A STUDY OF ATHLETE'S IMPACT ON

ADVERTISING THROUGH

PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

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A Thesis

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

at the University of Missouri-Columbia

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

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DECEMBER 2017

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

PLAYERS IN THE PARASOCIAL: ATHLETES' IMPACT ON ADVERTISING THROUGH PARASOCIAL INTERACTIONS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Players in the Parasocial: Athletes' Impact on Advertising through Parasocial Interactions

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Abstract

This research focuses on the social-media driven convention of advertising in order to analyze the parasocial interactions between athlete endorsers and audiences on Facebook. Wardell Stephen Curry II will be the focus of this study due to his placement on *Forbes* list of The NBA Endorsement All Stars in 2016. A content analysis including posts and comments from Curry's verified Facebook page during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 regular NBA seasons will be used to analyze the type of advertising messages and the effectiveness of the athlete/audience interactions. The goal of this study is to establish whether parasocial interaction can serve as an effective advertising tool. The results of this study could imply that advertisers will benefit from encouraging their endorsers to interact with audiences, or use parasocial techniques to foster a sense of personalization in communication about the brand on social media in order to enhance sales and the overall success of the brand.

Keywords: Parasocial Relationships, Social Penetration Theory, Content Analysis, Endorsements, Advertising. Athletic

Chapter 1: Introduction

From courtside, behind the small screen, and over the internet, fans all over the world have developed relationships with athletes. They have coached them play-by-play and praised their victories in a stadium with thousands of fans or on a timeline with millions of followers. Despite seeing their work only through quarters and innings, and often times never even meeting them, these public figures can simulate long-time friends, trusted parents, a close sibling, or even a romantic lover in their fans' lives. Researchers describe the intimacy, or one-sided connection that a member of the public gathers from a media-enabled connection as a parasocial relationship (Yuan, Kim & Kim 2016). The purpose of this study is to analyze celebrity-fan interactions on social media in order to evaluate the use of parasocial communication as an advertising method. I hypothesize that there are certain methods to stimulate one sided conversation with fans, and ultimately convert that market value for a brand. This research will contribute to potential modern advertising tactics, and understanding the psychology of an endorser's the target audience.

In many cases, fans and athletes have taken their relationship far beyond the court and the internet, all the way to the bank through endorsements. For some time now, advertisers have utilized celebrity endorsements, with good reason. According to Ad Age, "recent studies of hundreds of endorsements have indicated that sales for some brands increased up to 20 percent upon commencing an endorsement deal" (Crutchfield 2010). Brands have taken the consumer experience with athletes outside the walls of the arena and have intertwined their image into products they use everyday. U.S companies spent nearly $17.2 billion in 2010 to have a sports persona endorse their product (Hardin, Koo,

Ruihley, Dittmore, & Mcgreevy 2012). What advertisers are really paying for, is their product's credibility with a fan who has already developed a relationship with the public figure. Schaefer et al. (2010) also defends the investment of athlete endorsements, listing benefits such as: enhanced ad recall, increased product desirability, increased purchase likelihood, and an increase in brand loyalty.

This study will focus on one of the top endorsers in the NBA: Wardell Stephen Curry II. In 2016, Sports Pro, "the world's leading international media company for the sports industry in print, digital, and events," named Steph Curry as the number one most marketable athlete. The criteria used to asses their marketing potential includes: value for money, age, home market, charisma, willingness to be marketed, and crossover appeal. As the National Basketball Association's first unanimously voted most valuable player, in league history Curry's endorser profile includes brands like Under Armour, Muscle Milk, JP Morgan Chase, Degree, JBL, and Brita and these deals generate an estimated $10 million for the star.

Though his father, Dell Curry, also played in the NBA, as a 5-foot-4-college freshman, the same future was not predicted for Steph Curry. Curry was born in Akron, Ohio, but grew up primarily in Charlotte, North Carolina, to accommodate his father's career in the NBA. Dell Curry, was known for his consistent jumpshot during his 16-year professional career. He tried to instill a similar dedication and love for the game with his sons. It wasn't long before Curry went from watching courtside at his father's games to on the court at his own. At six years old, Steph started playing in rec leagues and the school teams alongside his brother. In an interview from USABasketball.com, Dell Curry was quoted saying, "He always had good ball-handling abilities and could shoot the ball.

He always was the smallest kid on every team he played, but one of the hardest workers."
With his small size, Steph was seen as a long shot for ever making it to the league and
struggled to get recruited his senior year of high school. Virginia Tech, his father's alma
mater allowed Steph to walk on the team, but instead, he signed with Davidson, a liberal
arts college that had not won a championship in 40 years (Phillips 2015).

By his junior year at Davidson, scouts argued that the NBA would be even easier
for him than the NCAA (Phillips 2015). Curry's accomplishments during his collegiate
career were completely unexpected, but based on his progression at Davidson, his debut
in the NBA was highly anticipated. He finished his final season at Davidson with an
averaging 28.6 points per game with the prestigious title as a first team All-American.
Former ESPN blog site, Grantland, describes Curry's entrance into the NBA as unique
because "he's an insider who's also an outlier, a star whose rise somehow feels both
wildly miraculous and quietly inevitable" (Phillips 2015).

In 2009, Curry was selected with the seventh overall pick by the Golden State
Warriors. To date, Curry has had much success with the team, leading the Warriors to
their first championship in 40 years in 2015. During the finals that year, Curry averaged
26 points per game, and was unanimously named MVP that season.

This study seeks to understand how patterns in the one-sided social media
interactions between athletes and fans translates to favorable endorsements and ultimately
market value for advertisers. This research will be supported through content analysis of
Steph Curry's Facebook posts which will be coded by admiration and approval by
fans/followers. Findings will be relevant to the industry based on the current landscape of

social communication between celebrities and their fans, and an increasing popularity in

celebrity endorsements.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Athletes and people in the public eye are in high positions of influence. So much so, they are able to reach through the glass screens of televisions and mobile devices and make it seem as if they were sitting right next to their fans. The following literature review will examine research on parasocial relationships and interactions, particularly how they are displayed on Facebook and the psychological processes behind these interactions.

Parasocial Relationships

D. Horton and R. Wohl developed the concept of parasocial interactions. Horton and Wohl explain the phenomena as "an (illusionary) experience of the viewer, who would feel like being in an interaction with a television performer, despite of the nonreciprocal exposure situation" (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011, p. 1104). The experience is unique for every participant, and personal with every public figure. Through their research, Horton and Wohl have found that users perceive their interactions with public figures as unique and intimate, despite knowing that it is only an illusion (Dibble, Hartmann & Rosaen 2016). Though fans are constantly aware of the relationship, public figures can trigger the relationship by acknowledging the presence of the audience in their performance, adapt the conversational style of face-to-face gatherings, and bodily and verbally address their users (Dibble et al., 2016).

Parasocial relationships can start from a variety of factors. The way a performer addresses an audience can impact the formation of attachment. They can do this through body language, eye contact, or with a verbal address. Though it is not common in cinema for actors to break the fourth wall, one instance where it is done is in television home

shopping. Approximately 14 million civilian non-institutionalized older people, who represent nearly half of the Baby Boomer generation, are experiencing a sensory, mental or physical disability leaving them vulnerable to loneliness in their lives (Lim & Kim, 2011, p.765). Researchers have found that the older generation engages with television to reduce the feeling of loneliness. "Shopping hosts' conversation styles, living room settings, and on-air callers' participation in the show make viewers feel like they are interacting with friends in their own living room" (Lim & Kim, 2011, p.767). During a game, athletes have little interaction with the cameras, but an instance where they will have an opportunity to break the fourth wall is in their post-game interviews. This is a period off the court where fans will be able to develop their perceived relationship with the athlete. This study shows the power that specific communication styles have to a form a bond with a viewer. Based on the research presented in this study, I would recommend that advertisers and marketers share how communication tactics such as body language, eye contact, and a verbal address can affect this audience. The following research will analyze how Curry currently incorporates these communication patterns in his posts.

Studies have proved that there is a correlation between address and parasocial bonds. Cummins and Cui (2014) notes a study where participants viewed one of two comedy shows. In the first, the central character directly addresses the viewer in the second those scenes were not included. The participants that were directly addressed experienced stronger parasocial bonds. It is mentioned that the study does have a flaw because bodily addressing and presentation style should also be considered in the result. Advertisers should make note of this when developing copy or scripts for athlete

endorsements. Followers on social media will benefit from a post opening with "Hey Guys" or a video that opens with an acknowledgement for Warriors fans.

Audiences select public figures to develop parasocial relationships based on their perception of the figure's attractiveness. The similarity-attraction principle says that individuals find people who are similar to them to form a relationship with (Bui 2017). The familiarity is a comfort for these individuals. Jake Harwood (1999) found in his own study that his collegiate participants preferred TV shows that feature characters that are similar in age. They also found that they are attracted to similarities in gender as well. Beyond similarity, people develop PSI for figures they perceive to be physically attractive and attractive within their trade - their ability to perform their specialized tasks well is attractive (Bui 2017). The research on attractiveness and parasocial relationships could work in Steph Curry's favor for a number of reasons. Curry's humble entrance into basketball is relatable, so a fan who finds his career to be similar to Curry's could attach themselves to him. He proves is attractiveness by trade through accolades like the Most Valuable Player award in consecutive seasons.

Tilo Hartmann and Charlotte Goldhoorn (2011) developed the Experience of Parasocial Interaction scale (EPSI). The EPSI scale was derived from an initial item pool of 38 items measuring mutual awareness (that the public figure is aware of the participant), mutual attention (the public figure seems to know that participants are paying attention to him or her) and mutual adjustment (the feeling that the public figure would react to the participant's behavior) to a TV performer (Hartmann and Goldhoorn 2011). A higher score indicates a more intense parasocial relationship. Prior to selecting a celebrity endorser, the EPSI scale will be helpful in revealing the target's feelings toward

a potential selection. With this research showing a stronger response when participants feel mutual awareness, advertisers should search for ways to simulate that.

Researchers acknowledge the potential negative impact that parasocial relationships may have. In the technology era, relationships that solely take place on social networking sites (SNSs) with no offline interaction are fairly common. Baek, Bae, and Jang (2013) recognize two different SNS relationships; where users mutually follow one another (social), or where users follow other users but have no mutual interaction (parasocial). This study hypothesized that "dependency on parasocial relationships with celebrities on SNS is positively related with loneliness and SNS addiction, but negatively related with interpersonal trust among SNS users" (Baek et al., 2013). This hypothesis was tested with a survey completed by 404 Korean adults who use at least one SNS. The results showed that dependence on the parasocial relationships over the internet is positively related to loneliness and distrust; however relationships where all interactions are online, both social and parasocial positively correlate to SNS addiction (Baek et al., 2013). Researchers acknowledge naivety in the simplicity of these findings but defend that non-reciprocal can hurt a participant's psychological well-being. With Stephen Curry's 7,000,000 plus followers on Facebook alone, his relationship with fans cannot possibly be reciprocated. With dependency on parasocial relationships being positively correlated with feelings of isolation and distrust, Curry could unknowingly develop negative relationships with his fans. For advertisers, the unreciprocated fandom could isolate the public instead of inviting them to participate in brand messaging.

Parasocial Relationships in Entertainment

With the root of parasocial relationships originating with psychological factors, they have the power to influence audience's emotions, beliefs, and behaviors. In the entertainment industry, moments of full self-disclosure are rare, but often make a significant impact. An example of this, that happens to come from the athletic area, when Magic Johnson disclosed his HIV positive status. About a week after Magic Johnson announced his status on November 14, 1991, HIV/AIDS was top of mind discussion for most Americans. Just that day, "the National AIDS Hotline logged over 40,000 calls, there was over a 10-fold increase from the normal number of AIDS inquires received by telephone, and counseling clinics reported an increase in calls for HIV/AIDS information" (Brown & Basil 1995). McGuire's (1989) hierarchy of effects communication-persuasion model attempts to explain audience's response to Johnson's revelation. "High levels of involvement in a persuasive communication process will increase the likelihood of cognitive and behavioral effects on an audience. Media users who develop a liking for media personalities are more involved with the mediated communication process than those simply exposed to media messages" (Brown & Basil 1995). The experiment involves a 67 question questionnaire that was distributed to upper- and lower-division speech communication classes. The survey covered topics like media exposure, knowledge of Johnson, emotional involvement with Johnson, and personal concern for HIV/AIDS. The results confirmed that "it is the celebrities with whom the public closely identifies who will probably be the most effective" in disease prevention (Brown & Basil 1995). The study also proves that it is not simply the exposure, but the personal connection to Johnson that can reduce risky sexual behavior in adolescents. When developing communication models for celebrity endorsers, communication experts

should encourage moments of transparency for their endorsers. As seen with Magic Johnson, fans connected when he revealed a more personal side of himself. On a larger scale, he had a great impact on a societal health issue that was demanding attention.

Outside of the health realm, parasocial relationships have proven make a difference in marketing endorsements as well. In 2015, Lueck (2015) conducted research on the then most current and successful celebrity endorser, Kim Kardashian. "Kim Kardashian stands out among the examples of reality television stars-turned-entrepreneur due to her high amount of followers on social networking sites, currently six million 'likes' on Facebook, and high amount of endorsements" (Lueck 2015). The reality-star credits the show for her success in business and branding, insisting that the show it is the best commercial that she could ever ask for. With a female endorser being the focus of this study, it analyzes the unique relationship between female endorsers and a female audience. Young adults are often experiencing their first taste of relationships in a parasocial manner. Whether it be a friendship or romantic relationship, the celebrity serves as a model to base their values, aspirations, and behavior. The psychology of adolescents supports the theory that they would develop one-sided relationships during this point of the lifespan due to attachment styles. As the attachment from a parent decreases, adolescents find themselves looking to public figures they idolize for approval (Giles & Maltby, 2004, p. 817). This study supports the reason that advertisers select athletes to endorse their brands. A consumer, particularly when they are young, idolizing an athlete, incorporates a product the athlete endorses into their lifestyle in order to mirror a person that they admire.

Social Penetration Theory

In an effort to decipher how the public develops a parasocial relationship with a celebrity, researchers could turn to the social penetration theory. Discovered by psychologists, Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor (1973), the social penetration theory says that "self-disclosure is the key to deepening interpersonal relationships, and that such relationships progressed through stages of "penetration" toward each person's inner self" (Punyanunt-Carter 2013). According to this theory, relationships develop as individuals willingly disclose superficial information from their outermost layer to gradually revealing things close to their most intimate level at the core. Altman and Taylor cite that there are three factors that determine the information that people are willing to share with others. The first factor is their personal characteristic, such as introverted or extroverted tendencies. Next is the opportunity to be rewarded, or the risk associated with sharing. Finally, the situational context in which you are sharing will affect one's willingness for self-disclosure (Punyanunt-Carter 2013).

The social penetration theory describes the stages at which people get to know one another and form relationships. The first stage serves as an orientation. The exchanges are superficial, and usually consist of trite conversation topics such as the weather. In this stage an effort is generally made to avoid any controversial topics. The next stage is the exploratory affective stage, where people discuss things like their favorite meals and movies. Many friendships remain in this stage (Punyanunt-Carter 2013). Next, people enter the affective stage. In this stage, arguments often arise because people feel more comfortable to express their criticisms. When relationships reach the fourth stage, they are considered stable. People share their most intimate details, and assess how the other person reacts and responds. Some relationships are not successful

and in result enter a depenetration stage. "The cost of intimate disclosure outweighs the benefits" (Punyanunt-Carter 2013). Using the research surrounding the social penetration theory, advertisers could benefit from dissecting endorsed posts and assigning them stages from the social penetration theory. This could be particularly useful on Curry's philanthropic posts, or any posts about improving his game. Fans in a parasocial relationship with Curry are longing for the information that they can receive outside of watching him in the game setting.

The social penetration theory is not exhibited solely in face-to-face relationships. A study by Tang and Wang (2012) explored how bloggers self-disclose information about themselves. "People are motivated to keep personal blogs to document their lives, express thoughts and opinions, for catharsis, and community" (Tang and Wang 2012). The sample in this study consisted of 50 bloggers, with ages ranging from 13 to 42. 56 percent were female. Their blogs were analyzed and categorized by subtopics such as: attitude, body, career, feelings, personalities, hobbies, money, experiences, and unclassified to measure the depth of disclosure amongst online friends, parents and best friends (Tang and Wang 2012). "Social penetration theory was applied to the context of blogging, and revealed that bloggers disclose their thoughts, feelings, and experiences to their best friends in the real world the deepest and widest, rather than to their parents and online audiences"(Tang and Wang 2012). The higher the intimacy, the lower the depth. The bloggers disclosed the most to their best friends, followed by their parents and then their online communities; the outlier result was when finances were the subject matter. The bloggers were cautious when discussing money matters with both their online communities and their friends. Personal matters were easiest to share with their friends

and interest were easiest to share with their like minded online community. Though the research reported high disclosure over the internet in general, this study challenges that with the conclusion that bloggers are most willing to share what is at their core with their real life best friends (Tang and Wang 2012). This research shows that though society is in a period of over sharing, there is little depth to the information being shared. The information shared through Curry's posts will likely contain little self-disclosure with his online community, but rather disclosure about the brand he is representing in order to persuade the consumer to purchase. The challenge is for advertisers to combine both information about the brand, and a healthy amount of self-disclosure.

In addition to blogs, researchers have analyzed self-disclosure patterns on social media as well. "Social media are inherently designed to facilitate human connection" (Sanderson, 2011). Depending on the celebrity's level of self-disclosure, fans following them on Twitter develop the perception that they have a human connection to the celebrity. For example, a study by Kim and Song (2016) conducted an online survey with 572 undergraduate students as the sample. After being given the definition of celebrity, the participants were asked to continue the study with a particular celebrity in mind. The survey asked about the celebrity's professional and personal disclosure, how often they interact with the celebrity through retweets, a measurement of their social presence, and the strength of their parasocial relationship with their selected celebrity. The findings showed that the more the celebrity disclosed about themselves and their personal life, the more participants felt that the celebrity was present. If that fan retweets a tweet with a high amount of self-disclosure truly feel that celebrity's presence in their messaging. "Social presence is found to facilitate positive PSI experiences" (Kim and Song 2016).

This study defends the importance of fans being able to feel a celebrity's social presence -- feelings of emotion and personability -- via their social media. The takeaways from this study should contribute to advertisers' strategy in crafting messages for Curry. Fans who subscribe to any of Steph Curry's social platforms will appreciate both professional and personal disclosure. At a glance, many of his Facebook posts center around the team, and their victories, but in reality it may be useful to somehow incorporate his family within his endorsements.

Endorsements on Facebook look very different from how they do on Twitter. "On Twitter, celebrities commonly tweet about brands they endorse, whereas on Facebook they commonly post status updates about the brand" (Um 2016). In addition to self-disclosure, Um (2016) studied whether factors such as social identity (norms, values, and beliefs) and the need for affiliation (forming of relationships with others which can motivate people to create a specific amount of social interactions) were predictors of effective celebrity endorsement on Facebook. The researchers conducted this study by selecting 10 celebrities who were most commonly mentioned by the sample of 20 collect students. Each of these celebrities was assessed based on their likability, trustworthiness, familiarity and identification (Um 2016). From those celebrities, Christian Bale was selected, and mock Facebook page was created in his name for the study. Through this page, participants were given a link to an online survey which measured self-disclosure, social identity, need for social affiliation, attitude toward the brand, purchase intention, and electronic word-of-mouth. Um proved the hypothesis of this study finding that "consumers with high self-disclosure intention on a celebrity Facebook fan page had a more favorable attitude toward the endorsed brand" (Um 2016). When placing a value on

social identity, "high social identity in relation to a celebrity Facebook fan page had stronger purchase intention as well as greater eWOM" (Um 2016). The data could not prove any effect of social identity on the attitude toward the brand. "Consumers' need for affiliation with the celebrity Facebook fan page had statistically significant effects on attitude toward the endorsed brand as well as on purchase intention, but not on eWOM" (Um 2016). The findings of this study show that self-disclosure intention, level of social identity, and need for affiliation can all predict the effectiveness of a celebrity endorser. This research should serve as a checklist for advertisers when they are selecting their endorsers. Steph Curry illustrates this finding, and proves his status as a top endorser through his post from April 12, 2017. The post reads:

> As a father, there are very few things in this world that compare to the feeling of not being able to protect your children. A few years ago I took a trip with Nothing But Nets to Tanzania. I witnessed the devastating effects of malaria firsthand and that experience changed me forever. With #WorldMalariaDay right around the corner, I ask that you join me in my continued support in the fight against malaria at nothingbutnets.net/steph.

Steph's self disclosure about his love for his family, his social identity of a protective father, and his need for affiliation resulted in thousands of positive comments from subscribers on his Facebook page. An example of a comment left on this post is: "The reason I love this guy not only because he is great as an NBA player but his good moral and attitude, and how real he is…God bless you idol". In some cases, fans had their own experiences with self-disclosure: "My father contracted malaria while in the service of his country as a Marine. He suffered from time to time the rest of his life, had to take

quinine, could never donate blood, etc. God bless you for raising awareness of the terrible disease."

Impact on Consumer Equity

Parasocial relationships have the power to influence they way advertisers communicate, and the overall consumer equity for a brand. So much so, "consumers who experience strong parasocial relationships with media characters tend to form or change their attitudes toward consumption to coincide their attitudes with media character endorses" (Yuan, Kim & Kim 2016). Companies should prioritize the managing and tracking a consumer's relationship with a company over time, in order to invest in strategies to strengthen the customer's retention. With the development of social media, audiences not only receive marketing messages, but they are now empowered with the ability to engage. Consumers express this power through product recommendations, reviews, discussions that ultimately have a large influence on purchasing decisions. The ODM group found that 74% of consumers rely on social networks to guide purchase decisions (Saboo 2016). As social media provides more access to brands, advertisers should take advantage of endorsers that will lure consumers to social platforms so that they willingly engage with the brand on their own.

In a sense, these public figures often serve as their own "human brands", or "well-known personas who are the subject of marketing efforts" (Saboo 2016). Research details that human brands go beyond celebrity endorsements when instead of simply bestowing celebrity status on a product, a human brand reaches brand status through mass mediatization and mass consumption of their identities and personalities (Loroz and Braig 2015). Loroz and Braig (2015) studied one of the most powerfully developed

human brands: Oprah Winfrey. Winfrey's talk show, network, magazine, and satellite radio station have provided plenty of avenues to reach her audience. Winfrey also has a high brand personality appeal defined by her autonomy (feeling that decisions are self-chosen), relatedness (feelings of connectedness), and competence (feelings of accomplishment), (ARC), when people meet these needs they are able to form secure attachments. (Loroz and Braig 2015). The results from Loroz and Braig's (2015) interviews showed that the selected fans and participants of the study described their relationship with Oprah as one of a close friend or mentor. The participants all felt as if they knew her. While they trusted in products she endorses, and philosophies she believes in, several participants mention they pick and chose what they would incorporate in to their lives. These responses reinforce the importance of an audience meeting all three dimensions of ARC.

Celebrity endorsers mainly connect with Millennials who account for 21-26% percent of the population but 33-35% of retail spending (McCormick 2016). Advertisers that select social platforms to reach audiences benefit from targeting Millennials because "they are twice as likely then Gen X to be influenced by celebrities and four times more likely than Baby Boomers" (McCormick 2016). Millennials are different from other generations because "they have shown an increased obsession with celebrities and their actions" (McCormick 2016). McCormick (2016) performed research to test the congruence of celebrities and products that they represent and how that contributes to purchase behavior. McCormick selected celebrities that the participants were least familiar with: Sarah Jessica Parker and Demi Moore. The millennial participants found little congruence between Moore brand Versace, and that, with the added unfamiliarity

with Moore lead to a minimal effect on their purchase behavior. Millennials were not influenced my Sarah Jessica Parker's GAP endorsement for similar reasons. Though the participants were not familiar with Moore or Parker, the celebrities were able to influence positive likeability toward the advertisement and the brand. This research supports the "match up" hypothesis emphasizing the importance that the celebrity and the brand align. In Curry's case, though his legacy in basketball will likely impact generations to come, should audiences be unfamiliar, there is still an opportunity for Curry to impact consumer equity.

Facebook Content Analysis

The current state of advertising expands far beyond print and television to social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, among many others. According to *Mashable*'s senior sports reporter, Sam Laird: "Social media plays a larger role than ever in the lives of sports fans around the world. YouTube is an endless source of video highlights and bloopers. Twitter is a gigantic news wire. And Facebook is a place for trash talk with friends." Catalyst PR, recently acquired by sports marketing firm, IMG attempted to identify on which social platforms sports fans are spending their time online. After surveying 2,100 fans of the NFL, MLB, NBA, college football, basketball, and soccer, between the ages of 16 to 64, Catalyst found that "nearly twice as many respondents use Facebook compared to Twitter, at 73 percent to 37 percent. But on game day, they check Twitter 1.5 times as often as they do Facebook." When asked about their actions taken beyond the "like" of a brand, 39 percent of respondents reported that they talked to their family and friends about the brand, 33 percent shared content, and 32 percent bought the brand. With the proposed research analyzing athlete interactions

outside the context of game day, Catalyst's findings support the decision to use Facebook in this study.

With social media gaining more popularity in today's society, research methods to analyze trends and themes have become increasingly necessary. "Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as " a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content''(Snelson 2016). There has been an overall increase in both qualitative and mixed method social media research, with more publications on Facebook research than any other social platform (Snelson 2016).

Researchers performed an example of content analysis on the popular Facebook blog, Humans of New York (HONY). Humans of New York is a narrative photoblog by Brandon Stanton featuring everyday people in New York City, along with occasional special series content. The content analysis of the Humans of New York posts "examine the popular topics on networked narratives and its impact on social media engagement as represented by the number of likes, the number of shares, and likability of characters featured in the post" (Wang, Kim, Xiao, & Jung 2017). The study looked at 390 posts from the HONY Facebook page coded by four students with positive inter-coder reliability.   Posts were coded by topic, tone, length, character likability (on the Likert scale) number of likes, number of shares, number of dominant characters, gender of dominant characters, and age category of dominant characters (Wang, Kim, Xiao, & Jung 2017). Frequency analysis was performed to find the dominant number of posts, the top results were family, career, and romantic relationships. "Results showed the degree of social media engagement varied by different topics; however, high frequency of topics

was not necessarily associated with high social media engagement"(Wang, Kim, Xiao, & Jung 2017). The tone of posts proved to be powerful, as it impacted the number of likes and shares and a character's likability. While posts featuring a positive narrative received more likes, posts with a negative narrative received more comments. The researchers explain the likeability for characters with a positive story with the Halo effect. "Halo effect means a cognitive bias in which an individual's overall impression of a person or a product will be influenced by the individual's feelings and thoughts about the person or the product's character or property" (Wang, Kim, Xiao, & Jung 2017). People who are perceived as attractive or craft messages in a positive tone are seen as having more credibility. The findings of the HONY study apply to Steph Curry as a strategy to enhance likability through his posts. Based on the posts that readers were most interested in the HONY study, it may be to Curry's benefit to incorporate subjects like family, his career, and his romantic relationship in his posts. The copy on Curry's posts should have a positive tone in order to garner more likes and shares, and ultimately more attention for the brand. With his positive reputation and high q score, Stephen Curry could benefit from the Halo effect amongst his fans.

Research Questions

On the basis of the literature provided, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: Does Stephen Curry exhibit parasocial behavior through his posts on his verified Facebook page, and in what way?

RQ2: How often does Stephen Curry post promotional posts?

RQ3: Does the audience on Stephen Curry's verified Facebook page exhibit parasocial

behavior on their responses to his posts?

RQ4: How are advertising messages such as celebrity endorsements and product

placements embedded in the Facebook posts of Stephen Curry?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Content Analysis

The methodology of this study consists of a content analysis of Facebook posts from Stephen Curry's verified page from the 2015-2016 regular NBA season and the 2016-2017 regular NBA season. Content analysis "allows the researcher to discern latent meaning, but also implicit patterns, assumptions and omissions of a text. Text is understood in it's broader, poststructural, sense as any cultural practice or object that can be 'read'" (Fürsich 2009). This study will employ a combination of qualitative and quantative methods. "Content analysis can be conducted with qualitative or quantitative methods, although combinations of both are possible. Results often take the form of frequency counts or themes identified in the content" (Snelson 2016).

I chose Stephen Curry for this study because his accomplishments as an athlete make him an excellent candidate to be an endorser. The role of an athlete is different from public figures in other roles such as television, cinema, or music. An athlete has little interaction with audience other than their brief interviews or press conferences off of the court or field. Although Curry does not have many opportunities to interact with fans, his 7,959,569 followers is an impressive amount for this study. I hypothesize that although Curry's posts will exhibit little parasocial communication, that fans will still communicate with Curry in such a way that suggest that he is a familiar figure in their lives.

The decision to only examine Curry's posts during the regular season his motivated by his traditional social media hiatus during the playoffs. Before the 2017 NBA finals, Curry explained that this is his third consecutive season taking this approach, "When you're really trying to zone in and keep your focus, you don't want to have any

unnecessary distractions during this point of the season," Curry told ESPN. He occasionally breaks his social ban typically sharing posts saying "Lock in, #DubNation" but even these rare messages are sent without being logged into his accounts.

The population of this study will include posts and comments from Stephen Curry's verified Facebook page in order to analyze how their engagement, usually in a parasocial manner, affects attempts at advertising. Today, athletes are often present on a number of social media platforms. Contrary to the believe that Facebook is no longer as popular with young people, "college students spend most of their social time using Facebook, and the usage rate of Facebook within the population is 92%" (Um 2016).

Stephen Curry's verified Facebook page was selected due to his approval ratings amongst fans. According to Repucom, the industry's first global, full-service portfolio for sport, entertainment, and events, "Curry's endorsement score, which measures whether the public sees him as an effective spokesperson and would buy a product he endorsed, is higher than any other active athlete. Curry ranks ninth overall for endorsers ahead of beloved American icons Oprah Winfrey and Taylor Swift, as well as nearly 4,000 other celebs" (Badenhausen 2016). Curry's score, based off of seven attributes: appeal, aspiration, breakthrough, endorsement, influence, trendsetter, and trust; is particularly impressive because of his poor awareness -- known by less than a half of US consumers. Curry's most significant deal is with Under Armour through the year 2024. "The deal included an equity stake in the company and royalties on his popular signature shoe" (Badenhausen 2016). Under Armour, Degree, Kaiser Permanente, JBL, Brita, and Fanatics are all brands part of Curry's endorser profile. In addition to these profitable brands, he also supports a number of philanthropic organizations such as Nothing But

Nets and (RED). The range of brands Curry has in his profile has importance in order to analyze how he communicates about these brands, and for the purpose of this study, this information will assist in answering RQ 1 and 2.

Curry's accomplishments as a successful endorser are essential to this study because they signify how Curry resonates with his audience as an endorser. Based on his positive ratings as an endorser, my hypothesis for RQ3 is that audiences will often communicate with Curry in a parasocial manner in order to seek his attention, and build a relationship with him. In answering RQ4, I will asses the current trends in communication through celebrity endorsers, in hopes to provide insight into how parasocial behavior and communication can be an asset in advertising.

Sampling Frame

A convenience sample of posts from the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 regular NBA seasons will be used in this study totaling to seventy-nine posts. Similar to Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell's (2010) content analysis of athlete's tweets, the proposed research will apply stratified random sampling on the comments of each of Curry's posts, and will randomly select every fifth "top" comment, with no more than the first five comments per post to include in the study to ultimately code and analyze Curry and fans' communication.

Unit of Analysis

For this study, the unit of analysis is one Facebook post by or in Steph Curry's name including its "top" responses. When viewing comments on an verified influencer's Facebook page, such as Curry's, Facebook gives you the option to view: top comments (unfiltered), which Facebook describes as "all comments including spam and comments

in other languages, with most relevant comments at the top"; most recent, described as "new comments and those with new replies go toward the top"; or top comments described as "the most relevant comments appear toward the top." For the purpose of this study, the option "top comments" was selected while viewing every post.

Coding Procedure and Scheme

Mirroring Lueck's (2015) study on Kim Kardashian, content analysis will be used to code the communication on Curry's Facebook page. A Qualtrics survey will be used to collect and track the data on each post and the comments associated with each post. Curry's posts will be analyzed to see if and how parasocial interaction took place, and what type of media, format, and strategy was implemented. Each of the comments was tested for a parasocial interaction, and how it was expressed. "Content analysis, regardless of whether it is qualitative or quantitative, has been described as requiring development of a codebook, which is used to guide coding of content"(Snelson 2016). Coding categories by Lueck (2015) were used as the basis for categories, later adjusted to relate to Steph Curry rather than Kim Kardashian. The primary adjustment that I needed to make for my study was the content of the posts. Lueck's study on Kardashian coded for things such as: fashion, Kardashian reality, television, and beauty but those topics would not apply to Curry.

To establish whether parasocial interaction can be used as an advertising vehicle, it was of high importance that the coding categories capture the parameters of the narrative, in which each brand was embedded. Therefore the coding categories include the theme of the post , the type of media, the format of the post, the

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product types, advertising strategy, advertising address, and the number of likes

and responses. (Lueck 2015).

The codebook for this research study can be found in the Appendix.

Intracoder Reliability

In order to measure the consistency of my own coding, I will rely on intracoding

reliability. Conducting intracoding reliability is considered acceptable for an M.A thesis.

To test for a consistent coding process, the coder usually codes a subset of the 'text'

under analysis at a certain time and then codes the same content again at a later time,

when the content from the first coding is usually forgotten (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

Chapter 4: Analysis/Results

Findings

Stephen Curry's parasocial behavior on Facebook (RQ1). Though frequency testing, with the statistics from Qualtrics, the research shows that Steph Curry does not typically exhibit parasocial behavior on his verified Facebook page (24.05%, n=19). In the few instances where parasocial interactions did take place, it was most often through verbally addressing viewers (n=10, .526%), commonly through greetings like "Hey #DubNation!" or "Happy Holidays #DubNation! In other cases, Curry acknowledged the presence of the audience (n=8, .421%) such as in his post from April 11, 2017, where he asked his followers how do they train their minds, or on January 30, 2016 when he asked his followers what motivates them. Curry never re-posts or responds on his posts, also adding to the lack of audience interaction.

#	Answer	Bar	Response	%
1	No		60	75.95%
2	Yes		19	24.05%
	Total		79	100.00%

#	Answer	Bar	Response	%
1	Acknowledged the presence of the audience		8	42.11%
2	Face-to-Face Address		1	5.26%
3	Bodily/Verbally Address Viewers		10	52.63%
	Total		19	100.00%

Stephen Curry's promotional posts on Facebook (RQ2 & RQ4). Over half of Curry's posts were classified as endorsements (n=46, 59.74%), where he was trying to promote a

product or service that he represents. Another significant amount of his posts were dedicated to promoting a game or current event he was attending (n=18, 23.38%) falling next to posts about his family and friends (n=7, 9.09%). Typically, all posts had some kind of media, most often photo (n=41, 51.90%) or video (n=16, 20.25%), sometimes a combination of multiple forms of media (n=14, 17.72). 30% of Curry's posts were about body and nutrition, consisting of brands like Brita, Degree, or Muscle Milk. Another large portion of his posts were promoting his philanthropic efforts (n=11, 13.92%) for charities like Nothing But Nets, (RED), #OaklandStrong, a relief effort for victims of the Oakland warehouse fire. When an advertising strategy was being implemented, usually a call to action (n=24, 30.77%) was involved, otherwise the posts were purely informational (n=22, 28.21%), but rarely was a personal story involved (n=8, 10.26%).

#	Answer	Bar	Response	%
1	Photo Only		41	51.90%
2	Video Only		16	20.25%
3	Link Only		7	8.86%
4	Multiple media		14	17.72%
5	No media		1	1.27%
	Total		79	100.00%

#	Answer	Bar	Response	%
1	NBA Team		8	10.13%
2	Fashion		5	6.33%
3	Leisure		3	3.80%
4	Body & Nutrition		30	37.97%
5	Philanthropic Efforts		11	13.92%
6	Self-Promotion		3	3.80%
7	None		19	24.05%
	Total		79	100.00%
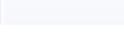
Audience member's parasocial behavior on Facebook (RQ3). The sample of

comments from audience members and fans in this study consists of 395 comments from

the 79 posts (five comments from each post). Of that total, over half of them showed

evidence of parasocial behavior (n=221, 55.94%). Whether fans spoke directly to Curry,

or not, the comments exhibited admiration (female n=163, 41.26%, male n=96, 24.30%),

aversion (female n=9, 2.27%, male n=19, 4.81%), advice (female n=10, 2.53%, male

n=14, 3.54%), requests (female n=10, 2.53%, male n=21, 5.31%) and information

(female n=20, 5.06%, male n=13, 3.39%) Other posts were classified with things such as

humor or seasonal greetings. This research supports Curry's high ratings as a celebrity

endorser with over half of the comments expressing admiration. Some of the comments

addressed the NBA player with titles like role model, idol, Mr. MVP, or sentiments of

being his biggest fan. On January 19, 2017, Curry posted a photo of himself laughing

with Barack Obama, with the simple caption: #BarackObama. This post contributed to

the small percentage of comments that expressed aversion. "So Steph loves the black

Goldman Sachs, Monsanto puppet but totally disrespects the American President [sic:

whose] been in office for less than a month. I was under the impression Curry had class.

Wrong again. Sad example of a Christian too." Fans also expressed aversion on posts

promoting Under Armour. "Under armour (sic.) sucks. They are right wing racists your

(sic.) to (sic.) good for that!!!! Leave!!!" (Likely in reference to Under Armour's CEO

Kevin Plank saying President Donald Trump is a real "asset" to his company.) Advice

was often on Curry's game play. A number of posts classified as informational where

Facebook users speaking on behalf of someone else. An example comes from a comment

left on Curry's post from January 26, 2016: "My 10 year old son, Boden, wrote this to

you: "I love your athletic ability that makes me feel inspired to be just like you. I love basketball and watch you play every game. My parents record it for me. I hope to one day see you play in person."

Data Analysis

This research was an attempt to discover whether Stephen Curry, an NBA star working as a celebrity endorser, makes use of parasocial interaction on his Facebook page to enhance the way her advertises and ultimately sells products and services.

The results of this study show that currently, Curry does not often implement parasocial interaction as a tactic in his communication with his audience, nor does he embed any endorsements into personal stories. In referencing the social penetration theory, Curry would likely benefit from directly addressing his followers with personal information about himself. Curry has a strong following likely because his fans feel connected to his game play, but the social penetration theory proves that his fans need more personal information about him to feel connected. During times like the playoffs when Curry is more public facing in situations like interviews and press conferences fans get facetime with Curry's growing family. The research proves that sharing more details about his life at home will provide more opportunities for fans to connect with the NBA star. When Curry posted a photo on November 10, 2016 facing off against his brother in a game, he received a positive response from followers. He also receives a similar response to posts endorsing his wife's cooking show, *Ayesha's Homemade*. The advertising strategy of embedding any endorsements into personal stories could work to Curry's advantage. Fans lock on to Curry's image as a family man. It was surprising that he had

no photos of his daughters, and limited photos of his wife in his posts, endorsements or not.

Stephen Curry's Facebook page is primarily used as a marketing vehicle whether it be for the brands he represents or for games he is starring in. Based on the category most of his brands are in, body and nutrition, Curry's endorsed posts likely target the same audience that supports him on the court. As marketers select endorsers, this audience transfer is something to be observed, to ensure that their brand shares Curry's established target.

The research conducted on fan's comments was especially revealing. With a majority of the posts expressing admiration, it defended Curry's placement as a top marketer with attractive qualities to fans. This research highlights points of contention with his audience: politics. The data on posts where fans expressed aversion could be used by marketers to establish rules of thumb for endorsers. Before adopting dinner table rules of avoiding religion and politics to the social media setting, it is important to note that fans often mention religion to connect with Curry knowing his background. The verse, Phillipians 4:13 his printed on his line of shoes manufactured by Under Armour. Comments from followers had serveral references to religion such as prayer hand emojis, well wishes with God bless you, or a quote from his signature verse, "I can do all things!"

Curry should implement parasocial advertising into posts about his lifestyle, not just the brands that he represents. By inviting fans and followers into his world with glimpses of his family, his home, religion, and team it satisfies fan's yearning to get to know him more personally. As an athlete, personal interaction outside of the game can be as limited as Curry makes it. If Curry were to establish a narrative in which a product

could be naturally integrated, this research shows that he'd likely receive a positive

response from his followers.

Chapter 5: Discussion/Conclusion

Limitations

There is plenty to still explore in the parasocial field of study and where it intersects with advertising, but the limitations of this study should be address before conducting further research. First, the sample of this study could be seen as a limitation. The proposed research initially only analyzed one NBA season, but added another to offer a more significant sample size. It may also be a disadvantage that the frame does not include the playoffs. There is likely a range of emotions during this time for a player, so it would be interesting to see how this is reflected in social media. In this research, content analysis and coding posts and comments is often subjective, so there is room to debate the numbers of admiration, aversion, etc. Also, with the Facebook update of reactions rather than just likes, there is more room to dissect emotional responses to posts that was not considered in this study. Another limitation were some of the definitions used throughout the codebook. For instance, I felt conflicted where PSI was exhibited when followers would address Curry inexplicitly such as "I know you may never see this", rather than opening with "Hey Steph!" Defining the a term like endorsement was also challenging, because technically even if a celebrity is not displaying a product any shared content can be seen as endorsing their personal brand. It could be argued that the survey may have needed an option to opt out if the post was not used to advertise a product or service.

Directions for Future Research

As social media continues to expand, this research supports that marketers should look for ways to encourage parasocial interactions for the sake of their advertising. In

looking just within Facebook, Curry could benefit from new Facebook features such as Facebook Live. For a fan in a parasocial relationship with Curry, a session on Facebook Live could satisfy their desire to interact with Curry personally, verbally, and with physical eye contact. Another area were parasocial relationships could be useful is in the public relations setting. When a celebrity or influencer is in trouble, their fan base becomes their jury in a sense. Good parasocial practices, could work in a celebrity's favor when it's time for fans to make their judgment. This research should also be expanded to other social platforms. It would be interesting to see how fans react to a celebrity that responds to their fans. It may be wise for marketers to respond to fans on Curry's behalf and evaluate fan's relationship with the brand afterwards. With advertising on social media being a fairly new phenomena, future studies should go beyond testing for the simple existence of parasocial relationships and investigate whether it actually leads to a higher market value for their brands.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the advertising world could in fact benefit from implementing traces of parasocial behavior in their endorsers' communication. The social pages of Curry, and just about any other public figure, prove that it takes very little effort from the endorser for the fan to develop a parasocial relationship. Though little effort is necessary, Curry can maintain and even increase his fan base if he were to occasionally respond on his posts to give fans hope of personally hearing from him. Fans that subscribe to his page, but do not comment may feel more inclined if there was a possibility that they could receive a response. As see by the research conducted by Lim and Kim (2011), this strategy would be successful particularly amongst fans in their adolescent or elderly stage

of life. Beyond responding to fans personally, if Curry were to open his posts with "Hey Warriors fans!" or "Let's Go Dub Nation" he would be acknowledging the unique community that supports him. Thanking fans for their support makes them feel like they are a part of his success, and encourages fans to continue to support him. For a marketer, this support will translate not only to Curry, but to the products that he communicates with his fans.

Advertisers should consider the social penetration theory when developing a plan for how they instruct endorsers to communicate on their social platforms. Advertisers should find natural places for self-disclosure as it relates to their product. If Curry were to reveal something that lies at his core based on the social penetration theory, and perhaps he turned to a product that he endorses for help, this is a story that could inspire his fan base. Because of the nature of parasocial relationships, fans skip many of the stages that normal relationship face such as: orientation and exploration. Advertisers should encourage Curry to communicate intimate details about himself to take his relationship with fans from admiration to trust. This transition in his relationship with fans will enhance the credibility of the product he is endorsing. After examining Curry's posts over two years, fans have an interest in topics like his childhood, his family, and his faith. When developing a communication fan, advertisers should consider the information fan's cannot gather by watching Curry play.

As social media continues to be a leading platform for endorsements, advertisers need to utilize parasocial relationships. Curry's following does not necessarily match the target for the products he endorses, providing an opportunity for advertisers to reach people who would not have an interest in the product if it were not for Curry. The beauty

of parasocial relationships is that they develop despite the lack of acknowledgement from the public figure, but if the endorser realizes the power the hold with these relationships, the way they approach their responsibility as an endorser will change. As an advertiser, I recommend that social calendars and communication plans are implemented with parasocial relationships in mind. When celebrities meet fans at events and activations they should also know their audience. The research shows that actions like greeting fans by name, sharing personal interactions or making eye contact will make a difference in the connection that they form with a fan. Parasocial relationships could be such an asset to advertising, that actions like these should even be contractually implemented. Curry's skill alone has formed a community made up of millions of fans, but in altering the way he communicates, he could translate his fandom into fans of the products he endorses.

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Appendix

Code Book & Definition of Terms

Introduction

The purpose of this Facebook protocol was designed to help determine the ways in which athlete, Steph Curry, communicates with target audiences. It examines the types of strategies of postings as well as advertising messages and responses on Facebook. The following definitions and references are important in selecting and analyzing the content under study.

Post

A post, or posting is any message at the top of a message thread posted by Steph Curry (and associates). A post may also contain pictures and videos. A majority of the posts have a link to that brand's homepage.

Likes/Reactions

Every post has so-called "likes" or "reactions". Every Facebook user can press the "like button: in order to express likeability of a posting; however, in order to be able to like a post, the user has to "like" Curry or James' verified page first. Users can instead react to posts by holding the like button and selection from options such as "love," "haha," "wow," "sad," and "angry". Once a user likes Curry page it will appear in the user's newsfeed for others to see, unless he or she disables visibility.

Parasocial Interaction

Parasocial interaction is a term that usually defines one-sided relationships, especially between celebrities and their fans, where the fan seeks a lot of information about the celebrity and therefore knows a lot about him or her; however, the celebrity does not

know details about the fan. By Horton and Strauss' definition, a parasocial interaction is "initiated and directed by the media performer in exposure situations" (Dibble et al., 2016). This study seeks to analyze whether parasocial interaction takes place on Facebook between Steph Curry and his target audiences. Furthermore, the study investigates whether parasocial interaction can be used as advertising vehicle.

v1. Date of Post? MM/DD/YEAR

v2. Post Text

v3. Did PSI take place? If yes, why and how?

Asses presence of a parasocial interaction based on the the triggers noted by Horton, Wohl, and Strauss: "a parasocial interaction is triggered if media performers acknowledge the presence of the audience in their performance, adapt the conversational style of informal face-to-face gatherings, and bodily and verbally address their users" (Dibble et al., 2016).

v4. Number of reactions post – fill in a numerical response

v5. Number of comments to post – fill in a numerical response

v6. Type of post

The type of post will be coded with one of the following five categories:

1. Public appearance of Steph Curry - A public appearance is the event in which Steph Curry appears before the public eye at a game, press conference, or promotional event. A public appearance is usually characterized by the publishing of Steph Curry on a red carpet.

2. Family and friends - Any story that is associated with Steph Curry's family, friends, or teammates whether it is in regards to the game or giving personal information and photographs it belongs in this category.

3. Endorsements - An endorsement is a testimonial for a product or brand that speaks for its positive features.

4. Current Event/ Game Promotion - A current event is what was currently the agenda in the media around October 2016 and April 2017 including regular season games.

5. Other – if the post is about anything other than the four categories mentioned above, the coder will fill in the blank with a new category type.

v7. Media

What media does the post contain?

1. Photo only

2. Video only

3. Link only

4. Multiple media

5. No media

v8. Message format of post

1. Benefit/promise

2. Information

3. Question

4. Command

5. Other[JS12]

v9. Type of product/brand advertised

1. NBA Team (ex: Golden State Warriors)

2. Fashion (ex: Shoes/Apparel)

3. Leisure Entertainment (Restaurant/Hotel)

4. Body and Nutrition (ex: Spas, Food Related to Nutrition, Supplements)

5. Philanthropic Efforts

6. Self-Promotion (ex: Magazine Cover)

v10. Name of product/brand advertised

Identify the product or brand that is mentioned and advertised in the post[JS13]

1. Under Armour

2. Express

3. JP Morgan Chase

4. Degree

5. JBL

6. Brita

7. Other

v11. Advertising strategy

Please select the option that is most evident in the post

1. Product is embedded into personal story (emotional/transformational) - An advertisement can be embedded into a personal story and will create an emotional appeal by doing so. In creating a personal frame for an advertisement, the audience finds the brand or product appealing because the trusted source Steph Curry uses this product himself or shares it with her family and friends.

2. Pure information (informational) - An advertising strategy can be purely informational by giving bare information about the product, its release date, benefits and costs to the audience.

3. Call for action/interactive advertising - An interactive advertisement usually tries to engage the audience with the product in various ways through games, videos, links, discussions and other forms of interactivity. Interactive advertising always asks the audience to take some kind of action that ultimately leads to a purchase of the product.

4. None

5. Other

v10. Did PSI take place on comment #_____

v11. Type of comment – Comment #_____

Identify the gender of the respondent to your best ability by analyzing the user name and picture used in the comment field. If the name and picture does not give any clues or gives conflicting information about the gender, please choose "other".

1. Expressing admiration male

2. Expressing admiration female

3. Expressing aversion male

4. Expressing aversion female

5. Advice male

6. Advice female

7. Third-party related

8. Informational response male

9. Informational response female

10. Request male

11. Request female

12. Other

- *Expressing admiration:* A respondent can express admiration by directly posting "I love you Steph", or giving compliments "you played a great game" and support; as well as embedding the heart symbol into a post.

- *Expressing aversion:* A respondent can express aversion by directly posting "I hate you Steph", or criticizing the athlete "you played terribly"; as well as other forms of disapproval.

- *Advice:* A respondent can give advice by giving his or her opinion to one of Steph Curry's questions in a manner of advice, or referring to ways in which Steph Curry can improve his appearances.

- *Third-party advertisement:* A respondent can employ third-party advertisements by responding to Steph Curry's post with a link to his or her own business website; or through advertising other causes, products and brands unrelated to Steph Curry on his Facebook page.

- *Informational Response:* Please select informational response when the user engages in interaction with the celebrity by answering Steph Curry's question or providing opinions related to Steph Curry's post headline.