HOW BRANDS ENGAGE WITH

COLLEGE STUDENTS

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

HOW BRANDS ENGAGE WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS:

THE EFFECTS OF NARRATIVES AND IMAGES ON THE ENGAGEMENT OF

COLLEGE STUDENTS ON FACEBOOK WITH LOW-INVOLVEMENT BRANDS

presented by James Patterson,

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

HOW BRANDS ENGAGE WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS:

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ABSTRACT

With Facebook and digital technology being such a large part of everyday life now, it is important for advertisers to understand how best to utilize the power of these platforms to reach consumers.

In order to examine effective strategies for low-involvement brands to engage with college students on social media (i.e. Facebook), this study tested how image (vs. no image) and narrative (vs. no narrative) influence college students' engagement with Facebook posts through an online experiment.

Findings from the experiment showed that the presence of a picture did increase perceived engagement. Specific Facebook posts with images had higher transportation and perceived interactivity to those without image. The narrative, however, had no effect on engagement in study participants.

Keywords: Transportation, perceived interactivity, social media, low-involvement, digital advertising, Facebook.

Chapter 1: Introduction

College students are leaving home and making their own purchases for the first time and are thus key targets for companies to attract to their brands. Targeting young consumers makes sense – if you can convince a college student to buy your product, then they may continue to do so, and thus you can attract a long-term consumer. In fact, many consumers start buying a brand that they will continue to purchase when they are teenagers or young adults – between ages 15 and 25 (Taylor & Cosenza, 2002). Brand loyalty is the idea that a consumer is biased toward picking one specific brand out over another, and thus increases the likelihood of repeat purchase (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). This brand loyalty is ideal for brands so that they can generate repeat purchases, with college students a potential long-term target for brands. For companies, finding a way that can engage these college students with their brand is crucial.

Social media presents a way for advertisers to reach all potential consumers – even without paying a lot of the time. Mangold and Faulds (2009) describe social media as a hybrid of the marketing mix. It is an opportunity to bring your product to almost any prospective audience, with targeting of audiences allowed to be as broad as everyone or limited by demographics such as age, location and interests. Indeed, 88 percent of those aged 18-29 have a Facebook account, while Facebook is by far the most popular social media platform for adults in the United States overall (Greenwood, Perrin & Duggan, 2016).

This means there is the potential to reach the right consumers for very little outlay – a high bang for your buck. This is possible for any brands and products, as

making a Facebook account is free. For low-involvement products – products that are purchased without much thought – this is an opportunity (Keller, 2003). Although low-involvement products aren't thought of much by consumers, they are still affected by the way in which consumers perceive them.

While social media and its uses for consumers have been investigated, there is very little research into how advertisers can best benefit of it. Further than that, little has been done to uncover why it is that people want to engage with advertisers on social media. While a common accepted use for social media is to be social – as the name indicates – what do users get out of engaging with brands on these platforms? What do they want from these brands and how would they like to communicate? Finding the answers to these questions should not only provide logic for brands that wish to advertise on social media, but they should also indicate how it is that people communicate through these platforms. The comparisons between the type of posts – text and visual – has not been done to compare how effective they are for advertising on social media.

This study aims to answer some of these questions. Specifically, this study investigates how companies can best get college-aged consumers to interact with their low-involvement products and brands on Facebook through the posts of the companies. To do so, an online experiment has been designed to test the likelihood of college students engaging with Facebook posts as a function of a narrative – meaning that it has a storyline and a main character that relates to the viewer of the post – or a photo – depicting someone who is college-aged and looks like a similar type of person to the participant that is making use of the product. The findings of the study will shed light on how companies can build brand recognition and build toward making these college-aged consumers purchasers of these products through having them engage

with brands and become something that is in their mind when they go shopping. Ultimately, this study aims to find what type of posts are best to get this engagement out of college students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Uses and Gratifications Theory and Facebook Usage

The use of social media perhaps illustrates uses and gratifications theory better than any other media today. The theory centers around audiences making use of media to meet some sort of need. This stems from the attributes of the media itself, the content of the media, exposure to the media, and the social context of the media (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973).

This has been expanded toward advertising and indeed the internet by Ko, Cho and Roberts (2005), who found that human-to-human interactions on websites led to favorable opinions of that website. People know of the presence of brands advertising on television and especially on the internet when they seek these companies and brands out, and can choose to interact with these things as they are not a captive audience being forced to. The assumed reason for using social media is to keep in touch with others, which this study gives credence to by showing that people are seeking the human-to-human interaction on such social media platforms.

However, other studies have also shown that people utilize social media for other reasons. It is because of this that there have been calls for use and gratifications to be updated to match up better with the way that media – and in particular, social media and technology – now exists (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). New types of media, such as the internet, video games, social networking sites, and new devices like MP3 players, tablets and other innovations bring new gratifications with new uses (Haugh & Watkins, 2016; Lim & Kumar, 2017; Whiting & Williams, 2013; Zeng, 2011). These new technologies are used for things such as social status as well as the obvious

uses such as entertainment and, in the case of tablets, laptops and other such devices, practical usage in a variety of circumstances. This suggests that uses and gratifications theory remains pertinent as technology continues to evolve, and that social media is a prime example of where uses and gratifications theory applies. The theory itself just needs to be adaptable and new scales need to be found, utilized and proven in studies in order to capture why it is that people are using these technologies, which have both explicit and implicit uses that previously didn't exist when the technology itself didn't exist.

The evolution of uses and gratifications theory has seen it already been used to explain how and why people communicate on Facebook. One of the main features of the platform is its practicality and the ability for people to stay in touch with one another, which is a reason that people are on social media and maintain use of it (Gezgin & Sen, 2012). However, there are underlying motivations to that usage, too, which mainly relate back to basic human emotions and needs. Ferris and Hollenbaugh (2018) found both the ability to communicate and the gratifications of basic emotions to be important in Facebook usage. While the ability to stay connected is an explicit use of social media, many underlying feelings makes that usage feel more important and make it the reason why social media is a favored way to stay in touch with people. Karapanos, Teixeira and Gouveia (2016) also found in a study of Facebook that users are seeking to meet basic human needs – needs that all people generally have and needs that Facebook's features can provide for. This includes the feelings of connectedness, as well as other social factors.

Looking beyond the emotional reasons behind it, Facebook as a whole and posting on the social media platform has the ability to make people feel better immediately after (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, Brady & Falk 2018). This shows a

very practical reason for anyone to utilize Facebook. While the needs themselves may be selfish, as other studies show, Facebook meets needs and helps people. This enjoyment means people make use of it more frequently, supporting that uses and gratifications theory applies to the evolving media landscape as a whole and Facebook specifically (Ledbetter, Taylor & Mazer, 2016).

Smock, Ellison, Lampe and Wohn (2011) proposed that all of these Facebook features that people make use of are in fact utilized for different needs by users. Their survey results indicate that even if features have very similar properties and functional use, these features are rarely all used for a purpose like expressive information sharing, which was more likely to take place on walls or in groups, where a larger audience could see the message. This shows that the audience who can see a post – which is both at its greatest and in front of a greater variety of people when in a group or on another person's wall – influences how people utilize social media and hints at people using it to maintain their own image. This is support by the general gratifications being social and not educational (Dhir, Chen, & Chen, 2017). People are seeking out things that make them feel good on social media – as well as things that serve them in a positive way. This is both in a practical and emotional sense.

In the case of photos and tagging other people in these photos, Dhir et al (2017) found that there are nine gratifications for this behavior: likes and comments, social influence, peer pressure, gains popularity, entertainment, feels good, social sharing, affection, and convenience. These gratifications proved equally relevant to adolescents and adults, and suggest that the social elements may be even more important when it comes to sharing and tagging people in photos. With more people seeing things as a result of sharing and tagging people in photos because another audience of people who are connected with those that are tagged will view it, this

could be because of it being of larger social consequence in the mind of Facebook users. This means that more thought is required when deciding whether to share or tag people in photos, and that doing so is of greater consequence to people than most other actions.

Building a personal brand goes beyond social media, Petruca (2018) argues that it's part of everyday life and something that most people do. The image that people present on Facebook has to be reflected in the actions of people in real life, though, otherwise they look phony. Therefore, their interactions on social media platforms like Facebook cannot be jarring or unexpected. Furthermore, they also don't want to reveal things about themselves on social media that they would not want known in real life. This means that people moderate their own Facebook usage to carefully project themselves, both in the way that they want to be seen, but also in a way that they believe that they can be seen in their day-to-day life.

Leung (2013), meanwhile, points out that much of social media is used in a largely narcissistic way. Leung presents five main uses for social media, showing affection, venting negative feelings, gaining recognition, getting entertainment, and fulfilling cognitive needs, for users. Facebook particularly was a platform where people could gain recognition, presenting a version of themselves online that they wanted other people – both that they're currently connected with and not – to see. This applied different across generations, but ultimately showed that Facebook and other social media platforms can be seen as a way to build a brand, and every action that a person undertakes on these platforms is geared toward building or maintaining that.

This has practical sense in life, especially when it comes to social networking for professional purposes. Harris and Rae (2011) say that early adopters on social

media platforms and in technology put themselves ahead of the competition with a presence on these things, and that developing and maintaining a personal brand on such platforms and technologies is crucial to get ahead as a professional. Those that do this are doing themselves a service and getting very practical professional rewards out of doing so, despite it perhaps looking like a social decision. For people entering the job market, curating a personal brand on social media is actually necessary because it's a way in which recruiters judge potential employees (Hood, Robles & Hopkins, 2014). This means that people need to present both a social self on social media and a professional self, making personal branding an effort that people have to maintain on social media.

For the purposes of businesses, it is also possible to use Facebook pages to meet the human needs for people and to also build a connection with the brand or product that is being advertised on the page. Liu, North and Li (2017) found that tribalism – and thus community interactions, of sorts – does lead to a greater association with the brand that runs the page. This shows that people interacting with each other on a page, even while not interacting with the page itself intentionally, build a connection with the company or brand that operates the page.

The problem that presents itself is how to build these communities. Phua and Anh (2016) found that people are more likely to "like" a page or posts on a page if they have friends that have already done so. This shows another way that people are trying to build a personal brand on social media. Even engaging with brands and pages on social media needs to be beneficial – or even cool – for people to consider doing it. If there is no benefit for a person to engage with the brand in a wider social sense, then people are less likely to do it. Brands that aren't popular to begin with therefore need to find a way to become popular and get their message across if they

want to communicate with the largest audience possible by bringing people into their community. Advertising on social media is a way to try to build that community, but it could prove difficult to gain that first "like" that gets the ball rolling for the page.

All of this suggests that uses and gratifications on brand pages are similar to the uses and gratifications that individual users achieve through their own pages and their friends' pages. It can also be used to cultivate a relationship and build positive feelings for a brand or product. However, in order to be able to do that, a company or brand may need to have some social capital for people to want to interact with it in the first place.

Digital Advertising

Digital advertising is a forever changing field, utilized on an array of developing technologies and platforms of those technologies (Aslam & Karjaluoto, 2017). Spending in digital advertising has surged over recent years, growing to more than $19 billion in just mobile advertising as of 2014 (Grewal, Bart, Spann, & Zubcsek, 2016). Such is the growth in the digital advertising sector that companies feel pressured to utilize it because they don't want to be left behind (Tiago & Verissimo, 2014).

There are multiple reasons for this. There is the incredible reach of social media, as illustrated by the 79 percent of adults in the United States that use Facebook (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). It enables companies to communicate directly with potential consumers for little to no expense, and even allows the consumers to communicate with one another in a way that companies can see (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). On top of that, people find interactive digital advertising more informative and interesting than they find advertising through SMS, MMS and email (Cheng,

Blankson, Wang, & Chen, 2009). This means that people are both reachable on Facebook and prefer it to other methods. With the cost of it being much less than trying to communicate with people via other methods, a social media presence is absolutely necessary for brands that want to communicate with the public, and enables a community to be built.

Despite online advertising and shopping seemingly taking away the personal touch, people feeling favorable toward a website leads to favorable opinions about a company as a whole (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005). For those that operate Facebook pages, this allows the opportunity to gain positive feeling toward the brand behind the page. People just want to be given a reason to interact with to a page, and, as highlighted above, often need it to give them something – be it practical or, more likely, offer them an image as a page that makes it acceptable for them to interact with, fitting in with both their personality and the brand that they have cultivated as a person.

With more than 50 million businesses having a Facebook page as of December 2015 (Chaykowski, 2015), companies are embracing this chance for direct advertising. Managers largely feel that digital marketing on a platform like Facebook is necessary for any business, and think it is important to use to build brands, improve knowledge about the brand and to heighten communication flow (Tiago & Verissimo, 2014). With consumers so reliant upon social media, it is actually now necessary for brands themselves to be on social media too so that they can connect and communicate with a social media base. It is extremely easy for companies to put their message in front of users on social media. Facebook ads and boosted posts – posts that a business can then pay to be shown to people that don't actually follow a page – allow for companies to target very specific targets based on demographics and

psychographics. This means that companies can ensure that their posts are seen by people in very narrow demographics like a certain age range – such as those that have recently moved out for college and are now having to make purchase decisions for the first time for a range of new products.

However, the aforementioned importance that is illustrated in the research doesn't highlight how to best communicate with customers once on social media, despite how easy it is to reach a certain audience. While managers believe that their companies, brands and products need to be on social media, using social media in a way that doesn't connect with consumers likely isn't going to help the company. This illustrates the importance of finding out exactly what it is that advertisers should do on social media in order to actually capture the audience that demands they be on social media now that they're there. They have to find a way to make themselves worth interacting with for users on social media – whether that's in a social or professional sense – in order to build viewers.

Low-Involvement Brands and Products

Some products are naturally less involved than others. Those that are highly involved have personal connections and importance, while those that are low-involvement lack those attributes. Simply stated, the involvement in a product is how interesting consumers find that product (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984; Laetitia & Huang, 2008; Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011).

More highly involved products have greater incidence of brand loyalty (Alcina & Filipe, 2015). This means that there is the opportunity for brand switching for low-involvement products, but also that building a connection could lead to higher involvement and brand loyalty. Building involvement could be beneficial in terms of

advertising, too, because more highly involved advertising leads to greater thinking about the product, thus influencing the involvement of the product itself (Lee, Kim, & Sundar, 2015). Advertising, however, may not bring attention to products that people just don't have any interest in (Laetitia & Huang, 2008). This creates a problem for advertisers of low-involvement brands and products. People are less likely to interact with brands if there is no benefit to them socially. Brands that aren't seen as interesting are unlikely to be seen as something people wish to include in the personal brand that they are attempting to build on social media.

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) dictates that low-involvement products often need a hook – like celebrity involvement, which gives something people will attach themselves to instead of just the brand – in order to gain attention, and that personal relevance is only one route to persuasion. This relevance means people are more likely to dedicate time to thinking about a product, and thus high-involvement products can have more complex messaging, while low-involvement products often need to be communicated more simply (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). Although the model predicts how involvement can change, involvement is seen as a difficult concept to measure (Andrews, Durvasula, & Akhter, 1990; Zaichowsky, 1985). Still, even though low-involvement ads generally tend to stick less in people's minds and are less memorable, related cues, like celebrities and images, result in greater attitude persistence for even products and brands that are considered to be low-involvement (Sengupta, Goodstein & Boninger, 1997). These celebrities and images are a way to take the message beyond the brand and make a message something that people will be more excited to interact with.

As expected, advertisements on Facebook for high-involvement products are more likely to be received positively than advertisements for low-involvement

products. Furthermore, the customization of an ad is more important for high-involvement ads – the difference customization makes for low-involvement ads is inconsequential if there is no outside hook that can bring attention to the message (Lee, Kim & Sundar, 2015).

Broeck, Poels and Walrave (2017) found that ad placement on Facebook is important for high-involvement products but that the attention paid to low-involvement products does not change in a significant way regardless of the positioning and intrusiveness of the ad. However, transparency surrounding data collection is more likely to be accepted for a low-involvement product. This is likely because people don't care about the ad and don't think of the data they are being given up as important, matching the importance that they put on the product.

The development of social media and the way in which activity can be tracked through "likes" and "shares" on Facebook could go some way to promoting interaction with low-involvement products or brands. This could then help transform low-involvement products into something people have a greater affinity for or involvement with, or at least aid in the promotion of them. How to attract this engagement is necessary in order to make this development.

Narratives

While not alone as a determinant, ELM highlights the use of a narrative as a key factor in enhancing the involvement of a reader (Andrews, Durvasula, & Akhter, 1990). The model suggests that the best technique for persuasion depends on the level of likelihood of elaboration in the communication method. When the personal relevance is high, the elaboration likelihood is high and thus cognitive effort in processing increases. When the involvement is low, ELM suggests that a simple

message may serve best. Further, if the communication is not persuasive then a temporary shift in attitude is the best an advertiser can hope for (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). This brings into question whether a low-involvement brand can become anything more than that for people unless a truly compelling message is put across, which may be difficult on social media.

It has been shown that personalization leads to a positive ad perception and that the use of both storylines and identifiable characters within a narrative is the most effective way to utilize a narrative (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Lee, Kim, & Sundar, 2015; Slater, 2002). For the purposes of this study, a narrative will be defined under the above idea that it must contain both an identifiable character and a storyline. The storyline does not need to be complex – it just needs to exist and be something that people are able to identify and see as a real circumstance.

Those that are transported into a narrative and are thus invested in whatever a narrative is about, show beliefs that align with the subject of the narrative. Fictitious narratives still make real-world differences in belief (Green & Brock, 2000). This ability to change people's beliefs about a product brings about the chance for narrative to make people think differently with just a short message that could be utilized through a Facebook post.

Although existent skepticism about products remains when they are advertised online (Sher & Sheng-Hsien, 2009), studies done in online advertising context found that narratives are likely to lead to more favorable opinions about a product, and narratives can also reduce counterarguing (Ching, Pingsheng, Ja-Shen, & Hung-Yen, 2012; McQueen, Kreuter, Kalesan, & Alcaraz, 2011). That users are choosing to interact with the brand and product online also indicates a form of involvement, and further elaboration likelihood research on the online sphere shows that aids persuasion

(Tan & Ho, 2005). This illustrates that people see narratives as truths, while finding these narrative truths to be more interesting to actually read than truths that exist without narratives. This makes these narratives a more effective way to get simple messages across.

Wang, Kim, Xiao and Jung (2017) examined how this use of narrative works in aiding engagement on Facebook through a content analysis of the Humans of New York Facebook page. They specifically looked at network narratives, or narratives that are specifically about human interactions. The tones and topics varied throughout the posts that were looked at. The social media engagement with the story varied by topics, but more topics did not lead to higher engagement. Instead, tone was crucial in both the social media engagement and how people felt about the character that was depicted in the post.

Although the Humans of New York page isn't attempting to sell or advertise a product directly, it is a case that shows how narratives can be vital for engagement on Facebook. As highlighted above, this could be crucial for low-involvement brands and products, as the engagement that narratives create could lift the engagement levels of the brands and products, or, as the Humans of New York study shows, at least bring attention to the posts. This is backed up by company executives, who believe that narrative is vital in making social media posts for brands (Diaz, 2012). Where it differs from low-involvement brands' posts is that Humans of New York is a recognized Facebook page that has a number of followers and some social capital already attached to it, which has already shown to be crucial in drawing engagement from people on social media.

At its best, narratives in advertising on digital media – including social media – can help advertisements go viral – that is, be propelled by word of mouth

throughout the online community (Yuri, Xiaozhu, Yung Kyun, & Sukki, 2018). This can be seen as the ultimate goal of advertising generally but especially on Facebook, where the potential for high reward for low investment is of even greater value. Achieving this is unlikely, though, especially without an understanding as to what people want to engage with in the first place, especially for low-involvement products and brands, which people are unlikely to spend time thinking about.

Key to finding these viral advertisements is having a narrative that elicits a feeling of transportation – an involvement within the post – for readers (Yuri, Xiaozhu, Yung Kyun, & Sukki, 2018). Narratives are crucial in cultivating this transportation and making it possible for posts to reach the greatest possible audience (Kim, Bigman, Leader, Lerman, & Cappella, 2012). This transportation leads to a greater number of "likes", "comments" and "shares", which means that both are crucial in making sure a post gets to the greatest number of people possible – potentially by going viral.

Images That Reflect the Target Market

Images have shown greater memorability, perhaps because of the way they're encoded within the brain (Nelson, 1979). Research in the area of picture superiority effect research shows that the use of images lead to greater recall, both short-term and long-term (Childers & Houston, 1984). This simpler processing ties in with the way in which low-involvement products should be advertised according to the elaboration likelihood model, with images, like celebrity involvement, being a hook that could draw attention to a post and entice more people to view it.

Images in advertising can be used to produce an affective response or aid in information processing (Scott, 1994). ELM indicates that simple messages may be

best for low-involvement products, which are less likely to garner the full attention of the viewer (Cacioppo & Petty, 1986; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). As a result, images, especially on platforms like Facebook that display them in full while not always displaying the full text of a post, could prove more effective. This ties in with how Facebook works, as full images are able to be seen and just scaled down, while text posts cannot be viewed in whole if they are too long.

This would suggest that posts with images that tell a story would be more effective than posts without images. In the case of this experiment, this would lead to the belief that an image portraying a college-aged student utilizing a laundry product is more likely to engage with a post describing a college-aged student needing to use a laundry product. Also, such images will result in increasing personal relevance to college students, which help processing of posts.

Recently, social media has shown that it's not just smaller brands that can leverage images. Photo statuses on Facebook are more likely to be shared than statuses without a photo, and even bigger companies have found posting photos leads to more "likes" on individual statuses (Malhotra, Malhotra, & See, 2012; Saxton & Waters, 2014). Therefore, according to theory, images should have a similar effect on low-involvement products and the brands that produce them. The simplicity that low-involvements products may need in their advertising means that images may be the best way to advertise on social media.

An area of strategic communications that has been quick to research how to best utilize social media and post type is health communications. An Australian study in that area on how to best engage Facebook users found that videos were most likely to draw engagement, with photos also drawing much more engagement than text-only posts (Kite, Foley, Grunseit & Freeman, 2016). However, the results could also have

been distorted according to Kite et al due to Facebook placing greater importance on videos in its algorithm, and thus the video appearing higher up on people's news feeds. Still, the study highlights that images are more likely to be engaged with, which is especially pertinent when it comes to looking at how to draw engagement for posts either about low-involvement products or from low-involvement brands on social media.

In a study that highlighted the importance of images on social media, photos were found to be more effective when looking at how farmers can utilize Facebook to attempt to engage with potential consumers (Pechrová, Lohr & Havlíček, 2015). This shows that potential consumers are looking for simple, easy-to-read messages. Short posts were also found to be favored over longer ones, indicating that people perhaps don't want to spend long on a post. This ties in with the above information about images in posts and could be a more general trend that applies to low-involvement products, too.

Generally, images that are tailored to their audience – the process by which the content specifically chosen for the audience – are likely to lead to a greater desired outcome from the audience (Hawkins, Kreuter, Resnicow, Fishbein & Dijkstra, 2008). Images used in advertising signify what a brand values (Rowley, 2004). Therefore, if the target audience is shown using the product in an image, as is to be done in this experiment, it should follow that the audience will feel a greater connection to the brand. This is crucial for trying to build a connected that is otherwise lacking.

This fits in with ELM when applying the thought process of low-involvement brands to images as well as text narratives. For a low-involvement product like a detergent, dishwashing liquid, paper towel or surface cleaner, an image showing a

college-aged student, like the one used in this experiment, is able to be processed quickly and an association should be built by the viewer.

Hypotheses

The overarching research question of the study is to examine how narrative and presence of image would influence audience engagement to 1) the product and 2) the brand shown in the messages. To do so, this study asks how the type of information (narrative vs. non-narrative) and the presence of photos that reflect the target consumers utilizing the product would motivate college students to engage with Facebook posts that promote low-involvement products from companies that produce these products.

This study defines engagement as the involvement within the story, or transportation into the post (Kim, Bigman, Leader, Lerman, & Cappella, 2012) and the perceived interactivity of the post – that is, how likely the participants are to want to interact with the post or poster in any way (Yang, Kang & Johnson, 2010). Scales for each of these two will be utilized to measure the engagement.

Green and Brock (2000) conceived the idea of transportation into narratives – measured by how involved the viewer felt within the narrative – as a way to show how effective the message behind a narrative could be on a viewer. In their experiment that tested how narratives influenced the reader's overall opinion of what they just read. Overall, they found that readers who had greater transportation were more likely to believe the story that the narrative was constructed around, found less mistakes in the text and that whether something was factual or fictitious was unimportant to the reader.

Kim et al (2012) measured transportation through how invested participants became in stories in health communications, with an emphasis on exemplars – or people that the readers could identify with. They found that greater narrative engagement – as measured through transportation – led to greater intention to quit smoking, as was the aim of the communication. The use of an exemplar within the story was positively associated with the likelihood that a participant said that they intended to quit smoking, showing that this character plays a part in how effective the communication is. The narrative as a whole, with both an exemplar and a storyline, is therefore shown to be important in engaging with the audience.

If a user feels like that a post is worth engaging with – and thus has perceived interactivity – it can go a long way to aiding in the retention of the information within the post (Yang, Kang & Johnson, 2010). This also achieves the aim of spreading the message further and getting a greater number of views, or "impressions" as they're called in advertising (Facebook, 2018).

It is expected that narrative posts will elicit higher engagement levels than non-narrative posts, as the narrative could potentially lift the involvement level of the product and brand and aid in the persuasiveness of the post (Tan & Ho, 2005). Similarly, it is expected that posts contain images will see a greater engagement than those that lack images because the images illustrate what a brand values easily to the audience and the tailored nature of the images that reflect the audience is more likely to bring the desired outcome from the audience (Rowley, 2004; Hawkins et al, 2008). Based on the theory and prior evidence that shows that both images and narratives are important on social media and with wider writing, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Participants will have greater transportation with the posts that contain a narrative than posts without a narrative.

H2. Participants will have greater perceived interactivity with the posts that contain a narrative than posts without a narrative.

H3. Participants will have greater transportation with the posts that contain a photo than posts without a photo.

H4. Participants will have greater perceived interactivity with the posts that contain a photo than posts without a photo.

Further, it is very likely that the post with both narrative and image would elicit greater transportation and perceived interactivity. With it to be expected that both narrative and image would positively influence transportation and perceived interactivity, it could be thought that they would interact to do so, and that the presence of both an image and narrative should lead to greater transportation than perceived interactivity and transportation if just a narrative or just an image were present in a post. However, with no empirical evidence confirming how these two variables interact and influence audience response, the following research question is asked:

RQ. How would narrative and image interact to influence transportation and perceived interactivity?

Chapter 3: Method

Experimental Design and Stimuli

The experiment employed a 2 (narrative vs. non-narrative post) x 2 (image vs. non-image post) x 4 (product repetition) within-subjects factorial design. For the experiment, four different low-involvement products – detergent, dishwashing liquid, paper towels and surface cleaner – were selected, as these items are necessary regular purchases, but consumers often don't consider which brand they're going to buy within this category. And then, for each product, a series of four stimuli reflecting the manipulation of narrative and image (narrative & image, narrative only, image only, no image or narrative) were produced to simulate four different Facebook posts. The text in all posts was approximately equal in length and to make sure they take the same time to read, regardless of whether they contain a narrative or not. The images were images of a Facebook post that simulated what is seen when a user clicks on a post on Facebook. Thus, each participant saw all four products in the four different manipulation conditions through Facebook posts. In reality, none of these posts had ever been seen before by the participants before the experiment, and the page itself that each post was on was made up so as to take away the possibility that the participants already have feelings associated with the company. This way, the evaluation to the experimental stimuli can then be measured at the end from a base of zero.

The way the posts were shown to each participant was in one of the following four sequences.

Post type	Post topic
Narrative and image	Detergent
Narrative and no image	Paper towels
No narrative and image	Surface cleaner
No narrative and no image	Dishwashing liquid

Table 1: Post type and post topic scenario

Post type	Post topic
Narrative and image	Dishwashing liquid
Narrative and no image	Detergent
No narrative and image	Paper towels
No narrative and no image	Surface cleaner

Table 2: Post type and post topic scenario

Post type	Post topic
Narrative and image	Surface cleaner
Narrative and no image	Dishwashing liquid
No narrative and image	Detergent
No narrative and no image	Paper towels

Table 3: Post type and post topic scenario

Post type	Post topic
Narrative and image	Paper towels
Narrative and no image	Surface cleaner
No narrative and image	Dishwashing liquid
No narrative and no image	Detergent

Table 4: Post type and post topic scenario

These different sequences were used to ensure that the results are reflective of the type of post, as opposed to the topic of the post. With each topic getting tested against each type, any potential bias toward one product over the other by participants was removed.

Independent Variables

Narrative. There were two levels — the presence of narrative and the absence of narrative for the Facebook post. A Facebook post with a narrative is defined as a message including both a storyline and an exemplar. This is based on prior research which showed that the presence of both is important in persuading through use of a narrative (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). The post with a narrative included both of those elements and also contained information relating to the product that is tied in with the narrative, while the post without a narrative was purely informational.

Image of target audience. This image of target audience is defined as whether or not the Facebook post includes an image. The image was related to the post, showing a person the age of a college student utilizing the product so that it related directly to the participants viewed it. The person in the image was considered typical of the college student demographic – 19-23 years old, dressed casually and in a room that reflected the type of basic housing for a college student.

Dependent Variable

Engagement is defined as the involvement within the story or transportation into the post and operationalized as transportation (Kim, Bigman, Leader, Lerman, & Capella, 2012) and perceived interactivity (Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010) measures.

Transportation. The transportation was measured through questions related to how involved the user felt in the post. This was done so as to show that the information was deemed important enough to enjoy and retain, and thus achieved some form of gratification when read. Transportation scales adopted from a prior study (Kim, Bigman, Leader, Lerman, & Capella, 2012) include, "I was mentally involved in the story while reading it," and "After I finished reading the story, I found

it easy to put it out of my mind," ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability of the scale was 0.913 (Cronbach's alpha).

Perceived interactivity. Perceived interactivity was measured by how likely the user is to "like," "share," and show interest in interacting with the page, as well as overall interest in the post. This will be done to check how effective the post was. Posts made on Facebook reach a larger audience if something is "liked," "shared" or "commented" on by other users, as they can then appear in on the news feeds for the people connected with those that interact with the posts (Lekach, 2018). The perceived interactivity scale adopted from a prior study (Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010) includes questions such as "I was interested in this post," "I would be comfortable if I was asked to interact with the page," "I feel connected to the post's ideas and thoughts," and "I would be likely to share this post on my own page." A 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" was utilized to assess the statements for each post. The reliability of the scale averaging all items was 0.971 (Cronbach's alpha).

Participants

A total of 93 participants were recruited from undergraduate courses in the journalism school at the University of Missouri, Columbia campus. Qualified participants were students in those courses in the journalism school. Of the 93 participants, 17 identified as male and 76 identified as female. Most of the participants were 21 years old or younger, with 22.6 percent of them being 20 years old and 60.2 percent of them being 21 years old. Caucasian was the most common ethnicity among participants, with 73 responding that that's how they identified.

Others identified as Asian (10), Black or African American (5), Mixed (2) and Latinx (2).

Facebook usage of the sample

The majority of participants had a Facebook account – only three respondents said that they did not have an account on the social media platform. Most respondents also browsed Facebook daily (60), while only three people said they never browse Facebook. Other participants browsed Facebook multiple times a week (15), once a week (10) or less than once a week (5).

There was a spread in participants with regard to how often they "liked" a post made by a brand on Facebook on average, although most did it rarely: 30 said that they never "liked" posts by brands on Facebook, while another 30 said they did it less than once a week. Eight participants said that they "liked" posts by brands multiple times a day, while 4 said they did it once a day, 13 said they did it multiple times a week and 8 said they did it once a week.

Similarly, the results for the question about how often participants "commented" on a brand post was also weighted heavily toward less frequently – 61 participants said that they never "commented" on brand posts on Facebook, while only 3 said they did it around once a day and no participants said they "commented" on brand posts multiple times a day. Other responses were multiple times a week (5), once a week (8) and less than once a week (16).

More participants said that they "shared" posts by brand on Facebook. Never "sharing" a post by a brand on Facebook was again the most common answer, with 50 participants responding in that way and another 23 saying that they did it less than once a week. That left 21.5 percent saying that they "shared" posts at least once a

week – a greater proportion than those who "commented" on posts by brands on Facebook at least once a week – with 12 saying they "shared" posts by brands once a week, 6 saying they did it multiple times a week and 2 saying they did it around once a day.

Study procedure

The study was completed as an online experiment using Qualtrics. The link to the experiment was provided to participants such that participants saw an invitation to participate posted by a professor or a teaching assistant on the announcements section of their class' Canvas page and were either told that they can complete the experiment to earn extra credit in that class or asked to complete it for no reward. The invitation described the experiment.

Once participants clicked the link, they were provided with informed consent form which explained the purpose of the experiment again, and let the participants know that the data will remain confidential and that they can withdraw from the study at any time.

Once they completed the consent form, the participants were asked to fill out questions about their Facebook usage.

These questions included: These questions included: 1) Do you have a Facebook account? 2) How often do you browse Facebook? 3) On average, how often do you "like" a post by a brand on Facebook? 4) On average, how often do you "comment" on a post by a brand on Facebook? 5) On average, how often do you "share" a post by a brand on Facebook?

These questions were asked because the study centers around the usage of Facebook. Participants who never "share" others' posts on Facebook aren't likely to

agree that they would "share" the simulated Facebook posts that are shown, and that might not be a function of the stimulus itself. Similarly, those that don't "like" posts frequently on Facebook are less likely to "like" the simulated posts. The presence of a Facebook account and how frequently a participant uses Facebook illustrate how likely they are to see more posts and could be an indicator as to likelihood to engage, too, and thus must be accounted for.

The next page told participants that they are about to read a sample Facebook post. They were asked to read the post in its entirety, and then click on the next page button when they are done. It was at this point that they will be asked for their thoughts on the post through the use of a scale.

After the participants clicked through to the next page, they saw the first post, which was the narrative condition.

After participants read through that post, they were be taken to a page where they were shown six statements and asked to rate their thoughts on the statement on a seven-point Likert scale. Once they completed that page, they were taken to the next page, which contained another five statements.

Once they did this, they clicked next and were taken to a page that told them they were about to read a sample Facebook. It asked them to read the post in its entirety and then click next on the next page when they were finished reading the post.

The participants saw the post, this time without a narrative. Instead, it will be a post that contains text only, describing information about the product's ability to remove stains. This is the no narrative and no image condition.

When the participants confirmed they had read the post, they were again be asked on their thoughts on the post using the 11-statement, seven-point Likert scale.

The ordering of the statements was changed to ensure that participants didn't get into the habit of clicking on the same things in the same order and ensure that they were reading the scale's statements as the experiments progresses. The statements were again spread out over two pages and there were six statements on the first of the two pages and five on the second.

This same process was then be completed with the image and no narrative condition. Participants were told to read the post on the next page and then proceed from that page when they were finished.

When they clicked next, they saw a post that contains an informational post about the product with an image. Participants completed the same Likert scale ratings with regard to the image post, and the statements had changed order again. Like the last two conditions, the statements were spread across two pages, with six statements on the first page and five statements on the second page.

Again, the same process was followed for the last post. Participants were told they were about to see a Facebook post, and were instructed to read it in its entirety before clicking through to the next page.

The post they saw that time will have both an image and a narrative. Participants then completed the Likert scale for the final time, again with the statements shuffled across the two pages of six statements and five statements, respectively.

Finally, demographic information was recorded, including that related to the age, gender and ethnicity. This was to test to see if those played a role in how people answered and if any of them were linked with different reactions to the types of Facebook posts that will be asked about through the experiment. This included how often participants utilize the functions that Facebook allows them to on posts.

Once participants had finished that part, they were asked to provide their pawprint and the class for which they were receiving extra credit for taking part in the experiment, if extra credit was offered. This was then communicated back to the professors so that they could receive the extra credit. Once they did this, they had completed the experiment and were told that they could close the tab on a final page that thanked them for their participation.

Chapter 4: Results

In order to answer the hypotheses and research question, a 2 (narrative: absence and presence) x 2 (picture: absence and presence) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted on both transportation and perceived interactivity.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 predicted that study participants would report greater levels of transportation for posts with a narrative than they would for posts without a narrative.

The result showed that the main effect of narrative on transportation was not statistically significant ($F_{(1, 92)} = 1.050$, $p > .05$), although the mean scores were in the direction such that posts that contained a narrative ($M = 3.133$, $sd = 0.916$) had greater levels of transportation than posts without a narrative ($M = 3.047$, $sd = 1.100$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Type of Post	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Score	F	P
Narrative	0.688	1, 92	0.688	1.050	0.308
Picture	21.613	1, 92	21.613	38.821	0.000
Narrative * Picture	0.036	1, 92	0.036	0.083	0.774

Table 5: The impact of the presence and absence of narrative and picture on transportation

Post Types	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Narrative	3.133	93	0.917	0.095
No Narrative	3.047	93	1.100	0.114

Table 6: Comparison of narrative and non-narrative conditions on transportation

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 predicted that study participants would report greater levels of perceived interactivity for posts with a narrative than they would for posts without a narrative.

The result showed there was no significant main effect of narrative on perceived interactivity $(F (1, 92) = 0.786, p > .05)$, such that there was no mean difference between posts that contained a narrative $(M = 1.990, sd = 0.957)$ and posts without a narrative $(M = 2.042, sd = 1.101)$, with slightly greater mean scores for posts without a narrative compared to posts with a narrative. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was rejected.

Type of Post	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Score	F	P
Narrative	0.248	1, 92	0.248	0.786	0.378
Picture	2.484	1, 92	2.484	9.605	0.003
Narrative * Picture	0.004	1, 92	0.004	0.014	0.905

Table 7: The impact of the presence and absence of narrative and picture on perceived interactivity

Post Types	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Narrative	1.990	93	0.957	0.099
No Narrative	2.042	93	1.101	0.114

Table 8: Comparison of narrative and non-narrative conditions on perceived interactivity

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 predicted that study participants would report greater levels of transportation for posts with a picture than they would for posts without a picture.

The result showed the main effect of pictures was statistically significant on transportation ($F (1, 92) = 38.821, p < .05$), such that the mean score for posts with a picture ($M = 3.331$, sd $= 0.903$) than the mean score for posts without a picture ($M = 2.849$, sd $= 1.089$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Post Types	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Picture	3.331	93	0.903	0.094
No Picture	2.849	93	1.089	0.113

Table 9: Comparison of picture and non-picture conditions on transportation

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 predicted that study participants would report greater levels of perceived interactivity for posts with a picture than they would for posts without a picture.

The result showed there was a statistically significant main effect of pictures on perceived interactivity ($F (1, 92) = 2.48, p < .05$), such that perceived interactivity was rated greater for posts with a picture ($M = 2.098$, sd $= 1.025$) than posts without a picture ($M = 1.934$, sd $= 1.025$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Post Types	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Picture	2.098	93	1.025	0.106
No Picture	1.934	93	1.025	0.106

Table 10: Comparison of picture and non-picture conditions on perceived interactivity

Research Question

The research question asked how the presence of narratives and pictures would interact to influence transportation and perceived interactivity. In order to answer the research question, a repeated-measures ANOVA was performed on the transportation scores. The result showed there was no significant interaction effect between narratives and pictures on transportation ($F (1, 92) = .083$, $p > .05$).

This is illustrated by the influence that the presence of an image had on the mean transportation scores. However, regardless of whether or not an image was present, transportation did not have a significant effect on the transportation scores reported by participants, and as such the two did not have a significant interaction effect.
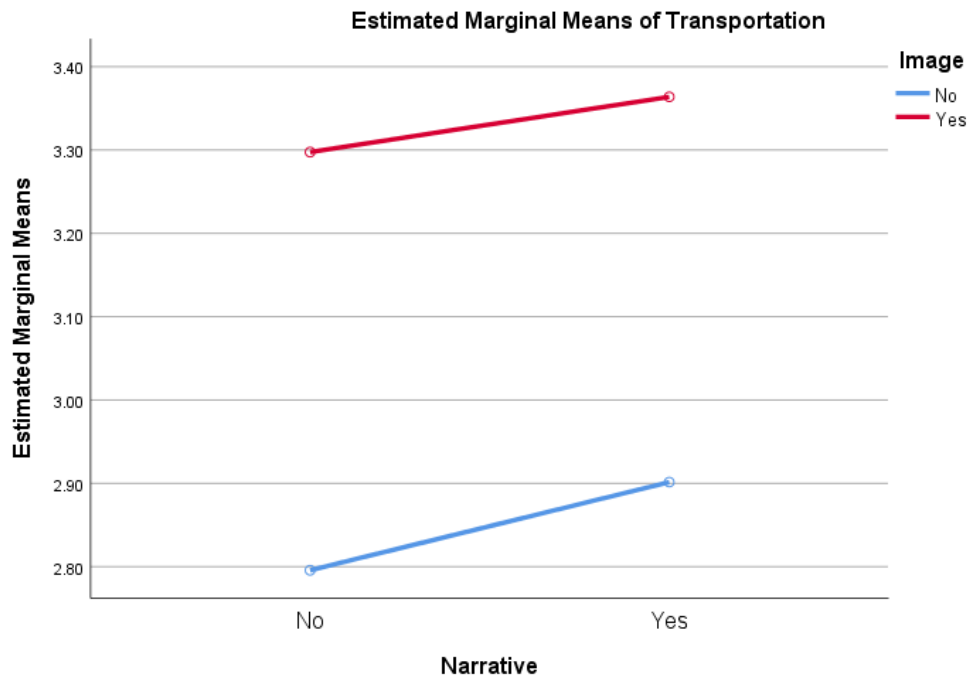
Estimated Marginal Means of Transportation

Table 11: Interaction between narrative and image on transportation

As well as that, a repeated-measures ANOVA was performed on the perceived interactivity scores. The result showed there was no significant interaction effect between narratives and pictures on perceived interactivity ($F (1, 92) = 0.004$, $p > .05$).

Like with the transportation results, this is seen by how the presence of a picture had a significant effect on the perceived interactivity scores at the same time that the presence of a narrative had no statistically significant effect – even if a picture was also present. This shows that there is no statistically significant interaction effect between the picture and narrative conditions as it pertains to perceived interactivity.
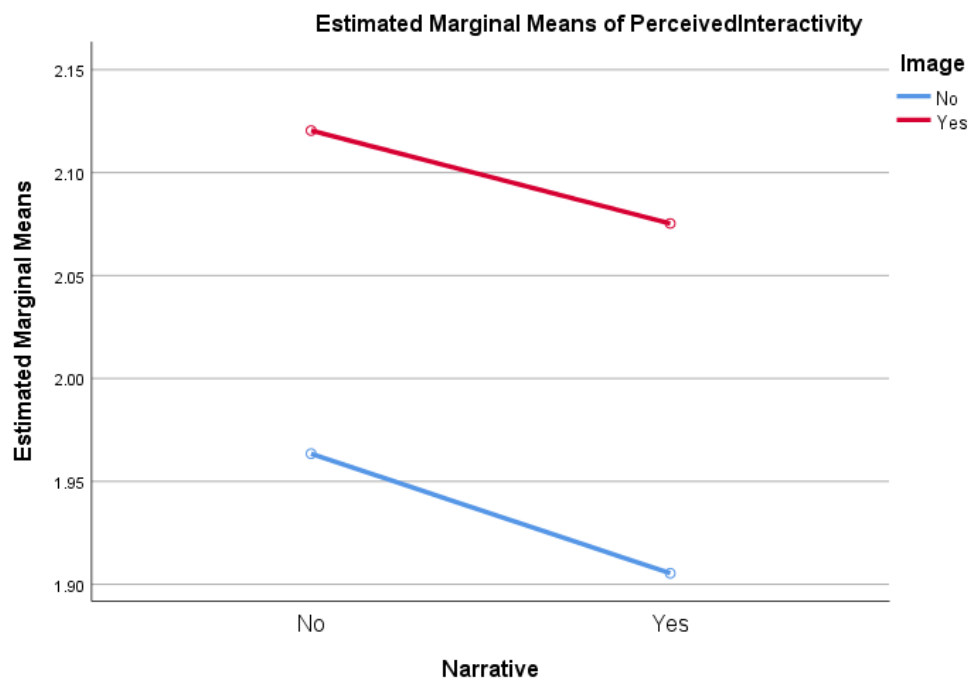
Table 12: Interaction between narrative and image on perceived interactivity

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study sought to investigate the effect that the presence of a narrative and an image had on the engagement of college students with a low-involvement post. Despite engagement being broken up and measured through transportation and perceived interactivity scales, there was a consistent result for both narratives and images: the presence or lack of narrative did not affect the engagement of the participants, but the presence an image significantly positively affected the engagement.

Demographic data was unable to be tested because the sample size of anyone non-Caucasian, over 21 years old or not female was too small. Despite that, those who met these demographics were overwhelmingly likely to be on Facebook, showing that the sample was relevant to the study with 90 of the 93 participants current Facebook users. All but eight of the participants visited Facebook at least once a week, which meant they would be a prime target for advertising on the platform. Furthermore, just under two out of every three participants said that they utilized Facebook daily.

The Effect of Posts Containing a Narrative on Transportation

The lack of influence that the presence of a narrative had on the engagement of posts was a surprise given what the literature predicted. While it a high level of engagement for posts that had a narrative wasn't expected because the topic manner isn't exciting, ELM indicated that personal relevance would result in a higher level of interest, and it would be expected that transportation would then increase (Andrews, Durvasula, & Akhter, 1990).

This seems like a natural assumption because ELM is about how important the narrative is in bringing about heightened interest in a piece of writing. The influence of the stimuli used being low-involvement products cannot be ignored when it comes to these results. As Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann (1983) described, low-involvement products are likely to need more than just words to be seen as more important by readers, such as with celebrity involvement or by at least using an image.

Although there was no statistically significant difference with regard to narrative and transportation, this was reflected in the results. The posts with a narrative but no image had a higher mean transportation score than the posts without a narrative or an image – 2.80 as opposed to 2.90.

Where the difference was made was that the two posts that contained an image had a higher transportation score. The posts with both a narrative and an image had the highest overall mean score with 3.36, while the posts with an image and no narrative had an overall mean of 3.30.

This showed that it was the image that made a larger difference and therefore meant that the narrative wasn't a decisive factor. It did appear to make a difference to the overall mean scores, but it ultimately was not a statistically significant one. That the posts with an image and no narrative had a higher overall mean than the post with a narrative and no image illustrated this.

Overall, the posts with a narrative weren't found to have high levels of transportation by participants, either. The seven-pointed Likert scale had a score of three for participants that somewhat disagreed with the statements. The mean scores therefore meant that participants, as a whole, somewhat disagreed that the posts transported them and were engaging in that manner.

The mean score of each of the transportation statements had a higher mean score across the 93 participants for the level that contained a narrative and no image than the level that contained no narrative and no image, except for the statement relating to how easy it was to put the post out of the reader's mind viewing the post. While the difference was not powerful enough to be significant, this fits in with the belief, based on ELM, that narratives should somewhat help.

The Effect of Posts Containing a Narrative on Perceived Interactivity

As with the transportation scale, there was no significant difference between the levels that contained a narrative and the levels that lacked a narrative.

As highlighted above, prior research that explored ELM showed that narratives, while important and helpful in building connections for people with brands and in a wider sense practically, they would often wouldn't make much of a difference for messaging with low-involvement brands or products – especially without an image. This was shown to be the case in this experiment: in fact, narrative had no real effect on the perceived interactivity of the posts. The level with an image and no narrative had the highest average mean, while the level with a narrative and no image had the lowest overall mean.

On top of that, the overall mean for the narrative and no image level was lower for perceived interactivity than for transportation. This could be because of many reasons – that transportation doesn't take an action and therefore takes less effort than actually interacting with a page, that people don't want to interact with low-involvement products or brands generally because they don't think about them, or, that people are very selective about what they interact with online.

The last factor is likely the most vital, with any act of "liking", "commenting" or "sharing" a post being something that other people see and is thus part of the brand that people put across online – something that is important to people on social media both in a personal sense and a professional sense as they seek to curate the way that they are seen online and, by extension, in person (Dhir et al, 2017; Hood, Robles & Hopkins, 2014).

Furthermore, Phua and Anh (2016) pointed out that people are most likely to interact with a page if their friends have already done so. With these pages invented for the sake of this experiment, it was impossible for people to have seen the pages before, and they wouldn't have thought that their friends had interacted with them before, nor would they be able to check to see if their friends had. In reality, it was impossible for their friends to have interacted with these pages, although participants might not have known that. However, this immediately makes the posts seem less worth interacting with for the participants.

In terms of comparing means for the individual statements on the perceived interactivity scale for both the level with a narrative and no image and the level with no narrative and no image, most of the results were very similar. All of the overall means were around a 2, which was the point at which people said they disagreed with the statements. Generally speaking, this means that people said that they disagreed with all potential ways that they would interact with the pages.

Only the statements relating to click on the post and interact with the page in the future scored above a 2, which occurred both for the level with a narrative and no image and the level with no narrative and no image. Neither of these are actions that people can see, which shows that any concrete actions that have an actual effect or consequence were even less likely to happen.

The Effect of Posts Containing a Picture on Transportation

Images serving as a hook to bring about a greater level of interest was clearly illustrated by the comparative results for transportation between levels contained a picture and levels that didn't contain a picture.

That there was a statistically significant difference between the two showed that pictures indeed made the posts more entertaining for the participants – despite the products that were involved being low-involvement.

As the literature showed, images generally have greater retention for people because of how they're encoded, and they are more likely to be recalled than plain text (Nelson, 1979; Childers & Houston, 1984). This was illustrated by the two levels that contained images having the highest overall mean transportation, with both the level containing a narrative and a picture and the level only containing an image having an overall mean well above 3.

While this doesn't seem significant because it shows that transportation level wasn't actually high, it was statistically significant and at least presented a chance that the posts would be remembered. Only the scales measuring the interest of the participants in the post for both image levels and the ability to put the post out of mind for the image and narrative level fell under an overall mean of 3, showing a heightened interest in the posts compared to the narrative posts.

The relevance of the post had an overall mean of 4.26 for the narrative and image level, which positioned it above the level of neither agree nor disagree with respondents. This is much higher than other results throughout the experiment, and also shows how important an image that reflects the audience is – it showing the audience using the product made the product and posts far more relevant to

participants than just having a narrative that was about someone similar to them did. While the narrative and picture combined performed best, that the picture and no narrative level performed significantly better than the non-picture levels shows how vital images are on social media.

The Effect of Posts Containing a Picture on Perceived Interactivity

The overall mean scores for each of the statements for the perceived interactivity scale was much lower for the picture levels, like it was for the narrative levels. However, even with that being the case, the difference between the presence and lack of a picture was statistically significant, and again proves that social media posts containing an image is important.

With the perceived interactivity again being lower than the transportation, the idea of interacting with a page is shown to be a bigger deal than simply reading the post and becoming engaged with it. That the picture levels were statistically significant from the non-picture levels also suggests that seeing someone who reflected the participants did make it seem more interactive to them. This fits in with the idea that people are unlikely to interact with a page if people they know don't. That the post is so clearly targeted toward them because both the text and image pertain to someone their age goes to show that the post is intended to make them react, at least making it more acceptable that they do so.

The likelihood that they would interact was low. Either clicking on the post or potentially interacting with the page in the future had the highest overall mean scores for the picture levels, reflecting what was also found for the narrative levels. That likelihood was still low, too – all of the overall mean statement responses were under

3, which meant that none of them even had a mean response of it being somewhat unlikely that they would interact in any way with the post.

These results are to be expected when paired with the way in which the participants interact with brands on Facebook: almost two thirds of participants said that they never "comment" on posts that brands make, while over half said that they never "share" posts made by brands.

This, too, fits in with the idea that people only do things on Facebook if it fits in with their brand that they've built. Attaching themselves to brands has to be a selective process, and anything negative that these companies do, both ethically or reflecting upon them socially, can then be associated with anyone who has attached themselves to that brand on social media.

This all shows that there could be high importance in posting imagery with advertising – and other posts – on Facebook if brands want to be able to spread messages as far as they can. Seeking out "likes", "comments" and "shares" is a way for advertisers to boost their reach without having to pay more for it, and these results suggest that utilizing pictures is a way to at least make that more likely, even if it still isn't probable for the majority of viewers. This can be applied in practice by those that operate Facebook pages for businesses simply by utilizing images that reflect the audience because of the greater engagement that this experiment suggests they draw.

Interaction of narratives and pictures

The lack of interaction effect between narratives and pictures was a surprise and comes as a result of the narrative not having a statistically significant effect on the engagement of participants while pictures did.

As explained above, this lack of effect from the presence of narrative was not predicted but is understandable given that low-involvement products and brands are unlikely to be interesting to people without some kind of a hook to draw attention. Generally, people probably wouldn't even read the posts of these low-involvement brands or products outside of this experiment. In this study, however, they had to in order to respond to the statements and complete the experiment.

This shows a weakness in the practical application of this experiment – people are unlikely to even read these posts to potentially engage with them. That means that it would be expected that engagement would be lower for both conditions in reality.

Limitations

This experiment utilized only a small audience with people of similar characteristics in terms of education level, age, ethnicity and geographic location, and thus cannot be regarded as research that adequately applies to all college-aged students. All participants were sourced from the University of Missouri's Columbia campus, and all were also students in journalism courses at the university. This shows not only that these participants have similar education levels, but also that they likely come from similar backgrounds because they have had the opportunity to attend the same college. Many students from different colleges around the nation won't have had the same opportunities, and there are also of course people living out of home for the first time (the type of audience that was being researched with these participants) that aren't in college.

The selected audience of college students is very small and doesn't apply to the larger population, too. While this age group was selected with the purpose of looking at people who were both likely to be on Facebook (and thus reachable

through this type of digital advertising) and making purchase decisions for the first time and thus more impressionable, the advertising could still be effective on a different audience. It would be worth researching how this advertising works on people before they make purchasing decisions, such as a younger teenage audience that could be primed by advertisers to buy their products when they do move out of the family home. Similarly, with products that people are more likely to think about purchasing, it would be interesting to research how advertising to older audiences would work.

The research itself only focused on a very small set of Facebook advertising. The only products utilized were low-investment products, which leaves a multitude of different products left to research. Low-involvement products were chosen so that participants would have a similar level of interest across all products used, meaning that the product itself was unlikely to affect how people engaged with the posts, and because low-involvement products are unlikely to elicit strong feelings in a viewer. However, it is worth researching if high-involvement products elicit a similar response, or if products of different involvements bring similar results despite their involvement levels. Other product differences could be the usage of low-involvement products that are not cleaning-related. All of these products were selected because they're necessary purchases, but there are other low-involvement products that could also be utilized that may bring about different results from a similar group of participants.

In terms of the research material, the scope of the stimuli used was limited. Posts were restricted in length so that they would take the same length of time to read, but these posts were very basic. A different length of post could result in different

results. Similarly, all of the images used were photos. Images on Facebook don't have to be photos – they can be graphics that could still be relevant to the audience.

On top of that, this study compared only narrative and images that related to the target audience. Narratives that don't relate to the target audience could be used. Narratives could be mixed in with information as well to create a hybrid of the two category types (broken into narrative and non-narrative) and compared elsewhere. As well as images, videos could be used, as could GIFs and imagery that doesn't relate to the target audience.

If similar stimuli, products and participants were used, how all of this effects purchase intention would then be a good way to test the ultimate effectiveness of the advertising and provide practical research for businesses going forward. While this shows that, for these participants, different types of posts have differing effectiveness when it comes to post engagement, how that then translates to real business is an unknown.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study sought to investigate how different type of Facebook posts can boost brands' engagement with college students on social media. With such a homogenous sample of only 93 participants, sweeping generalizations that apply beyond this experiment cannot be made.

However, that the presence of a photo was found to be statistically significant in boosting engagement in both of the ways in which it was measured – transportation and perceived interactivity – suggests that pictures being important in boosting investigating is something that should be further tested to confirm.

Practical application of this study is also difficult because participants had to read the posts in order to complete the experiment. When scrolling through Facebook in reality, people don't read every post, and are certainly unlikely to pick a post from a low-involvement brand, even if the company pays to make sure the posts appear in the newsfeeds of users.

It is worth further investigation to see not just if the results of this study hold up with the same type of stimuli and participants, but also to see if images are as important in social media posts in a wider context than just low-involvement brands and products. Indeed, it could also be investigated to see if these results are similar across different forms of media, or if the results are specific to images on Facebook. Furthermore, it is also worth investigating to see if there are situations where the presence of a narrative does have a statistically significant effect on the engagement with posts. While previous literature shows that it makes sense for the presence of a

narrative to not boost engagement for low-involvement posts, there is also a lot of

literature that explains the positive effect that a narrative can have.

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Appendix: Experiment Design

<u>Page 1 – Informed consent</u>

Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted to further understand how college students engage with brands on social media. When you are invited to participate in research, you have the right to be informed about the study procedures so that you can decide whether you want to consent to participation. This form may contain words that you do not know. Please ask the researcher to explain any words or information that you do not understand.

You have the right to know what you will be asked to do so that you can decide whether or not to be in the study. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You may refuse to be in the study and nothing will happen. If you do not want to continue to be in the study, you may stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

<u>Why I am doing the study</u>
This is a study about social media engagement with brands on Facebook. I am researching how brands can best engage with college students on social media through the types of posts that they can make.

<u>Who will be taking part in this study</u>
Around 100 students from the University of Missouri, Columbia campus will be taking part.

<u>What I ask of you</u>
I am running an experiment where you will be shown a series of different Facebook posts and asked how you felt about each of these posts on a seven-point Likert scale. Your answers will be kept and stored, along with a pseudonym that you will be given. All information will be coded by me, and your connection with it other than your pseudonym will be destroyed.

The study contains no risk of harm. Students who participate in this study will receive extra credit. If you wish to not complete the study at any point, email the primary investigator, whose email address is included below, with your pawprint and class number and your information will be passed on to receive extra credit. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you don't have to answer any question you may not want to answer. You can choose to stop participating at any point in the study or withdraw and I will comply with your request.

<u>Who to contact with questions</u>
If you have questions, you are free to ask them now. If you have questions later, you may contact the primary investigator, James Patterson, via email at jepg46@mail.missouri.edu, or the advisor, Dr. Sungkyoung Lee, via email at leesungk@missouri.edu.

You may contact the Campus Institutional Review Board if you have questions about your rights, concerns, complaints or comments as a research participant. You can contact the Campus Institutional Review Board directly by telephone or email to voice or solicit any concerns, questions, input or complaints about the research study.

489 McReynolds Hall   E-Mail: umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu

Columbia, MO 65211   Website: http://www.research.missouri.edu/cirb/index.htm

573-882-9585

<u>Page 2 – Your Facebook usage</u>

In this section, you will be asked a series of questions regarding your social media use. Please choose the appropriate answers.

Do you have a Facebook account?
- "Yes"
- "No"

How often do you browse Facebook?
- "Daily"
- "Multiple times a week"
- "Once a week"
- "Less than once a week"
- "Never"

On average, how often do you "like" a post by a brand on Facebook?
- "Multiple times a day"
- "Around once a day"
- "Multiple times a week"
- "Once a week"
- "Less than once a week"
- "Never"

On average, how often do you "comment" on a post by a brand on Facebook?
- "Multiple times a day"
- "Around once a day"

- "Multiple times a week"
- "Once a week"
- "Less than once a week"
- "Never"

On average, how often do you "share" a post by a brand on Facebook?
- "Multiple times a day"
- "Around once a day"
- "Multiple times a week"
- "Once a week"
- "Less than once a week"
- "Never"

Page 3 – Section introduction

In the following section, you will see a series of Facebook posts. After each post, you will be asked to answer questions relating to the post. Please make sure to read all of the text in the posts and look at all associated content. Once you are ready, please click "Next" to proceed.

Page 4 – Upcoming post

On the next page, you will see a Facebook post. **Please read all of the text in the post and look at all associated content.** When you are ready to view the post, click "Next."

Page 5 – Post

Page 6 – Statements

Please rate the following statements. "1" means that you "strongly disagree with the statement and "7" means that you "strongly agree" with the statement.

- "The content of the post is relevant to my everyday life."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I would interact with this page in the future."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I feel connected to the post's ideas and thoughts."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I would be likely to 'like' this post."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I was interested in this post."

- (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I would be likely to share this post on my own page."
  - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)

Page 7 – Statements

- "I was mentally involved in the post while reading it."
  - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I would click on this post."
  - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I could picture myself using the product in the post."
  - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "After I finished reading the post, I found it easy to put it out of my mind."
  - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I would be likely to comment on this post."
  - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)

Page 8 – Upcoming post

On the next page, you will see a Facebook post. **Please read all of the text in the post and look at all associated content.** When you are ready to view the post, click "Next."

Page 9 – Post

Page 10 – Statements

Please rate the following statements. "1" means that you "strongly disagree with the statement and "7" means that you "strongly agree" with the statement.

- "I was interested in this post."
  - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I would be likely to share this post on my own page."
  - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I feel connected to the post's ideas and thoughts."
  - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I would be likely to 'like' this post."
  - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I would click on this post."
  - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I would be likely to comment on this post."

o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)

Page 11 – Statements

- "I could picture myself using the product in the post."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "After I finished reading the post, I found it easy to put it out of my mind."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "The content of the post is relevant to my everyday life."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I would interact with this page in the future."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I was mentally involved in the post while reading it."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)

Page 12 – Upcoming post

On the next page, you will see a Facebook post. **Please read all of the text in the post and look at all associated content.** When you are ready to view the post, click "Next."

Page 13 – Post

Page 14 – Statements

Please rate the following statements. "1" means that you "strongly disagree with the statement and "7" means that you "strongly agree" with the statement.

- "I would click on this post."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I was interested in this post."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I would be likely to share this post on my own page."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I was mentally involved in the post while reading it."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I would be likely to 'like' this post."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I would be likely to comment on this post."
  o (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)

Page 15 – Statements

- "I feel connected to the post's ideas and thoughts."
    o (Strongly disagree) $1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7$ (Strongly agree)
- "I could picture myself using the product in the post."
    o (Strongly disagree) $1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7$ (Strongly agree)
- "The content of the post is relevant to my everyday life."
    o (Strongly disagree) $1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7$ (Strongly agree)
- "I would interact with this page in the future."
    o (Strongly disagree) $1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7$ (Strongly agree)
- "After I finished reading the post, I found it easy to put it out of my mind."
    o (Strongly disagree) $1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7$ (Strongly agree)

Page 16 – Upcoming post

On the next page, you will see a Facebook post. **Please read all of the text in the post and look at all associated content.** When you are ready to view the post, click "Next."

Page 17 – Post

Page 18 – Statements

Please rate the following statements. "1" means that you "strongly disagree with the statement and "7" means that you "strongly agree" with the statement.

- "I would be likely to 'like' this post."
    o (Strongly disagree) $1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7$ (Strongly agree)
- "I would click on this post."
    o (Strongly disagree) $1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7$ (Strongly agree)
- "I would be likely to share this post on my own page."
    o (Strongly disagree) $1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7$ (Strongly agree)
- "I would interact with this page in the future."
    o (Strongly disagree) $1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7$ (Strongly agree)
- "I was mentally involved in the post while reading it."
    o (Strongly disagree) $1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7$ (Strongly agree)
- "I feel connected to the post's ideas and thoughts."
    o (Strongly disagree) $1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7$ (Strongly agree)

- "I could picture myself using the product in the post."
    - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I would be likely to comment on this post."
    - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "The content of the post is relevant to my everyday life."
    - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "After I finished reading the post, I found it easy to put it out of my mind."
    - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)
- "I was interested in this post."
    - (Strongly disagree) 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 (Strongly agree)

Page 20 – Upcoming demographic questions

In this section, you will be asked a series of questions about yourself. Once you are ready, please click "Next" to proceed.

Page 21 – Demographic questions

How old are you?
- Participants type in their answer

What gender do you identify as?
- Male
- Female
- Other

What ethnicity do you identify as?
- Caucasian
- Black or African American
- Latinx
- Asian
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Mixed

Page 21 – Pawprint and class

Please provide your pawprint and enter the name of your class so that you can receive extra credit from your professor.

Page 22 – Thank you

Thank you for participating in this study. You may now close this window.