

**The (Social) Medium Is The Message:
An Analysis of Social Media and
How Social Media Success & Media Theory Align**

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Abstract

This project assessed how pioneering media theories, developed in an era of broadcasting to apply to radio and television use, relate to an era of narrowcasting, in which social media increasingly dominate. Social media have altered traditional ways that organizations advertise and market products, but it's not entirely clear whether their use may simply be new applications of old theories about how audiences perceive and receive messages - even if the form of the message is more individualized and appears on a different platform. Understanding the intersection of the practical and theoretical can help marketers innovate for the future while remaining effective in their practices.

Aspects of social media use can be explained through the ideas of media theorists like McLuhan, Boorstin, and Cialdini. At the center of social media marketing is an attempt of a brand to form a relationship with a consumer. To achieve this, businesses put out content to foster this relationship. They also receive content, which is an opportunity to listen to their consumers and demonstrate customer service.

In my analysis, I sought to find out if social media could be seen as a sustainable media outlet for the exchange of information and entertainment through its connection to traditional media theories. Why is there an information boom, in which content is created by users and put on the web to share with a wide net of every day? And why does the information boom respond so positively to the infiltration of social media in our society. McLuhan argued that "the medium is the message," and I also question which of the following is more important: the act of

being on the medium of social media itself, or simply the message, or the content that is placed on social media?

Introduction/Project Significance

The purpose of this project is to answer the following research questions: At its core, what is social media? What are people doing on this new participatory digital medium and why? Why is inbound marketing so efficient for businesses who seek prospective customers on social media? How has digital communication evolved into permission marketing, where individuals must accept messages before actually receiving them? I explore the line between traditional and social media marketing to understand the answer to this question. What are the conditions out of which this social media landscape has evolved? How do the modern occurrences on social media relate to media theories that applied to other, or traditional, forms of media like television and radio? Do the characteristics of social media affect society more than the content on the platform itself? I study the worldwide phenomenon of social media to answer my research questions in an academic lens that can also be applied practically for social media marketing.

In this project, I seek the answers to key definitions for understanding social media research. I complete a vast literature review on social media research, and a literature review on the renowned books of three media theorists. Then, I note my research methodology for the remainder of my work, which includes 2 social media analyses for Starbucks and Nike, my original thoughts on how social media applies

to the traditional media theories studied, and a rubric that can be designed to analyze companies.

This project culminates in a discussion on how pioneering media theories relate to social media marketing success stories, and how social media marketing success can be measured and graded by analyzing specific components using an originally designed rubric. It is important to note how theories developed many years ago about traditional forms of print and broadcast media can be applied to social media use in the new marketing methodologies that we see today. Understanding the intersection of the practical and theoretical can help marketers innovate for the future while remaining effective in their practices. Though technology is constantly evolving, some things never change. In this project, I try to find these “constants.”

I find that there are three underlying media theories that are particularly consistent with social media today. First, media tends to act like a mirror, reflecting society back on itself. Second, media has fostered a new component of human evolution, where the boundaries of relevancy are pushed to be more instantaneous. Third, the medium and the message are two separate entities that work together.

Social media marketing is a critical component of inbound marketing in the current digital landscape. Inbound marketing is a strategy that involves creating content designed for a specific target audience that drives a potential consumer to the product being marketed. This involves narrowcasting, which means sending messages to a smaller and specific audience rather than casting a wide net. This contrasts with outbound marketing, where marketers actively seek customers using

more intrusive techniques such as posting information clearly intended to convince someone to buy something. Methods of the traditional outbound marketing playbook are decreasingly efficient due to the way that today's buyers act, and the way that information is delivered to consumers.

We live in a world of information abundance and attention scarcity. There are 1.96 billion worldwide social media users, and this year, in 2016, 78 percent of U.S. Americans have a social network profile (Statista, 2016). It used to be that information on the Internet was uploaded by a small group of people; now, because of the increasing availability to the Internet worldwide, almost anyone can put information on the Internet in many different ways, including blogging, commenting on articles, and nurturing a social media profile. "According to IBM, we now create 2.5 quintillion bytes of data each day – so much that 90% of the data in the world today has been created in the last two years alone" (Marketo, 2016). This boom in information does not seem to be slowing down. There is no doubt that the amount of people and information on the Internet is overwhelming and expansive. It can leave brands and companies questioning whether or not they can be heard in the busy, loud, and crowded online world.

Within a few seconds or minutes, consumers who have access to the Internet can access details, prices, reviews, and basically any information they want to find about a good or service. This makes buyers more informed and empowered than ever before. At the same time, the nature of social media encourages consumers to share and compare products and services within the online community. With this, social media has become ingrained in the fabric of human interactions, and it has

brought humans closer to technology than ever before. This has brought a new opportunity for companies and organizations to now connect with potential customers online through the set of tools that social media offers.

It is time to give a new meaning to McLuhan's famous line "the medium is the message," in the context of social media. In this project, I explore McLuhan's pioneering study in media theory, his book titled *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964). McLuhan argues that a medium affects society not by the content delivered over the medium, but rather by the characteristics of the medium, itself. His work is instrumental in my analysis of social media here, as I ask: do the characteristics of a social networking site affect society more than the content on the site itself? This is essential in determining the efficacy of the inbound marketing, a new and highly acclaimed digital marketing methodology.

Additional media theories include the theories addressed in two books: *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, written by Robert Cialdini, and *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* by Daniel J. Boorstin.

This topic is of interest to anyone trying to understand why investing time and funds into social media marketing is important to a business's marketing strategy. Social media marketing is key in developing a strong brand. Without a strong social media presence, businesses are in danger of appearing as though they do not exist; people use social media to develop a unique identity, and brands play a huge part in identity formation. Businesses are given the opportunity to entertain, inform, and connect with potential buyers online.

Key Definitions: Understanding The Internet's Role In Digital Marketing

What is marketing? What is advertising?

Though the words marketing and advertising relate to similar things, their meanings are completely different. Simply put, advertising is a piece of the marketing pie. Marketing has several components that include advertising, market research, media planning, public relations, and more. Advertising is typically the largest expense of marketing budgets, and has to do with getting the word out about a product, service, or brand. Web 2.0 has changed the definitions of marketing and advertising and has blurred the lines between the two. The blurred lines between marketing and advertising are evident when considering social media, since social media has facilitated the ability to join advertising with the brand's markets of interest by simply posting content. The digital era arrived at a time when traditional forms of advertising in print and in radio became oversaturated (Bambrick, 2015).

The definition of advertising has changed with the arrival of the digital world. With Web 2.0, advertisers can present a product to a niche viewer through a niche Web 2.0 vehicle, such as Facebook, for example. Facebook advertising can target a specific demographic that is more interested in whatever is being advertised. Though social media advertising seamlessly communicates with individuals, we find ourselves in the midst of "permission marketing," where brand relationship building starts provided that the individual being marketed to consciously accepts the marketing (Bambrick, 2015). Though this is the case, "permission marketing" must provide something to the potential consumer to be successful, such as relevant information or entertainment. This is one key reason as to why inbound marketing

is so efficient, by delivering content designed to appeal to an audience the marketing is trying to reach.

What is social media?

For the millennial, the term “social media” primarily refers to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and any other leading social networking site used to interact with other individuals that they are somehow connected with. The term social media was coined to describe “new platforms of digital communication that continually appear in this interactive electronic environment, underlying their participative and collaborative social characteristics,” demonstrating that the definition of social media goes beyond main social networking sites and also refers to a wider net of participatory media that Web 2.0 has fostered (Vernuccio, 2014). Research shows that social media use is expanding not only in the United States but all around the world. A report by Nielsen (2011) revealed that “social networks and blogs are the foremost online destination in each country, accounting for the majority of time spent online and reaching at least 60% of active Internet users” (Vernuccio, 2014). Additionally, according to “comScore (2011), social networking ranked as the most popular content category in worldwide Internet engagement, accounting for 19% of the time spent online globally” (Vernuccio, 2014). The proliferation of social media has fascinated marketing and advertising scholars and professionals. Marketers seek to go where the consumer goes, and right now there is no doubt that social media is the place to be to attract potential buyers.

What is branding?

A brand is not merely a name or a logo. A brand is “a promise made by a company to its customers and supported by that company” (Rowley, 2004). Online branding consists of using online platforms to build and develop a brand. Once something is posted on the Internet, it almost becomes instantly irrelevant, since new content is constantly introduced. A strong online brand presence is one that keeps up with the rapidly changing pace and delivers a consistent value-based message during the rapidly changing times (Littlewood, 2015). Brands can “deliver different levels of meaning. A brand may bring to mind certain product attributes, such as ‘organized,’ ‘durable,’ ‘reliable,’ and ‘pleasurable’” (Rowley, 2004). These traits say something about the individual that connects with the brand, providing the company or organization behind the brand with a golden opportunity to form a lasting relationship with this consumer. For example, “a buyer of a Mercedes may value high performance, safety, and prestige” (Rowley, 2004). It is also possible to draw conclusions about the personality of the general buyer of a Mercedes, thus giving the brand its own personality. In short, brands personify the company, product, or organization being represented. At the end of the day “the brand will attract people whose actual or desired self images are congruent with that of the brand” (Rowley, 2004). Branding is at the center of relationships that are essential for brands to build with their potential or existing consumers (Vernuccio, 2014).

What is Web 2.0?

Web 2.0 is the term used to describe the second phase of the World Wide Web. As opposed to Web 1.0, where content was distributed by a handful of authorities, the Web 2.0 world allows consumers to generate their own content and interact with existing content through dynamic web pages and social media. Web 2.0 “can be thought of as a series of technological innovations in terms of both hardware and software that facilitate inexpensive content creation, interaction, and interoperability...” (Berthon et al., 2012). The Web 2.0 landscape evolved out of Web 1.0 and has caused marketers to adapt to more “untraditional” marketing avenues such as social media. The advent of Web 2.0 has made social media seem like a necessity for brands, since the lack of a page can indicate that the company is lagging behind in some way or that the company does not exist. All Internet users have the power to generate content in some way, like on social media. The relationship between social media and Web 2.0 is as follows: Web 2.0 “enables the creation and distribution of the content that is social media” (Berthon et al., 2012).

What are COBRAS?

COBRAS is an acronym that stands for consumer online brand-related activities. “The COBRA concept is deliberately broadly marked out to cover all of such activities on social media” that involved communicating with or about a brand (Muntinga et al., 2012). When consumers generate content related to brands, there may be good or bad repercussions for the brand, depending on the content. The effect of a message is magnified when a consumer generates it on their own, because

people rely on actions and advice from their friends to make decisions, like word of mouth.

What is eWOM?

Word of mouth is “considered one of the most influential factors impacting consumer decision-making at all phases; from initial product awareness to product choice to post-purchase evaluations” (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2013). Research and practical applications show that word of mouth is one of, if not the most, critical component of marketing. This is because word of mouth (referred to as ‘WOM’ from here on out) is considered to provide “greater perceived credibility, less biased information, and more authentic assessments by consumers” (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2013). WOM generation within social media is as influential and can have a magnified effect. eWOM, or electronic word of mouth, is when individuals spread information through communication between people on the Internet, and eWOM is particularly apparent on social media (Villarejo et al., 2014). eWOM about brands can be positive or negative. It is possible to generate positive eWOM through strategic advertising, which we will discuss in Part IV (Spotts et al, 2014). Negative eWOM occurs when a brand no longer stays loyal to their promise or if the brand promise is negative to start off with. When people start commenting about a brand in a negative way on social media, the negative impact can magnify and expand beyond just that interaction, as a large network of people have the power of viewing the comment. Negative eWOM can ruin a company’s image and can cause a major loss of sales. Therefore, staying loyal to your brand promise and encouraging

positive consumer generated brand related activities can and will result in positive eWOM, and thus fostering a new relationship with the brand and potentially also improving sales. Social monitoring tools have the ability to track and interact with consumer eWOM. The best brands do not stay silent when displeased customers try to communicate with the brand on social media, but rather they respond to the customer's concern in a timely manner.

What are blogs? What are microblogs?

As mentioned earlier, Web 2.0 allows Internet users to generate their own content while consuming existing content created by other Internet users. Blogs and "microblogs" are two examples of consumer-generated content that anyone, including brands, can use to generate content. "Blogs are websites owned and written by individuals who maintain regular commentaries and diaries that may include text, graphics, videos, and links to other blogs and web pages and are usually presented in reverse chronological order. Micro-blogs (e.g., Twitter) are social networking services that enable users to send and read very short messages, which are usually restricted by the number of characters in the message" (Berthon et al, 2012). Blogs are key as they are the platform on which marketers can write content specifically targeted to an audience. They are effective in inbound marketing because they lead customers to the website of the brand, and can then provide more information to the consumer, provided that the consumer enjoys the initial content provided. The blog content is then shared on social media as part of efficient inbound campaigns. The sharing on social media attempts to create a chain of

actions in which a consumer clicks on the blog link, explores the brand's website, and hopefully fills out a form that allows the consumer to see additional content. Once the consumer fills out this form, they become a lead that marketers can then vet and send additional information to in the hopes that they convert to a customer.

What is the goal of using social media for branding?

Every brand uses social media for a different purpose, but in general, social media has the power to help brands formulate relationships with individuals. These individual relationships are what bring consumers back to their social media communities and are what bring success to businesses. The individual relationships make consumers feel heard by something bigger than one's own self. The brand has the opportunity to become personified and literally become the consumer's "friend" or "follower". When individuals associate with brands on social media, they are using the brand to help build their identity by connecting with the brand's values. Social activities, like generating eWOM, have effects larger than the individual conversations between two individuals because public social media posts or posts on spaces where multiple people can view the conversation attract a wide audience. Viewing the actions of others impacts individual decisions, especially when seeing how others perceive the comment via "likes" or "comments" on posts. Using social media is key for businesses to generate sales, but "no online presence is better than a bad one" (Littlewood, 2015).

Understanding the Social Media Marketing World: Literature Review

A key factor in understanding social media marketing is understanding how social media is used. People use social media to be a part of a booming online community, but what brings them back to social media platforms day after day is more than the feeling of community. The relationships and ties that individuals build with other people and brands are what give meaning to social media interactions. People have the opportunity to reinforce relationships that they've made in the real world through interacting with people that they know in some way on social platforms. There is a loop of positive reinforcement sent to and received by people that we know and are connected with on social media. When people "like" things, they are stroking egos, inflating that individual's self-esteem. "Liking" something involves pressing a button under a post, depending on the social media channel, declaring interest or positive thoughts on the post. Additionally, so much information sharing and entertainment occurs on the web today, and missing out on this would be detrimental to an individual's life, since so much of what occurs in person revolves around discussion of information that was found on the Internet, especially for the millennial generation. Young millennials even use an acronym for the fear of missing out: FOMO. The fear of missing out is a huge factor in determining social media use. Not only that, but also the idea of identity formation is intrinsic to an individual's experience on social media sites. Individuals have the freedom to construct their profiles to their own liking and they have the opportunity to brand themselves on these outlets. You can control how people see you based on what you put out. By sharing and generating content and photographs, an individual

can impose specific traits and values on his or herself, similar to how companies do. There is some aspect of “showing off” in this category. We want the people that we know to see the cool things that we’ve done, and we want to be positively reinforced by them, which goes back to the point about relationships mentioned above. In the social media world, you are what you share. In sum, the importance of relationships, FOMO, and identity formation all play a key role in why people use social media.

Marketing goes where the consumers go, and right now consumers are on social media. Research shows that businesses “use social network sites as a two-way communication with their current and potential customers” (Villarejo et al., 2014). The dialogue that is created on social media helps consumers connect on a deeper level with brands. “Branded social campaigns provide additional touch-points to encourage ongoing interaction between the consumer and the brand story throughout the day, which can deepen consumer-brand relationships, help marketers uncover common themes in consumer feedback, and persuade consumers to engage with online content” (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). In other words, successfully branded social media campaigns have multiple benefits for businesses and consumers alike. Social media is free to use, except for when you want to launch some sort of paid ad campaign to increase likes and views, which can have a significant return on investment.

Businesses have the unique opportunity to receive feedback on their products and to hear what people want from the business. By listening to what your customers want on social media, companies can alter or improve their businesses based on feedback that they receive. Not all brands work well on social media, but

for those that do, the impact and results are huge (Dobrow, 2015). For brands that do not have a social media presence, there can be huge consequences, as the brand is at risk of appearing as though it does not exist (Littlewood, 2015). But at the same time, “social media is free as in kittens,” meaning that if you do not care for it and nurture it, you might as well not have it at all (Littlewood, 2015).

Social media was started as a place for young people to go to “hang out.” Social media “compete for consumers’ leisure time” (Chan-Olmsted, 2011). There is a fun factor embedded into social media that is important for marketers not to neglect. The fun factor can be integrated into social media marketing through creating a branded game, or by posting relevant and entertaining content.

The social media campaigns with the highest return on investment are those that use the inbound methodology. The inbound approach is a summation of several qualities that include creating a dialogue with consumers and providing consumers (or potential consumers) with interesting, relevant, and individualized content. This can be summed up by the term “narrowcasting,” which involves sending messages to a more streamlined and targeted audience. This is in opposition to the word “broadcasting,” which involves catering to a wider net of participants. It is important to give consumers more than you take; “if you interrupt consumers, make sure to give them something of value in return” (Baron et al., 2014). Additionally, people are tired of hearing from marketers. “Consumers often hit the delete key when they know the message is from a marketer” (Silberer et al., 2012). Consumers are now turning to their connections (friends or social media networks) to make decisions about products. This relates back to the importance of electronic word of mouth, as

discussed earlier. People still want to hear from individuals, though. Brands can do this by paying relevant and influential thought leaders to write about their brand or product on the individual's blog. Also brand ambassadors (or individuals who represent a brand) can help generate WOM and eWOM throughout their in-person or online communities.

A huge part of branding, especially on social media, is personification and intangibility. Personification is when you attribute human characteristics to animals, inanimate objects, or abstract notions. Here, branding is the abstract notion. Social media calls for brands to come across as a person. Strong brands have clear tones and interact with people, just as your Facebook friends do, for example.

Additionally, businesses with strong brand identities somehow demonstrate an intangible aspect that the product provides, and this is completed through the personification. For example, Coca-Cola sells happiness through cheerful, upbeat social media posts; through this, Coca-Cola creates a strong brand image.

Social media marketing and marketing through traditional media (print, radio, television) should not be seen as separate, but rather as tactics working in tandem "to enhance brand engagement" (Spotts et al., 2014). Determining the lines between traditional media and social media depend on how you define the two forms. If defining traditional media as simply the medium on which the advertising is placed, social media should be seen as a tool to help further the messages portrayed on these traditional forms. With the advent of social media, the quality, rather than the quantity, of the audience is what is most important. Social media casts a wide net, and with strategic tools, social media marketing can be targeted to

a specific audience of interest. It is imperative to consider what type of content is delivered across all marketing channels: it should be designed to specifically please the viewer that is trying to be reached to be successful.

There is no such thing as a “one-size-fits-all solution for social media” brand building for businesses (Schulze et al., 2015). By understanding the social media actions of individuals and other brands, it is possible to achieve social media goals for businesses. Every social media approach needs to be customized to match the promise that the business is delivering to consumers. There are qualities of successful social media practices that all businesses can follow, and there are also important concepts to understand when developing content for social media consumption, as noted below.

Before you jump in and start a social media marketing strategy, it is important to first “set the context for the brand” (Rowley, 2004). Where does your brand fit in the marketplace? What does it value? When answering these questions it is vital to stay true to the product or service being branded. Answering these questions should be completed in a branding guide that all staff of the company being presented must internalize and understand.

When putting out messages to consumers, it is necessary to provide them with something that gives them value (Littlewood, 2015). That value is likely rooted in an intangible aspect like happiness, friendship, or love (Bambrick, 2015).

“Regardless of the goal, information about the brand must be relevant to the consumer if you want the consumer to engage with a brand in self-relevant ways” (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Managing a social media account on behalf of a brand

requires nurturing, and it is necessary to post consistently. The consequences of not being consistent are extremely detrimental, as it can make your brand seem as though it does not care about consumers. Branding must be consistent across all marketing forms, not only social media. The lack of consistency can also come across as a lack of innovation or change.

“Design features may determine receivers’ awareness and liking of advertisements” (Rauchnabel et al., 2012). Branding is not just a logo or an image; it is essential that thought goes into the logos and images that the brand is connected with in order to be consistent with the brand’s message. Brand designs “help to accelerate [brand] recognition, and thereby speed up the branding process” (Rowley, 2004). A study shows that “the size of the posting, the number of media elements included (e.g., pictures), and an invitation to respond to the posting increase liking, whereas the amount of text decreases liking” (Rauchnabel et al., 2012). Unfortunately, social media platforms have constraints and there is not complete design freedom. “Neither Facebook nor Twitter can be taken far from their default look and feel, with interfaces that have become very familiar with their large user bases” (Yan, 2011).

As mentioned earlier, electronic word of mouth is extremely influential. People are tired of hearing from marketers, but they still want to hear from other people (Silberer et al., 2012). Additionally, when making purchasing decisions, consumers look to people they trust (e.g., friends, family, and peers). Consumers have become a brand’s most important persuasion vehicle (Muntinga et al., 2012), and a main goal is to have COBRAS (consumer online brand-related activities) occur

on social media. To do this, marketers need to create entertaining, informative, new, and interesting content that is highly sharable. This sounds like a big goal, but it is attainable. It requires creative thinking and an analysis of what is trending. By looking at what is trending, you can see what people are sharing right now, and that can provide some indication as to what to share or what to produce. For example, in January 2012, there was a boom of the “Sh*t [People] Say” video meme, where people would make hilarious videos saying things that people of a specific demographic say. Lululemon hopped on the bandwagon just in time and created a “Sh*t Yogis Say” video, poking fun at the things that yoga-obsessed individuals say, and the video got millions of views in a short period of time. Lululemon clothing adorned the video, and it also served as an advertisement for their clothing as yogis shared the video with their social media networks.

Marketing strategies need to have a clear-cut commitment to social media. Social media marketing strategies include frequency of messaging, types of messaging, writing and visual style guides, and key information on buyer personas. Buyer personas are fictional stories about fictional people who represent a segment of customers for a brand’s product or service. It is important to create buyer personas in the strategy phase so that social content can be designed according to things that these fictional personas (that represent a larger audience) want to see.

Social media is just a puzzle piece of a big picture that makes up a brand’s identity formation, but it is becoming more and more essential for a brand’s existence. Web pages, for example, are extremely important for business services. In order to attract the viewer to your company and to generate a lead, social media is a

critical tool to leading someone to a website, but the website must be strong to turn the view into a lead. A strong website offers information to an individual in some way and includes a call to action to transform viewers into leads.

Social media has quickly evolved into the most important set of tools in a company's marketing toolbox. Consistency, frequency, and truthfulness are necessary when formulating a brand identity, but to maintain and build your brand's identity, it is key to listen to consumers, create content that consumers will want to share, and tie advertising on other media forms (like print, television, and radio) with social media to encourage viewer participation and engagement.

Understanding Media Theory: Literature Review

For this literature review on renowned media theories, I looked at three books by different authors: *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* by Marshall McLuhan, 1964, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* by David J. Boorstin, 1962, and *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* by Robert Cialdini, 1984. I chose these books based on advice from my advisors who have experience reading media theory, and who noted that these three books will shed some light on media theories that may be relevant to social media studies. Below I address aspects of these books that I feel are relevant to this paper and can be analyzed for the modern digital landscape. There is a larger focus on Marshall McLuhan's work due to his impact in the media studies sphere.

In 1964, Marshall McLuhan published *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, and within months the book "acquired the standing of Holy Scripture and

made of its author the foremost oracle of the age” (McLuhan, 1994). The theories addressed in McLuhan’s book are relevant not only for the time it was written; it’s underlying theories hold true for looking at media today. In the introduction chapter to this book, McLuhan says that there has been an “electric implosion” that has “heightened human awareness of responsibility to an intense degree” (McLuhan, 1994). McLuhan notes that because of this, groups previously marginalized now have a voice and can be involved in society. Since electric implosion “compels commitment and participation,” McLuhan calls the 1960s “the Age of Anxiety”; by this he means that society is becoming overwhelmed by the amount of information put out in the media, and society gets anxious because of it (McLuhan, 1994).

In his second and most acclaimed chapter titled “The Medium Is The Message,” McLuhan notes “it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message” (McLuhan, 1994). McLuhan says that “many people would be disposed to say that it was not the machine, but what one did with the machine, that was its meaning or message,” which would contradict his point that the medium is the message; McLuhan goes on to say, “The restructuring of human work and association was shaped by the technique of fragmentation that is the essence of machine technology” (McLuhan, 1994). In other words, McLuhan is saying here that the machine, itself, had an impact on society much larger than what one did with the machine, making the medium, in this case the machine, the impetus for change in society, or the message.

McLuhan uses the electric light as an example to help explain what he is trying to say here. Light can be used to illuminate a wide variety of things, ranging

from brain surgery to an evening baseball game, making these activities the content of the light (McLuhan, 1994). The light “escapes attention as a communication medium just because it has no content,” but light is essential in making things happen (McLuhan, 1994). It is taken for granted because of its widespread use, and society that is accustomed to electricity may not think of what life would be like without electricity on a day-to-day basis. From this example, McLuhan says, “It is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.” In short, “the medium is the message” means that a message is embedded with meaning because of the nature of the medium on which the message is placed. The medium and the message have a symbiotic relationship, as the medium impacts how the message is interpreted.

McLuhan classifies media forms as being “hot” or “cold”, with radio as an example of a hot medium, and the telephone as an example of a cold medium. “Hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience” and are therefore “low in participation” (McLuhan, 1994). On the contrary, “cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience” (McLuhan, 1994). While radio provides information for people to consume passively by listening, the telephone is a platform on which people need to actively participate by listening closely and talking to whoever is on the other end of the line. These classifications of media show that McLuhan is interested in the level of human participation in media forms and sees participation as a key factor when analyzing media.

Society’s media consumption is compared to the Greek myth of Narcissus, who “mistook his own reflection in the water for another person” (McLuhan, 1994).

“This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image” (McLuhan, 1994). The significance of this story to media theory is as follows: people tend to “become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves,” and media has the power to act as such a source or reflection.

This reflection is because of the “electric age,” where “we see ourselves being translated more and more into the form of information, moving toward the technological extension of consciousness” (McLuhan, 1994). In other words, media is a translator because it turns the human experience into information that can be consumed by others. The process of turning the human experience into information on media platforms furthers the concept of media as an extension of man, a key component of McLuhan’s arguments. This is because a component of life in modern society has become this translation of life onto media forms.

McLuhan says that electronic technology seems to favor the inclusive spoken word, rather than the written word. He also says that advertisements are created in the image of audience motives and desires in his chapter titled “Ads: Keeping Upset with the Joneses”. McLuhan is discussing the trend of successful advertising to discuss less about a product, but rather the feeling and intangible qualities that result. These two ideas call for advertising that is not written, and that discuss the effects of a product rather than a product itself.

McLuhan goes on to address several other components of media theory that he feels that are essential to comprehending the media landscape that are generally complex and perplexing. His key theories mentioned above have interesting

applications when looking at them through the lens of the modern digital sphere of social media marketing, which will be addressed later in this paper.

Daniel J. Boorstin's book titled *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* was first published in 1962, two years before McLuhan's. Boorstin coined the term "pseudo-event", which he defines as an event or activity that exists for the sole purpose of media publicity. He refers to a pseudo-event as an artificial innovation that has inundated society (Boorstin, 1962). According to Boorstin, our expectations of news reporting has changed and evolved through the years as a result of media that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This has led to an expectation of society to know what is going on, and who said what to whom and when (Boorstin, 1962). The marker of success for a news publication in this new era inundated with information is thus one that can yield interesting content to their readers every moment of the day; if there is no noteworthy news, the writer is expected to make the viewer think critically through an opinion story or other type of essay that makes the reader speculate what is to come in future content (Boorstin, 1962). This creates, according to Boorstin, an "illusion," which people demand. This fascination with the illusion keeps the news business afloat due to their ability to satisfy the illusion that society craves. Boorstin also notes that news writers and public relations firms are in the business of making experiences extravagant to entice readers to read their stories and listen to them on media; hence, they create pseudo-events.

Boorstin discusses celebrities as illusions and writes, "Celebrity status can be fleeting. No one is more forgotten than last generation's celebrity. He becomes a

tragic hero, a victim of his greatness” (Boorstin, 1962). Boorstin looks at the celebrity as a human pseudo-event, as the celebrity informs and educates us about him or herself, creating consumable entertainment for society. Boorstin believes that the advertising world has increased the mass appeal of celebrities by using celebrities to endorse goods and services.

Boorstin continues his discussion on images and illusions and writes, “The Bible tells us that “God created man in his own image.”” But now, “the language of images is everywhere,” and everywhere “it has displaced the language of ideals” (Boorstin). Having the “right image” can help sell a product or elect a president, but the image does not necessarily reflect the ideal. “God created man in his own image” is usually interpreted as God created man in his own ideal, as images are typically contrived, and it is not generally desirable to look at humanity in this way. Boorstin discusses the “corporate image,” and how images help build associations with intangible things to develop an identity for a company. An image needs to be believable: “The most effective images are usually those which have been especially doctored for believability” (Boorstin, 1962). An example is Ivory Soap’s advertising copy declaring that they are “99.44%” pure, since “100%” sounds too good to be true and not believable (Boorstin, 1962). In addition to an image being believable, it also is passive (Boorstin, 1962). “Since the image is already supposed to be congruent with reality, the producer of the image is expected to fit into the image – rather than to strive toward it. The consumer of the image is also supposed somehow to fit into it” (Boorstin, 1962). “Once the image is there, it commonly becomes the more important reality, of which the corporation’s conduct seems mere

evidence” (Boorstin, 1962). By being passive, Boorstin means that this reflected image has very little to do with the activities of the corporation itself. An image is also “vivid and concrete,” meaning that one or few good qualities appropriate to whatever is being portrayed must be vividly portrayed (Boorstin, 1962). An image is “simplified,” meaning that it is simpler than the object it represents (Boorstin, 1962). “The most effective image is one simple and distinctive enough to be remembered, yet not so handy as to seem the natural symbol for the whole class of objects it describes” (Boorstin, 1962). Images are ambiguous, floating “somewhere between the imagination and the senses, between expectation and reality” (Boorstin, 1962).

Society shifted from looking at ideals to looking at images. The real and the contrived are so blurred that it is hard to decipher which is which. Even individuals who associate with contrived images to build their brand identity have difficulty separating the real from the contrived. Boorstin mentions the mirror effect, which is something that McLuhan touches upon in his chapter titled *The Gadget Lover: Narcissus as Narcosis*. Boorstin says this mirror effect involves the contriving of experiences by society, according to their own liking, resulting in people reading what they want to read and hearing what they want to hear.

In *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Dr. Robert Cialdini discusses the psychological practices used to influence people to say yes. These tactics have many different applications, including the marketing realm. Dr. Cialdini addresses six principles: reciprocity, commitment and consistency, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity. Reciprocity realized that people feel like they owe those who

do something for them. For marketers, Cialdini says, “The implication is you have to go first. Give something: give information, give free samples, give a positive experience to people and they will want to give you something in return” (Cialdini, 1984). The commitment and consistency principle is about the “...desire to be (and to appear) consistent with what we have already done. Once we have made a choice or taken a stand, we will encounter personal and interpersonal pressures to behave consistently with that commitment. Those pressures will cause us to respond in ways that justify our earlier decision” (Cialdini, 1984). The social proof rule “applies especially to the way we decide what constitutes correct behavior. We view a behavior as more correct in a given situation to the degree that we see others performing it” (Cialdini, 1984). It can be thought of as peer pressure, but it is more unspoken. It involves taking actions inspired by a group of others that an individual may associate with. From a young age, we are taught to obey figures of authority. This is the premise of the authority principle. The liking principle just means that we prefer to say yes to the people we like and the people we know. Finally, the scarcity principle means “opportunities seem more valuable to us when their availability is limited,” as the fear of loss is greater than the desire for gain (Cialdini, 1984).

These theories demonstrate some key findings that will be compared to the realm of social media later in this paper. In summary, according to this analysis, the theory says that media has a tendency to reflect human desires. I think that McLuhan and Boorstin would agree that media has created man in their own image, and man has created media in his own image. Electric media has created a human expectation of constant information and entertainment. Additionally, media gives

meaning to the content of messages. Media content, however, creates illusions, as it blurs the lines of the real and the contrived, making it difficult for the person interacting with the given media platform to decipher fiction from fact. I think that these theories can be separated into three overarching theories: (1) media acts as a mirror for society, (2) media has pushed humans to evolve into information and entertainment-expecting beings, and (3) media and the message on media should be considered as separate entities and have a symbiotic relationship.

Research Methodology

After completing literature reviews on social media marketing terminology, the social media marketing landscape, and media theories, I analyzed two iconic brands to understand successful social media marketing techniques. I chose two large companies that offer consumer products: Starbucks and Nike. I chose these brands because they both have a high infiltration in their corresponding markets. Of coffee house chains in the United States, Starbucks has a 32.8% share, which is a large share at nearly one third of the market (Statista). In the athletic footwear realm, Nike has a global market share of 22.8% this year, but market share is expected to increase to 27.2% by 2020 (Statista). This currently is more than one fifth of the entire world's consumption of athletic footwear, which is huge. It is important to note that both Starbucks and Nike offer products beyond what they have a large market share in, demonstrating an expansive reach to a wide range of consumers.

To analyze these brands I first researched what others had to say about the social media marketing of these two companies by searching online for articles from news websites and blogs. I read these articles and then looked at the two companies social media marketing profiles across all channels where they have a presence. First, I looked at pages and posts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, and then did a general Google search to see what other social media profiles the brands interact on. From there, I wrote two social media brand analyses, one for each company, that highlight findings from online research and things that I found when looking at their social media.

After completing these case studies, I synthesized all of my aforementioned research and developed my own ideas on how media theory and modern social media marketing strategies align. I developed ideas by writing notes while reading the three media theory books that I read for the media theory literature review. I read critically and annotated ways that I felt the media theory presented in the literature could apply to social media marketing. I used the Nike and Starbucks case studies to bolster my arguments.

When looking at the social media accounts, I looked at post frequency, visual components, text tone, and interactions, which are the aspects that stood out to me during a preliminary critically analysis of the social profiles. Within these four components, I found variations for nearly each page, even for different pages on the same platform for the same brand. I took these categories and developed a rubric that can be used to analyze, or grade, any social media platform. I completed the

rubric analysis for both Nike and Starbucks and explain the reasoning behind why I chose these scores for the two brands.

Social Media Brand Analysis: Starbucks

“One of the reasons behind Starbucks’ social media success is that drinking coffee is a social activity. People love to meet over coffee, bring each other coffee, swap stories about coffee, and build coffee acquisition into their morning routines” (Huff, 2014). Starbucks beverages are a part of a social experience that transcends generations. Starbucks’ social media team translates this social experience to digital media in an attempt to keep customers loyal to their products. The company has reached critical mass in terms of advertising, so their challenge now is to keep customers loyal and to make sure they are not swayed by the similar offerings of competitors (Huff, 2014).

People interact with Starbucks social media by posting “countless pictures of their handcrafted beverages on social media channels” (Starbucks Newsroom, 2015). The Starbucks social media team has found that social media users tend to post the iconic Starbucks cup with an interesting background, “but there’s something different about Starbucks Frappuccino blended beverage photos” (Starbucks Newsroom, 2015). “They’re usually selfies featuring a person sipping their favorite Frappuccino through a green straw” (Starbucks Newsroom, 2015). Social media Starbucks fans post pictures with or of their Pumpkin Spice Lattes (PSLs), a fall favorite drink with a cult following, too; the same goes for other seasonal specialty drinks.

The Starbucks social media team is constantly “listening to people who are drawn to popular Starbucks beverages and then “holding the funhouse mirror up,” as Turner, the Starbucks director of Global Social Media, calls it, to reflect the community” (Starbucks Newsroom, 2015). This shows that Starbucks is really listening to what their ideal consumer, or buyer persona, is experiencing. By adding fun images Starbucks understands the importance of social monitoring in social media marketing. Starbucks is a global chain, yet their individual attention to customer’s online actions with their products is reminiscent to that of a local coffee shop.

Starbucks has received permission to interact with over 50 million people who have agreed to join their online communities on social media. We live in an age of permission marketing, where marketing designed to disrupt is no longer effective. Starbucks’ social media marketing fosters a feeling of community where people share a common love for coffee beverages without disruption. This aligns with the marketing goals of Starbucks, which is to build brand loyalty. Delighting existing customers furthers brand loyalty, and in this case delighting involves adding value through entertaining content and great customer engagement. This gives Starbucks’ a greater reach with their marketing budget, as well as access to information about their patrons.

“No matter what Starbucks social platform you visit, the Starbucks touch is evident. The company’s social channels all have the same look, feel, and tone as their stores. Although the marketing team takes a slightly approach from Twitter to Instagram to Facebook, the content is consistently unified around the company’s

mission, message, and goals” (Huff, 2014). Starbucks’ customer-centric messaging and attention to visual detail elevate their image on social media above competing beverage distributors.

“The Starbucks social media management team doesn’t post Facebook updates all that often. When they do, however, they’re usually eye-catching and ultra-clever. The posts strike a good balance between fun contests, helpful tips for the java-loving crowd, and subtle sales messages to its customers” (Huff, 2014).

Fans created the Starbucks Frappuccino “like” page on Facebook ;
“Customers started their own Frappuccino fan page on Facebook in 2008 and were a million strong when Starbucks became involved with the community a year later. Its personality – defined by fans – is joyful and exuberant. Because a Frappuccino can be customized with more than 36,000 combinations, it’s also viewed as a statement of a customer’s personality” (Starbucks Newsroom, 2015). This aligns with one of the key reasons as to why individuals use social media: identity formation. The Frappuccino was also designed for a younger generation whose first coffee shop experience was likely over a Frappuccino, a blended beverage that’s reminiscent of a milkshake. Most teenagers prefer this blended drink to actual coffee or espresso, which adults tend to order. This younger generation is comprised of digital natives who grew up with the advent of social media. There is no surprise that they took to social media to share their Frappuccino drinking experience, as it presents another outlet for experimenting with identity formation by connecting with an iconic brand.

“All Tweets are directed at specific Twitter users who’ve “spoken” to Starbucks in their own timeline, sometimes with a complaint or negative feedback. The Starbucks team checks in several times a day and encourages dissatisfied customers to get in touch with the company for follow-up using a Twitter-specific email address. It’s an unorthodox but smart approach to deal with customer complaints before they have a chance to get out of hand.” (Huff, 2014). Monitoring and responding to negative eWOM (electronic word of mouth) before it gets out of hand prevents a firestorm of negativity surrounding their online image.

The Starbucks Pumpkin Spice Latte has its own Twitter page and persona. “The Starbucks social team established traits to support PSL’s spirited persona and decided to treat it as a celebrity after noticing people who follow PSL on social media also follow more celebrities than the average user” (Starbucks Newsroom, 2015). Through their personification of the PSL, Starbucks shows that it recognizes that social media is a place where companies can express their personality. The iconic PSL has spun off a number of mentions in other media, including satirical critiques of those who drink the beverage. The fame of the PSL has inspired other companies to attempt their own seasonal drink, but nothing has surpassed the PSL as of late.

Beyond Facebook and Twitter, “Starbucks really shines on visually-oriented social sites like Pinterest and Instagram where they can post appealing beverage-related eye candy” (Huff, 2014). In addition to having its own Twitter page, the PSL has its own Tumblr page. The company has a Google+ presence, and a successful app with a multitude of features as well. Starbucks’ social media success is largely due to

their cult following and loyal patrons; the company has been able to achieve great success without much work or monetary burden.

Social Media Brand Analysis: Nike

Attending sporting events and partaking in athletic ventures are sociable activities that bring people together, and Nike is a company with large-scale, global infiltration in these sectors. Nike “engages in the design, development, marketing and sale of footwear, apparel, and equipment, accessories and services” (money.cnn.com). Nike is an iconic brand with an even more iconic swoosh logo and advertising campaigns that have resonated with millions around the world. Nike’s social media presence has connected the sociability of sports with the online sphere. Consumers of Nike products connect with the brands iconic campaigns on a deep level; thus, they use the brand to build their online identity by connecting and interacting with the brand. Nike is for athletes so by sharing Nike content the consumer is demonstrating a desire to identify as an athletic individual. Nike has a multitude of projects focused on specific sports, so their social media content is segregated by sporting activity across different accounts.

A Facebook search for “Nike” yields several verified pages that focus on specific products or services that the company offers. There is an overarching “Nike” page with around 24 million likes, and there are other pages such as “NikeWomen,” “Nike Sportswear,” and “Nike Football.” The value of creating all of these pages “is that communities have been formed surrounding mutual interests and content can be tailored specifically for that audience, meaning followers see exactly what they

are interested in” (linkhumans.com). All Facebook pages have a consistent visual and writing style, with content resembling their memorable campaigns like “Just Do It,” many of which viewers first interacted with on TV and in print. These formerly traditional campaigns (such as Nike commercials surrounding the “Just Do It” phrase) are made more meaningful with the opportunity for viewers to interact with them on social media. The “Just Do It” campaign encourages people to achieve their goals and shake off all of the things potentially holding them back; the campaign aligns with Nike’s brand image of helping people achieve their athletic goals through high quality athletic-related apparel and products. By sharing “Just Do It” related content, social media users demonstrate that they are similar to the Nike brand image because they believe in the same inspirational message. Thus, it increases the value of Nike’s brand message as more and more people identify with it and want it to continue to be a source of inspiration and personal brand building on social media.

Posts on the “Nike” official overarching page are less frequent than on the niche pages, perhaps because of the engagement opportunities. Specific audiences like the niche pages, and thus Nike can create content that appeals to them specifically, making their marketing efforts more likely to create engaged, loyal customers. Though lacking in post frequency, this Facebook page serves as a hub for Nike’s digital presence, however: the page leads to the Nike Instagram and Nike+ online support. There is also a “Shop Now” button, where customers can quickly and easily purchase the company’s products.

Nearly every post in the past few months has a video clip, some of which have captivated audiences on television, YouTube, and other non-social digital media too. All videos include famous athletes and/or Nike products. The celebrity athlete endorsement adds credibility to their product and gets the viewer thinking, “If it’s good enough for this famous athlete, it’s good enough for me;” “it” being Nike products. Nike understands the sports culture and the role that athletes play: people who like sports and are big sports fans tend to identify with certain teams. With that comes an interest in certain athletes. Nike knows that this is what goes through the head of the every day sports fan, and they use that to their advantage through the celebrity athlete endorsement here. “Interestingly the product-related content appears to get more interactions than posts featuring players, with one photo gallery of new boots attracting more than 35,000 ‘likes’ and almost 1,000 comments” (Moth, 2013) This shows Nike’s interest with staying up to date with new technology, such as Facebook auto play, where videos play without requiring a user to press a play button. Nike leverages this technology by creating short videos with quick editing to automatically captivate the viewer scrolling through their newsfeed.

On Twitter, as with Facebook, “Nike has individual feeds for its subsidiary brands, including golf, basketball, FuelBand, Nike.com and football” (Moth, 2013). Like Facebook, visually-based posts highlight products. For the most part, Nike uses Twitter to correspond with Nike customers. “For each of the feeds the focus is very much on responding to @mentions rather than pushing out marketing messages, and the rate at which some of the more popular accounts respond to users is quite

astounding” (Moth, 2013). It is unusual for such a large company to have such personalized customer service; Twitter allows the brand to not lose that opportunity to make customers feel valued. On Facebook, Nike does the same, but to a lesser degree. The brand’s entire Twitter strategy seems to be very customer-centric, emphasizing their desire to connect with individuals and build a positive community around their products. This demonstrates Nike’s understanding of the power of eWOM (electronic word of mouth) and how customer satisfaction is growing in importance in this highly digital era where reviews of products and product recommendations are greatly influenced by social media networks.

As a visually based platform, Instagram contains the most interesting Nike-related images. Still, the content is “on brand,” meaning that it still looks as though it is coming from the same source as all other social media. On Instagram, Nike uses hashtags and encourages others to share their Nike-related photo with the same hashtag, channeling a community of Nike users who frequent the platform. Nike’s creative content makes their account stand out amongst the rest, particularly because of the way that they frame their products in colorful, beautiful shots. They also do multi-image Instagram campaigns, where they post several square images that create a larger image when you scroll through their page’s home feed.

Nike takes technology, social media, and data very seriously. In fact, the company has created fitness tracking products and applications that allow users to track statistics of their athletic efforts. These platforms encourage social sharing and have online communities surrounding the products. For example, Nike+ offers fitness tracking, and there is a Facebook page dedicated to the “Nike+ Run Club”

with nearly 5 million likes. Content on this Facebook page is all related to running, and how running brings people together.

By bringing their iconic advertising and cult following online, Nike has been able to create a strong presence on social media, without much of a financial or time investment. The company is able to connect with their target audiences through narrowcasting, or creating content specifically catered to those that they are trying to reach in order to appeal to them. This technique has lead users to interact with their content as component of their online identity formation, strengthening the Nike brand on the digital sphere at minimal cost and effort.

How Media Theory and Social Media Align

Aspects of social media can be explained through the ideas of McLuhan, Boorstin, and Cialdini. At the center of social media marketing is an attempt of a brand to form a relationship with a consumer. To achieve this, businesses put out content to foster this relationship. They also receive content, which is an opportunity to listen to their consumers and demonstrate customer service.

Social media serve as platforms on which people can share their life experiences and have their voices be heard, with both active and passive levels of participation. This is the case due to the infrastructure of the web; Web 2.0 has allowed these actions to take place, since nearly anyone can be a content creator. The advent of Web 2.0 has shaped the way that society interacts online. It has allowed the personified company, or brand, to start conversations with people. These conversations occur when companies reply to mentions of their products on

social media. For example, both Starbucks and Nike use Twitter as a platform to reply to consumers more than to push a specific message to them. Consumers take action to reach out to the brand, and the brand takes action to reply to the consumer. This action requires a high level of interaction for both parties, thus, because of this, McLuhan would likely classify social media as a cool media, which “are high in participation or completion by the audience” (McLuhan, 1994). “Hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience” and are therefore “low in participation” (McLuhan, 1994). McLuhan may have considered social media to be a “hot media” when looking at social media actions by consumers when not interacting with companies or others. The act of getting a social media profile could have been due to Cialdini’s principle of social proof in *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, meaning that a key component of getting the account could have been due to the network effect, in which the high volume of social media users make social media platforms more desired, and the fear of missing out. By simply joining a social media platform and interacting with others, there is a level of passivity when aimlessly scrolling through platforms when you are not actively seeking something in particular. Acting on social media in such a way could classify social media as “hot media” in McLuhan’s eyes. This does not necessarily make social media good or bad, but I think that its ability to fall in both categories classifies it as a diverse medium on which society can either be active or passive. Regardless of level of interaction on social media, social media serves as a space where society can exercise their ability to become part of a community. McLuhan said that there has been an “electric implosion” in which groups previously

marginalized now have a voice and can be involved in society (McLuhan, 1994). Social media allows people to find their voice by partaking in both active and passive experiences. The underlying purpose of these experiences is to have any individual's voice be heard, no matter how marginalized in society. This quality of social media can help shape the media as a legitimate format that is pushing society forward for the better.

On any media form, there seems to be a tendency for content to inform relevantly. Humans have evolved into beings that crave instantaneous information and entertainment. In McLuhan's introduction he says, "Electric speed in bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden implosion has heightened human awareness of responsibility to an intense degree" (McLuhan, 1994). McLuhan was talking about a time when television just became common, and the widespread use of computers and cell phones were not on the forefront of society's mind. For today's digital era, it can be argued that McLuhan is addressing the importance of staying relevant in social media marketing efforts.

According to Boorstin, our expectations of news reporting has changed and evolved through the years as a result of media that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, highlighting the importance of relevancy in media. This is accurate when looking at social media; relevancy has a deadline, and social media calls for this deadline to be achieved. This relevancy is possible since there are a vast number of content creators; people are expected to share and document the modern human experience as it occurs. Bystanders can discuss a newsworthy event instead of waiting for an official news source to post content about it. Creating pseudo-

events is common on social media and manifest in the form of social media campaigns for brands. Brands create advertisements highlighting product launches, for example, which are events solely created to generate buzz.

Our era is inundated with information, especially with the advent of social media. The discussion of the quantity of information available on media seems to be relative to the time; Boorstin considered the 1960s as an era marked by vast information. The calling for more and more information to be put out seems to be a desire of society, reflected through the media forms of the time. Social media right now is serving as this source of information relevancy, and this seems to be a key and desired form of any media platform widely used by society. I think that McLuhan and Boorstin would not be surprised by the amount of information that is available for consumption today, but I also do not think that they would have been able to fathom it in the 1960s.

This information that is made readily available through social media reflects society, almost like a mirror. This is because there is an inclination to create content that others want to see. McLuhan says, "In this electric age we see ourselves being translated more and more into the form of information, moving toward the technological extension of consciousness" (McLuhan, 1994). In other words, media is a translator because it turns the human experience into information that can be consumed by others. The process of turning the human experience into information on social media underscores media as an extension of man, a key component of McLuhan's arguments. Boorstin notes that the general image, which is composed of content, "is already supposed to be congruent with reality," so "the producer of the

image is expected to fit into the image – rather than to strive toward it. The consumer of the image is also supposed somehow to fit into it” (Boorstin, 1962). This theory is confirmed in social media content and brand creation. For example, Nike followers share “Just Do It” related content, demonstrating that they are similar to the Nike brand image because they believe in the same inspirational message. Thus, it increases the value of Nike’s brand message as more and more people identify with it and want it to continue to be a source of inspiration and personal brand building on social media. Additionally, the Starbucks social media team is constantly “listening to people who are drawn to popular Starbucks beverages and then “holding the funhouse mirror up,” as Turner, the Starbucks director of Global Social Media, calls it, to reflect the community” (Starbucks Newsroom, 2015). This demonstrates their realization that highly used media forms consistently have content that reflects society in some way.

Not only is the information that is put on social media a reflection of society, but also the platform of social media itself serves as a mirror too. According to McLuhan, people tend to “become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves,” and media has the power to act as such source or reflection (McLuhan, 1994). This may be a key reason as to why social media has become so ingrained in society.

This raises the question as to whether or not social media platforms are more important than the messages and content posted on social media, itself. Marshall McLuhan would say that the content of social media is other media, like text, video, and pictures. When looking at the skeleton of social media without users

or content, it is useless. What makes social media valuable is the growing number of interacting individuals, who also serve as the content creators.

Is the social medium the message? I think that there is a symbiotic relationship between the medium and the message on social media, and I think that Marshall McLuhan would agree. Messages on social media have a specific tone and quality unique to the platform. Brands can do things on social media that they could not really do on other media forms, such as personifying their brand as a human being through engaging in conversations with others. Where the message is placed on social media is important. Just being on social media itself is not efficient, but being an active participant and content creator on the platform presents an opportunity to relay a message to those engaged. This highlights the importance of thinking about audience when creating marketing content on social media. Different social media platforms have different audiences, expectations, and experiences.

Social media has become a main tenant of the fabric of our digital society. It has become successful due to its alignment with traditional media theory factors that relate to all successful media forms as well. It's time to consider social media as a legitimate media form on which our society is adapting around. This Social Era is inundated with information, designed for consumers and by consumers.

Social Rubric: How To Grade A Social Media Presence

Using the information I learned from analyzing the social media profiles of both Starbucks and Nike, the readings on social media, and the aforementioned media theories, I have developed six categories that I think should be used to

evaluate social media presences. A brand with the highest score in all of these categories will have the most robust and successful social media presence in terms of user engagement and brand strength. This rubric can be used not only for fully developed social media pages, but also for marketers seeking tactics on how to develop, nurture, and grow their social media presence.

I have created the following rubric with six main components with scores 1-5, 1 being the weakest and 5 being the strongest. Below I analyze what each component means. The highest score would be 5 for all categories. This rubric is ideally used for analyzing companies with social media profiles across several channels (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, etc.)

Category 1 - Immediacy: Do the social media pages post timely information? Does the information relate to what is going on in the world at the specific time that the content is shared? A grade of 1 would be if no pages posted timely information, and were outdated. A grade of 2 would be if 25% of the pages posted timely information. A grade of 3 would be if 50% of the pages posted timely information. A grade of 4 would be if 75% of the pages posted timely information. A grade of 5 would be if 100% of the pages posted timely information

Category 2 - Consistency: Is the tone of images and text consistent across all platforms? Do they consistently post with regards to a posting schedule? A grade of 1 would be if no pages posted consistent information, and had no common themes across pages. A grade of 2 would be if 25% of the pages posted consistent

information. A grade of 3 would be if 50% of the pages posted consistent information. A grade of 4 would be if 75% of the pages posted consistent information. A grade of 5 would be if 100% of the pages posted consistent information.

Category 3 - Targeting: Is content addressed to a specific audience? Are text and images crafted to appeal to a specific persona that represents the desired audience? A grade of 1 would be if no pages contained targeted information. A grade of 2 would be if 25% of the pages contained targeted information. A grade of 3 would be if 50% of the pages contained targeted information. A grade of 4 would be if 75% of the pages contained targeted information. A grade of 5 would be if 100% of the pages contained targeted information.

Category 4 - Listening: Does the social media profile appear to act in a way that is beneficial or helpful to those who would ideally respond to the brand? When people attempt to interact with the brand, are they replied to in a timely fashion? In other words, does the account clearly listen to who is interacting with them? A grade of 1 would be if no pages demonstrated social listening. A grade of 2 would be if 25% of the pages demonstrated social listening. A grade of 3 would be if 50% of the pages demonstrated social listening. A grade of 4 would be if 75% of the pages demonstrated social listening. A grade of 5 would be if 100% of the pages demonstrated social listening.

Category 5 – Sharing, eWOM (electronic word of mouth), and COBRAS (consumer online brand-related activities): Does the content facilitate “sharing,” or reposting the content delivered to a new, more individualized audience? Do followers share the content? Sharable content is designed to generate positive electronic word of mouth between potential consumers and existing customers. Content is carefully crafted in such a way that fosters sharing. A grade of 1 would be if no pages contain sharable content. A grade of 2 would be if 25% of the pages contain sharable content. A grade of 3 would be if 50% of the pages contain sharable content. A grade of 4 would be if 75% of the pages contain sharable content. A grade of 5 would be if 100% of the pages contain sharable content.

Category 6 - Brand Image: Does the company’s promise align with what they do as an organization? Is their social media content true to their actual product? Are the intangible qualities that they associate with their company somehow related? This section requires more research and knowledge about the product or service being marketed and is harder to judge. It should be the last section analyzed in this rubric, and may not be able to be answered at all if the person analyzing the platforms does not have knowledge about the brand. A grade of 1 would be if no pages demonstrate an accurate brand image. A grade of 2 would be if 25% of the pages demonstrate an accurate brand image. A grade of 3 would be if 50% of the pages demonstrate an accurate brand image. A grade of 4 would be if 75% of the pages demonstrate an accurate brand image. A grade of 5 would be if 100% of the pages demonstrate an accurate brand image.

Discussion/Conclusion

On the social media profiles of Starbucks and Nike, content is designed for specific target audiences. The brands seem to attempt to reflect the desires of their viewers on social media to connect with those who they are trying to reach. This is not unique to social media, however. McLuhan and Boorstin would agree that media created man in his own image; in other words, the core of society's fascination with media is that it replicates our experiences in the real world. I can't help but question, though, if humans are inspired by the experiences on social media or if social media inspires the human experience.

I think that McLuhan and Boorstin would both agree that media has created man in their own image, and man has created media in his own image. Determining which came first or the extent of one on the other involves further investigation, and perhaps a large philosophical component. Social media use has influenced the actions of individuals through eWOM and COBRAS, and at the same time humans have created social media profiles with pieces of their life experience.

The level of user participation on social media is interesting to study, as it reveals the importance of content compared to the infrastructure of social media platforms themselves. It is not enough for a business to have a social media page and do nothing with it. According to the research, a neglected social media page can make it seem as though whatever is being promoted does not exist. However, when looking at the world of well-maintained social media pages, there seems to be a threshold at which content loses importance, and simply the act of the user being on social media is of only concern.

With regards to content, electric media has continued to push the boundaries of the human desire for access to immediate information and entertainment. Web 2.0, and the social media that has emanated from it, pushes these boundaries even further. Social media is instantaneous and allows us to see other people's lives as they occur. The on the spot delivery of information has become a part of human evolution. We create what we crave, and we have been conditioned to crave relevant content about the world.

By no means is what we see on social media the full truth, however. As Boorstin says, the media is comprised of "pseudo-events". This calls for a more philosophical interpretation on whether or not the media reflects a "false" life that we live, or if inflated news events, for example, shape our experiences. The real and the contrived are blurred on traditional, and now social media, but in a new way.

Regardless, the medium and the message are both of extreme importance. They should be considered as separate entities with separate effects, but the symbiotic relationship between the two shape media as a whole. The future of social media depends on what the relationship between the medium and the message will look like. Will humans become desensitized to messages on social media? Or will we become more concerned with the message, as opposed to the platform on which it is delivered? What will the next era of content creation look like on social media? These are all questions that I am eager to see the answer to. One can speculate that based on this analysis, the future of media will continue to act as a mirror of society, push the boundaries of relevancy, and involve both a platform and a message.

Practically, social media marketing should leverage these three factors to continue to remain successful. Marketers need to be aware of who they are targeting and create content specifically designed with them in mind in order to act as a mirror of society. Staying relevant and consistent with content posting is essential for marketers to tap into the human desire for relevancy. And at the end of the day, the platform on which content is posted is essential.

Although this paper addresses social media as a whole, not all social media should be treated the same. Each platform focuses on different components of communication, from being visual to text focused. Different social media relate more to specific theoretical components than others. For example, on Instagram, filters are a key part of the platform, where colors can be morphed to create a striking image unseen in reality. This can be compared to Boorstin's ideas of illusion versus ideal, and McLuhan and Boorstin's ideas of media acting as a reflection of society. On the other hand, Snapchat may seem to try to do the opposite of Instagram; Snapchat shows moments as they occur, not allowing much room for a filtered version of reality. It attempts to show what is occurring in the Snapchatter's reality. There are, however, some filters on Snapchat, which limit this. And it is essential to note that the Snapchatter carefully decides moments shown, contributing to the illusion that Snapchat creates. There is an element of construction to the Snapchat, as there is to the Instagram, for example, but it is less obvious through a basic analysis of the platform. Different platforms have different focuses, nuances, audiences, norms, etc. Like how Twitter and LinkedIn are very text-based, Facebook is a combination of text, images, and photos. Regardless of the

platform, the same theories apply as the experiences on all of them occur on Web 2.0 technologies that shape the digital landscape that we are living.

The nuances of social media platform must be understood in order to create successful content on it, and the marketer must understand that the relationship between the platform and the content is a living being, changing constantly in the rapidly developing digital world.

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