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**ANALYSIS OF TEENS' ATTITUDES
TOWARD HEALTH CLAIMS
ON BRANDED, PREPACKAGED FOODS**

A Thesis submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Journalism

by
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Approved by
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May 2011

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my thesis committee:

Christopher Swindell, Ph.D.

Janet Dooley, M.S.

Christine Ingersoll, M.F.A.

This thesis is also dedicated to Dr. Stuart Hall,
pioneer in the field of Cultural Studies and Critical Studies
in Mass Communication.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my wife, Linda McAteer,
who has supported and encouraged me every step of the way.

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Abstract:

In the 31 years since Stuart Hall added a defiant read to audience reception analysis, several scholars have broadened its use beyond television discourse. The current study used directed focus groups to attempt the same. Encoding/decoding (1980) revolutionized modern critical thought by expanding audience interpretation. Gone were notions that mass audiences simply bowed to their message overlords in every case without thought or conviction. The oppositional read was a breakthrough with few comparisons. Still present and true to standard critical thought, was the preferred read—an interpretation of text that closely followed authorial intent (Hall, 1980, p. 107). The negotiated read yielded to audience members who may have agreed to parts of the message but disagreed or had opposite experience with another. Suddenly, critical/cultural thought had evolved to include the reality that all audiences were not homogenous, long a complaint of Uses and Gratifications theory proponents.

What about the notion that all life is really just text open to interpretation? The researchers wondered whether branding/marketing claims to teenagers were as subject to decoded interpretation as the television discourse of the original. Fortunately, the current study is not the first to explore encoding/decoding from an alternative perspective.

This thesis project interprets Stuart Hall in a new light, bringing the Encoding/Decoding theory into advertising analysis. What attitudes do teens hold toward health messaging on prepackaged foods? How influential are the health claims on prepackaged, branded foods? Do teens feel that they are making healthy choices by eating prepackaged food? And finally, what potential read are the teens making with their perceived belief or lack thereof in the persuasive advertising messaging.

Chapter One: Introduction

American youth have more discretionary spending power and influence in the market than ever before. The tastes, interests and trends of teens and “tweens” across the country are of great interest to advertisers, marketers and brand managers of every stripe. Young consumers have rapidly evolving tastes and styles and, as their preferences for products shift and change, their brand loyalty becomes that much more elusive for contemporary branding companies to keep tabs on. From cosmetics to cell phones, the phenomenon of selling to kids is strong and only growing stronger in the marketplace. “U.S. teens spent \$155 billion in ‘discretionary income’ in 2000 alone, buying clothing, CD’s, and makeup” (Quart, 2003, p. xiii). According to a study conducted by researchers Elizabeth Preston and Cindy White, the \$155 billion figure is conservative. Preston and White suggest in their 2004 study that children directly influence the spending of \$200 billion each year and a more recent estimate place this figure to be closer to \$300 billion (Preston & White, 2004, p. 121). This figure is likely to increase as children and teens gain more personal power over their own money and the number of retail outlets specializing in young peoples’ apparel and accessories increase. “Today, *teens* influence up to an estimated 90% of grocery and apparel purchases, according to studies by digital marketing agency Resource Interactive. Even beyond their sway over household budgets, *teen* buyers, with their willingness, even eagerness, to spend, are highly sought-after consumers in their own right” (O’Donnell & Kutz, 2008, p. 1b).

The amounts of spending have escalated quickly since the 1980s until present. “In 1989, corporations spent about \$600 million on marketing to kids. In 1999, they spent twenty times that amount” (Quart, 2003, p. 51). With such mammoth spending power comes the attention of marketers and advertisers to reach American teens where they live. “As advertisers differentiate the children’s market according to race and ethnicity, income lifestyle, media use patterns, etc. and target narrower and narrower segments of the market, media organizations and content providers see financial incentive to create the kinds of primary communities that will deliver desirable niche target markets to advertisers” (Preston & White, 2004, p. 116).

The proliferation of 24-hour cable channels of children's programming, such as Nickelodeon, Nick Jr. and Cartoon Network, demonstrates that there is a viable market to market-director children (primarily under the age of 12). MTV, VH1, Spike, E! and network prime time lineups appeal to a more sophisticated teen audience. According to Preston & White's 2004 study, children's programming has grown in popularity alongside the direct marketing of the demographic. "During the 1990's [*sic*], children's television underwent a radical transformation...Last year 800 hours of children's programming was shown on American television, compared with 300 hours in 1990" (Preston & White, 2004, p. 116). It is startling to fathom the amount of direct-to-child-consumer advertising that was shown over the 800 hours of programming and what product lines would be appealing to children in advertisements. A 2005 content analysis of children's programming in British television found that "34.8% of adverts related to food/drink products, and 95.3% of these promoted products that were deemed potentially carcinogenic or erosive" (Rodd & Patel, 2005, p. 710). In a 2006 study by Susan Connor, food-related advertisements in television programming was analyzed for advertising on the 'big three stations' of children's programming: FoxKids, Nickelodeon and PBS (Connor, 2006, p. 1478).

In 96 half-hour blocks of preschool programming view, the 3 stations had a total of 1,345 food advertisements per half-hour of viewing. The over-representation of foods high in fat, sugar, and/or sodium is in keeping with the findings from earlier studies...Children's television viewing including 40,000 advertisements to which they are exposed each year, also is associated positively with poor eating habits and misperceptions about nutrition (Connor, 2006, p. 1478).

According to Susan Connor's research, it can be deduced that we are producing a generation of children and teens who are at high risk for diabetes, heart disease and other health risks associated with poor dietary choices. According to a European study based on an expert literature review and CDC findings from 2003-2004, "one in seven up to one in three obese children in the USA might not have been obese in the absence of advertising for unhealthy food on TV" (Veerman, Van Beeck, Barendregt, & Mackenbach, 2009, p. 365).

The quest to find the right marketing mix of message, image and personality to meet teens' tastes has been evolving over the past 50 years. Since the 1960s, teens have moved from a marginal demographic of retailers aimed at their parents to a monolithic niche industry worth billions in annual sales. Although today's teens are somewhat autonomous in their discretionary spending they are still largely tethered to their parents. Teens have some direct influence over their dietary choices in that "students' (12-19 years old) spending power comes from the fact that 47 percent of respondents have part time jobs, but they are still spending their parent's money" (A. M. M., 2007, p. 15). Teens who earn their own money spend a large part of their (part time) income on inexpensive fast food or entertainment or if they do receive an allowance they will spend a high percentage of their allotted funds on prepackaged food and snacks. And there is evidence to show that teens are making their dietary decisions in the marketplace based upon big box store convenience. "...They are getting out and about because 81 percent shopped in mass-market stores (Wal-Mart or Target, for example) in the last 30 days, and an equal number shopped in a grocery store within the last 30 days" (A. M. M., 2007, p. 15).

There is also evidence to show that teens follow the dietary patterns learned from their parents. Parents who eat out frequently also demonstrate poor dietary choices when eating at home. "Results showed that parents who reported purchasing fast food for family meals at least 3 times per week were significantly more likely than parents who reported purchasing fewer fast-food family meals to report the availability of soda pop and chips in the home. Adolescents in homes with fewer than 3 fast-food family meals per week were significantly more likely than adolescents in homes with more fast-food family meals to report having vegetables and milk served with meals at home" (Boutelle, Fulkerson, Neumark-Sztainer, Story & French, 2007, p. 17). But, that does not entirely tell the full story of exposure to unhealthy food messages broadcast to children through television advertising versus food advertising being broadcast to their parents. A 2001 study compared the amount of nutritional content advertised on children's Saturday morning programming versus the broadcast programming to their parents in prime time evening shows. "In general, the morning commercials advertised more unhealthy food products than the evening commercials. Specifically, the morning food commercials advertised unhealthy products in

terms of sugar and cholesterol” (Kuribayashi, Roberts & Johnson, 2001, p. 309). And there are very serious consequences for both children and adults who continue to consume, on a regular basis, the types of foods regularly advertised.

A number of these practices [food marketing] may be inherently exploitative and unfair, or even deceptive. For adults, they are problematic enough. For children and teens, they pose even greater risks. When used to promote certain food products, the aggregation of these new marketing tactics, could worsen the childhood obesity epidemic, which is already contributing to rising heart rates, and circulatory illnesses, depression and other mental illnesses, respiratory problems, and Type II diabetes, a disease that used to only strike adults (Chester & Montgomery, 2008, p. 11-12).

The dangers of consuming foods high in sugar, salt and saturated fat are well documented and nutritional facts are being more widely circulated through public schools and places of work. American consumers have been trained for generations to embrace the “stamp of approval” that comes with highly recognized brand name products. “Analysis of national survey data reveals that children's diets are high in added sugar (20% of total food energy), and only 2% of children meet Food Guide Pyramid serving recommendations for all food groups. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that children's poor nutrition may be caused, at least in part, by marketing of unhealthful food” (Culp, Bell & Cassady, 2010, p. 197). Companies such as Campbell's, Nabisco and Quaker Oats have been using compelling brand images and concepts for over one hundred years to lull consumers into a sense of *healthfulness* about their product lines. In some instances, the claims of healthfulness were legitimate and helped educate consumers about the benefits of eating nutritious foods. There are also historical instances of companies, especially tobacco companies, espousing the health virtues of their products long after there was evidence to the contrary from the scientific community. In 1946, R.J. Reynolds boosted sales for Camel, their most popular brand of cigarette at the time, with claims of physician endorsement. (Gardner & Brandt, 2006, p. 227)

‘More doctors smoke Camels than any other cigarette.’ This phrase would be the mainstay of their advertising for the next 6 years. Touting surveys conducted by ‘three leading independent research organizations.’ One typical advertisement proclaimed that according to ‘nationwide’ surveys of 113 597 doctors ‘from every branch of medicine.’ Camel was the brand smoked by most respondents. It also asserted that this statistic was an ‘actual fact’ not a ‘casual claim’. In reality, this ‘independent’ surveying was conducted by RJ Reynolds’s advertising agency, the William Esty Company, whose employees questioned physicians about their smoking habits at medical conferences and in their offices. It appears that most doctors were surveyed about their cigarette brand of choice just after being provided complimentary cartons of Camels (Gardner & Brandt, 2006, p. 222).

There is also evidence of a close relationship developing between physicians and a new breed of consumer influencers, the pharmaceutical industry. Multiple studies conducted recently have indicated that “advertising by the pharmaceutical industry influences physician prescribing. This effect appears to be correlated with information provided by the pharmaceutical industry but independent of the physician’s attitudes [*sic*] of credibility of the information. A consistent lack of concern on the part of physicians regarding their risk of influence by PRs (Pharmaceutical Representatives) is particularly interesting” (Caudill, Louie & Rich, 1992, p. 331). It would be unfair to assume that the pharmaceutical companies are propagating products that are actively harmful to consumers or that physicians are co-signing on products that do not help to treat the ailments of their clients. The studies conducted merely showcase a potential alliance between medicine and private industry which might not be entirely healthy for the end users. The relationship between food manufacturers and dietitians has been around longer than that of tobacco companies and physicians and certainly much longer than the symbiotic relationship of physicians and the drug companies.

In pre-industrial age America, the local proprietor was the guarantor of quality and service, brand name packaged foods became the face of quality, consistency and assurance. That changed in the industrial age, when prepackaged foods were disseminated locally, regionally and eventually nationally through a network of factory-producing foods, investments in technology by manufacturers and a national

system of railroads for distribution. For the first time, the food product's packaging was charged with educating, enticing and promoting the qualities and virtues of the product. "For manufacturers, packaging's the crucial final payoff to a marketing campaign. Sophisticated packaging is one of the chief ways people find the confidence to buy. It can also give a powerful image to products and commodities that are in themselves characterless...Packages promise, and usually deliver, predictability" (Hine, 1997, p. 3). What began as a necessity to compete in a primitive grocer has grown into a full-fledged industry with teams of designers, researchers and marketers scientifically dissecting every nuance of consumer behavior. Fred Richards wrote an opinion piece for *Brandweek* suggesting the vital place that packaging has in the realm of a company's larger brand. "*Packaging* is the capstone of *brand* expression. All of the touch point messages that are leading, convincing or driving the consumer to consider a particular product at shelf are forming a perception of that product's *brand* promise and delivery even before the Consumer has purchased or tried it. The *brand's* package seals or kills the deal. Within seconds, the package has to help the consumer find the *brand* on shelf and communicate a number of key messages [*sic*]" (Richards, 2009, p. 22).

Diet certainly affects a young person's physical stature and growth but also plays on a teen's self-image. As young people struggle with their weight and physical development, many are also facing more pressure to look a certain way. Many teens today feel more pressure to be seen as beautiful or sexy than ever before. "In one year, from 2000 to 2001, the number of cosmetic surgeries on teens 18 and under jumped 21.8 percent, from 65,231 to 79,501. Almost 306,000 of the 7.4 million plastic surgeries performed in 2000 in the United States were alterations to teens and children" (Quart, 2003, p. 114). And as the number of diagnosed eating disorders grows in boys and girls alike, girls in particular are finding "better living through surgery" (Quart, 2003, p. 123). The steep incline in teen's obsession with beauty may stem from the images they see in the magazines that they read.

In the 1960's, a scant 15 articles about plastic surgery appeared in the major women's magazines listed in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*. In the 1970's, the number rose to 55. In the 1980's, it near doubled to 107. Since the later 1980's, there has

been a general rise in stories about breast augmentations – countless newspaper articles and television and even stories in general interest magazines-and the Reader’s Digest listed 39 articles on plastic surgery in the biggest women’s magazines in 1999 alone...The use of plastic surgery as a way of making teen (girls) feel more confident and beautiful is obviously a luxury of the well to do. The average breast augmentation surgery costs \$6,000 and is likely not covered by insurance, but what about teens from low-income families who cannot afford voluntary surgery? They may then turn to cheaper alternatives of self-expression which could be within their means [*sic*] (Quart, 2003, p. 119).

And “cheaper alternatives” for girls who cannot afford surgery may come in the form of dietary supplements and energy drinks. “...The dietary supplement industry is big. It generates billions of dollars annually and seems likely to continue growing, largely in response to the public’s increasing frustration with the mainstream health care industry. It is also relatively unregulated (compared to, for instance, the pharmaceutical industry) and existing regulations are difficult to enforce” (Kreth, 2000, p. 66). A study conducted by Temple University in 2006 in part found that girls between the ages of 9- 17 were unable to recognize obviously unreliable claims like “rapid” or “permanent” in conjunction with advertisements for weight loss products, (Hobbs, Broder, Pope & Rowe, 2006, p. 719).

To some, the idea that Americans are both obsessed with fitness and yet practice unhealthy eating is an emerging crisis of culture. “Fat is a significant issue in this country. More than 125 million Americans are overweight. More than 60 million Americans are obese. “Nearly 10 million Americans have been clinically diagnosed as morbidly obese...If nearly 50 percent in this county is overweight, there must be a cultural reason for it” (Rapaille, 2006, p. 65). There may in fact be a cultural reason for it, and it may have to do with the contradiction of corporate sponsorship. Political activist Ralph Nader weighed in recently when *Sesame Street*, the children’s programming institution, recently reported accepting sponsorship dollars from fast-food giant McDonald’s. “Ralph Nader's Commercial Alert and some public-health advocates contended McDonald’s *sponsorship* messages violate a ‘trust’ and turns Sesame Street

into ‘an auxiliary megaphone for the marketing machine of McDonald’s franchise’” (Advertising Age, 2003, p. 20). Although McDonald’s claimed that “its funding is part of its promotion of literacy and the funding helps to ensure continuation of the program,” the mere specter of a fast food company paying for public programming was enough to raise red flags for some (Advertising Age, 2003, p. 20).

It is possible that consumers, too, are confused by messages on packaging? There appears to be a trend on the part of food manufactures to re-brand themselves as healthy or having healthy qualities. General Mills cereals have recently started their “Big G cereals” marketing campaign that touts that all of the cereals in the category are made with whole grains. Although there is very little doubt that food manufacturers are correct in their facts and rightly meet the FDA guidelines for nutrition; the Big G cereals of *Cheerios* and *Wheaties* are equated with *Trix* and *Lucky Charms* as all being *a good source of dietary fiber*. Does that mean that because *Wheaties* and *Trix* breakfast cereals are both *a good source of dietary fiber* and that they are equally as healthy for you? “...Food packaging can mislead children and parents into thinking that the product is healthy when it is not” (Hawkes, 2010, p. 297). The mix and match of healthfulness and fun has become a confusing paradox for children and teens. “People are affected by packaging in ways that they do not fully understand...The first package the shopper examines is almost always the one that is bought. The instantaneous emotional reaction carries the greatest weight” (Hine, 1995, p. 205-208). And despite the government's regulatory response of adding nutritional facts to every food package, in many cases the facts are (even though scientifically accurate) do not properly register with potential buyers at the point of purchase. “The ‘Nutritional Facts’ box requires analytic thinking, and even mental mathematics...Most purchasing decisions are made in a tiny fraction of a second, so there is little likelihood that increasing information at the point of purchase will increase the rationality of consumers’ decisions” (Hine, 1995, p. 208). In an article published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, a team of researchers investigated the role of television advertising of food during children’s programming and found, “Evidence from psychological research indicates that children, particularly those younger than 8 years, are not fully aware of the persuasive intent of food marketing and tend to accept advertising as truthful, accurate, and unbiased. Older children, although they may

understand that advertising is intended to sell a product, may not be able to interpret these messages critically” (Kelly, Halford, Boyland, Chapman, Bautista-Castaño, Berg, & Serra-Majem, 2010, p. 1730).

A full generation of young people is growing up with more access to food and more food choices than ever before. The consequences for lack of supervision and portion control can be staggering.

“They have eaten enormous bags of chips and great buckets of movie popcorn. It’s no wonder that kids are supersized, too: Obesity engulfs 17 percent of the teen population, a number that have grown into from kids and preteens-where child in seven is obese. Today’s generation of rampant teenage consumers have lived only in the era of supersizing; they know no other” (Quart, 2003, p. 126).

The consequences for consumers could not be more significant. Dr. Mathews equate the onset of Type 2 Diabetes to be equaled to the bubonic plague that wiped out the European population several centuries ago.

In some settings, the population prevalence of Type 2 diabetes is 50%, and half of those affected will die from diabetes-related complications. Eight centuries ago, an epidemic of bubonic plague swept across Europe, killing at least half of its victims. We here draw comparisons between these two pandemics, proposing close analogies between the 'BlackDeath' of the 14th century and the modern-day equivalent of Type 2 diabetes. Both diseases can be considered in terms of an aetiological agent, a reservoir, a vector and a predisposing toxic environment; populations can be considered as highly susceptible to the transmissible agents of Type 2 diabetes in the setting of calorie excess, inadequate food labeling, poorly regulated advertising and sedentary lifestyles (Mathews & Mathews, 2011, p. 2).

These doctors propose that the “diabetic pandemic” is being supported by “poor advertising regulation” as a culprit. The researchers of the global television advertising study noted that “advertised foods (on television) are typically the antithesis of dietary recommendations” (Kelly, Halford, Boyland, Chapman, Bautista-Castaño, Berg, & Serra-Majem, p. 1730, 2010).

The Federal Trade Commission, the body which is responsible for regulating advertising, has the power to enact more stringent rules as to how food products are marketed to consumers, but has yet to act. “The FTC has considerable latitude to regulate individual food advertisements more rigorously, either on the basis that they are deceptive or on the basis that they are unfair. Broader rule making under the unfairness authority would require congressional intervention to expand the FTC's scope of authority, but there exist possibilities for rule making under the deception doctrine. Finally, the FTC could strengthen its efforts to encourage the food industry to regulate its own advertising practices more stringently and could provide mechanisms for making voluntary initiatives more meaningful” (Mello, 2010, p. 227). The relationship between food producers, advertisers and government regulators is made more complicated when the Federal Trade Commission has to interface with the Food and Drug Administration to enact standard of food safety for consumers. Both governmental agencies have recently responded positively to public pressure to address the problem of obesity in children. “The Food and Drug Administration recently held an all-day workshop on ways it could act to increase health-food choices and the Federal Trade Commission recently began looking into a KFC ad that suggests fried chicken can be part of a healthy diet” (Teinowitz, 2003, p. 4).

According to one recent study, “only 17% of students stated that food deemed as ‘healthy’ was ‘really important’ in their choice of restaurants, and nutritious value was ranked lowest of 13 considerations given” (Johnson Avery, Carpenter Childers, Lambert & Kim, 2009, p. 6). Furthermore, do teens view dietary supplements, *Slim Fast* shakes and protein bars, as being as healthy as eating a whole meal or fresh fruit? One can postulate that there is, in fact, a negative correlation between *branded* packaged foods (with health claims) and teen’s perceptions of eating *healthily*.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Branding has become the catchall for marketing efforts that garners the attention and loyalty of customers. “The brand can be regarded as the lens through which the firm’s marketing activities are focused (or conversely, the lens through which the consumers view the product and the firm)” (Harris, 2007, p. 284). It is the idea that the brand becomes the lens, through which consumers view the product, which makes contemporary branding so powerful and successful. And there is a trend in the industry. Major corporations and businesses point their high-powered branding instruments directly toward the youngest of society. According to researcher Susan Connor, the ultimate aim of branding is to establish recognition and positive associations with a name or product, which will carry lifelong loyalty. Some brand strategists believe that the best way to make lifelong customers is to reach potential consumers at the earliest possible age.

Brand recognition begins as early as 2 years of age, particularly when cartoon (Tony the Tiger) or cartoonish (Ronald McDonald) licensed characters are used to sell products.

Marketers are eager to reach very young children but not necessarily to promote specific products; instead, the goal is often to build brand loyalties, on the basis of the theory that, the younger the age at which brand awareness is established, the stronger the brand loyalty will be as a child grows (Connor, 2006, p. 1479).

When the average American is exposed to more than 3,000 messages a day, it becomes of great importance for brand names to break through the clutter. In “branding” terms, the key to differentiating from the pack and leaving a lasting and memorable impression on consumers is emotional resonance. “Associating the brand with positive emotions and meanings is central to success. Marketers start branding at a young age, and they are successful in doing so. Children recognize brands as early as 18 months; can identify characters, colors, and symbols by age 2; and begin to evaluate products by age 3. For example, children as young as 3 years old prefer branded McDonald’s food over identical but unmarked food” (Culp, Bell & Cassady, 2010, p. 197). Manufacturers have been using cartoon characters to reach children for decades to induce a sense of ease and fun associated with their food products. The

relationship between food producers and younger consumers can be a tenuous one. “Children under 8 have difficulty distinguishing between product advertising and the television show in which the advertising is embedded. Thus, they are unlikely to be aware of the persuasive intent of the advertiser. For this reason, the American Psychological Association has recommended that television advertising be restricted to children over 8 years of age” (Culp, Bell & Cassady, 2010, p. 200). Even if television advertising toward children under the age of 8 were curtailed, it would not begin to examine the insidious relationship that has evolved between food producers and media conglomerates.

The very lucrative relationship between far-reaching Hollywood studios and conglomerate food manufacturers does not end at the drive through window. When a marketer like Pepsi can “pony up \$30 million for a single tent pole movie” then how are child consumers not supposed to identify *The Hulk* with a myriad of food products tethered to the movie’s 2003 premier (Ebenkamp, 2003, p. 1). “*Pepsi* gives *The Hulk* a hand-up with an instant-win promotion on 150 million packages of its *Hulk*-hued Mountain Dew...Hershey also will tie in with POP for its giant green Bubble Yum chewing gum sporting the green menace” and “Banquet, Manwich, Chef Boyardee, Gulden's, Butterball, Pam and others will take part in a ConAgra Foods' blitz, for which *Hulk* will break out of 40 million packages” (Ebenkamp, 2003, p. 24). Advertising executives have begun speaking in terms of a “Level 10” of product placement, where “a show’s entire episode is written around the product” (McChesney & Foster, 2003, p. 3). One movie studio, Threshold Entertainment, actually produced a “Level 10” of full-length animated film titled *Foodfight!* which “incorporates thousands of products and character icons from the familiar packages of products in a grocery store” (McChesney & Foster, 2003, p. 5). The story is literally one of branded packaging characters: Chester the Cheetah, Dolly Madison, Twinkie the Kid, Charlie the Tuna, Mr. Clean, Mr. Pringle and Uncle Ben, among others band together to fight the evil ‘Brand X’ for control of the grocery store (McChesney & Foster, 2003, p. 5). Nothing could be craftier for food marketers than to insinuate that the innocent brands of major corporations are the literal hero’s of retail against the unknown or evil unbranded packages in the minds of young consumers.

Another trend in the industry has been the wholesale endorsement of snack food by professional athletes. Kraft foods began promoting the Double Stuff Racing League (DSRL) campaign in 2008. The campaign features television spots of two highly competitive sibling athletes, Peyton and Eli Manning and Venus and Serena Williams who have declared themselves entering “a second sport,” the sport of competitive cookie eating. Although these athletes are highly regarded in their respective sports, there is no hint of irony in the advertising to suggest that they actually compete in a recreation that would be detrimental to their professional lives. Never mind the notion that the role models for children and teens (professional athletes) are endorsing a food product that merits no health benefit at all.

How long have commercial food vendors been using brand and advertising chicanery to lull people into a false sense of healthfulness and reliability? At what point did consumers turn over the reins of their self-interest to corporate food manufacturers? The rise of advertising (and brand name commercial goods, including prepackaged foods) came in the advent of the industrial revolution in North America by the mid-1800s. “By using machines to mass-produce goods with uniform quality, large companies increased their productivity. For the first time, it cost people less to buy a product than to make it themselves” (Arens & Schaefer, 2007, p. 11). Breakfast cereals produced in Kellogg factories were one of the first commercial food items to reach local retailers. In a dissertation on food marketing and the power of branded products in the U.S. (1880-1920), Terri Lonier asserts that start up commercial food manufacturers like Coca-Cola, Quaker Oats, Proctor & Gamble and Crisco were able to “transform low-cost agricultural goods—oats, sugar, and cottonseed oil—into appealing, high-revenue branded food products” (Lonier, 2010) and were therefore able to “lay the foundation for iconic billion-dollar *brands*, and changed forever how Americans make daily food choices” (Lonier, 2010, p. 4826). The significance of this transformation in food distribution was not strictly won in economic terms. What the pioneers of commercial food production were realizing was a shift in American culture from a local lifestyle and economy to one in which families were traveling greater distances to find work in larger metropolitan areas – and branded products played a role in forwarding that movement in society. “...Branding fulfilled a need in a mobile, diverse, and nationalizing society—a society that in turn was partially shaped by an

economy dominated by national *brands*... and how they (brands) gained credibility and bolstered their images by incorporating scientific knowledge and authoritative health professionals into their marketing” (Lonier, 2010, p. 4826). By the 1920s, advertising, broadcast communication (radio and telephone) and national lines of distribution via railroad ensured that everyone in America had equal access to “new *brands* of consumer luxury and convenience goods” (Arens & Schaffer, p. 17, 2007) including packaged foods, hygiene products and cosmetics. With the advent of the Great Depression, advertisers had come on hard times. The easy selling of luxury products to affluent families dried up. Manufacturers, newspapers and advertisers, for possibly the first time, had to justify their existence for the cost of their use. And by the end of the Great Depression era, adding research, such as copy testing, consumer sampling and coupons to advertising promotions became the “secret ingredient” that ensured which advertising and branding tactics resonated with end users most effectively.

After WWII, many GIs were returning from the war with money to spend on burgeoning families back home. As American’s swiftly moved from large metropolitan cities toward the newly dubbed suburbs in the 1950s, they began living well and family discretionary spending grew as well. “By 1950 Americans were living better than at any other time in their history. From its crude beginnings in a few major markets, television set ownership grew from less than 10 percent household penetration in 1950 to more than 90 percent in 1960. At the same time, televisions advertising share increased 400 percent from 4 percent to 17 percent” (Russell & Lane, 2002, p. 18). And it wasn’t just televisions that Americans were buying with their post-war earnings. “Between 1946 and 1950, for example, Americans purchased 21.4 million automobiles, more than 20 million refrigerators, 5.5 million electric stoves, and 11.6 million television sets” (Stole, 2003, p. 67) Many of the products advertised at this time were directed at women, who made the majority of purchasing decisions for the family household. “Everywhere, consumer goods companies bombarded Americans with the notion that new equaled improved. Housewives, especially, were promised freedom from the drudgery of the past through technologically advanced gadgets of the Space Age. "Practically every ad from the period offers women products for the perfect cup of coffee or

the shiniest floors...All possible, of course, through the latest in modern technology" (Ebenkamp, 1997, p. 24).

"By the 1960's, television had forever changed both magazine and radio as advertising media" (Russell & Lane, 2002, p. 18). Broadcasters were eager to mold the image of the "ideal family" for American families via programming and advertising, with greater or lesser success. "In 1960, the stereotypical American family could still be summed up in Norman Rockwell's vignettes of a small New England village. It is white, middle class, homogeneous, and patriarchal. Families gathered together to eat, pray, and watch TV" (Oswald, 2003, p. 310). By the late 1960's the cracks in the façade of American idealism at home were beginning to show. Reflected in the cultural change that was brewing came a "creative revolution" in advertising. Legendary ad men Bill Bernbach, David Ogilvy and Leo Burnett in Chicago were changing how consumers related to products (from travel to food) with radical approaches to television and print media. David Ogilvy, thought of by many as the "father of modern branding" has been given credit for capitalizing on the *image* of a product over its tangible features. Ogilvy writes in his book *Ogilvy On Advertising*, "You now have to decide what 'image' you want for your brand. Image means personality. Products, like people, have personalities, and they can make or break them in the marketplace. The personality of a product is an amalgam of many things – its name, its packaging, its price, the style of advertising, and, above all, the nature of the product itself...Every advertisement should be thought of as a contribution to the brand image" (Ogilvy, 1985, p. 117). The shift from product features and advantages propagated by Claude Hopkins in the 1920s was now being usurped by a very seductive "brand image" via David Ogilvy's contribution to the industry.

Since the late 1960s, when brash advertising men were carving new inroads in the minds of consumers, advertising and the business of brands have continued to grow and transcend from product/service differentiators to cultural icons of multiple generations. "When a brand creates a myth, most often through advertisements, consumers come to perceive the myth as embodied in the product. So they buy the product to consume the myth and to forge a relationship with the author: the brand. Anthropologists call this "ritual action": When Nike's core customers laced up their Air Jordans in the

early 1990s they tapped into Nike's myth of individual achievement through perseverance. As Apple's customers typed away on their keyboards in the late 1990s, they communed with the company's myth of rebellious, creative, libertarian values at work in a new economy” (Holt, 2003, p. 44). The cultural power that brands can hold over a generation of consumers can be powerful and compelling. PepsiCo brand Mountain Dew is now a “\$5 billion brand, surpassed in size only by Coke and Pepsi” (Holt, 2003, p. 48) and much of the Mountain Dew brands’ financial gain has been attributed to its ability to read into the mood of American men at the time in their lives where they need to feel liberated and channel that spirit into a carbonated beverage.

And today, branding has had a meaningful impact on the bottom line of businesses in a global economy, making a branding component of a marketing mix a must in order to remain competitive. “The growing fascination for brand building and ownership is manifestation of deeper level changes that the business system has undergone in the last three decades. It would take a probing eye to reach beyond the surface to appreciate how the concepts of value and the value creation process have drastically changed overtime. The managers who continue to hold on to the previous learning take the risk of being outmoded by the ones who are quicker to unlearn the past and learn the realities of the present and future” (Verma, 2007, p. 27). Some of the most successful companies today are embracing this new phenomenon and way of doing business; Coca-Cola, Apple and Nike for example are three of the largest and most successful businesses and brands today. “A brand is an intangible but critical component of what a company stands for: *A brand represents a set of promises*. It implies trust, consistency, and a defined set of expectations. The strongest brands in the world own a positioning in the consumer’s mind that is unique to that brand and can be remembered by almost everyone” (Mullin, 2006, p. 38). There are some brands that become a part of our daily lives and change the way we feel about ourselves. And as brands have changed and become more complex since the 1960’s, so have our relationships to those brands. “Consumers are no longer looking to companies and their brands as authority figures. We can trace this shift back to the 1960’s. The Depression generation has had a strong belief in authority, largely because it was authority that got them out if it and authority that won two world wars. Since the far different experience of

Vietnam, authority has meant far less to consumers” (Kiley, 1998, p.36). Martyn Straw, President of *Interbrand Americas*, said the following as a part of an interview he granted to David Kiley for *Brandweek* in 1998. “The brands that have succeeded on imagination and ideas, such as Saturn, Nike and now Amazon.com have succeeded because they are brands ‘we want to be with’” (Kiley, 1998, p. 36). The role of brands today is more of an “emotional facilitator” for our passions rather than a product preference in a category. “Various parts combine to create a customer’s world. Customer mind, brain, body and external world influence one another in fluid and dynamic ways. At the fundamental level a product or service seeks to lift a customer from a less desired state to a desired state... This includes both the internal and external world; the functional and non-functional world; physiological and psychological world” (Verma, 2007, p. 32).

Many brands have now become multinational, which introduces a new set of problems for corporations to translate their brand identity across cultures and nationalities. In some cases, a foreign food brand, attempting to infiltrate a culture, may embed its product with local flavors in order to better assimilate with the local palette. “Coca-Cola, for example, has not only its global *brand* of colas but also several local and regional *brands* that cater to specific market tastes. In Turkey, Coca-Cola has introduced a pear-flavored drink and in Germany a berry-flavored version of Fanta” (Douglas, Craig & Nijssen, 2001, p. 104). A study conducted by Michelle Nelson demonstrated how product placement for (American) international brands in Indian cinema could have a detrimental effect on local culture. “While local media may offer a place for global marketers to socialize new customers, such additional commercialism may also give rise to negative social effects...the purchase of local brands and local pride could suffer as a result in a homogenous world culture based on international brands” (Nelson & Devanathan, 2006, p. 220). It is possible, in light of recent research, that international food brands could have an equally negative effect on local culture.

Brands can make a positive impact in a community by allying themselves to cultural and religious practices. This has been tackled by Coca-Cola, which has been working to raise its profile in the Asian community. The massive levels of consumption of the drink

among Asians, is partly because it is an alternative to alcohol. Coca-Cola has targeted Asian youths through a school cricket league. The brand sponsored equipment, promotions and prizes; it also used point-of-sale material in local retailers. As a follow-up strategy, the company linked promotions with Bollywood films and the Hindu festival of light, Diwali (Sharma, 2002, p. 36).

But, not everyone is excited about the prospect of corporations playing a “friendly hand” in the lives of children abroad. “A counter-culture is forming around the idea that the branding efforts of global consumer goods companies has spawned a destructive consumer culture. Standing in opposition to brands is no longer merely an anti-establishment badge for youth; it is a full-fledged social movement” (Holt, 2002, p. 70). And in the worst case, corporations are cultural merchants whose aim is to dominate the market and culture of another via slight marketing maneuvers. “Marketers are portrayed as cultural engineers, organizing how people think and feel through branded commercial products. Omnipotent corporations use sophisticated marketing techniques to seduce consumers to participate in a system of commodified meanings embedded in brands. Likewise, consumer culture is organized around the principle of obeisance to the cultural authority of marketers” (Holt, 2002, p. 71). But the ideas of emancipating ourselves from the lash of corporate sponsorship are much older than the brands they represent today. Frankfurt school scholars Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno prescribed a Marxist philosophy that would entail the denial of today’s modern branding techniques toward the masses. “Horkheimer and Adorno’s ([1944] 1996) chapter on what they term the ‘culture industries’ is the locus classicus for these ideas. They assert that the system of mass cultural production, a set of techniques for rationalizing culture as commodity, is the ideological glue that maintains broad consensual participation in advanced capitalistic society” (Holt, 2002, p. 71). They (Horkheimer and Adorno) aimed their arguments specifically at the mass culture industries that blossomed after World War II: television, consumer goods, music, film, and advertising. The modern era of consumer capitalism was the first to rely upon the ideological premise that social identities are best realized through commodities” (Holt, 2002, p. 71).

The new functions of branding and its effects have infiltrated cultures and the daily lives of average Americans, but imagine that the lives of some average Americans, in the eyes of advertiser's, are children. Children of all ages are exposed to complicated advertising messages meant to entice them to consume and train them to be savvy future consumers. "The explosion in recent years in media aimed directly at infants and toddlers, and the advertising that accompanies such media, the youngest members of our society are being exposed to more television and more advertisements than ever before....40,000 advertisements a year" (Connor, 2006, p. 1480). But television is not the only place where children interface with brand messaging. Parent's play a role in their lifestyle choices, as well. "For the most part, children in the 3- to 5-year-old age group cannot read, and yet many are picking up logos on a daily basis...Perhaps the presence of these logos is developing life-long loyalty to certain products." (Kinsky & Bichard, 2008, p. 2). One study demonstrated a strong relationship between brand preference and television viewing. "The study shows that children as young as two years old easily recognize brand logos, and that the amount of television they watch determines how much branding they can identify. Infants studies...were able to recognize eight out of twelve brands they were shown" (Burke, 2005, p. 10). And in a relationship between children and branded "fast food," there are data to support a negative health outcome.

Environmental changes have facilitated the rapid increase in childhood obesity. One such change is increased presence of food marketing which promotes intake of high-fat, energy dense foods. Food brand awareness was assessed by testing children's abilities to match food brand logos with correct foods and name specific brands from recall.

Overweight children consumed significantly more energy per meal than non-overweight children. Child age and brand awareness were positively associated. Overweight children showed greater responsiveness to food branding, and they may be at risk in environments that are highly inundated with messages about food (Forman, Halford, Summe, MacDougall & Keller, 2009, p. 82).

Yet another study conducted at Case Western University found, “Promotional spots on advertisement-supported (Nickelodeon) and sponsor-supported (Public Broadcasting Service and Disney) networks took similar approaches and used similar appeals, seeming to promote the equation that food equals fun and happiness. In 96 half-hour blocks of preschool programming viewed, the 3 stations (Nickelodeon, Public Broadcasting Service and Disney) had a total of 130 food-related advertisements that is an average of 1,254 food advertisements per half-hour of viewing. The over-representation of foods high in fat, sugar, and/or sodium is in keeping with findings from earlier studies” (Connor, 2006, p. 1478). Another research project published in 2010 analyzed 2,448.5 hours of children's programming across several countries and found that “in all countries, 23% of all food advertisements contained promotional characters, with a range of 9% (Italy) to 49% (United States)” (Kelly, Halford, Boyland, Chapman, Bautista-Castaño, Berg, & Serra-Majem, 2010).

Sugary cereals and fattening fast food are easy culprits to target for the rise of obesity in children. But, food producers and restaurants are not the only companies interested in tracking the money being spent on and by children and teens. “The amount of money spent on advertising during children’s television programming climbed past the \$1 billion mark for the first time in 1998” (Preston & White, 2004, p. 116). The amount of money being spent on children’s advertising demonstrates the number of corporate interests competing for the family budget.

Steady growth in the size and spending power of the children’s market has made it possible for marketers to look for ways to more efficiently target kids: initial segmentation has been along the conventional demographic lines of age and gender, but according to James McNeal (1992), further segmentation of the market was the key development of the 1990s. As advertisers differentiate the children’s market according to race and ethnicity, income, lifestyle, media use patterns, etc. and target narrower and narrower segments of the market (Preston and White, 2004, p. 116).

This demonstrates that the demographics of children as consumers have become much more pronounced over time. Given the data gathered concerning children and obesity, there is good reason to believe that as

children grow into their teens and twenties that their patterns of consumption will continue to be the same. We also know that the patterns of cognitive development in early childhood affect people throughout their lives.

Marketing efforts aimed at children are fueled by much well-funded research into the cognitive and behavioral effects of advertising on very young subjects. Pediatricians and other health care providers who are knowledgeable about the current state of advertising in preschool television can better encourage parents to follow the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics for families, that is, to limit television viewing time, to remove television sets from children's bedrooms, to monitor the shows that children are watching, and to watch television with children (Connor, 2006, p. 1485).

Aside from parents actively attempting to monitor the amount of programming that children watch on a daily basis and the quality of that programming, there is no other probable solution to prevent children from consuming (up to) hundreds of marketing messages a day through television advertising directed toward them specifically.

What effect would an unbridled stream of corporate messaging have on an impressionable mind concerning consumption as entertainment? Stuart Hall, the pioneering cultural studies scholar introduced a theory in the early 1980s about audience responses to television programming: Encoding and decoding. According to Hall's theory, "television production is a...series of codes and signs that are constructed in order to relay specific messages" (Neu, 2009). Hall sees the process of producing television content as a system of "production, circulation, distribution, consumption, reproduction" whereby the viewer completes the loop of transmission by reproducing the message via their own cultural experience. In this case, the intended audience, children, would be reproducing the message of consuming sugary and fattening foods for fun – as advertised on television. But, the intended "encoded" message from the advertiser must be accurately "decoded" by the viewer for the message to be correctly interpreted. And the *ultimate* meaning that is drawn from the viewer "...depends on the cultural background of the person. The background can explain how some readers accept a reading of a text while others reject it" (Spritus-

Temporis.com, 2005). Differing cultural backgrounds would explain why some children actively engage in the consumption of media heartily while other see the media as an entertaining phenomenon but do not necessarily “buy in” to the culture of the product. The tagline, *Trix are for kids* might lead some children to believe that the breakfast cereal is formulated specifically *by* and for children; or purchasing a full line of *Hannah Montana* apparel and accessories will allow them to accurately decode the message that buying these items will bring them closer to identifying with or emulating the lifestyle of the pop star. There are also data to support that not all children are equally resistant to decoding the messages as prescribed. When studying the amount of television advertising directed toward adolescents along racial lines, “the proportion of advertising exposure to food products was 14% greater for African-American versus white adolescents” (Powell, Szczypka, & Chaloupka, 2007, p. 255). This statement suggests that African-American youth watch more television on average than white children, but that can hardly explain the difference in volume of unhealthy products directed to children of color.

As children get older and their preferences and tastes develop and become more sophisticated, so does the branding that accompanies their respective products. “Today’s teenagers are ahead of their elders when it comes to understanding sophisticated branding in advertising and media messaging” (Brandweek, 2008, p. 7). “Fast-food, phones and cars--three of the essentials in any teen’s life. And three categories that aggressively pursue that young consumer... a good first experience with a brand is important for these young consumers who are continuously bombarded with marketing messages” (Advertising Age, 2005, p. 4). As children who grew up with favorite brands grow into adolescent consumers, their brands are right there to help them make that transition in life. And, as technology progresses into mobile devices, marketers are finding more and more prevalent and instantaneous routes to a teen’s mind and wallet. “The unprecedented ability of digital technologies to track and profile individuals across the media landscape, and engage in ‘micro’ and ‘nano’ targeting, raises the twin specters of manipulation and invasion of privacy. The growing use of neuropsychology research suggests that digital marketing will increasingly be designed to foster emotional and unconscious choices, rather than reasoned, thoughtful decision making” (Chester & Montgomery, 2008, p. 12).

For the most part, the brands their parents found most desirable are often times the favorites of the youngest generation of consumers. “From Coca-Cola to CoverGirl, many of the favorite brands of today are the same as yesterday...other veteran brands, like McDonald’s, Nike, MTV and Seventeen, also were tops” (Hein & Newman, 2008, p. 25). “Youth friendly products” are aimed at children and/or their parents, and very adult products are also crossing over into the lives of adolescents. “By the time children reach the sixth grade, alcohol advertising has made a significant impact, according to a study by RAND. While previous studies have found that television advertising influences youth, a RAND survey of over 1,700 South Dakota sixth graders found that young teens are also affected by magazine and radio ads, as well as by marketing in the form of promotional items, such as t-shirts and hats...as early as seventh grade, 17% of children reported that they had consumed beer in the past year. By eighth grade, this number had jumped to over 50%” (The Brown University Digest of Addiction Theory & Application, 2007, p. 241). And there may be similar anecdotal data to support the notion that teens’ smoking habits are similarly mirrored based on advertising that is targeted to adults.

In spite of the propagation, exploitation and targeting of children as "mini-consumers," there is some evidence to show that traditional branding approaches may not be having the desired effect on today’s young people – they may be thinking for themselves. “Teens look to the media and celebrities to pique their interest in new brands, but they won’t buy the brand just because their favorite celeb uses it – they want validation from local peers” (Advertising Age, 2005, p. 4). And generation Y seems to be the least interested and most resistant to being sold to directly.” These teens might not care about brands at all. Some 78% of college students feel people place too much emphasis on brands, and only 46% said brand names were helpful when making their purchasing decisions. They want products and services that speak to them on a personal level, and have more of a niche feel and appeal” (Brandweek, 2008, p. 7). “Teens crave personal independence; they desire to have truly “private lives, and appreciate the ownership they have over their cell phones” (Brandweek, 2008, p. 7). This trend seems to be the case across the board for Gen-Y consumers who have become accustomed to customizable options for their

favorite products. “Today’s teens are light years ahead of their elders in understanding sophisticated branding and media messaging” (Brandweek, 2008, p. 7).

Finally, today’s uber-savvy teens thankfully value what the media have to offer by way of entertainment and news, but find little value in being intruded upon while accessing their private lives online. “The campaigns come as there’s mounting evidence that teens are skeptical about advertising messages via social media and that Facebook is losing its appeal among the demographic as older consumers sign up” (Glowatz, 2009, p. 7). To put a fine point on it, “teens don’t want to be bugged too much!” (Brandweek, 2008, p. 7).

Given that there are data that supports that there are serious health risks associated with poor dietary choices on the market today, it is possible that deceptive health claims may be aiding teens in consuming inexpensive and convenient foods that are high in sodium, fat and sugar. According to data from brand analysts, teens may be veering away from traditional marketing messages and brand loyalty, out of what Stuart Hall would call an *oppositional* read to the marketing message of healthfulness and liberating their minds from the confines of prescribed behaviors of consumption which would be detrimental to their health. The next logical step would be to talk to teens about their views of marketing messages of healthfulness on packaged foods and determine if they are in fact influenced by said messages or if they are giving a *preferred*, *negotiated* or *oppositional* read to the medium (Davis, 2004, p. 61). The purpose of this research study is to designed to do just that.

Through talking to teens about their attitudes and understanding of health messaging on prepackaged foods, the researchers are attempting to address the power relationship between prepackaged food producers and teen-age consumers. Whether the claims of *healthfulness* are true is of interest to the researchers involved, and cannot be qualified in this study. Furthermore, the belief, validity or inherent nature of “truth” in health claims will be assessed by the teens. The inherent “truth” of health claims, as set by the standards of the FTC and FDA are outside the purvue of this research study.

The research questions are as follows:

1. Is it possible to adapt Stuart Hall's Encoding and Decoding theory into a model that can be used to assess advertising messaging from the consumer's perspective?
2. Are teens aware that health claims exist on prepackaged foods?
3. Is there a clear "read" between the authorial intent of messages of *healthfulness* on packaging and teens' attitudes about healthy food choices?
4. Are teens influenced by marketing messages on packaging with phrases like "all natural," "sugar free" or "whole grain," and do they presume that these messages equate healthy eating or making a healthy choice for themselves?
5. Do the health claims ultimately affect teens' intent to purchase food items based on *healthfulness*?

Chapter Three: Methodology

Overview

This research project adopted Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding theory to induce a comparative analysis using comments from participants during focus groups in defense of Hall's *preferred*, *negotiated* and *oppositional* reads.

This research met the strict definition of category interpretation, and the results used the interpretive process but not without objective criteria. The results of comments from focus participants were registered by the following criteria:

1. A *preferred read* would be categorized when a participant agreed with authorial intent or if they had no idea that there was any underlying intent.
2. A *negotiated read* would be categorized by a participant acknowledging authorial intent to persuade yet still purchasing or consuming product. Even with a different experience from the claim.
3. An *oppositional read* must have consisted of two parts, considering the age and aptitude of the participants. First, the participants did not believe, in any part, the validity or "truth" of a statement or fact regarding the product or its promotion. Second, a participant was not persuaded by health claims and did not actively engage in the consumption of the product as a means of personal liberation from corporate food processing. I.e. the participant chose not to participate in the consumption of any commercially processed foods as a personal statement against the food industry.

Research Design

The focus groups were conducted in the fall of 2010 with a random sampling of 21 teens, 15-17 years old from a local high school. Each focus group was to be conducted in an enclosed environment away from other class activities and to last for no more than 50 minutes. The researcher conducted 4 independent focus groups with teens (5 or 6 per group) to determine *if and when* teens were aware of

health claims in packaging, whether they were affected by said claims, and to determine the importance of brand recognition in their understanding/belief of claim authenticity. The ultimate purpose of the focus groups was to analyze teen's attitudes, understanding and acceptance of health messaging on prepackaged, branded food products, although their understanding of the study was limited during the focus groups.

Participants were given the opportunity to select from a list of marketing messages (health claims included) for a fictitious beverage product designed by the primary researcher to test which marketing messages they would find most compelling, if they were in a position to market the product to their demographic themselves.

The first task of the focus groups was to allow teens to develop marketing messages for the fictitious brand of energy drink: *Action!* The participants were told the energy drink was being marketed to their age group and that they were to choose what they felt were the "best" or "most compelling" marketing messages to be incorporated on the package.

Participants had up to 5 minutes to review the list of materials to choose **no more than 5 and no less than 3 messages to incorporate on their product package**. Participants were provided with a paper that included a pre-drawn rendering of the product package and the following information printed on the rendering (to meet regulatory standards):

1. Product Name: *Action!*
2. Specified product as an "energy drink" beverage.
3. Specified 8.4 fl. Oz.
4. Specified product flavor: "Tropical Punch Flavor."

The paper had the following list of "marketing messages" for the participants to choose from (in no particular order of preference or dominance):

- a. TASTES GREAT!
- b. ONLY 29 mgs of CAFFEINE!

- c. LOW SODIUM!
- d. SUGAR FREE!
- e. NO CARBS!
- f. Loaded with VITAMIN B!
- g. Made with REAL FRUIT JUICE!
- h. ONLY 100 CALORIES!
- i. 100% ENERGY!
- j. No additives or Preservatives!
- k. 10 HOURS of energy per can!
- l. NO CRASH!
- m. PREMIUM BEVERAGE!
- n. _____ (add your own health claim).

After participants were given time to choose their “marketing messages” from the above list, a short discussion followed to determine which messages the teens found to be “best” or “most compelling” and why. Also, the discussion attempted to determine if the teens considered the validity of the marketing messages, particularly in conjunction to their “healthfulness” and whether the “healthfulness” of such claims were important to them as (potential) marketers of the fictitious product, as well as potential consumers of the actual product in the same category.

The following discussion guide was used when polling participants as to their choices: *Which marketing message did you choose first? Why?*

1. Which of the messages from the list did you think were most relevant for the product?
2. Would it matter to you (if you knew), while designing the package, that some of the claims were not “entirely true?”
3. If these messages were not “entirely true,” would that change your perception of the product?

4. Does it bother you to know that most of the food products that you purchase at the grocer are made by a handful of corporations?
5. If you could change one thing about the way you bought food from the grocery store, what would it be?

The teens were then shown a bevy of prepackaged food products from the following food categories; breakfast cereal, protein bar, meal replacement shake, energy drink, fruit snack, fruit drink, individually wrapped cake and frozen dinner, See Figures 1-8, (p. 55-62). The products were purchased by the primary researcher at a local grocery store with a focus on selecting food products with the following criteria:

1. All food products must be prepackaged and sealed.
2. All food products should be purchased at a price-point which would match the budgets of participants (if they were shopping for themselves).
3. All food products must be purchased from an area grocery store that would be easily accessible to the teens themselves.
4. All food products must have an identifiable brand name (preferably branded food products from categories that would be easily recognizable to participants).
5. All food products must incorporate at least one clearly identifiable “health claim” on the front of the package.

Next, the focus group’s attention was fixed on the panel of prepackaged, branded food products. The food products were arranged randomly and reassembled in different order between focus groups to control for any inadvertent product associations (by proximity). The food products were no more than 7 feet from the participants to ensure that participants could easily read the messages on the packaging as well as assess the quality of the products’ presentation. All products were placed, at eye level, front facing and under even lighting.

The following questions were used as a discussion guide by the researcher to assess the teens’ attitudes about the line of food product packaging:

1. Do you recognize these food items?
2. Do you eat any of these on a regular basis?
3. When looking at this packaging, *what do you see first?* What strikes you about this packaging?
4. Do you notice any health claims? What are they?
5. What do you think that claim means? Do you *believe* it is true?
6. What do you think it means when it says “meal replacement?” Is this the same as eating a full meal?
7. If you consume a prepackaged food product that claims to be “made with real fruit,” is it the equivalent of eating real fruit?
8. Have you bought something recently because it had a health claim on it? What was it?
9. Do health claims matter to you? Does it factor into whether you buy or eat something over something that doesn’t have the same message?
 - Further discussion may ensue.

Sample

Before the focus groups were conducted, the researcher was introduced to the students by a faculty member at the high school. The researcher identified himself as a graduate student from a mid-major university and alerted students of their rights as human study participants. The focus groups were conducted in the high school facility with permission from the county and high school administration, school Health and Civics educators, and the participant’s parents (consent forms). Appropriate school facilities provided by the high school were secured and away from the larger student population to protect the anonymity of participants and to account for any unnecessary distractions for participants during the 50-minute period. At no time were participants identified by name or likeness – only by gender. There was no risk of harm to participants at any time before, during or after the focus group.

The sessions were video recorded and transcribed by the researcher (with the consent of the school, parents and students beforehand). The videos will be destroyed in one year's time following the conclusion of the study.

To solicit a higher level of participation from the students, the researcher personally contacted faculty at the designated school to guarantee extra credit in class for any students who participated in the study. Parental consent forms were completed prior to the date of the interview and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was necessary prior to application of the study.

Chapter Four: Findings

Focus groups were concluded in November, 2010 at XYZ's high school, which was the closest high school in proximity of the university. In the four focus groups conducted, 21 students participated in the research study; 10 students were male, 11 were female. Three groups were comprised of 5 students and one group had 6 students present. All students in the study participated equally in the discussions during focus groups. The students were randomly selected by the Economics and Health teachers at XYZ high school, and there was a mix of Caucasian, African-American and Milano students, as well as one international student (nationality not known). All students participated on a voluntary basis and received some additional class credit from their instructors for participation. No further compensation was given to the students for their participation.

The first part of the research study asked the participants to collect marketing messages from a list of options based on what they thought would be most appealing to consumers of their age demographic. Of the 15 messages offered, #15 being "add your own claim," only 13 were selected by participants. Of the marketing messages, "No Crash" was most popular with 16 of the 21 students selecting it as most important in marketing an energy drink. "100% Energy" and "Tastes Great" were second and third most popular selections with 13 and 12 participants of 21 choosing those as being most important. See table 2, (p. 54).

Of the fifteen marketing messages presented, "Only 29 mgs of caffeine" and "Premium Beverage" were the only two messages not selected by any participants. Only one participant opted to "add your own claim" writing, "All Natural". See table 2, (p.54).

Upon completion of the energy drink exercise, the participants were queried about their understanding, knowledge and interest in the prepackaged foods and the health messages posted on the packaging. Of the nearly four hours of transcribed sessions with the 21 participants, there 21 specifically identified instances of "reads" per the researcher's interpretation of Stuart Hall's definition. All 21 reads were cross-checked by the primary researcher and were encoded by three other independent coders who were knowledgeable of Stuart Hall's theory, as well as the intent of the study.

Of the 21 potential reads, there was 100% inter-coder reliability in 7 reads (33%). There were 7 reads of 75% inter-coder reliability (33%), and there were 7 reads with 50% inter-coder reliability (33%). There were no reads with less than 50% inter-coder reliability. Of the 7 reads with 100% inter-coder reliability, three had a “preferred” read (2, 13 and 18) and four were “negotiated” reads (9, 12, 14 and 15). There were no reads of 100% inter-coder reliability with an “oppositional” read. See Table 1 (p. 63).

Of the 7 reads with 75% inter-coder reliability, five were “negotiated” (1, 10, 11, 20 and 21) and two demonstrated “preferred” (reads 7 and 19). There were no reads with 75% inter-coder reliability for “oppositional” reads. See Table 1 (p. 53).

In the 7 instances in which 50% inter-coder reliability was achieved, five were defined as “oppositional” (4, 5, 6, 8 and 16). Read 3 had a 50% reliability of a “negotiated” read and Read 17 was either “preferred” or “negotiated” (50-50). See Table 1 (p. 53).

There was a total of 84 inter-coder reads (21 instances x 4 coders). Forty-one were “negotiated” reads (48%), 25 were “preferred” reads (30%), 11 were “oppositional” (13%), and 7 were “unreadable” (8%). See Table 1 (p. 53).

It would be impossible for the inter-coder findings to be relevant without showing the statements made by the participants themselves, which are considered worthy of analysis. See Appendix for details, (p. 63). Participants are noted strictly by their numbers in the focus group (1 – 6) and their gender.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Summary of Findings

R1: Is it possible to adapt Stuart Hall's Encoding and Decoding theory into a model that can be used to assess advertising messaging from the consumer's perspective?

Based on the 21 definitive reads procured from participant respondents, the answer to research question one was *yes*. See Table 1 (p. 53). Of the five focus groups conducted, and 21 teens polled, there was sufficient evidence to show that Dr. Hall's Encoding and Decoding theory could be translated into primary advertising research.

Although Hall initially introduced the Encoding and Decoding theory in 1980 with an eye toward television discourse, the researchers have expanded the comprehension of this theory and its power to the field of consumer advertising research. There is evidence of the flexibility of this theory when it has been utilized in other areas of communication research far afield from traditional media criticism. For example, in 2009, Devendra Sharma and Manisha Mishra presented materials to the National Communication Association regarding the Encoding and Decoding theory in addressing discourse surrounding HIV/AIDS in rural Indian societies. In their study, the positive use of encoding and decoding as a communication tool was productive in "HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support among the rural population" (Sharma & Mishra, 2009). Given that such recent data have supported that the encoding and decoding theory is gaining traction in communication studies (more broadly) it is appropriate that the theory be used, albeit experimentally, in this instance.

R2: Are teens aware that health claims exist on prepackaged foods?

Based on the findings from the four focus groups conducted with the teens, the answer to research question 2 would be *yes and no*. One of the first exercises in the focus groups was to ask a panel of teens to focus on the front of a package for 2 or 3 seconds and then describe what they "saw first." In the case of the *Trix* breakfast cereal, all of the teens polled said that they saw either "the rabbit" or the word "*Trix*" first. When the researcher asked the first group of teens if they noticed the large swath of health claim

across the front of the box, one male participant said it was the “third or fourth thing you see.” Another young woman said, “It’s like you see it but you don’t read it. It’s kind of like, there.” When the participants were asked if they noticed that the health claim was on the box front twice, they responded that they “didn’t notice that at all.”

Another reason as to why the teens were not registering the health claims associated with the products was because they, **a. did not have adequate knowledge to qualify the claim,** **b. presumed that the health message was not directed at them,** or **c. did not trust the inherent quality of the health claim itself (part C will be answered in R3).** There is evidence to support the notion that the teens did not know how to interpret or translate the health claim messaging. When a group of teens was asked what “zero trans fat” meant one of the female participants said, “I don’t know, there’s no fat in it?” When a female participant was asked what “seven essential vitamins and minerals” meant on a *Hot Pockets* box, she responded “It’s good for ya.” These types of responses epitomized the bulk of the answers given when teens were asked about the specific health qualities of vitamins, fat and calories. The teens demonstrated a baseline understanding that the health claims were positive but were unable to communicate anything more substantial.

The second focus group had two self-proclaimed male athletes who were better able to articulate the virtues of certain vitamins and health qualities in the food products. The *MetRx Big 100 Colossal Protein Bar* was a product that they were both familiar with and had admitted using before. “It really is good. I’ve had it before, just for like, after weight lifting or before...” When they were asked if a health claim of “32 grams of protein” was a good serving of protein for that product, they responded “yes” but they did not elaborate as to how they knew that was an appropriate amount of protein per serving.

Of the 21 teen participants interviewed in the focus groups, only two were able to articulate in isolated instances what the specific qualities of food products were or *why* they were important. When a young woman from the first group was asked if she considered the *Banana Nut Muffins* healthy, based on

the fact that they were muffins, she said, “Like, possibly...because, like they have bread and like fiber in it.” When the group of teens was asked if they had recently eaten *Hot Pockets*, most adamantly admitted to having consumed the product within the past month. One young woman, however, said that she did not eat *Hot Pockets* because “It probably has a lot of preservatives to be, like, in freezer for a while...like when you eat it, it has junk.” In another instance, the teens were asked about sodium content in prepackaged foods, and if they knew why that would be a bad thing. The same young woman said, “Yeah. Like, it could cause, like, high blood pressure and cholesterol and stuff like that. It’s just, all around bad.”

Another young man from the second focus group was also able to articulate why some dietary precautions should be observed when making food choices. His accent indicated he was probably either a foreign exchange student or a first-generation born American in his family. He was most interested in what the health claims said exactly, and he was able to define some of the parameters of the health claim. When a group of teens was asked if they ever looked at the nutritional facts on the back of the box, 4 out of 5 teens said *no*. One young woman in the group said, “I just look at the back to look at how to make them.” But this young man was different from the other teens. He said that what he looked for on the back of the box was “Um...firstly...um...calorie count above anything else.” It was then affirmed that “calorie count” was *important to him* and he said yes. Then he said, “secondly the ingredients.” The young man did not say exactly why those qualities were most important or how where he learned to check for the content of the products. If there was an opportunity to interview this young man singularly, a great deal could have been learned about his family or country of origin and how he accumulated his nutritional knowledge.

In one other instance of knowledge of vitamins and nutrients, a focus group was asked about the health claims on the *Jillian Michaels Meal Replacement Shake*. When the group was asked if the health claims of “low calorie, excellent source of fiber and rich in B6, B12, and antioxidants” were important, the young man answered, “The B12 is going to give you the energy.” This statement was another of the rare examples in which a participant was able to articulate the specific benefit of a vitamin or mineral

supplement in a beverage or food product. What another young man said following this statement was more accurate as to how the teens perceived their need for first-hand knowledge of health claims on packaging, “I mean, honestly, most people don’t understand the use of those vitamins anyway, so they are just going to read it and automatically – I mean it can say that it has ‘vitamin C4’ in it and they’d be like ‘oh yeah, C4, I need that...’” Aside from the one young woman and young man of dark complexion, the teens demonstrated no specific knowledge of nutrition or how to discern the quality of the health claim. Moreover, they assumed that the health claim was true because vitamins are good and that fat is bad. Or as the one young woman with a rudimentary understanding of nutrition put it, “It’s like the fat that makes you...it’s not like the good fat. Well, like there’s good fat and bad fat and the trans fat’s the bad kind...” The complicity of the teens in these instances demonstrates an underlying *preferred read* of the health claims, because they do not have the knowledge or intent to decipher the claims validity or strength.

The second component of establishing the teens not noticing the health claim is that they presumed that the health messages on the packaging were not intended for them. In nearly every product shown, which clearly stated a health claim, the teens did not indicate that they saw themselves as the intended target for any of the *health messages*, although they certainly could have been. When a female teen participant was asked if she ate *Trix* because it had “whole grain or has real calcium in it,” she said, “Maybe my parents buy it because of that, but, I mean I don’t...” The same group of teens were asked about specific health claim call outs at the top of the *Trix* box, “120 calories,” “0 Trans Fats” and “artificially flavored fruit flavored sweetened corn puffs”. The following exchange occurred:

Researcher: “*Who is that for?*”

Participant 4 (girl): “Adults or...”

Participant 2 (guy): “Old people...”

Participant 4 (girl): “People on a diet. Or, not saying people who are on a diet but...”

Participant 5 (girl): “Maybe if you are just watching what you eat. Counting the calories every day and watching what you eat...”

From similar responses from the teens about products which they liked, although the product might be targeting them, the health messages on that product were not.

One of the surprising results of polling the teens as to whom they thought the products were marketed to was the *Apple Crisps*. The teens in all four focus groups responded that they thought that the *Apple Crisps* marketed to “Mom's.” One teen said that it looked like a “good snack that you would give to your kid, to put in their lunch.” There was no evidence from the packaging that the *Apple Crisps* were intended for any particular audience possibly, for a consumer searching for a healthy snack. Another case of mixed marketing messaging, or messaging to more than one audience, came with the *Trix* breakfast cereal. One young man, describing the *Trix* cereal box message put it this way, “I think the whole rabbit and the colorful logo is more related to the children and the whole grain and calcium is more to the adults.”

R3: Is there a clear “read” between the authorial intent of messages of healthfulness on packaging and teens attitudes about healthy food choices?

Based on the data set from the research project (see Table 1), of the twenty-one definitive possible reads, seven were *conclusively matched* by four independent coders. Aside from the twenty-one specific instances of *preferred*, *negotiated* or *oppositional* reads from the participants, there was secondary, anecdotal evidences that supports the notion that the participants were making judgments about the degree of validity of the claim in their minds, but that the persuasiveness of the claim was underscored by the *brand name* of the food product that proported it.

The first task that the teens were given before interviewing them about the panel of pre-packaged foods was to have them choose marketing messages for a fictitious Energy Beverage: *Action*. See table 2 (p. 64). “No Crash” and “Tastes Great” were highly popular choices because, as one teen said, “Because if it tastes bad you wouldn’t buy it.” Same was true of “no crash.” The participants said many of the energy drinks they had tried *did* have a crash, and if there were a new product on the market that

advertised having “no crash,” that would be a great selling point. None of the most frequently chosen responses indicate any authorial intent on their part specifically. They, instead, appear to be choosing the most practical advantages for their product for the market.

In regard to the *Action! Energy Drink* exercise, there was a marked difference for teens when they were asked “if it mattered to them if the claims were true?” There was a short pause after the question was directed toward the first group and the responses were, “yeah” and “sorta.” One young woman said, “Yeah, I mean, you can't – well, you can't sell something that's not true.” These types of responses from teens were recurring several times in the interview process. Some teens consistently voiced that the health claims *had* to be true because it would be illegal to post anything on a package that was not true. Other teens took more of an oppositional view toward the companies who produced the packaged foods, suggesting that they would not tell the truth in order to sell more of their products. In one exchange, the primary researcher asked the teens if *they* believed that *Trix* was a good source of calcium? One female participant responded with, “I don't know, it could vary, because, like, it could also be the company trying to sell you their product and saying ‘hey, our product has whole grain and calcium. Buy me, so I can feed it to your children.’” A follow up question was asked: *Do you think that General Mills would lie about their health claim?* Two female participants responded with, “I think that they would” and “Yeah, I think that they have enough money.”

The most marked example of the teen participants voicing consistent doubt about authorial intent was when the researcher asked the participants if, as a personal spokesman for the companies that produced the food products, if their *personal endorsement* of quality and validity carried more or less weight in their minds than the packaging did. The following is an excerpt from one of the conversations:

Researcher: “*Okay, let me put it to you this way. Let's say I'm the rep from MetRx brand, and I'm the guy who makes these. And I am telling you, RIGHT NOW, that personally, I will endorse this and I will tell you that it's got no artificial flavors, no artificial colors. Does my personal selling*

make any difference in your mind?"

Participants: **No!** (Forcefully)

Researcher: "*No?*"

Participant 5 (guy): "You are trying to sell us your product."

Participant 4 (guy): "Yeah..."

Researcher: "*Am I?*"

Participant 5 (guy): "Yep."

Researcher: "*I would do that?*"

Participant 1 (guy): "Yeah."

Researcher: "*Is that wrong?*"

Participants 1 (guy): "Yeah."

Participant 4 (guy): "No."

Researcher: "*Is it?*"

Participant 2 (girl): "It's false advertising."

Participant 1 (guy): "In business, you're trying to make money."

Participant 3 (guy): "It's just business."

Researcher: "*It's just business? It's not personal, right?*

I don't dislike you guys or anything."

Participant 2 (girl): "Umm-hmmm..." (suspicious)

Participant 3 (guy): "They don't really care about-they just argue-"

Participant 1 (guy): "They're trying to stand out."

Participant 3 (guy): "They're just trying to make money. Because they can make it look good, so they will buy it, then make it taste good even though its not that good for you and then you keep buying it."

Participant 1 (guy): "Like what they do with tobacco products."

Researcher: “*Is it the same thing, with tobacco? Emphasize the good, and kind of ----*”

Participant 5 (guy): “Yep.”

In every instance in which the researcher played the role of company spokesman endorsing the product, it was met with rebuke. The teens presumed that, as a personal advocate for the company, that the allegiance of the researcher lies with the needs to sell the product, not necessarily to report the accuracy of product claims. The teens demonstrated a visceral and negative reaction toward the prospect of the researcher giving a personal endorsement on behalf of the company. It would appear from the course of the focus groups conducted, that the teens consented that they were in fact receiving persuasive messages from the food manufacturers, but that the health messaging did not permeate their consciousness.

Brand recognition and brand loyalty played a large part as to whether the teens believed or were influenced by the marketing messaging. When the teens were asked if they noticed any health claims on the *Hot Pockets* box, for example, they said “No.” Their responses were reinforced by their reported “love” for the product. For products that the teens already had a propensity for, they seemed willing to fore go scrutinizing the health claims of the branded packaged foods. Products like *Fuze* beverage and *Hot Pockets* (products very popular with the teens) were much less scrutinized by the respondents than products that the teens had less of a brand allegiance to. Other products that the teens were less familiar with or did not find as appetizing drew higher scrutiny as to the *validity* of their “healthfulness,” even if the products in the second category were (largely) a healthier choice.

In the fourth focus group, one young woman in particular was very suspicious about the authorial intent of a purported healthy product. When I asked her about the *MetRx BIG100 Colossal Protein Bar's* claim of being “naturally flavored” she balked, and said, “It's not true!” When asked her how it could *not* be true she said, “You have to have artificial flavors in chocolate bars.” From her response to the second question, it would appear that she was doubtful that although all of the ingredients may have been “natural” in the raw, the fact that the food had been processed to make the end product had contaminated

its claim of “healthfulness” in her mind. At the same time, when the same group was asked how much “fruit” was in a *Fuze* beverage, the same young woman said that “half” of the product was made with real fruit, (see Appendix, Read 19, p. 80). The other teens in the group echoed similar replies, anywhere from 50 – 85% of the product was made with fruit. When it was pointed out that the product packaging says that it only has “5% juice” the teens were despondent. When asked if the fact that the product had 5% juice instead of 50% juice affected their opinion of the product, they said no. This underscores the fact that the *Fuze* beverage held a higher degree of validity because it was familiar to them and they liked the product over the *MetRX BIG100 Colossal Protein Bars* that they were less familiar with.

The authorial intent was also challenged (or not) when the product's primary appeal was largely recognized without requiring an in depth analysis of “healthfulness.” The first group of teens interviewed were asked to describe what they saw first on a box of *Trix* breakfast cereal, then second, etc. All of the teens polled (over all four groups) were familiar with the particular product and nearly all of them had tried the product before, if not recently. In many cases, the teens said that either the “*Trix* rabbit” was most noticeable, followed by the word *Trix*, the spoon of cereal and the word “fruitalicious” that is featured prominently on the box. When asked what the word “fruitalicious” meant, the teens responded with “it means real fruit swirls,” “colorful,” or “different flavors,” which demonstrated that the fictitious word registered with them correctly (in the *preferred* sense). These statements demonstrated that if the teens were asked specifically about the health claims made that they were aware of them, but that the claims either did not register as highly as the recognition of the *Trix* brand name, the *Trix rabbit* or some other form of experience or advertising recognition. The fact that the product featured a term that was completely innocuous, “fruitalicious,” had no meaning to them as to the authorial intent. But once the teens were asked specifically to reconcile the disconnect between their experience or preference for the product and its claims of healthfulness, there was a breakdown in thinking. When asked if they believed the product was made with “naturally artificially fruit flavor” as advertised, the participants said no. One female participant said “It’s not real” and another young woman said, “Half real, half fake.” Other

participants were more articulate about their assessment of the products composition saying, “I mean, if it’s made out of grain, how much real fruit can be involved?”

R4: Are teens influenced by marketing messages on packaging with phrases like “all natural,” “sugar free” or “whole grain” and do they presume that these messages equate healthy eating or making a healthy choice for themselves?

The answer to this question, largely is “no.” They are not influenced by such marketing messages in part because they assume that said messages are not directed toward them (R2 - Part B). These types of responses are explained in part because the teens did not feel that they were at an age when diet was terribly important to their long-term health and well-being.

When a group was asked if they ever looked at the back of the box for nutritional content or additional health facts they said no. One young man said, “I’m sure that whenever I first decide to buy it I looked on the back of the box” to which another girl said, “I just look at how long it takes to cook it.” When pressed if they ever looked for specific ingredients or nutritional facts on the back of the box, the same girl said, “No, I don’t care.” One young man said that he didn’t have to worry about the sodium content in products because, as he put it, “Uumm...as far as health, uh, I really don’t find it that important mainly because I have teenage metabolism, so...I guess maybe later in life I will be more concerned with it...”

Some participants showed abject skepticism toward the notion that the product was remotely healthy. The teens were particularly skeptical of the protein bars and meal replacement shakes, not just the product’s claim of healthfulness, but also their inherent ability to produce the results as advertised. Their skepticism exemplifies what was uncovered by directly engaging the teens in *what they saw versus what they thought*. In many cases, it was clear that they saw the intended message while simultaneously holding a secondary opinion of the product in their mind. Examples of this behavior were shown when the teens were asked similar questions of authenticity of health claims between products that they

“liked/used” over products that they “didn’t like/ didn’t use.” For example, all of the teens sampled were familiar with *Hot Pockets* and many of them liked the product very much. Some participants claimed to “love” *Hot Pockets* and said they consumed the product on a regular basis. According to their responses, the healthfulness (or lack thereof) was not a factor in their positive associations with the product.

The *Hot Pockets* box clearly featured a burst that reads “0 grams trans fat per serving,” and when the teens were asked what that meant specifically, many indicated that they didn’t know but that it was generally a “good thing.” None of the teens questioned were able to articulate why trans fat was unhealthy, just that they knew that not having trans fat in a product was always good. Others would concede that even though it didn’t have trans fat, as claimed, that it certainly had other kinds of fat in the product. As one female participant said, “It probably has high regular fat, or like higher, like she said sodium or calories.” When the same participant was asked if she thought that by advertising the product had no trans fat that the consumer would be led to believe that this meant that the product had no actual fat? She said, “Not everybody thinks that. Not everybody-they just find it appealing. It’s a plus on the box.” This is an important distinction that was featured many times among products and the claims of healthfulness, particularly with a very popular product like *Hot Pockets*. The teens were saying they saw the health claim, and in many cases didn’t believe said claim but consumed the product in spite of its potential lack of nutrients because they believed more in the *product brand*. One young lady said that it did not matter what health claim was associated with the product she was going to consume because she liked the product. “It doesn’t matter, cause it’s a *Hot Pocket*.” When another female participant was asked if it mattered to her if she ate *Hot Pocket* brand over a “generic” brand of the same product, she insisted that it did matter to her. “Yeah, because cereal is just cereal...but the *Hot Pocket*, that makes a difference.” Even if I assured this participant that the products were made at the same site with exact same ingredients, she was certain that the *Hot Pockets* branded product would “still taste better.” When the focus group leader went so far as to suggest that if the product had a burst on the front of the box that included statements such as “*High In Sodium: 2400 mgs.*,” “*Heart Attack Ready*” and “*It’s like eating*

cigarettes,” the participants were not deterred. The participants acknowledged that such claims were far-fetched and would never be prominently featured on the product, but it does underscore their *negotiated* association between acknowledging that the product is not entirely healthy for them and the positive association that they have with their favorite brand name products. As one young woman said of *Hot Pockets* products, “People think that it’s good, so they’re going to eat it.”

In contrast, other products that did not have the same brand resonance or positive usage were met with a higher degree of skepticism. Negative responses are particularly interesting when the products which were met with most skepticism were the same products that were inherently the most healthy. The *Jillian Michaels Ultimate Shake* and the *MetRX Big100 Colossal* created the most direct *oppositional* reads from the participants. Some teens recognized Ms. Michaels from NBC’s *The Biggest Loser* program and saw her as “an inspiration” -- one girl explained to another that “she helps fat people lose weight,” a seemingly positive association, while others saw her as “just some girl” on the package. To some, she was seen as an authentic spokesperson for a protein shake, and to others she was a stereotype of what women *should* look like. In one instance, there was a directly *oppositional read* when a participant was asked if she thought that you could *look like* Ms. Jillian Michaels by drinking the product. “Her job is training... And I guarantee, she probably doesn’t drink those. If she does, it isn’t what makes her that way.” When asked if she thought that anyone could look like her if they used her product, the answer was no. Many of the teens questioned thought the product was being directly marketed to women because it had a picture of a woman on the package. As one female participant said, “There’s a girl on there and girls WANT that body.” Some indicated that if a male bodybuilder were featured on the same packaging that they would assume that the product were being marketed to men. Other participants indicated that they felt that promoting Jillian Michaels as a spokesperson was detrimental to women. One young man said, “It’s kinda why some girls gain depression, because they are not comfortable with, with their figure..or facial structure...or.” In all cases, the teens recognized that “you gotta do other stuff” in order to achieve the desired results of a perfectly trim body.

R5: Do the health claims ultimately affect teens intent to purchase food items, based on healthfulness?

When participants were asked about the particular vitamins and health messaging such as “high protein,” “low calorie,” “rich in B6, B12, and Antioxidants,” they were again unable to articulate what the exact effect that such nutrients would have but correctly received the *preferred* read that those were good qualities to have in a health food product. This response was generally true when teens were polled about the particular attributes of any given vitamin or nutrient on the body. With the exception of two participants, no teens queried were able to articulate why a vitamin or nutrient was essential and, in nearly every case, took it for granted that the mere mention of a proposed supplement was “good.” One of the two participants who stood out in her knowledge of nutrition was a young woman from the first focus group. Having no knowledge of her background or family life, she was able to articulate the difference between “good fat and bad fat” and how some nutrients and vitamins positively affected the body and in what ways.

A dark complexioned young man’s answers were *decisively different* from his American counterparts. He was able to speak quite intelligently about ingredients, serving sizes and portions. One example of this arose when a group was asked what they thought of a package of muffins that claimed to be “baked with Real Bananas and nuts” the emphasis being on the word “real.” The young man replied, “I don’t understand why it says made with real banana and nut because most of the fruits and stuff that they use are genetically modified.” His answer is not a huge departure from his teenage counterparts, but it does demonstrate discernment in materials that the other participants did not make. He was also the only participant who said that he always checked the back of the box for nutritional content and ingredients. When his group was asked about whether they considered *how much fruit* was in a product that claimed “made with real fruit” this gentlemen said, “Umm...I’m sure if I worried about it, if I worried more about what was inside rather than flavor... But I feel like consumers are more into the taste of things consequently than what’s inside appeals as much.”

Conclusion:

Based on previous research using Dr. Hall's Encoding and Decoding theory, along with the findings of this research study, there is reason to believe that Dr. Hall's theory could be expanded into the field of consumer research and development. The use of persuasive selling in advertising messaging could be adapted for use outside of Dr. Hall's initial intent of television discourse.

A surprising discovery in the course of the focus groups was the teen's awareness that they were being sold to by major corporations. When I asked the fourth focus group if they thought that they were "more or less susceptible to advertising messaging" they suggested that they considered themselves *more* susceptible. One male teen said he thought it was because "we grew up around technology." Another male participant in the same group made note that "we are young too," which meant they realized that, at their age, they had not developed a more critical eye for advertising messaging. When the teens were asked if they felt that advertising had an effect on them, their answers were mixed. Some asserted that they liked what they liked regardless of how it was advertised. "I am my own man" one teen said.

It was surprising to find that the teens reported that food and fashion advertising did not play largely in their desire for merchandise, and that their friend's tastes in such things weighed more than corporate messaging. When the researcher asked a couple of female participants when they became aware of wearing makeup, and they all said in sixth or seventh grade. Although they were quick to associate their awakening as young women with their friend's increased interest in wearing makeup, one young woman said she felt that the media did have some effect on her noticing women in public wore makeup and dressed up. "Um...I should say media influence, because from a young ...you know girls usually come from a grade six. And that's because you see other people doing it, they see TV people doing it. Whenever someone is at an event, Emmy awards, whatever, they have a lot of makeup, just a lot of nice clothing, elegant and all that."

Electronic devices, such as cell phones, were not an item that they were clamoring to buy or begging to receive as gifts. When the researcher asked if there was any product category that they felt did have a meaningful impact on their awareness and made them more likely to anticipate its purchase, there was one – *video games*. Both male and female participants emphatically said they were “very into” video game play and that, if they saw an ad on television for an upcoming video game release, it had an impact on their intent to purchase. According to one young man, “If you tell me there’s something on TV that’s going to blow up or shoot something, then I want it.” It was not surprising to find that a young man would be that excited about a video game release. What was surprising was that the girls in the focus groups were just as interested in violent video game play as well. When one girl was asked if there was a title that she was particularly interested in playing, she named *Black Ops*, the controversial and very violent first-person shooter. Participants were also quick to point out that children (younger than themselves) were much more susceptible to advertising messaging than themselves. A young lady in the third focus group cheerfully reenacted her performance at the site of a toy advertisement on television, “I have to have that and you just keep, like, bugging your Mom to get it.” This reaction is analogous with prior research that suggested that children as young as two years old are able to recognize and ask for branded food characters like Tony the Tiger, (Connor, 2006), which would make the case that young children were demonstrating *preferred* reads of authorial intent at a very early age.

On the face of it, such claims of inoculation from the effects of advertising would be a good thing for teen consumers. And, although there is research to suggest that Gen-Y consumers are savvier than their parents or grandparents, there is an under-current for concern as well. In many cases, the teens gave a *preferred* read to the marketing messaging on the prepackaged food. Upon further examination of the messaging, some of the participants were able to give a *negotiated* or *oppositional* read, but there is no evidence to support that the teens are ever truly liberated from the confines of corporate messaging in their dietary choices. In their own words, “my taste buds shop, not my brain.”

It is also interesting to note that convenience is one of the primary factors when purchasing food for themselves. Above nutritional content or ingredients was “the need for speed” when preparing their meals. When teens were asked who prepared their meals at home, many said that they cooked for themselves. Some students reported that one or both of their parents prepared meals for the family, but only if time permitted. A young woman responded, “My mom doesn’t cook, so...it’s either fast food or restaurant or out of the box.” Other students said that they preferred home-cooked meals over processed foods, but to them it was a luxury. “Grandma always makes the best food” reported a young woman, when asked under what circumstances she could expect a meal made from scratch. When I asked what her grandma made that was so special, she responded, “Uh, garden food...from the garden.” This statement demonstrates how differently the teens viewed the quality of their grandparent’s meals from food they prepared for themselves, and how their parents could be showing a generational difference away from traditional foods to more processed foods. Further research would have to be performed in order to determine if, in fact, older generations were more accustomed to growing and producing their own meals versus prepackaged, branded food items.

Such comments about a need for convenience and speedy food preparation led to another question for the participants. The focus group leader asked, “Do you know anybody that doesn’t eat food that comes ‘out of the box’? When you’re at home? Do your family, when you’re at home?...How much stuff that you guys eat comes out of a box?” One young man answered “93%.” He went on to say that both of his parents worked and he was left to prepare meals for himself in the evening, “So everything I cook is for myself, so...yeah, convenience matters, so most of it is out of the box.” When the participant was asked if he liked this prospect for his food choices, his response “What choice do I have?” His statement was the most alarming statement made by any of the teens during the focus groups discussions. This statement seemed to resonate fully throughout many of the teens comments about how they perceived food options. It is not that the teens were apathetic about nutritional value because they were so focused on convenience, it is more likely they did not see a viable alternative for themselves that did not “come out of the box.” With the exception of the one young man with a foreign accent, many of the teens

surveyed noted that they would “love to have that kind of time” to make a “real breakfast,” consisting of eggs, bacon, toast, etc. But, they also quickly wrote off such a possibility as a dream wherein they had unlimited time for such leisurely cooking. The young black man said, “If I really wanted to eat eggs for breakfast, I would go to the store the night before and purchase the eggs and set my alarm early enough in the morning to ensure that I had time to cook them.” His statement about planning one’s meals in advance would appeal to one’s common logic. If one wants eggs for breakfast then one should be prepared and make time for their preparation. But the logic did not seem to rest as easily in the minds of the other teen participants. In nearly every case, the teens appear to have succumbed to dull apathy wherein they only saw prepackaged foods as an option.

Finally, when asked if the participants would like to know how their packaged food was made, they said “No. It would lose some appeal,” noted one girl. “I know, I’ve watched documentaries” said another. When asked if they cared that a majority of the processed food that they ate was produced by a handful of major corporations, they said “No.” The researcher asked the teens in the fourth focus group at the end of the discussion, what they thought my purpose was in asking them about their opinions. “You’re gonna make the product...you’re going to tell them what we said that would make us want to buy it.” When the researcher asked the teen if he thought that it was okay to do that, he said “I don’t like to be lied to, but at the same time...” Her comment is yet another example of how the teens in these focus groups reported feeling powerless in the context of how they were being manipulated by advertisers. Although a couple spoke of “being their own man” for the most part, the teens demonstrated a *preferred* read based on perceived defeat in this arena.

These findings from the teen participants demonstrates a complex relationship with prepackaged food and its marketing messages. In many cases, the teens reported that the “health claims” on the box did little if anything to influence or change their view of the product. They bought based on what they liked and “what looked good on the box.” It would be of interest to expand this research project to a larger demographic to determine if the responses of the participants would be mirrored across a larger audience, or if their attitudes reflected a regional interest and knowledge about healthful foods.

In order of importance in selecting food items, the teens reported the following: **1. Brand recognition 2. Packaging photography 3. Price point and 4. Convenience.** If these criteria were not met at the retail level, the teens were not likely to purchase the food products for themselves. When a group of teens was asked if there were any brands or food products that they would go out of their way to purchase they couldn't think of any. After a short pause, a young man said “Ben & Jerry's” (ice cream).

As there was one young man with an accent that was foreign who had vastly different responses to the questions, it would also be interesting to expand this research project to include an international sampling of teens from varying parts of the world to determine if knowledge and interest in prepackaged food messaging changed from location to location, and if so, in what ways. Certainly, there are enough international food manufactures that distribute a line of products worldwide that could be tested over several regions for commonality or difference.

Limitations:

There are several limitations to this research project. Certainly, the researcher associated with this study did not intend to draw larger conclusions from four focus groups of 21 teens. If anything, this limited study may give rise to a much larger study that could be conducted among children and teens of differing regional demographics and ethnicity as well as extending this experiment to adult consumers.

This research project was conducted in a semi-rural community. Teen participants from more affluent or cosmopolitan areas could possibly have more access to foods and better food choices, which might lead to differing attitudes and responses regarding health messaging. Likewise, teens from other countries or communities might have different palettes for more or less fruit, more or less sugar, etc., which would affect their knowledge, attitudes and reception toward health food messaging.

Huntington, West Virginia, where this research project was conducted was named by the Associated Press as “America’s Fattest City” in 2008. This announcement was published in several major newspapers, coast to coast, and eventually caught the attention of celebrity chef Jamie Oliver and his film crew to record *Jamie Oliver’s Food Revolution*, which was broadcast nationwide on ABC. Although

Jamie Oliver and his program brought a great deal of attention to Huntington and its eating habits, this did not appear to affect the teens' responses during discussion in any way, but the fact that the show was filmed on location could have swayed the attitudes of teen participants by some degree.

Table 1

Inter-coder analysis of potential “reads” within focus group discussion.

Read types: Preferred, Negotiated, Oppositional and Unreadable.

	<u>Coder 1</u>	<u>Coder 2</u>	<u>Coder 3</u>	<u>Coder 4</u>
Read 1	Negotiated	Negotiated	Preferred	Negotiated
Read 2	Preferred	Preferred	Preferred	Preferred
Read 3	Negotiated	Negotiated	Preferred	Oppositional
Read 4	Negotiated	Preferred	Oppositional	Oppositional
Read 5	Unreadable	Oppositional	Oppositional	Unreadable
Read 6	Negotiated	Oppositional	Unreadable	Oppositional
Read 7	Preferred	Preferred	Unreadable	Preferred
Read 8	Negotiated	Oppositional	Negotiated	Oppositional
Read 9	Negotiated	Negotiated	Negotiated	Negotiated
Read 10	Negotiated	Negotiated	Preferred	Negotiated
Read 11	Negotiated	Negotiated	Preferred	Negotiated
Read 12	Negotiated	Negotiated	Negotiated	Negotiated
Read 13	Preferred	Preferred	Preferred	Preferred
Read 14	Negotiated	Negotiated	Negotiated	Negotiated
Read 15	Negotiated	Negotiated	Negotiated	Negotiated
Read 16	Unreadable	Negotiated	Oppositional	Oppositional
Read 17	Negotiated	Preferred	Negotiated	Preferred
Read 18	Preferred	Preferred	Preferred	Preferred
Read 19	Preferred	Preferred	Negotiated	Preferred
Read 20	Unreadable	Negotiated	Negotiated	Negotiated
Read 21	Unreadable	Negotiated	Negotiated	Negotiated

Table 2

Ranking of which “health claim” messages were most commonly to least commonly chosen by participants for fictitious ACTION Energy Drink.

1. No crash (16/21) 76%
2. 100% energy (13/21) 61%
3. Tastes great (12/21) 57%
4. Only 100 calories (12/21) 57%
5. Sugar free (10/21) 47%
6. Made with real fruit juice (10/21) 47%
7. Increased focus (7/21) 33%
8. 4 Hours of energy per can (4/21) 19%
9. No carbs (3/21) 14%
10. No additional or preservatives (2/21) 9%
11. Low sodium (1/21) 4%
12. Loaded with vitamin B (1/21) 4%
13. Add your own claim: All Natural (1/21) 4%
14. Only 29 mgs of caffeine (0/21) 0%
15. Premium Beverage (0/21) 0%



Figure 1: General Mill's *Trix* breakfast cereal. Purchased from Wal-Mart (WV), 2010.



Figure 2: MET-Rx *Big100 Colossal* protein bars. Purchased from Wal-Mart (WV), 2010.



Figure 3: Hostess Muffins, *Baked with Real Bananas & Nuts*. Individually Wrapped Muffins. Purchased from Wal-Mart (WV), 2010.



Figure 4: Jillian Michaels Ultimate Shake. Meal Replacement.

Purchased from Wal-Mart (WV), 2010.



Figure 5: *Rockstar Recovery (Energy + Hydration)*. Energy Drink.

Purchased from Wal-Mart (WV), 2010.



Figure 6: *Fuze (Peach Mango)*. Refresh Beverage.

Purchased from Wal-Mart (WV), 2010.



Figure 7: *Hot Pockets (Mexican Style: Jalapeno Steak & Cheese)*. Sandwich.

Purchased from Wal-Mart (WV), 2010.



Figure 8: Brothers-All-Natural *Crisps* (*Apple Cinnamon*). Fruit Snacks.

Purchased from Wal-Mart (WV), 2010.

Appendix

List of 21 potential “reads” from transcription of focus groups.

POTENTIAL READ 1:

Researcher: Okay, that’s right. So these both have check marks to indicate somebody has – marked this off on the list, right? We have indicated that these are certified good for you. Is that right? (Referring to check marks with associated health facts at the top of Trix cereal box).

Participants: Nodding in agreement.

Researcher: Do you guys think it’s true?

Participant 5 (girl): No. Not all the way, no.

Researcher: Not all the way?

Read 1: Participant 1 (girl): “I don’t see the Trix as being whole grain...cus, I don’t know, I just don’t see that as being whole grain. When I think of whole grain I think of...bread.”

POTENTIAL READS 2, 3 & 4:

Researcher: Okay. What does that mean if it is “all natural”?

Participant 3 (guy): “That it’s got real sugar, not sugar stuff.”

Participant 1 (girl): “No preservatives.”

Researcher: Do you think it’s true?

Participant 2 (guy): “No.”

Participant 4 (girl): “Yes.”

Read 2: Participant 4 (girl): “Because I don’t think that a company like that could be able to just put something out like that without having a lot of research and statistics to back it up.”

Researcher: Okay, good point. Why do you not think that it is true?

Read 3: Participant 2 (guy): “Because it could be just like anything else. Um, they put it on there to make it sell more...um...I mean no artificial flavors, no artificial colors. Then how did they get

everything and are they really going to work on that as big as big as actually getting the bar itself to look amazing.”

Researcher: We have two different sides. Who is on her side that says ‘somebody has checked this thing out, they can’t just put that on the box if it’s not true’. Do you think that’s true (to participant 1)?

Participant 1 (girl): “No.”

Participant 4 (girl): “I mean, I feel like they are not 100% true. I feel like they just –“

Participant 2 (guy): “I feel like both ways, like her.”

Read 4: Participant 4 (girl): “I feel like they don’t tell you everything about it. They just tell like, the good things, but, it’s still true, it’s on there.”

Participant 2 (guy): “Once she started telling about it, like, it could go either way really...”

POTENTIAL READS 5 & 6:

Researcher: What do you think of Jillian Michaels as a representative of a shake? Is she ...does she?..(Referring to Jillian Michael’s Ultimate Shake).

Read 5: Participant 4 (girl): “I don’t think that she is the worst thing...I mean,..I don’t think that people are going to look like that. I mean, she trains, probably...”

Researcher: So, if I drank these and did the workout tape, I couldn’t look like Jillian?

Read 6: Participants: “No.”

Researcher: Do you think that anybody could?

Participants: No.

POTENTIAL READS 7, 8 & 9:

Referring to the “0 Trans Fat” burst on the front of the Hot Pockets box.

Read 7: Participant 5 (girl): “If I had a *Hot Pocket* and if I had some other, different brand that’s a hot pocket and *Hot Pocket* said ‘0 Trans Fat’ and the other one didn’t I would probably go for that one just cause it sounds healthier.”

Researcher: Okay. Alright, so let's take a quick poll one more time, we're almost done. So, of the product that I am showing you, and I'm a representative of all these companies, and I am guaranteeing you that I am personally, I personally, I'm the guy that puts the check mark on the box, that's my job, is to check mark that it is quality

and I am telling you that these are absolutely healthy, you don't believe that?

READ 8: Participants 1 and 2: Shaking their heads, no.

Participant 5 (girl): Nu-uh.

Researcher: But you eat them anyway?

READ 9: Participants: "yeah."

Researcher: So, we'll identify this: So you don't believe that they're healthy, but you do eat them anyway.

Participants: Shaking their heads in agreement.

POTENTIAL READS 10 & 11:

Researcher: Do you think it's true? Do you think that this says 'it's a good source of whole grain and calcium'?(Referring to the health claim on the box of Trix cereal).

READ 10: Participant 3 (girl): "I don't know, it could vary, because, like, it could also be the company trying to sell you their product and saying 'hey, our product has whole grain and calcium. Buy me, so I can feed it to your children."

Participant 1 (girl): Why would General Mills lie?

READ 11: Participant 3 (girl): "I think that they would."

Participant 5 (girl): "Yeah. I think that they have enough money."

Participant 3 (girl): "I don't know...you never know..."

POTENTIAL READ 12:

Researcher: Let's say that I am a representative of Hot Pockets, and I'm Michael McAteer with Hot Pockets and I am wanting to change this package, for you Trevor, I want to say 'you're right! I'm not being completely honest and I want to tell you the truth about this. I'm going to put a bug on this that says 'High In Sodium: 2400 mgs' 'Heart Attack Ready', you know, 'It's like eating cigarettes'. If I was being completely honest with you, would that have any effect on you on the way that you perceived the product?

READ 12: Participant 4 (guy): “Well, I mean, honestly would probably still buy it because it's like going to McDonald's, you know. It's not like it got any better or worse.”

Researcher: Alright. You're a Hot Pocket enthusiast (speaking to Participant 3: girl who admitted earlier to loving Hot Pockets). If I put those true facts out there and I said, “look, you're right. High sodium. Heart attack ready, it's like eating cigarettes, would you still eat Hot Pockets? Would it deter you at all?

Participant 3 (girl): “I, I'd still buy it.”

POTENTIAL READS 13, 14 & 15:

Researcher: Okay, let me ask you this. Based on the product that I am showing you here...do you feel that generally, the health claims that they are making on here are true?

READ 13: Participant 5 (girl): “Yeah.”

READ 14: Participant 4 (guy): “For the most part. I feel like they're true, but they are also deceiving.”

Researcher: But, how could they be both? How could it be true and deceiving?

READ 15: Participant 3 (girl): “They're telling you one thing, but there's also other things that you're not really reading...or they just don't put on the box or the bottle.”

POTENTIAL READ 16:

Researcher: No? Alright, well, again, I am the rep from the company, okay, I represent MetRX, and I am telling you guys that for a fact, that has zero artificial flavors and zero artificial colors. Does it matter if I

say so?

Participants: No.

Researcher: Why not?!

Participant 1 (guy): “You’re trying to get us to buy it.”

Researcher: Do you think that I would lie to you guys?

READ 16: Participants: Yes!

Participant 1 (guy): “Business people would.”

Researcher: Business people would?

Participant 4 (girl): “Yes.”

Researcher: Show of hands, how many people think that I would lie to you about that?

(All hands go up).

POTENTIAL READ 17:

Researcher: (Referring to health claim on the front of the Hot Pockets box). This has some claims too, which we have not brought up...it says it’s made with “7 essential vitamins and minerals”. What does that mean?

Participant 2 (girl): “It’s good for ya”.

Researcher: Do you care what the vitamins and minerals are?

Participants: No.

Researcher: Do you care if they are essential?

Participants: No.

Researcher: Do you believe that it has seven essential vitamin and minerals in it?

Participant 2 (girl): “No.”

Participant 1 (guy): "...yes?"

Participant 5 (girl): "Yeah."

Participant 3 (guy): "It's seven?"

Researcher: That's what it says.

Participant 3 (guy): "Okay, yes."

READ 17: Participant 5 (girl): "But see, it's like..we like *Hot Pockets* more...so we trust that it has those in there. But like, that cookie bar (referring to the Big100 Colossal)

I don't know, I don't believe that..."

POTENTIAL READ 18:

Researcher: Who do you think is most effective at persuading you, in the media?(Asking in a general way, not referring to any products show to the participants).

Participant 1 (guy): The *Old Spice* guy!

Researcher: The Old Spice guy?

Participant 1 (guy): The *Old Spice* guy!

Researcher: Why is that, because he's humorous?

Participant 1 (guy): Because he is SO AWESOME!

Researcher: What makes him awesome?

Participant 3 (guy): I think the fact that they use masculinity with the smell of the fragrance.

Participant 2 (girl): Yeah, cause he is funny.

Researcher: It's a clever thing?

**READ 18: Participant 1 (guy): “It’s funny and it smells amazing. *Old Spice*,
that’s the way to go.”**

Researcher: Would you have thought Old Spice smelled amazing before he came along?

Participant 1 (guy): “Nope!”

Participant 2 (girl): “No...”

Researcher: Isn't that interesting...

POTENTIAL READ 19:

*Researcher: Okay, how much of this do you think is actual fruit? By percentage. (Referring to Fuze –
Peach Mango Naturally Flavored Beverage)*

Participant 2 (girl): “Half.”

Participant 3 (guy): “At least 90% of it.”

Researcher: 90% of it is real fruit? How about you? (referring to Participant 5)

Participant 5 (guy): “I would say a good part, I would say 75.”

Researcher: 75%? You venture to guess? (Referring to Participant 1).

Participant 1 (guy): “Uumm...probably 75...”

Researcher: 75 percent? What about you (Referring to Participant 3).

Participant 3 (guy): “85%.”

Researcher: 85%?

Participant 2 (girl): “50%.”

Researcher: Okay, I want to know..it says 5% juice on the back.

Participant 5 (guy): “Does it really?”

Researcher: That’s what it says...

Participant 1 (guy): “Yeah right! That stuff is wicked good.”

Researcher: So what does that mean if it only has 5% juice, does that change your opinion of it?

READ 19: Participant 3 (guy): “No.”

Participant 5 (guy): “No, it still tastes really good.”

POTENTIAL READS 20 & 21:

Researcher: Alright, let me ask you one more thing...what do you think I’m up to when I ask you about this stuff? What do you think my purpose is? (Asking in a general way about the discussion which proceeded).

Participant 4 (guy): “You’re gonna make the product.”

Researcher: I’m going to make the product?

Participant 3 (guy): “You’re going to tell them what we said that would make us want to buy it.”

Researcher: Is that right?

Participants: Yeah.

Researcher: What do you think about me doing that?

Participant 1 (guy): “You are going to change your ad and should do observation first.”

Participant 3 (guy): “Yeah.”

Researcher: Okay. But what do you think about me, if I'm – let's say that I am. Let's say that I'm working for one of these product groups and I'm going to tweak your guys brains to get it more influential, is that okay?

READ 20: Participant 2 (girl): “Yeah.”

Participant 1 (guy): “Uh-huh.”

Participant 3 (guy): “Yes and no.”

Researcher: Yes and no?

Participant 3 (guy): “I don't like to be lied to, but at the same time...”

Participant 1 (guy): “I hate it.”

Participant 3 (guy): “Yeah.”

Participant 2 (girl): “You tell me something, I'll keep it. Like, if you promise me something I will hold you to it till you do it.”

Researcher: Okay. Do you think advertising is basically true or not true? Overall...

Participant 2 (girl): “Sometimes...”

Participant 1 (guy): “Overall...A little of both...I don't think its true. I think it's a little more false though.”

Participant 3 (guy): “I think it's just 50.”

Researcher: 50-50?

Participant 3 (guy): “Yeah.”

READ 21: Participant 1 (guy): I think its about 95-5, because..

Researcher: Which way, true or not true?

Participant 1 (guy): NOT true.

Researcher: You don't think that most of it is true?

Participant 1 (guy): No, I don't.

Researcher: Okay.

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