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**Nationalistic Stereotyping in Automotive Advertising:
The Use and Viewer Response on the Internet**

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Abstract

This research is focused on the usage of nationalistic stereotypes in television commercials in the automotive industry. We specifically analyzed one case in which nationalistic stereotypes were used in an automotive advertisement in the USA, using netnographic and document analysis methods. Our main objectives were to first uncover how an automotive advertisement is now using these stereotypes to boost brand awareness, and secondly, to analyze how the public reacts and experiences advertisements that use these stereotypes. By applying Hall's Encoding/Decoding Theory and Brewer's In-Group Bias Theory, we uncovered that advertisers are now using nationalistic stereotypes to provoke and create controversy that cuts through the clutter and creates buzz. As opposed to the previous tactics in implementing these nationalistic stereotypes in this industry where the ad addressed an entire nation to promote one country of manufacturing over another, this advertisement stereotyped a specific kind of American based on distinct values and ideologies in order to directly target their audience. It was also observed that the responses to the same commercial could be found on two ideological extremes, depending on political orientation. Another interesting finding of our research is the propensity for viewers' to manufacture their response and comments within the social platform where a discussion is taking place. Our research seeks to make consumers aware of advertisers using nationalistic stereotypes in this way, so that viewers do not perpetuate stereotypes they've seen in commercials, but make decisions based on experiences of their own. Simultaneously, this research can serve to educate advertisers on what type of responses and reactions the public can have towards their usage of nationalistic stereotypes.

Keywords: stereotypes, nationalistic, advertising, provocation, political orientation, automotive advertising

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Stereotypes are encountered almost on a daily basis and there have always been controversies regarding their existence and, even more so, their usage in different aspects of everyday life. Lippmann (1922: 95) put it best when coining the concept of stereotypes, he referred to them as “pictures of our world,” used as tools to understand our surrounding. However, these pictures are in the mercy of limitless human imagination and more than guiding us to understand our world, they also help us shape inevitable prejudice. Seiter (1986: 14) emphasizes this prejudice by going even as far as calling the very notion of stereotypes a “dirty word,” blaming her outburst on our “failure to account for the evaluative and historical as well as descriptive aspects” of this concept. This detrimental outcome of the wrongful implementation of stereotypes has always played a significant role in our everyday interactions. The researches of social psychologists have focused mainly on this issue, since they believe that commonly used stereotypes are basically generalizations of different social groups—mainly minorities—with a disregard to variations, and believe that these stereotypes, even though true to some extent, are generally distorted (Babad, Birnbaum, and Benne, 1983: 75). These variations can differ in quantity depending on the nature of the group. Sex-role stereotypes are, for instance, considered more valid due to the inherent physical differences between two sexes (Seiter, 1986: 18). However, other types of generalizations such as those of different religious groups or people of different race might need to be looked into on a deeper level since the possibility of the existence of variation in these cases is probably much higher, due to the fact that both religion and race, unlike the only two different sexes there is, come in a variety of shades. One field in which such stereotypes dominate public opinion is media and advertising. Beauty products are typically displayed in commercials through the use of beautiful, young models, household cleaning products are used by happy housewives, while the large pick-up truck is driven by a strong, male construction worker. Marketers are doing the best they can to use these kinds of gender and race stereotypes to help sell their products. The intention of boosting sales do not stop only at race and sex, but are at times extended even to the national pride of a particular country. These nationalistic stereotypes serve the same purpose but use other generalizations in addition to gender or race to promote products. We have looked at an example of such stereotyping to further investigate the impact and the consequences of using the generalized characteristics of a particular nation within the automotive industry.

1.2 Stereotyping in Mass Media

For the sake of our research, we are looking at the way nationalistic stereotypes are used in automotive advertising. Advertising is called by Pollay (1986: 24) a “propaganda for products” where the bottom line is to sell and make profit, ignoring the undesirable side-effects not counted for. The article’s title is self-explanatory: *The Distorted Mirror: Reflections on the Unintended Consequences of Advertising*. In this article, Pollay (1986: 24) focuses mainly on the way advertising is used to affect the mass market in different ways using distinct stereotypes, politics, ethnicity, culture, and the like of similar social aspects to “persuade” people to buy products, calling advertising at times “greedy and selfish” because it lacks ethics and compassion. Noelle-Neumann claims stereotypes in mass communication to be incorrect interpretations of reality, thus calling them immoral, using the example of television in Western culture as a medium that is “overwhelmingly dominated by white males,” for instance (Noelle-Neumann, 1984: 149). In the same vein, Seggar, Hafen and Hannonen-Gladden (1981: 277-288) argue that the American commercial television industry is principally interested in “white, young, middle-class consumers”. Seiter (1986: 24), however, distinguishes between two types of television: public and network. She claims that it is mainly the network TV that is taking advantage of stereotyping different groups, since the other type, public television, is “free” of those. The problem with analyzing stereotypes in commercial television, however, has been that of exactly pin-pointing what stereotyping really means and how it is “related to ideology,” stressing the importance of assumptions made of stereotypes by a very general audience (Hall, 1982: 56). Hall is concerned that no accurate distinctions are drawn as to the kind of stereotype and the kind of audience involved, and that makes problematic the execution of a thorough content analysis. Taking up on Hall’s argument, and regarding portrayals of minorities on television where the audience is mainly white, Schuetz and Sprafkin (1978: 71) state the following:

“The major concern with the presentation of stereotypes on television is that the result of such portrayals may be the acquisition of negative attitudes towards certain groups by the audience and the solidification of sexual and racial stereotypes”.

An example of these groups is women. Controversial, sex-role stereotypes are common in the Western culture of mass media communication, due, according to Seiter, to the split between the “majority” and the “minority” depiction of generalizations, where the latter is almost always

present because of its inferiority to the former's high social power. She suggests that it's the dominating presence of this social power that, in fact, controls the way minority stereotypes are utilized for the sake of advertising purposes. In the case of women as a minority group, the role of women is always displayed as a one-way, dependent relationship, mostly based on her sexuality, to the white man, where the man is depicted as an independent, strong majority (Seiter, 1986: 19). An example of that could be seen in the election process of women politicians in the USA. According to Dolan (2014: 96-97), there is much study done on this subject that has led to the premise that "voters rely on gender stereotypes to evaluate these women" to ascertain their policy competencies and personality characteristics of which compassion and honesty are mentioned, which gives women politicians a soft side that might not be appreciated by all voters. In the same vein, and also arguing for the aforementioned majority depiction of male generalization in society, she goes on to explain that male candidates are viewed as "more competent, decisive, and stronger leaders, and possessing a greater ability to handle a crisis" (Dolan, 2014: 97).

The contemporary marketplace is largely impacted by mass media, and television plays an integral role in the public being able to construct their ideas of reality based on what they're viewing (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000: 385). It is through television commercials that viewers consciously, as well as subconsciously, shape images of others and cognitively set up group boundaries based on stereotypes that are depicted (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000: 385). Gender-roles, nationality, ethnicity and social class are all stereotypes being portrayed in advertising in which consumers absorb what's being shown and later form subtle prejudices, feelings of entitlement and promotion of these stereotypes (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000: 364, 385). The forging of these subtle prejudices that are founded on the pride of a nation and the inevitable shaping of different opinions which follow, together form the pivotal point of the impact of nationalistic stereotypes within the media that is the subject of analysis of this research paper.

1.3 Nationality Stereotyping

This study will be focusing on the use of nationalistic stereotyping in automotive advertising. As defined by Meadows and Sayer (2013: 104), national stereotypes are "symbolic attributes (e.g., polite, individualistic, arrogant) that are conventionally associated with groups of individuals collectively identified as a nation (e.g., the Canadiens, the Americans, the French)". There are

common knowledge stereotypes that circulate in almost every culture around the world: the materialistic American, the hot-tempered Italian, or the cheap Scot. Nationality stereotyping creates frames of referencing on a global level, and ignites a viewers' "commonsense" in order to automatically place what it is they're watching (Meadows and Sayer, 2013: 104; Billig, 1995: 4). When viewing these types of stereotypes, you can see the ignition of belonging to an "ideological nationhood" at work and the embrace of a "complex set of themes" about "'us' and 'our homeland'" (Billig, 1995: 4); advertisers use these messages to create a sense of identity and belonging. Carvalho and Luna (2014) suggest that the pride taken in the identity of each nation by its citizens, more commonly known as nationalism, is also taken advantage of by marketers since for the targeted audience the product, under these circumstances, actually does reflect the sense of belonging to a certain culture and nation. Touching precisely upon this aspect of advertising through research, it's concluded: "heightening national identity leads individuals to react more positively to representations of that identity" (Carvalho and Luna, 2014: 1026). However, we are not sure such a generalized statement can be made. Do commercials that draw attention and create a heightened national identity lead individuals to react more positively? This study has investigated that topic in more detail.

In the current globalized marketplace, people have access to consumer goods found all over the world in a convenient way, which was not an option only a decade or two ago. Now, consumers can consciously decide or discriminate on whether you will purchase goods manufactured from a specific country. You can now see nations competing with one another and "branding is promoted as a strategy to do so successfully" (Widler, 2007: 146). In what Gal and Irvine (1995: 973-974) refer to as iconization, it's possible that some attributes of a specific social group can be mapped onto other products or objects associated with that social group. It is through this discourse that "nationalized characteristics are in turn transmittable to material products that members of the nation produce, such as cars" (Meadows and Sayer, 2013: 105). Within the car industry, you can see the public making assumptions about the nature of a car, based on stereotypes of the people in the country of manufacture. For example, in a television series called *Top Gear*, aired on BBC in Britain, one of the hosts make the following statements about cars, based on where they were manufactured: "So German cars are sort of very, well built and efficient. Italian cars are flamboyant and quick. Mexican cars are just going to be lazy, feckless, flatulent, overweight" (Meadows and Sayer, 2013: 105). While the comments are not always kind, they nevertheless reflect nationalistic stereotypes that an audience uses to make initial judgements.

1.4 Nationality Stereotyping in the Automotive Industry

The automotive industry has been using nationalism and nationalistic stereotyping for many years in order to differentiate the country of manufacturing (Jobling, 2011). In addition, it's been shown that consumers use the country-of-origin (i.e. country of manufacturing) as a symbolic cue in differentiating products (Sohail and Sahin, 2010: 248), where in developed countries, domestic products are evaluated more favorably (Morello, 1984). It's easy to see why some countries chose to use nationalistic stereotyping in their automotive advertising campaigns in order to take advantage of these country-of-origin biases. Since the primary objective of advertising is boosting sales or brand awareness, marketing personnel use different means to reach their target audience. This makes stereotyping within advertising campaigns an almost inevitable resource that is used constantly to trigger emotions in order to make different groups aware of certain products or services. That is the point of Gilman's (1985: 16) argument on British advertising for the French Renault. He claims that taking advantage of stereotyping for promotional purposes is simply a given and "a fundamental means of classification and differentiation". Considering the kinds of stereotypes it has come to employ, the automotive industry is of particular interest due to the fact that national and cultural differentiations seem to have been strong, driving factors for marketers in the industry. National stereotypes, for instance, have been used to demonstrate "the superiority of one 'white' nation's automobile design and manufacture over that of another"; this is clearly shown in a 2008 commercial for Citroen where the logo states that the car is "Unmistakably German, Made in France" (Jobling, 2011: 248). Jobling (2011: 247), however, argues that this type of national reflection within the car industry advertisements in Britain did not come around until the outcome of the early 1970's oil crisis, and ever since "nationalistic stereotyping has functioned most obviously to bolster racial differences and to subordinate or marginalise the non-white". Building on Jobling's argument, and in the same vein, Calhoun (1997: 46) goes further on to explain that nationality could be seen as the 'trump card in the game of identity' that incorporates distinct stereotypical notions of, for instance, culture and ethnicity (Billig, 1995; Gellner, 1997).

It is common knowledge that cars, just like clothes, are for many a way of expressing themselves. Young people tend to want to own fast, sport cars that reflect their style of life; likewise, the older-generation prefer larger, sturdier and more luxurious cars that reflect success and well-being. These are the ways in which we identify ourselves with our own groups. Pickering (2001: 89) explains how this sense of identity is inherent of every nation:

“Each nation is assumed to have a specific identity, and to identify with this means assimilating the style in which it is imagined as a nation. It also means distinguishing this identity from others, against which it is divided by the very fact of being constructed as intrinsically different”.

The American car industry uses this to distinguish its products from other country’s products. American automotive brand, Chevrolet, is renowned for consistently using its heritage throughout the years in advertising campaigns. Some of its most successful campaigns include: The Heartbeat of America (1986-1993), Malibu: The Car You Knew America Could Build (1997), and An American Revolution (2004-2008) (Halpert, 2011). Dodge, another American brand, has just launched a new ad for their 2014 Challenger in which a depiction of the Revolutionary War is shown with George Washington winning back America’s freedom against the British. The commercial then states, “America got two things right: cars and freedom”. These are just two examples of how the American car industry uses it’s nationality to distinguish itself from other car manufacturers, in hopes of creating interest and loyalty among its home-nation.

While the American car industry has been using its nationality in advertising campaigns for a long time, some brands are resorting to using nationalistic stereotypes in a more provocative way. With the barrage of commercials consumers face every day via television, magazines and the Internet, it’s no wonder why advertisers seek innovative or unique ways to try to cut through the clutter. The question remains, how are automotive brands currently using nationality stereotyping in commercials to provoke and gain viewer awareness?

1.5 Research Aims

Many companies today use stereotypes in their advertising in order to project positive or negative fantasies to which the targeted consumer can relate (Wall, 2001: 1048). By doing this, advertisers create the possibility of controversy. Viewers of the advertisement can become easily offended when they feel they’re being targeted or portrayed in an unrealistic or negative light, while those viewers who are not a part of the stereotyped group being depicted feel ambivalent towards the ad (Johnson and Grier, 2012: 100). When an advertisement portrays nationalistic stereotypes and broadcasts that ad to the nation in which they’re stereotyping, it seems the opportunities for viewers to reject the ad become greater, as it’s been shown that

viewers who are exposed to ads in which their social group is stereotyped, exhibit more negative reactions to the ad (Johnson and Grier, 2012: 100).

However, we have to be careful in the application of the term “stereotyping” here, since studies show that although researchers agree to some point what stereotyping means, not all agree on a solid and final definition for it, but rather merely rely on the fact that stereotyping has a “grain (Branston and Stafford, 2003: 92) [or a] kernel of truth” (Seiter, 1986: 4). Wall (2008: 1042) simply calls stereotyping a form of “narrative” and claims that it is not a procedure that systematically makes use of statistical evaluations. Considering all this, we have to offer our readers a frame of mind in which the stereotype that is intended for our purpose and our research is being used. Therefore, we focus on one single car commercial and explain in detail each and every hint to the particular kind of stereotyping that is presented in it.

There are two aims of this study that seek to explore nationalistic stereotypes further. First, we plan to answer the research question: *In what ways does the American automotive industry use nationalistic stereotyping in their advertising campaigns?* One thing that has to be emphasized here is the heterogeneity of sub-groups within the same culture, or nation. Douglas (1976) argues for this by reminding us that even in the same country the perception of nationalistic values might differ from group to group within the country. She claims that these differences not only are due to the fact that people in the same culture have “different social classes, lifestyle and geographic location,” but also because they have “different personality, interest and purchase behavior” (Douglas, 1976: 12). Keeping this in mind, we will review specific lifestyle, personality, and social class stereotypes that are depicted in the advertisement in order to avoid any misconceptions about the whole of the American nation. Because of the inability to truly stereotype the prototypical American because of the vast heterogeneity of the nation, when this tactic is used it becomes rather interesting in viewing how the nations’ public reacts and responds to being tied into such a generalization. This leads to our second research question in this study: *How does the American public respond to advertisements that use nationalistic stereotypes?*

1.6 Relevance

The relevance of our intended research stems from the lack of current study on nationality stereotyping within advertisements, as much research on stereotypes in marketing concentrate

on gender, race and social class. By studying the way in which the American nationality is stereotyped in advertising, we can draw attention to the ways in which this population is being illustrated. It's been argued within research that "stereotyped portrayals nurture long-held stereotypes and shape intergroup attitudes and relationships" (Johnson and Grier, 2012: 91). Even though stereotyping draws criticisms, it's still a tactic used by advertisers. It's important to inform and educate younger consumers about these ploys. Consumers should be conscious of what advertisers are doing in these instances so that stereotypes are not perpetuated based on long-standing portrayals, but on what the public honestly feels, thinks and experiences for themselves. This study will illuminate how a commercial specifically uses nationality stereotyping to create a 'buzz-worthy' ad and the implications of that. It's important for the public to realize when stereotypes are being used in ironic ways or as intentional instruments to create awareness about an advertisement so there is not an unconscious activation of stereotypes, consistently leading to an automatic "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Chen and Bargh, 1997: 542).

Our research will contribute practically, in so much, that it will illuminate the ways in which the public responds to specific advertising tactics. Car manufacturers and advertisers need to be conscious and aware of what type of impact their marketing decisions have on consumers. By choosing to use stereotypes and create controversial campaigns, one chances offending many viewers and possible alienation. While these negatives may be taken into consideration by the advertisers, this research could better prepare the brands in what can be expected in terms of support, backlash, and news and media exposure once the controversial advertisement airs. In the contemporary marketplace, consumers are more savvy and have access to more information than ever. It's important that advertisers are aware and conscious of the ways in which creating a provocative ad can be perceived in the marketplace, especially because of the viewers' ability to affect consumer response by vocalizing their thoughts and feelings on Internet platforms, such as YouTube (Johnson and Grier, 2012: 91).

Delving deeply into the analysis of an advertisement that uses nationalistic stereotypes, we will be uncovering the ways in which the public responds. Building on the theoretical framework of encoding and decoding by Hall (1973) and in-group bias theory by Brewer (1979), we plan to make interesting practical contributions to in this field. While our aim and methods do not plan to analyze the effectiveness of advertising that utilizes stereotypes, the goal of this research is to use this case to educate consumers and practitioners alike, on the truth behind employing this tactic.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The case of our study, the 2014 Cadillac commercial named “Poolside,” was produced in the United States of America and aired on television on major networks during prime-time, events with high ratings such as the Olympic Games and the Oscars. This goes only to demonstrate the desired impact intended by marketing executives of Cadillac; they wanted to reach as many people as possible. However, the intended target audience that could be observed as potential buyers of the specific model of car being promoted by the ad does not represent the bulk of the American population, as the car’s MSRP (manufacturer’s suggested retail price) is \$75,000. Also, and this is the most important aspect of our research, the commercial has been broadcasted on the Internet, by both Cadillac and other news and media organizations, where it has received innumerable comments, both for and against the ad. It’s this latter means of communication of social media platform that we are going to use for the sake of the analysis of our research phenomena. In order to start off on the right premise, we have to engage in a specific theoretical framework that represents an in-depth and correct analysis of the social responses to this ad. Building our research on established theories within mass-communication, we intend to use the below frameworks to analyze the use of nationalistic stereotypes in advertising in the automobile industry in the USA and how the public responds to it.

2.1 Encoding/Decoding Theory

As our point of departure, following the framework put forward by Hall (1973: 53) regarding messages broadcasted visually to a large audience, we begin by referring to the production and the reception of the broadcasted message as *moments*. Hall continues to explain how these moments, that are formed by the social relations of the communicative process—which is the linear form of sender/message/receiver—are the points at which the ‘discursive’ form of the message is either encoded at the sender’s end or decoded at the receiver’s. Both encoding and decoding, including their own set of frameworks of knowledge, relations of production and technical infrastructure (Hall, 1973: 53), which we will refer to as FK, RP and TI, respectively, for practical purposes (see fig. 1 below). The term discursive is of crucial importance here, since it deals directly with the spoken language that is commonly heard throughout almost all television advertisement. Hall (1973: 55) stresses this issue since he believes that even though “reality exists outside language...it is constantly mediated by and through language: and what we can know and say has to be produced through discourse”.

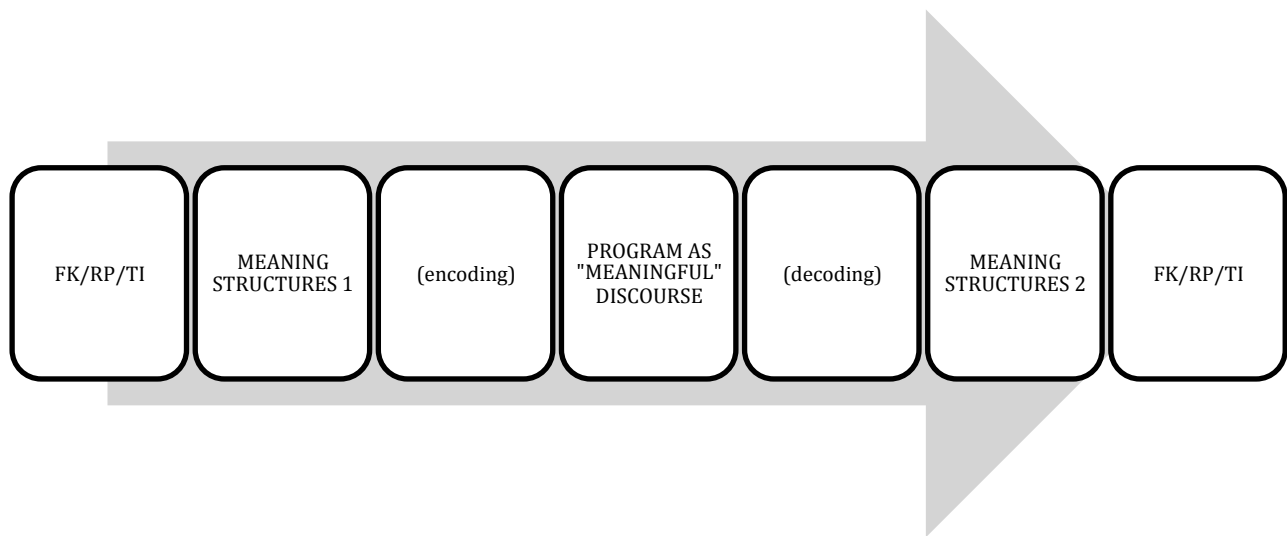


Fig. 1: Hall's Encoding/Decoding Theory Diagram

Hall (1973) suggests a four-stage theory of communication: production, circulation, use (distribution or consumption), and reproduction. Hall goes on to explain these four stages as follows: *production* is the actual 'moment' where the encoding of the intended message is carried out; at the *circulation* stage the 'product' has been taken out to be observed by the eyes of the population. Here, much stress is put on the discursive aspect of the message, since it uses language to be understood by the public, which, in turn, shapes the next stage of the loop, the consumption; during the *consumption* stage it is already assumed that a meaning has been transmitted to the audience through its decoding techniques, even though, as discussed before, the perceived meaning might not be the same with every single group of observers, or niche audiences. Nevertheless, some kind of meaning, no matter how different among different groups, must be comprehended in order for the message to be able to be consumed; during the last stage of *reproduction*, after consuming the message, a transformation of it "into social practices" will take place and thus, the circle is complete. Each of these stages should be treated as "relatively autonomous," as while each of the stages are paramount in defining the message being sent, there is limited control on how each moment will be articulated and understood by the viewer (Hall, 1973: 52). This has to do with the fact that the meaning of an encoded message might not be recognized through the same associations upon which it was initially created. Since, according to Hall, "the codes of encoding and decoding" could differ at some points leading to an imbalance between the original, intended message and the perceived one. Hall (1973: 54) refers to this as "degrees of symmetry," with symmetry in this case, meaning the understanding and/or the misunderstanding of the forthcoming transposition that is

taking place. By the light of this knowledge on the encoding and decoding of messages, we intend to analyze various comments made about the Cadillac commercial in order to emphasize and comprehend stereotyped information (encoding) in American advertising and how this stereotype is perceived by the audience (decoding).

2.2 In-Group Bias Theory (IGBT)

Viewer evaluation of stereotypes in advertising has been highly researched over the years. In order to evaluate the way in which political affiliation affect how consumers react and experience an ad using nationalistic stereotypes, we will be applying Brewer's (1979) In-Group Bias Theory (IGBT) which states that people have built-in attitudinal and perceptual biases that lead to them favoring members of their own group (in-group) then members of other groups (out-group). This bias occurs when the evaluator perceives there to be less psychological or social distance to one group over another; conversely, the out-group refers to those that differ in comparison to the evaluator and where there is a larger psychological or social distance (Brewer, 1979: 322). This theory argues that when no other information is present, people will rely on the knowledge of their own group and on preconceived assumptions and biases regarding the out-group members (Qualls and Moore, 1990: 139). In Qualls and Moore's (1990) research on how viewers react to and evaluate racial stereotyping in advertising, building upon Brewer's IGBT, they found that white observers (in-group) would evaluate white actors (in-group) more positively than they would black actors (out-group).

Building upon the IGBT, Brewer (1999) went on to research whether an in-groups favoritism for its own members, automatically resulted in out-group distaste. She found that "ultimately, many forms of discrimination and bias may develop not because outgroups are hated, but because positive emotions such as admiration, sympathy, and trust are reserved for the ingroup and withheld from outgroups" (Brewer, 1999: 438). Furthermore, the distinctiveness of other factors such as social class and culture can further unite in-group members and create an even larger distance between the in-group and out-group (Brewer, 1999: 438). The propensity for an in-group to have automatic distaste for the out-group can become more apparent when the groups are categorized dichotomously, "dividing the society into two significant sub-groups" (Brewer, 1999: 439).

This study will be placing a large emphasis on comments made to a commercial that reflects only one of two, major American political ideologies—Conservatism. Taking into account these research studies, one could make the assumption that conservative Americans (in-group) would perceive and react to an advertisement that stereotyped conservative ideals (in-group) in a positive way. In the same respect, liberals (out-group) will not view the advertisement with such favoritism. While the advertisement we are analyzing is promoting an American nationalistic stereotype, the ideals stated are clearly in favor of the conservative-specific political orientation within the American political party system. In compiling and analyzing viewers' comments, we will be applying the IGBT framework in order to categorize and group these comments by means of the political orientation they reflect. It remains to be seen if the “in-group love” will also automatically reflect “out-group hate” (Brewer, 1999).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The goals of this study are to analyze how an automotive advertising campaign uses American nationalistic stereotypes and also how the public responds to and experiences such ad. Both of these goals reflect the observers' opinion, with reality being constructed and given meaning by the people who view the advertisement, rather than being objective and exterior, lending this research to the social constructionist epistemology (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008: 58). The purpose of this study is to understand the way in which viewers relate to advertising that uses nationalistic stereotypes and how they respond to the content being shown, not to uncover patterns or causal relationships. The social constructionist philosophy centers itself on the way in which people understand and "make sense of the world through sharing their experiences with others via the medium of language" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008: 58). As part of this study we analyzed comments shared by viewers of the advertisement on the Internet. We concerned ourselves with how people feel and think, individually as well as collectively, and then share these experiences. Using our theoretical framework as described above, we have attempted to understand why viewer's have varying and different responses to the same stimuli, rather than attempting to find external causes or cues to why people react in different manners (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008: 59). Although the data collected for this study could be given lower credibility because of the nature of the viewers' subjective opinions, in alignment with the social constructionist philosophy, the majority of the data analyzed has been collected in a natural, less-artificial way. By using viewer responses to the advertisement organically found on the Internet, we minimize the chance of socially-desirable responses (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008: 72).

For the purposes of this study, we utilized a case study method in order to gain a deep understanding of a single, controversial commercial that uses American nationalistic stereotypes to engage the audience. In analyzing the case of Cadillac's 2014 advertising commercial called "Poolside," we thoroughly evaluated the commercial's explicit content, viewers' response and reactions, the news and media exposure the advertising received because of its controversial nature, its political implications, as well as, Cadillac's brand management of the advertisement. This specific commercial was chosen because of its direct correlation to the phenomena we're studying surrounding advertising that illustrates American nationalistic stereotypes. A single case has been chosen on the basis of being able to provide

an extensive “examination of an entire network of communication” in order to make in-depth insights (Kerr et al., 2012: 393), as it is also within the realm of the constructionist epistemology (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008: 97). Our approach also falls within the lines of an expressive case study, as it seeks to investigate a single case because of its distinctive features, and while findings can convincingly test theories, they may not be generalizable (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008: 98).

For this case analysis, we obtained qualitative data through netnographic methods and a thorough analysis of relevant material. Throughout the analysis process, materials collected via these techniques were subjected to a comprehensive content analysis and in accordance with the social constructionist philosophy, distinctions between the collection of data and the analysis and interpretation stages were not drawn (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008: 172). The particularities of the data collection have been outlined below.

3.2 Netnography

In order to study how the public responds to controversial advertising that uses American nationalistic stereotypes, we need to go to where the public is: the Internet. Content analysis of collected netnography data related to our advertisement is one of our methods of research. In most specific of terms, Kozinets (2002: 62) outlined the netnographic research method best:

“Netnography,’ or ethnography on the Internet, is a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study the cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications. As a marketing research technique, netnography uses the information that is publicly available in online forums to identify and understand the needs and decision influences of relevant online consumer groups”.

The sources of information that is sought by the consumer do not simply extend to the limited amount of biased feedback provided by the company anymore. Today, thanks to the socially linked system of Web 2.0, customers interact with each other through the innumerable amount of social media platforms where they share interests and experiences in an instant, no matter where in the world they find themselves. Kozinets (2002: 61) argues for this to emphasize on the more objective side of consumer feedback on products and services by referring to distinct internet forums that consumers use to “share ideas, build communities and contact fellow

consumers who are seen as more objective information sources". We have taken an in-depth look into these forums and have collected public comments left by viewers of the "Poolside" commercial from various sites on the Internet. These include the official Cadillac YouTube video and online news and media articles related to the advertisement and discussions with the marketing executives at Cadillac. We then categorized each comment into two groups: 1.) The Conservative In-Group Comments; 2.) The Liberal Out-Group Comments, to uncover themes and apply the theoretical framework in order to develop a better understanding on how the audience responds to the specific kind of stereotype used in said campaign.

Our research was very much inspired by the netnography method, but let us be clear that our research did not carry-out a full-fledged netnographic study, as we did not focus on the online culture and communities. Instead, we chose to target the comments left on these online forums, as those are the actual responses and reactions to the case we are studying. This method allowed us to collect and analyze a large amount of data within the short amount of time outlined by this research project. According to Kozinets, netnography is a "far less time consuming and elaborate" system (Kozinets, 2002: 62), and that is in complete contrast with the traditional system of market oriented ethnography, a system that is "less costly and more timely" compared to its more conservative method of focus groups and interviews (Kozinets, 2002: 70). This system is not a definitive formula for analyzing the way stereotypes are used or even perceived by different audiences in the USA, but it does analyze a crucial part in how opinions are built throughout the vast spectrum of Web 2.0 social media platforms. Kozinets (2002: 62) argues for this by mentioning how over these last years there has been a need to somehow connect the traditional ethnographic research techniques to a new kind of communication system that is developing through the internet. He calls it a "window into naturally occurring behaviors...netnography allows continuing access to informants in a particular online social situation (Kozinets, 2002: 62). This, in turn, will help us grasp a good understanding on how our topic of research is being perceived continually by the public. It helps us see how different people actually opine on the sensitive issue of stereotyping and broaden our view enough to draw some preliminary conclusions on the subject of generalizations in advertising.

While the netnographic method aligns itself well with the research we're conducting, it does come with some flaws. Our research will be primarily looking at the way in which the public responds to this type of advertising in an online community. We have not analyzed responses that were made off-line, nor have we gathered demographic information about the posters of these online comments. In this sense, making overly zealous generalizations or conclusions

from our findings will be avoided. However, careful analysis and categorization of the comments will allow an understanding of online community members, compared with typical online and offline consumers (Kozinets, 2002: 70).

3.3 Analysis of Material

In order to gain a complete understanding of the way in which the public responds and experiences advertising that uses nationalistic stereotyping, we must also study how news and media outlets, as well as the brand conveying the message speaks out about the campaign. In doing so, we have investigated key documents that have been disseminated online, since the “Poolside” commercial aired. The documents analyzed have not been produced at our request, but exist ‘out there,’ waiting to be assembled and analyzed (Bryman and Bell, 2011: 544).

The documents collected have given us a window view into how others perceived, interpreted and experienced the ad. When collecting, conceptualizing and analyzing these documents, we applied an Ethnographic Content Analysis in which we had constructed initial categorizations of In-Group Comments and Out-Group Comments, but there was much more movement and freedom to go back and forth during these stages, as well as the ability to refine our categories throughout the process (Bryman and Bell, 2011: 560). The qualitative analysis of mass-media documents also entailed scrutinizing the sources of the documents we examined (Bryman and Bell, 2011: 552). It was of great importance during the qualitative document analysis that only articles written by reputable and known sources were analyzed, as this gave the content of the articles greater reliability, and also provided a more enriching comment pool, as these sources also tended to have a higher audience participation in the comment section. While it was important to stay mindful that these documents were written “with distinctive purposes in mind,” they nevertheless contribute to our study in which they are still a response to the commercial, no matter the intent of “reality” they are trying to reflect with the articles viewpoint (Bryman and Bell, 2011: 559). By collecting and analyzing various online articles written about the “Poolside” commercial, we were able to further look at how the public responded to this advertisement, by means of the actual content of the article, as well as audience comments to the articles. Below is a summary of the main documents used.

Summary of Documents Used		
Author	Title	Date Published
DeMorro, Christopher	GM Executives Defend Controversial ELR Commercial	March 11, 2014
Dorstewitz, Michael	Love it or Hate it, Cadillac's New Ad Creates Big Political Controversy	February 15, 2014
Dreher, Rod	The Air-Conditioned Nightmare	March 4, 2011
Gregoire, Carolyn	Cadillac Made a Commercial About the American Dream, and it's a Nightmare	February 27, 2014
Hadden, Gerry	Cadillac's Viral Ad Glorifies America's Crazy Work Ethic – But My French In-Laws Don't Buy It	March 10, 2014
McCarthy, Michael	Cadillac Clears the Air on 'Poolside'	March 2, 2014
Rosenberg, Alyssa	That Cadillac Commercial Everyone's Talking About is Actually Proof of How Far Electric Cars Have Come	March 5, 2014
Voelcker, John	Cadillac ELR Wasn't Originally Used in 'Provocative' Ad	March 7, 2014

We anticipated some controversy when we started our investigation of these comments as direct responses to the stereotypes used in the commercial. The controversy arises from the fact that the ad was generalizing a certain group using particular features that distinguish it according to annual income, since the car is fairly expensive and not affordable by the mainstream American. This, as we have observed, was the purpose of the marketers in order to create a stir. However, because of the extreme differences of the political views expressed in the comments, there was little challenge in categorizing them according to the political orientation they reflected.

The ad is focusing on one, single nation and through the use of stereotypes, brings the two strong political orientations of the nation—conservatism and liberalism—face to face, while putting other countries down due to the fact that they, according to the ad, don't work as hard as the Americans. However, some liberals think that the latter is only a matter of cultural differences. For instance, using an example from the list above, we observed that Gerry Hadden with his remark on the commercial made on March 10, 2014, mentions how his wife's family, who are from French origins, do not "buy" the statements made by the ad. Jeremy Schulz (2012), has investigated different nations' perceptions on hard work and work ethics in general

to prove the point that there is an element of cultural divergence involved in the way professionals of different countries perform at work. In studying the working habits of Western Europeans versus the Americans, where the latter is formally known to aspire to higher levels of status and financial wealth through hard work, this is what Schulz had to say about the former:

“While the European repertoire turns a blind eye to the motivational possibilities of career success and drive, the American repertoire is alive to them. This transatlantic legitimation divide points to a correlative transatlantic divide in work ethics. For the French respondents and the Norwegian respondents, individuals loyal to the devotional-vocational repertoire, it suffices to invoke the scripts that reference the intrinsic appeal of work and its conduciveness to self-realization and self-development. These European professional men shrink from invoking industriousness, the aversion to idleness, or the hunger for individual status as the dominant motivations behind hard work” (Schulz, 2012: 629).

Thus, the consequences of this specific method we chose actually gave us the desired positive feedback, because we delved into the political mind of a nation and investigated how its citizens see a common stereotype that is being displayed in different aspects of everyday life.

4. CASE AND CONTEXT

Using the methodologies described above, this study will analyze the 2014 Cadillac ELR advertising commercial named “Poolside”. This commercial has created a great deal of controversy surrounding its pro-American, patriotic theme. The following case analysis will take a close look at the aired commercial to see how stereotypes of nationality and culture are depicted within an automotive advertising commercial. We will also be analyzing various news and media exposure, political implications, and the brand intentions of the advertisement to further see how the public responds to an automotive campaign that uses nationalistic and cultural stereotypes.

4.1 Description of Advertisement

The commercial “Poolside” debuted on television in the United States during the 2014 Olympics in February, followed by another airing during the Academy Awards on March 2, 2014; it was uploaded on YouTube by Cadillac on February 7, 2014. The commercial features an all-American, alpha-male businessman played by, middle-aged (48), white, male, actor Neal McDonough. The ad begins by showing McDonough wearing casual shorts and a pique polo shirt, newspaper in hand, standing in front of his large, uniquely designed outdoor pool. He poses the question:

“Why do we work so hard? For what? For this? For stuff? Other countries they work, they stroll home, they stop by the café, they take August off. Off. Why aren’t you like that? Why aren’t we like that?”

We then follow him as he briskly walks throughout his sizable, well-maintained and modern home. Throughout the house he passes his two, young, female children who are playing in the living room and then his wife, clad in business attire, coming out of the kitchen with a coffee in her hand and receives the newspaper from McDonough. He answers the previously posed question by saying:

“Because we’re crazy driven, hard working believers, that’s why. Those other countries think we’re nuts. Whatever! Were the Wright brothers insane? Bill Gates? Les Paul? Ali? Were we nuts when we pointed to the moon? That’s right, we went up there, and you know what we got? Bored. So we left. Got a car up there, left the keys in it. Do you know why? Because we’re the only ones going back up there. That’s why.”

He then turns into the bedroom and comes out dressed in a business suit and tie. He proceeds outside to his driveway where the 2014 Cadillac ELR is shown with an electronic plug charging it up. At this point, McDonough states:

“But I digress...It’s pretty simple. You work hard, you create your own luck, and you’ve got to believe anything’s possible.”

He removes the plug and gets in the car in which we’re shown the inside of the vehicle from a back seat perspective. The ad concludes showing McDonough sitting in the driver seat with a larger view of the modern house and driveway. He ends the commercial by stating:

“As for all the stuff, that’s the upside of only taking two weeks off in August. N’est ce pas?”

4.2 Political Background

This analysis will provide our interpretation of how an automotive advertisement uses nationalistic stereotyping in an advertising campaign. This is an American ad, produced for the American public, therefore, before we begin analyzing the nationalistic stereotypes present in the ad, we find that it’s imperative to provide the reader with the political background of conservative and liberal orientations, the two major ideologies in the USA, as the analysis of this ad revolves heavily around these two ideals.

One of our main criteria will be the dominating ideologies of the audience involved in addressing the issue of stereotyped features of a particular American car commercial. We will incorporate the political foundations of different ideologies that are instilled in the minds of our intended audience to be able to correctly apply the decoding model for the discursive message. We assume that these foundations are the primary driving factors of the opinions that are being shaped about this controversial ad. The symbolic aspect of values within every group that shares the same beliefs makes people perceive stereotypes in different ways. Morley (1981) refers to this symbolization as a major part of the social operation of mass media that affects deeply the way an audience perceives an encoded message through advertisements. Zaslow (2012: 194) strengthens Morley’s meaning by referring to different social media groups as ‘agentic,’ different people from different social and political classes and groups that actively participate in the process of creating significance from the media, and while the makers of

messages encode a certain meaning into their visual aids of promotion, these meanings “may not be decoded, or read, by audiences in the ways in which they were intended”.

For the sake of our research, the principal division of our intended audience for the Cadillac commercial will take place between two American political orientations: Conservatism and Liberalism. Political ideologies in general take on a significant role in the decoding of the discursive messages, especially those broadcasted on “user-generated media networks such as YouTube” (Zaslow, 2012: 195). A more detailed description of the ideologies behind these two political orientations will be given below.

4.2.1 Conservative Ideology

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2014), conservatism is defined as the belief in the value of established, traditional practices in politics and society; a political philosophy based on tradition and social stability, stressing established institutions, and preferring gradual development to abrupt change. The Heritage Foundation (2014), a research and educational institute that formulates and promotes conservative public policy, allude that those in favor of this political ideology are in favor of the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense. They go on to state that the first principles written in The Declaration of Independence need to be returned to and upheld, as well as, returning to America’s original structure outlined in the Constitution, as these frameworks are the best mechanisms for “securing national independence, providing economic opportunity, establishing religious liberty, and maintaining a flourishing society of republican self-government” (The Heritage Foundation, 2014). According to the Conservative Party USA (2014), some of the important issues that conservatives find themselves addressing in alignment with traditional American values are: Controlling Illegal Immigration, Managing Welfare Spending, Abolishing Gay Marriage, Abolishing Gays serving openly in the Military, Abolishing Abortion, Saving American Jobs, and Stopping the Discrimination of Affirmative Action. The majority of people with conservative ideologies endorse the Republican Party, one of two major political parties in the United States.

4.2.2 Liberal Ideology

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2014), liberalism is defined as the belief in the value of social and political change in order to achieve progress; a political philosophy based on belief in progress, the essential goodness of the human race, the autonomy of the human race, and such a philosophy that considers government as a crucial instrument for amelioration of social inequities. In 1960, during his famous acceptance speech of the Liberal Party of New York Nomination, John F. Kennedy goes on to define a liberal as “someone who welcomes new ideas without rigid reactions, someone who cares about the welfare of the people—their health, their housing, their schools, their jobs, their civil rights, and their civil liberties—someone who believes we can break through the stalemate and suspicions that grip us in our policies abroad” (Public Broadcasting Service, 2014). According to the Liberal Party of New York (2014), some of the important issues that liberals find themselves addressing are: Universal Health Care, Maintaining the woman’s choice to have an Abortion, Marriage Equality, Abolishing the Death Penalty, and Protection of the Environment. The majority of people with liberal ideologies endorse the Democratic Party, the other major political party in the United States.

5. ENCODING

In this section we have used Stuart Hall's theory of encoding, which revolves around the techniques producers of commercials use to insert different encoded messages inside, for instance, a television advertisements. In this case, the encoded messages are collected from the a set of stereotypes—such as skin color, age, possessions, etc.—that encompass the characteristics of the successful, American protagonist who has worked hard to earn himself the expensive car, Cadillac ELR, which is the theme of the ad itself. We have looked at all stereotypes encoded in the commercial and studied how each message is intentionally instilled in the ad to arouse, provoke and conjure up emotions in order to raise the public awareness of the product and/or brand.

5.1 Cadillac's Intention

In analyzing our findings, we applied the encoding and decoding theory in evaluating the primary intention of the ad itself, as well as the categorized comments by viewers of the commercial. The four stages of the complete loop entailing production, circulation, use and reproduction of message was briefly explained above. At the production stage messages are encoded into the means of communication, in our case the Cadillac commercial. As far as the codes involved—those chosen by producers to be put inside the message—Hall (1973: 54) argues for “relation of equivalence...between the positions of...encoder-producer and decoder-receiver,” where the relevance of the codes is in direct relation to what the producer deems relevant as far a sense of identification is involved, meaning how the producer thinks the receiver would relate to and identify with these codes at the time of decoding. The codes that are instilled in the “Poolside” commercial are generalizations of a distinct type of lifestyle led by a certain type of people, namely upper-middle to upper-class, conservative Americans. Some of the stereotypes could even be seen as given and not necessarily messages that are encoded into the advertisement but simply clear, up-front messages that are giving the audience precisely what the audience is seeing. In this regard, Hall (1973: 55) suggests some codes, especially in television, might not be constructed because of their “near-universality” aspect since they stem from values and traditional beliefs that are so extensively shared by a certain culture or group of people from early childhood that instead of thinking of them as codes that are being encoded, they are rather codes that have been “profoundly naturalized”. This, then produces within the audience that are observing them, a simply intrinsic perception. Following this, he goes on to explain that this does not make these codes any less prone to the decoding

fashion of the receiving audience. But, whether the messages are naturalized or simply try to transmit new information, they must be trustworthy by the audience. This does not necessarily mean that the audience has to agree with the message but simply that it is, in fact a legitimate message that, regardless of type of ideology behind it, is trying to persuade the receiver (Jutbring, 2014: 30).

In the case of the “Poolside” commercial, the message that is being encoded is that Americans are the hardest working, compared to other countries, and therefore deserve material possessions. It is obvious by the monologue uttered by the protagonist that the producers of the commercial did not try very hard to conceal their message into a more politically correct form of language but rather, and much contrary, tried to provoke the audience: “...according to Cadillac, reaction to the advertisement was three times more positive than negative. Cadillac’s advertising director Craig Bierly says the ad spot is meant to serve as brand ‘provocation,’ to get customers talking about the luxury car maker” (DeMorro, 2014). In this way, the encoding part of the message within the commercial is actually not very complicated. The ad is very aggressively targeting a decidedly specific market niche and uses other people from out-groups to further strengthen its argument about the hard-working American. As told in an interview with Bierly, the ad is targeted at consumers who make over \$200,000 annually who have worked hard for everything they have in life (McCarthy, 2014). Furthermore, Bierly states that the ad is intended to speak to the demographic that values “hard work and hustle” when it comes to earning their achievements in which they reward themselves with a luxury car (McCarthy, 2014).

Lang et al. explain the encoding process by initially referring to it as a procedure of “selecting important information from the media stimulus for further processing,” which in turn, has the objective of targeting the desires and the goals of a selected audience (Lang et al., 2013: 509). This process, in the platform of television media, is actually divided into two further categories: the encoded *visual* paralleled with the encoded *verbal* message (Potter, Lang and Bolls, 2009: 145). Following this suggestion, we aimed to separate the verbal messages encoded in the monologue of “Poolside” commercial from the visual messages encoded in the scenery chosen and depicted. Please bear in mind that the stereotypes we will be uncovering are based on our interpretation of the ad and have been identified by removing as much individual bias as possible. As far as the verbal part of the message was concerned, there were two main topics covered by the monologue: the reference to the proud, hard-working American and the criticism made to other countries for not being as motivated and ambitious. We used examples from the

monologue for each of these topics to enlighten the reader more closely on how these messages are encoded into the overall commercial itself.

5.2 The Verbal Encoding

The monologue of “Poolside,” carried on by the actor throughout the commercial, hails Americans from the very start. It is, however, not merely an unplanned discourse of a pointless applauding but a carefully organized scheme to convince, or at least enlighten, the viewer that Americans are different in the sense that they are more diligent and tireless than the rest of the world. The whole speech is concerned with emphasizing three central intentions of the producers: that the USA is one single nation and every citizen is an American; that the one important characteristic that sets Americans apart from the rest of the world is that they are hard-working; and, finally, that other countries—most likely Western European countries, based on comments like the mentioning of ‘cafes’ and the final phrase sarcastically uttered in French—are lazy compared to the USA.

We’re All Americans

To begin with, throughout this advertisement, the actor is consistently using the language of “we” and “us” when referring to everything that Americans do, want, and enjoy in life. The very first phrase incorporates this phenomena by asking “Why do we work so hard?”. Shortly thereafter the actor goes on to answer this question himself claiming that “Because we’re crazy driven, hard working believers, that’s why”. This compelling technique of using first-person pronouns “are powerful tools for individuals to project on the level of imagination an expansive horizontal camaraderie of fellow nationals” (Meadows and Sayer, 2013: 107). From the beginning, it’s clear that all Americans should be relating to and agreeing with what the message this commercial is sending. By addressing all Americans and using the phrasing of “we,” this advertisement can be seen as trying to collectively bring together the public from vastly different communities, under one nationalized identity (Meadows and Sayer, 2013: 107). We will now explain our interpretation of the American nationalistic stereotypes present in this commercial, as it’s shown that this commercial is generalizing all American’s by their use of language.

The Proud, Hard-working American

The phrasing of words that hint, or even directly point, to the fact that Americans are different in the sense that they are believed to strive harder for material things in life is obvious from the very beginning of the commercial. The very first verbal communication is conducted through a question: the actor of the ad is directly asking the audience why “we,” the Americans, work so hard. He calls themselves “crazy driven, hard-working believers” that do not really care about other countries, because when “they think we are nuts,” as he puts it, we—the proud Americans—respond: “whatever”. He goes on to remind the audience about the trip to the Moon, by Americans, and that they have “a car up there and left the keys in it”. The Americans left the keys in it because nobody else is going up there except the Americans again, because they are ambitious people that “create their own luck” (extracts from “Poolside” commercial). One thing that is of interest here is that the actor keeps repeating these extraordinary American characteristics. Potter, Lang and Bolls (2009: 149) in explaining this technique, refer to what in television is known as the “audio/video redundancy,” an encoding formula that uses the repetition style to “vary the cognitive load imposed by a television message,” where the amount of variation depends directly on the kind of message that is being sent across. They also believe that some television messages are intentionally encoded with arousing verbal and visual themes since they believe that “viewer arousal plays an important role in many aspects of information processing, [since] it is argued that arousing content will increase cognitive load in a way that impacts audio and video encoding equally,” to later on influence a future step that is completed at the decoding stage (Potter, Lang and Bolls, 2009: 149). As far as ‘arousing’ content is concerned, the producers of the commercial—the encoders—seem to be doing a good job since there have been plenty of strong comments both for and against the ad. These comments are discussed in depth further down our research in the decoding section of our analysis.

The Other, ‘Lazy’ Countries

The verbal encoding of biased messages that puts the American on a pedestal does not conform itself only to speaking of the favored group; it also negatively portrays the ‘kicked-back’ way of the citizens of other countries, the other group, who do not work as hard and ambitiously as Americans. This verbal part, just like the one that favors the hard-working Americans, uses hints at the somewhat looser moral of the workers of other countries: “Other countries they work, they stroll home, they stop by the cafe, they take August off. Off”. The actor uses words such as “stroll” when referring to how they stop by the coffee shop to relax, and repeats, here

again, the word “off” when talking about how other countries take the whole month of August off from work, as opposed to the ambitious American who only takes two weeks off in August. The mild attack of the commercial on other countries becomes more obvious on a certain country, France, at the very end, when the monologue ends in a French phrase: “n’est-ce pas?,” meaning ‘isn’t that so?’ or put in the common slang, ‘right?’ (extracts from “Poolside” commercial). Here, the same encoding principles are used in a reverse intention. When the positive, encoded messages were used to elevate the hard-working American, the negative ones here are used to depreciate the working moral of the ‘other,’ who is not from the USA. The interesting point here is that, unlike the verbal encoding of positive messages that beautifully garnish the American character, the negative ones that patronize the ‘others’ are not accompanied by visual reinforcements.

5.3 The Visual Encoding

The visual encoding in the commercial is mostly concentrated on flashing the wealth of the actor, who, incidentally, owns a Cadillac ELR. All the visual messages have been incorporated into the ad for the sake of one purpose, and that is to inform the viewer that hard work will lead to a life of perfection led by the successful American, which, as we discussed above, is encoded into the monologue. Both of these aspects will be discussed in detail in the following section.

The Picture of Perfection

The visual encoding in this commercial takes place from the very beginning. The protagonist, as will be analyzed below, is a white, middle-aged, American male, and the setting of his residence is a large, presumably expensive house with a very spacious backyard and a big swimming pool. One can immediately see the intentions of the encoders of the advertisement, even before the verbal part is started. The power of visual communication is explained by Basil (1994: 182) who, in reviewing empirical data on “attention and television viewing,” stated that in studying the results of such data much of the findings proved that the audience more easily process visual information than auditory information. This might then explain the lack of any encoded visual messages against the other country workers, since our assumption also leans towards the possibility that such visual augmentation might, in fact, have been very difficult to come by, since the notion of the unambitious working man from other countries is most likely not reflective of reality.

The visual encoding does not stop at the backyard. The actor later enters the house where his wife, dressed very sharply as a successful businesswoman, hands him his cup of coffee while smiling happily. His two children, both just as happy as their mother, are in the living room high-fiving their father as he proudly passes them to go get dressed for work. In the next scene he exits the bedroom clothed in a seemingly expensive tailored suit on his way out to the driveway to get into his luxury Cadillac. The commercial is only one minute and three seconds long, but manages to show many different scenes and angles of the expensive house and the family that resides in it. According to Potter, Lang and Bolls (2009), the fast change of scenes is another marketing technique used by encoders to enhance the cognitive perception of the intended audience; this research reveals:

“The more scene changes in a message, the more new information is presented (visually) and, as a result, the greater the cognitive load on the visual encoding system” (Potter, Lang and Bolls, 2009: 150).

The Successful American

The commercial protagonist is a middle aged, upper-middle class, white American. Right from the start, the ad is portraying the typical stereotype of a successful person in the United States. Hottola (2012) suggests that this image owes its birth and the long journey of gradually being shaped to a number of different factors that after the Second World War started to forge the global perception of ‘USA’. According to her, the main driving factor that lead to the shaping of this image was the fact that Americans helped win the war and thus started to victoriously ‘export’ some of their particular trades, one of which was its strong sense of commercialism “with its world-wide media and market presence” (Hottola, 2012: 50). From that moment on, due to the representation of the USA by white, middle aged males that were financially well off, there came to exist a global perception that would make this image very dominating. By taking advantage of this image, not only did the country send out signals to other citizens outside the USA making them wish they lived there, but also started selling its own culture to others that would either welcome or reject it; Coca Cola, for instance, became one of the many strong symbols of this culture, and there was a split in the East and the West in Europe partially because of the rejection or the acceptance of this ‘American Culture’ represented by mainly older, white, financially and politically powerful males (Hottola, 2012: 50-51).

It can be seen through Cadillac's implicit intentions, as well as these various encoded messages that the commercial chose to use nationalistic stereotyping in order to purposely target a segment of the American public—Conservatives. They decided to use nationalistic stereotypes that reflect this population's values and ideologies in order to appeal to the conservative mindset, while hoping to create a buzz with all the publicity this commercial's message provokes. We will now see how the audience did indeed react to this commercial, which uses nationalistic stereotyping, in the following Decoding section.

6. DECODING

Once the “Poolside” commercial aired on television, as well as, uploaded by Cadillac on YouTube in February 2014, debate from the public on whether the ad is positive or not was fierce. Drawing much news and media exposure due to its provocative nature, the ad has the American people split on either loving the ad and the way it depicts Americans or finding it incredibly offensive and hating how ‘they’ are being lumped into how Americans are portrayed. The official YouTube link of the advertisement published by Cadillac on February 7, has generated 2,062,384 views, 4,374 likes, 3,393 dislikes and 3,492 comments at this point in time (May 14, 2014), with countless other articles and discussions taking place concurrently (Cadillac, 2014). After analyzing a large number of articles centered on this ad, and the comments and discussions attached to these articles, our analysis has unfolded into two different streams: Conservative- or Liberal-minded in nature, as to how the public responds to advertising campaigns using nationalistic stereotypes. As described above, this ad stereotypes Americans by using standard conservative orientation views, thus making the in-group for this advertisement, comments that could be considered of the conservative-mindset; viewers who relate and enjoy the ad. It is no surprise then to then see those comments that express liberal ideologies as the out-group; those taking offense.

Both of these groups are decoding the message of the advertisement with background information inherent to them. It is through the viewer, also known as the receiver in this case, to determine, react and experience the message in their own terms—the message at this point, is out of Cadillac’s control. It is during the decoding phase of the communication chain, where the distortions, or lack of equivalence between the sender and receiver are revealed (Hall, 1973: 54). On one hand we have the conservative Americans who are typically identified more aggressively as the “top 1%”; the stereotyped personality of the actor in the advertisement. On the other hand, we have the liberal Americans who are typically identified with believing that more focus should be on helping ‘the people’ as a whole, and not just focusing on how to make the most money for your own benefit. Because of this very apparent rift in attitude and reaction to this commercial, we have separated the viewers’ responses to this ad based on whether they express conservative or liberal ideologies, and then further within those orientations to see how these specific groups experience the ad.

Consumer Reactions

6.1 The Conservative In-Group Comments

Those that are in favor of this ad and agree with the message could be seen as viewing the ad 'inside the dominant code,' in which they've decoded the message in terms of the reference code in which it was encoded by Cadillac (Hall, 1973: 59). This is also referred to as a dominant-hegemonic position from which a televisual discourse can be decoded (Hall, 1973: 59). As those with conservative ideologies view this ad, they see the reality of the 'American Dream', its pro-patriotic nature and the way in which Americans should be working, hard. In an article posted on The American conservative website, Rod Dreher (2014) sums up the ad in the following way:

"It is the triumphalist American ideology in its purest, most distilled form. And yet, I think this is an absolutely brilliant commercial...The kind of person who would buy a Cadillac is the kind of person who would take this to heart. I find the screw-you-Pierre brashness of this ad to be refreshing, in a way; it ought to be shown to foreigners to tell them that this is how many, many Americans think about the American Dream. It is by no means how all Americans think, but there is a profound truth in this ad. Whether it's a good thing or a bad thing—well, that depends on what you value in life".

When analyzing comments in this group, three apparent themes seemed to resonate: 1. The Proud American, 2. The Hard-Work Promoter, 3. The Liberal Basher. While, it was not always the case that these themes were independent from each other within one comment, we categorized comments by the theme that it most aggressively boasted.

The Proud American

A common theme throughout comments to this commercial was the boasting of pride in America. They felt the commercial stood up for what America was built upon and what it should stand for. These viewers' were able to relate to the stereotypes being presented and expressed their positive connection with them. Many reactions within this group expressed joy in watching a commercial that presents an attitude that defends America, instead of putting the country

down or making apologies. Examples and further analysis of these comments will be given below.

Example One:

"I love this ad! It's been a long time since I've seen or heard anything that actually celebrates America for what we are, instead of putting us down, and acting embarrassed! I am a proud American!" (Sandra Trusso, 2014)

This comment clearly expresses pride when stating, "I am a proud American". Similar to the first example, this viewers' comment speaks to the same idea that there are those out there who persecute or put down America. The conservative ideology is that the public needs to protect and defend America's values (Conservative Party USA, 2014). This comment saw congruence between the message in the commercial and this conservative ideal.

Example Two:

"Absolutely love the commercial. Absolutely love my country, we are exceptional, we are the shining light on a hill, the last great hope of mankind. We are not perfect but we are blessed to be Americans...White, Black, Hispanic, Jewish, Irish, Russian, Chinese...etc, we are all blessed to be in the greatest country on earth...so why the heck should we not be proud of it?" (o3marine52, 2014)

The pride in this comment can be seen with the overt devotion and fervor to America: "Absolutely love my country, we are exceptional, we are the shining light on a hill, the last great hope of mankind" and "we are all blessed to be in the greatest country on earth". This commentator clearly feels that this commercial supports America and its values, illustrating a message that resonates with like-minded individuals who are not ashamed or embarrassed about the country they live in, but purely proud of it.

The Hard-Work Promoter

Another theme that was very present within the in-group, were comments that spoke of pride at this ad promoting the American characteristic of working hard. Many viewers' reactions in this category simply decoded the strongest message present in this advertisement, as being "work hard and create your own luck," which they correlate to being a strong possibility while living in the USA. These viewers' were similar to those in the "Proud American" category, but took their

reactions a step further by really lamenting on the fact that America was founded on the ethics of hard work and being in control of your own destiny, one of the driving principles of the conservative ideology (Conservative Party USA, 2014). Examples and further analysis of these comments will be given below.

Example One:

“If success in contemporary American society isn't correlated with hard work than you must have been born with a silver spoon in your mouth....not YOU literally of course...unless you were. It is the hope for achievement (aka success) that has everyone else in the world clamoring to get in. Very few countries offer a chance at success if you work hard like the US does....I also needed a bit of luck and engaging my brain...but like the commercial says you make your own luck. Funny thing about luck,...the harder you work the luckier you seem to get. I've never been attracted to Cadillacs before....but I am now.” (Craig Muma, 2014)

In this comment, the reaction is encompassed by the notion that hard work does pay-off in America, “If success in contemporary American society isn’t correlated with hard work than you must have been born with a silver spoon in your mouth”. Here, the expression of “silver spoon in your mouth” refers to those that are born into traditionally wealthy families, and have inherited their affluence; in other words, people who did not have to work for their wealth, but had it handed to them. This comment then goes on to say, “Very few countries offer a chance at success if you work hard like the US does”. Again, showing pride at the fact that in America, you’re responsible for your own success depending on how hard you’re willing to work and that America is one of a few countries that promote this. This comment reiterates the principles seen in the conservative ideology as stated above. This commentator shows their allegiance with the Cadillac brand because of the message sent in this advertisement by writing, “I’ve never been attracted to Cadillacs before...but I am now”. Cadillac successfully transmitted their message to a receiver and were able to have them consider their brand because of the stereotyped ideologies presented in the ad.

Example Two:

"I LOVE this commercial!!!! Thanks, Cadillac! Hard work and a great work ethic are the keys to success in the land of opportunity." (garnet1963, 2014)

Again, this comment clearly states their concurrence with the message in the commercial of "you work hard, you create your own luck". This comment states, "Hard work and a great work ethic are the keys to success in the land of opportunity," once again illustrating an alignment with the Conservative orientation of the American Dream still being very much alive if you're willing to work for it.

Example Three:

"Great commercial! Shows what made this country great. HARD WORK! What libs hate. Actually they like it so they can tax all of it. If I had the \$ I'd go buy one of the Cadillacs mentioned." (Eric Belander, 2014)

This commentator reacts by pointing out that this commercial "shows what made this country great. HARD WORK!" Using the past tense of "made" instead of "makes" illustrates that this commentator believes that this was a founding value of America. This comment goes on to put down liberals and their propensity to vote for higher taxes on higher incomes by saying, "What libs (liberals) hate. Actually they like it so they can tax all of it". Like the second example above, this commentator addresses their agreement with the message Cadillac sent in this ad by stating, "If I had the \$ (money) I'd go buy one of the Cadillacs mentioned".

The Liberal Basher

Another major theme present when analyzing comments made by the in-group, was their propensity to provoke or berate those that belong to the liberal political orientation. Many of these comments started "wars" on the message board, where there would be strong debates between comment posters arguing politics from the liberal and conservative side. These posts tended to be long-winded and bringing in political ideologies that were not concretely shown in the stereotypes present in the ad, but that belong to the in-group that was depicted. These viewers' decoded the message as Cadillac "speaking" to them, the conservatives, and that they were a part of this group portrayed. They were saw the literal translation of the ad, and were able to invoke the political ideologies they would presume Cadillac is standing up for in this ad,

even though they were not directly said. Many of these comments incorporated the previous two themes of “The Proud American” and “The Hard-Work Promoter,” but then directly compared these ideologies to the liberal group. They reacted to this commercial by attacking the liberal out-group, and berating them for not being a part of the stereotypical setting presented in the ad, and in fact, having (in their minds) the opposite opinion of the message sent. Examples and further analysis of these comments will be given below.

Example One:

“Personally, I love the ad, because at 65, I remember when Americans were strong, proud, hardworking, independent and didn’t care what anyone thought [sic]. We were successful, upwardly mobile and your future was in your own hands. Now we’re a lazy, cowardly, European Model, entitlement population, led by an even lazier, cowardly community organizer, telling us we should be ashamed of the success our parents and grandparents worked so hard for. Someone that lived his whole life on the largess and success of others. To all you American success-hating liberal progressives: If your parents and grandparents didn’t work hard and become successful, you wouldn’t be where you are today...sitting on your collective, lazy asses belittling a country that gave you so much.” (AppraisHer, 2014)

It’s clear in this comment the vehemence the commentator feels for those that have liberal ideologies and how America has transformed into this way of thinking, leaving behind their previous values of being “strong, proud, hardworking” and “independent”. This commentator used to see Americans as “successful, upwardly mobile” and with the ability to put their future in their “own hands”. They go on to call America(ns) “lazy, cowardly, European Model, entitlement population” and then refer to President Obama as a “cowardly community organizer”. President Obama, who is a member of the Democratic Party which supports largely liberal ideologies, is then chastised as “someone that lived his whole life on the largess and success of others,” yet tells us (Americans) “we should be ashamed of the success our parents and grandparents worked so hard for”. This comment ends with a direct message to those that have a liberal-mindset, calling them “success-hating” and insinuating they are all sitting on their “collective, lazy asses belittling a country that gave” them “so much” because their families before them worked hard and were successful. This viewers’ reaction reflect those of the Conservative ideology that one needs to work hard and create success for themselves, and chides the liberal ideologies of not showing pride in their country, but instead, wanting to assimilate to a different political mindset, similar to one found in European countries.

Example Two:

“Who is offended by an add aimed at people who work smart, work hard, and are successful, and proud of their hard work, success, and America? I guess failure, loser [sic], obama supporters who think they deserve the fruits of the labor of the factious person in the add, not the person who earned it. After all, they voted to receive other peoples money.” (Cliff, 2014)

The reaction experienced in this comment is to criticize those that could be offended by this advertisement, whom the commentator feel are liberal-minded people that would have voted for President Obama: “Obama supporters who think they deserve the fruits of the labor of the factious person in the add, not the person who earned it”. Clearly, this viewer feels that any person that would vote for a Democrat, must be offended by an advertisement that promotes hard work and success, as according to this viewer, those values are not within their ideology. This comment could be seen as attacking the liberal ideology of having an increased welfare fund or higher taxes, by saying the people offended by this advertisement, “voted to receive other peoples money”; once again, trying to show that liberals do not want to work hard and create success for themselves.

6.2 The Liberal Out-Group Comments

As a member of the out-group, or of liberal ideology, when viewing this commercial, it can be seen through comments that the encoded message becomes an offensive tirade about a distinct type of American that is found to be despicable. This commercial seems to glorify the individual and their personal wealth and happiness, a fundamental difference in the liberal-mindset to the conservative way of thinking (Liberal Party of New York, 2014). It is through the oppositional code that this group decodes the message, in which the viewer understands the literal and the connotative meaning of the discursive message, but decodes the message in a “globally contrary way” (Hall, 1973: 61). It is within this positioning of decoding a televisual discourse that the viewer reconfigures the message based on a different reference point or framework (Hall, 1973: 61)—in this case, their political background. In an article titled, “Cadillac Made A Commercial About The American Dream, And It’s A Nightmare,” Huffington Post editor Carolyn Gregoire (2014) goes on to say the following about this commercial:

“There are plenty of things to celebrate about being American, but being possessed by a blind mania for working yourself into the ground, buying more stuff and mocking people in other countries just isn’t one of them. So we wish we could say that Cadillac’s commercial for its 2014 ELR, which debuted during the Olympics, was a joke. But no, it seems to be dead serious—a completely shameless celebration of our work-hard-buy-more culture, with a blanket dismissal of “other countries” and their laziness tossed in for good measure.”

When analyzing comments in the liberal out-group, two very different themes from the in-group were illustrated: 1. The Repulsed, 2. The Defenders.

The Repulsed

Comments found in the out-group, or of Liberal-mindset, in general vocalized a degree of offense and/or disgust with this commercial. Comments in this category typically spoke of the stereotypical American portrayed as someone who is reprehensible, and a completely adverse picture of how they, as Americans act and why it can be clearly seen why ‘others’ hate Americans. Many within this category also admitted that the “American” portrayed does exist, but that they do not want to be associated with them. The majority of these posts feel ashamed at the type of American that’s being stereotyped and are embarrassed to be categorized as an American along-side the message being sent in this commercial. There are many comments that feel Cadillac ostracized another segment of Americans that do not act and behave like the actor in this ad, and only reinforces the negative stereotypes other countries’ have of America. Examples and further analysis of these comments will be given below.

Example One:

“Disgusting. This is the reason a large portion world hates us. PLEASE try to see the folly in this terrible commercial AND destructive ideology.” (Aaron Gray, 2014)

The obvious reaction in this comment is that the ad is “disgusting”. It’s said that the “destructive ideology” present in the ad is the reason why “a large portion” of the “world hates us”. It could be seen that this destructive ideology is in fact the actors arrogant approach to the ideal that if you work hard enough and limit your time off, you can afford to buy whatever you want—a conservative ideology. This commentator could also be speaking about the actors monologue in

which he is a bit put off by other countries having a more laid back approach to life, as well as boasting of all of America(ns) accomplishments. This viewer clearly does not relate to the message in the commercial.

Example Two:

“Officially the most pretentious commercial I’ve ever seen... this actually made me hate Cadillac for the way they portrayed the typical American.” (Leslie Martin, 2014)

Clearly the most apparent reaction in this comment is hatred for Cadillac because of the way they stereotyped Americans. This viewer felt offense at the “typical American” portrayed and could be seen as embarrassed to be grouped in as the type of American depicted.

Example Three:

“Thank you cadillac for taking all the negative stereotypes of america and putting them together in one piece. Now I don’t have to explain all the sucky aspects of american culture, I only need to show this ad.” (Francis Watts, 2014)

In this comment, the reaction is that Cadillac did a great job of putting all negative stereotypes of America into one commercial. This commentator clearly does not enjoy the way in which America(ns) have been portrayed, but can agree that these ideologies do exist, by stating, “now I don’t have to explain all the sucky aspects of american culture”. The viewer must feel that the aspects illustrated in the commercial occur, but they are obviously not proud of this.

The Defenders

Similar to the comments found in “The Repulsed” category, comments in the “The Defenders” took the reaction of being offended and further discouraged the belittling of those that were ‘attacked’ in the commercial. In these comments, people spoke negatively of the message they decoded the commercial as sending—mainly the promotion of greed and materialism—and encouraged people to actually take a look at and consider the positives of the European work ethic. These comments were unhappy with the illustration of the “elitist” attitude of the American in this commercial, and felt that America should start focusing on creating a more well-rounded lifestyle, not focused around personal wealth and work. The liberal ideology favors more civil rights, national health insurance and social security benefits—what could be seen as more

aligned with some European models (Liberal Party of New York, 2014). Examples and further analysis of these comments will be given below.

Example One:

"I was disgusted the first time I saw this ad. First of all, the actor is all pumped-up and his suits are too tight; his hair is a fake blonde, and he looks too old to have that hair. It's a stupid, superficial ad. More importantly, he snubs "The European" approach to life. I think the Europeans know a few things about how to live well; they've been through two devastating world wars, and they have learned to put their priorities in the right place. This ad makes Americans come off as materialistic, arrogant, air heads. It's sad that the children in the ad are mere accent pieces to his upscale home. We can learn much from the Europeans about balance and raison d'etre." (Meredith, 2014)

In this example, the commentator sides with “The European’ approach to life” that was chided in the commercial—what can be considered similar to the liberal-mindset. This viewer is “disgusted” by the message of this commercial and does not appreciate the way in which it makes Americans appear “materialistic, arrogant, air heads”. Showing their distaste for the conservative way of thinking very much illustrated in the advertisement. Clearly they feel Americans can actually learn from the European approach to life in the reason for being and the work-life balance; the opposite of what the ad is boasting.

Example Two:

"There's nothing wrong with hard work - the problem is glorifying "stuff" and implying that's all Americans want and work for. People in Europe work hard, but they have different values - they value time off, maternity/paternity leave, universal health care, etc. And seriously, how many Americans, if given the choice, wouldn't want the whole month of August off?" (Connie Currier, 2014)

Here, the commentator can appreciate the message of hard work that’s being presented in the commercial, “there’s nothing wrong with hard work,” but do not appreciate that the ad further justifies the purchasing of materialistic “stuff” because of working hard. They are backing the European work ethic that the commercial belittles, by stating that people in other countries do work hard, but “have different values”. This viewer relates to the European model of valuing more time off, longer maternity/paternity leave and health care available for all—values that those in the liberal parties tend to pursue and agree with as well. They then make the point that,

if given the opportunity to have the entire month of August off in the United States, who wouldn't take it? Showing that it's easy to put down other countries' for having this extended vacation time since it's rarely offered to those working in America, but of course it would be taken advantage of if it was available.

Example Three:

"The problem I had was the, we're superior people and that's why we build superior cars attitude of the ad. The ad wasn't bad, and it is just a commercial, but you could also see the ad as saying "Americans work harder than lazy Europeans". Which I also see as Cadillac trying to go after European competitors from Audi, BMW, Jaguar, and Mercedes-Benz. But the ad doesn't mention any car really, he was saying our car is better than yours, but he did so by putting European people down by basically calling them lazy. Insulting other cars would have been expected, but insulting the nations and people who build them wasn't necessary." (CDspeed, 2014)

In this comment, the viewer reacts by showing frustration at the fact that the commercial called European people lazy, and built up the American mentality of being a "superior people" that "build superior cars". Again, a common mindset of conservative viewers to show and boast pride in their country and what it has accomplished. This comment reflects that it would be understandable to insult cars made by European competitors since this is an ad for a car, however, insulting "nations and people who build them wasn't necessary". In other words, this comment reflects annoyance at Cadillac's message as delivered by the actor—a stereotypically conservative one.

7. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

7.1 Summary

The intention of almost every corporate, multinational company is primarily to increase sales. Advertising and propaganda are hence used for the purpose of raising awareness of the product, brand, and/or service that is being put on display, and marketers take advantage of different tactics that can help them boost sales. The use of stereotyping within televised advertising has long been a tool and one of the ways in which such task can be accomplished. The consequences of generalizing groups in order to sell a certain product, though, can often be very surprising. Different groups of people, depending on whether or not they belong to the stereotyped crowd, react differently to the message. For example, the in-group can be seen as appraising the stereotype while others, the out-group, condemn it. In this study we set out, initially, to study our first research question and show how nationalistic stereotypes are used in the automotive industry of a particular nation—the USA. We investigated the kind of stereotype and also how it was being portrayed through encoding of different visual messages, such as age, skin color and financial wealth of the generalized group, as well as messages that were encoded verbally into the commercial, such as statements made by the protagonist about Americans and people of other countries. We witnessed, by observing commentaries made by the company executives themselves, that the encoding of messages that stereotyped the niche market was done so intentionally to arouse and provoke the audience and thus aggressively make people aware of their product. This, in turn, led us to our second research question, the public response to such nationalistic display of stereotypes, which led to the inevitable creation of the controversy that immediately followed the televising of the ad. Comments started to pour in on different media platforms and people took sides either defending the ideology demonstrated by the ad or taking an offense to it. We observed that these responses were founded on two main political orientations: conservative versus liberal. The battle between the two, whether the line of reasoning of their arguments was justified or not, clearly demonstrated how different people from different social groups perceive certain stereotypes and how these kinds of generalizations, especially within the media, should perhaps be evaluated more thoroughly before shown to the public.

7.2 Findings

In this section, we will discuss our results after applying two distinct, existing theories in order to answer the research questions: “In what ways does the American automotive industry use nationalistic stereotyping in their advertising campaigns?” and “How does the public respond to ads that use nationalistic stereotypes?”.

As we conferred earlier on, the intention of this research has depended highly upon a relatively sensible definition of the term stereotype, and how it can differ in the way it explains distinct categories of people. We have concluded, after reviewing different research material on the subject, that generalization is the main ingredient of the term. However, this generalization might at times result in controversial or undesired consequences. It has the ability to put a certain group of people at risk of being wrongly judged by the actions of only a few within that group, that actually fall under the category that contains the stereotype characteristics assigned to the whole group by others. This possibility is referred to by Steele and Aronson (1995: 798) as the *stereotype threat*, which is defined as a “situational predicament in which individuals are at risk, by dint of their actions or behaviors, of confirming negative stereotypes about their group”. The purpose of this research has partially been to avoid deviations such as this. We have clearly explained the origins of the ‘American’ stereotype, how it is perceived by others and how many Americans themselves, understand the underlying foundations of such stereotypes. We have seen through their comments how they have tried to avoid the aforementioned stereotype threat. At the same time, we have also seen that many that belong to the in-group do support some stereotypes portrayed by both the commercial and perceived by the out-group; it seems as if they are proud of the stereotype features that set them apart.

Use of Nationalistic Stereotyping in an American Automotive Advertising Campaign

So how does the automotive industry use nationalistic stereotyping in their advertising campaigns? The use of stereotyping in advertising campaigns has been a commonly used tactic since commercials began. Their purpose of creating a picture for viewers to relate to or fantasize about has proved to be a widely used marketing tool (Gilman, 1985; Wall, 2001). As could be seen in previous research, the automotive industry has been using nationalistic stereotyping in advertising campaigns for a long time. In the beginning, they could be seen being used as ways to differentiate one’s superiority amongst other ‘white’ nation’s automobile design and manufacturing (Jobling, 2011: 248). By instituting nationalistic stereotypes in automotive advertising, manufacturers were able to incorporate stereotypes of gender, class,

ethnicity and race, all-in-one generalization (Jobling, 2011: 248). Automotive campaigns using nationalistic stereotypes in this way, could be seen employing taglines such as “Unmistakably German, Made in France” for Citroën; “The Heartbeat of America” for Chevrolet; and “Made by Sweden” for Volvo. The use of stereotyping in this matter shows the manufacturer’s heritage, even when the automobile is advertised and/or sold globally, and can create an initial reference for the consumer. It shows pride in the country-of-origin without deploying the belittling of other countries’ products or people. It could be argued that today, advertising in this manner creates friction in the minds of consumers, as it’s largely known that cars are manufactured and using parts from around the world, taking advantage of ever-evolving global commerce. With that being said, nationalistic stereotyping in the automotive industry is still relevant and manufacturers are using new methods of employing this tactic.

Vaughan (1989) has suggested that the use of nationalistic stereotypes within advertisements could go one of two ways: there would be propagation of polarized, national-brand identities, or there would be the portrayal of a ‘contextual no-man’s land,’ in which everyone can identify with the stereotype in a non-threatening, almost non-observant way, over cross-cultural borders. As seen in the case of Cadillac’s “Poolside” commercial, the advertisement uses American nationalistic stereotyping to advertise within America—not globally. Stereotyping a large nation, made up of heterogeneous classes, races, ethnicities and other characteristics, would prove to be a difficult feat, especially when advertising directly to this group. In the case of America, there’s a basic split in political ideologies between those that support liberalism or conservatism values and policies. Within these two political orientations, certain stereotypes of their ‘follower’ exist—both very much Americans, but very much different in their mindsets and attitudes about their country. For fear of landing in what Vaughan calls the ‘no-mans land,’ Cadillac chose to pick a side and stereotype an American by way of the conservative mindset; a side that would most closely resemble a consumer that would purchase the vehicle advertised. It was clear from the interview with Bierly, Cadillac’s advertising director that the intention of this ad was to provoke and create a buzz (DeMorro, 2014). By polarizing half of Americans by stereotyping the thoughts and attitudes of only 50% of the population, Cadillac was able to do just what they intended.

It’s seen in this advertisement that the use of nationalistic stereotyping was indeed to create a more provocative campaign. Cadillac chose to identify their product with the American group that would be more prone to purchasing their vehicle, therefore, giving them the stereotypical

American that stood up for their ideologies who they could relate and identify with. The stereotypical ideologies encoded into the commercial illustrated the successful American dad, living with his perfect family in their large home, boasting about the American Dream while belittling other countries that don't value working as hard as Americans. As for the remaining Americans that don't classify themselves with the ideologies presented in the ad, the nature of the message sent was sure to get them outraged since it was a nationwide campaign propagating the 'American,' who they despise. Cadillac was able to successfully encode their message in precisely a manner to achieve their desired results of provocation and creation of a buzz in the American public and media. Through online, word-of-mouth by both sides—the offended and the appraised—the commercial was able to gain great exposure to a very large audience, boosting awareness of not only the commercial, but the Cadillac brand.

Instead of relying on previous ways in which the automotive industry has used nationalistic stereotyping in the past—as a means of differentiation and creation of all-encompassing pride with their country and its people—Cadillac crossed a new threshold of polarizing groups within their country with the understanding that their ad would be both loved and hated.

Understanding/Misunderstanding of Encoded and Decoded Messages

In setting out to investigate how viewers' react to commercials that use nationalistic stereotyping, we relied on both theories mentioned above. Using the encoding/decoding theory in analyzing the comments made on the subject of our research, the "Poolside" television commercial about the ELR Cadillac, we see that the link between the intended message by the producer that is either verbally or visually encoded in the medium is not necessarily a straight line as far as *understanding* the encoded message is concerned. The decoding of information is more often than not done through other sets of values and principles that were initially used by the producer to convey an intended message. Hall (1973: 54) refers to this as the symmetry between the two stages, where there is a process of *understanding* and *misunderstanding* of the intended message that takes place throughout the whole procedure that starts at the encoding stage and ends at the decoding of the message by the viewer.

The perception of different kinds of stereotypes is the major driving factor in both the usage of them by the encoder to affect the minds of viewers in fulfilling the purpose of the message, which in Cadillac's case is to sell a highly priced product, and the receiving of them by a vast audience that as whole does not correspond qualitatively to the intended niche market meant to

be targeted by the commercial producers. As discussed previously, the producers of the commercial are using the commonly perceived image of success through a stereotyped American profile: white, middle-aged, and economically well-off. Through the analysis at the decoding section, where we looked at different types of comments made by an audience that mainly differed in two major political ideologies, we witnessed different perceptions of the same encoded visual and verbal message. We had already seen how, according to these ideologies, the viewers were mainly divided into the in-group and the out-group. If the viewer is experiencing this commercial, and has a tie to one of these political orientations, it has been revealed that they experience the ad in completely different ways. The Conservative In-group Comments were found to consist of one of the following themes: The Proud American, The Hard-Work Promoter, or The Liberal Basher. While the Liberal Out-Group Comments fell into one of the following categories: The Repulsed or The Defenders. From the categorization of these comments, it can further be seen that those comments found in both the in-group and out-group, did in fact reflect some distaste or even hatred for the opposite group, similar to what Brewer (1999) described as being a possibility.

By producing what Cadillac intended, a campaign meant to provoke and arouse the public in discussing it, they in fact tapped into the actuality that these different groups would debate what this ad “really” is trying to convey subjectively to the viewer. While the liberals that view this ad are perhaps “not operating within the ‘dominant’ or ‘preferred’ code” (in-group), what they get instead are comments and public reactions as ‘systematically distorted communication’ which indeed furthered Cadillac’s mission to provoke and create more of a “buzz” (Hall, 1973: 58).

Consumer Response is Manufactured in the Social Community Online

As we set out to study the comments on the “Poolside” commercial, we had naturally anticipated some original findings, such as the responses of in- versus out-groups, or the confirmation of Cadillac’s controversial intentions behind the ad. What we had not expected to see, was how these responses, especially from the general audience, would create other types of very personal debates that had almost nothing to do with the ad itself. As we analyzed the comments, we noticed how in responding to each other, some members of the audience would either agree or refute previous commentaries. However, in expressing their own personal views, which in general were based on some kind of political bearing, some people succeeded in arousing, offending, or simply upsetting another viewer whose political take on the subject differed from the former’s, and so the two, and usually more, would get into a heated discussion

that soon would leave Cadillac behind. This additional bonus to the findings of our research only further stresses the role that is played out by the strong political affiliations of some Americans, which is exactly what Cadillac commercial producers have chosen to take advantage of in order to arouse people emotionally and stir things up, so to speak. An example of this reaction, which are manufactured in the online community, can be found below:

"Love it --- what's wrong with pursuing the American Dream and working hard!" (Jim Walsh, 2014)

"It illustrates in no uncertain terms the despite of liberals, who try to get ahead by politics, chicanery, begging or extorting 'contributions', joining unions and swindling taxpayers, creating Ponzi schemes, and in general treating work and jobs as not-so-necessary evils that interfere with writing crappy poetry or un-melodic music to display pseudo-intellectual angst, which they confuse with genius and relevance." (Gary Stevensen, 2014)

"@ Jim. Nothing inherently wrong with it, but when it becomes your overriding ambition, and becomes a screw everyone before they screw you mentality, and I got mine now screw you. That's when it becomes bad. I plan on becoming a business owner, and would like to do well in business, but not at the expense of my friends, family, the environment, and country. It is possible to be a good steward of our fellow man, and be a successful business person." (Brian Ellis, 2014)

"Gary Stevensen - lol. Projection much? I don't have much time for pseudo intellectualism either. But unions are not instances of pseudo intellect. And cronyism is very much the domain of Republicans which is why pretty much every single one of them is bought and paid for by corporate interests. And they have no problem doing their bidding. But what I hate most is lying. And you are a liar." (Duncan Frame, 2014)

The above quotes are only one example of a long train of highly opinionated commentaries by a vast audience that has recently seen the "Poolside" commercial. They only prove the fact that the ad has had such heavy impact by its particularly biased use of nationalistic stereotypes that it has raised among the viewers a strong sense of political awareness. The comments are no longer directly addressing the car, or even the ad itself, but are using the stereotype that is

being portrayed in it as a tool to express their own, personal, and, in the majority of cases, very political point of view. Consequently, a textual battle is going on, and the battlefields are the different social platforms on the internet, where the affiliates of the two political extremes are trying to gain credibility by either praising the commercial or condemning it, depending on their respective, political views. The interesting point here, for the sake of this research, is not merely the disagreement that is being displayed so vividly through these comments, but whether or not the marketing managers and personnel involved in creating the commercial actually expected this kind of reaction to take place, where the car—their product—is seemingly drowned and forgotten in the fierce and angry comments of the viewers. This is the “less optimal outcome” referred to by Cowart and Darke (2014: 67) who claim it to be the direct result of using derogatory or stereotypical images in ad campaigns. Marketers should be aware of this when in target marketing they appeal to national or political stereotypes in order to increase sales. Target marketing, where a specific group of people is deliberately chosen by marketers to serve as their principal audience due to the fact that they best meet the requirements for the ideal consumer of that specific product or service, should avoid potentially unethical sales tactics that might offend other people (Cowart and Darke, 2014: 73). It should be noted by advertisers that these socially manufactured responses are completely out of their control. Once the commercial is broadcasted, consumers can and will take to the internet to voice their opinions and reactions.

7.3 Theoretical, Managerial, and Practical Contributions

The contributions of this study will focus mainly on the practical additions this research has yielded in the field of stereotype use in advertisements. However, one theoretical contribution this research has made, is inclusive of Brewer’s (1979) In-Group Bias Theory. Qualls and Moore (1990) built upon this theory by extending it to include that people will evaluate and react more positively to seeing their own race (in-group) depicted in advertisements, rather than someone of a different race (out-group). This research can now be seen as contributing and extending the IGBT to political orientation in advertising. Similar to what was uncovered in Qualls and Moore (1990), we found that those that are viewing an advertisement that shared their political ideologies (in-group), would respond and react more positively than those that express political ideologies of the out-group. It was without a doubt, clear to see that an advertisement that was infused with the conservative orientation (in-group) was found to be favored by those that expressed more conservative-based comments (in-group). In opposition, those comments that took a more liberal-based orientation (out-group), clearly found the ad unfavorable.

Applying the In-Group Bias Theory to research how an automotive advertisement uses nationalistic stereotypes has uncovered managerial contributions. One major implication that advertisers and brands need to be aware of when using nationalistic stereotypes in commercials, is that the audience will be decoding the message based on their intrinsic beliefs and values. Specifically in the USA, the task of creating an actor that reflects non-controversial nationalistic stereotypes would be difficult due to the incredible heterogeneity of the nation's people. In the case where the advertiser seeks to purposely create controversy through nationalistic stereotypes, it seems idolizing one political orientation over another is one way to do this. A major heed of caution here is that while the intended effect of provocation is met, it also directly correlates your brand and/or product to that political orientation. As could be seen in the comments analyzed, those in the in-group rallied around the message and spoke of considering purchasing Cadillac because of the message sent. However, those in the out-group showed pure disgust and spoke of hatred for the brand because of the commercial. While this advertisement was for a \$75,000 Cadillac ELR, in the future Cadillac could be advertising a different car, possibly lower in price that would open up the target audience. The use of nationalistic stereotypes in this one commercial, could have repercussions in the future, as those in the out-group now associate Cadillac with the type of thinking they say present in this one commercial, and will not consider purchasing this brand because of these ideologies.

Another contribution this research posits is practical in nature. In alignment with the social constructionist philosophy our method adopted, it could be argued that people respond and react to situations and other people based on knowledge gained from relationships, society, the media and other actors they interact with daily. It's been shown through various research that stereotypes can shape the attitudes of individuals and groups and how they relate to others in society (Johnson and Grier, 2012). By using nationalistic stereotyping in advertisements being aired via mass media, this practice can only further confirm "one's world view, promote acceptance of current social arrangements, and reassure people that things are the way they ought to be" (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000: 364). While some viewers are conscious and aware of advertisers using this tactic, many others are not as cognizant and take the message, stereotypes and all, at face-value. Less-educated or younger consumers can see the nationalistic portrayal and believe this is how a certain people (as a whole) think, act, and behave, only perpetuating negative stereotypes that are not correctly identifying an entire nation. This research seeks to educate these consumers that these tactics are being employed by advertisers in a way to create more awareness and create buzz. While these intentions seem

quite innocent, in the hands of certain consumers, the information presented can be devastating. When broadcasting an advertisement promoting controversial, nationalistic stereotypes today, even if intended for only the nation that's being stereotyped, with platforms such as YouTube and online media outlets, the message easily surpasses those borders. Now, people from all over the world are watching the perpetuation of these American stereotypes and forming opinions and reactions to them. In more drastic measures, these "false perceptions" others are now forming based on this commercial, combined with other negative nationalistic stereotypes they've heard or seen in one way or another, can negatively affect the "economic development of a country" (Widler, 2007: 144). This research seeks to educate consumers to be mindful of advertisers' use of this tactic so that stereotypes are not perpetuated due to being uninformed or ignorant of this ploy.

7.4 Suggestions for Further Research

According to the online platform news magazine, *Transport Evolved Electric Car News*, the "Poolside" commercial does not seem to have responded well to the expectations of the marketers. Now, GM is resorting to another marketing technique, namely the test-driving of the vehicle in order to get clients interested in buying the car. According to *Automotive News*, GM is trying to combat slow sales of its luxury plug-in coupe by rewarding dealerships who are prepared to designate one of their Cadillac ELRs an official test-drive vehicle" (Naughton, 2014). This only goes to prove that the use of such stereotypes displayed in the commercial, even though to some extent provoking and alerting, does not necessarily offer a chance at better sales. Whether this poor response and the low sales numbers has anything to do with the fact that many viewers might have found the contents offensive or simply because of a down shift in the automotive market is open for discussion and makes good point of departure for further studies on the subject.

Another very interesting suggestion for further research on the topic would be to look at similar display of nationalistic stereotypes and related encoded messages in the televised advertisements of a completely different commercial industry, such as real estate or clothing industries. These products, just like a car, are perceived by many as highlighters of social status and financial wealth within different groups of society. It would be interesting to investigate the possibility of the existence of much the same type of generalizations that relate the niche market to a certain product.

We should also be aware of the fact that this study has limited itself to one single commercial produced in the developed Western country of the USA. Stereotypes of gender, race, culture, nation and the like might differ in the way they are portrayed and even perceived by both insiders as well as outsiders in other countries, both developed and underdeveloped. A recommendation would be to perhaps find a similar ad within one such nation and study the usage of different stereotypes that are used in it for purposes of boosting sales and raising awareness. A very good example of such ad would, for instance, be the Swedish, 2013 Volvo commercial that features the international soccer sensation, Zlatan Ibrahimovic. This commercial, too, aroused different kinds of sentiments with many viewers of distinct political and social orientations. The stereotypes used in the commercial differ slightly from those demonstrated in the "Poolside" commercial; nevertheless, they exist and would make great research material.

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9. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Transcript of Commercial

Why do we work so hard? For what? For this? For stuff? Other countries they work, they stroll home, they stop by the cafe, they take August off. Off. Why aren't you like that? Why aren't we like that?

Because we're crazy driven, hard working believers, that's why. Those other countries think we're nuts. Whatever! Were the Wright brothers insane? Bill Gates? Les Paul? Ali?

Were we nuts when we pointed to the moon? That's right, we went up there, and you know what we got? Bored. So we left. Got a car up there, left the keys in it. Do you know why? Because we're the only ones going back up there. That's why.

But I digress...It's pretty simple. You work hard, you create your own luck, and you've got to believe anything's possible. As for all the stuff, that's the upside of only taking two weeks off in August. N'est ce pas?

The first ever ELR. Cadillac