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The University of Southern Mississippi

EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION, PARASOCIAL
RELATIONSHIPS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE

by

Lindsey Webb Dancy

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015

ABSTRACT

EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION, PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE

by Lindsey Webb Dancy

May 2015

The pervasive use of the Internet for social purposes has led to organizational and social change, as well as social movements online throughout the world. Of particular interest in this study is commitment to organizations by patrons and stakeholders showcased via social media outlets. This research includes a review of organizational identification, parasocial relationships, and social media research followed by a detailed description of the method, which included the creation and testing of a questionnaire examining the organizational identification and parasocial relationships of external publics, and their social media use. A hypothesis is put forth suggesting that there is a relationship between social media use and external organizational identification, which was confirmed with a Pearson Product-Moment correlation. A research question that sought to discover whether parasocial relationships influence that relationship was asked and results of a mediation analysis suggest that parasocial relationships do mediate the relationship between social media use and external organizational identification. Practical implications for communication researchers and organizations, as well as suggestions for future research and limitations conclude this research.

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of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2015

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family for their continued support, encouragement, and patience throughout this journey. Particularly, to my husband who has held my hand through many of the most challenging academic endeavors of this process and continually encouraged me with his love and compassion, and to my Mom and brother who always encouraged me to keep reaching for my goals and always stood by me even in the most trying of times. Without you all, this would not have been possible. I love you all.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I certainly thank my committee chairman, Dr. Steven Venette, for his patience and helpful guidance through this process. I also thank Drs. Eura Jung, Lawrence Hosman, John Meyer, and Charles Tardy for their participation and commitment as members of my committee.

My friend and mentor, Dr. Mignon Kucia deserves special thanks, as well. Your perspective, encouragement, and guidance were essential to this journey. Thank you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

External Organizational Identification, Parasocial Relationships and Social Media Use

In an interview with the *Baptist Press* (Blume, 2012), Dan Cathy, President and Chief Operating Officer of Chick-fil-A, said, "We are very much supportive of the family -- the biblical definition of the family unit." Backlash ensued as groups, individuals, and other businesses found fault with the Chick-fil-A President's stance on marriage. From this, Mike Huckabee launched an online movement inviting all who supported Chick-fil-A to patronize the company on August 1, 2012. "Huckabee said the event was not about gay marriage -- as some had made it to be -- but about free speech and religious liberty. A business owner, he said, should be able to state basic Christian belief without being castigated" (Foust, 2012). Huckabee dubbed this day "Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day."

Not only were individuals speaking out about their support of Chick-fil-A, but those in opposition spoke out, too. Approximately 11,000 people on Facebook committed to attending the National Same Sex Kiss Day at Chick-fil-A the Friday after Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day. A staggering 55 times that many people pledged to attend Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day (Bingham, 2012). While Chick-fil-A did not promote the day, they did not ignore the Facebook movement that took place. Chick-fil-A tried to be prepared for the event, but inevitably several locations had to close their doors early and direct customers to other locations as they neared the end of their food supply. Many restaurants reported wait times upwards of two hours.

The movement reached far and wide, even to cities that are not home to a Chick-fil-A location. For example, "Arthur Langley organized a caravan to cart supporters to

the nearest location two hours away. Langley said he and 14 friends and supporters drove the two hours and "happily" waited a "very, very long time" to "demonstrate their support for what they believe was very important values in our society" (Bingham, 2012).

Chick-fil-A is not a publicly traded company, so they are not required to release their financial information; however, Steve Robinson, Chick-fil-A Executive Vice President for marketing, confirmed the success of the day by saying, "while we don't release exact sales numbers, we can confirm reports that it was a record-setting day" (Bingham, 2012).

Such an online movement and act of support by patrons and stakeholders merits an evaluation of the identification that people feel with organizations. Why did patrons travel hours one-way, or stand in line for hours, to buy a chicken sandwich? What connection do supporters have to this company that led them to heed the invitation on Facebook? Organizational identification may be the motivating factor for many of the supporters of this movement.

Organizational identification is "conceptualized as a feeling of attachment, belonging, and pride in being an organizational member, loyalty to the organization, and a perception that the employee and the organization are similar in terms of shared values and goals" (Gautam, Van Dick, & Wagner, 2004). Organizational identification has traditionally centered on employees, but consideration should be paid to the identification which external stakeholders or patrons have with organizations.

In the case of Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day, thousands of traditional marriage supporters stood up for their beliefs and backed an organization with which they share those beliefs. Those supporters seemingly felt some sort of attachment to and pride for

Chick-fil-A. But also of importance is that this movement began and drew its strength from the online community. Mike Huckabee began a page on Facebook that eventually touted over 650,000 followers planning to attend Appreciation Day. On Twitter, #chickfila was seen popping up in droves, and before the day was half over, more than 50,000 Twitter pictures were posted by those in attendance (Sebastian, 2012).

Another interesting aspect of online community is that of parasocial relationships. A parasocial relationship is “the unreciprocated interaction between individuals of differing status and knowledge of one another” (Stever & Lawson, 2013, p. 339). Traditionally, research centering on parasocial relationships has connected individual to individual. This study considered the notion that an individual may hold a parasocial relationship with an organization. Organizations are seeking out supporters via social media in hopes of creating stronger supporters. This study sought to discover whether the extension of an organization onto social media is aiding in the creation of parasocial relationships with supporters, thus leading to identification.

As “new media” use has rapidly expanded, not only are people connecting and reconnecting relationally with friends and family, but movements are also being structured. The aim of this study was to contribute to the research on organizational identification by extending it to include identification by external publics, as well as contribute knowledge to organizations and groups for use in practical ways when tapping into the power of their stakeholders and patrons through social media.

This dissertation includes a review of organizational identification and social media research, as well as parasocial relationship research, followed by a detailed description of the method, which included the creation and testing of a questionnaire

examining the organizational identification and parasocial relationships of external publics, and their social media use. Conclusions drawn based on statistical analysis and past research are included, as well as implications for communication researchers and organizations. Suggestions for future research and limitations conclude this study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Identification

Though it is largely considered a relatively new concept, identification dates back to the early 1940's. However, the most influence and research has come within the last 30 years with Tajfel's (1981) concept of social identity theory, and Burke's (1989) concepts of consubstantiality and identification, and further research by scholars such as Cheney (1983a, 1983b), Tompkins and Cheney (1983, 1985), Ashforth and Mael (1989), Mael and Ashforth (1992, 1995, 2001), and Scott (1999, 2007).

One of the first works to address organizational identification, "Psychological Man" (Tolman, 1941), came when scholars questioned the motives that lead to war. Tolman asserted that human motives should be evaluated according to four types of socially oriented subclasses. He called them id wants, ego wants, superego wants, and enlarged ego wants. The superego wants type deal with identification.

A strongly developed superego demands that the individual submerge himself in the group – the family, the school, the political party, the gang, the economic class, the nation, the entire human race, or whatever it may be – with which he has identified. (p. 207)

Tolman pointed out that the superego wants are the "selfless wants" (p.207). Further, Tolman described the enlarged ego wants as the "feature involved in an individual's adherence to and identification with a group" (p.207). The enlarged superego is that which an individual equates with the group. "The successes and failures of the latter become *his* successes and failures" (Tolman, 1941, p. 208).

With that article, Tolman (1941) set forth an exploration of organizational identification, without actually naming the concept as such. Ramsey (2007) pointed out that Tolman's reference to vocational groups was the basis for organizational identification well before it was added to the social scientist lexicon. "Though organizational identification was not mentioned by name, this work made clear the human desire for group identification and interaction in multiple settings" (p. 9).

Two years later, Tolman wrote again about identification. He discussed three interrelated kinds of identification:

(1) that of an individual with some other older and more important (or in some other way envied and preferred) person whom the individual in question wants to be like; (2) that of an individual with some whole group which he wants "to love" and "to be loved by"; and, finally, (3) that of an individual with a cause proclaimed by a group. (Tolman, 1943, p. 142)

Tolman (1943) suggested that the essential motivation for those in the second group would "lead inevitably to one's adopting the values and causes proclaimed by the group" (p. 142). When identifying with a group, individuals feel as though they are one with the group: "*Its* fortunes are *his* fortunes; *its* goals become *his* goals; *its* successes and failures, *his* successes and failures; and *its* prestige becomes *his* prestige" (p. 143).

Some years later, "occupational identification" emerged in the work of Becker and Carper (1956). They asserted that a clear tension might arise when a man entering the workforce holds an identity to his new work, yet it does not mesh with his pre-existing identifications, such as family. "The person finds it expedient to acquire a work identity, since general cultural emphases require some occupational attachment" (p. 290). Becker

and Carper studied graduate students in physiology, mechanical engineering, and philosophy, and examined aspects that they believed influenced the students' identification. They found that factors such as pride in one's skills, internal motivations, sponsorship, and ideologies influenced how one identified with an occupation.

Further research by Becker and Carper (1956) considered the conflicts between occupational identifications. Students from the same three departments in graduate school were interviewed, and results showed that engineering students had little problem identifying with their career choice, physiology students were conflicted with feelings of failure and success, and the philosophy students did not feel conflicted, as they were more concerned with intellectual enlightenment rather than with societal standards.

In 1970, Hall, Schneider and Nygren used new terminology for one's identification with their workplace – organizational identification. Their research considered organizational identification within the U.S. Forest Service. The goal was to discover whether identification increased over one's career and how that identification was influenced by personal factors. Hall and colleagues hypothesized that satisfaction and self-fulfillment would play a role in organizational identification. Results showed that length of time in a career does influence the identification one holds toward that organization. Specifically, the personal motive for identification development with foresters was public service. Overall, organizational identification was made stronger over the years as the employees remained with one company, but not necessarily in the same position.

Two perspectives later emerged in identification research. First is the social-psychological perspective, which is based in Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory.

Second is the Kenneth Burke or Burkean (1989) perspective, which considers identification to be a rhetorical concept. The social-psychological perspective launched when Tajfel et al. (1971) began research looking at social categorization and its effects on intergroup behavior. Results showed that individuals prefer their own group over others in order to distribute rewards and penalties, and rewards received independent of their group do not affect distribution of rewards within the group. Following that research, Billig and Tajfel (1973) found that the mention of social categorization led to intergroup bias. From this point, a logical next step for Tajfel was to research how social categorization influences identity. In-group and out-group comparisons were discovered to be significant as a result of social identification.

These social categorizations affected the notion of self-concept, which Tajfel and Turner (1986) said was made up of a personal identity and a social identity; the first being individual attributes such as abilities and talents, and the second being salient group classifications or memberships. Turner (1984) proposed another aspect of self-concept, which he called “psychological group”, and defined as “a collection of people who share the same social identification or define themselves in terms of the same social category membership” (p. 530). Ashforth and Mael (1989) suggested that social identification is the perception of belongingness to a group and a sense of oneness with the group. Ashforth and Mael also asserted that organizational identification is a specific form of social identification.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) defined identification as “the perception of oneness with or belongingness to a group, involving direct or vicarious experience of its successes and failures” (p. 34). They suggested that, at that time, identification within

organizational research was not being done well, but with a frame of social identity theory it would flourish. Of the issues pertinent in organizational identification, Ashforth and Mael asserted that, “identification enables the newcomer to reify the organization and feel loyal, and committed to it per se, and facilitates the internalization of organizational values and beliefs” (p. 35). Socialization in organizations is a means of managing a newcomer’s perception of the organization, thus how they identify with that organization. Additionally, they contended that because an individual may belong to multiple groups, different identities exist for that individual, and oftentimes the demands from those roles are inconsistent. In organizations, roles within the multiple identities are often “nested” (p. 30); however, Ashforth and Mael suggest that rather than being integrated as one, they be compartmentalized.

From his perspective, Burke (1989) considered identification to be a rhetorical concept. He began with the concept of consubstantiality, which he defined as a human connection developed through shared experiences or values. Following a Burkean perspective, Cheney (1983b) suggested that identification is a process, which “aid[s] us in making sense of our experience, in organizing our thoughts, in achieving decisions, and in anchoring the self” (p. 342). Cheney said that identification “allows people to persuade and to be persuaded (p. 342). Scott (2007) acknowledged a connection between communication and identification:

it is through communication with others that we express belongingness (or lack thereof) to various collectives, assess the reputation and image of those collectives, that various identities are made known to us, and the

social costs and rewards of maintaining various identities are revealed. (p. 124)

Cheney (1983a) elaborated that, “with so much emphasis on distinctions and differences (consider social strata, the bureaucratic model and elitism as just a few examples), identification arises as a communicative, cooperative response” (p. 145). Given these divisions in society, a person attempts to connect the self to particular others, groups, values, goals or objects, or even a particular organization. Burke (1969) acknowledged that a person would think they “belong” to that special body or group.

Several important aspects of identification have emerged through the years of research. Of interest, multiple identifications may exist simultaneously, and may be concentric or in conflict with one another (Cheney, 1983a), as Ashforth and Mael (1989) also explored. An individual may identify with a particular political party or religious/non-religious group, and identify with their organization, also, or vice versa.

Another important aspect of identification is that “identities may be manifested by labels or ‘names’ for the individual” (Cheney, 1983a). An individual may say, “I am a Mississippian” or “I am a southerner,” and with such identifications comes “other identifying ‘baggage’ in the form of values, interests and the like” (p. 146). Claiming identification with a particular organization, religion, or region prompts or elicits certain assumptions or stereotypes from others about the individual’s political views, work ethic, religious views, family, education, and so on.

Identification also serves as a means of bolstering the self. As individuals identify with organizations held in high esteem with others, they are, in essence, placing themselves on the pedestal next to the organization. Conversely, identification with an

organization receiving criticism will also heap the criticism on those identified with that organization. “In this way, praise (and by implication, criticism) of an organization to which I belong may reflect directly or indirectly upon me, depending on how I perceive my relationship with that unit” (Cheney, 1983a, p. 146).

Burke’s concept of identification “embraces the notions of community and shared meanings” (Seiter, 1998). Further, “identification is more than simply engaging in cooperative activity; it is a feeling of mutuality that enables individuals to share the emotions, values, and decisions that allow them to act together” (Gossett, 2001, p. 386).

Cheney (1983b) sought to research organizational identification quantitatively, and created the Organizational Identification Questionnaire, consisting of 25 items measuring three components of identification – membership, loyalty and similarity. Cheney combined the components and considered organizational identification to be one dimension; therefore respondents to the questionnaire received one score. The assumption that the three components can be conceptualized as one dimension has been supported by more recent research (Miller, Allen, Casey, & Johnson, 2000).

More modern research has been conducted integrating identification and the Internet. A review of such research is warranted, as the focus of this study is on the influence of social media on one’s identification and parasocial relationship with an organization.

Identification and the Internet

Research in the area of organizational identification has been rich; however, with the rise in communication technology and the advancements in technology use in organizations, research is ripe with potential for studying the influence of such

communication technology use on organizational identification. Although organizations have used and maintained websites for many years, the development and rapid implementation of new media such as Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites has led organizations to consider how they may most effectively engage with supporters via these media. “These newer social media applications present communication opportunities that differ dramatically from organizationally supported websites” (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). With these new media outlets, organizations are now able to not only communicate by one-way information dissemination, but also can participate in two-way communication with the organization’s “followers” on Twitter or “friends” on Facebook. This notion has implications for organizational communication and the fostering of identification in both internal and external stakeholders.

The study of identification extended into computer-mediated communication as technology became more and more prevalent in the workplace and more commonplace in the home. Individuals are able to connect with organizations around the globe from one location. How this identification has been fostered and continues to play out, and how the changing times influence it are key aspects of the research. The changing social contract, characterized by less loyalty from employers and employees, has (among other things) reinforced the importance of recruiting and retaining members who are attached to the values and goals of the organization” (Scott, 1999, p. 456). As technology was becoming more prevalently used by organizations in the late 1990’s, research began to flourish, particularly in the area of decision-making. One aspect of that research “essentially argues that identification and key technological characteristics – specifically anonymity – interact to affect decision making outcomes” (p. 457). However, Scott argued that the

impact of new technology had yet to be considered in terms of identification with various targets (p. 457).

As a means of researching new technology, identification, and anonymity, Scott (1999) conducted an experiment in which he manipulated discursive and physical anonymity of participants and measured the perceived identification with personal, group, university, and major (p. 468). A pre-test and post-test were conducted along with a decision-making exercise that related directly to the participants' area of study. Results showed that identification with all four targets was lower during these meetings than in general. The participants in the discursive anonymity group had less identification with their group, and physically anonymous participants were less identified with their major and group.

Even as his study focused on decision-making using computer-mediated communication, "the implications of reduced identifications in computer-mediated interaction are potentially alarming" (Scott, 1999, p. 477). In Scott's study, both physically and discursively anonymous participants were less identified with any of the potential targets. This finding leads one to ponder the identification ratings of those identified via their social media account and the effects of such identification and lack of anonymity.

A second study, set up similarly to the previous, examined nearly the same factors. Scott and Fontenot (1999) studied the differences in identification between face-to-face groups and computer-mediated groups, as well as multiple targets of identification. Again, a pre-test and post-test were used to measure identification in general when the participants were not in the group meeting. The three targets were team,

organization, and occupation. Like the previous study, results showed lower identification scores for all three targets during group meetings than in general (p. 95). Additionally, identification scores were lower for those in computer-mediated group meetings than those in traditional face-to-face meetings.

Not only did the findings from these studies (Scott, 1999; Scott & Fontenot, 1999) assert that identification could fluctuate by situation, but also that identification can also depend upon the target. Organizations face a challenge not only to maintain employee identification in general, but these results show that organizations face an even larger challenge when the attempt is made to foster identification through computer-mediated communication. Because situation is an important factor in the construction and maintenance of identification, one may consider how economic, national, local and world events, such as the economic crash in 2008 or the wars in the Middle East, influence the identification stakeholders maintain with organizations. Additionally, a challenge that organizations face in fostering identification with stakeholders is the volatile nature of the mass media and computer-mediated communication itself. As events happen locally, nationally and internationally, individuals have immediate access to news and reports of organizational involvement. One wrong decision on the part of an organization could hinder the identification process for millions rather than the seemingly small number that could have been influenced prior to mass media and social media.

The global nature of many organizations requires the use of virtual work – working from home while connected to the workplace via the Internet. This presents another challenge to organizations when considering the identification of their employees to the organization. “Virtual work increases employee’s isolation and independence,

threatening to fragment the organization” (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 2001, p. 213). It is important for those who work from home via the Internet to be identified with the organization “because it may replace or otherwise compensate for the loss of aspects of traditional organizations that facilitate cooperation, coordination and the long-term effort of employees” (p. 215).

Virtual workers’ identification with an organization was studied considering the effects of the workers’ need for affiliation and their work-based social support. Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, and Garud (2001) found that both the workers’ need for affiliation and their work-based social support influenced their level of identification with their organization. The results suggested that work-based social support might offset the different levels of need for affiliation in virtual workers.

The implications for such findings include, for organizations, the need to contribute to or find ways to encourage work-based social support for all members of their virtual workforce. While these individuals may have low levels of need for affiliation and function adequately in more secluded work environments, this research (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 2001) suggested that for identification with the organization to be fostered, work-based social support must be nurtured.

Identification and Social Media

In 2004 Facebook was merely a website for university students to connect with one another. Started by Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard student, the website was “originally called thefacebook In August of 2005, thefacebook was renamed Facebook” (Myers, 2014). The intent of Facebook is to “connect friends, family, and business associates” (Myers, 2014) and is the largest of social networking sites online (Myers, 2014). Once a

user has created a profile, which contains information such as a photo, their location, network, and other personal information that the user decides to share, they begin “friending” others. Family members, colleagues, friends, businesses, and anyone the user finds on the site may be sent a request to connect and become “Facebook friends.” The site allows for pictures and video to be shared, posts to be written on users’ walls, games to be played and also allows a user to chat with other users via the site.

In a study (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011) supported by Universal McCann, a media agency, longitudinal results showed that in the beginning, 27% of respondents had created their own social network profile, and four years later 74% of respondents had done so. The same research found that there is a shift away from company websites and toward blogs. “Consumers increasingly are turning to blogs as sources of information on entertainment, product recommendations, and even news” (p. 567). A part of this transition to blogging is the concept of microblogging, which includes Twitter.

Twitter is a microblog that limits the length of posts to 140 characters, and can include photos or links to photos and videos. The company began in 2006 when Jack Dorsey sent the first tweet, “just setting up my twtr [sic]” (Dorsey, 2006). Since then, Twitter has grown to include more than 243 million active monthly users (Smith, 2014) sending 500 million Tweets per day (Twitter, 2014), to be archived within the Library of Congress (Stone, 2010), and to sometimes be the first place news is reported (Krums, 2009).

Stemming from microblogging and constant access to the Internet is the concept of media meshing. “Meshing occurs where consumers actively use two media – with at least one being an Internet-enabled mobile device – together to enhance their total media

experience” (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011, p.570). This concept has more recently been dubbed “social TV” (Muellner, 2013). Social TV is “technology that supports communication and social interaction in either the context of watching television, or related to TV content” (Muellner, 2013). “The first-ever measure of the total activity and reach of TV-related conversation on Twitter” (Nielsen, 2013) was launched, and is called Nielsen Twitter TV Ratings. This partnership is a step toward understanding the influence and impact of social TV. Facebook is also reporting social TV numbers, and “may be pulling ahead in this fight [against Twitter to harness the social TV market]” (Kent, 2014). “Social TV is transforming TV from something we watch to something we do” (Nielsen, 2013).

Evidence of media meshing or social TV can be seen on many popular “reality” television shows such as Big Brother, which asks those watching to tweet using #BB15 for Big Brother Season 15. At different points in each episode tweets using the hashtag that have been posted while watching are displayed on the screen for other viewers to see. This is not only a means of showing viewers that others are actively involved in the show, but also creates a connection between the show and those whose tweets are broadcast during the episode. “It creates an interesting dynamic where offline media acts as a trigger for online behaviors” (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011, p. 568).

Social TV is also being used heavily in marketing research. The vice-president for global media and consumer engagement at Mondelez International said of social TV, “our recent real-time marketing activities across brands like Oreo, Wheat Thins and Trident have shown us how live engagement can drive brand loyalty and business growth. But Nielsen Twitter TV Ratings are opening up a whole new world: they enable

us to amplify our brand messages by taking full advantage of social TV engagement” (Nielsen, 2013). The vice-president went on to explain that, “knowing in advance what the effective Twitter TV engagement is around key events is game-changing and will enable us to connect even more efficiently with our consumers” (Nielsen, 2013).

Not only are consumers actively using social media in media meshing or social TV, social media are being used by consumers to engage directly with companies and brands. “Although the movement away from brand web sites is both statistically significant and strategically important, consumers in markets throughout the world still are demonstrating a keen interest in interacting with their preferred brands online” (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011, p. 569). The previously mentioned study found that 18% of respondents had created an online brand community in the past six months. Consumers “want their relationship with specific products and services on their own terms” (p. 569). The researchers also found that 58% of those who had joined online brand communities were more likely to buy the brand after joining (p. 569).

So the question stands to reason, why do people join these online communities and use social media in connection with their preferred brands or companies? Hutton and Fosdick (2011) reported that “to support a cause I like” and “to feel part of a like-minded community” (p. 569) were two of the main reasons consumers join online brand communities. Supporting a cause one likes and being a part of a like-minded community is situated within the three aspects of organizational identification tested by Cheney (1983b) – membership, loyalty and similarity; however, these characteristics are being exhibited by consumers – external stakeholders, rather than employees, or internal stakeholders.

As of January 2014, there were approximately 1.23 billion monthly active users on Facebook (Smith, 2014). As of February 2014, over 550 million user accounts existed on Twitter (Holt, 2013), although some 243 million are regular users (Smith, 2014). With this number of users on the world's top social media sites, there is no wonder that organizations have turned to these web sites to promote themselves. Organizations need money, employee volunteers, support volunteers, word-of-mouth promotion, and more. By connecting with their customers, organizations foster relationships within these stakeholders, who in turn will contribute when the need is placed in front of them.

Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) studied non-profit organizations' communication via social media and their attempts to create identification with their external stakeholders specifically. The researchers explored the use of Twitter and developed three categories that the 100 largest charitable organizations exhibited in their posts. The results revealed three major functions of the organizations' posts: "information", "community," and "action" (p. 337).

Nearly 59% of the Twitter posts were information about "the organization's activities, highlights from events, or any other news, facts, reports or information relevant to an organization's stakeholders" (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012, p. 343). Nearly 26% of the tweets were intended to create community with the stakeholders. This "community" function included two aspects: dialogue and community building. The first type of tweet (dialogue) was intended to create interaction between the organization and the stakeholders, and consisted mainly of tweets of response to public reply messages, and tweets soliciting response from the followers. "Social media enhances the value proposition in this regard (building trust) by offering a forum for customers to be heard"

(Andzulis, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2012, p. 310). When customers feel heard, they feel more included and like they connect with an organization. For such identification to happen, the organization must give the customer the opportunity to speak, then listen to the customers' responses. "*Listening* is a primary component in building trust with a customer. Customers want to be heard, understood, and appreciated. Social media not only allow that to happen, but at its core it promotes and encourages listening" (also p. 310, emphasis in original). The community building tweets were used to "say something that strengthens ties with the online community without involving an expectation of interactive conversation" (pp. 343-344). Community building tweets consisted of giving recognition or thanks to stakeholders or acknowledging current or local events.

The final, and seemingly most important, function uncovered by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) is "action." The organizations used tweets to call their stakeholders to action nearly 16% of the time. "It involves the promotional and mobilizational uses of social media messages, where, implicitly at least, Twitter users are seen as a resource that can be mobilized to help the organization fulfill its mission" (p. 345). In this study, the tweets were used to promote an event, ask for donations, sell a product, seek volunteers, promote lobbying and advocacy, promote joining a movement/website or organization, and provide information on ways to get involved.

The three functions uncovered by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) can be viewed as a hierarchical progression for organizations in their use of social media. Information dissemination is important for organizations. In fact, information dissemination is the most basic function of social media for organizations, particularly non-profit organizations. More important is the dialogue that the organization could and should

promote with their stakeholders. “This is where true engagement begins, when networks are developed and users can join in the conversation and provide feedback” (p. 350). At the pinnacle of this hierarchy is action. If an organization has influenced stakeholders to take action in some way, they are “fully engaging their follower base” (p. 350). For non-profit organizations like those studied in the research of Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), moving their stakeholders from information-consumers to action-takers aids in the fulfillment of the organization’s mission. “Communicating brand loyalty or support by becoming ‘fans’ of particular companies, or by clicking an icon to indicate that they ‘like’ a brand” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 26) is a means of expressing identification with an organization.

By using two-way computer-mediated communication technology, organizations are allowing those identified with them to dialogue, donate or participate. This two-way communication also gives those not identified with the organization the opportunity to engage, and like the company would hope, to then become identified with the organization. “Offering site users entertaining games, exclusive content, and the opportunity for engaging conversations can contribute to strong customer relationships” (Zhang, Sung, & Lee, 2010).

Not only do social media allow organizations to engage their stakeholders in two-way communication, social media can be used in times of crisis for the organization (Anderson et al., 2012). While this is the lowest in the hierarchy proposed by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), the dissemination of information is a necessary aspect of business relations. For example, organizations may use their social media accounts as a means of notifying customers of recalls or incidences within the organization before such is

released in mass media. This “in-the-know” feeling that customers get because the organization keeps them up-to-date may foster identification with that organization.

Two-way communication through social media allows stakeholders to contribute their perspectives and wishes to the organization, as well. “One person’s views or described experience can now reach millions of people in a very short period of time and, in turn, strangers are able to rally into communities and online groups with shared agendas” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 27). These shared agendas are, in fact, identification according to Burke’s conceptualization in which identification was centered on shared experience. Decisions to bring products back, suspend production of products or enhance products can be effected by the communities created on social media. For example, “in the United Kingdom in 2007, Cadbury decided to reintroduce the confectionary brand Wispa, after a popular campaign on Facebook” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 27).

More predominant symbols for many of the top social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can be seen on television shows, commercials, billboards and the like. Companies are reaching out to their current and potential customers through social media, and seeking to engage them. Perhaps this is a side effect of social TV. Recently, the yogurt company Yoplait delved into the world of social media and the results of such online communication was the removal of high fructose corn syrup from all of their products. In their 2012 commercial “No high fructose corn syrup – everything,” Yoplait spokesperson Lisa Kudrow said, “when you call, tweet and post, we listen” (Yoplait, 2012). She goes on to say, “anything else we can do for you, let us know” (Yoplait, 2012). Yoplait used their social media accounts as a means of creating community, and making their loyal buyers feel heard.

Social Media and Activism

As previously mentioned, one's values significantly dictate whether they identify with an organization. The same is true when it comes to social movements and causes. Whether actual organizations are behind the movements or not, individuals identify with the values associated with social movements. As different social media ecologies will differ, Segerberg and Bennett (2011) presented three points of focus that tie them all together. The first of which is most relevant to this discussion: "*Twitter streams can be crosscutting networking mechanisms*" (p. 201). Keeping in mind that calls to action via social media are effective because individuals identify with the organization or values of groups, this point is of keen importance.

Twitter streams can (although do not always) attract diverse players, from individuals to organizations, and include contributors and followers from afar and in the midst of the action...they cut across and connect diverse networks, actors and locations in an action space. (pp. 201-202)

Social movements have been played out on computer-mediated communication significantly over the past few years. For example, the Iranian revolution was reported to the world primarily through new media. Researchers studied the 2009 Twitter Revolution, specifically the 15th United Nations Conference of the Parties on Climate Change. "The debate about the 2009 Twitter Revolution at base concerned whether Twitter triggers revolutions, and whether twittered uprisings are effective" (Segerberg & Bennett, 2011, p. 198).

The Twitter Revolution in 2009 was a collection of identified individuals using social media to "belong" (Burke, 1969) to a larger group of individuals who share

common values and sought to speak out about those beliefs. These like-minded identifiers used hash tags (e.g., #TheWave) as a means of grouping all who were communicating in support of the same message.

Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) discussed the third step in online social media usage for organizations, engagement or “action.” For example, Facebook was used to accelerate the movement of support for Chick-fil-A in 2011, and was also used two years prior in 2009 to initiate a boycott of Whole Foods. As Kang (2012) discussed, Whole Foods’ CEO John Mackey wrote an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, which criticized the Obama administration’s proposed health-care reforms. As a result, “within a matter of days, the company’s Web site was inundated with self-identified loyal customers expressing shock that Mackey stood against the proposed health-care reform” (p. 563). The same day the op-ed was published, a Facebook page was created called “Boycott Whole Foods,” and more than 30,000 members joined within the first two weeks. “The boycott quickly grew into a national movement through social media” (p. 563). The page still exists and as of February 25, 2014 posts were still being added to the page.

As was the case in both situations – Chick-fil-A and Whole Foods – people banded together via social media in order to give rise to their support for the organization or shock at the position of the CEO in political matters. While the nature of the Whole Foods movement was in protest rather than support, the boycott beginning on Facebook is the important aspect to consider in relation to the Chick-fil-A Facebook movement. These movements needed the catalyst of social media to bring together supporters and protesters from across the country to make their voices heard. In discussing the Whole Foods boycott online, Kang (2012) pointed out, “an individual decision to boycott was

otherwise likely to be invisible, its impact unnoticed” (p. 569). However, coming together on social media allowed for a larger impact to be seen by the public and felt by the organization.

Parasocial Relationships

Organizational identification and parasocial relationships have been studied with somewhat of a link; however, the bulk of the research has considered parasocial relationships only with media, television or sports celebrities (Brown, Basil, & Bocarnea, 2003; Earnhardt & Haridakis, 2009; Stever & Lawson, 2013). Horton and Wohl (1956) originally suggested the concept of parasocial interaction. Their focus was on a television viewers’ imaginary relationship with television personalities. That imaginary relationship was called a parasocial relationship, and the process parasocial interaction. Horton and Wohl asserted that, “the interaction, characteristically, is one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible of mutual development” (p. 215). Stever and Lawson (2013) defined parasocial interaction as “the unreciprocated interaction between individuals of differing status and knowledge of one another” (p. 339).

Horton and Wohl (1956) went on to discuss the nature of parasocial relationships of spectator and performer or “persona” on radio or television. They discussed that the persona offers a relationship to the spectator, and this relationships comes about by daily interaction because the “live with him” (p. 216). Further, the authors pointed out that, “their [spectators] continued association with him [persona] acquires a history, and the accumulation of shared past experiences gives additional meaning to the present performance” (p. 216). As this history of shared experiences continues, the spectator

comes to believe that he 'knows' the persona more intimately and profoundly than others do; that he 'understands' his character and appreciates his values and motives. Such an accumulation of knowledge and intensification of loyalty, however, appears to be a kind of growth without development, for the one-sided nature of the connection precludes a progressive and mutual reformulation of its values and aims. (p. 216)

There is an "illusion of intimacy" (p. 217) that takes place between the spectator and persona. This illusion of intimacy felt by the spectator leads to some form of maintaining the relationship, and the initiation of intimacy falls on the persona. "If he is successful in initiating an intimacy which his audience can believe in, then the audience may help him maintain it by fan mail and by various other kinds of support" (p. 218). Giles (2002) regards parasocial relationship as "a user(s) response to a figure as if s/he was a personal acquaintance" (p. 289).

While the original concept of parasocial interaction or parasocial relationships dealt strictly with television "personae", Brown and Basil (1995) extended the research and asserted that parasocial relationships with celebrities may be established through several media forms. For example, parasocial relationships with sports celebrities may develop via the individual's exposure to live sporting events, televised events, movies and commercials. Brown and colleagues (2003) studied the influence of famous athletes, particularly Mark McGwire's home run record, his work with abused children, and steroid use. They found that athletes do have an important place in influencing the American public. They suggested that, "the public does establish parasocial relationships with sports celebrities" (p. 54). Later, Earnhardt and Hardakis (2009) further delineated

the fan-athlete relationships via television, with emphasis on fandom, parasocial interaction, and identification with athletes. Their results showed that fandom was positively related to parasocial interaction and identification with athletes. The researchers suggested this result “demonstrated [that] television viewers vary in their relationships with mediated characters based on levels of interaction with those characters” (p. 44).

Of interest in the study of parasocial relationships and identification are the varying definitions of identification provided by media researchers. Brown, Basil and Bocarnea (2003) suggested that parasocial interaction is an aspect of audience involvement, which they equated with Kelman’s (1961) definition of identification. “Identification can be said to occur when an individual adopts behavior derived from another person or a group because this behavior is associated with a satisfying self-defining relationship to this person or group” (p. 63). Sun (2010) asserted that identification “involves sharing characters’ experiences and a desire to be like them” (p. 196). Although not wildly different from Tolman (1941) or Burke’s (1989) conceptions of identification, the notion that when an audience member identifies with a media personae, they do so by “adopting similar behavior exhibited by the player with whom the viewers wants to relate” (Brown, Basil, & Bocarnea, 2003, p. 47) is of particular interest. From a Tolman or Burkean view, one who identifies with another *already* shares some similarity in values, beliefs, etc., with that person, rather than *adopting* similar behavior.

Brown and colleagues (2003) suggested “parasocial interaction is [a] necessary condition for identification but not a sufficient condition for identification” (p. 47). Sun

(2010) elaborated on this notion by asserting “audience parasocial interaction with a sport athlete may lead to audience identification with that person, which in turn promotes certain attitudes and beliefs. However, a fan’s parasocial interaction with an athlete does not mean that he or she wants to be like that person” (p. 196).

To this point, parasocial relationships have been discussed as existing only between an individual and persona in a positive manner. However, Giles (2002) suggests that a “user may still engage in PSI without sharing any perspective; this enables us to interact with media figures whom we actively dislike” (p. 290). Giles discussed some distinctions between identification and parasocial relationships with this notion in mind. Identification suggests that 1) there is some salient characteristic shared between the individual and media persona, and 2) the individual desires to emulate the persona. Engaging in a parasocial relationship “does not necessarily imply a wish to emulate the figure” (p. 290), as also suggested by Sun (2010), and mentioned above when related to a sports figure.

Giles (2002) also suggested consideration should be paid to the result of an individual meeting the persona with which they hold a parasocial relationship. He calls this a “gray area” (p. 290) when considering how a parasocial relationship changes after a meeting takes place. From this “gray area”, Giles suggests a continuum of social-parasocial encounters.

“At the ‘social’ end of the continuum, encounters are ranked largely in terms of group size, from dyads to large groups” (Giles, 2002, p. 293). This notion is due to the fact that with more people involved, the quality of the interaction becomes weaker. Midway down the continuum encounters with media figures is included. With potentially

the same relationship possibilities as with any social encounter, a one-to-one meeting with a media figure is considered the most “social” of the interactions with media figures (p.293). “As we approach the ‘parasocial’ end of the continuum, the interaction becomes weaker according to the authenticity or realism of the representation of the person” (p. 294).

Giles (2002) suggested three levels of parasocial interaction on the continuum. First-order parasocial interaction is referred to when “the media figure addresses the user directly, for example a talk show host facing the camera and greeting the viewer” (p. 294). Some level of inauthenticity constitutes second-order parasocial interaction by the media figure. In this level, “a user might make face-to-face contact with the figure, but would only be able to enter into a social relationship with the actor and not the character to whom s/he has established a parasocial relationship,” for example a fictional character played by an actor. Third- order parasocial interaction is distinguished “in that a social relationship with the figure is impossible” (p. 294), because the figure has no real-life counterpart, as with a cartoon character.

According to Giles (2002) model of the continuum of social-parasocial interaction, relationships can move from being solely parasocial to be social with increased interaction, particularly through face-to-face interaction. However, Giles pointed out that a relationship might become social rather than parasocial through e-mail messages that are distant encounters, and are informal; they still constitute a dyadic encounter. Email could be considered the start of social media interaction.

If a parasocial relationship, as traditionally described between an individual and a media persona, can exist, and can move into a true social relationship, then one can assert

that that the same can happen between an individual and an organization. Empirical evidence is lacking in the study of parasocial relationships and organizations. Thus, the need to study the connection between identification and parasocial relationships from a Tolman (1941) perspective of organizational identification is evident. Of interest in the current research is the creation of such relationships and identification through social media. Little research (Stever & Lawson, 2013) has been conducted on the use of social media and the establishment of parasocial relationships, while many (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Men & Tsai, 2012; Men & Tsai, 2013; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010) in the public relations field have addressed social media use and the cultivation of relationships between organizations and individuals.

As technology and social media are advancing, organizations are more readily using what were previously non-traditional forms of communication to reach their stakeholders. The influence that social media has in creating, reinforcing, or negating one's identification with an organization is an important area to explore in modern communication research. In order to advance such research, this study will focus on the relationship between external organizational identification, parasocial relationships and social media.

Hypothesis and Research Question

Scott and Fontenot (1999) found that computer-mediated communication reduced participants' identification with their team, organization, and occupation. Since then, the rise of computer-mediated communication has led organizations to use social media as a means of connecting with their audiences. Computer-mediated communication has become a predominant means of communicating. In 2012, Lovejoy and Saxton found that

non-profit organizations used Twitter for three main reasons: to disseminate information, create community, and call supporters to action. Not only do organizations want to connect with consumers through social media, consumers are using social media to connect directly with organizations, as well.

Consumers have used social media to support organizations (e.g., Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day) and protest against them (e.g., Boycott Whole Foods). Consumers have voiced their opinions on social media and seen change take place in organizations or with products (e.g., Yoplait and Cadbury). Organizations have seen the link from social media to television rise in recent years with the notion of social TV (e.g., Nielsen Twitter TV Ratings).

Hutton and Fosdick (2011) reported that consumers join online groups “to support a cause I like” and “to feel part of a like-minded community” (p. 569). With this understanding, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: A positive relationship exists between consumers’ social media use and their identification with an organization.

Horton and Wohl (1956) called the one-sided interaction between a television personality and a viewer a parasocial relationship. Most research on parasocial relationships continued in the same vein of television celebrities. Basil and Brown (1995) extended the research to include sports celebrities and found that parasocial relationships could be established by exposure to live events, televised events, movies and commercials. Additionally, much in public relations (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Men & Tsai, 2012; Men & Tsai, 2013; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010) discusses parasocial relationships and social media.

Research on parasocial relationships based in media lead to the assertion that parasocial relationships are a necessary but not sufficient condition for identification (Brown, Basil, & Bocarnea, 2003; Sun, 2010), but such a connection has not been established between consumers and organizations. The connection between social media use and the creation of organizational identification has not yet been established. The connection of parasocial relationships to identification is yet to be studied regarding external publics or consumers from a communication perspective, rather than a public relations or marketing perspective. This research sought to understand the relationship between identification and social media use in order to extend the theories about organizations into new media, in particular the relationship of new media to a consumer's identification with an organization. The research also sought to explain the nature of the relationship between external organizational identification and parasocial relationship as currently little work has been done to describe such a relationship.

Thus, the following research question is proposed:

RQ: How do social media use and parasocial relationships interact in the establishment of organizational identification?

The apparent relationships between social media use, parasocial relationships, and external organizational identification have not been clearly articulated. This study seeks to understand the relationship between these concepts in the context of the Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day event. Chapter III presents the method used to investigate these relationships.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This section will first define the three major concepts discussed and measured in this study, then explain the survey process including a description of the participants and the instrument. A discussion of the reliability and validity measures used in a pre-test of the instrument, followed by a discussion of the statistical analysis for answering the proposed research question and testing the hypothesis is included. This section describes the method used to test the hypothesis that a positive relationship exists between consumers' social media use and their identification with an organization, and to answer the research question that asked, how do social media use and parasocial relationships interact in the establishment of organizational identification?

Conceptual Definitions

External Organizational Identification. Cheney (1983b) identified three components of identification when creating the Organizational Identification Questionnaire – membership, loyalty, and similarity. He combined these concepts and considered them to be one dimension. Thus, when scoring the questionnaire, participants received one score. This procedure is explained below, as well as how it translates to this study. As Cheney's concepts of organizational identification focused on employee to organization identification, external organizational identification is the notion that just as employees may identify with an organization, so may consumers or external stakeholders.

Parasocial Relationships. Horton and Wohl (1956) proposed that a one-sided relationship where one individual becomes a "fan" or devotee of the other is considered a parasocial

relationship. Later, Stever and Lawson (2013) defined parasocial interaction as, “the unreciprocated interaction between individuals of differing status and knowledge of one another” (p. 339). This understanding, along with the notion provided by Horton and Wohl of an illusion of intimacy that leads to an “accumulation of knowledge and intensification of loyalty” (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 216), will guide this research.

Social Media Use. Social media are the new media sites such as Facebook and Twitter that allow individuals, organizations, groups, and so on to create profiles or accounts in order to share information, news, photos, videos and the like with other users. Social media use, as applied in this study, is the type of social media employed, the amount it is put into practice, importance placed on social media, and for what purposes it is used.

Participants

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board for research with human subjects, the snowball sampling method was employed to gather participants. Participants were recruited using the researcher’s email and Facebook contacts, which then shared the information with their own email or Facebook contacts. The survey was accessible on Qualtrics.com for ease of use throughout different geographical regions. A link to the online survey was provided via email and on all Facebook postings used to recruit participants. Prior to beginning the survey, participants were asked to give informed consent saying they were fluent English speakers, at least 18 years old, knew about Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day, own some form of social media account, had access to the internet and were willingly participating in the survey.

Two hundred seventy three participants agreed to the online consent form; however, only 195 said they knew about Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day. Because a

requirement to participate in the study was to have knowledge of the event, those that did not were directed to the end of the survey where they were thanked for their time. They were not given the opportunity to complete any questions on the survey. Of those 195 who said they knew about the event, 153 responded to the survey, including 122 females and 31 males (N=153). The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 73, with one outlier reporting to be 100 years old (M= 23.71, SD = 15.15). Ninety-three percent of the respondents reported being Caucasian, and the remainder of the participants reported Native American (1%), Asian (1%), African American (1%), and Other (4%). Fifty-eight percent reported being married, while 33% reported being single, 9% reported being divorced, and 1% (one respondent) was widowed. Individuals from 20 states participated. The majority reported being from a southeastern state.

Instrument

External organizational identification was operationalized based on Cheney's (1983b) Organizational Identification Questionnaire (OIQ), which combines the constructs of organizational loyalty, similarity, and membership. An altered version of the OIQ was created to measure the identification of supporters outside an organization, rather than internal publics. The questions were structured similarly to those on the original OIQ; the original questions were reworded to assess external identification, rather than internal organizational identification. Twenty-five 7-point Likert-type questions were included in the altered version, as on the original questionnaire. As Cheney (1983b) suggested, the three constructs came together to form one factor, thus the 25 responses were summed for a total score. Cheney reported the mean total score for the OIQ to be 124.7 and an item mean of 5.0 for the 173 respondents in his study. He

considered scores greater than or equal to 137 to be high identification, scores from 113 to 136 to be medium identification and scores less than or equal to 112 to be low identification. These three categories were decided based on a one-half standard deviation rule. Cheney reported no reliability and validity statistics in his study. After a pre-test, this edited version of the OIQ included only 22 questions. Three questions were removed after the pre-test; explanation for that follows in the Scale Pre-Test section of this chapter. Raw total scores were used in this study, because the goal was to explore the relationship of each variable to the other, rather than simply measuring one's identification ranking.

A section of five questions was added to the survey to operationalize the participants' ownership and use of social media. These questions included: on which social media do the participants have accounts, how often they use them and in what ways they use them. Also drawing from other social media use questionnaires, eight Likert-type questions addressed participants' views of the importance of social media use to support organizations. Generic and questions specific to Chick-fil-A were included. The scores were totaled to assess the importance participants place on social media uses to support organizations.

Parasocial relationship was operationalized by a series of seven 7-point Likert-type questions asking whether the participant viewed communication via email, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram or an RSS feed as a personal communication to them from the organization. Also included were three Likert-type questions to assess whether the participants' desire to engage with the organization increased with more interaction, whether they felt the desire to post about an experience

with a company, or whether they felt like an insider when they received messages on social media from the organization. Demographic information including age, gender, ethnicity, marital status and location were asked. See Appendix A for the full questionnaire.

Scale Pre-Test

For the pre-test, reliability and validity measures were calculated using SPSS. Both were calculated for two of the three subscales – external organizational identification and social media use and perception. The parasocial relationship questions were added to the instrument after the pre-test was completed, therefore were not included in the initial reliability and validity testing.

According to Carmines and Zeller (1979), the general rule for reliability measures is that a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 is acceptable (p. 51). That standard was used for this pre-test. Spector (1992) suggests a minimum loading value of 0.3 for factor analysis. Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) propose the minimum be 0.32. Additionally, when running principle component analyses, the sample size is important. Guadagnoli and Velicer (1988) suggest that sample size is not relevant if four or more items load at 0.60 or higher, and if 10 to 12 items load at 0.40 or higher, which is considered moderate, then a sample of 150 or more is required. Other suggestions (Fabrigar et al, 1999 & MacCallum et al, 2001) are that samples as low as 100 are feasible when three to four item loadings are 0.70 or higher. All of this was taken into consideration as principle component analyses were conducted during the pre-test and with the full sample.

With ten pre-test survey instruments returned in the pre-test, reliability and validity measures were calculated. The organizational identification subscale, consisting

of 25 items, was tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha and was found to be acceptable ($\alpha=0.90$). The social media subscale, consisting of the first eight items on the social media section of the questionnaire, was tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha and was also found to be acceptable ($\alpha=0.88$).

The subscales were tested for validity using principle component analysis. When setting up the analyses, extraction was based on eigenvalues greater than one, and a varimax rotation was used. With these parameters in place, all items on the external organizational identification scale loaded on one factor; however, three items were below the aforementioned acceptable 0.30 factor loading value. Therefore, these items were removed and the remaining items loaded on one factor at or above 0.37 (see Table 1). This value is above the proposed 0.32 minimum (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Because 16 of the remaining 22 items load at 0.6 or higher (Guadagnoli & Velicer, 1988), the small sample size is not significant. Additionally, when the three items were removed, reliability of the scale was increased ($\alpha=0.93$). For social media, each item loaded on a single factor at or above 0.46 (See Table 2). Like the external organizational identification scale, because four items loaded at or above .6, the small sample size is not significant.

Ten participants in the pre-test clearly provides unstable results; however the results being in the right direction suggested the scales were usable for further research. Thus, the external organizational identification scale excluding the three items that measured lower than acceptable, and the social media use scale, in addition to the parasocial relationship concept and scale, were used to answer the research question and hypothesis.

Table 1

Component Matrix for External Organizational Identification Principle Component Analysis

Survey Item	Component 1
Q1	.59
Q2	.61
Q3	.84
Q4	.78
Q5	.45
Q6	.80
Q7	.79
Q8	.74
Q9	.87
Q10	.63
Q12	.37
Q13	.79
Q14	.83
Q15	.57
Q16	.78
Q17	.41
Q20	.77
Q21	.59
Q22	.94
Q23	.64
Q24	.69
Q25	.78

Note. Excludes the three factors that loaded below .3 in the initial test, which were items 11, 18, and 19.

Table 2

Component Matrix for Social Media Principle Component Analysis

Survey Item	Component
	1
Q1	.99
Q2	.68
Q3	.91
Q4	.46
Q5	.95

Full Survey Statistical Analysis

Again, reliability and validity were calculated for the scales after the survey was completed by the full sample. This time the parasocial relationship scale was included. The same Cronbach's alpha standard of 0.80 was used to evaluate each of these scales. The external organizational identification scale included the final 22 acceptable questions of the survey (see Appendix A), as the pre-test showed that three had low validity and were removed. With 139 surveys included, the reliability of the external organizational identification scale exceeded the standard for Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha=0.98$). Reliability of the parasocial relationship scale (N = 151) was calculated using the ten Likert-type questions pertaining to the concept, and also exceeded the standard ($\alpha=0.97$). Reliability of the social media use scale (N = 150) was calculated using the eight Likert-type questions pertaining to the concept, and was also found to exceed the standard ($\alpha=0.94$).

Validity measures were calculated for each of the three scales using the 0.3 standard previously mentioned (Spector, 1992, p. 55). The .32 standard proposed by

Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) was also considered. Using a principle component analysis for the same 22 items of the external organizational identification scale, all factors loaded onto a single factor, exceeding the proposed standard, at or above 0.59 (see Table 3).

Using the same ten items for parasocial relationships, all items of the scale loaded onto a single factor, again exceeding the proposed standard, at or above 0.75 (see Table 4). All eight items of the social media use scale loaded onto a single factor, exceeding the standard, at or above 0.80 (see Table 5).

Another way of viewing the component analysis results is to consider the communalities extraction values. In the social sciences, values of 0.40 to 0.70 are considered acceptable for the items to be included in a single factor (Costello & Osborne, 2005). These extraction values also show how related two items are on a scale and suggest whether another factor should be considered. On the external organizational identification scale, only one item has a low extraction value; however, the component value is above the acceptable value of 0.32 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) (See Table 3). On the parasocial relationship scale, no extraction value was below 0.56, which is acceptable (See Table 4). On the social media use scale, extraction values were all acceptable with none below 0.64 (See Table 5).

Table 3

Component Matrix for External Organizational Identification Principle Component Analysis

Survey Item	Component 1	Communalities Extraction
Q1	.83	.69
Q2	.93	.86
Q3	.95	.89

Table 3 (continued).

Survey Item	Component 1	Communalities Extraction
Q4	.92	.85
Q5	.91	.82
Q6	.79	.63
Q7	.56	.35
Q8	.92	.85
Q9	.89	.80
Q10	.88	.78
Q11	.90	.81
Q12	.95	.90
Q13	.95	.90
Q14	.85	.72
Q15	.84	.71
Q16	.92	.84
Q17	.81	.66
Q18	.95	.91
Q19	.59	.35
Q20	.76	.58
Q21	.93	.87
Q22	.86	.74

Table 4

Component Matrix for Parasocial Relationship Principle Component Analysis

Survey Item	Component 1	Communalities Extraction
Q1	.83	.69
Q2	.93	.86
Q3	.93	.87

Table 4 (continued).

Survey Item	Component 1	Communalities Extraction
Q4	.92	.84
Q5	.93	.87
Q6	.94	.88
Q7	.92	.84
Q8	.77	.56
Q9	.76	.57
Q10	.89	.74

Table 5

Component Matrix for Social Media Use Principle Component Analysis

Survey Item	Component 1	Communalities Extraction
Q1	.87	.76
Q2	.84	.71
Q3	.84	.69
Q4	.87	.76
Q5	.80	.64
Q6	.86	.74
Q7	.85	.72
Q8	.82	.67

Also of note is that each scale contained four or more items with factor loadings of 0.60 or higher, which makes the samples size irrelevant (Guadagnoli & Velicer, 1988).

Also consistent with suggestions (Fabrigar et al., 1999; MacCallum et al., 2001) that

samples as low as 100 are suitable when at least three to four items load at 0.70 or higher, the external organizational identification scale included 20 items at or above 0.70, the parasocial relationship scale included all 10 items above 0.70, and the social media use scale included all 8 items above 0.70.

Totals were calculated for each of the three scales, particularly to follow the lead of Cheney (1983b) who totaled the items on his Organizational Identification Questionnaire to come up with one total for the single factor called identification. A one-tailed Pearson Product-Moment correlation was used to test hypothesis one that a positive relationship exists between social media use ($n = 150$) and external organizational identification ($n=139$). A one-tailed test was chosen because the relationship is predicted to be positive.

In order to answer the research question, the SPSS macro PROCESS was used to identify a possible mediation effect. Mediation exists when the independent variable is thought to operate via or because of another variable. As established by previous research, both social media and parasocial relationships effect identification, but mediation tests whether one variable's relationship can be explained by the presence of the mediator. In this study, the inquiry lies in whether parasocial relationships mediate the relationship between social media use and external organizational identification.

To test whether the direct relationship between social media and external organizational identification is mediated by parasocial relationships, the PROCESS model four for mediation was used in SPSS. The PROCESS model is a type of regression analysis that takes into consideration not just the independent and dependent variables, but accounts for the inclusion of another variable. Model four was used in the PROCESS

analysis, as it is the appropriate model for basic mediation analysis using an independent variable (social media use), a dependent variable (external organization identification), and a potential mediating variable (parasocial relationships).

Additionally, indirect effect statistics were calculated. This analysis allows for identifying the indirect effect (both magnitude and significance) between social media use and organizational identification through parasocial relationships. This process also uses bootstrapping (1,000 times) to determine the upper and lower levels of the confidence interval.

This method section provided the conceptual definitions needed to understand the concepts measured in this survey, and also included a detailed description of the participants and instrument. The standards used for reliability and validity, along with an explanation of each pertaining to pre-test and full survey testing were provided, in addition to the results for each analysis. Also included was the method by which the hypothesis was tested and the research question answered. The results of those analyses are included in the following section.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study employed an altered version of the Organizational Identification Questionnaire (Cheney, 1983b), along with additional scales created to better understand parasocial relationships and social media use. The reliability and validity were tested on each section of the questionnaire. Results of those preliminary tests were reported in the previous chapter. In order to understand the relationship of external organizational identification, parasocial relationships and social media use, Pearson Product-Moment correlation statistics were calculated. This section will discuss the results of those tests.

Descriptive Statistics

Two hundred seventy-three participants agreed to the informed consent. After the informed consent, the first question asked whether the participant knew about Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day (CFA AD), and one hundred ninety-five people reported that they were aware of it (Table 6). They were then asked how they found out about the event. Forty-one percent reported that they learned of the event via Facebook, thirty-eight reported not remembering where they learned of it, 34% reported that a friend or family member told them, and 27% reported hearing about it on television (Table 7). While one hundred ninety-two participants reported where they heard about the event, fifty-two reported that they attended the event (Table 6).

Table 6

Participant Consent, Knowledge of and Attendance at CFA AD

Gave Consent	Knew About Event	Attended Event
273	195	52

Table 7

Sources by Which Participants Learned About CFA AD

Source of Information	Number of Responses	Percentage
Facebook	78	41
Twitter	2	1
Television	27	14
A friend or family member	34	18
Don't Remember	38	20
Other	13	7

H1: A positive relationship exists between consumers' social media use and their identification with an organization.

A total of 159 external organizational identification questionnaires were completed, 151 parasocial relationship scales were completed, and 150 social media scales were completed (Table 8). Tables 9, 10 and 11 provide a breakdown of the mean and standard deviations for each item on each of the three scales.

Table 8

Scale Descriptive Statistics

Scale	Complete Surveys	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
EOIQ	159	101.72	37.06
PSR	151	29.86	13.54
SM	150	36.06	10.47

Table 9

Social Media Survey Statistics

Survey Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q1	4.56	1.53
Q2	4.04	1.70
Q3	4.87	1.40
Q4	5.07	1.40
Q5	4.50	1.71
Q6	4.40	1.55
Q7	4.59	1.50
Q8	4.09	1.64

Table 10

External Organizational Identification Survey Statistics

Survey Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q1	4.38	2.12
Q2	4.65	2.04
Q3	5.16	2.12
Q4	5.50	1.96
Q5	4.32	2.13
Q6	4.47	1.80
Q7	5.55	1.50
Q8	4.81	1.90
Q9	4.16	2.03
Q10	4.05	1.99
Q11	4.18	2.01
Q12	4.62	2.08

Table 10 (continued).

Survey Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q13	4.85	2.05
Q14	4.58	1.79
Q15	5.19	1.72
Q16	4.60	1.97
Q17	3.77	1.99
Q18	4.78	2.12
Q19	4.33	2.04
Q20	4.56	1.67
Q21	4.31	2.03
Q22	4.87	1.95

Table 11

Parasocial Relationship Survey Statistics

Survey Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q1	2.92	1.60
Q2	2.92	1.55
Q3	3.01	1.54
Q4	2.90	1.35
Q5	2.95	1.39
Q6	2.94	1.47
Q7	2.90	1.39
Q8	3.45	1.70
Q9	2.90	1.73
Q10	3.14	1.70

Before statistical tests were run, the values assigned to each question by the participants were summed to create a new total value for each of the three factors for each

participant. These totals were used to calculate a Pearson Product-Moment correlation to test the hypothesis, and run mediation analysis to answer the research question.

The external organizational identification scores yielded a mean of 101.72 ($SD=39.06$), the parasocial relationship scores had a mean of 29.86 ($SD=13.54$), and the social media scores had a mean of 36.06 ($SD=10.47$). The result of a two-tailed Pearson Product-Moment correlation between social media and external organizational identification was a significant positive and strong relationship ($r=.665$, $p=.000$, $r^2=.443$). This relationship suggests that, as values for the parasocial relationship variable increase, the scores for external organizational identification are similarly higher.

RQ: How do social media use and parasocial relationships interact in the establishment of organizational identification?

The results of the mediation analysis suggest that the relationship between social media use and external organizational identification is mediated by parasocial relationships. The beta of the indirect effect is 1.207 with a bootstrapped standard error of .005. The bootstrapped lower limit of the confidence interval is .851, and the bootstrapped upper limit of the confidence interval is 1.678. Because the confidence interval does not include zero, the mediation effect is significant. The relationship between social media use and external organizational identification (as determined in relation to the research hypothesis) appears to be explained by those variables relationship to the parasocial relationship index. Therefore, social media use predicts parasocial relationships ($b=.739$, $p=.000$), and parasocial relationships predicts external organizational identification ($b=1.633$, $p=.000$). The direct effect of social media use on external organizational identification is not significant ($b=.353$, $p=.204$).

This section reported the results a Pearson Product-Moment correlation including social media use and external organizational identification, as well as a mediation analysis to answer the research question. According to this result, the hypothesis is supported. The mediation analysis suggests that parasocial relationships do mediate the relationship between social media and external organizational identification. These statistical results will be used to extrapolate the information that can be gained by this knowledge in the next section. Conclusions, future research suggestions, and limitations are included in the following section.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Over forty years ago the term *organizational identification* was introduced by Hall, Schneider, and Nygren (1970). The focus then, and for much of the past four decades, was on how employees identify with the organization for which they work. However, the world has changed drastically in those years and the way people connect with others has changed, too. Social media use has become fairly ubiquitous in the early part of the twenty first century. This use also influences the way in which individuals connect with organizations. Research in social media has been growing, but the connection between identification and social media has not yet received significant focus. With little more than an anecdotal understanding of the relationship between social media and identification, it was imperative that research, such as this current study, explores the topic.

As revolutions or movements have been forged, organizations have reintroduced products or made changes the public wanted to see. Social media has been at the center of such influence for several years, including the 2012 Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day movement, which was launched and spread via Facebook. These occurrences did not simply happen; they were brought about because individuals were connected with the organization as either employees or external stakeholders. Individuals' values lead to the desire to connect with others who share similar values. As previously mentioned, "identification arises as a communicative, cooperative response" (Cheney, 1983b, p. 145) to diversity and division. Identification is a process of creating community among individuals who otherwise may not be connected. Social media has been integral to many

of those connections. Social media can be used to inform publics, engage dialogue, create community and call identifiers to action (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Identification does not come only through social media; today's tech-savvy stakeholders "following" and "liking" organizations is a reflection of identification created, most likely, through one-on-one interaction, or in some cases (e.g., Amazon.com and Netflix) online-only interactions.

While research has been strong in the areas of identification, and social media individually, little systematic research has been conducted to assess the influence and relationship of social media use and perceptions on the identification of external publics to organizations. The concept of identification began as a notion that employees identified with their employer organization, but the idea that someone outside the organization can also identify with that organization has not been studied with depth. This research sought to contribute to the field of organizational communication by furthering the understanding of organizational identification, specifically external organizational identification, and how social media influences identification.

With previous research (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Cheney, 1983b; Hall, Schneider & Nygren, 1970) suggesting that employees do identify with their employer organizations for a number of reasons, similar results were expected for external publics' identification. Additionally, with an understanding of how the Internet and social media have influenced the way in which individuals connect not only with their workplace for work related tasks (Scott, 1999; Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 2001), but also with the world around them (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), the expectation was that identification between external publics and organizations would be

significantly influenced by social media. This assumption was the focus of the hypothesis.

This attention to external publics' identification with organizations and social media use may also inform best practices for organizations using social media outlets to create that wanted and oftentimes needed identification in both their current and potential patrons. Additionally, the creation of a systematic means of measuring external organizational identification may aid further research on the topic of organizational identification in other contexts.

While the research suggests that a link between external organizational identification and social media exists, another factor is involved. Parasocial interaction, as previously discussed, has been described as “one-sided” and “nondialectical” (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215), meaning that the interaction is not mutual, but rather it includes unreciprocated interaction. This concept has been studied with much focus on these relationships that individuals hold with television celebrities, sports figures and the like. Brown and Basil (1995) extended the research in the area and suggested that individuals may develop parasocial relationships via live sporting events, as well as television and movies. Giles (2002) brought identification and parasocial relationships together as he discussed the idea that an individual may engage in parasocial interaction with a persona while not identifying with that persona (p. 290). Giles also put forth the notion of parasocial interaction existing on a continuum, as well as the idea that a “gray area” exists when an individual meets the person with whom they hold a parasocial relationship (p. 290). Parasocial relationships and identification have been studied together; however, parasocial relationships and identification involving external publics to an organization,

rather than a person, has not been considered with depth. This research also aimed to examine the relationship between external organizational identification and parasocial relationships in an effort to add to the field of organizational communication, as much of the research in this area has come from the field of public relations. Additionally, this research sought to understand how social media, external organizational identification and parasocial relationships work together. Previous research suggested that parasocial interaction was connected to identification, and also that social media effects one's identification, the research question was asked to assess whether there is a mediation effect among the three variables.

Identification and Social Media

This study attempted to adapt Cheney's (1983b) Organizational Identification Questionnaire to assess the identification of external publics rather than employees. By rewording the questions originally included in Cheney's instrument, the questions probed consumer's attitudes about an organization. In this study, this organization was Chick-fil-A in the context of the 2012 Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day. In this study, reliability was high for the external organizational identification scale ($\alpha=0.98$), and all items loaded on one factor at or above .59 (see Table 3 in Method chapter). A social media scale was included in this study (see Appendix A). For this scale, reliability was high ($\alpha=0.94$), and all items loaded on one factor at or above 0.80. The items on the social media scale were totaled to provide one score for each participant.

The parasocial relationship scale was created and added to the full instrument after the pre-test. It included ten Likert-type questions designed to understand how participants view their communication with organizations via several social media

outlets, and to understand their desire to engage with those organizations. These ten items were also summed to provide a total score for parasocial relationships. The reliability of the parasocial relationship scale exceeded the standard ($\alpha=0.97$), and the ten items loaded on one factor at or above .75. The scales functioned very well. Their use in future scholarly work is encouraged.

The results of the correlation analysis supported the hypothesis that a positive relationship exists between external organizational identification and social media use ($r=.452$, $p=.000$, $r^2=.204$). This result suggests that as individuals' use of social media is greater, then their identification with the organization is also higher. The positive relationship allows speculation for possible explanations and further implications.

A possible explanation for this result is that individuals interact using social media with organizations with which they already identify. The identification created via another route (i.e., face-to-face interaction) may have carried over to interactions and associations online through social media and may be sustained both there, and face-to-face. Adversely, the identification could have been created on social media, and may have carried over to face-to-face interactions, or could be maintained only on social media. The notion that the interactions and identification are sustained on social media lends itself to the idea that a parasocial relationship truly exists. Regardless, the results provide evidence that identification and social media use are positively related.

Parasocial Relationships as a Mediator

With this relationship of social media and external organizational identification in mind, the research question asked whether parasocial relationships mediated the direct relationship between social media and external organizational identification. With an

indirect effect beta of 1.207 and the lower level of the confidence interval at .851 and the upper level at 1.678, there is a significant mediation effect. Social media usage alone does not predict external organizational identification. The influence of parasocial relationships on social media use accounts for the apparent significant finding between social media and external organizational identification. The direct relationship between social media and external organizational identification is explained by the presence of parasocial relationships, and thus parasocial relationships are mediating the significant relationship.

Previous research on parasocial relationships based on media usage found that such relationships are a necessary but insufficient condition for identification. Results of the present study suggest that parasocial relationships are sufficient for external organizational identification. Additionally, social media appear to be an important conduit for the establishment of parasocial relationships.

As previously discussed, identification with an organization is limitless as long as an individual is aware of the organization. Oftentimes, knowledge of organizations comes through social media use in this technology savvy world. Thus, social media use leads to identification, and a parasocial relationship that is developed along the way strongly influences the identification.

Practical Implications

The finding of these statistical tests involving external organizational identification, parasocial relationships and the use and perception of social media indicate that a significant relationship exists among these variables which may be beneficial for organizations in their attempt to create and sustain relationships, interaction and

identification with existing and potential patrons. As evidenced in Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day, masses of individuals come together on social media in support of an organization with which they identify. While Chick-fil-A did not seek out this day, they embraced it and enjoyed the increased business and massive outpouring of support that came from across the country. However, they also came under attack for their strongly held beliefs. In both scenarios, social media was used to rally those who supported Chick-fil-A and those who opposed the purpose of the day.

Chick-fil-A did not directly engage consumers to seek their feedback and support during that time, but consumers held a strong identification to the organization based on their shared values. Due to this identification, these consumers perpetuated a parasocial relationship with Chick-fil-A by posting comments, using hashtags and employing other forms of social media to show their support, likely never reciprocated by Chick-fil-A. However, when the customer entered the Chick-fil-A location in support on August 1, 2012, Giles' (2002) continuum would suggest that the parasocial relationship was moved to a more social relationship as the customer engaged face-to-face with representatives of the organization.

This study supports the conclusion that organizations would be wise to actively monitor and strategically manage their online presence, paying particular attention to social media. Organizations should also be aware that some messages directed toward a mass audience through social media are at times interpreted as direct communication between the organization and the individual receiver. This perception is powerful in that it facilitates a bond between that individual and the organization. Maintaining a positive relationship not only encourages organizational identification, but also creates a reservoir

of goodwill for that organization. Such goodwill is invaluable (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003).

Organizations have an opportunity to engage their patrons in social media communication simply by posing questions, making statements about the organizations or supporting other causes or organizations. Patrons will likely respond with their thoughts, providing the organization direction for future conversations, product changes, and the like. For example, Yoplait received such communication from its consumers and took out high fructose corn syrup from its yogurt. It followed the change by communicating with its consumers, and also kept the communication lines open by telling consumers, “anything else we can do for you, let us know” (Yoplait, 2012). It leveraged the parasocial relationships, the mediating factor in the relationship between social media and external organizational identification, that had been created via social media to make changes to its product that made their consumers happy, thus retaining yogurt eaters and possibly adding more folks that will begin eating the Yoplait brand because of the removal of high fructose corn syrup.

As Yoplait posed questions, or opened the door for consumer feedback, it engaged its customers and potential customers in a parasocial relationship via social media, and television media. The company responded to the comments and feedback from consumers, but not directly to each person. The response was collective and in the form of a commercial to let people know of the change while inviting more feedback on social media. The response, though not direct to a particular consumer, made consumers as a whole feel heard, and perceive that their opinions mattered. The decision also showed consumers that the healthy choices that are important to them also matter to

Yoplait. The response via media and social media perpetuated the parasocial relationship and the evidence of common values (health) engendered even greater identification.

Parasocial relationships and external organizational identification initiated by either the patron or the organization on social media has immense influence on continued and new support and patronage. Some organizations may thrive through their social media presence and interaction with consumers, while other organizations may founder due to their failure to capture a consumer's attention and allegiance. To harness the ability to create relationships through social media, show values and connect with those that share them, and foster relationship where the organization receives communication from those who support them is commensurate with developing a business quickly, effectively and practically.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this research followed in the line of previous research and sought to expand knowledge about organizational communication and social media, several important limitations must be acknowledged and used to improve the research. First, the sample may not be representative universally. The challenge of recruiting participants from various locations was a contributing factor, even though the survey was available online. The scales' reliability and validity were still quite high; however, a more diverse sample would provide for a much more specific understanding of the included variables.

Additionally, while the participants reported being from a number of different states, the majority was from the southeastern United States. Of course, Chick-fil-A is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, and has a large presence in this part of the United States, so the higher response rate from the southeast could be an explanation for the

results of this study when dealing directly with questions about Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day. The southeastern region of the country is known to more commonly hold certain views that would lead a participant to identify with Chick-fil-A and the value that lead to the Appreciation Day – support for traditional marriage. A larger sample size with more participants from other regions would benefit the understanding of external organizational identification, parasocial relationships, and the use and perception of social media.

A third limitation, related to the previous, and area for future research involves the use of Chick-fil-A as the focus of the survey instrument. While it would present a challenge to measure external organizational identification when dealing with organizations as a whole that may provide a more clear view of how external organizational identification and parasocial relationships work together. If an individual is allowed to answer the survey items imagining any organization with which they identify, then the results may explain the phenomenon of identification in a more broad sense and be more applicable to any organization that may seek to foster identification and parasocial relationship with its patrons and potential patrons. In short, by limiting the study to those who knew about Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day the generalizability of the findings is challenged.

A fourth limitation involves the design of the Qualtrics.com survey. While the first three questions – informed consent, whether the participant knew about Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day and whether they attended – were forced choice, the remainder of the questions was not. This contributed to lower response rates, one hundred ninety-five participants said they knew about the event, yet one hundred fifty, one hundred fifty-one

and one hundred fifty-nine participants completed each of the scales respectively. Incomplete data has drawbacks.

Conclusion

With the continued growth of organizational communication and social media, the need to understand how the two work together is imperative. Scholars, business professionals, and consumers will seek to understand topics such as this and how they influence the world in which they work and live. Identification is not a new topic in the field of communication, but has not been applied to external publics in such a way as this research. This work sought to understand the relationship of external organizational identification, parasocial relationships, as well as the use and perception of social media.

The results suggest that a relatively strong relationship exists between external organizational identification and social media, and that parasocial relationships mediate the association between social media and external organizational identification. These findings offer practical applications for organizations. Fostering parasocial relationships through social media with external publics is likely to encourage identification between the consumer and the organization. Additionally, ensuring that organizations are represented on social media is important in first creating knowledge of the organization before identification can occur.

Ultimately, the goal of this research was to understand a communication concept – organizational identification – in a different context and with a modern view of how individuals communicate and relate to the world around them. This research expands the understanding of identification for organizations and how they relate to their consumers, patrons and customers.

In 2012, Mike Huckabee harnessed the power of social media to gather support for Chick-fil-A. This online movement created buzz and conversation about Chick-fil-A and the beliefs of the company's leaders. Individuals traveled hours to support the organization, and leveraged their own social media networks to seek further support. Chick-fil-A had a record setting day. Clearly, the importance of businesses communicating with stakeholders has not diminished in this age of social media. In fact, organizations depend on these external publics for success, and individuals increasingly value organizations that express beliefs that are consistent with their own. This study helps establish that social media is the communication vehicle by which parasocial relationships are created and organizational identification is fostered.

APPENDIX A

EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE
AND PERCEPTION QUESTIONNAIRE

including items removed after reliability and validity assessment

Think of your support of Chick-fil-A, and the Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day events that took place on August 1, 2012. Answer each question on the 1-7 scale with 1 being Very Strongly Disagree and 7 being Very Strongly Agree. Select only one answer for each question.

1. I would probably consider working for this organization, if I were seeking employment.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

2. In general, I see this organization and myself working toward the same goals.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

3. I am proud to be a supporter of this organization.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

4. This organization's image in the community is one to be respected.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

5. I often describe myself to others by saying, "I really support this organization" or "I enjoy supporting the work this organization does".

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

6. I try to consider that my actions as a supporter of this organization affect the view others hold of this organization.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

7. I view this organization as different from others companies.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

8. I am glad I choose to support this organization rather than another.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

9. I talk up this organization to my friends as a great company to support.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

10. In general, I view it as my responsibility as a supporter to help the organization keep a good reputation in the community.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

11. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected of a supporter in order to help this organization to be successful.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

12. I become irritated when I hear others criticize this company.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

13. I have warm feelings toward this organization I support.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

14. I would be willing to support this organization continually.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

15. I feel that this organization values me as a supporter.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

16. The record of this organization is an example of what dedicated people can achieve.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

17. I have a lot in common with others who support this organization.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

18. I find it difficult to agree with this organization's policies on important matters that affect me as a supporter.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

19. My association with this organization is a matter of choice.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

20. I tell others about project or events happening at this organization.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

21. I find that my values and the values of this organization are similar.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

22. I feel very little loyalty to this organization.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

23. As a supporter, I would describe this organization as a large “family” in which most employees and supporters feel a sense of belonging.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

24. I find it easy to identify myself with this organization.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

25. I really care about the fate of this organization.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

The following questions address your view of communication via social media produced by this organization. Answer each by circling only one number for each question.

1. I tend to see it as a personal message to me when I receive email communication from this organization.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

2. I tend to see it as a personal message to me when I receive Facebook communication from this organization.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

3. I tend to see it as a personal message to me when I receive Twitter communication from this organization.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

4. I tend to see it as a personal message to me when I receive LinkedIn communication from this organization.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

5. I tend to see it as a personal message to me when I receive Pinterest communication from this organization.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

6. I tend to see it as a personal message to me when I receive Instagram communication from this organization.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

7. I tend to see it as a personal message to me when I receive RSS feed communication from this organization.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

The following questions address your view and use of social media. Answer each by circling only one number for each question.

1. It is important for supporters to “fan” or “follow” organizations.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

2. It is important for supporters to share the good things about organizations on their social media.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

3. It is important for patrons to support an organization both online and offline.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

4. I feel that I contribute to the well-being and success of the organizations I “fan” or “follow” online.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

5. It is important for patrons to leverage their social media presence in support of organizations with which they identify.

Very Strongly Agree 7....6....5....4....3....2....1 Very Strongly Disagree

For the following questions, consider your ownership of social media accounts and the ways in which you use those media.

6. Please select all social media for which you have a personal and/or business account.

- Email
- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Pinterest
- Instagram
- RSS Feeds
- Other:

7. How many hours do you spend on social media per day?

- 0 – 3
- 4 – 6
- 7 – 10
- 11 – 14
- 15 – 18
- 19+

8. Why do you use social media? (select all that apply)

- To keep in touch with friends and family – including sharing pictures, videos, etc.
- To meet new people
- To make professional connections
- To play games
- To find information about friends and share feedback
- To find information and provide feedback regarding organizations you support
- To promote your business or other businesses you support

9. Where did you learn about Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day?

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Television
- A friend or family member in person
- Other:

10. Have you ever attended an event of any kind that you learned about strictly online?

Yes

No

11. Do you share your location (“check in”) or what events you are attending on your social media accounts?

Yes

No

For the remaining questions, please circle only one answer.

Age Range: 18 – 22 23 - 30 31 – 40 41 – 50 51 – 60 60+

Gender: Female Male

Ethnicity:

Native American

Asian

African American

Caucasian

Hispanic

Other: _____

Marital Status:

Single

Married

Widowed

Divorced

Location: (select one)

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

(initial request for pre-test)

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.6820 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

The risks to subjects are minimized.
The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
The selection of subjects is equitable.
Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **13041601**
PROJECT TITLE: **Organizational Identification and Social Media Use**
PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation**
RESEARCHER(S): **Lindsey Elizabeth Webb**
COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Arts & Letters**
DEPARTMENT: **Communication Studies**
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: **N/A**
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **04/29/2013 to 04/28/2014**

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

(Amendment request for full study)



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
 118 College Drive #5116 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
 Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional - review-board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
 Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **CH13041601**
 PROJECT TITLE: **Organizational Identification and Social Media Use**
 PROJECT TYPE: **Change to a Previously Approved Project**
 RESEARCHER(S): **Lindsey Webb**
 COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Arts & Letters**
 DEPARTMENT: **Communication Studies**
 FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: **N/A**
 IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**
 PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **12/13/2013 to 12/12/2014**

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board

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