

Honors Capstone Reflection and Critique  
Examining a Relational Approach to Social Media Marketing  
Sydney Hopkins  
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When I first sat down with my capstone mentors, Dr. John Brummette and Dr. Sam Jennings, in the summer of 2022 over zoom, I realized that I had never truly done research like this before. My professors knew I did not like to take the easy route, and so we decided to aim high. Originally, we intended to hold a strict deadline on April 1st, 2023, for having a completed literature review in time to apply for the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Conference in August; however, plans quickly changed when our first method for analysis was unlikely to be replicated. Throughout all of the changes of plans and codebook redoes, I believe, though we are unfinished, we have already uncovered some specular information on social media marketing.

The strength in our capstone idea lies in the fact that there truly is not much accessibly theory and strategy relating to social media marketing. My mentors and I went as far back as the 1980s to adapt the Elaboration Likelihood Model by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo into a theory still applicable today. By using a mixed methods content analysis to organize our data from NodelXL, we were able to create a codebook that could likely be recreated without large errors. The results were a mix of the expected and unexpected. We found that 78% of our 534 coded tweets were calling for no engagement, requesting nothing from users. Peripheral messaging was used more than central messaging. Tesla who has the most followers on Twitter (from our current dataset) hardly ever called for engagement and stuck to central messaging, in turn they get the most engagement out of their follower base. In contrast, GMC called for

engagement in a good portion of their tweets and focused on peripheral but got little engagement in response. Some common social media messaging themes that we collected were relating to product feature, benefit, new products, building relationship (customer and employee), appealing to the environmentalists, notifying consumers of their impact on the environment, letting consumers know of events, collaborations, and other information. Other themes included showcasing achievements, building excitement, and celebrating holidays (national as well as nontraditional ones).

As we only have collected data from four brands, we have much more data collecting and coding to do before we can ever hope to publish our literature review. Some limitations of this project were that we could not code for everything that we wanted to, such as tweet length, brand personality, and other quantitative qualities due to the unlikelihood of replication. Additionally, we were not able to code for certain companies, like Apple or Costco, because they rejected Twitter's application programming in NodeXL. We were also unable to code for every insight in our codebook since the feature was only on newer tweets and companies that allowed users to see. If I were to do a study similar to this, I would revamp the codebook for more specific rules so there would be less confusion for any other coders.

As we continue to conduct research and draft our literature review, we hope to make an impact in the field of knowledge for social media marketing and strategy.