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Media, Publicity, and Fashion: The Michelle Obama Effect A Content Analysis of News Around the World

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Media, Publicity, and Fashion: The Michelle Obama Effect

A Content Analysis of News Around the World

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ABSTRACT

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This study is a content analysis of media content in a 12-month time period in the lives of Jason Wu and Thom Browne, who were the designers of Michelle Obama's outfit to the second presidential inauguration. In order to discover the increase in awareness and media coverage of these designers due to Michelle Obama's fashion selection during the second inauguration, which brought about publicity, the researcher compared mentions, tone of stories, and framing of stories concerning these designers 6 months before and after the inauguration. Results indeed gave support to the hypothesis that mentions of these designers increased significantly after that pivotal event, that the mentions were more likely to include Michelle Obama, and that Wu received more mentions than Browne. However, support was not obtained for an increase in positive tone of stories after the inauguration.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With as much relevant literature that is available, this study explored previous studies about Michelle Obama and her effect on the fashion designers she patronized, specifically the designers whose dresses she wore at the second inaugural ceremony in 2013. The designers of her outfits to the second inauguration, Jason Wu and Thom Browne, are the focus of this research. She wore Thom Browne's coat-dress on the day and Jason Wu's red velvet and silk dress for the inaugural ball later that night (Cartner-Morley & Spedding, 2013). This paper researched how the media has framed her fashion sense and appearance and how it has made an impact in the lives and businesses of designers that she wears. For the purpose of the research, this study looked at the impact Obama's decision to wear the designs she wore at the second presidential inauguration has had on the selected designers' media prominence.

Arens (2006) stated "some people think of publicity as free because the media don't charge firms to run it (they also don't guarantee they'll use it)… publicity often offers a considerably greater return on money invested than other communications activities" (p. 343). Arens further explained that event must be newsworthy to be picked up by the media. What better way is there to accomplish that than working for a fashion icon and First Lady of the U.S.?

> Many firms supplement (or replace) their advertising with various public relations activities such as publicity (news releases, feature stores) and special events (open houses, factory tours, VIP parties, grand opening) to inform various audiences about the company and its product and to build corporate worthiness and image. (Arens, 2006, p. 166)

With designers Jason Wu and Thom Browne, the special events that served as a medium to inform their audience about their brands have been the Inauguration ceremony and galas for which the First Lady wore their designs. Though it seems unplanned, these designers have been able to get recognition for their brands in the media as news organizations could not talk about the First Lady's outfit without mentioning their names.

A media event such as this poses many questions. How much publicity and promotion were the designers able to generate for themselves? Did the mention of their names in the media create positive buzz? These designers have been able to promote their brands to an extent, but to what extent? Given the specifics of the present study's scope, it is important to look at the concept of endorsement, especially celebrity endorsement, which according to research has been beneficial to companies provided the celebrity is popular and has a solid reputation (Swann, 2008). Getting a reputable celebrity to wear a brand to an event and mentioning it in the process automatically gives the brand an edge over others. "In March 2005, Star Jones Reynolds of The View wore a pair of Payless shoes on the red carpet at the Oscars. The Payless public relations team coordinated a red carpet photographer and issued the news on the wire service, securing significant coverage" (Swann, 2008, p. 174). Organizations use celebrity endorsers especially those to whom their consumers can relate with in order to promote their brands. Most times, it is done deliberately and paid for in order to promote their brand. In the case of the First Lady, she is beyond celebrity. She is an icon, a fashion icon precisely (Betts, 2009; Norwood, 2009). Anything she wears becomes newsworthy, not to mention what she wears to one of America's most important events- the presidential inauguration. Designers Michael Kors and Reed Krakoff, as well as Jason Wu and Thom Browne, were among the designers responsible for her official portraits and outfits at the second inauguration.

It is important to note that it is not just that the First Lady wore these designers; the core of this argument is that her celebrity yielded more prominence for the designers in the media. Similarly, it would be irrelevant to this study if the First Lady wore these designs on an ordinary day when less attention was paid to what she was wearing and therefore was not mentioned as much in the media. Research suggests that the mass media play an important role in publicity, as they are responsible for generating the promotion and awareness that brings about that publicity (Arens, 2006; Swann, 2008). ABC news reported few days before the second inauguration ceremony that, "Cuban-born fashion designer Isabel Toledo's life changed four years ago when Michelle Obama wore one of her dresses during her husband's inauguration" (Vilchez, 2013). New York times also reported that, "Mrs. Obama, in a spectacular fashion show, chose her inaugural wardrobe from a range of not-quite-famous American designers, lifting them instantly to the level of household names, and then surprised everyone by choosing Jason Wu to design her inaugural gown for a second time" (Wilson, 2013). Without the mass media, it is not considered publicity. The fact that a particular product or name brand is mentioned in the media by a "credible source when others are not helps establish its superiority. This is a relatively inexpensive publicity tactic to draw attention to the product and heighten consumer awareness" (Swann, 2008, p.153).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fashion and Framing Theory

Framing is the process by which people develop specific conceptualization of issues or reorient their thinking about an issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007). "The major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations" (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104). In terms of communication, framing promotes definition and interpretation of issues and situation. The meaning and interpretation of a phenomenon ends up being how the media defines it and not necessary what it is in actuality, therefore, forming reality, that is, social reality. Framing analysis, on the other hand, is an important aspect of journalism and mass communication research because it "examines the selection and salience of certain aspects of an issue by exploring images, stereotypes, metaphors, actors, and messages" (Matthes, 2009). Matthes (2009) examined what is in a frame and framing analysis using a content analysis of media framing studies from 1990 to 2005. In his research he examined four aspects of conceptualizing and coding frames: the definition of frames and how they are used for operationalization, types of frames, use of theory, and the method of frame analysis. According to Matthes, the definitions helps researchers realize if they have measured what they intend to measure based on concepts laid out at the beginning of the study. Frame type has to do the differing discourse unit, that is, units of analysis. It could be news items or articles, or visual features (Matthes, 2009). In terms of the use of theory, some studies use theory to arrive at a hypothesis about the nature and structure of frames, while "others formulate research questions with an interest in the description of news content" (Matthes, 2009, p. 351). Method of frame

analysis could be whether the analysis is text-based or number-based, whether frames are determined inductively or deductively, whether coding is manual or computer-based, and whether data-reduction techniques are used to reveal frames or whole frames are coded (Matthes, 2009). In relation to this study, the unit of analysis is the mention of these designers in news articles as well as graphics that accompany them. The use of theory was also employed as framing theory, as well as priming effect were the theory that guided the formulation of hypothesis. Lastly, the method of the framing analysis is number based, manually coded, and deductive.

A discussion on framing would not be complete without integrating the impact of the media on framing. The power of media effect makes it a viable tool for framing. Media framing, therefore, is conceptually defined as the central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to unfolding events as portrayed by the media (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987).

Framing theory has been normally used for political analysis, most times through content analysis. However, framing theory can and is used in other news analysis, as Borah (2011) refers to it as "frames in the news," so long as it is used in making sense of relevant issues (p.249). Through media framing, individuals begin to form opinions, beliefs, and attitudes. Likewise, the media mimics behavior and opinion of the public (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Through content analysis, this study is an examination of the media framing of Obama as a fashionista in relation to the designers of her outfits during the period of the second inauguration. As indicated earlier, Jason Wu and Thom Browne are the focus of this study, I sought to discover through a framing perspective, the effect Obama had on these designers in terms of media coverage and mentions.

Obama has been framed in the media to be a fashion icon, super model, fashion leader, and even first lady of fashion (Betts, 2009; Norwood, 2009; Ricapito, 2013). Furthermore,

Obama's heritage as an African American woman and the very first African American first lady

in the history of America plays a major role in her appearance and portrayal in the media.

> Michelle Obama can be described as an open text with potential to influence the course
>
> of fashion and culture in the ways that touch the lives and histories of the African
>
> diaspora, and the world more generally. The particular position of Michelle Obama
>
> allows great flexibility in manipulating the various strands tying her fashion subjectivity
>
> to diverse subject personalities. (Kaiser & McCullogh, 2010)

According to Thakoon Panichugul, one of Michelle Obama's designers, as quoted by Betts

(2009), "She is someone with authority and power… it is a new way of looking at fashion, it is

about women who are real and confident and in position of power, as opposed to the celebrity

thing, which is so false" (p. 42). Obama is not the only woman in position of power who has

commanded such attention through her fashion decisions. Jacqueline Kennedy, Nancy Reagan,

and first lady of France Carla Bruni have also commanded this attention and defined the way

women dressed and want to dress (Betts, 2009; Ricapito, 2009). They have defined fashion

trends just like show business celebrities. According to Miller, Shelby, McIntyre, and Mantara

(1993), people "tend to have a desire to adopt styles that will identify them as up-to-date with the

people whom they admire in given situation" (p.147). This has been the case for Michelle

Obama and the aforementioned women in power. It will be interesting to discover how Obama

and especially the designers were framed in the media during the period of the inauguration.

> Through a content analysis of topics in the news in newspapers, TV, and blogs, media

framing of ideas and public opinion can be determined. It would be interesting to find out the –

differences—if any at all—in the manner in which the media told the stories of these designers

before and after the inauguration. It is possible that these designers were framed in a more

positive light after the inauguration because of a positive reflection of Obama on them. It is also possible that Obama's image has reflected on these designers in a manner that caused them to be framed in the news differently. However, the manner in which they were framed is what I sought to discover. Given the effect of framing, mentions of the designers after the inauguration will most likely be positive and more in relation to Michelle Obama and the inauguration in terms of topic.

Priming Effect

The premise of priming theory is that "the presentation of a certain stimulus with a particular meaning "primes" other semantically related concepts, thus heightening the likelihood that thoughts with the same meaning as the presentation stimulus will come to mind" (Jo & Berkowitz, 1994, p. 46). For example, an advertisement "(e.g., a crime story) can prime or activate certain attributes (e.g., safety) to readers and to their interpretation of products in the ad (e.g., car size)" (Yi, 1990, p. 40). Also, priming effect has been demonstrated to show that a variety of complex social behaviors such as rudeness, loyalty, aggression can be activated by relevant external stimuli, that is, the primes without the awareness or intention of that person of the influence (Dijksterhuis, Chartrand, & Aarts, 2007). Priming effect has usually been used to analyze the influence of violent content of the media on the audience especially from video games, sports, and movies. According to Jo and Berkowitz (1994), "video games, including arcade games and home video games such as Nintendo, are not only exceedingly popular with children and many adults these days, but many of them also have a lot of violent content, and it is not surprising that some researchers have sought to determine what effect the might have on youngsters" (p. 49). However, priming effect is not used in analyzing aggressive and violent content alone. Priming effect can be used to analyze media content in general, including the

efficacy of advertising, public relations, or marketing campaigns just as Harris, Bargh, and Brownell's (2009) and Li's (1990) studies indicated . Li's (1990) study showed the cognitive and affective priming effect of the context of print advertisement. His study investigated "one way in which ad context can influence consumer's processing of ad information. It proposes that context may affect the persuasive impact of ads by priming certain cognitive and affective components" (Li, 1990, p. 40). It is important to note that this process does to last for too long. Due to the transient nature of the media, priming only takes effect for a short period and it wears out (Jo & Berkowitz, 1994). Harris et al.'s (2009) study similarly addressed the priming effect of television food advertising on eating disorder. Their study revealed that "food advertising that promoted snacking, fun, happiness, and excitement (i.e., the majority of children food advertisements) directly contributed to increased food intake" (Harris et al., 2009, p. 410).

In respect to this research, I tried to find out if there was any occurrence of priming through the fashion decisions the First Lady made. Her fashion decisions could have made the media pay more attention to the designers whose clothes she wore. It might also have primed the media to think of these designers when Obama is mentioned. Likewise, it could prime the media to associate qualities they see in Obama and her style to these designers. Furthermore, Obama's fashion selection to the inauguration could have put these designers at top of mind of the media, maybe for a short while. If priming actually took effect, perhaps the media's coverage could have spurred their audience to have liked the Facebook pages of these designers, followed them on Twitter, visited their online store and website, or perhaps paid their physical store a visit. More importantly, regarding this study, stories and mentions of these designers might increase after the second inauguration, given that Obama's fashion selection has primed writers to think

of these designers, therefore, writing about them more and differently from before the inauguration.

<div align="center">Fashion and Women Leaders</div>

Over time, first ladies in the United States have been looked up to as celebrities and role models, especially when they possess great taste in fashion. Princess Diana during her lifetime was a great fashion icon as she commanded so much attention with whatever she wore, so also is the case of Princess Kate Middleton. American First Ladies, likewise, have had this same effect on the public. Jacqueline Kennedy, Nancy Reagan, and presently, Michelle Obama command this respect and attention (Betts, 2009; Norwood, 2009). This has a great connection with taste in fashion, many female leaders have come and gone but did not receive this respect and effect. Taste, according to Kant's definition in the work of Gronow (1993), is pure aesthetic; everyone has his or her own notion of taste, and what is considered beautiful to one might not be beautiful to another. "As Kant put it, we do not, in fact, postulate that everyone agrees with us on the matter… when we call someone beautiful, we appeal to other people and believe ourselves to be speaking with a universal voice," (as cited in Gronow, 1993, p. 93). Fashion on the other hand has to do with a collective taste formation; this in turn has invariably been involved in social class. As mentioned above, women leaders have been visualized as celebrities and role models, which more or less places them in different and higher social class. According to Simmel (1981), "the fashions of the upper stratum of society are never identical with those of the lower, in fact, they are abandoned by the former as soon as the latter prepare to appropriate them" (p. 7). Fashion is a product of class distinction and once the lower class has successfully adopted a style, the upper class is quick to abandon it and find new styles to maintain their superiority (Gronow, 1993; Simmel, 1981). These women leaders definitely are of higher social class than

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most of their supporters and followers; however, they might not deliberately leave a style and move to another to prove their superiority. In fact, most of them maintain a style that defines their taste and fashion that many women around the world can relate with. Obama is known for her form fitting evening dresses and floral patterned dresses with a cardigan to match. She "perhaps more than any First Lady before her, with the exception of Jackie Kennedy, understands that style is much more than an aesthetic choice or political tool; it is the expression of one's life, one's way of being" (Kate, 2011, p. 6)

First ladies are the new representation of celebrity and fashion icon as they bring so much presence with their fashion sense to the scene. "Since former supermodel Carla Bruni wed French President… she's globe-trotted in many Dior outfits. And now glowing American beauty, Michelle Obama is on the scene. The fashion quake set off by Jackie Kennedy hasn't had its equal until now" (Ricapito, 2009, n.p.).These reports show that with these women's positions as leaders, they possess power and every move they make makes a meaning and sends a message. Concerning Carla Sakorzy, John Galliano, artistic director for Dior said: "She has always had great elegance, poise and presence… She uses clothes to speak without words. As an Ambassador for France, I cannot think of anyone who can carry this role off with as much class" (Ricapito, 2009, n.p).

Michelle Obama on the other hand has used her power as a leader and definitely a fashion leader to bring about change in the fashion scene and raise awareness for unknown brands and fledging designers that were not well-known (Rapkin, 2013; Yermack, 2011). She has made her style easily relatable and adoptable. In a 2009 issue of Vogue magazine, Obama said she wears what she loves and that is what every woman has to focus on.

Unlike Carla Sarkozy who wears only Dior, Obama wears it all from Target to Gap to J-crew; she "mixes and matches couture with items anyone can buy at the mall" (Yermack, 2010, p. 38)"Her patronage of up-and-coming U.S. designers helped put them on the map well before the inauguration" (Ricapito, 2009, n.p.). This is not deliberate but that shows the power of her celebrity and leadership. Obama's spokeswoman Katie McCormick said in 2009 that fashion and what to wear to the inauguration has not been high on the list of priorities for the incoming First Lady (Betts, 2009).Contrary to what Obama says, fashion experts believe she is calculated and media-smart, (Norwood, 2009). Unlike Jackie Kennedy who once out of naivety asked why people are so concerned with what she was wearing, Obama understands "full well the power of clothes and the profound influence of image" (Norwood, 2009, p. 4). However, just like Jackie Kennedy, Obama "doesn't care what the rest of the world thinks, it is about what she feels comfortable in. And in that respect, she is a lot like Jackie Kennedy "(Norwood, 2009, p.11).

<u>Michelle Obama: The First Lady of Fashion</u>

Obama is not only the First Lady of the United States of America, she is, as it stands, the First Lady of fashion as well (Norwood, 2009). She began to command attention the moment she appeared on the scene during her husband's campaign trail. Ever since then she has been in the public eye as expected. The press seizes every opportunity to report what she wears, her outfits, and replicas of her outfits sell out within days in stores and the stock value of designers she wears increases rapidly (Yermack, 2011). Research showed that she has brought many unknown and not so well known designers to limelight, especially the designers whose clothes she wore to the inauguration ceremonies (Rapkin, 2013; Ricapito, 2009; Trebay, 2013; Vilchez, 2013). With her decision, she has touched lives and businesses of many of these designers by publicizing them. Designer Thakoon Panichgul was watching the Democratic National Convention when he

saw Obama in his dress, which was a Kimono-inspired design. He reported being very shocked and honored to have been part of that moment for the Obama family and the entire country (Ricapito, 2009). Isabel Toledo was absolutely delighted when she realized that Obama wore one of her ensembles. She said: "I understand that she buys a lot of work, it's even better than her contacting me, the fact that she just goes out and buys it" (Norwood, 2009, p. 14). Arnold Scaaci, a celebrity stylist, described Obama as glam and chic, he confirmed that this was not a way to describe first ladies; however, Obama appeals to so many that the world cannot help seeing her as the girl next door. A fashion Director at Saks Fifth Avenue, a high-end clothing store, hopes that Obama's strong sense of style will inspire women to shop because "what she puts on sparks incredible interest" (Betts, 2009, p. 43).

As opposed to celebrity endorsement, Obama is not paid to wear what she wears. She in fact pays little attention to what she wears, and all she does in terms of fashion is effortless. Findings show that she does not have a stylist (Betts, 2009). Her "astonishing influence may be tied to the fact that consumers know she is not paid to wear what she does… few models or celebrities make the kind of impact on company stock price that Michelle Obama does" (Yermack, 2010, p. 38). Although she has the opportunity to influence the trends in contemporary fashion, Obama does not derive any financial benefits from her actions (Yermack, 2010). According to Yermack,"the First Lady's wardrobe choices can create value exceeding $100 million for companies that design and market her outfits when she attends highly visible ceremonies such as state dinners or overseas summit meetings" (p.3). Such is the case of the event at the heart of this research, the second inauguration, for which she wore Jason Wu's and Thom Browne's designs. It is very interesting to note that firms whose clothing she did not select see their stock prices drop (Yermack, 2010).

The influence she has had on designers' image cannot be overstated. She has not only put them on the fashion map, she has also succeeded in putting them in the news. Every time she steps out, the media reports on what she wears. Mrs. O (www.mrs-o.org) is a blog especially dedicated to reporting the fashion of Obama on daily basis. When the press realized that Obama would be wearing Jason Wu and Thom Browne for the second inauguration, they could not stop talking about them. Considering that Obama chose these designers for the second time for a major event made a lot of news especially as the inauguration got closer.

<u>Jason Wu and Thom Browne: Second Time is the Charm</u>

In 2009, 26-year-old Jason Wu did not have an idea the First lady was going to wear his design for the first inaugural ball, he just suddenly stumbled on it while watching television with friends. The First Lady did not inform him she would be wearing his design. However, Jason's life changed drastically. "As the designer of the fairytale ball gown the First Lady wore for the inaugural balls, Jason Wu is now the subject of worldwide media attention… On Thursday alone, the young designer's website, jasonwustudio.com received more than 4 million hits" (Jason Wu in Profile, 2009, para. 3). He described the experience as exciting and never in his wildest dream would he have thought the First Lady of the United States would wear one of his designs. As Wu's career gradually progressed since then, he remained in the scene, and by the time the First Lady called him to make the red dress she wore to the second inaugural ball, the whole world knew that Jason was the designer to watch. He said: "I knew the dress was going to be red, we didn't talk about it- me and the First Lady. It just felt right" (Rapkin, 2013, n.p.). He has since then moved on to become the creative director for the women's line of Hugo Boss and also launched his own line of cosmetics. The PR value of the moment Obama wore Jason's designs,

although not planned, cannot be overestimated (Rapkin, 2013). Now 30 years old, "what most people know about the designer centers largely around his association with the first lady; she wore him to both inaugurations, two unlikely coups chronicled extensively by the press" (Rapkin, 2009, n.p.).

The second inauguration was not the first time the First Lady was wearing Thom Browne's design either. Thom Browne's design had been selected by Obama when she wore his gray short sleeve dress to the final presidential debate (Moss, 2013). Browne, well known for men's fashion, was humbled when the First Lady selected his navy silk, checkered-patterned dress-coat for the inauguration. He said: "I wanted it to be this distinct American style that people around the world could look to" (Treguy, 2013). Obama wore his design to the inauguration right before he launched a new line of women's wear. "What Mrs. Obama's dress and the glowing reviews it garnered suggest is that the time is right for Mr. Browne's skills and his intuitions about this conservative cultural moment," (Treguy, 2013, n. p). Obama's choice and decision was absolute perfect timing for Thom Browne. Considering he is not exactly an unknown designer but rather established and high-end, Thom Browne still needed the endorsement he got when the First Lady wore his design. He "won the Fashion Group's Rising Star Award for Menswear and also the CFDA Menswear of the Year Award. With Obama's powerful endorsement, he's probably going to be nominated for his women's wear collection soon" (Snead, 2013, n.p.).

We cannot overlook the power of endorsement and publicity, it is very valuable and productive, and the fact that it is earned makes much more credible to consumers just as it is when editors pick up a brand story without being prompted to do it. It is believed to be more

credible and believable than seeing an advertisement of a paid celebrity endorser. In fact, her profound influence may be based on the fact that consumers are aware she is not being paid to wear what she does, (Yermack, 2009). It is important to emphasize the fact that Obama's decision to wear the designs she wore is genuine endorsement. She chose these dresses because she likes them as opposed to being paid to wear them. This shows sincerity in her endorsements. Just as a celebrity endorser, whenever Obama appears in a brand, she automatically represents the brand and speaks for it. The consumers and potential consumers of the brand believe that if it is good for the First Lady of the United States, it is good for them as well. Whether paid or earned, brands leverage that public relations opportunity to grow their business and brands (Rapkin, 2013; Trebay, 2013). When Obama wore Jason Wu the second time, "he was determined to make his collaboration with Obama a shiny data point in a very varied and very rich career" (Rapkin, 2013). He will always be known as the designer that dressed Obama for two historic inaugural balls in the United States. Fashion designer, Naeem Khan testified to Obama's fashion effect when she said, "It's a gift that doesn't stop giving. My stuff is flying out of stores," (Yermack, 2009, p. 39).

<center>20th Century Fashion and the Significance of Famous Clientele</center>

It is quite obvious how fashion designers strive to get famous people and celebrities to wear their designs in other to promote and advertise their products. That did not start today; it began before the 1960s when Coco Chanel took on the scene. She, like Paris, is where fashion started (Lee, 1975).

It was she who launched the things we like now- the once despised jersey, the little black dress, beige, navy blue and white, real pockets, comfortable coats, bell-bottomed

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trousers, and artificial jewelry. It was a revolution that takes us through nearly half a

century in which her muslins, her scissors, reigned over feminine mystery. (Baillen,

1973, p. 61)

The likes of Channel and the city of Paris paved the way for fashion and designers in the

America as it served as a source of inspiration and authority (Lee, 1975).American designers in

the 60s such as Mainbocher, McCardell, Norell, and Pauline Trigere demonstrated the essence of

famous clientele.

Known for corseted waist, defined bosom, and back draping, Mainbocher's list of clients

included the Duchess of Windsor, actress, writer, and painter Gloria Vanderbilt Cooper; onetime

editor of Harper's Bazaar Daisy Fellowes; Princess Maria Cristina De Bourbon of Spain, and

more (McConathy, 1975). Similar to Jason Wu and his work with Obama, Mainbocher designed

Duchess of Windsor's wedding dress, the most famous dress he made for the Duchess. It was

arguably the "most widely photographed and widely copied couture dress ever made"

(McConathy, 1975, p. 156). "Mainbocher traveled to the South of France where Mrs. Simpson

was in seclusion before the wedding and presented sketches of the wedding dress," (McConathy,

1975, p. 156). The Duchess went on to patronize Mainbocher and represented the designer's

many feminine attributes, "worldly, self-made and the creature of a modern fairy tale"

(McConathy, 1975, p. 158). Actress Gloria Vanderbilt Cooper, who also is a member of

America's most wealthy and famous families, wore Mainbocher with "fervor" (p. 179). "Her

lifestyle and her extraordinary social prominence were important advertisements for the

suitability of the clothes Mainbocher made for her" (McConathy, 1975, p. 179).

Pauline Trigere, on the other hand, became famous herself for her work with celebrities. Her famous clients included Grace Kelley and Breakfast at Tiffany's actress Patricia Neal. Trigere designed Patricia Neal's "sophisticated looks in 'Breakfast at Tiffany's' which earned praise, despite her co-star's immensely popular looks" (Designer spotlight, n.d.).Trigere was known for her dynamic suit or skirts, or whichever you choose to call it. "Is it a suit? A cape and skirt? A bolero and skirt? This is how Trigere often handled the suit look through the years" (Epstein, 1975, p. 434). This was the look Patricia Neal wore the entire time in the movie, Breakfast at Tiffany's.

Although it was not called celebrity endorsement back then, the act of celebrity endorsement was practiced and leveraged upon by these designers. Findings and history showed that these famous clients had a significant positive effect on the businesses of the fashion designers in those days (Epstein, 1975; McConathy, 1975). The trend that started years ago is still very much in vogue as celebrities are given designer outfits as gifts in other to advertise and promote the brands. Famous people who do not get these outfits for free, but pay designers, have had designers leverage this opportunity and benefit from that action, just as seen in the case of Michelle Obama and the designers she wears (Yermack, 2009).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used the Lexis Nexis database to search articles with the terms "Jason Wu" or "Thom Browne" and "Wu" or "Browne." This created an extensive search and result from worldwide publications between the period of July 21, 2012, and June 21, 2013. These dates mark the 6 months before and 5 months after the second inauguration, which was on January 21, 2013. The time frame, which was strategically selected, allowed sufficient amount of data and population for this research and allowed the researcher to gauge the event's effect on the designers and their media mentions The search of "Jason Wu," "Thom Browne," "Wu" and "Browne" yielded an population size of 754 results after it was cleaned up, removing all irrelevant stories such as company reports. With the collaboration of two coders, which included the author as the predominant coder, the entire population was coded. To test inter-coder reliability, the two coders each coded half of the population and both coded 10% of the entire population in common. Each coder ended up with 377 stories. The researcher thought it is best to code the entire population in order to capture every detail, and get an adequate representation of data, as well as generalization of results. A total of 754 articles and 1,400 mentions were coded. The designers' names were the only search terms because it is important to this research to discover and code data involving these designers with or without Obama in order to analyze the extent to which they were in the media without Obama, hence, publicity and awareness. Adding Obama to the search limits the search to only news that was in reference to or about the first lady.

Lexis Nexis was selected as a reliable database for this research because it is "probably the largest message archive available online and certainly the most accessed for content analyses

of news coverage" (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 76). This does not mean that it contains all of the

publications in the world, but it is the closest to the best database and what is required for this

study.

<div align="center">Research Design</div>

The unit of analysis for this research is each mention of "Jason Wu," "Thom Browne,"

"Wu," or "Browne" in major world publications from the Lexis/Nexis database from July 21,

2012 through June 21, 2013. Identification variables include *ID* and *coder.* The ID is the number

of the news article being coded as provided by Lexis Nexis. Coder is another identification

variable that indicates the coder coding particular story, e.g. ID No. 1 for coder 1 and ID No. 2

for coder 2.

Independent variables included *date of the publication*, which is important in this study.

This variable suggests the time frame of the sample, which could be either within the 6 months

before or 5 months after the second inauguration. Dates before the inauguration were

(07/21/2012-01/20/2013), and after were (01/21/2013-06/21/2013).*Designer's names* is each

mention (Jason Wu or Thom Browne) and *Source* (media) in which the stories were published

were also coded.

Dependent variables included *Associated with Michelle Obama* (Yes/No), which shows

whether the mention was about the designers alone or alongside Michelle Obama, and *mention*

placement (headline, lead, paired with picture of in caption, body of the story), which signifies

the prominence given to the designers. The dependent variable of *tone*, whether positive, neutral

or negative, signifies how the media has framed the designers in this respect. A neutral tone will

look more like this: "Jason Wu became Hugo Boss women's artistic director" (Atkinson, 2013,

n.d.). Or this: "The result for the consumer is a collection of clothes that's such a departure from

menswear as usual, it makes Thom Browne's shortened trouser leg -- the last big menswear sea change -- seem like an added belt loop by comparison" (Tschorn, 2013, n.d.). A positive tone will look like this: "Target has a tradition of collaborating with prominent designers, who have included Jason Wu, Missoni and Zac Posen. Last up was Philip Lim; next up is Peter Pilotto," (Freida, 2013). Coders looked out for adjectives with positive connotations such as, "prominent" as seen in the sentence above. A negative tone will clearly have a negative connotation as opposed to the positive tone. Finally, the dependent variable, *topic,* deals with the subject being discussed in the sentence where the mention is located. This also goes further in signifying framing of the story. Topics coders looked out for in the data included: Michelle Obama in terms of the inauguration or the designer's new line or collection. Topic also included the designer's personal life or personality, designers' new career move, as well as designers' other client or dressing other celebrities, and other topics that does not involve the aforementioned.

<u>Hypotheses Statements</u>

Going by the premise of the theories, framing, and priming; and the previous literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Mentions for Jason Wu and Thom Browne in the media will increase after the second presidential inauguration.

H2: Mentions of the designers in the media after the inauguration will mostly be about Michelle Obama's inauguration outfit than it was before.

H3: Jason Wu will receive more mentions than Thom Browne after the inauguration because he was designing Michelle Obama's inaugural outfit for the second time.

H4: The tone of media mentions for both designers will be more positive after inauguration than before.

Trials and Training

In order to train the coder, the researcher got a simple random sampling of 20 articles from Lexis Nexis. Articles from the month of August 2013 to January 2014 were selected on purpose in order to avoid any overlapping that might occur with the timeframe of the actual study. The two coders discussed the variables and the criteria used to assign values to them. By the third round, coders reached agreement. A total of 83 articles (10% of the actual population of study) were each coded in common by the two coders. This provided data to test inter-coder reliability using the Cohen's Kappa formula (Mahmud, 2010). The inter-coder reliability test came up with these results: ID, coder, date, and designer's name each got a Kappa value of 1.000 with signifies a strong agreement among coders. Variables such as mentions associated with Michelle Obama, mention placement, and topic got Kappa values of .966, .918, .635 respectively. Tone, on the other hand, had a Kappa value of .367, suggesting a very weak agreement. See Table 1 below.

Table 1:

Cohen's Kappa Reliability

Variables	Kappa's Reliability
ID	1.000
Coder	1.000
Date	1.000
Designer's name	1.000
Associated with Michelle Obama	.966
Mention Placement	.918
Topic	.635
Tone	.367

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Hypotheses Testing

For H1, the researcher hypothesized that the designers, Wu and Browne, would receive

more mentions after the inauguration than before the inauguration. In order to test this

hypothesis, an independent samples t test comparing the number of mentions across both

designers before and after the inauguration found a significant difference between the time

frames (t (752) = 3.10, p = .001). The number of mentions after the inauguration was indeed

significantly higher (M = 2.14, $S.D.$ = 3.45) than the number of the mentions before the

inauguration (M= 1.53, $S.D.$ = 1.58). Thus, H1 is supported by the data. See figure 1 below.
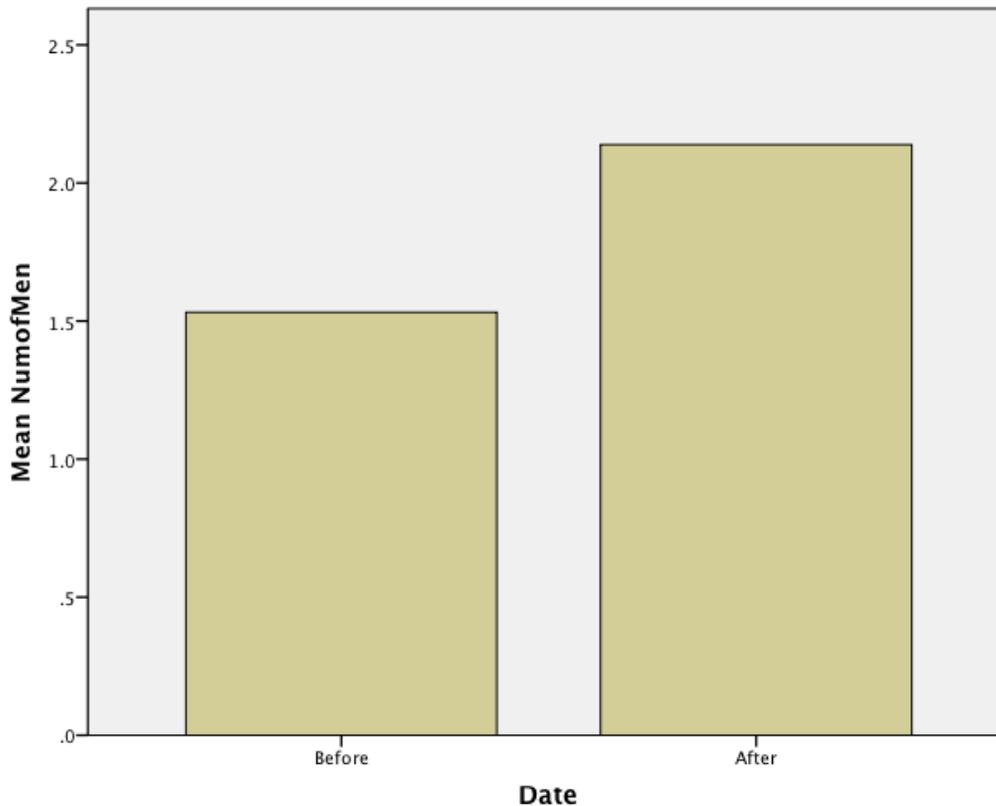

Figure 1: Mentions of designers before and after the inauguration

As regards H2, the researcher hypothesized that mentions of the designers in the media after the inauguration will mostly be about Obama's inauguration outfit than it was before. An independent sample t test comparing the number of topic about Obama in terms of her inaugural outfit before and after the inauguration found a significant difference between the time frames (t $(752) = 7.37$, $p< .001$). The number of mentions concerning Obama in terms of her inaugural outfit after the inauguration was significantly higher ($M = .80$, *S.D.* $= 1.68$) than the number of the mentions before the inauguration ($M= .17$, *S.D.* $= .49$). H2 is also supported by the data. See figure 2.
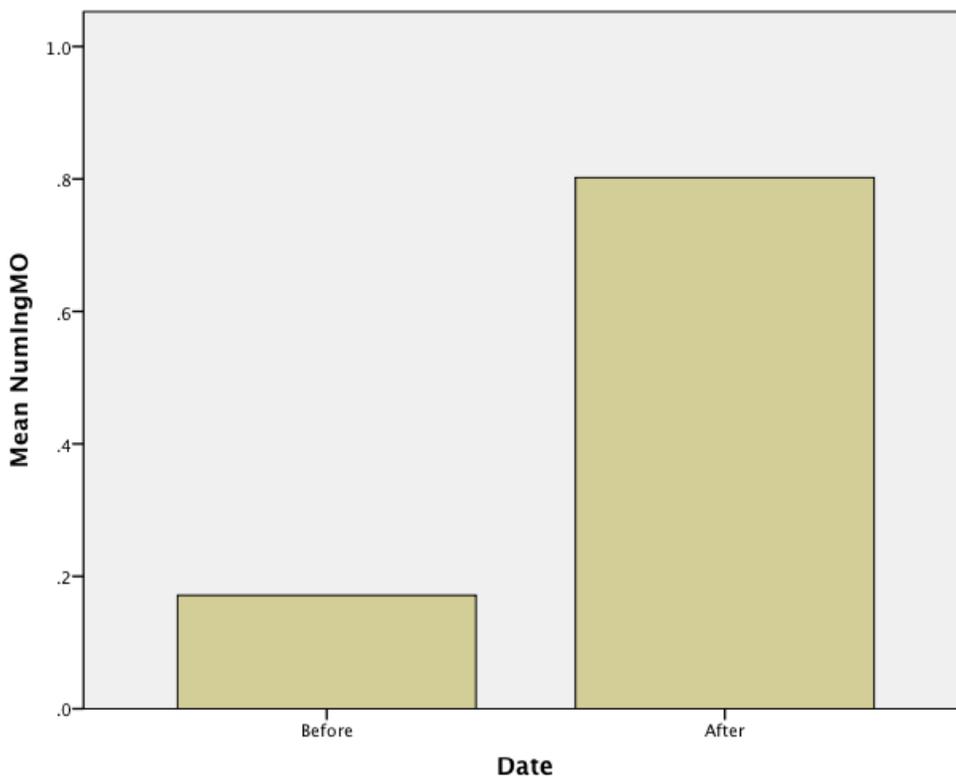

Figure 2: Topic concerning Michelle Obama in terms of the inauguration before and after the

inauguration

For H3, it was hypothesized that Jason Wu will receive more mentions than Thom Browne after the inauguration because he was designing Michelle Obama's inaugural outfit for the second time. A t-test comparing the mentions of Jason Wu to that of Thom Browne after the inauguration found a significant difference between the designers (t (752) = 2.00, p = .05). The number of Jason Wu mentions was significantly higher (*M*= 1.13, *S.D.* = 2.29) than the number of Thom Browne mentions (*M* = .83, *S.D.*= 2.25). Figure 3 demonstrates an increase in the mentions Wu and Browne got after the inauguration as compared to before. So while Wu got more mentions, which is consistent with the hypothesis, Browne experienced a larger increase in the number of times he was mentioned before versus after. Therefore, H3 is supported by the data.

It is also worthy to note the significant differences in the individual mentions of both designers before and after. Data show that Wu did not get a significant increase in number of mentions (t(752) = -1.13, p = .26). Wu's number of mentions moved from *M* = 1.15, *S.D.* = 1.59 before the inauguration to (*M* = 1.31, *S.D.* = 2.29) after the inauguration. This is not a significant increase. However, Browne saw a significant increase in number of mentions (t(752) = -3.10, *p*= .002). His number of mentions increased from *M* = .38, *S.D.* = .89 before the inauguration to *M* = .83, *S.D.* = 2.25 after the inauguration. This was a significant increase. Figure 3 below illustrates this significance.
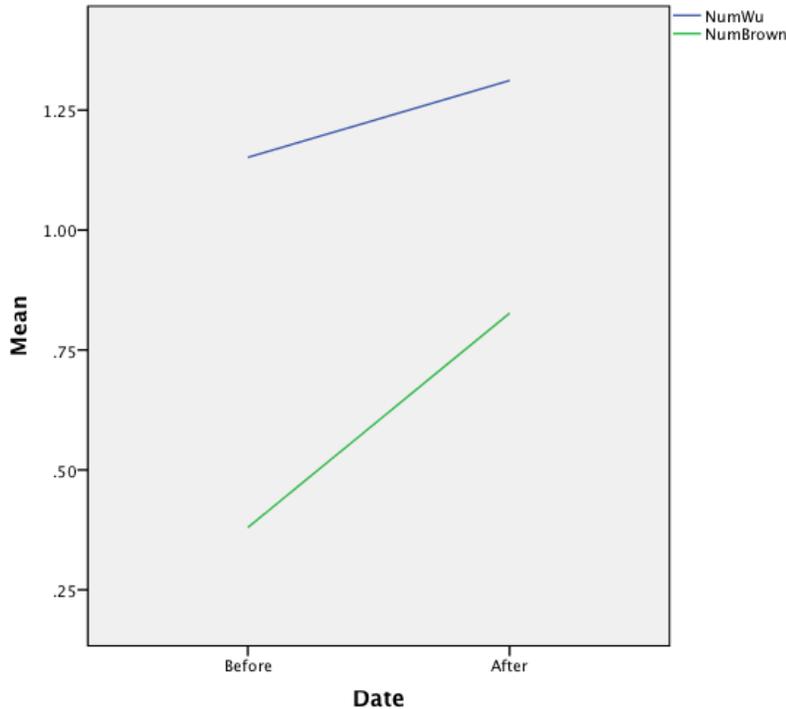
Figure 3: Mentions of Jason Wu and Thom Browne after the inauguration

H4 hypothesized that the tone of media mentions for both designers will be more positive after inauguration than before. Results from an independent sample t test comparing the number positive mentions before and after the inauguration found a significant difference between the time frames (t (752) = 3.66, $p < .001$). The number of positive mentions after the inauguration was significantly lower ($M = .18$, *S.D.* $= .48$) than the number of positive mentions before the inauguration ($M = .31$, *S.D.* $= .50$). This data did not support the hypothesis. Figure 4 shows that, although there was significant difference in the mean, it did not support the hypothesis because it goes in the opposite direction. Instead of an increase in positive mentions, there was a decrease. See figure 4 below.
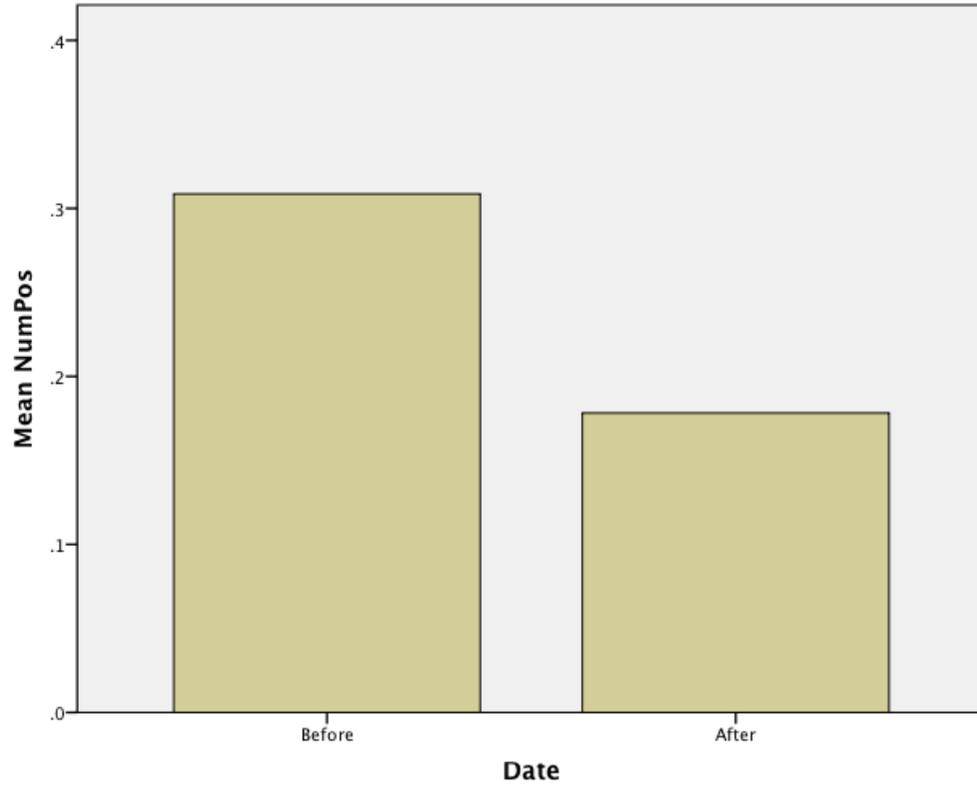
Figure 4: Positive mentions before and after the inauguration

Table 2:

Results Summary

	M	*S.D.*
H1- Before Inauguration	1.53	1.58
H1 - After Inauguration	2.14	3.42
H2 - Before Inauguration	.17	.49
H2 – After Inauguration	.80	1.64
H3 – Jason Wu	1.31	2.29
H3 – Thom Browne	.83	2.25
H4 – Before Inauguration	.31	.50
H4 – After Inauguration	.18	.48

Table 3:

Hypothesis statistics

	df	*t*	*p*	Supported
H1	752	3.10	.001	Yes
H2	752	7.370	<.001	Yes
H3	752	2.00	.05	Yes
H4	752	3.66	<.001	No

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As the first hypothesis suggested, there was an actual increase in mentions of the designers after the inauguration. Using an independent sample t-test to compare mentions of the designers before and after the inauguration, a significant increase was discovered. This suggests that the inauguration was indeed a pivotal event in the careers of these designers. As their designs were worn by Obama, journalists and bloggers were primed to think of the designers more, thus, writing about them more than or unlike they did before. Possibly, the social media presence of these designers would have increased during this period as well because the audience, customers, fans, and other stakeholders involved must have posted messages about these designers on the web, thereby, creating conversations which might have helped these designers achieve some communication and social media objectives. Going by the premise of priming theory it is possible that as the inauguration occurred or whenever Obama is mentioned, writers are primed to think of the designers who dressed her for the event, thus, a possible reason for a continued and increased mention of the designers after the inauguration. They connected Obama with these designers and these designers to Obama.

The second hypothesis suggested that the topic or framing of articles concerning the designers would be more in relation to Obama in terms the inauguration after the inauguration as opposed to six months before the inauguration. Again, this hypothesis was supported through the result of an independent sample t-test that compared the mentions of articles talking about Obama in terms of the inauguration before to after the inauguration. What this indicates is that there was a significant increase in articles with themes of Obama in relation to the inauguration after the inauguration. This helps to conclude that the media presence of the designers has a lot to

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do with Obama. In fact, these designers were in the news as much as they were because of Obama and the inauguration. This ties back to the notion that Obama influenced the publicity of these designers through her fashion selection to the inauguration.

Furthermore, as previous research suggested, Wu rose to fame after he designed Obama's dress for the first inauguration. This informed the third hypothesis, that Wu would receive more mentions than Browne after the second inauguration because he is designing Obama's dress for the second time. This hypothesis was supported using a t-test to compare the mentions of Wu and Browne after the second inauguration. This means that Wu received more mentions than Browne after the second inauguration. However, Browne saw more of an increase in the number of times he was mentioned after the inauguration. Wu has always had substantial amount of mentions in the media before the inauguration, therefore, his mentions after the inauguration increased but not at the rate that Browne's did. Nevertheless, Wu still received more mentions than Browne after the second inauguration, which is what the research is interested in discovering. This, as predicted, might be as a result of his affiliation with Obama for the previous inauguration and the latent connection between Wu and Obama as a result of priming (Jo & Berkowitz, 1994, p. 46) through his continuous service to Obama. He has not only designed Obama's first inaugural dress, Obama has always been a fan of his and patronizes him regularly (Spedding, 2013).

With the hype surrounding the inauguration and what Obama would be wearing to the event, the researcher hypothesized that the tone of mentions after the inauguration will be more positive than it was before the inauguration. This was based on framing theory. However, this hypothesis was completely rejected. Although there was significant statistical difference in the number of positive mentions before and after the inauguration, results of an independent sample *t*

test indicated that the number of positive mentions reduced significantly after the inauguration. So, counter to the hypothesis, the number of positive mentions reduced instead of increased. This brings to mind the fact that the entire process was not planned. It was not a marketing or advertising campaign, neither was it a deliberate PR or marketing strategy. Therefore, these designers did not put much effort into the public relations and media outcome of the process. The reporters basically reported factual and neutral stories. Nothing was done on the part of the reporters to make the designers look good. All the attention was on the first lady instead. This probably explains the reason the number of positive mentions were lower than hypothesized. Also, considering the objective nature maintained in journalism (Maras, 2013), the stories would be reported factually, which is more objective as opposed to being subjective. This, perhaps, is the reason for the reduced number of positive mentions after the inauguration. Another possible reason for lack of support for the hypothesis might the disagreement between coders on tone. The Kappa reliability test results showed that the coders had minimal agreement on tone. Therefore, the designer might have gotten more positive mentions than was coded or maybe less. Any of these could be the reason for the outcome of the data.

<u>Limitations</u>

This study was designed to discover Obama's effect on designers through media coverage and awareness they garnered after she wore their designs. Few television news transcripts were found on Lexis Nexis, thus the effect of that medium is not as well represented. The population of the study was mostly newspaper articles and blog stories. Television news concerning Obama and the designers of her outfits to the second inauguration inspired this research, unfortunately, only few television news transcripts were available.

Another major limitation for this study was the coding process. The coders had difficulty reaching agreement on tone. Although a hundred percent agreement was reached during training, Kappa inter-coder reliability test results showed that the coders had minimal agreement on this variable. As a result of this, the data were not adequately coded in terms of tone.

Additionally, this study was able to answer the questions who, what, where, and when; but it is not adequate in answering the questions how and why. In as much as we know the impact of Obama in this process, it is uncertain as to how these designers have benefited specifically from it. It is also unclear what the audience and target consumers and prospect of these brands feel about the effect of Obama on the brands. Also, the reason why Jason Wu got more mentions than Thom Browne in the 1-year period is still uncertain. It is also unclear how the entire process has had an effect on the audience, thereby, translating to increase in sales and awareness for these brands. Many questions are left unanswered in this research, which should serve as foundation for further research.

<u>Future Research</u>

A vast body of research has gone into the study of celebrity endorsement, publicity, awareness, and more significantly the study of Michelle Obama and her fashion effect. The literature review of this study indicates this; however, not many have studied audience reaction to the Obama effect as regards to priming and behavioral change. Further research using a survey would be highly effective in achieving this. That way, questions on why and how will be answered. Furthermore, Michelle Obama's fashion effect can then be truly measured, not just among designers but also the audience. Furthermore, a qualitative study analyzing major themes of stories surrounding Obama and fashion designers especially Jason Wu and Thom Browne will be helpful to order to truly articulate and understand the pattern of framing. Also, a more in-

depth analysis of social media impact on this topic will be highly beneficial. Consequently, audience reaction to Obama and these designers can be measured. Communication strategies used by these designers will be discovered as well.

Conclusion

This study revealed that most of the media coverage on the designers, especially after the inauguration, was concerning Obama and the inauguration. These designers also generally were mentioned more after the inauguration, as they got more personality interviews and attention from the media due to the inauguration. After the first inauguration, Wu went from being an unknown designer to a major player in the fashion business. This is probably why Jason Wu received more mentions than Browne overall. Research could not indicate the reason for Jason Wu's greater media coverage within the one-year time period studied; however, it could be because he has done the inaugural dress before.

All these signify the power of celebrity endorsement in promotion and publicity of brands, in this case, fashion designers. The power of the media cannot be overlooked as well. Being the vehicle that drives the ideas to the audience, the media plays an important and indispensable role in the entire process. Although these designers did not pay for this major publicity move (instead they were paid by the first lady), these designers benefited from it by achieving some unplanned media objectives, and most likely sales objectives as well. This research shows that the media was not trying to make these designers look good, the media only reported news about these designers, most of which were factual. This indicated that it was earned media. These designers went on to do what they knew how to do best, which is, designing clothes, and they received adequate media coverage while they were at it. When the media is not talking about the inauguration, the media is talking about sighting these designers at an event,

other celebrities wearing their designs, their collaboration with other designers, their fashion shows, and so on, while usually mentioning that they became famous for dressing Obama for the inauguration in the process. It is enlightening to study the shift in the lives of these designers in the 1 year time period- 6 months before and 5 months after the inauguration. In what seems to be a short period of time, there was a significant change in the media presence of these designers due to that single pivotal moment- the second presidential inauguration.

This is significant to the field of marketing, advertising, and public relations as it gives support to the fact that celebrity endorsement is valuable whether it is paid for or not. Other designers looking to get this sort of media exposure are also sure to get an adequate return on their investment, so long as it is through celebrity endorsement with a celebrity of such high repute as the First Lady of the United States. Communications practitioners can also take a cue from this by recognizing and capturing moments of receptivity of their audience, which could happen any time and may not necessarily be planned for. The ability to take advantage of these moments is gives communication practitioners the ability to deliver relevant and effective messages (Young, 2010). Communication practitioners such as publicists of both Jason Wu and Thom Browne would have had this advantage if they recognized and made use of it through Obama's endorsement and the entire inauguration. As Young (2010) rightly said, "the role of a relevant location-coupled with relevant messaging- is a powerful idea (p. 128).

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CODING INSTRUCTIONS

Unit of analysis: each mention of "Jason Wu," "Thom Browne," "Wu," or "Browne"

Identification variables

ID: Write the ID number of each story, for example, id- 23

Coder: Write ID number of the coder

1= Temitope

2= Bethany

12= Both

Independent Variables

Date: date of publication

Write code indicating timeframe of publication, i.e., before inauguration (07/21/2012-01/20/2013), and after inauguration (01/21/2013-06/21/2013).

1= Before

2= After

Source- Newspaper/magazine/blog/ transcript name

Enter the name of the newspaper e.g. New York Times

Designer's name: write ID of designer

1= Jason Wu

2= Thom Browne.

Dependent variables

Tone: general tone of the sentence where Jason Wu or Thom Browne were mentioned

1= negative (clearly negative)

2= neutral (factual or neutral)

3=positive (clearly positive)

Mention Placement - if the mention was in the headline, the lead or body of the story.

1= in the body of the story

2= in the lead of the story (first sentence/first paragraph)

3=in the headline of the story

Associated with Michelle Obama: coders will look out for any mention of or reference to Michelle Obama in the sentence where the designers are mentioned.

1= No

2= Yes

Topic/Framing: to determine the topic being discussed and framing of the story, the entire sentence where the mention is found will be read and the dominant topic or how the story is framed by the writer will be coded. If topic cannot be ascertained from the sentence of the mention, the sentence before will be read alongside. In the case where topic still could not be ascertained through the main sentence and the one before, the sentence following the main sentence will be coded as well. The dominant topic will then be coded.

1= the inauguration and/or Michelle Obama

2= Designer's new line

3= Designer's personal life\collection

4= Designer's new career move

5= Designer's other Client/dressing other celebrities

6= others

VITA

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