campaigns with advertising effectiveness lasting only one day. Gelman and King (1993), however, argue that longer campaigns may have a cumulative education effect. But while some voters are capable of long-term learning, the conditions necessary to produce such learning is rare. Gerber et al. (2011) argue that with regard to campaign ads, within just a week or two advertising effectiveness has all but worn off. On the other hand, advertising may have an impact on Consumer-Based Brand Equity over a period of years (Loftus and Loftus, 1980). In their work involving online advertising, Havlena and Graham (2004) found a "measurable but weak relationship between time since last exposure and branding effectiveness" (p. 327). Thus, what effect can social media have on traditional advertising? That is, can engagement through social media reduce the effects of ad decay or does it perhaps speed up the process? In the next section, the hypotheses are developed situating social media engagement with traditional advertising mediums.

## Social Media

Social media platforms allow enormous amounts of information to be dispensed at near real-time speeds through a combination of online and mobile devices. The unprecedented surge of social media users has changed the way individuals interact with others, share information, and interrelate with companies of all types. Social media is a formidable tool among consumers because people often trust others more than mass marketing communications fostering what can essentially be considered an electronic version of word of mouth advertising (Goldsmith, 2008; Kim, Sung, and Kang, 2014).

Social media outlets give companies the opportunity to distribute marketing messages to both mass audiences and smaller targeted key groups of consumers (Wallace, Wilson, and Miloch, 2011; Pegoraro, 2010). The more precise targeting coupled with fast response time allows marketers to create more advertising impressions in the same amount of time than with the more traditional advertising medium of television (Fulgoni and Lipsman, 2014).

Past research has linked growing brand awareness with consumers and companies with a large social media presence (Kwon and Sung, 2011). Research suggests that marketing managers are increasingly relying on social media for newsgathering, creativity, and entertainment to better understand and target individual customer needs (Killian and McManus, 2015). With multi-tasking during television viewing events – such as with the Super Bowl – commonplace, marketers need to better understand audience behavior and determine how to best use social media as part of an integrated marketing plan.

## Ad Memory

Assessing a consumer's ad memory is routine in advertising research. It helps to evaluate the advertising effectiveness of each advertisement. Ad memory has been shown to be linked to brand knowledge, attitude, likeability, trust, and purchase intention (Ambler and Burne, 1999; Keller, 1987; Shen and Chen, 2006). Ad memory is a quantitative measure assessing

consumer's recall and recognition. Moorman and colleagues (2007) through a thorough content analysis suggest and utilize in their own studies the measures of free recall, corrected aided recall, and proven recall to best capture a consumer's ad memory. Free recall is defined as the ability to remember advertisements without any prompting or cues. Corrected aid recall is correctly identifying the advertisements (and receiving negative points whenever a wrong advertisement is chosen). Proven recall is defined as the ability to mention one or more specific elements about the advertisement when given the chance to provide a response. Thus based on the literature review, the following hypotheses are put forth:

- H<sub>1</sub>:** Free recall of advertisements will be lower after the two-week delay than the day after the Super Bowl.
- H<sub>2</sub>:** Corrected aided recall of advertisements will be lower after the two-week delay than the day after the Super Bowl.

### Social Media Advertisement Engagement

Ideally, brands want consumers to engage with their advertisements. The belief is that engaged consumers will be more likely to attend to – and process – the advertising and in turn, talk more highly about the brands (Wang, 2006). Social media provides platforms for consumers to be engaged with the advertisements. They have the opportunity to share their views about brand advertisements through word-of-mouth and thus potentially influence the sales (Keller and Fay, 2012). When an advertiser is able to invoke higher levels of emotional engagement in a consumer, it has been shown to yield more online buzz (Seifert et al., 2009). Thus, social media advertisement engagement is defined as the ability to connect with and share traditional television advertisements on social media.

Consumers enjoy interacting on social media via their smartphone or tablet while watching television; this idea is termed as “social TV” (Deighton and Kornfeld, 2013). The Super Bowl broadcast allows the potential for this interaction between social media and traditional television advertising. In 2016, twenty-seven (27) of the fifty (50) advertisements had hashtags embedded in the commercials, encouraging viewers to share and discuss the

advertisements. The “sharing” of advertisements allows marketers to monitor social media and perhaps, increase the effectiveness of the television message through the volume of mentions and/or the sentiment analysis of the advertisement (Deighton and Kornfeld, 2013). Consumers provide color commentary in real time along with the Super Bowl advertisements being broadcasted. With Twitter's acquisition of Bluefin Labs, there is possibility to monitor the social media data to see how consumers are responding to the advertisements and thus evaluate its effectiveness.

Announcements of Super Bowl advertisements through traditional media sources influence post-game online social conversations (Nail, 2007). Nail (2007) find that prior to the big game, firms made formal announcements indicating they would have a Super Bowl commercial. The advertisers who announced early and promoted their affiliation with the Super Bowl experience higher postgame coverage and discussion (Nail, 2007). Thus, social media advertisement engagement was increased through the pre-game announcement setting the stage for the postgame coverage.

One way, beyond just announcing a forthcoming advertisement, to perhaps increase engagement with consumers is through the act of pre-releasing advertisements. Essentially, the options for Super Bowl advertising brands is to pre-release the full ad, provide a teaser ad, or wait until the Super Bowl to reveal their ad. The act of pre-releasing Super Bowl advertisements began in 2011 when Volkswagen's “The Force” Super Bowl commercial could be seen on YouTube the Wednesday before the Super Bowl (Sanburn, 2015). Volkswagen as a pioneer paved the way and marked a fundamental shift in Super Bowl campaigns as the potential for social media advertisement engagement could be realized even before the Super Bowl aired. In 2016, four days before the Super Bowl on February 3, thirteen (13) brands had already pre-released their full Super Bowl commercial. Thus, building on prior research on pregame releases and the effect on social media advertisement engagement, H<sub>3</sub> and H<sub>4</sub> are proposed as:

- H<sub>3</sub>:** Free recall of advertisements will demonstrate less decay for those

respondents who engaged with the Super Bowl advertisements on social media platforms before the Super Bowl.

- H<sub>4</sub>:** Corrected aided recall of advertisements will demonstrate less decay for those respondents who engaged with the Super Bowl advertisements on social media platforms before the Super Bowl.

Following the Super Bowl, consumers have the opportunity to continue to interact with the advertisements. Companies and consumer-created videos of the Super Bowl advertisements are easily shown and distributed through multiple social media platforms (e.g., YouTube). Therefore, consumers have the opportunity to view again, like, and share amongst their social networks. Nail (2007) indicates three-quarters of the social media discussion surrounding Super Bowl advertisements occurred after the game. We therefore suggest the following hypotheses:

- H<sub>5</sub>:** Free recall of advertisements will demonstrate less decay for those respondents who engaged with the Super Bowl advertisements on social media platforms between the day after the Super Bowl and two weeks after.
- H<sub>6</sub>:** Corrected aided recall of advertisements will demonstrate less decay for those respondents who engaged with the Super Bowl advertisements on social media platforms between the day after the Super Bowl and two weeks after.

## METHOD

### Sample

Student volunteers in a marketing principles class at a large Midwestern U.S. university participated in the study for extra credit. The study was conducted at two different points in time (the day after the Super Bowl and two weeks following the Super Bowl). The Super Bowl broadcast occurred on February 7, 2016. One hundred eighty-two (182) respondents who watched Super Bowl commercials during the broadcast completed both surveys at both Time 1 (day after the Super Bowl) and Time 2 (two weeks following the Super Bowl).

A screening question as the first question in the

survey, asked the respondents to indicate the amount of commercials they viewed during the Super Bowl broadcast. The screening question was asked as follows: What proportion of Super Bowl 50 commercials did you see during the game on February 7, 2016? The choice options were: "I saw none of the commercials", "I saw less than half of the commercials", "I saw half of the commercials", "I saw more than half of the commercials", and "I saw all of the commercials". Respondents who chose "I saw none of the commercials" were taken to the end of the survey and not included in this analysis.

Just over 58 percent of the respondents were male, and 58.7 percent of the respondents were White/Caucasian, 9.5 percent indicated they were African American, 16.2 percent were Hispanic, and 13.4 chose Asian as their ethnicity. Finally, 2.3 percent of the respondents preferred not to answer. Being single and never married made up the majority of respondents at 90 percent. Participants were subsequently questioned regarding their social media usage. Approximately 1.7 percent of the respondents indicated they did not check their social media accounts daily. Respondents who checked their accounts once a day accounted for 8.4 percent of the sample. Thirty-three percent of respondents checked their accounts 2-5 times per day. Respondents who checked their accounts 6-10 times a day accounted for 21.8 percent of the sample. Roughly, 20.1 percent checked their social media accounts 11-20 times per day. Approximately, 7.3 percent of respondents answered they checked their accounts 21-29 times a day. Some respondents revealed they checked their social media accounts over 30 times a day, accounting 7.8 percent of the sample.

### Measures

Due to the design of the study being longitudinal (desires to capture the decay in advertisements), time is an independent variable. Social media-ad engagement (SM-ad engagement) is used as an independent variable. Respondents were asked if they interacted with any commercials on any social media platforms before/after the Super Bowl broadcast. Before the Super Bowl broadcast, 73 (40% of the sample) respondents engaged with the Super Bowl ads on social media before the

actual television advertisement was aired during the broadcast. During the two weeks following the Super Bowl broadcast, 51 (28% of the sample) respondents engaged with the Super Bowl ads on various social media platforms. The dependent variables will be discussed next.

Free recall was measured by asking respondents in an open-ended question to list which advertisers had a commercial during the 2016 Super Bowl broadcast. No cues were provided and thus this measure of free recall was the first measure asked in the survey (similar to Moorman, Neijens, and Smit, 2007; Moorman et al., 2012).

Corrected aided recall involves creating a score for each respondent by taking the number of correctly recalled ads minus the number of falsely recalled ads (Moorman et al., 2007; Moorman et al., 2012). The corrected aided recall measure was chosen to rule out the possibility for guessing and false positives by the respondents (Slater, 2004; Smith and Graesser, 1981). A list of 20 brands was presented to the respondents in which half (10) of the ads appeared during the Super Bowl and the other half did not present advertisements during the Super Bowl. Respondents were given the option to choose which brands advertised during the Super Bowl. The respondents were not aware there were only ten correct answers. False brands were chosen as direct competitors of correct brands and which compete in the same industry and product category. For example, if an advertisement for T-Mobile aired during the Super Bowl, Verizon was offered as a false brand to present to the respondents. The correct brands which aired a Super Bowl commercial are as follows with the false brand presented in the parentheses: Advil (Tylenol), Axe (Old Spice), Colgate (Crest), Dollar Shave Club (Harry's), Marmot (Patagonia), McDonald's (Jack in the Box), Persil ProClean (Tide), Skittles Mars, Inc. (Reese's Hershey), T-Mobile (Verizon), and TurboTax Intuit (H&R Block).

All twenty brands (ten correct and ten false) were pre-tested by using the Brand Awareness scale adapted from Yoo et al. (2000) and Netemeyer et al. (2004). The following five items were included in the pre-test for all

twenty brands: "I can recognize (brand X) among other competing brands", "I am aware of (brand X)", "Some characteristics of (brand X) come to my mind quickly", "I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of (brand X)", and "I have difficulty in imagining (brand X) in my mind" ( $r$ ). Additionally, respondents were given the opportunity "please list any competitors you know of for *brand X*". All of the false brands chosen by the research team were validated through the pre-test as respondents indicated the advertising Super Bowl brand as direct competitors of each of the false brands.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The first hypothesis states Super Bowl advertisements will experience a decay effect in consumer's free recall and thus the consumer will recall less brands two weeks after the Super Bowl (Time 2) than the day after the Super Bowl (Time 1). A repeated-measures analysis of variances (ANOVA) compared the means. The sphericity assumption was not met and thus requiring Greenhouse-Geisser correction for degrees of freedom. The main effect of time of measurement was not significant  $F(1, 178) = .52$ , n.s. Free recall of advertisements two weeks after the Super Bowl ( $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 3.03$ ) does not differ significantly from the free recall of advertisement the day after the Super Bowl ( $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = 2.85$ , n.s.) and  $H_1$  was not supported.

The second hypothesis states the decay in consumer's aided recall of Super Bowl advertisements will be higher two weeks after the Super Bowl (Time 2) than the day after the Super Bowl (Time 1), that is respondents will be able to correctly recognize and identify less brands as time goes on. The sphericity assumption was not met and thus requiring Greenhouse-Geisser correction for degrees of freedom. The main effect of time was significant  $F(1, 178) = 5.43$ ,  $p < .05$ . Correctly being able to recall advertisements that occurred during the Super Bowl after a two week delay ( $M = .83$ ,  $SD = 2.14$ ) was significantly lower than the corrected aided recall of Super Bowl advertisements the day after ( $M = .52$ ,  $SD = 2.07$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Thus,  $H_2$  was supported. Table 1 contains the means and standard deviations for the effects of ad decay.

To test H<sub>3</sub>, we conducted a mixed-model repeated-measures ANOVA of the influence of time on the free recall with SM-ad engagement with the advertisements before the Super Bowl broadcast as a between-subjects factor. Consumers who engaged with Super Bowl advertisements before the Super Bowl broadcast and at Time 1 (M = 3.19, SD = 3.02) revealed similar free recall scores as to those consumers who did not interact with any advertisements on social media before the Super Bowl broadcast (M = 2.85, SD = 3.26). Additionally, at Time 2 consumers who engaged with Super Bowl advertisements on social media since the Super Bowl broadcast (M = 3.01, SD = 2.49) did not reveal significant differences from those consumers who have not engaged with any advertisements from the Super Bowl on social media (M = 2.49, SD = 3.04). Thus, the decay of consumer’s free recall of advertisements after a two week delay was not enhanced through engaging with the Super Bowl advertisements on social media before the Super Bowl  $F(1, 136) = 1.21$ , n.s. and H<sub>3</sub> was not supported.

To investigate H<sub>4</sub>, we conducted a mixed-model repeated-measures ANOVA of the

influence of time on the corrected aided recall with SM-ad engagement with the advertisements before the Super Bowl broadcast as a between-subjects factor. Results show a statistically significant main effect for corrected aided recall,  $F(1, 136) = 6.24$ ,  $p < .05$ . Follow-up tests showed that the consumers who engaged with the Super Bowl advertisements before the Super Bowl broadcast and at Time 1 (M = .92, SD = 2.23) did not see a significant drop in their memory corrected aided recall measure at Time 2 (M = .79, SD = 2.37). However, consumers who did not engage with any Super Bowl advertisements before the Super Bowl broadcast experienced a large decrease in the number of corrected aided recall of the Super Bowl advertising brands (Time 1: M = 1.26, SD = 2.56; Time 2: M = .53, SD = 2.28). Thus, H<sub>4</sub> was supported. Table 2 contains the means and standard deviations for the effects of social media engagement prior to the Super Bowl broadcast.

To test H<sub>5</sub>, we conducted a mixed-model repeated-measures ANOVA of the influence of time on the free recall with SM-ad engagement with the advertisements after the Super Bowl broadcast as a between-subjects factor.

**TABLE 1:**  
**Means for Ad Decay**

| Measure                                   | Time 1      | Time 2      |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Free recall (H <sub>1</sub> )             | 2.23 (2.85) | 2.35 (3.03) |
| Corrected aided recall (H <sub>2</sub> )* | 0.52 (2.07) | 0.83 (2.14) |

Note. \*  $p < .05$ .

**TABLE 2:**  
**Means for Ad Decay with Social Media Advertisement Engagement Prior to the Super Bowl**

| Time                | Free recall (H <sub>3</sub> ) | Corrected aided recall (H <sub>4</sub> )* |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| No SM-ad engagement |                               |   |
| Time 1              | 2.85 (3.26)                   | 1.26 (2.56)                               |
| Time 2              | 2.49 (3.04)                   | 0.53 (2.28)                               |
| SM-ad engagement    |                               |   |
| Time 1              | 3.19 (3.02)                   | 0.92 (2.23)                               |
| Time 2              | 3.01 (2.49)                   | 0.79 (2.37)                               |

Respondents' free recall of advertisements after a two week delay was not significantly enhanced by engaging with Super Bowl advertisements after the Super Bowl (between Time 1 and Time 2),  $F(1, 136) = .36$ , n.s. Respondents who did not engage with the Super Bowl advertisements (Time 1:  $M = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 3.39$ ; Time 2:  $M = 2.65$ ,  $SD = 3.67$ ) versus those consumers who reported they have viewed Super Bowl advertisements on social media platforms during the two weeks following the Super Bowl (Time 1:  $M = 2.91$ ,  $SD = 3.08$ ; Time 2:  $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 3.04$ ) do not reveal significantly different means from each other.  $H_5$  was not supported.

$H_6$  was investigated using a mixed-model repeated-measures ANOVA of the influence of time on the corrected aided recall with the SM-ad engagement with the advertisements after the Super Bowl broadcast as the between-subjects factor. Consumers who engaged with the Super Bowl ads on social media during the two weeks following the Super Bowl broadcast revealed yielded a statistically significant main effect for corrected aided recall,  $F(1, 136) = 7.86$ ,  $p < .01$ . Consumers who engaged with the Super Bowl advertisements since the Super Bowl broadcast and at Time 1 ( $M = 1.12$ ,  $SD = 2.08$ ) did not see a significant drop in their memory corrected aided recall measure at Time 2 ( $M = .82$ ,  $SD = 2.14$ ). However, consumers who did not engage with any Super Bowl advertisements since the Super Bowl broadcast experienced a large decrease in the number of corrected aided recall of the Super Bowl advertising brands (Time 1:  $M = 1.05$ ,  $SD =$

$3.01$ ; Time 2:  $M = .27$ ,  $SD = 2.80$ ). Thus,  $H_6$  was supported. Table 3 contains the means and standard deviations for the effects of social media engagement since the Super Bowl broadcast.

### DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The role that social media plays in the promotion of products continues to grow as Americans spend larger portions of their time engaged in social media and firms invest a larger percentage of their promotional budgets in a host of social media platforms (Pew, 2017; Ashley and Tuten, 2015). This study does not, however, fully support the effectiveness of social media in addressing a key promotional metric – ad decay. Only when ad recall is aided does social media have a significant, positive effect on ad decay. The use of social media does not appear to have a positive effect with the free recall of advertisements under the conditions tested.

While the financial investment in a Super Bowl ad is truly exceptional, most forms of television advertising can represent a significant monetary outlay to firms. The assumption that a well-integrated, social media-television advertising campaign will provide superior results to a television campaign that is not coordinated with a social media initiative cannot be assumed. Careful planning is essential in the design and execution of an integrated marketing communications plan that relies heavily upon social media to enhance ad recall and

**TABLE 3:**  
Means for Ad Decay with Social Media Advertisement Engagement Since the Super Bowl

| Time                | Free recall<br>( $H_5$ ) | Corrected aided<br>recall ( $H_6$ )* |
|---------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| No SM-ad engagement |                          |                                      |
| Time 1              | 2.97 (3.39)              | 1.05 (3.01)                          |
| Time 2              | 2.65 (3.67)              | 0.27 (2.80)                          |
| SM-ad engagement    |                          |                                      |
| Time 1              | 2.91 (3.08)              | 1.12 (2.08)                          |
| Time 2              | 2.96 (3.04)              | 0.82 (2.14)                          |

Note. \*  $p < .05$ .

awareness of the product/service/or brand being promoted as well as other elements of the adaptation model including interest, desire, or action.

The inherent advantages of integrated marketing communications would seem to grow significantly with not only the advent of social media but the growth with which social media is used by American consumers. The specific communication vehicles employed and the precision with which they are used are changing as both information technology and customer interests become increasing dynamic and varied. As mass media advertising is used less frequently today due to its high costs and lower effectiveness (Pride and Ferrell, 2016), many firms are quick to take advantage of the latest social media options without conducting due diligence to determine specific advantages of the new media or goals and metrics that will be implemented to measure effectiveness. Fortunately, analytical tools such as Google Analytics offer the marketer outstanding options by which media campaigns can be planned, implemented, and ROMI (as well as other metrics) evaluated. This study, if anything, illustrates the value that social media *can play* in a successful promotional campaign, as well as the limitations social media *may have* when used in conjunction with mass media advertising.

#### LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study dealt only with undergraduate college business students, the vast majority being of traditional college age. It was also limited to Super Bowl ads and the select social media surrounding the ads. Further research involving the impact of a wider variety of social media on other forms of mass media promotions and the ever-changing social media options is essential. While the role of traditional media may be waning, its use in conjunction with social media in a truly integrated marketing communications framework may offer viable opportunities for both consumer goods and B2B firms. Studying the wide array of traditional-social media promotional options that are available to firms is daunting. This study provides a look at only a small sample of promotional media combinations that, used in

conjunction, could provide significant enhancements with aided and unaided recall of ads. Researchers are encouraged to investigate the plethora of traditional-social media options available as the marketplace embraces social media and all it has to offer.

Additionally, this survey relied on self-report measures where the student sample indicated what proportion of the Super Bowl commercials they viewed during the Super Bowl broadcast. It is difficult to know if they actually watched what they stated they did. Thus, further research that utilizes other methodologies that allow researchers to capture behavioral measures rather than attitudinal measures would greatly increase the external validity and our understanding of consumer interactions with Super Bowl commercials. Furthermore, future research should consider the effect of respondents only viewing half of (or some other proportion of) the advertisements versus all of the advertisements.

The free recall and corrected aided measures chosen in this study mirror the work of Moorman and colleagues (2007; 2012). We acknowledge that other metrics exist that might have strengthened our analysis. For example, researchers in the future may wish to consider the use of signal detection theory (Singh and Churchill, 1986; Swets, Tanner, and Birdsall, 1961), which suggests the use of a sensitivity index linking true and false recognition utilizing the z-transformations of hit rates (HR) and false alarm rates (FAR). High hit rates reveal high true recognition and high false alarm rates reveal high false recognition. Future researchers could capture the data and utilize the following formula to assess sensitivity: ( $d' = Z(\text{HR}) - Z(\text{FAR})$ ). Future research could pursue a replication study but instead of utilizing free recall and corrected aided recall measures, put into place the sensitivity index of signal detection theory.

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# THE ADVERTISEMENT VALUE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL & INFORMATIONAL APPEAL ON COMPANY FACEBOOK PAGES

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*The advertisement value of Facebook is an under-developed area of social media research. Transformational and informational advertising appeal has yet to be studied as it relates to social media. This paper utilizes established classification and measurement scales from marketing literature to classify companies and their Facebook posts and measures the advertisement value of these posts. The study uses a sample of 100 companies from the 2015 Fortune 500 list. Results indicate that posts with transformational appeal are more engaging to the consumer than informational appeal; however, posts with informational appeal have greater advertisement value for the company. The results also indicate there is no relationship between type of company and type of appeal used by companies.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's marketplace, social media has evolved as a necessary tool for companies to stay connected with consumers. With its high traffic and reach, many companies have launched major advertising campaigns for their products via Facebook. Yousif (2012) found there is interest in the advertising messages by Facebook users, that the content of the advertising messages is viewed as both exciting and reliable by them, that these messages motivate them to buy, and that Facebook represents a successful medium for promoting products.

Companies rely on advertisements to appeal to the senses of their target consumers, a major component of advertising effectiveness. Appeal can fall into one of two categories – hedonic or utilitarian. Advertisements with hedonic appeal are referred to as transformational ads and those with utilitarian appeal are informational ads. Champoux, Durgee, and McGlynn (2012) found that posts on company Facebook pages are actually more successful in getting consumers to buy their products. Therefore, this study conducted a value assessment of posts on company Facebook pages. The posts were classified as transformational or informational

based on type of appeal used. Engagement of these posts was then measured by noting number of "likes". Lastly, the advertisement value of these posts was measured based on three variables – entertainment, information and irritation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Facebook represents an important connecting point for companies to disseminate their advertising messages. Famous brands such as Lacoste, Adidas, Nike, Coca Cola and others focus on Facebook in promoting their products and allowing their users to express their opinions about the product, advertisements and levels of influence (Yousif, 2012). A company on Facebook can also establish a rapport with existing and potential clients, post sales information, promotions and new product announcements.

Facebook's low advertisement click-through rates (CTR) have shifted the attention to company Facebook pages. Champoux et al. (2012) found that Facebook posts or wall content have more appeal on Facebook than advertisements. Click-through rates for general display ads on Facebook have been criticized for being rather unimpressive, but CTR for content on brand page walls are as high as 6.49%, according to estimates from Virtue (2009) as noted by Klassen (2009).

With over 2.7 billion likes per day, expressing the endorsements of photos, fan pages, status updates, articles, news feeds, products, services, and more, brand managers understood they had to develop a method to utilize and capitalize on this powerful tool (Mariani & Mohammed, 2014). Many managers realized that when a user clicks “like”, not only does the user display approval and/or endorsement, it is seen by everyone within his/her network. This delivers a new meaning to word of mouth (WOM) marketing, one of the most positive and effective marketing tools. Commenting behavior allows consumers to share their

opinions about agreement or disagreement with the content on the brand’s Facebook page, created either by the brand or other visitors (Kabadayi & Price, 2014).

An area of importance in research today is what type of content is most engaging on company Facebook pages. Parsons (2013) established twenty main types of Facebook wall content. Certain types of wall content are more engaging than others such as Ad Campaigns and Photos. See Table 1 below for the different types of wall content.

**TABLE 1:  
Types of Wall Content on Facebook**

|   |
|---|
| Ad campaigns/Product Information/Sponsorships         |
| Company information/News/History/Fun Facts            |
| Celebrity/Athlete information/Acknowledgements        |
| Events  |
| Information about changes to Facebook page or website |
| Photos  |
| Video/You Tube links                                  |
| Entertainment related – TV/Movies                     |
| Social Responsibility/Charity/Philanthropy/Community  |
| Live events/Live video                                |
| Holiday greetings                                     |
| Polls/Poll questions                                  |
| Calls for involvement                                 |
| Customer comments                                     |
| Product Reviews/Tips/Uses/Recipes                     |
| Contests/Sweepstakes                                  |
| Apps/Games/Downloads                                  |
| Career/Business Opportunities                         |
| Links   |
| Promotions/Coupons/Samples                            |

Source: (Parsons, 2013)

### Facebook Posts

In this study, Facebook posts on company Facebook pages were treated the same as Facebook advertisements. Once a company has created a brand page, the company can begin to post content. Information on brand pages is shared in the form of posts, which can be seen on the central part of the page known as the timeline. Users who are fans of brand pages can see posts and engage with them by “liking, sharing and commenting” (Luarn, Lin, & Chiu, 2015).

It is worth noting that Facebook has faced some negative consumer responses in recent years. In a study conducted by Insight Strategy Group in 2012, it was found that consumers have mixed feelings about companies marketing to them on social media websites. In this study, 58 percent of respondents describe social media marketing as “invasive;” 60 percent characterize social media brand communication as “annoying;” and 64 percent of respondents “hate” receiving targeted messages on their social media profile (Beauchamp, 2013). On the other hand, 53 percent of respondents in this study believe that a brand must have a Facebook page to remain relevant; 54 percent appreciate when a brand has a Facebook page or other social media presence; and 58 percent followed brands on Facebook to receive special promotions and deals (Beauchamp, 2013). Hence, consumers tend to have negative perceptions of being targeted on social media websites, but they understand the importance of social media brand communications and enjoy the benefits of special offers (Beauchamp, 2013).

Unlike wall posts, which are free, companies must set aside a budget for creating Facebook advertisements. Another distinction is location. Unlike Facebook wall posts, which can only be seen on the company brand page, advertisements can be seen on an individual’s desktop news feed, mobile news feed or right-hand column of the news feed. News feed includes status updates, photos, videos, links, app activity and “likes” from people, pages and groups that are followed on Facebook (Facebook, 2016). Lastly, is the distinction between the “push” marketing approach of Facebook advertisements and the “pull” marketing approach of Facebook wall posts.

Social media users receive many recommendations without explicitly asking for them through unsolicited direct or broadcast “push” messages. Facebook advertisements would fall in this category as they are unsolicited messages that appear on users’ newsfeed (Schulze, Scholer, & Skiera, 2015). Other social sharing mechanisms rely on “pull” messages that consumers seek out, such as wall posts.

The main similarity between posts on company Facebook pages and advertisements is that they both have appeal. For example, if you establish a Facebook page it must have intriguing content, be current, and responsive to customer queries (Parsons, 2013). When a consumer “likes” a post on a company’s Facebook page, it serves as an advertising vehicle. Companies benefit when users like their content because it encourages customer-customer and firm-customer interaction, gauges the popularity of their posts, and allows users to provide their personal endorsements (Swani, Milne, & Brown, 2013).

### Advertisement Appeal

The central element of the whole process of advertising influence on the recipient is advertising appeal (Shayekina & Tleuberdinov, 2012). Advertising appeal can be considered as the main vehicle or the main instrument for achieving the objectives of advertising (Shayekina & Tleuberdinov, 2012). For the purposes of this study, appeal was categorized as either being hedonic (emotional) or utilitarian (rational). The hedonic/utilitarian framework has been studied extensively in the marketing and advertising literature, possibly stemming from Copeland’s (1924) original proposition that individuals buy products for either rational or emotional reasons (Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999). Rational advertising stems from the traditional information processing models of decision making where the consumer is believed to make logical and rational decisions. Rational advertising would include messages showing a product’s quality, economy, value or performance. In contrast, emotional appeals are grounded in the emotional, experiential side of consumption (Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999). They seek to make the consumer feel good about the product,

by creating a likeable or friendly brand; they rely on feelings for effectiveness (Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999).

Broadly speaking, products used for consumption purposes can be categorized as hedonic or utilitarian (Lim & Ang, 2008). Hedonic products are primarily consumed for sensory gratification and affective purposes or for fun and enjoyment (Lim & Ang, 2008). Thus, hedonic products generate emotional arousal with benefits that are evaluated primarily on aesthetics, taste, symbolic meaning and sensory experience (Lim & Ang, 2008). In contrast, utilitarian products possess a rational appeal and are less arousing as they generally provide cognitively oriented benefits (Lim & Ang, 2008). Examples of highly hedonic products identified in previous research studies include designer clothes, sports cars, luxury watches, candy bars and games. Examples of highly utilitarian products identified in previous research studies include microwaves, minivans, personal computers, hair dryers and washers/dryers.

Chang (2004) found that a match between product characteristics and advertisement appeal has been shown to generate more favorable responses. A product's inherent characteristics determine if it is effective to employ either a hedonic or utilitarian appeal (Chang, 2004). Consumers tend to prefer rational ads for utilitarian products and emotional ads for hedonic products (Drolet, Williams, & Lau-Gesk, 2007). The findings in Saxena and Khanna (2013) suggest that when advertisements displayed on social networking sites provide entertainment and information content, it increases the worth of the advertisement. This study sought to confirm which of the two is more valuable – entertainment, which would be hedonic in nature and informational, which would be utilitarian in nature.

Voss, Spangenberg and Grohmann (2003) developed a hedonic/utilitarian (HED/UT) scale to measure dimensions of overall brand/product attributes. Their scale consisted of adjectives representing utilitarian and hedonic dimensions to assess a product's magnitude of utilitarian versus hedonic value (Yoo & MacInnis, 2005). The HED/UT scale includes ten semantic

differential response items, five of which refer to the hedonic dimension (“fun,” “exciting,” “delightful,” “thrilling,” “enjoyable”) and five of which refer to the utilitarian dimension (“effective,” “helpful,” “functional,” “necessary,” “practical”) of consumer attitudes. The authors conducted six studies to establish the uni-dimensionality, reliability, and validity of the two HED/UT subscales (Voss, Spangenberg, & Grohmann, 2003). Results of the study suggested that the hedonic and utilitarian constructs are two distinct dimensions of brand attitude and are reliably and validly measured by the HED/UT scale. This scale was utilized in this study.

### **Transformational & Informational Advertisements**

Johar and Sirgy (1991) coined the terms value expressive (image) appeal and utilitarian appeal. They stated that the two most common approaches used in advertising to influence consumer behavior might be described as value -expressive (image) or symbolic (hedonic) appeal and utilitarian (functional) appeal (Johar & Sirgy, 1991). The image strategy is part of what Rossiter and Percy (1987) refer to as “transformational advertising” (Johar & Sirgy, 1991). On the other hand, the utilitarian appeal involves informing consumers of one or more key benefits that are perceived to be highly functional or important to target consumers (Johar & Sirgy, 1991). Rossiter and Percy (1987) referred to this as “informational advertising” (Johar & Sirgy, 1991).

Emotional (hedonic) and informational (utilitarian) ad formats have been found to lead consumers through different paths of persuasion. Yoo and MacInnis (2005) found that although both ad formats create very different routes to persuasion, each route depends critically on the evocation of a set of common responses or constructs. These constructs are credibility, feelings (positive and negative), beliefs and ad attitudes (Aad). See Figure 1 below for a mapping of the two different routes. As can be seen, the main difference between the emotional and informational ad format routes is the starting point. The emotional ad format is driven by positive and negative feelings, which results in a level of credibility. Informational ad format is

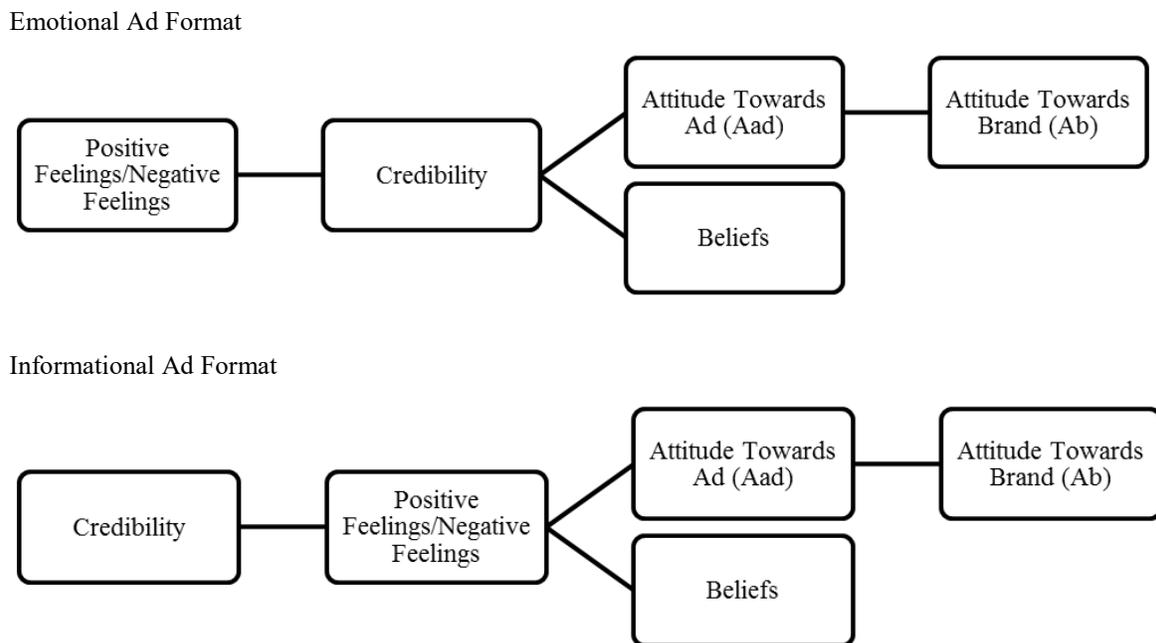
driven by the level of credibility first, followed by positive and negative feelings.

According to Puto and Wells (1984), for an advertisement to be judged transformational, it must contain the following characteristics: (1) It must make the experience of using the product richer, warmer, more exciting, and/or more enjoyable, than that obtained solely from an objective description of the advertised brand and (2) It must connect the experience of the advertisement so tightly with the experience of using the brand that consumers cannot remember the brand without recalling the experience generated by the advertisement. For an advertisement to be judged informational in accordance with the preceding definition, it must reflect the following characteristics: (1) present factual, relevant information about the brand, (2) present information which is immediately and obviously important to the potential consumer, and (3) present data which the consumer accepts as being verifiable.

It is worth noting that information and transformation are not mutually exclusive categories of advertisements (Puto & Wells, 1984). They are, however, exhaustive. Thus,

any given advertisement can be classified as belonging to one of four basic categories: (1) High Transformation/ Low Information, (2) Low Transformation/High Information, (3) High Transformation/High Information, and (4) Low Transformation/Low Information (Puto & Wells, 1984). Moriarty (1987) categorized ads into a single “primary” process classification. The following process typology was established: Literal (Informational): Identification–ad identified the brand, but contained little additional objective information, Description–ad described what the product looked like and its attributes and/or parts, Comparison–ad portrayed and/or named the competition in the visual, Before/after–ad showed the situation before and after the product’s use, and Demonstration–ad showed how to do something or how to use, apply, or make the product and Symbolic (Transformational): Association–ad used a person or setting which identified a lifestyle, typical user, or typical situation, Metaphor–ad used an allegory or some unexpected substitution based on similar features, Storytelling–ad used a narrative, drama, or playlet, and Aesthetics–ad showed detailed artwork, patterns, or an abstraction. The first

**FIGURE 1:**  
**Emotional Ad Format vs. Informational Ad Format (Yoo & MacInnis, 2005)**



five subcategories are then combined into a “literal” category, while the last four subgroups are combined into a “symbolic” category. The literal category might also be described as “informational” advertising, while the symbolic category is akin to “transformational” advertising (Cutler, Thomas, & Rao, 2000). All of the above nine categories described by Moriarty (1987) appear to be applicable to various media (Cutler, Thomas, & Rao, 2000). This scale was also utilized in this study.

### Measuring Advertising Effectiveness on Facebook

An area that has emerged in marketing literature on the topic of the advertising effectiveness of Facebook is the “Likes” plugin on the site. This option allows users to easily express their preferences in relation to news, music, sports, film, photos, or any commercial product. Likes have led to increases in clicks of websites by 500% (Parra, Gordo, & D'Antonio, 2014). The Facebook Likes plugin is the most adopted one-click social plugin in the social media space (Swani, Milne, & Brown, 2013). WOM referrals have a strong impact on new customer acquisition, 20 times stronger than marketing events and 30 times stronger than traditional media appearances (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). Furthermore, liking a brand message creates customer brand engagement where individuals are more likely to make brand purchases and talk about their experiences, emotional attachment, commitment and loyalty with the brand (Swani, Milne, & Brown, 2013). The value of each consumer that Likes a brand on Facebook has increased an average of 28 percent over the past couple of years (Kabadayi & Price, 2014). Levi Strauss & Company experienced a 40 percent increase in traffic to its web site after adding the Facebook Like button to its web site, and American Eagle Outfitters found that Facebook-referred visitors spent an average of 57 percent more than those not referred by Facebook after including a Like button next to every product (Swani, Milne, & Brown, 2013). It seems that audience engagement has become the major criterion for judging the effectiveness of advertising campaigns in digital media (Yu, 2012).

### Advertisement Value

Advertising value is defined as a subjective evaluation of the relative worth or utility of advertising to consumers (Ducoffe, 1995). Ducoffe (1996), in his study on the World Wide Web—proved the significant impact (either positive or negative) of entertainment, information and irritation on advertisement value (Saxena & Khanna, 2013). Through a series of studies, Ducoffe (1995, 1996) developed a model based on these three antecedents of perceived value: informativeness, entertainment and irritation (Logan, Bright, & Gangadharbatla, 2012).

Consumers report that advertisers’ ability to supply information is the primary reason for approving of it (Ducoffe, 1996). Uses and gratifications research has demonstrated that the value of entertainment lies in its ability to fulfill audience needs for escapism, diversion, aesthetic enjoyment, or emotional release (Ducoffe, 1996). In their major survey of the American consumer, Bauer and Greyser (1968) found the main reasons people criticize advertising relate to the annoyance or irritation it causes, an outcome thought to lead to a general reduction in advertising effectiveness (Ducoffe, 1996). Brackett and Carr (2001), in their study on cyberspace advertising report that information, entertainment, irritation and credibility significantly affect advertisement value which in turn affects attitude towards advertisements (Saxena & Khanna, 2013). Ducoffe’s model was utilized in this study.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

This study consists of a content analysis. Content analysis has been widely used by researchers to examine communication content and channels such as advertising, media stories and web sites (Luarn, Lin, & Chiu, 2015). This study examined and analyzed communication content in the form of wall posts on the social media networking website, Facebook.

In a study conducted by Parsons (2013), a content analysis of official Facebook pages was performed using companies from Interbrand’s Best Global Brands by looking at three

components – content of tabs, number of likes and wall content. Similar to the Parson's study, in this study, companies from the 2015 Fortune 500 list were selected and two components were analyzed – number of likes and wall content. Parsons noted the total number of likes of each company page. This study also noted the total number of likes of particular wall posts made on company pages. In addition to noting the number of likes of postings on the company Facebook pages, the advertisement value of these posts were also measured in this study by using an established advertisement value scale. Saxena and Khanna (2013) performed an empirical study to understand the implications of different variables in advertisements on the delivery of advertising value to respondents. Utilizing the scale for measuring advertisement value created by Ducoffe (1995), their results confirmed the roles of information, entertainment and irritation in assessing the value of advertisements displayed on social networking sites. Using this same advertisement value measurement scale, this study measured the advertisement value of Facebook wall posts.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Does the type of appeal used in posts on company Facebook pages have an impact on viewer engagement?
2. Are certain types of companies more prone to use a certain type of appeal?
3. Is the advertisement value of Facebook posts impacted by the type of appeal used?

The content analysis allowed the following hypotheses to be tested:

- H<sub>a1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the level of engagement between posts with transformational appeal and those with informational appeal.
- H<sub>a2</sub>: There is a relationship between the type of company – hedonic or utilitarian and the type of post appeal – either transformational or informational.
- H<sub>a3</sub>: There is a significant difference in the advertising value of posts with transformational appeal and those with informational appeal.

## METHODOLOGY

For this study, one-hundred companies ranked by highest total revenues for the 2015 fiscal year were selected from the 2015 Fortune 500 list (Fortune, 2015). Only companies that fit the following criteria were used: 1. The company serves the consumer product market, 2. The company has an official Facebook page. There may have been other pages such as fan pages or community pages dedicated to these brands on Facebook but the focus for this study for comparability purposes was on the main official page sponsored by the brand/company (Parsons, 2013), and 3. The company has static posts (non-animated) on a Facebook page(s) in the months of February, May, August and November of 2015. Please see Appendix A for the list of companies.

Three different samples were used in this study to code the companies as hedonic or utilitarian, to code the posts as transformational or informational and to measure the advertisement value of each post. The sample sizes were determined by ensuring that each company and post had been coded at least three times to determine a final classification on appeal, as well as evaluated at least three times to determine advertisement value. Respondents were acquired through the website Amazon Mechanical Turk, also known as MTurk. This is a crowdsourcing Internet marketplace set up for the coordination of human intelligence tasks (HITs) and is a commonly used tool in social science experiments to recruit subjects. Respondents are primarily located in the United States with demographics similar to the overall U.S. Internet population. MTurk allows researchers to recruit a randomly diverse sample, which helps in obtaining a good representation of the overall population.

In order to conduct the study, each company and post had to be classified as hedonic or transformational and as utilitarian or informational. For classifying the companies, a survey questionnaire was created on Qualtrics and placed on MTurk. The questionnaire allowed collection of respondents' attitudes towards each company based on the products they offer. The respondents were referred to as coders. The hedonic or utilitarian (HED/UT) scale developed by Voss, Spangenberg and

Grohmann (2003) was used. The HED/UT scale was developed through a rigorous testing. It has been found to be reliable, valid, and a generalizable scale to measure the hedonic and utilitarian dimensions of consumer attitudes (Gursoy, Spangenberg, & Rutherford, 2006). To ensure coder reliability, each company was coded three times by three separate respondents. The process used by Yoo et al. (2014) was used in this study. In this process, coders used two three point scales (1=not at all, 2=somewhat, 3=very), one to identify utilitarian and the second to identify the hedonic dimensions of products (Yoo, Yi-Cheon Yim, & Sauer, 2014). Company descriptions provided by Hoover's and Reuter's Company were provided for each company in case coders were unfamiliar with the company's offerings.

Four static posts were collected from the Facebook pages of each of the one hundred companies (four hundred posts in total) on the earliest dates in February, May, August and November. These posts needed to be classified as transformational or informational. For classifying the posts, a survey questionnaire was created on Qualtrics and placed on MTurk. The questionnaire evaluated respondents' attitudes towards each post by asking them to select one category that best describes the post. Moriarty's classification system (Moriarty 1987) was used for this study. Moriarty's system uses what might best be described as the "process" of appeal, with the subcategories of "identification," "description," "comparison," "demonstration," "association," "metaphor," "storytelling," and "aesthetic" (Moriarty, 1987). The first four subcategories are then combined into a "literal" category, while the last four subgroups are combined into a "symbolic" category. The literal category might also be described as "informational" advertising, while the symbolic category is "transformational" advertising (Cutler, Thomas, & Rao, 2000). To ensure coder reliability, each post was coded three times by three separate respondents.

After the companies and posts were classified, a questionnaire was then administered to measure the advertisement value of the posts based on the three established variables – information, entertainment and irritation. The questionnaire was created on Qualtrics and placed on MTurk.

For measuring the value of the posts, a 20-item scale developed by Ducoffe (1995) to measure advertisement value was used. Participants were asked to respond to a five-item Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree by selecting the option that best represents how they felt about the posts included in the questionnaire. To ensure coder reliability, each post was evaluated three times by three separate respondents.

For the company classification questionnaire, a total of 44 questionnaires was collected and analyzed. Each respondent answered questions on ten randomly selected companies out of the one-hundred. For the post classification questionnaire, a total of 183 participants completed the questionnaire. Each respondent answered questions on twelve randomly selected posts out of the four-hundred. For the advertisement value questionnaire, a total of 212 questionnaires was collected and analyzed. Each respondent answered questions on eight randomly selected posts out of the four-hundred.

### Scale Reliability

Scales were utilized on the company classification and advertisement value questionnaires. To test the reliability of the assessment instrument, a split-half reliability test was performed and Cronbach's alpha coefficient values were calculated. The test assessed the internal consistency of the items used through correlation of items as a measure of consistency. Using SPSS, a reliability analysis was run for each scale used on the company classification questionnaires – Utilitarian and Hedonic, as well as the advertisement value questionnaire – Informativeness, Entertainment, Irritation, and Advertising Value. Cronbach's alpha coefficient values of greater than .70 indicate high internal consistency. All of the scales were found to have high internal consistency, as can be seen in Table 2 below:

To test for reliability of the post classification responses, the percentage agreement method was utilized. The general rule of thumb for percent agreement is presented in Neuendorf (2002). Coefficients of .90 or greater are nearly always acceptable, .80 or greater is acceptable

**TABLE 2:**  
**Cronbach’s Alpha Test for Scale Reliability**

| Company Classification      |                         |                         |                             |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Utilitarian Scale (5 items) |                         | Hedonic Scale (5 items) |                             |
| 0.866                       |                         | 0.947                   |                             |
| Advertisement Value         |                         |                         |                             |
| Informativeness (7 items)   | Entertainment (5 items) | Irritation (5 items)    | Advertising Value (3 items) |
| 0.948                       | 0.937                   | 0.901                   | 0.924                       |

in most situations, and .70 may be appropriate in some exploratory studies (Neuendorf, 2002). In this study, three posts out of four-hundred posts were eliminated because they could not be categorized as informational -1 or transformational - 2. Out of the 397 posts, 183 were classified as informational and 166 were classified as transformational posts. A final category of 1.33 indicates that two out of the three coders chose informational categories for the post and a category of 1.67 indicates that two out of the three coders chose transformational categories for the post. A total of 29 posts were classified as 1.33 and a total of 19 were classified as 1.67. The percentage agreement calculations are shown in Table 3 below. The responses had over 95% total agreement.

**RESULTS**

Table 4 below provides the descriptive statistics of the company classification and post classification questionnaires.

A paired samples *t*-test of the difference in means of the likes of posts with transformational  $M_{\text{Transformational}} = 0.904$ ,  $SD = 5.21$  and those with informational  $M_{\text{Informational}} = 0.281$ ,  $SD = 0.64$  appeal revealed that transformational posts were significantly ( $t(397) = 5.544$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) liked more. In agreement with the results, the posts that were categorized by two out of the three coders as transformational  $M_{2/3\text{Transformational}} = 0.235$ ,  $SD = 0.40$  also received more likes than those that were categorized by two of the three coders as informational  $M_{2/3\text{Informational}} = 0.121$ ,  $SD = 0.20$ .  $H_{01}$  is rejected in favor of the alternate; there is

a significant difference in the level of engagement between posts with transformational appeal and those with informational appeal.

A chi square test for association revealed that there was no relationship between type of company and type of post appeal,  $\chi^2(3, N=397) = 2.030$ ,  $p = 0.566$ . The study failed to reject  $H_{02}$ ; there is no significant relationship between type of company - hedonic or utilitarian and the type of post appeal.

For the advertisement value questionnaire, respondents were asked to identify their gender, age and location. 1=under21, 2=21-35, 3=36-50, 4=51 and up; Location: 1=Northeast, 2=Southeast, 3=Midwest, 4=West, 5=Southwest. Please see Table 5 below for a breakdown of the demographics of the sample.

Specific reactions to the Facebook posts from the advertisement value questionnaire are presented in Table 6 below:

The following are highlights of these results:

1. Respondents rated the posts as somewhat neutral at roughly 60% with mean ratings on the three items used to measure advertising value ranging between 3.20 and 3.35 on the 5-increment scale where 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.
2. Respondents rated the posts as more valuable than informative with mean ratings of 3.28 for the three items measuring advertising value and 3.15 for the seven items measuring informativeness.

**TABLE 3:  
Response Agreement for Post Classification**

| Final Category | Frequency        | Calculation                    | Percentage Agreement |
|----------------|------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1              | 183              | $183 \times (.25 \times 1) =$  | 45.75                |
| 1.33           | 29               | $29 \times (.25 \times .67) =$ | 4.8575               |
| 1.67           | 19               | $19 \times (.25 \times .67) =$ | 3.1825               |
| 2              | 166              | $166 \times (.25 \times 1) =$  | 41.5                 |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>397 posts</b> |                                | <b>95.29%</b>        |

**TABLE 4:  
Company and Post Classification**

| Company Classification |                   |                  |                      |
|------------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Utilitarian            |                   | Hedonic          |                      |
| 52 (52%)               |                   | 48 (48%)         |                      |
| Post Classification    |                   |                  |                      |
| Informational          | 2/3 Informational | Transformational | 2/3 Transformational |
| 183 (46.1%)            | 29 (7.3%)         | 19 (4.8%)        | 166 (41.8%)          |

**TABLE 5:  
Sample Demographics**

| Gender              |           |         |         |           |
|---------------------|-----------|---------|---------|-----------|
| Male                |           | Female  |         |           |
| 116                 |           | 96      |         |           |
| Age                 |           |         |         |           |
| Under 21            | 21-35     | 36-50   | 51 & up |           |
| 5                   | 121       | 63      | 23      |           |
| Geographic Location |           |         |         |           |
| Northeast           | Southeast | Midwest | West    | Southwest |
| 42                  | 56        | 54      | 42      | 18        |

**TABLE 6:**  
**Mean Responses to Selected Items, n=397 (1= strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)**

|  | Means       | Scale reliability |
|--|-------------|-------------------|
| <b>Informativeness scale</b>                                 | <b>3.15</b> | 0.95              |
| This post is a good source of product information            | 3.20        |                   |
| This post supplies relevant product information              | 3.25        |                   |
| This post provides timely information                        | 3.38        |                   |
| This post is a good source of up-to-date product information | 3.15        |                   |
| This post makes product information immediately accessible   | 3.19        |                   |
| This post is a convenient source of product information      | 3.17        |                   |
| This post supplies complete product information              | 2.73        |                   |
| <b>Entertainment scale</b>                                   | <b>3.21</b> | 0.94              |
| This post is entertaining                                    | 3.21        |                   |
| This post is enjoyable                                       | 3.38        |                   |
| This post is pleasing  | 3.46        |                   |
| This post is fun to use                                      | 3.04        |                   |
| This post is exciting  | 2.98        |                   |
| <b>Irritation Scale</b>                                      | <b>1.94</b> | 0.90              |
| This post insults a person's intelligence                    | 1.81        |                   |
| This post is annoying  | 2.04        |                   |
| This post is irritating                                      | 1.97        |                   |
| This post is deceptive                                       | 1.86        |                   |
| This post is confusing                                       | 2.00        |                   |
| <b>Advertising Value Scale</b>                               | <b>3.28</b> | 0.92              |
| This post is useful  | 3.35        |                   |
| This post is valuable  | 3.29        |                   |
| This post is important                                       | 3.20        |                   |

3. Respondents rated the posts as more valuable than entertaining with mean ratings of 3.28 for the three items measuring advertising value and 3.21 for the five items measuring entertainment.
4. Respondents did not consider the posts to be particularly irritating with mean ratings on the three items used to measure irritation ranging between 1.81 and 2.04 on the 5-increment scale

where 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree or roughly 36%.

A paired samples *t*-test of the difference in means in the advertising value of posts with informational ( $M_{\text{Informational}} = 3.373$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) and those with transformational ( $M_{\text{Transformational}} = 3.216$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) appeal revealed that informational posts ( $t(397) = -40.332$ ,  $p = .000$ ) had greater advertising value. In agreement with these results, the posts that were

categorized by two out of the three coders as informational ( $M_{2/3\text{Informational}} = 3.180$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ) also were deemed as having more advertising value than those that were categorized by two of the three respondents as transformational ( $M_{2/3\text{Transformational}} = 3.088$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ).  $H_03$  is rejected in favor of the alternate; there is a significant difference in advertising value of posts with transformational appeal and informational appeal.

As expected and in agreement with the Ducoffe study (1996), the correlations were sizable, significant, and in the expected directions as follows: informativeness,  $r(397) = .698$ ,  $p = .000$ ; entertainment,  $r(397) = .403$ ,  $p = .000$ ; and irritation,  $r(397) = -.382$ ,  $p = .000$ .

## DISCUSSION

This study made two key findings: (1) There is a statistically significant difference in the level of user engagement between posts with informational appeal and posts with transformational appeal and (2) There is a statistically significant difference in advertising value of posts with transformational appeal and informational appeal.

The study accomplished the primary motivation, which was to determine which form of advertisement appeal, informational or transformational, holds more value on Facebook. A paired samples *t*-test of the difference in means of the likes of posts with transformational and those with informational appeal revealed that there was a statistical significant difference between the two and that transformational posts were significantly liked more. However, when looking at the actual advertisement value of the posts, a paired samples *t*-test of the difference in means in the advertising value of posts with informational and those with transformational appeal revealed that there was a statistical significant difference between the two and that informational posts were significantly rated as having greater advertising value.

### Managerial Implications

Marketing managers can utilize this information to better assist them in deciding which form of appeal to use for their Facebook

company posts. This study found that posts with informational appeal were deemed as having greater advertising value than those with transformational appeal. Organizational leaders can use this information to determine what kinds of informational appeals are essential in guiding consumers' evaluations of the company's products and brands compared to other competing brands and products. Corporations could integrate efficient advertising strategy via the Facebook platform and connect with a variety of consumers. Moreover, through their online presence, corporation leaders could improve their skills to effectively communicate, and try to convince skeptical and prospective consumers about the benefits of buying the company's products, and eventually convert them into loyal customers. Organizational leaders could also look to consumers' reaction to posts to gauge whether their positioning strategy is effective.

### Research Limitations/Recommendations for Future Research

While this study established that appeal has an impact on the engagement as well as advertisement value of company Facebook posts, future research is needed to further investigate the use of appeal by all social media outlets. Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram, other highly utilized social media marketing tools, would be interesting to study by applying the same appeal framework and advertisement value measurement scale used in this study to determine if it can be concluded that a certain type of appeal is most engaging across these social media outlets. As well, there could be demographic implications that might be isolated to determine whether gender, income levels, age and/or zip codes have specific effects on consumer appeal.

Another approach could be to create a specific set of metrics to measure not only the level of appeal of an advertisement but to measure, more specifically, the intent of the consumer to purchase a specific product. This would help to determine whether that product was, in fact, purchased and how it related to the level of advertisement appeal.

This study was limited to companies in various consumer product industries. It would also be

interesting to see if there are distinctive variations in appeal among different industries. Along these same lines, looking at small businesses or start-up firms would shed light on what types of appeal work to attract and captivate new customers. This study only looked at well-established Fortune 500 firms. Adding foreign companies to the study would shed light on the cultural differences that exist in the perceptions of appeal and advertisement value.

### CONCLUSION

This study found a statistically significant difference in advertising value of posts with transformational appeal and informational appeal. The study accomplished the primary motivation, which was to determine which form of advertisement appeal, informational or transformational, holds more value on Facebook. A paired samples *t*-test of the difference in means of the likes of posts with transformational and those with informational appeal revealed that there was a statistical significant difference between the two and that transformational posts were significantly liked more by consumers.

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## APPENDIX A

|                          |                              |                                 |                             |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1.General Motors         | 2.CVS Health                 | 3.Valero Energy                 | 4.JP Morgan Chase           |
| 5.IBM                    | 6.Citigroup                  | 7.Home Depot                    | 8.Johnson & Johnson         |
| 9.MetLife                | 10.PepsiCo                   | 11.Intel                        | 12.Pfizer                   |
| 13.Walt Disney           | 14.Humana                    | 15.FedEx                        | 16.American Airlines        |
| 17.Merck                 | 18. Tyson Foods              | 19.Allstate                     | 20. Cigna                   |
| 21. 3M                   | 22.Macy's                    | 23.Travelers Cos.               | 24.Duke Energy              |
| 25.Rite Aid              | 26.Capital One               | 27.Aflac                        | 28.U.S. Bancorp             |
| 29.Kimberly-Clark        | 30.Hess                      | 31.Xerox                        | 32. Whirlpool               |
| 33.Progressive           | 34.Dollar General            | 35.Hartford Financial           | 36.Southern                 |
| 37.eBay                  | 38.ConAgra Foods             | 39.Penke Automotive Group       | 40.American Electric Power  |
| 41.Starbucks             | 42.Gap                       | 43.PNC Financial Services Group | 44.Western Digital          |
| 45.Kellogg               | 46.Marriott International    | 47.Nordstrom                    | 48.Yum Brands               |
| 49.Texas Instruments     | 50.DTE Energy                | 51.J.C. Penney                  | 52.PPL                      |
| 53.Bed Bath & Beyond     | 54.Sherwin-Williams          | 55.Voya Financial               | 56.Ross Stores              |
| 57.Estee Lauder          | 58.Unum Group                | 59.Hilton Worldwide             | 60.Principal Financial      |
| 61.BB&T Corp.            | 62.Advance Auto Parts        | 63.Genworth Financial           | 64.AutoZone                 |
| 65.CenterPoint Energy    | 66.Sonic Automotive          | 67.Avon Products                | 68.SunTrust Banks           |
| 69.Dollar Tree           | 70.Avis Budget Group         | 71.Priceline Group              | 72.Campbell Soup            |
| 73.Lennar                | 74.Hershey                   | 75.O'Reilly Automotive          | 76.Casey's General Stores   |
| 77.Dick's Sporting Goods | 78.Dillard's                 | 79.Level 3 Communications       | 80.Symantec                 |
| 81.SanDisk               | 82.Fifth Third Bancorp       | 83.NiSource                     | 84.Discovery Communications |
| 85.Harley-Davidson       | 86.Charles Schwab            | 87.Dr Pepper Snapple Group      | 88.Ameren                   |
| 89.Mattel                | 90.Starwood Hotels & Resorts | 91.Spectra Energy               | 92.Asbury Automotive Group  |
| 93.Newell Rubbermaid     | 94.Expedia                   | 95.Navient                      | 96.J.M. Smucker             |
| 97.Clorox                | 98.Regions Financial         | 99.Lithia Motors                | 100.Alaska Air Group        |

# BRAND MARKETING VIA FACEBOOK: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE MARKETING MIX, CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY, AND PURCHASE INTENTION IN THE FITNESS INDUSTRY

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*Due to the rising number of fitness club brands and lack of consumption, there has been a call to improve the industry's consumer-targeted business practices. In accordance, this research examined the relationship between marketing mix-related social media communications, brand equity, and purchase intention in a fitness setting. After being exposed to marketing mix-related Facebook posts for a simulated fitness club brand, a total of 393 respondents answered questions regarding social media communications, brand equity, and purchase intention. Results of structural equation modeling indicated that the hypothesized positive relationships between marketing mix-related social media communications and brand equity, and brand equity and purchase intention were supported. Results not only have implications for social media marketing and fitness marketing, but also for consumer-based brand equity and marketing-mix-related consumer behavior.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms such as Facebook are often considered a marketing tool for businesses to communicate with consumers and potential customers (Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, & Pihlstrom, 2012). Unlike traditional media, social media provides distinct advantages for service-related businesses through the ability to foster direct communication with large amounts of consumers (Wallace, Wilson, & Miloch, 2011). The widespread usage of social media is convincing as research has indicated that nearly 75% of Internet users in the United States use social media (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012) with as many as two billion users worldwide (Barker, Barker, Bormann, & Neher, 2017). To that end, social media such as Facebook provides a unique and strategic means for organizations such as fitness clubs to cultivate relationships with consumers and build a strong consumer base.

Facebook is the most popular social media account, with more than one billion daily users (Barker et al., 2017). Unsurprisingly, Facebook has emerged as an important platform for

successful marketing mix efforts by fitness-related organizations (Bayne & Cianfrone, 2013; Pronschinske, Groza, & Walker, 2012). Due to the widespread use of social media within the fitness (i.e., participatory sport) industry, scholars and industry professionals have indicated there is a need for further social media marketing-related research (Brody et al., 2010; Wallace et al., 2011). In light of these recommendations, the current study examined Facebook messages of fitness clubs used for marketing-related purposes.

Although previous literature has illustrated the importance of the marketing mix in terms of creating brand equity (Keller, 1993; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000), there have been limited examinations of this relationship within the social media setting (e.g., Bruhn et al., 2012; Mangold & Faulds, 2009) and/or fitness industry (e.g., Westerbeek & Shilbury, 1999; Williams et al., 2014). Furthermore, none of the existing research has examined the relationship among social media-related marketing mix efforts, brand equity, and purchase intention simultaneous. Therefore, the present study was designed to fill gaps in the literature to better understand the development of consumer-based brand equity as it relates to the fitness club via marketing mix efforts in a social media environment. Moreover, this research appears

to be an important endeavor in the fitness club industry that struggles to attract a consistent consumer base.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Social Media

Most of the research regarding social media marketing and branding to date (e.g., Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) has been limited to describing social media marketing activities and provided general suggestions. Due in part to its large membership and reach, Facebook has often been used by organizations to enhance brand efforts and image communication (Wallace et al., 2011). Facebook research also appears as an important line of inquiry for the fitness sector (e.g., Pronschinske et al., 2012) and other business-related sectors (e.g., Kim & Ko, 2010).

The Internet and social media applications such as Facebook have emerged as important marketing tools for the fitness-related entities (Conrad & Allen, 2013). For example, Scholl, Leen, Alexander, Pike, and Johansen (2012) indicated that recreation centers should use Facebook to market and promote their services. Similarly, Bayne and Cianfrone (2013) found that Facebook marketing was effective in increasing awareness for recreation-related events. When included as part of an organization's marketing mix, social media such as Facebook can be used as an effective communication to build relationships with fitness and/or participatory sport consumers (Williams & Chinn, 2010). Furthermore, Facebook may be a viable platform for successful marketing mix efforts by fitness and/or sport organizations (Bayne & Cianfrone, 2013).

### The Marketing Mix and Brand Equity

The marketing mix provides a framework for evaluating the scope of marketing activities for firms. Similar to other conceptualizations, McCarthy's (1960) marketing mix (i.e., product, price, place, and promotion) was developed with product goods in mind. Due to the unique nature of the services industry, however, Booms and Bitner (1981) added the following dimensions to McCarthy's original

four: participants, physical evidence, and service process. Together, these service-related marketing mix dimensions encapsulate the variables controlled by organizations located in the service industry that have a direct impact on consumers and the development of brand equity (Berry, 2000).

One of the earliest known attempts to measure customer-based brand equity was proposed by Martin and Brown (1990) who conceptualized brand equity with five dimensions, including perceived quality, perceived value, image, trustworthiness, and commitment. In an effort to improve upon this initial brand equity measurement, Lassar, Mittal, and Sharma (1995) developed their measurement to assess individual dimensions of brand equity, thus enabling companies to more easily evaluate their marketing programs. Lassar et al. (1995) utilized performance, social image, value, trustworthiness, and commitment as dimensions in their customer-based brand equity model.

The current study adopted Lassar et al.'s (1995) brand equity model due to the following reasons: (a) Lassar et al.'s (1995) measurement appears to fit well due to its lack of inclusion of behavioral dimensions such as loyalty that occur in other frameworks (e.g., Aaker, 1991) and (b) Lassar et al. (1995) used relatively abstract association dimensions that capture a large range of brands, which may be useful due to the differences that exist between fitness clubs and their marketing efforts. Lassar et al. (1995) included a five-dimension brand equity model including performance, social image, value, trustworthiness, and commitment. The current study utilized prospects and a simulated brand, so two of the five dimensions were not included in the model (i.e., performance and trustworthiness).

### Fitness branding

Based on existing consumer-based brand equity (i.e., Keller, 1993; Ross, 2006), Alexandris, Douka, Papadopoulos, and Kaltsatou (2008) measured brand associations in an international fitness setting in order to examine brand associations and their influence on brand loyalty. Their results suggested that the dimensions used were appropriate modifications for examining brand associations

in participatory sport. Moreover, the results of their study are practically applicable for fitness club managers in terms of strategies for developing and fostering brand names in the fitness industry. However, Alexandris et al. (2008) limited their inquiry to brand associations within the minds of consumers, and therefore does not examine the organization-induced component of sport brand equity proposed by Ross (2006). Bodet, Meurgey, and Lacassagne (2009) also examined the branding efforts of international fitness brands and found there was a significant difference between the way a fitness club brand wishes to be perceived and its actual social representation. However, the authors focused on only one French fitness club and focused mostly on the perceived brand image of the fitness club.

Expanding on the work of Alexandris et al. (2008), Williams and Pedersen (2012) suggested that direct experiences (i.e., service quality and exercise commitment) act as antecedents of brand associations held in the minds of fitness consumers (i.e., product delivery, socialization, location, value/price, popularity, escape, logo, nostalgia, pride, and management). Results indicated that service quality dimensions had a significant relationship with nine of the ten brand association dimensions (i.e., all except socialization). The research represents one of the first empirical inquiries testing the sport brand equity model proposed by Ross (2006). However, Williams and Pedersen only examined the experience-induced components with regard to the fitness industry. The current study aimed to extend the literature by examining the organization-induced components (i.e., the marketing mix) in an online fitness setting. Therefore, we posit that a relationship exists between the marketing mix-based social media communications and brand equity.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a positive relationship between consumers' attitude toward organization-generated social media communications and perceived social image brand equity.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** There is a positive relationship between consumers' attitude toward organization-generated social media communications and perceived value brand equity.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** There is a positive relationship between consumers' attitude toward organization-generated social media communications and perceived commitment image brand equity.

### Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is often represented by a consumer's plan to buy a specific brand or a decision making process in which a consumer has developed a willingness to act toward a brand (Wells, Valacich, & Hess, 2011). Brand-related marketing research has indicated that a high level of brand equity drives purchase intention (Yoo et al., 2000). Early brand equity research suggested that positive customer perceptions of a brand are associated with stronger purchase intention (Aaker, 1991). Similarly, Keller and Lehmann (2003) indicated that a consumer's positive attitude toward a brand impacts purchase intention. Unsurprisingly, empirical research has shown that building brand equity can bring advantages such as consumer brand preference and consumer purchase intention (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995).

Purchase intention should be important to fitness clubs for several reasons. First, the literature suggests that purchase intention is a key dimension of consumers and successful organizations in general (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995). Second, attracting members is a major issue facing the fitness club industry (Tharrett & Peterson, 2012). Fitness clubs are only attracting around 16% of market (Steiman, 2014).

Keller, Parameswaran, and Jacob (2011) suggested that social media should positively impact the purchase intention of consumers. Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, and Füller (2013) surveyed the users of a brand's Facebook page in order to analyze the influence of a brand's social media activities. Their findings suggest that engagement with a company's Facebook page has positive effects on consumer purchase intention. Similarly, Phan (2011) found a positive correlation between consumer "liking" luxury brands on social media and subsequent purchase intention.

Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014) surveyed Facebook users to examine the brand consequences of social media communications. Results indicated that user-generated social media communication had a positive influence on both brand equity and brand attitude, whereas firm-created social media communication only affected brand attitude. Both brand equity and brand attitude had a positive influence on purchase intention. The current study expands this research by examining a service-based brand, as opposed to consumer-based goods. The following hypotheses were developed based on this conceptual framework (See Figure 1 for the proposed model).

- H<sub>4</sub>:** There is a positive relationship between perceptions of social image brand equity and purchase intention.
- H<sub>5</sub>:** There is a positive relationship between perceptions of value brand equity and purchase intention.
- H<sub>6</sub>:** There is a positive relationship between perceptions of commitment brand equity and purchase intention.

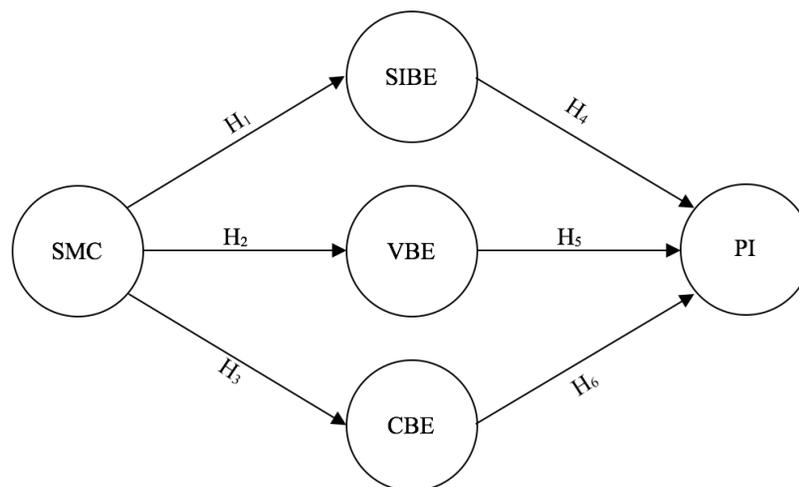
**METHOD**

**Pretest**

An initial pretest (i.e., qualitative content analysis) was conducted to examine the types of social media messages used by fitness clubs on Facebook. Facebook posts (*N* = 1,856) were placed into seven marketing mix categories (i.e., product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, and process) by two trained coders who used a codebook to guide them through the categorization process. Each Facebook message was coded for the following variables: coder, company, and type of message. A total of 150 messages were examined for all but one fitness club, which had only 56 total Facebook posts. For message categorization, coders achieved reliable results with Cohen’s kappa scores (*k* = 0.817) that indicated an acceptable level of intercoder reliability (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014).

The *product* dimension was overwhelmingly the most popular category (889 messages, 47.9%). The second most common category was *people* (289 messages, 15.57%). *Promotion* was the third most common type of message (181 messages, 9.8%). The fourth most common category was *physical evidence* (151

**FIGURE 1:  
Proposed Conceptual Model**



Note. SMC: Social Media Communications, SIBE: Social Image Brand Equity, VBE: Value Brand Equity, CBE: Commitment Brand Equity, PI: Purchase Intention

messages, 8.13%). *Other* messages were the fifth most common (117 messages, 6.3%). The sixth most popular type of message was *process*-related (104 messages, 5.6%). The seventh most common category was *place* (70 messages, 3.8%). Lastly, *price* messages were the least common type of messages (55 messages, 3%).

### Sample

The data for the current study were collected using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and Qualtrics Survey Software. Unlike previous fitness branding research that used fitness club members as subjects (e.g., Williams, Pedersen, & Walsh, 2012), the current study targeted individuals who were considered fitness club prospects so that they would not have preconceived feelings for the brand and instead focused on the Facebook post content. In order to identify the desired sample size, a power analysis was performed using the G\*Power (Field, 2005). The test was conducted using a specified power of .95, significance level of .05, and medium effect size ( $f = 0.25$ ) based on Cohen's (1992) recommendations. Seven groups of participants were presented with a specific marketing mix-related social media communication (e.g., Facebook messages focused on the price dimension, place dimension, promotion dimension, etc.). The eighth group of participants was presented with a combination of one Facebook posts for each of the seven types of social media messages in order to examine participant results for a variety of Facebook posts.

The current study targeted individuals over 18 years old that live in the United States with no prior knowledge of the fitness club brand presented in the social media communication stimuli, which helped participants be relatively free of biases and opinions of the brand (Hoyer & Brown, 1990). The sample, which was collected using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), consisted of 393 ( $N = 393$ ) participants. The study was launched using MTurk in early 2016 and was open for one week. Upon satisfactorily completing the survey, participations were paid \$0.50. Demographic information of the sample indicated that 43.5% of the respondents were

female, and 56.5% were male. The age group with the most respondents included participants between the ages of 27 and 35 years old (46.1%). The most prevalent participant ethnicity was Caucasian (42.8%) followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (20.1%), and Hispanic or Latino (14%). Nearly half of the participants had an undergraduate degree (47.1%) and almost one-quarter held a Master's degree (24.4%). The most common household income range was from \$20,000 to \$39,999 (32.8%).

### Procedures

Social media messages (i.e., Facebook posts) for each marketing mix element (i.e., product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, and process) were presented at the beginning of the questionnaire on Qualtrics (linked from MTurk), and participants were instructed to review the posts before they completed the questionnaire. The same social media usage, demographic, brand equity, and purchase intention questions were presented to each participant. The only difference among participant groups was the type of marketing mix-related social media messages presented before participants responded to the questionnaire. Participants were able to view the Facebook posts as they completed the questionnaire using the scroll function on Qualtrics.

### Measurement

A comprehensive review of literature was utilized to develop measurement items that include a total of 16 items under three constructs (i.e., marketing mix-related social media communications, brand equity, and purchase intention). Three items adopted from Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014) were used to measure social media communication, and 10 items from Lassar et al.'s (1995) were used to assess brand equity. Specifically, the number of items associated with the three dimensions are as follows: social image (four items), value (three items), and commitment (three items). Lastly, three items were borrowed from Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014), which have been used to measure purchase intention in a brand equity-related Facebook context. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert

scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

**RESULTS**

**Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)**

Based on the results of the one-way between subjects ANOVA there was not a significant effect of exposure to the various marketing mix element-related Facebook stimuli on brand equity at the  $p < .05$  level for any of the eight conditions  $F(7, 385) = 0.860, p = .539$ . Specifically, there was not a significant effect for any of the brand equity measures based on marketing mix stimuli: social image  $F(7, 385) = 0.679, p = .690$ , value  $F(7, 385) = 1.95, p = .061$ , commitment  $F(7, 385) = 1.00, p = .428$ . Additionally, we found there was not an effect of exposure to the various marketing mix element-related Facebook stimuli on social media communication responses at the  $p < .05$  level for any of the eight conditions  $F(7, 385) = 0.659, p = .706$ .

**Measurement Model**

Prior to a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), several assumptions were examined. In the data set, all skewness (-.112 to -.720) and kurtosis (-.083 to -.565) values were within the acceptable threshold (Hair 2010). See Table 1 for descriptive statistics. No multicollinearity issue was detected via examination of variance inflation factor scores (3.198 to 5.223). In regard to the correlations between variables, Table 2 summarizes the items used in the current study. The boxplot test revealed that there was no extreme score in the data set. Therefore, it was appropriate to proceed to conduct a CFA.

Following Anderson and Gerbing’s (1988) two-step modeling, a CFA using maximum likelihood estimation was employed to assess the measurement model. The fit indices suggested that the model showed an acceptable fit for the data ( $\chi^2 = 224.171; \chi^2/df = 2.385; CFI = .978; TLI = .971; RMSEA = .059$ ). All standardized factor loadings were statistically significant and above the threshold of .70 (Hair

**TABLE 1:**  
**Descriptive Statistics for Social Media, Brand Equity, and Purchase Intention Items**

| Dimensions                 | Items | Mean | S.D. | Skewness | Kurtosis | $\alpha$ | C.R. | AVE  |
|----------------------------|-------|------|------|----------|----------|----------|------|------|
| Social media communication | 3     | 5.17 | 1.29 | -0.75    | 0.19     | .860     | .860 | .673 |
| Social image brand equity  | 4     | 5.04 | 1.36 | -0.53    | -0.12    | .914     | .915 | .730 |
| Value brand equity         | 3     | 4.96 | 1.29 | -0.28    | -0.26    | .873     | .875 | .700 |
| Commitment brand equity    | 3     | 5.14 | 1.26 | -0.55    | -0.03    | .882     | .882 | .714 |
| Purchase intention         | 3     | 4.83 | 1.50 | -0.57    | -0.22    | .914     | .916 | .783 |

Note. S.D.: Standard Deviation,  $\alpha$ : Cronbach’s Alpha, C.R.: Construct Reliability, AVE: Average Variance Extracted.

**TABLE 2:**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations**

| Variable                      | M    | SD   | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| 1. Social media communication | 5.17 | 1.12 | 1     |       |       |       |   |
| 2. Social image brand equity  | 5.00 | 1.22 | 0.80* | 1     |       |       |   |
| 3. Value brand equity         | 4.96 | 1.15 | 0.74* | 0.77* | 1     |       |   |
| 4. Commitment brand equity    | 5.14 | 1.13 | 0.79* | 0.86* | 0.78* | 1     |   |
| 5. Purchase intention         | 4.83 | 1.39 | 0.75* | 0.85* | 0.80* | 0.82* | 1 |

Note. N = 393. \*  $p < .05$ .

et al., 2010), ranging from .779 (organization-generated social media communications item 1) to .894 (purchase intention item 1). Factor reliability was also assessed with evaluation of Cronbach's alpha, ( $\alpha$ ), composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). Results indicated that all  $\alpha$ , CR, and AVE values exceeded the suggested criterion of .70 and .50, respectively (See Table 1). Factor loading measurements can be found in Table 3.

### Structural Model

Prior to estimating the structural model, overall model fit of the model was examined. Results indicated that the model satisfactorily fit the data ( $\chi^2 = 276.451$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.821$ ; CFI = .969; TLI = .962; RMSEA = .068). With respect to the hypotheses, organization-generated social media communications positively impacted social image ( $\beta = .965$ ,  $p < .05$ ), providing support for Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2, which predicted a positive relationship between

organization-generated social media communications and value, was supported ( $\beta = .901$ ,  $p < .05$ ). SEM results also indicated there was a positive association of organization-generated social media communications with commitment ( $\beta = .965$ ,  $p < .05$ ), providing support for Hypothesis 3. Results also revealed that the influence of social image ( $\beta = .488$ ,  $p < .05$ ), value ( $\beta = .327$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and commitment ( $\beta = .156$ ,  $p < .05$ ) on purchase intention was positive and statistically significant, respectively, providing support for hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 (see Figure 2 for path estimates of the structural model).

### DISCUSSION

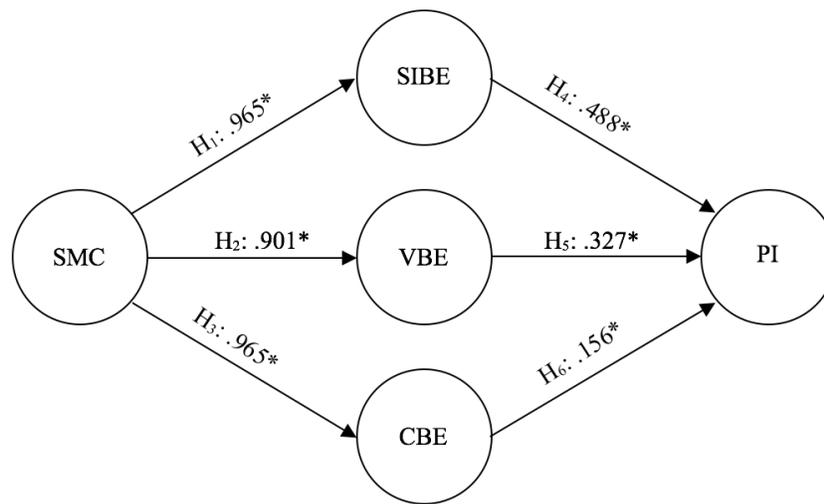
Previous research has suggested that a positive relationship exists between the marketing mix and consumer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993; Stahl et al., 2012; Yoo et al., 2000), and our results support this relationship in a social media and fitness setting. The current study

**TABLE 3:**  
**Item Factor Loadings**

| Factor | Item  | $\lambda$ |
|--------|---|-----------|
| SMC1   | The social media communications for the fitness club meets my expectations.   | .779      |
| SMC2   | The social media communications for the fitness club are very attractive.   | .865      |
| SMC3   | The social media communications for the fitness club perform well, when compared with the social media communications of other fitness clubs. | .814      |
| SIBE1  | This brand of fitness club fits my personality.   | .856      |
| SIBE2  | I would be proud to own a membership to this fitness club brand.  | .874      |
| SIBE3  | This brand of fitness club will be well regarded by my friends.   | .834      |
| SIBE4  | In its status and style, this fitness club brand matches my personality.  | .854      |
| VBE1   | This fitness club brand is well priced.   | .786      |
| VBE2   | Considering what I would pay for membership to this fitness club brand, I will get much more than my money's worth.                           | .872      |
| VBE3   | I consider this fitness club brand to be a bargain because of the benefits I receive.   | .849      |
| CBE1   | After using this fitness club brand, I am very likely to grow fond of it.   | .845      |
| CBE2   | For this fitness club brand, I have positive personal feelings.   | .860      |
| CBE3   | With time, I will develop a warm feeling toward this brand of fitness club.   | .829      |
| PI1    | I would buy this fitness club membership rather than any other fitness club memberships available.  | .894      |
| PI2    | I am willing to recommend that others buy this fitness club membership.   | .884      |
| PI3    | I intend to purchase this fitness club membership in the future.  | .877      |

Note.  $N = 393$ ,  $\lambda$  : Factor Loading, SMC: Social Media Communications, SIBE: Social Image Brand Equity, VBE: Value Brand Equity, CBE: Commitment Brand Equity, PI: Purchase Intention

**FIGURE 2:**  
**Structural Equation Model**



Note. SMC: Social Media Communications, SIBE: Social Image Brand Equity, VBE: Value Brand Equity, CBE: Commitment Brand Equity, PI: Purchase Intention. \* $p < .05$ .

also found support for the relationship between brand equity and purchase intention for fitness club prospects, which is in line with existing marketing and social media-related research (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014). In regard to fitness-related consumer-based brand equity research, several studies have indicated that experiences such as service quality (Alexandris et al., 2008) and exercise commitment (Williams et al., 2012) act as antecedents of brand associations of fitness clubs, which can lead to the development of brand loyalty. However, such research has been limited to existing members of fitness clubs. The current study provides one of the first examinations of fitness club prospects, which was done by using a fictitious brand in order to isolate the impact of exposure to the marketing mix-related Facebook posts.

### Social Media Communications and Brand Equity

Hypothesis 1 stated there is a positive relationship between consumers' attitude toward organization-generated social media communications and perceived social image brand equity, and our findings support this claim with a positive and significant relationship. The social image construct employed in the current study was defined as

the consumer's view of the esteem in which the consumer's social group holds the brand (Lassar et al., 1995). The social image construct is similar to user imagery, which Aaker (1996) defined as the set of characteristics associated with a typical user of a brand. Therefore, the ability of an organization to control the presented social imagery via Facebook posts that embrace the social aspects of a fitness club may lead to the development of perceived social image-based brand equity for fitness club prospects. In addition, the social image construct may be analogous to usage imagery, which is defined as the way in which the product is to be used (Keller, 1993).

The results also provide support for Hypothesis 2, which suggested there would be a positive relationship between consumers' attitude toward organization-generated social media communications and perceived social image brand equity. Based on the marketing mix-related Facebook posts presented, participants may have perceived that the fitness club was valuable. However, the value-related items employed in the current study focused on the price and benefits received for the fitness club brand. While it was possible for individuals to feel that the benefits they would receive from the fitness club were valuable, not all participants saw price-specific Facebook

posts, which limits this finding. Existing research such as Williams et al. (2014) found that price significantly predicted brand awareness and brand associations, but they did not examine online price-related messages. Nevertheless, the results of the present study providing support for Hypothesis 2 may be linked to the perceived nature of value brand equity and should be taken prudently.

Hypothesis 3 suggested there would be a positive relationship between consumers' attitude toward organization-generated social media communications and perceived commitment brand equity. Our results provide positive and significant support for this claim. Other fitness-related branding research such as Williams and Pedersen (2012) found that exercise commitment was a direct experience that contributed to the development of brand associations in the minds of health club members. The current study used a fictitious brand to isolate the exposure of marketing mix-related Facebook messages, and our results suggest that it was possible for the fitness club to develop a perceived level of commitment among prospects via organization-generated social media communications. Since it was impossible for the participants to have positive feelings towards the brand before being exposed to the marketing mix-related Facebook messages, this level of commitment appears to be perceptual rather than behavioral, which is in line with the commitment construct adopted from Lassar et al. (1995). In fact, it could be posited that the prospects' commitment was directed toward the service (i.e., exercise) as opposed to the fictitious brand.

### **Brand Equity and Purchase Intention**

Hypothesis 4 stated there is a positive relationship between perceptions of social image brand equity and purchase intention, and the results provide positive and significant support for our claim. Based on these results, social imagery – which is defined as the consumer's view of the esteem in which the consumer's social group holds the brand (Lassar et al., 1995) – is an important consideration for a prospective member when choosing which fitness club to join. Moreover, in line with the positive and significant relationship found in the results of the current

study between social image and purchase intention, it is likely that the social image of a fitness club plays a role in the decision making process when fitness club prospects are choosing which club to join. For example, potential consumers may perceive a certain social image by the Facebook posts of a fitness club that is desirable to their ideal social group. Thus, based on our results, individuals are likely to exhibit an intent to purchase when there is a social image connection between fitness club and potential consumer occurs.

In regard to Hypothesis 5, which stated there is a positive relationship between perceived value brand equity and purchase intention, our findings indicated positive and significant support for this claim. Aaker (1991) stated that the underlying value of a brand is the set of associations that represent the bases for purchase decisions. Therefore, in regard to the current study, when prospective members believed there was value-driven equity in the brand, they were more likely to indicate they would make a purchase from the fitness club. Aaker (1996) suggested that generating value is one of the most important indicators of success for a brand. Likewise, the positive and significant relationship between value and purchase intention found in the present study suggests that if a prospective consumer perceives the fitness club to have value-driven equity, they are more likely to purchase a membership from that fitness club, thus exhibiting success of the brand.

Our findings also support Hypothesis 6, which stated there is a positive relationship between perceived commitment brand equity and purchase intention. The commitment construct utilized was defined as “the relative strength of a consumer's positive feelings toward the brand,” (Lassar et al., 1995, p. 13). Because it was impossible for the sample to have prior experience and/or knowledge with the brand, these results may be based on individuals having a commitment to the product itself (i.e., fitness/exercise), not the fitness club brand. Existing fitness-related branding research such as Williams and Pedersen (2012) has suggested that familiarity with exercise and a commitment to participating in exercise may be a brand association predictor regardless of the brand.

Therefore, participants in the current study may have been basing this purchase decision on how committed they are to the actual product (i.e., fitness/exercise), instead of the fitness club brand delivering the product.

### Managerial Insights

Collectively, the results of this study provide insights on the relationship among social media communications, consumer-based brand equity, and purchase intention that may be useful to practitioners. For example, fitness club marketers should be aware of the positive relationship between social media communications and perceived social image brand equity. Specifically, the inclusion of Facebook posts that highlight the typical user of the fitness club and/or the specific services offered by the club (e.g., personal training, weight lifting, exercise classes, etc.) may assist in the development of brand equity for fitness club prospects. The fitness club industry is highly competitive and many clubs have very similar brand offerings. Therefore, the implementation of image-based Facebook posts may be a compelling way for fitness clubs to successfully separate themselves in terms of social image from the competition and assemble a more centralized marketing focus on Facebook that connects with potential consumers.

The results of the current study also suggest that perceived social image-based brand equity may be linked to an intent to purchase among potential consumers. Therefore, it is recommended that fitness club marketers use Facebook posts that accurately represent the image their club. For example, an upscale fitness club (e.g., Equinox) will have a different social image than a traditional weight lifting fitness club (e.g., Gold's Gym). Prospective members will likely choose to join a fitness club brand with a social image that best fits the consumer and the social group that the consumer aligns with or desires to align with. Instead of utilizing broad and general marketing posts on Facebook, we advocate that fitness club marketers provide specific image-based posts related to their club offerings and

atmosphere in order to attract potential consumers that will be likely to join their club.

### Future Research

Based on the findings of the current study, we feel there are several areas of research that should be completed. The current study included price-related Facebook posts as stimuli for some participants and found a positive relationship between satisfaction of those posts and perceived brand equity. Future research should directly examine the relationship between price-related Facebook posts and value-related brand equity. In doing so, this may provide an opportunity to better understand the relationship between price-related social media efforts (e.g., sales, discounts, etc.) and perceived brand equity among consumers.

The present study used a simulated brand and resulted in perceptual responses, so future research should address the relationship between variables (e.g., commitment brand equity and purchase intention) by using an actual brand that prospective consumers are familiar with so that the potential commitment to the individual brand is realistic. Furthermore, Facebook is just one of many social media platforms used by businesses such as fitness clubs, so examining other social media platforms is an important next step in better understanding the relationship among social media communications, brand equity, and purchase intention.

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