Love, Brands, and Marriage: Audience Reception of LGBT Instagram Posts after the 2015 Supreme Court Ruling on Same-sex Marriage

M. Olguta Vilceanu
Alison N. Novak

After the Supreme Court's decision to extend marriage benefits to LGBTQ couples across the country, prominent brands turned to social networks to share their support and enthusiasm. Images of same-sex couples, equality, and traditional LGBTQ symbols promoted positive brand associations with current events and the larger American culture. Social media users made sense of these politicized messages by engaging in communication with the brands, and with each other. Discursive themes centered around the opportunistic versus authentic nature of the campaign relative to personal values, civics, and religious beliefs.

Introduction

On June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) ruled that same-sex couples have equal right to legal marriage and marriage benefits in the eyes of the law. In the hours after the decision was released, news outlets around the country attempted to summarize what this could mean for the American public. CNN wrote, "the decision could settle one of the major civil rights fights of this era," reflecting on the abundance of pro-LGBTQ demonstrations, parades, and celebrations taking place across the country on that day (de Vogue & Diamond, 2015). While notably the country was still split regarding public opinion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) rights, many reflected that a SCOTUS decision might bridge and start to resolve this ongoing debate (Chappell, 2015). The public turned to social media to voice their reactions to the SCOTUS ruling, and posted numerous messages of support or dissent.

Brands also turned to social media, posting their own supportive or opposing interpretation of the ruling in carefully crafted corporate messages. Companies such as Budweiser, Gap, Hilton Hotels, and Coca-Cola brandished their support of the LGBTQ community in general and the newly legalized marriage rights on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr messages (Castillo, 2015). MSNBC reported that within an hour of the ruling, 3.6 million tweets used the hashtag *#LoveWins* (Castillo, 2015). Even more importantly, many of these tweets originated from corporate, rather than individual users. In an effort to show their support and backing of the SCOTUS decision, corporations posted images, messages, and videos that aligned their company interests with the LGBTQ community.

It is unclear whether these messages were authentic signs of support or carefully crafted marketing (or some combination of both). However, rainbow-themed posts quickly elicited reactions from brand followers on nearly every social network, resulting in user debates and criticism of these pro-LGBTQ posts (Thadani, 2015). Users questioned the authenticity and perhaps ulterior motives of companies perceived to suddenly demonstrate support and pride. For example, when Facebook released a new tool that would lay a rainbow gloss over user profile pictures, some users questioned its motive and suspected it was a poorly disguised strategy for the platform to track users' support or dissent (Lafferty, 2015). In short, the public was responding, but perhaps not in the way brand managers had anticipated.

This is not the first time public opinion questioned the authenticity of just-in-time social media content (Guidry, Messner, Jin, & Medina-Messner, 2015). Previous research suggests users were quick to identify posts they felt were obvious forms of *pandering* or *unwanted marketing* (Howard, Mangold, & Johnston, 2014). Furthermore, Shao, Jones, and Grace (2014) found that social media communication tends to coalesce around present or missing alignments between consumer self-expression and brand-promoted values and ideas. While social media currently offers the best tools for brands and consumers alike to communicate quickly with various groups, many users are skeptical of companies who seem too eager to take advantage of this ability (Carlson & Lee, 2015) by tying their communication to timely or topical posts.

This study investigated public reactions to seven SCOTUS-themed Instagram posts by four large American companies using narrative discourse analysis. Within the wider context of critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk,

_____

M. Olguta Vilceanu (Ph.D., Temple University) is an Associate Professor at Rowan University, College of Communication and Creative Arts. **Alison N. Novak** (Ph.D., Drexel University) is an Assistant Professor at Rowan University, College of Communication and Creative Arts. Direct inquiries to vilceanu@rowan.edu.

2007), a total of 516 user comments and responses were mapped against Hall's (1997) three categories of public reactions: operating inside the dominant code, applying a negotiable code, and substituting and oppositional code (See Appendix 1) (Novak, 2016). Given the highly controversial nature of the topic of same-sex marriage, the study examines two key questions:

> *RQ1. What types of consumer reactions did the brands elicit when attempting to show support for the SCOTUS decision in particular, and LGBT issues in general?*

> *RQ2. What types of themes dominated consumer reactions to each of the brand ads?*

Advertising to LGBTQ Communities

To many heterosexual consumers and communicators, LGBTQ advertising might seems to be a recent and explosive phenomenon. What is relatively recent, though, is the concept of gay *communities*, associated with the interbelic mass urbanization, mass immigration, and mass industrialization, as well as post-WWII advent of free time and disposable income for large numbers of relatively young and often single men and women (Branchik, 2002). Most importantly, however, the bulk of LGBTQ research, advertising, and social activism are irrevocably connected to gay identity polemics triggered by changes in the entertainment industry and by the AIDS pandemics in the last quarter of the twentieth century (Kates, 1999).

Early research addressing LGBTQ and advertising referenced post-1970 advertising campaigns, following the establishment of gay-owned businesses and over 150 gay magazines and newspapers (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005). The newly-coined "dream market" (Kates, 1999) included the possibility of higher income, no kids, young, affluent, and educated gay men, interested in purchasing high quality products from brands perceived to be rebellious, progressive, or simply friendly toward gay issues and communities. *Inclusive* advertising, in this context, referred to mainstream brands such as Toyota, Microsoft, Levi's, Banana Republic, American Express, Miller, and Absolut, who placed ads created for mainstream media into *gay media*. *Crossover* advertising, on the other hand, referred to brands such as Abercrombie & Fitch who embedded veiled or overt gay/lesbian stereotypical messages or characters in *mainstream media* (Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999). In this context, crossover advertising was a reflection of the fact that the vast majority of LGBTQ audiences are more likely to consume mainstream media, rather than gay media (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005). As is the case with other groups defined by key sociodemographic characteristics, LGBTQ audiences balance precariously between the dual perspective of coveted niches and controversial minority groups. Within the broader cultural context, LGBTQ communities are represented disproportionately as either disenfranchised or predominantly affluent, while at the same time portentedly under the influence of normality-driven universal human needs and values such as happiness, comfort, and freedom to define one's life (Kates, 1999; Tsai, 2011).

In a parallel stream of research, advertising was connected to social perceptions of gender and ideal masculinity/femininity, a circular reference owed to the fact that "it is virtually impossible to speak of one without reference to the other" in an ever-evolving discourse about what is socially acceptable in terms of power, emotional expression, and presence (Jhally, 2009). In the 80s gender-fluid advertising discourse of brands such as Levi's jeans and clothing retailer Abercrombie & Fitch, strategic employment and role-positioning of male and female bodies enabled the audience to identify the messages they could comfortably embrace. In Sut Jhally's (2009) analysis of gender representations in advertising and promotion of strong female characters in recent action movies and competitive female athletes, homophobic groups find reassurance in the strong, healthy, and buff male bodies posing in the company of skinny, beautiful, female models. Gender nonconformists, on the other hand, can read multiple stories escaping the heteronormative discourse, despite the prevalence of some measure of stereotypical gender coding pervading these carefully composed snapshots of gender displays. While the commercial success of these brands proves their staying power in terms of appealing to various audience, the question remains the be answered about the degree to which such disguised advertising meets the aspirational needs of LGBTQ audiences who wish to express both their individuality and their shared characteristics marking their ability and right to belong to mainstream groups, ideas, and consumption patterns.

Some brands successfully confined male gay characters to trend-setter stereotypes within the fashion and decorating industry (as in the example of a 1990s IKEA campaign where same-sex couples were choosing furniture

or appliances for their homes, or the more recent TV phenomenon of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*). Other brands such as car manufacturer Volkswagen chose to air 'ambiguously gay' ads during coming-out episodes of Ellen, or to advertise on shows portraying sexually confused or vaguely out characters like the early episodes of *Will and Grace* (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005). However, Buford (2005) anticipated increased resistance when brands inevitably broadened the repertoire of LGBT stereotypes portrayed in ad campaigns advocating social issues such as same-sex marriage, domestic abuse, and so on. The very characteristics that made the gay guy likeable (young, blond, and beautiful), they say, would prevent mass marketing to an increasingly diversified audience because of the narrow demographic profile of a significant market consisting primarily of white, educated, affluent, urban consumers (Skover & Testy, 2002). In Chung's (2007) words, "stereotypes reflect a culture's beliefs and values about *other* people or objects"–therefore narrowcasting LGBT characters and issues can isolate even as they attempt to include the LGBT population into mainstream media (p. 99, author's emphasis). Furthermore, Chung (2007) maintains, the media industry at large is "in the business of making profits, not in raising social consciousness" (p. 100) , therefore the rare individual professionals and media messages promoting LGBT *countertypes*, or positive stereotypes, should receive wider attention and support from researchers and educators.

Brands using this strategy, also known as *dual marketing* (Bordo, 1999), tend to select imagery that could appeal to both LGBT and heterosexual audiences, yet results depend heavily on consumer's prior knowledge and belonging of specific groups or subcultures (Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999). For example, the beautiful, strong, and toned male bodies used in fashion and cosmetics by brands such as Calvin Klein and Old Spice might ostensibly appeal to the newly defined assertive female audience, empowered to choose and purchase products for their male partners—while to gay consumers the same ads would identify and promote or criticize socio-demographic characteristics associated with the LGBT community (see Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999, for an extensive review of early research on in-group/out-group advertising and intended vs. actualized meaning).

An experimental study by Bhat, Leigh and Wardlow (1998) emphasized the augmenting role of pre-existing values and beliefs on the ways in which majority or in-group audience members perceived minority or out-group advertising messages and imagery. Researchers created a set of parallel ads where heterosexual and gay couples were portrayed in positions that explicitly denoted affection, but were attributed contextual romantic connotations. In their findings, prior negative perceptions of homosexual status or lifestyle tended to correlate strongly with a more negative reading of LGBT-coded advertising imagery.

Gender studies literature also picked up on conflicting meanings in consumerism and advertising attempting to impose normality-centered messages such as the expectations of beauty, youth, leisure, and potential for success, as requisite gay attributes (Bordo, 1999), while excluding economically disadvantaged LGBT populations dealing with some of the same social and personal issues of the general population—such as AIDS, lack of education, or serious handicaps (Kates, 1999). Sexuality, gender, and power are essential concepts in analyzing the social role of advertising, all the more so when audiences have the means to express their opinions in forums where brands are careful to promote multi-way communication. So how do audiences perceive branding efforts to advertise across the borderlines of sexual orientation?

LGBTQ and Social Media Advocacy

While social media allows for almost-instant brand responses to events and incidents in the real world, it also allows consumers to respond to such campaigns, in honest—if not always friendly—ways. Cultural norms anchored in religion, politics, and personal preferences require careful balancing of dual marketing (Tsai, 2011), with its combination of insider jokes, sarcastic, and metaphoric approaches. When the intention of the ad is to promote the brand as well as advocate a social issue, the challenge is even more complex. Hall's (1997) model would map *inclusive advertising, crossover advertising,* and *dual advertising* relative to different types of consumer reactions, providing the opportunity to use analytical categories for analyzing audience engagement with media messaging, such as in Novak's (2016) study of Millennial engagement. Political social media communication is highly susceptible to minority/majority and outgroup/ingroup perceptions even as consumers interpret and post their reflections and reactions to various public relations campaigns, social media discourse, and corporate LGBTQ messaging (Novak, 2016).

It is important to study brand-focused communication around support for LGBTQ issues, because not all brands opted for cooperation and friendly support of social advocacy. An 1994 ad by Italian fashion brand Benetton

created a fake obituary of former US President Reagan (while he was still alive), with a picture depicting him in the final stages of AIDS, in an advocacy effort protesting the former President's position on miscommunicating about the 'gay pandemic'--a communication strategy that invited strong emotional reactions due to its *negotiation of contradictory codes and messages* (the president was neither gay, nor suffering from AIDS; however, the AIDS crisis was both real and grave). The brand intended to send a message supportive of LGBTQ issues and did so in a manner consistent with their provoking style of advertising; however, it triggered negative reactions from a variety of publics who may have been supportive of LGBT issues in general and finding effective ways to address the AIDS pandemic--but strongly disagreed with the brand's communication strategy.

More recently, the CEOs of well-known brand-companies such as Chick-fil-A and Papa John's fast-food chains issued gay-bashing messages and advertising, openly engaging in usage of *oppositional codes* regarding same-sex marriage in particular, and LGBTQ rights and values in general. Many consumers who might not have otherwise expressed support for LGBT causes were enraged by these CEOs who engaged in attention-seeking communication consistent with their brands, yet entirely disrespectful to large groups who did not subscribe to their own individual persuasions (be they sexual, religious, or of other nature).

Discourse Analysis and Brand-Focused Communication

With the advent of digital social networks in the late 2000s, marketers turned their attention to tailoring messages and visuals to specific digital spaces. Instagram (now owned by Facebook) was released in October 2010 as an iPhone-exclusive application for sharing images and brief messaging content. Smith and Sanderson (2015) described Instagram as a hybrid between Twitter and Facebook, with an emphasis on visual content and textual brevity as a social norm. Instagram quickly gained popularity and users as it expanded to other operating systems such as Android and tablets, as far away as Russian territories during the Sochi Olympic games. Howard et al. (2014) noted that Instagram is an essential part of the marketing mix due to its visual and instantaneous nature, facilitating immediate and two-way distribution of messages, campaigns, and visuals between brands and their audiences (Zolkepli, Hasno, & Mukhiar, 2015).

Posting comments, tagging friends, or using hashtags to connect with liked authors enable sharing and connections between users and brands. Bataineh and Al-Smadi (2015) proposed that user comments on specific posts represent the highest level of engagement, as a culmination of the process requiring that users follow the account, view the post, and decide to invest their attention and energy into expressing their reaction in *active forms* of brand participation (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2014) that help account managers remain current with the views of their most engaged publics by monitoring various expressions of support, dissent, and non-commitment elicited by their brand communication. Comments on Instagram posts often include actual words, visuals, and links to further augment user engagement, resulting in a type of feedback to the brand which, if properly analyzed, can yield insights into public reaction to the brand's communication strategy. Beyond brand management techniques, studying user comments is also a good way to look at the type of engagement users exhibit to politicized messages such as brands' support of same-sex civil rights. Brands need the feedback such analysis can yield, in order to determine what changes are necessary at various steps during a campaign.

Critical discourse analysis methodology examines audience engagement with branded messaging and controversial media content within a qualitative framework (Van Dijk, 2007; 2009). By categorizing audience comments according to Hall's (1997) three codes, and then qualitatively reading and analyzing the content of these comments, researchers can build understanding of how brand messages are accepted, rejected, or negotiated by their audience. Within the sample of advertising messages selected for this study, it is interesting to notice the similarities between the products advertised: they are all meant for both solitary and shared consumption, which renders them as means of expressing one's persona. Hotels and the hospitality industry are particularly sensitive to LGBT issues, because guests need to feel safe socializing and showing affection to their travel companions. Gap attire caters to the young, urban, affluent, and hip consumer, consistent with the media-proposed prototype of the gay guy. Coca-Cola encourages happiness in the form of sharing (or gifting) the beverage with friends and strangers alike. And Budweiser has a long history of promoting the idea of buddies among gay and heterosexual audiences. What could be more organic than the connection between these brands, same-sex marriage, and social networking?

Methods

This project integrates discourse analysis techniques to look at the nature of user responses to LGBTQ-supportive Instagram posts. This approach allows for insight into the marketing messages as a data set and how consumers engage with the brand through the Instagram platform. While this type of analysis could be conducted on a great number of brands, this study focused on four brands which have been previously identified as openly supportive of same-sex marriage and actively marketing to LGBTQ audiences immediately after the SCOTUS decision (Tharett, 2015) and had a topical presence on Instagram: Budweiser, Coca-Cola, Gap, and Hilton Hotels (See actual Instagram ad messages in Appendix 2).

Analysis of consumer-generated discourse considered Hall's categories within an advertising-specific context. For example, when *operating inside the dominant code*, LGBT and heterosexual audiences partake in consumption of messages from well-known brands while actively seeking ways to connect their own values and experience. On the other hand, *substitution of oppositional codes* occurs when consumers express strong negative reactions and question the very foundations of the brand, message, or context. When advertising pursues social advocacy, however, it is equally likely to trigger *application of negotiable codes*, whereby consumers agree with the message on account of free speech, but oppose its use in an advertising campaign and therefore are inclined to stop buying the product due to conflict with their personal values; or they may find the brand message irrelevant and retain their consumption habit for a particular product, completely bypassing any advertising message. Across all three coding categories, there is the potential of alignment or conflict between individual and shared consumption, beliefs, images, and attitudes.

In total, seven brand posts were collected for this analysis; of the initial yield of 754 comments, only 516 were retained after careful screening for relevance (See Table 1). The final set of comments excluded posts where some people tagged their friends in the comments section of one of the brands, an action that could signify either positive or negative emotional reactions. Also excluded were posts in a language other than English, or tagging a previous Instagram (or Twitter) message that could not be accessed.

While a more detailed visual analysis of each post could be a vital source of marketing information, this project specifically focuses on the comments posted by users to each of the brand's posts. The initial step in writing out the findings summarized the overall type and frequency of reactions to the brand advertising posts (Storcila, 2014). Although conducted with surface-level codes and in the absence of follow-up interaction with individual Instagram users, the analysis of supportive versus disagreeing messages provides insight into the range and frequency of consumer reactions likely to emerge when well-known brands decide to engage with publicly debated social issues.

> *RQ1. What types of consumer reactions did the brands elicit when attempting to show support for the SCOTUS decision in particular, and LGBT issues in general?*

For the first research question the authors used qualitative discourse analysis to delve deeper into the nuances of each comment by looking for patterns, themes, and types of user comments (Clary & Wandersee, 2014). Rather than simply noting if users agreed or disagreed with the brand's messages, discourse analysis provides greater insight into the possible users' rationale and the ways they expressed themselves through the social networking platform. This study adopts Gee's (2012) discourse analysis methodology and specifically examines how users expressed their emotional reactions to the brand's posts. In a recent study, Alper (2014) argued for the necessity of combining qualitative and quantitative methods when studying discursive patterns in consumer engagement on Instagram comment sections. Further, Schleifer (2014) noted that qualitative discourse analysis is an important methodology for digital research due to the myriad of ways users can express their opinion and values through text, emoticons, and links. Discourse analysis allows for a holistic investigation of the terms of reference, sentiment, and language used throughout user reactions. This study proposes to use Hall's (1997) set of three discursive categories to support identification of complexity and patterns (Schleifer, 2014) in user responses to brands' messages of support for the Supreme Court decision.

After carefully reading each of the seven sets of user responses to the brand advertising images, each post was coded with labels corresponding to Hall's Appendix A (see Appendix 1), based on the appearance of the

consumer/author operating inside the dominant code, substituting oppositional codes, or applying negotiable codes. An example of operating inside the dominant code reads "Good job Gap, I'm happy you support ALL your customers equally."[1] Unhappy consumers were more likely to substitute an oppositional code such as "Ugh, Gap, why don't you keep your mind out of politics. I'll never buy from you again" or "Bull s**t 😳 No more Budweiser for me I'm totally offended by this 🍺."

Marketing-savvy consumers, however, appeared to propose applying a negotiable code that supported the brand's message, but saw a need for more substantial brand communication on the issue, such as in the following post: "Good start, but make this a commercial." Other consumers reaffirmed brand loyalty to the product while completely discounting the ad's social advocacy message, in post like "lmao does the label on the bottle change the beer? Still tastes the same to me and im not gay." After using Hall's system of categories to summarize consumer reactions, the next research question explored the context around thematic groups among consumer reactions.

RQ2. What types of themes dominated consumer reactions to each of the brand ads?

While it could be argued that the four brands included in this study shared many common characteristics in terms of types of products and audiences, they chose different communication strategies to express their support for the SCOTUS decision. Breaking down Hall's (1997) discursive categories across the four brands allowed the researchers to investigate specific themes associated with each communication strategy. It seems quite obvious to anticipate that consumers would struggle to reconcile their personal views on religion, marriage, and civil rights in general, with LGBT advertising initiated by mainstream brands. In what ways, though, would consumers react to brand-generated and consumer-generated visual and text communication for each of these well-known brands?

Findings

Data Summary. Instagram comments to brands posting ads supporting the SCOTUS decision (See Figure 1) showed overall a clearly uneven distribution relative to Hall's categories of consumers responding *within the dominant code* (48.1%), in an *oppositional code* (35.9%) or *negotiated code* (11.1%). Confirming Abbott, Donaghey, Hare, and Hopkins' (2013) findings, a little over 5% (N=26) of the comments simply used the Instagram ad pages as a starting point to engage in interpersonal disputes or referencing separate threads, and even online or offline relationships. Off-topic conversations sparked sometimes from debates over the connection between homosexuality, heterosexuality, and religious beliefs, Christian and otherwise. While all four brands posted ads intended to express support for the SCOTUS decision, their communication strategies combined different textual and visual references, thus triggering a variety of consumer reactions (See Table 1).

Operating Inside the Dominant Code. The images and messages in these ads celebrated the LGBT victory and simultaneously positioned their brand as sharing in the happiness, pride, and emotional context of the community--thus operating fully *inside the dominant code*. Budweiser posted an image of a rainbow-flag colored bottle; Gap posted images of the equal sign, rainbow shirts, and young people jumping with P-R-I-D-E balloons; Hilton Hotels posted an equal sign made of two room keys and an image of two men kissing behind a rainbow-flag; and Coca-Cola shared an image of rainbow bottles with *#LoveWins*.

When the communication target of the ad had in-group status, users wrote supportive and accepting messages of the brand and its post. They rationalized their own agreement with the brand by providing supporting evidence of other pro-LGBTQ companies and sometimes by critiquing non-participating brands or pro-active message detractors, thus reaffirming their support of both the message and the brand. These positive messages affirmed the legitimacy of the brand as well as of LGBTQ rights through language that supported the actions of the company and its publics. For example, one user wrote of Hilton Hotels, "@hiltonhotels you guys have my loyalty because of your stance on equality. It's wonderful!" In posts like this, users wrote that the brand's message on Instagram strengthened their relationship with the company. Other users wrote similar messages of Gap, "I want a

---

[1] All posts have been anonymized, but are kept in their original state, including any spelling, grammar, and typing errors. Some of the offensive terms were replaced with asterisks, though most readers will immediately guess the reference.

tee like this one!!!! Please!!!!" and "You Did The Right Thing!" Such posts encourage proactive brand communication as they continually support brand messaging, strategy, and identity.

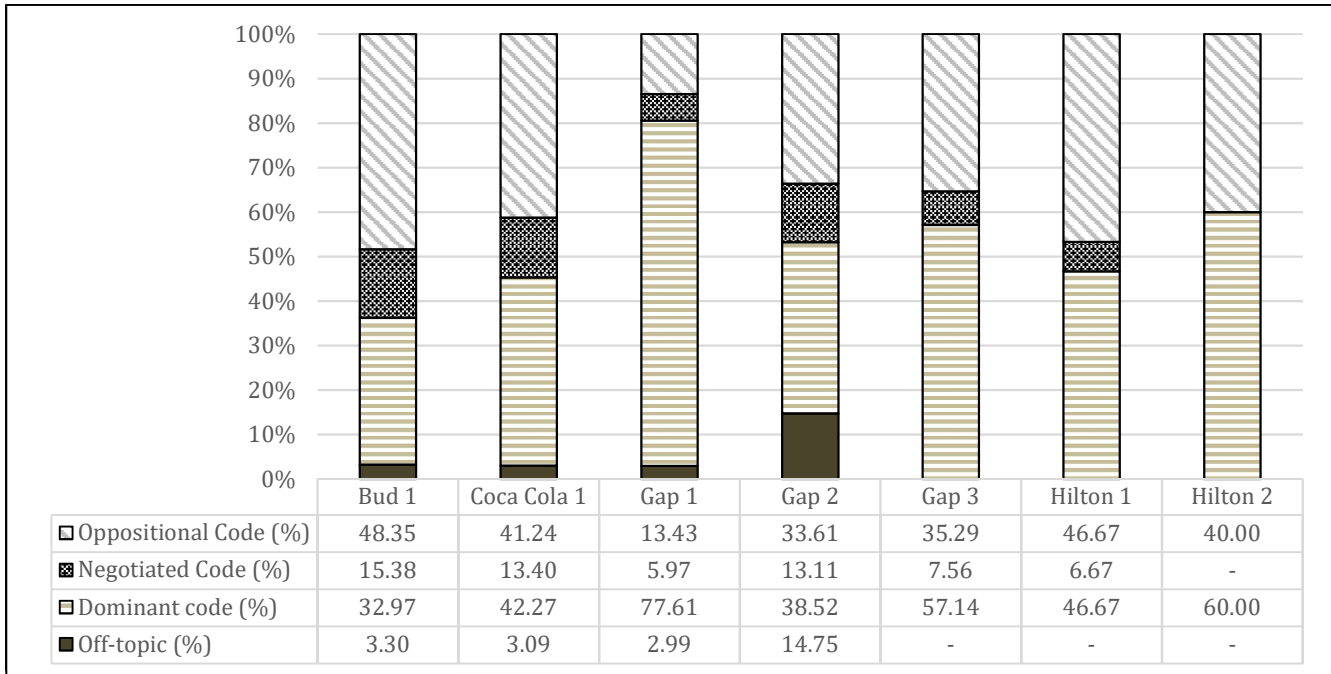Figure 1. Comments to brands posting ads supportive of SCOTUS decision

	Bud 1	Coca Cola 1	Gap 1	Gap 2	Gap 3	Hilton 1	Hilton 2
☐ Oppositional Code (%)	48.35	41.24	13.43	33.61	35.29	46.67	40.00
▨ Negotiated Code (%)	15.38	13.40	5.97	13.11	7.56	6.67	-
☐ Dominant code (%)	32.97	42.27	77.61	38.52	57.14	46.67	60.00
■ Off-topic (%)	3.30	3.09	2.99	14.75	-	-	-

Table 1

Sample Summary

Brand	# comments
1. Budweiser Bud for you	91
2. Coca Cola bottles	97
3. Gap ice cream	67
4. Gap heart	122
5. Gap PRIDE	119
6. Hilton flag	15
7. Hilton keycard	5
Total	*516*

Emoticons were one of many ways users demonstrated support for these messages. The *thumbs-up/thumbs-down* sign, hearts, rainbows, and smiley/unhappy-face emoticons were most common (See Table 2). About 10% of

the posts consisted entirely of emoticons, such as this Gap reaction, " ." Without words, this user demonstrated their support of LGBTQ rights through the use of people emoticons, hearts and a *worship* sign. This was common for many posts operating inside the dominant code, as users showed support for the brand and its messages.

Table 2

Usage of emoticons in consumer reactions to brand message

Emoticons relative to code	*None*	*Some*	*Exclusive*	*Total*
Off-topic	N=23 88.5%	N=2 7.7%	N=1 3.9%	*N=26* *5.04%*
Dominant	N=155 62.5%	N=55 22.2%	N=38 15.3%	*N=248* *48.1%*
Negotiated	N=53 92.9%	N=3 5.3%	N=1 1.8%	*N=57* *11.1%*
Opposed	N=154 83.2%	N=20 10.8%	N=11 6%	*N=185* *35.9%*
Total	*N=385* *74.6%*	*N=80* *15.5%*	*N=51* *9.9%*	*N=516* *100%*

Moreover, posts operating inside the dominant code also reflected on the SCOTUS decision and the larger progress of the LGBTQ community. For example, one Budweiser follower wrote, "It's about time the SCOTUS got something right!" In these reactions, the brand is connected to larger movements and changes in the American political system. Beneficial for the brand, these users acknowledged the contemporary nature of the advertising message by recognizing its genuine connection with the newly judicially legitimized changes in culture.

Other users took this a step further and wrote off the entire group of brand detractors, particularly those who disagreed with the company's LGBTQ support. One Budweiser supporter wrote, "You better throw away your phone too then. Apple, Microsoft, Android, Google and Facebook and Instagram itself all support marriage equality. Don't dare think of drinking any of the hundreds of Coke and Pepsi products either, or eating any of the Mars candy line. Don't forget not to eat any Kellogg's or General Mills cereal either." In this post, the user addresses those followers who were claiming they would no longer drink Budweiser beer, in light of their LGBTQ support. This user defends Budweiser's position, and provides a list of other brands and companies who similarly support LGBTQ rights.

Substituting an Oppositional Code. In this category, some users voiced direct disagreement with the brand's message or intent (" I will stop visiting Gap stores after this post" and "I'm gonna start buying Miller from now on"). As users attempted to make sense of the Instagram posts and interact with other comments, many turned to critiquing the brand, its message, and strategy ("Well this country is going to hell after that... GAP = Gay And Proud! "). They examined or criticized the authenticity of the posts and questioned the intentions of the brand.

When the target audience of LGBT consumers was perceived to be an outgroup that threatened the legitimacy of their own values and rights, users posted vitriolic messages critiquing the brand's communication strategy as phony attempts to feign support for LGBT rights and issues, in exchange for short-term sales. Throughout such posts, the common sentiment is of indignation or despondency over a brand that is suddenly turning away from its main customer base ("Need too find a new beer too. Bad move by these guys, have they even looked at their customers lately? Not gay friendly" and "I'm highly disappointed right now") or for effecting what was perceived as a new and wrong type of marketing: "Wish there was an 'unlike' or 'unheart' button @budweiser. Don't pander to the Holiwierd elite. Stay out of it and do what you do best." Within this context, users reflected on the posted ad as a piece of marketing inconsistent with the larger brand strategy. Rather than reading the Budweiser post as a genuine sign of support, these messages were oppositional in nature, as they criticized the underlying strategic aims of the company.

Hall's (1997) work identifies these responses as a type of *substituting an oppositional code* where the reactor attempts to critically engage the message or post and, in the process, attempts to generate new meaning in their responses to brand messages, consistent with their own values and beliefs. The reactors ultimately rejected the message of the post and sometimes even distanced themselves from the brand by avowing to forego future purchases. This type of opposition to the brand's strategy is important, as it reflects the customer's feelings that the brand image and ideology no longer synchronize with their own. While finding that some customers disagree with a brand's position is not surprising, the Instagram platform allows researchers to document the language of such opposition.

Other posts called out companies like Gap through extremist language and sentiments, by engaging in polemics through the prism of brand's coexistence with or stance on social issues. In these posts, users attempt to distance themselves from the brand as a reflection of its perceived or actual connections with various issues. For example, one Gap follower wrote "And not that i would but i shall never wear gap now that i know they support a mental illness like pedophileism." This is a complete rejection of both the brand and its message. While we could easily argue that pedophilia and homosexuality are nowhere near synonymous, and furthermore that homosexuality is not a mental illness, to respond as such would simply engage a reader with strong homophobic convictions in a polemics which would not benefit the brand in any manner. The consumer expressed oppositional reaction in this case by contesting homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle, furthermore substituting it with a concept that includes socially and morally degradable meanings. By associating Gap with pedophilic crimes, the user attempts to question the ethics and morals of the company itself.

Similarly, another Gap follower wrote a post challenging the genuineness of Gap's pro-LGBTQ advertising based on the brand's own unethical practices: "How hypocritical of Gap for advocating human rights when it thrives because of the work of underpaid sweatshop workers! @gap." It appears, in this post, as if the user attempted to include unfair labor practices and LGBT/same-sex marriage rights within the broader category of human rights, which would be laudable; however, somehow the company's support of latter disingenuous, after having ignored the former. A Budweiser follower similarly commented, "You have to stop promoting the #MakoMania event as they were seen to kill a shark from an endangered specie and then take pictures of it like it was cool!! Promoting that kind of attitude towards the nature is horrible!" Although neither company referenced either issue in their posts (or anywhere in their Instagram accounts), users took this moment of seemingly activist branding behavior to address other social activism issues. In this second coding category, the advertisement again served as a conduit for consumers to rationalize and express their pre-established beliefs and values.

Applying a Negotiable Code. Many users found difficulty with completely supporting or disagreeing with the brand posts, as followers grappled with their own beliefs *and* the messages that were shared on Instagram. When applying a negotiable code, users voiced complex reactions, whereby they felt the need to disassociate themselves either with the brand message, or with the brand products. For example, one Gap follower reacted to a post of a young man and woman wearing rainbow t-shirts and eating ice cream by saying that "There should be two boys eating it"—thus questioning the authenticity of a dual-advertising message with imagery that appears to be a heterosexual couple in a pro-LGBT ad. At the same time, this finding could be seen as another instance of a priori convictions influencing insider vs. outsider perceptions of niche target advertising. Why would the reader immediately assume that, just because the ad portrayed two characters that appeared to be one male and one female, the message imagery was non-queer? Clearly, the suggestion for stronger LGBTQ-normative visuals in the post is

from someone who does not disagree with the message, but with its presentation--hence the request for same-sex couple visuals to go with the same-sex marriage message.

Similarly, a Coca-Cola follower reacted to their post by requesting changes in the imagery of marketing and advertising. One user wrote, "Show some gay POC [people of color] in your TV commercials please." Again, this consumer is requesting more images clearly presenting LGBTQ and minority individuals, while agreeing with the overall message of the post. Such requests and suggestions for marketing improvements reflect the user beliefs that the brand could do more in terms of social activism, and that advertising messages could be stronger, clearer, or more obvious.

Importantly, users also applied a negotiable code by debating the merits of the Instagram posts and their support of LGBTQ rights. Throughout the dataset, there were ongoing conversations, arguments, and debates between users regarding the connections between homosexuality and morality, legitimacy, or religion. For example, consider the back-and-forth between these two users commenting on the Coca-Cola Instagram post:

> User1: Look CC can do whatever they want. I'm sorry but I really can't stop until you understand that you can't love God if you indulge in what he calls sin
> User 2: Everyone sins so shut up and goodbye
>
> User1: 😊 aww I'm sorry did the facts make you mad??
> User2: No not really. Everyone sins and god still loves them 😂😂
> User2: My dad is a pastor and he told me that if you sin but love God, he will ALWAYS love you.
> User1: when did I ever say that God stops loving us when we sin?... there's no such thing as a gay Christian

Debates were common throughout each of the post threads, as users engaged each other in lively (and often profanity-laced) conversations about the connections between homosexuality and various religious beliefs. While User1 clearly considers LGBTQ lifestyles as sinful and irreligious, they are also suggesting that Coca-Cola's post is independent of their own beliefs. Rather than saying they disagree with Coca-Cola, they instead argue that the brand has the right to free speech (and implicitly the freedom to advertise in whatever manner they choose), and reserve the right to buy or boycott the product. This is unlike how they feel towards User2, who holds a different interpretation of God and Christianity. Once breached, the debate over God, Christianity, and homosexuality cascades downhill into a demonstration of the relativity of what users call facts and reliable information:

> User2: Actually yes there is. There is this show called survivor and a gay couple announced they were gay Christians.
> User1: And you're going to believe that sinners who ARE PROUD of their sin are telling the truth over what the Bible, inspired by God, says?

Without any information about the actual individuals, it is impossible to determine exactly how someone would make universal-truth statements based on what they had seen on a reality-TV show such as *Survivor*. While both users appear to be Christians holding strong religious convictions, their interpretation of the compatibility (or lack thereof) between their religion and homosexuality are completely opposite to each other, to the point where User 1 re-codes even the word *pride* into a negative meaning, in order to fit his views, and completely separates from the brand page hosting this conversation.

In these debates, negotiation of concept meanings ascribed different degrees of freedom: companies can decide to support or oppose various social issues and causes; and users will make their own choices on whether or not to keep following brands and purchasing their products. In such contexts, the brand's support of same-sex marriage directly affects consumers' brand loyalty:

> "I have no issue with people loving who they wish. However I don't want to support something that is against my personal morals. Therefore I no longer wish to follow this company's page nor will I give them business. I don't hate anyone for the decisions they make in life and I never spoke against anyone. So that

being said.. You, me and everyone else has an opinion, and all you are doing is spreading the same hate as the people you are fighting which is putting you on the same level that they are. Calling people (including me) things such as "dumb hicks, inbred, wastes of oxygen." Is no way to get your point across. Just trying to be mature here."

Applying a negotiable code thus reflects a type of engagement with both the platform (" 😂😂 responding to people's posts from almost 2 months ago? get a damn life!") and the brand itself ("lmao does the label on the bottle change the beer? Still tastes the same to me and im not gay"), as well as sometimes reacting to a particular ad based on the company's prior actions and within the wider environment of civic responsibility. Users demonstrated their familiarity with brand advertising by making recommendations about non-Instagram related marketing ("It should at least be Bud Light Lime or any of the fruity flavored"). This reflects a knowledge of the overall company, the history of its connection with LGBT issues, and its advertising and marketing strategies.

Unlike substituting an oppositional code or operating inside a dominant code, these posts occupy an in-between space, where users have not yet completely reconciled their own opinions with the brand's strategy. Consumers often levied criticism towards the overall social issue, though showing a modicum of agreement with the position of the company or bypassed advertising considerations altogether in order to focus on social activism ("Are you homophobic or what?? What the f*** is wrong with you???? We want equality remember?? You should accept gay couples!! They're human beings just like you idiots !!!!!!").

Comparison of Consumer Responses across Brand Ads

Budweiser. The first ad in this sample, Budweiser's "Love on your own terms. #ThisBudsForYou," presents a bottle of Budweiser beer wrapped in rainbow-colored packaging and featuring the Liberty Statue. While it would be easy to read in this ad a brand intention of supporting love and liberty for all, it triggered very strong negative reactions among consumers. In fact, almost half of the comments opposed the brand's message, with the most frequently used terms including a variety of expletives; furthermore, in the spirit of equality, some consumers requested that Budweiser also come up with a bottle of beer wrapped in the Confederate flag. Not only did homophobic consumers dislike the presence of the rainbow flag on their formerly favorite beer ("even Budweiser is turning f*ing gay"), as evidenced in their promises to unlike and stop drinking this brand of beer ("I need to find a new beer" and "I guess it's Miller time"), but they also questioned the integrity of the brand's message ("WTF has beer gotta do with same sex marriage aka being gay TF, outta here!!!!").

About one-third of the comments were positive and consumers operating within the dominant code were quick to counteract homophobic comments as well as to praise Budweiser for "bravery" and "marketing genius." Consumers familiar with the brand's ten years-old relationship with the LGBT population rejoiced ("Thank you!" and "Love it!!!") and almost renewed their brand fealty: "Budweiser family forever."

Comments negotiating the brand's meaning ranged from contesting the validity of the message ("lmao does the label on the bottle change the beer? Still tastes the same to me and im not gay") to suggesting different marketing strategies such as "It should at least be Bud Light Lime or any of the fruity flavored." For some consumers, this ad was a deal breaker because it pushed them beyond their level of comfort with the brand's alliance: "I have no issue with people loving who they wish. However I don't want to support something that is against my personal morals. Therefore I no longer wish to follow this company's page nor will I give them business."

Coca Cola's message, on the other hand, was more basic and, one might say, in line with the brand's recent initiatives of launching the popular drink in a variety of packaging colors. The ad "It's now official. Love is love is love. #LoveWins" clearly states the brand's support for the recent SCOTUS decision. Each bottle is packaged in one solid color from the rainbow flag.

Consumer comments were almost evenly split between agreement with the dominant code ("Cool rainbow Coke" and "We want equality, remember?? You should accept gay couples!! They're human beings just like you idiots!!!!!") and opposing it ("bravo I like Pepsi now" and "Team Pepsi now"). Interestingly enough, it was this ad that triggered most of the discussion over love in same-sex couples and the connection between gays, lesbians, and Christianity. This topic, due to its association with deeply held personal religious values, was most likely to trigger strong positive and negative reactions.

Re-coding messages mentioned marketing suggestions referencing the Share a Coke campaign ("Can you put Bella on bottles please?") and inquired into sponsorship opportunities ("However we can get @cocacola as a sponsor"). Most consumer posts within this category, however, attempted to integrate the #Loveislove concept within their own system of beliefs.

Gap placed three different ads to celebrate the SCOTUS decision. The first ad presented what appeared to be a heterosexual couple, or at least one male and one female who were comfortable with moderate public displays of affection (her hand on his shoulder and sitting closely together). The ad tied in with the 2015 Pride Parade and Pride Month in New York City and invited Gap customers to "join the celebration." Most comments focused on the "kyuuute" t-shirt design ("we need these" and "these are cool shirts!!") and the rainbow sprinkles on the ice cream.

The second ad presented a pink heart enclosing the equality sign, consisting of two small rainbows. Posts spanned, again, both sides of the LGBT issues. Just as in the case of rainbow-colored Coke bottles, the equal sign seems to have been heavily interpreted as an "equal rights" signifier and thus dominated the conversations, with a somewhat balanced number of posts on each side of the debate. Civil rights and religious beliefs featured prominently throughout the debate: "I'm not even gay but today I am very, very proud to be an American. I wish the very best to all you happy couples that can finally form your own perfect (and legal) union!"

The third post represented Gap's attempt to illustrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion. Again, supporters and detractors alike invoked a variety of religion-related arguments to sustain their point of view. This was the only site where issues of skin color were mentioned, in conversations that exploded in extremist posts both in support of gay rights and issues ("Proud to work for such an amazing company!" and "Thank you, Gap, you've guaranteed me as a customer for life") to outright and final opposition ("Unfollow" and "We are against the gays and lesbians").

Some of the consumers, again, expressed reticence in light of Gap's support of same-sex marriage and LGBT rights: "GAP, sell clothes, OK?" and "A place of business should stay out of politics. Sick to selling merchandise. Not all customers and employees are in agreement." Furthermore, limited agreement with both the brand and the issue was obvious in comments such as "I will love em but not support them" and observations critical of the brand's pandering efforts ("Scrape for profits wherever you can").

Hilton Hotels. On the day of the SCOTUS decision, Hilton Hotels posted two ads on Instagram. The first one is a picture from the Capital Pride Parade in DC, depicting two men appearing to be kissing atop of a float in the shape of a rainbow-colored wedding cake. The message said "Sometimes you just have to make your own rainbow @CapitalPrideDC! #EqualityAtPlay #DCPride." There are a variety of flags in the picture, including two rainbow PRIDE flags. The second ad simply presents two room cards with the message "Love is the key. #LoveIsLove." While these ads elicited only 20 comments, it was interesting to remark that they were the only pages obviously moderated by a brand manager (responsible for one-third of the posts), they did not include off-topic conversations, and they were evenly distributed between dominant and oppositional code.

Positive comments evidenced consumers' confidence in the authenticity of Hilton Hotels as a travel ally, appreciation for the beauty of the float, and suggestions for a new room card (something Hilton did design later). Negative comments were short ("Shame" and "Wtf") and negotiated codes invited Hilton "or anybody for that matter" to "do a transgender Float."

Reflection

While these Instagram posts represent only a small sample from among the brands celebrating the SCOTUS decision, they do offer insight into how the public may react. Whether operating inside the dominant code, applying a negotiable code, or substituting an oppositional code, the public participated in the larger cultural debate over the place, rights, and legal structures that impact members of the LGBTQ communities. Overall, a general observation would question why these posts elicited a relatively small number of comments, given the popularity of the brands and the amount of emotion and energy the topic generated elsewhere in the news and social media.

User reactions *operating inside the dominant code* did support the larger issue of LGBTQ marriage equality and civil rights. Often, these posts did not even acknowledge the brand or the specific message: responses were written for the larger community. For example, on Gap's first post, one user wrote "#LoveisLove." Rather than identifying the message as an extension of the brand, the user took the opportunity to address the issue behind the

post, and treated the brand as a placeholder, or a conduit for the cause. From a branding perspective, although this is a type of positive engagement with the post, the response fails to acknowledge the brand itself, thus possibly diluting the brand's presence and position.

Alternatively, for media researchers and brand managers, substituting an opposition code seems like a worst-case scenario. Where the brand's followers completely disagreed with the content and strategy of the brand, they felt prompted to take drastic action such as switching to a competitor brand ("I guess it's Miller time" or "Thats it, im team pepsi") or completely distancing from the brand ("Well. I have to donate all my GAP clothes now," a sentiment echoed by several users). However, despite this challenge, the fact that users chose to engage with the brand on the Instagram platform at all represents an important and subtle silver-lining. The choice to engage the brand by posting reflects a relatively strong connection between the brand and its follower. Users had the choice to quietly un-follow or disregard the post; however, they chose to engage and took the time to participate on the brand's forum on Instagram. This connection might actually signify a relationship of engagement—one that perhaps could be augmented through other forms of marketing or brand positioning. Their choice to engage suggests they care enough about the brand that they might, in time, accept its message, if not necessarily identify with the brand's values.

The third coding category provides the most meaningful findings, complicating the notion of digital engagement and Hall's three discursive categories: it challenges brand managers' desire to engage users within their dominant code. Substituting a negotiable code no longer simply reflects positive or negative feelings towards the brand, but rather the social issues the brand associates with, in consumers' mind. In addition, this group of comments also provides insight into the role of brands in LGBTQ advocacy.

On a superficial level, each of the ads exists as a type of brand support for LGBTQ communities through the lens of the recent SCOTUS decision. Buying a rainbow-packaged product or a rainbow-themed t-shirt is a very small gesture of consumer support in a cause that does affect supporters and detractors and standers-by, in various ways. And yet, those products are meant for consumption and usage in the company of friends, and in front of strangers. Upon further consideration, all conversation threads reveal implied expectations of gender representations, and a very limited repertoire of LGBTQ stories and imagery. It seems everyone assumed the GAP ad included a man and a woman. Furthermore, the concept of love is limited to couples consisting of people with clear and binary gender identities (male-male and female-female), completely ignoring the rainbow of other gender and sexual identities within LGBTQ communities.

These observations may be inherent to the medium: Instagram is less not exactly conducive to complex arguments built on extensively researched topics between conversation partners who know each other well and wish to build long-term interactions. Brands need imagery that follows the shortest path from product to consumer in simplified visuals and stories. Negotiated meaning posts where consumers agreed to the brand's right to support same-sex marriage on grounds of free speech while at the same time refusing to purchase its products might be interpreted as a non-hegemonic way to express bigotry, or a way for consumers to oppose same-sex marriage without actually saying negative things about homosexuality. At the end of the day, however, buying or boycotting are the actual behaviors that indicate consumer interest in a particular brand. Some degree of skepticism in the brand's sincere and deep support for LGBTQ issues, rather than simple opportunistic advertising, would enable consumers to dissociate the product and the message. With the exception of the wedding cake ad from Hilton, all other ads were rather vague and generic, relying on (and thus activating) previously established ideas and ideals.

Overall, then, where consumers' communication background included an alignment between personal beliefs and brand communication, the comments tended to be supportive of the ad and consumers contributed examples of the ways in which the brand had been consistently communicating a positive association with promotion of LGBT issues. On the contrary, negative comments revealed consumers' surprise at the apparently sudden change in brand communication relative to the LGBTQ cause: again, deeply held personal beliefs, though wrong from the perspective of LGBTQ communities and supporters, caused consumers to outright reject the message promoted in the brand advertising.

Ironically, it is in the negotiated meaning posts where the advertising message seemed to serve a central function of actually considering ways to reconcile the difference between brand message, social advocacy, and personal values. A strong positive connection with either the issue or the brand triggered an attempt to reconcile the ad in positive terms: the brand has the right to promote an issue, consumers are under no obligation to buy; or the

brand can say anything, since advertising has no bearing on the quality or taste of the product and therefore the consumer can keep using it. Discarding the advertising message is a conscious effort here, that requires some analysis and justification of why what the brand says does not matter. Conversely, a strong negative connection with the issue or the brand triggered an attempt to formulate a post or comment in negative terms: strong opposition to same-sex marriage triggered rejection of brand product; dissatisfaction with the brand's association with other issues such as unequitable labor treatment or support of controversial causes spilled into this instance and caused rejection of SCOTUS ad.

Importantly, advocacy posts seeking to convert others to consumers' own beliefs, or perhaps to reinforce the validity and value of such beliefs to themselves, produced advocacy responses, where proponents and opponents voiced and defended their opinions loudly and clearly. Because the ads were overwhelmingly visual, and in the absence of textual information from the brands, social media conversations were instead driven by comments and responses posted by consumers. Advocacy posts served as inspiration for larger and longer conversations between followers regarding the ethics, religious morals, and implications for the SCOTUS decision. The trend of advocacy causing advocacy reveals a pattern in online and digital platforms. When a brand extends their message as advocacy for a specific population, they can expect a return of advocacy responses (both affirmative and oppositional in nature).

Future Research

Future work will need to consider other types of responses featured on Instagram. For example, this study excluded responses that were written in foreign languages (including French, Spanish, Arabic, Turkish, Portuguese, and Russian). In addition, this study also excluded posts tagging other users or friends (without any comments), because it is difficult to know if this is a sign of support, dissent, or negotiation. While many previous studies interpreted sharing as a form of liking or positive reaction, without a comment, it is difficult to code it for one of Hall's three categories. More conceptual work on Instagram needs to define and interpret the act of sharing before these behaviors can be fully analyzed in advocacy posts.

For a deeper understanding of social media conversations in the context of advocacy efforts from well-known brands, future research should attempt to draw out descriptive interpretations of the ad copy and map them against consumers' own attitudes and beliefs regarding the advocacy issue--in this case, attitudes toward homosexuality and same-sex marriage, as well as attitudes toward each specific brand, prior to users being exposed to the social advocacy ads. With this additional layer of information it would be possible to determine if some of the negotiated code might perhaps be a placeholder for a way to withhold judgment while allowing for bigotry--or a form of nascent advocacy within users who need more time to reconcile their viewpoints to the new reality of such issues impacting their world.

Finally, although these advertisements, as well as many of the posts and responses were primarily positive in their interpretation of the SCOTUS decision seen as an LGBTQ victory, more work on interpreting the application of a negotiable code is necessary. Many users reflected that they supported the victory, but challenged the brand's use of the topic for monetary gains. Users questioned if brands should be involved in politics and advocacy at all, and challenged brand communication strategies. Although all the brands used in this study have a long history of supporting LGBTQ rights, it is clear the public was not always convinced of the sincerity of brands' choice of imagery and message. This may relate to the history of LGBTQ presence in advertising and marketing, particularly as a group that was stigmatized, isolated, and often ignored. When users were not aware of this context, they felt that the sudden LGBTQ imagery was pandering rather than an authentic sign of support and interest, thus questioning both the intent and the content of branded communication.

Conclusion

LGBTQ presence in digital marketing is an expanding and important area of brand research and development. Through Hall's discourses and codes, it is possible to understand how a digital community reacts to advocacy posts on Instagram. Although future work is still necessary to understand how this might impact the

LGBTQ community, advocacy, and advertising, it is the ongoing growth and pattern of this type of marketing presence that make this line of research necessary.

References

Abbott, W, Donaghey, J., Hare, J., & Hopkins, P. (2013). An Instagram is worth a thousand words: An industry panel and audience Q&A. *Library Hi Tech News, 30*(7), 1-6. doi:10.1108/LHTN-08-2013-0047.

Alper, M. (2014). War on Instagram: Framing conflict photojournalism with mobile photography apps. *New Media & Society, 16*(8), 1233-1248. doi:10.1177/1461444813504265

Bataineh, A. Q., & Al-Smadi, H. M. (2015). Factors impact customers' engagement in eWOM on SNSs of non-profit organizations: The moderating role of habit. *International Journal of Business and Management, 10*(6), 178-187. doi:10.5539/ijbm.v10n6p178

Bhat, S., Leigh, T. W., & Wardlow, D. L. (1998). The effect of consumer prejudices on ad processing: Heterosexual consumers' responses to homosexual imagery in ads. *Journal of Advertising, 27*(4), 9-25.

Bordo, S. (1999). Gay men's revenge. *The Journal of Aestethics and Art Criticism*, 57(1), 21-25.

Branchik, B. J. (2002). Out in the market: A history of the gay market segment in the United States. *Journal of Macromarketing, 22*(1), 86-97.

Buford, H. (2005). The gay market goes mainstream. *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide*, 12(1), 22-24.

Carlson, A., & Lee, C. (2015). Followership and social media marketing. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal, 19*(1), 80-101.

Castillo, M. (2015, June 26). "Brands use social media to back same sex marriage." *CNBC.com.* Retrieved from http://www.cnbc.com/2015/06/26/brands-use-social-media-to-back-same-sex-marriage.html

Chappell, B. (2015, June 26). "Supreme Court declares same sex marriage legal in all 50 states." *NPR.com*. Retrieved from http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/06/26/417717613/supreme-court-rules-all-states-must-allow-same-sex-marriages

Chung, S. K. (2007). Media literacy art education: Deconstructing lesbian and gay stereotypes in the media. *International Journal of Art & Design Education, 26*(1), 98-106

Clary, R., & Wandersee, J. (2014). The Leonardo strategy: Scientific discourse and argumentation in an online environment. *Science Scope, 37*(5), 18-22.

de Vogue, A. & Diamond, J. (2015, June 24). "Supreme Court rules in favor of same sex marriage nationwide." *CNN.com.* Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/26/politics/supreme-court-same-sex-marriage-ruling/

Gee, J. P. (2012). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Geurin-Eagleman, A. N., & Burch, L. M. (2014). Communicating via photographs: A gendered analysis of Olympic athletes' visual self-presentation on Instagram. *Sport Management Review, 19,* 133-145. doi:10.1016/j.smr.2015.03.002.

Grier, S. A. & Brumbaugh, A. M. (1999). Noticing cultural differences: Ad meanings created by target and non-target markets. Journal of Advertising 28(1), 79-93.

Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representation and signifying practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers.

Howard, D., Mangold, W., & Johnston, T. (2014). *Managing your social campaign strategy using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube & Pinterest: An interview with Dana Howard, social media marketing manager*. *Business Horizons*, *57*(5), 657-665. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2014.05.001.

Jhally, S. (2009). The codes of Gender: Identity and performance in pop culture. Transcript. *Media Education Foundation.* Retrieved from www.mediaed.org

Kates, S. (1999). Making the ad perfectly queer: Marketing "normality" to the gay men's community? *Journal of Advertising*, *28*(1), 25-37.

Lafferty, J. (2015, June 30). "#LoveWins: How the same sex marriage decision spread through social media." *AdWeek.com*. Retrieved from http://www.adweek.com/socialtimes/lovewins-how-the-same-sex-marriage-decision-spread-through-social/622661.

Novak, A. N. (2016). *Media, Millennials, and politics: The coming of age of the next political generation.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Oakenfull, G.K. & Greenlee, T.B. (2005). Queer eye for a gay guy: Using market-specific symbols in advertising to attract gay consumers without alienating the mainstream. *Psychology & Marketing, 22*(5): 421-439.

Schleifer, J. (2014). To tweet or not to tweet… is that even the question? *The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter, 30*(12), 8. doi:10.1002/cbl.30006

Shao, W., Jones, R.G., & Grace, D. (2012). Brandscapes: contrasting corporate-generated versus consumer-generated media in the creation of brand meaning. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 33*(3), 414-443. doi:10.1108/MIP-11-2013-0178.

Skover, D. & Testy, K. Y. (2002). LesBiGay identity as commodity. *California Law Review, 90*(1), 223-255.

Smith, L. R., & Sanderson, J. (2015). I'm going to Instagram it! An analysis of athlete self-presentation on Instagram. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 59*(2), 342-358. doi:10.1080/08838151.2015.102912.

Storcila, A. C. (2014). It's selfie-evident: Spectrums of alienability and copyrighted content on social media. *Boston University Law Review, 94*(6), 2045-2088.

Thadani, T. (2015, June 26). "After historic ruling on gay marriage, social media gets colourful." *USA Today.* Retrieved from http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2015/06/26/scotus-ruling-tech/29330821/

Tharett, A. (2015, June 26). "36 Major Companies Celebrating Pride with Social Media." Queerty.com. Retrieved from http://www.queerty.com/36-major-companies-celebrating-pride-with-social-media-20130628

Tsai W-H. S. (2011). How minority consumers use targeted advertising as pathways to self-empowerment: Gay men's and lesbians' reading of out-of-the-closet advertising. *Journal of Advertising,* 40(3), 85-97. doi:10.2753/JOA0091-3367400307.

Van Dijk, T. (Ed.). (2007). *Discourse studies: Benchmarks in discourse studies.* London, UK: Sage.

Van Dijk, T. (2009). *Society and discourse: How context controls text and talk.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Zolkepli, I.A., Hasno, H., & Mukhiar, S.N.S. (2015). Online social network citizen engagement on Instagram crowdsourcing: A conceptual framework. *The Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management, 13*(4), 283-292.

Appendix 1: Hall's (1997) Labels of Discourse

Operating inside dominant code	Applying a negotiable code	Substituting an oppositional code
The reactor agrees with the brand's message The reactor does not levy any criticism of the brand's message The reactor adopts some or all of the brand's language The reactor rationalizes their approval/agreement by citing examples of useful or interesting information	The reactor partially agrees with the brand's message and partially disagrees The reactor critiques the brand for its position or the presentation of the information (format, style, or type) The reactor adopts some of the brand's language Reactor may agree with the contents of this specific post, but still levies criticism against generalized brand activities Reactor attempts to explain the rationale behind the brand's post	The reactor disagrees with the brand's message and corrects it or proposes another message The reactor proposes an alternative message or corrects the brand's message The reactor doesn't adopt any of the brand's language Reactor critiques both the specific post and generalized brand activities Reactor provides examples from brand's post about specific disagreements they have with the brand's perspective, style, or format Reactor questions the ethics of the post Reactor questions and criticizes the bias, issue salience, or rationale of the post

Appendix 2: Instagram Ads

1. Budweiser: 2,862 likes. Love on your own terms. #ThisBudsForYou

2. Coca Cola: 33.9K likes. It's now official. Love is love is love. #LoveWins

3. Gap: 19.8K likes. We are excited to celebrate Pride this month with our friends at @biggayicecream! If you're in New York City be sure to swing by our store on 5th Ave & 54th Street starting tomorrow through July 26th to join the celebration. #NYCPride2015

4. Gap: 18.6K likes. Equality is always in style. We've been proud supporters since #1969. #LoveWins #Pride2015 #LetsDoMore Read more through the link in our profile.

5. Gap: 17.8K likes. When Doris and Don Fisher opened the first Gap store on Ocean Avenue in San Francisco in 1969, they did so with a simple promise: to do more than sell clothes.

6. Hilton Hotels: 416 likes. Sometimes you just have to make your own rainbow @CapitalPrideDC! #EqualityAtPlay #DCPride

7. Hilton Hotels: 547 likes. Love is the key. #LoveIsLove