Spring 2020

Narrativizing the Holidays: Event Branding through Commodity Narrative Campaigns

Peighton Hinote
Eastern Illinois University

Narrativizing the Holidays

Event Branding through Commodity Narrative Campaigns

Peighton Hinote

Eastern Illinois University

Department of Communication Studies

2020

Abstract

Event planning and coordination often view events to be standalone, existing only until the event has passed. However, this thesis looks to serialize events to exist long after a single event takes place. Through the application of narrative, myth, and floating signification through the lens of semiotics theory, this thesis aims to create evergreen content for public relations practitioners in their efforts to promote events. The contents of this thesis focus on theory and application, allowing the two to enrich one another. Furthermore, this thesis practically applies foundational concepts from scholars like Fiske (1987, 1990) and Barthes (1957, 1970, 1978) to content created for a local brand, Towne Square Jewelers. In partnering with Towne Square Jewelers, this thesis creates narratives for three holidays treated as events: Christmas, New Year's Eve, and Galentine's Day. Formulation of narrative to serialize events is based on the serialized content of Hallmark (Larson, 2019) and their use of "Acts" to maintain story structure while switching out paradigmatic elements. Furthermore, this thesis used first-person perspective to immerse audiences in the experiences demonstrated through the visual content created.

Dedication

To Nathan Hinote, my husband; thank you for encouraging and supporting me to follow

my dreams and pursue my master's degree.

To Remi Hinote, my daughter; may you one day reach the stars.

I love you both.

Acknowledgements

Dr. Scott Walus — Thank you for dedicating so much of your time and energy to mentoring me throughout this program. I cannot express my gratitude enough for your patience and guidance as I navigated graduate school on top of becoming a new parent. Thank you for the weekend check-ins and meetings at Jackson Avenue Coffee over breaks. Although I only had one production class with you in undergrad, you inspired me so much that I made a whole thesis involving media. Thank you for guiding me through production and encouraging me to take ownership of my achievements. I could not have made the progress I did without your mentorship.

To the Department of Communication Studies graduate faculty — Thank you for inspiring and encouraging me to continue my education through this graduate program. I could not have done it without the guidance and mentorship of the amazing professors and advisors in this department. Thank you for allowing me to work and learn throughout my pregnancy and first year of parenthood. I greatly appreciate Dr. Elizabeth Gill, Dr. Matt Gill, and Dr. Marita Gronnvoll for allowing me to assist in their classrooms so I could still stay connected to teaching. Thank you to Dr. Matt Gill and Dr. Sam Szczur for being on my committee, guiding me through this process and providing insightful feedback. Thank you to Dr. Rich Jones and Dr. Angie Jacobs for guidance throughout my graduate career and assistantship teaching CMN 1310. I cannot express the gratitude I feel for the entire graduate faculty and all that they have done for me.

Table of Contents

Part I: There's Something Going on Here…

Growing up in the small, Mid-Western city of Charleston, I have become familiar with several local businesses and their brands. One of the local brands I have followed closely on social media is Towne Square Jewelers. After acquiring my engagement ring here, I noted the friendly atmosphere and their vast knowledge of jewelry. So, it came as a surprise when I heard through the grapevine that some of their latest events had been less than successful, and when I went to visit the business for myself, I only became more confused.

Towne Square Jewelers, with the phrase jewelry in its name, lends audiences to expect a store that sells fine jewelry. However, when I entered the business, I noticed a wall of Corkcicle cups and tumblers, case for partyware, and even a case of purses. The brand I had known to be primarily based in jewelry seemed confused and lost in various other merchandise. Still, nothing manifested this confusion more than the event they recently held, "Whiskey and Wishes," targeting men and ignoring their own marketing base.

In our discussion of brand identity, I asked Towne Square Jewelers, "Who is your audience?" The response to this demonstrated some confusion over who the intended audience should be. In an interview with Towne Square Jewelers' co-owner, Elena Davis, it became evident that the business owners were unaware of a specific target market and wanted to attract "everyone" to their business (E. Davis, personal communication, August 22, 2019). This lack of focus is evident in the product displays and lack of stakeholder interest in special events and social media engagement.

Identifying target markets is important to strategic planning as well as innovation of overall brand identity. Here, simply identifying who to market to can increase overall understanding of how to market to them. Furthermore, Lynn (2011) identifies segmentation, the act of identifying and segmenting members of a target audience into homogenous groupings, as an effective measure of identifying these target markets. Through segmentation, organizations can "direct marketing activities at the segments which the marketers believe that their company can satisfy better than their competitors, and position their product offering so as to appeal to the targeted segments" (Lynn, 2011). Thus, identifying and segmenting target audiences benefits organizations in identifying who to spend their marketing efforts on. With this research in mind, it is imperative that businesses understand their target market and how to brand themselves to that specific psychographic, or cultural clusters and identity categories, to not only increase sales, but also to improve overall reputation among stakeholders. Therefore, the underlying issue for Towne Square Jewelers is the desire to sell to "everyone," resulting in a generic story, or narrative, for overall brand and, more specifically, branded events that cater to no one.

As previously mentioned, a clear example of Towne Square's attempt to appeal to a more masculine audience, foregoing their target market
is found in their "Whiskey and Wishes" night. Here, they offered free alcohol and cigars to any men that decided to join them in looking at their jewelry collection. This attempt aimed to draw in a larger audience through indulging in luxurious cocktails and cigars while shopping. Although this idea seemed promising in theory, it resulted in only two participants. The issue, as identified by workers, involved a lack of understanding and

effective communication with a traditionally heteronormative, masculine audience. "Men

don't want to shop," explained worker and Towne Square social media specialist Molly

Chappell, "They don't go out of their way to enjoy the shopping experience. They strictly

want to spend as little time looking around as possible," (M. Chappell, personal

communication, July 12, 2019). Molly identified these qualities of "not wanting to shop"

and "avoiding stores" as something Towne Square didn't fully consider, leading to an

uncertain narrative in branding the event. Again, in the organization's attempt to appeal

to "everyone," they ultimately appealed to no one. The branding for this event consisted

of generic images of whiskey with font overlaying in frame. Promotion for the event

identified unclear audience expectations, promising no clear transformation other than an

opportunity to drink while shopping.

     The disorganized nature of Towne Square's event structure further clarifies the

importance of identifying a target audience and creating a narrative-driven structure to

follow for the overall brand and, in turn, the branded events that follow. Through our

conversations, it became apparent that Towne Square did not set up clear expectations for

audiences to easily understand the benefits of attending the event (reference Appendix E).

Additionally, Towne Square did not understand its own need to host the event in the first

place, reaching to appeal to "everyone" rather than their own identifiable psychographic.

This problem is not confined to the Towne Square brand but is a rampant issue among

organizations in need of clearer understanding in how to campaign or market an event

with the knowledge that the build up to an event is just as—if not more—important than

the event itself. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to create sample content that would be

used for the lead up to holidays as events, generated from the foundational concepts of

commodity narrative and floating signification.

Brand Identity

When I first met with Towne Square Jewelers' Elena Davis and Molly Chappell, I

soon learned that the brand suffered a form of identity crisis (E. Davis & M. Chappell,

personal communication, August 22, 2019). Although the business is a jewelry store, it is

also now a gift store, offering personalized engravings, cards, and even pens. However,

the community is vastly unaware of the gift options Towne Square carries, as reported

through a survey I performed on October 30, 2019, outlined in Appendix E.

To best understand the state of the brand, I used Facebook to reach out to local

women in the area that were available and willing to take a short survey. Here, I asked

sixteen women, median age of thirty, about their perceptions of the Towne Square

Jewelers' brand. After confirmation of their participation, I sent a list of questions, most

open-ended, to each woman through Facebook messenger. The women would then

provide their answers through the same platform, including a mix of length in responses.

From here, if an answer seemed unclear or needed elaboration, I provided follow-up

questions for clarification. I then compiled responses into a data set and identified the

most common answers. These responses then influenced the direction of my campaign.

Overall, answers demonstrated a general perception of the brand as positive, but

with little to no direct experience with the organization itself. Rather, participants'

viewed Towne Square as a place for only high-end jewelry and saw little need to visit the

store more than once, if at all. Very few women were aware of the events Towne Square

hosted or gifts outside of jewelry that the store offers (please see Appendix E).

Additionally, none of the women surveyed followed Towne Square on any social media

platform.

Optimizing New Media (Mode)

As Berger (1972) postulates, "Seeing comes before words," (p. 33). Therefore,

images are held in high standing within the confusion of promotions and advertisements.

Despite this, Towne Square, like other businesses, relies on stock photos and generic

images of jewelry, flowers, or even whiskey to advertise special events and connect with

audiences. These images, however, do not generate audience interaction or help in

creating expectations for the event they advertise. Therefore, the main issue here is the

lack of understanding how to optimize visuals through the introduction of new media

with the inclusion of narrative.

Channel

In addition to visual content being key, the channel carrying this content also

heavily influences its interactivity among audiences. A recent study performed by USC

Center for Public Relations (2019) demonstrates that the top two most important area for

growth among public relations practitioners include content creation and social media.

Through this study, it is evident that organizations are turning more to social media and

the content distributed through that channel as a means of promoting and marketing.

From this, I examined Towne Square Jewelers' own social media accounts to garner a

better understanding of their content.

In their social media accounts, specifically Instagram, Towne Square maintains

the use of stock photos for a majority of posts, including but not limited to contest

winners, upcoming events, and new merchandise. Although there are some photographs

taken in-house and used to advertise specific merchandise, the sentiment is the same—a generic burst of images that tell no story and lack a connection to the target audience. Additionally, some content is posted multiple times. For example, during a Freida Rothman sales event on October 30, 2019, Towne Square used the exact same picture template with only a couple photo changes used eight times (Towne Square Jewelers, n.d.). Though the event would include food, alcohol, and an in-person sales demonstration from Freida Rothman, a generic "Halloween" sugar skull adorned every promotional material. The content on social media lacked narrative and included stock photos, like the sugar skull, that had little to do with the event itself other than its date aligning with Halloween celebrations. Although an audience member might not catch on to this repetitiveness, the Instagram (Towne Square Jewelers, n.d.) page tells the story clearly. Here, it is evident that Towne Square lacks creativity as well as variability in the brand's social media content.

Lack of Narrative

In conjunction with the surveys and interviews, I performed a brand audit for Towne Square. Here, I identified a lack of focus for the overall brand narrative. Although Towne Square identifies itself as emphasizing "trust, expertise, and a laid-back, comfortable atmosphere," it lacks a clear focus on defining itself as a more than a generic jewelry store. Furthermore, the logos, promotional materials, and even the storefront are an amalgamation of various fonts, color schemes, visual styles, and mixed voice. The lack of a clear narrative in the brand's social media accounts and business pages demonstrated a lack of focus in its brand identity.

Part II: Goals/Objectives

Instead of focusing on marketing to "everyone," I followed the strategy that Towne Square Jewelers look to identify a target audience and then use that to create a narrative for the event. This form of using audience data to create a relatable narrative for event branding can then be replicated for any event and any audience. Through my partnership with Towne Square Jewelers, I created three campaigns for the holidays of Christmas, New Year's Eve, and Galentine's Day following the concept that the build up to an event is just as—if not more—important than the event itself. Here, holidays are treated as events. Based on this concept, I focused all efforts on creating a clear story that demonstrates audience event expectations, using narrative to build the idea that, ultimately, life will be better for audiences after the commodity.

Overall Brand

In their efforts to reach "everyone," Towne Square Jewelers garnered limited engagement through social media posts. These posts were limited to generic templates and default images that often had little relation to the actual events advertised. Thus, I established the goal of creating a commodity narrative for TSJ's holiday events. The commodity narrative establishes a character as feeling unappreciated until presented with a gift from Towne Square Jewelers, thus providing them with a sense of validation and fulfillment. This commodity narrative goal centered on focusing the audience to a more concentrated group, humanizing the brand through narrative storytelling, and implementing a clearer brand image for future use of TSJ. Additionally, the goal centered on content creation and narratives generated for each holiday.

Embracing Medium/Channel

To effectively demonstrate these narratives, I chose a visual mode. Specifically, promotional material for these campaigns relied heavily on still photos with the inclusion of video. The focus here is on perspective angles, positioning the camera in the shoes of a character in the scene. Here, audiences are immersed in the action and a part of their own story within the narratives presented. Faces are strategically out of frame, forcing audiences to focus on the gifts and setting while allowing them to fill in the idea of who they would like to receive the gifts in frame. Although this concept of perspective angles is not new in the world of television and film, it rarely exists in promotional materials, although some perspective-driven promotional ads can be found in successful brands like GoPro (Right Left Agency, 2018). Therefore, the implementation of this perspective angle can be considered innovative in its connection with commodity narrative, especially for boutique items.

Through strategic use of perspective angles, this campaign aimed to provide audiences with a look into their own lives if they presented their friends, family, significant others with gifts from Towne Square. Here, I positioned the camera to focus on the gifts and setting, cutting out characters' faces altogether. This allowed the audience just enough information to fill in the blanks of the narrative with their own ideas of who they would give each gift to. Additionally, I embraced visual media to emphasize the idea that humans focus on pictures before reading. With that in mind, commodity narratives were demonstrated through each photo still and video to clearly reach the audience through the noise of other social media posts.

The best channel for this visual mode is social media. Although I also created content for website use, posters, and even billboards, the primary focus became an emphasis on social media. With the growing demand for organizational presence on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, organizations must focus on the needs of each individual platform. However, each platform emphasized visual media in some form. Through this, the pairing of visual media and social media is the perfect match to utilize for special event campaigning.

Examples of brands that are successful in their use of social media, specifically Instagram, are UOI Boutique (UOI Boutique, n.d.) and ModCloth (ModCloth, n.d.). Both clothing brands use visuals of "everyday" women in their clothing. ModCloth is exceptionally good at using commodity narrative to tell the story through visuals of how women are out in the world, feeling great in their ModCloth apparel (ModCloth, n.d.). Similarly, UOI uses retail workers to live stream various outfits and upload their own pairings to the company's Instagram (UOI Boutique, n.d.). Therefore, both brands connect to their audiences of young women through character and setting. The strategies of both brands were thus emulated in the Towne Square's Galentine's Day campaign set.

Narrativizing

To remedy this lack of brand focus, I created a clear commodity narrative for the year's upcoming holidays of Christmas, New Year's Eve, and "Galentine's Day," treating each holiday as a special event. I connected these three holidays through the commodity narrative of feeling unappreciated until presented with a gift from Towne Square Jewelers. The gifts used are symbolic representations of appreciation. I applied floating signification to unify the promotional campaigns for each holiday. The floating

signification used is that of the various relationships presented and each characters' desire

to show appreciation for one another through giving gifts from Towne Square. I created

narratives for all three through posters, social media posts, billboards, and video. Here, I

used a television structure to follow a set of characters the audience can relate to. The

overall narrative concept demonstrated through each campaign is that of a person feeling

unappreciated until presented with a gift from TSJ, thus resolving the issue and providing

a sense of fulfillment and validation.

The idea of creating a clear narrative is molded after Freshers Festival's most

recent event in Glasgow. Event coordinator, Graeme Barratt, told Eventbrite (2018) that

their event saw over 10,000 in attendance. To accomplish this, the event's team created a

video marketing campaign following the narrative of students encountering different

activities at the festival, showcasing "what students should expect to experience at the

fests" (2018, para. 14). "We focus on creating visual content, such as videos, to really

bring the spirit of Freshers Festival to life for students and the brands that get involved,"

said Barratt (Eventbrite, 2018, para. 15). Barratt went on to tell Eventbrite (2018) that the

video emphasizes the universal student experience through showing students interacting

with the event features, exhibitors, and even each other at Freshers Festival.

Another successful campaign can be found in Bosscat Productions' use of theme

and narrative for their one-day event teaching business owners how to attract media

attention (Eventbrite, 2018). Liz Galloway, event and "Your Reason Why" campaign

coordinator, told Eventbrite (2018) that Bosscat Productions "focused on building a story

around the individual person and how we could help them solve their problem with

attracting media brand attention by giving them the tools to DIY media" (para. 26) They

continued this concept through the event theme of "red carpet rebels," encouraging "each attendee to share their own story… welcome[ing] them with a full red carpet production, including 'paparazzi' to have them feel engaged and like VIPs as they entered the door" (Eventbrite, 2018, para. 27). Here, Bosscat Productions used a problem-solution narrative similar to what I used for Towne Square Jewelers. Bosscat Productions identified a need through a problem their audience had. Then, the organization provided a solution in the event hosted and told this problem-solution narrative in their branding campaign for the event. By generating a narrative to the content produced leading up to the event, these organizations were thus able to create successful events.

Narrative Function of Setting

In addition to the commodity narrative, my thesis focused on the narrative function of setting used in each campaign. For example, the Christmas campaign took place in a home in front of a Christmas tree and fireplace mantle. The setting for New Year's Eve centered around a luxurious party. However, "Galentine's Day" took place in various locations, highlighting activities women enjoy with their "gal-pals." Each campaign strategically utilized setting to inform the overall narratives at play, as emulated by the aforementioned brands of ModCloth (ModCloth, n.d.) and UOI Boutique (UOI Boutique, n.d.).

Narrative Function of Season

Similar to Hallmark's emphasis on seasonal programming, when utilizing the narrative function of setting, it is also important to include focus on the narrative functions of season. Here, Hallmark films center on seasons, having the setting dictated by which season the film takes place in. For example, if the film is related to Christmas,

Hallmark will implement a setting that will allow for a light snowfall on Christmas Day. To emulate this relation of season to setting, the Christmas campaign centered on "family, comfort, and togetherness" and thus took place in a family home.

The New Year's Eve campaign focused on a party scene to reflect its emphasis on celebrations. The use of celebrations utilizes the narrative function of season, promoting it as a time to celebrate friendships as well as true love. By incorporating images of a party among friends interposed with images of a proposal, this campaign effectively emulates the concept of celebration Therefore, this set demonstrates to the audience the direct correlation of celebration with the season of New Year's Eve

In addition to these seasonal narratives, "Galentine's Day" is a lesser-known holiday that is quickly gaining traction as a national holiday, as outlined later in the thesis. Therefore, it became the perfect opportunity to emphasize the narrative of friendship in a time that is typically centered on romantic love. Here, Towne Square is portrayed as the perfect gift store for all forms of friendships on top of being a jewelry store for Valentine's Day, which occurs the day after Galentine's Day.

Part III: Overview of Communication Phenomena

Preview

In effectively implementing a commodity narrative for Towne Square Jewelers' holidays campaigns, I applied semiotic theory through the use of floating signification. At its core, semiotics examines how a concept is attached to an image, aligning the signified to the signifier. From here, I applied myth, simplifying the concepts attached to each image in the commodity narratives, such as attaching concepts like family to Towne Square's brand through an image of a perceived family opening Towne Square Jewelers' gifts in front of a Christmas tree. Following foundational concepts set in place by theorists such as Barthes (1957) and Fiske (1987, 1990), I used myth and narrative to generate clear campaigns. Additionally, I followed formulas of Hallmark television and holiday campaigns, such as John Lewis, to shape the guiding concepts attached to each narrative. To grant a clearer understanding of how the holidays were narrativized in Towne Square Jewelers' holiday campaigns, the following sections on semiotics theory are divided into brand, myth, and narrative. Narrative is then discussed in terms of elements, conventions, and *mise en scène*.

Semiotics

This creative thesis demonstrates the practical applicability of semiotics theory for creating commodity narrative campaigns. Here, signifiers, such as gifts, colors, backdrops, and even people evoke a feeling in the audience that directly relates to a concept, identified as the signified, tied with the image. For example, the Galentine's Day campaign centers on the concept of various relationships women have to other women in their lives, celebrating these relationships through the act of giving gifts and spending

time together. The images shown of women shopping together to buy an outfit to match

their new Towne Square Jewelers' matching necklaces evokes a sense of togetherness,

appreciation, bonding. These concepts are then tied directly to the Towne Square brand,

allowing audiences to now connect Towne Square Jewelers' to the ideas of being

appreciated, together, and bonded with others through the giving of Towne Square gifts.

This act of tying image to concept is the study of semiotics. To better understand how

semiotics, the study of signifier and signified, connects to the narratives used in these

holiday campaigns, the theory must be thoroughly unpacked. Additionally, parts of this

thesis refer to the act of articulation, attaching a sign to another sign system in relation to

applying the theory of semiotics.

In the early 20th century, Saussure developed semiology, the science of sign

systems and their social uses. As identified by Jensen (1991), Saussure saw a sign as

consisting of signifier (image) and signified (concept; p. 27). Moriarty (2005) recorded

later contributions of Stuart Hall and Roland Barthes as "extending signifier and signified

to include denotation (direct, specific, or literal meaning) and connotation (the meaning

that is evoked on a subjective level)" (p. 231). An example of this connects the term cat

with two separate meanings. Here, cat denotatively refers to felis catus, a domesticated

mammal that walks on all fours and has pointed ears and whiskers. These general

descriptions denote cat; however, each person subjectively interprets cat to refer to a

specific image in their minds. Some imagine a white, fluffy cat with green eyes while

others might think of a childhood tabby cat they owned, and others still imagine an

entirely different image of a cat being akin to Garfield from the Sunday comics. Although

all of these perspectives are versions of cat, they are not the same image. Thus, the unifying term of cat can evoke multiple images when expressed connotatively.

In his foundational work, Barthes (1957) begins with a criticism of semiology, noting this theory postulates a link between two terms, a signifier and a signified, image and concept, respectively. However, Barthes (1957) goes on to clarify that there is a third term in any semiological system. Here, there is a signifier, a signified, and a sign. This understanding adds a link between the signifier and signified, providing a new being known as the sign. In his example, Barthes (1957) refers to roses, the signifier, and passion, the signified. When these two are combined, they create the sign, impassioned roses. In semiotics, "an object becomes a symbol when it acquires through convention and use a meaning that enables it to stand for something else," (Fiske, 1990, p. 91). Another example of an object becoming a symbol involves the Towne Square Jeweler's New Year's campaign. Here, the campaign plays to the ideology of marriage in Western culture through creating a narrative around a ring. The ring, adorned in a diamond, is the object or signifier. The signified, or concept, attached to the ring is that of solidifying a relationship through a proposal and act of engagement. The ring, when placed on the left "ring" finger, now becomes a new sign, an engagement ring. The New Year's party campaign plays on this new sign creation, evoking an understanding in the audience that the relationships depicted is now solidified and acknowledged as true love by simply showing the image of a ring being placed on a young woman's left "ring" finger.

Additionally, research from Barthes (1957) further clarifies terms like "ring" finger, as outlined below. Analysis from Larsen (1991) identifies Barthes' work to use the term denotation to refer to the natural while connotation is used to refer to the

ideological (p. 125). Thus, the finger itself is the natural while the concept of a "ring"

finger is the ideological. Western culture has placed such significance on marriage that

the naming of a finger comes from an ideological understanding that said finger is

reserved for wearing a symbol of marriage, a wedding or engagement ring.

Conventionally, the mythical or allegorical are added (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994,

p. 466). To better understand the application of meanings, Page (2006) provides the

example of a convertible. Here, the convertible may denote transportation but connote

wealth and success. The convertible then becomes mythical if it is seen as the mark of a

mid-life crisis or the entitlement in celebrating a 50th birthday.

Articulation and brand

As previously discussed, semiotics attaches meaning to message, or concept

(signified) to image (signifier). When this is done, the concepts can then be attached to

the brand creating those images through the notion of floating signification. Thus, these

floating signifiers, as implemented through strategic messaging, ultimately increase brand

capital. Therefore, theoretical work in semiotic systems and narrative structure can be

directly translated into modern campaigns, or event branding.

As identified by Goldman and Papson (1996), campaigns are often broken down

into a set of symbols that resonate with audiences. "Increasingly campaigns are being

reduced to strands of simple yet stylish scenes that speak volumes to viewers. Attitudes,

values, characteristics, relative degrees of hipness and relevancy—all are communicated

not so much by words anymore but by how you look, what you wear, what you do"

(Goldman & Papson, 1996). What this means for organizations is that they are no longer

simply selling products, but marketing lifestyles for which their products contribute. For

example, Hallmark is not simply a greeting card company or television channel. It advocates a space for connecting with others, indulging in the predictability through its narratives in film, and even celebrating family, friendship, and true love. The Hallmark brand is no longer reduced down to the products it sells, but the lifestyles attached with its brand. Those that consume Hallmark materials, align themselves to be in tune with what Hallmark promotes itself as, thus attaching the floating signification to increase brand capital. These underlying concepts of narrative and event branding intertwine in a cohesive strategy for organizations to use in content creation.

In the interest of understanding event branding as it relates to semiotics, it is important to note that companies, and therefore brands, are no longer viewed as simply providers of goods and services. As explained with Hallmark, brands are much more than the products they sell. Instead, they are the very embodiment of the concepts they promote. With Hallmark, Christmas is a heightened season for sales opportunities. Thus, the Hallmark Channel creates movies that follow predictable yet endearing narratives that center around holiday festivities for viewers to indulge in. These narratives directly relate to the family-oriented perspective Hallmark aligns itself with. Therefore, consumers of these films see themselves as family-oriented, aligning their views with those proposed by Hallmark, and ultimately increasing Hallmark's brand capital.

Moscovici (2000) defines brands as socio-cognitive representations, cognitive structures which are "jointly held by members of a group, provide a shared frame of reference for communication, establish social identities and relations by being communicated and are negotiated in social interaction and discourse" (Koller, 2008, p. 431). Further relating this to the Hallmark brand, the organization is well-known for its

"cult" following—so much so, that other organizations create shirts stating things like, "I just want to watch Hallmark Christmas movies all day," which can be found on sites like Etsy, Amazon, and TeePublic. The popularity of the films can be directly contributed to its use of brand identity as aligned with family, feel-good narratives, and holiday cheer.

Furthermore, the act of branding involves the creation of a brand—that is, constructing a brand "personality" reduced to a set of core values. Thus, it is imperative that a brand have an underlying set of values in place as a starting point of how the brand should then identify itself. Koller (2008) adds that, from there, the brand is "encoded in various semiotic modes, including language and images, and communicated in discourse" (p. 432). Through the brand audit, Towne Square's branding of itself as both "up-scale" and "easy-going" became an easily identifiable dilemma for the organization to overcome. Here, Towne Square's branding included a mix of various fonts, color schemes, and narratives; beginning with its own issues in brand identity. However, through the connection of floating signification and narrative, I rectified these sign systems to identify the brand as "everyday luxuries," as explained in myth below.

Articulation and myth

In *Mythologies*, Barthes (1957) related nature with myth, conceived as an accepted narration about how the world is. Here, Barthes (1957) treated myth as the result of the juxtaposition of a signifier and signified, or a second-order sign. Myth is therefore the delineation of form and concept, form being the things seen and concept being the ideologies at play. In semiotics, both message and meaning and their connections are explored at length. However, myth expands on these ideas by clarifying and simplifying the ideological meanings at play in a way that can be more easily understood. For

example, the Towne Square's Christmas campaign depicts a gift exchange in front of a

tree adorned in hand-made decorations. Myth understands that audiences then tie the

concepts of family and Christmas to those images through previously held ideologies of

what it means to be gathered around a Christmas tree for gift exchanges among family

members. From here, second-order systems identify family as a new signifier and the

signified is now the bonded togetherness achieved through the family gathering. Thus,

the image now symbolizes togetherness through second-order mythological systems.

Salvador (2011) identifies myth as often being interpreted not as a human creation

but an independently existing entity. Thus, myth is perceived as something natural and

factual rather than what it is—a cultural system (Salvador, 2011). Additionally, the only

way myth works is through narrative because it is based in causality. An example of a

causal, cultural system myth is that "working hard leads to success." Here, the myth

represents a natural order to the world rather than its created value system. The emphasis

is placed on working hard as the precursor to success. Although this is not nearly the case

for most Americans, the myth persists as factual due to its simplification of a complex

ideology.

As suggested by Fisher (1973), myths are the very foundation of culture. They

allow those within the culture to make sense of the world through a shared system of

beliefs and assumptions. These myths can then be utilized by content creators, aligning

myths with narrative and thus the promotional material for event branding. For example,

a prevalent myth in Western culture is that of marriage. Here, the act of proposing with

an engagement ring solidifies a relationship and declares to the world that the couple are

devoted to one another enough to marry and be "together forever." The concepts at play,

engagement ring, relationships, and marriage, can all be attributed to the underlined

ideologies of Americans that a relationship is not solidified or recognized as truly valid

until the couple is married. This myth that marriage is the final "step" in solidifying a

relationship can then be pandered to in branded campaigns. For example, Towne Square

Jewelers' New Year's campaign uses an engagement scene to align the brand as being the

place to go to find the perfect engagement ring. From the scene depicted, audiences view

Towne Square as the jewelry store that values the engagement process as a step to

solidifying the relationship through marriage. Thus, Towne Square Jewelers uses the

myth of marriage to tie its brand to others that share in this belief system.

    With this thesis' application of myth, emphasis is put on its cultural modernity

rather than its roots. An example of this is the Galentine's campaign. A fairly new

holiday, Galentine's Day is an alternative to Valentine's Day and centers around the

celebration of women and their friendships with one another. Fiske (1990) explains in his

analysis of Barthes (1957), "a myth, for Barthes, is a culture's way of thinking about

something, a way of conceptualizing or understanding it." By understanding the

prevalent, current myths of a given culture, event branding specialists can then include

these myths in marketing devices. Therefore, organizations like Towne Square can

capitalize on emerging holiday myths, such as Galentine's Day.

    Furthermore, *Mythologies* (Barthes, 1957) identifies myth as rectifying sign

systems. Through these concepts, Towne Square no longer faces a choice between

formality and friendliness in its brand identity. Instead, I applied the concept of everyday

luxuries. Rather than the confused sign systems Towne Square used, I encouraged the

combination of the two through myth, creating the everyday luxury. Here, the brand

identifies everyday luxuries as a way for audiences to "treat" themselves to a luxury that

they can use, wear, and enjoy throughout their "every day." Thus, the Towne Square

brand can now imply luxury and indulgence while existing within the casual every day.

In addition to myth building on brand, knowledge of prevalent myths also

provides an understanding of the key problems the brand's target audience is facing.

Here, the concept of binary opposites is an element that drives both myth and semiotics to

reveal what needs an audience has. In the case of Towne Square Jewelers, giving and

showing gratitude for others is the solution, the opposite of which is a sense of being

undervalued and unappreciated. According to prevalent myths, the holidays are peak

times in the year in which people anticipate the presentation of these feelings of

appreciation. Capitalizing on this concept, a narrative is created from portraying a

character as feeling unappreciated until presented with Towne Square Jewelers' gifts, as

demonstrated through the narratives created for the holiday campaigns. Here, the

commodity narrative is made possible through identification of important myths to the

organization's target audience.

Myth and narrative

The concept of narrative is as traditional as language itself, and "like language,

narrative is a basic way of making sense of our experience of the real," (Fiske, 1987,

p.128). This means that humans use narrative to create causality and structure to

experiences and events throughout life. For example, the very structure of consequences

is a narrative used to explain why bad things happen when certain decisions have been

made, such as tripping when not tying shoelaces or getting a burn when drinking

something too hot. Fiske (1987) continues his analysis of narrative by noting its two

dimensions through which narrative primarily works as a sense-making mechanism.

These include syntagmatic, the dimension that links events rationally, and paradigmatic,

the dimension that "takes character and settings and makes a non-temporal sense of them

that serves as an additional unifying agency upon the syntagmatic chain of events"

(Fiske, 1987). Essentially, narrative structure demonstrates sense and order, taking on

character and setting into a sequence of events and revealing a deeper meaning. Thus,

narrative combines these dimensions to create a grand signifying pattern. Examples of

signifying pattern can be found in overarching brand narratives where narrative is used as

a strategic statement that can be pulled from to create conversation and community with

an audience (Craig, 2018).

In Barthes' *S/Z* (1970), he identifies the practical application of open and closed

sign systems in the popular literary work of Balzac, *Sarrasine* (1830). Here, Barthes

applies the concept that, although the story ends, the narrative continues in our minds.

Barthes' (1970) foundational work on sign systems demonstrates the concept's influence

on audiences, especially in the application of popular cultural works, which can then be

transferred to application in promotional material. Page (2006) notes that, "we are always

looking at the relationship between things and ourselves, in our physical environment and

in society, and interpreting what we see through the context of cultural and historical

references" (p. 91).

In her analysis, Page (2006) identifies advertising texts as visual expressions of

culture and society, often inviting viewers to "solve" their puzzles. Here, the absence of

overt meaning requires consumers to place their own subjective interpretations on the

visual. On the principle of closure, Allport and Postman (1947) describe "the subject's

urge to make his experiences as complete, coherent and meaningful as possible" (p. 97).

Thus, importance is placed on the scene set up in each visual for a campaign. Without a

clear visual narrative, audiences are led to create their own interpretations, often leading

to misinterpretations of the goals of a campaign.

Additionally, myth relies on narrative to make concepts transferrable. An example

of this can be found in John Lewis' holiday campaign, featuring Elton John. Here, the

chain of high-end department stores evoked a sense of nostalgia through a reverse-

chronological journey of Elton John's performances, ending with the gift of his first

piano (Manifest, 2018). Through correlating success with a Christmas gift and tying that

to nostalgia, this marketing campaign can be referred to as successful in connecting with

its audience through both narrative, making sense of Elton John's journey to success, and

myth, tying together success to the hard work Elton John put in, starting with the gift of

his first piano. In the end, John Lewis is able to successful implement narrative and myth

to connect the connotative feelings of success through the lens of nostalgia in its

campaign, ultimately tying the two together to be transferrable from the story of Elton

John and his first piano to the John Lewis brand.

Elements of Narrative

As examined in John Lewis' campaign and Hallmark television, the concepts of

narrative and myth are heavily applied to televisual content as well as promotional

material. In television, certain structures are put in place to replicate our real world in the

shows we watch, such as the syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions. For the

syntagmatic dimension, involving causality, order, and coherence, build into how a story

is told. The same applies to the paradigmatic dimension, including setting, character, and

mise en scène. Another concept based in this idea of replicating real world elements is a classic realist narrative. Here, a "self-contained, internally consistent world which is real-seeming" is constructed (Fiske, 1987, p. 130). Fiske notes this does not mean it is an objective replication of the world, but rather it appears to be governed by the same rules, conventions, and structure.

Delving deeper into the elements of narrative, conventions are employed to replicate the real world through character, narrative structure, production elements, *mise en scène* and setting. More specifically, genre-focused conventions of holiday narratives are applied to the Towne Square campaigns to more clearly generate identifiable elements as associated with what has come to be expected of the holidays. These holiday conventions include elements such as the setting of a family home and the *mise en scène* of placement in front of a decorated Christmas tree. Additionally, the narrative conventions of Hallmark's holiday films are utilized to better relate to audiences and their expectations of holiday, namely Christmas, celebrations.

An examination of Hallmark Christmas film's use of conventions, such as character, narrative structure, production elements, *mise en scène*, and setting, clearly identifies tropes that are also used in holiday event campaigning through establishing narrative structures. For example, Hallmark films tend to center on independent women with interesting jobs (novelists, chocolatiers) and appealing romantic prospects (princes, firemen), identified as the trope of a woman that appears as if she is uninterested in romance despite secretly hoping someone will rescue her. This trope is also a convention in its implementation of character. This character is used in the Towne Square Christmas section, portrayed through a mother independently decorating on her own. These

characters experience similar feelings of lack of appreciation from those around them

until the appealing romantic interest, or in the case of Towne Square, the father/husband

character, shows appreciation through the gifts from Towne Square.

Furthermore, the concept of character is also imperative in storytelling. Seiter

(1992) discusses the importance of character in narrative structure. Seiter (1992) notes

that television series structure, which is used as the narrative structure basis for this

thesis, often follows a single character or set of characters that the audience can relate to.

This character or group of characters then acts as a symbol for this show. This concept

bleeds into the theory of semiotics because this character is no longer a person, animal, or

thing, but a symbol for what the show aligns itself with, whether morally, socially,

politically, or otherwise. This same idea can permeate through campaigns as well, such as

the characters followed in Towne Square Jeweler's holiday campaigns. Here, the

characters represent different target audiences as they pertain to each individual holiday.

Thus, while audiences identify with these characters as symbols for the brand, they're

also representations of their potential happiness engaging with Towne Square.

Through Hallmark channel's seasonal programming, centered around common,

popular holidays such as Christmas, Valentine's, and New Year's Eve, characters pair up

through the corresponding holidays, i.e. Valentine's parties, fireworks celebrations,

pumpkin patches, harvest festivals, ice-skating rinks, and even Christmas shopping in the

malls. Thus, the convention of setting also plays an important role. Through application

of these settings as demonstrated by Hallmark films, the campaigns for Towne Square

follow characters in similar settings. For example, the Christmas set takes place in a

family home by a fireplace to evoke a sense of togetherness and comfort. Similarly, the

New Year's Eve set takes place at a party while the Galentine's set follows women in their day-to-day lives, celebrating each other in settings like a salon, boutique, and office.

In addition to setting, *mise en scène* is also important. Ferrari (2019) identifies *mise en scène* as "the arrangement of everything as it appears in the framing of a film." Thus, through *mise en scène*, producers thoughtfully arrange objects to reflect the desired narrative. In the case of Towne Square Jewelers' campaigns, first-person perspective was utilized to place audience members in shoes of certain characters. By strategically taking photos from over the shoulders of characters and leaving out faces of other characters, focus is shifted from the characters' identities and onto the staged items and scenery.

For Hallmark, *mise en scène* relies heavily on the tiny details of each setting to make them seem more realistic, such as the mistletoe in an entryway for the main characters to mistakenly stand under. Here, the mistletoe is strategically placed just out of the audience's view until the time is right for the big finale of the kiss. This idea of strategic placement is also applied to the Towne Square Jewelers' Christmas campaign through the use of placing characters in front of a fully decorated Christmas tree to ensure a sense of authenticity, connecting audience expectations of Christmas décor with the *mise en scène* elements of the Christmas campaign.

In *The New Yorker*, Larson (2019) attributes Hallmark's success to the familiarity of the films. This idea of familiarity relates directly to the narrative structure. Larson (2019) continues, "Hallmark screenplays have nine acts, each of which hits specific plot points—a meet-cute in Act I, before the first commercial, an "almost kiss" in Act VII. The shots are lit with a distinctive warmth. Actors recur." Additional conventions include the "ideal" America portrayed in which politics are excluded from the narrative and

townspeople care for one another and run viable small businesses. Bill Abbott, the C.E.O.

of Crown Media, Hallmark's entertainment company, remarked Hallmark as being "your

place to go to get away from politics, to get away from everything in your life that is

problematic and negative, and to feel like there are people out there who are good human

beings that could make you feel happy to be part of the human race" (Larson, 2019, para.

5). Larson (2019) adds, "Hallmark had discovered that it had everything it needed—

positivity, reassurance, sentimentality, and cozy salesmanship" (para. 18). To implement

these similar narrative structure conventions, the holiday campaign excludes political

statements and uses the familiarity of local spots, easily identifiable to local audiences.

For example, the Galentine's set features a local boutique, aligning with Hallmark's idea

of flourishing small-town businesses and cozy salesmanship.

Additional conventions found in Hallmark Channel television and films lie in the

brand's ability to maintain a delicate balance between realism and something more

idealized. Larson (2019) identifies a paradox of the channel, "the artificiality of its

content, which offers predictable pleasures—the 'almost kiss,' interrupted by a ringing

phone or a bleating goat; the ubiquitous baking contests—is often delivered alongside

surprisingly realistic performances" (para. 27). Hallmark plot conventions focus on, what

Larson (2019) identifies as, "a voyage of self-discovery" as opposed to modern rom-

coms' use of arch concepts, high jinks, or panic about being single. Similar conventions

are easily applicable to branding holidays through commodity narrative and the concept

of a promised transformation. For example, each set of the Towne Square Jeweler's

holiday campaign follows characters through their transformations from feeling

unappreciated to feeling appreciated upon receiving their gifts from Towne Square.

Part IV: Production Insights

In the treatment section, I will break down the process used to generate each campaign. The process focuses on how the concepts of perspective and narrative evolved and strengthened through the progress of each campaign. The following section on general application examines the structure of other promotional campaigns and televisual content replicated through these campaigns. Next, I divide each campaign by holiday. From here, I dissect each campaign into elements of narrative structure, character, *mise en scène*, and production elements. For narrative structure, I explain how each narrative lends itself to the overall goals of the individual campaign. In discussing character, I reflect on how each character relates to the target audience. The *mise en scène* elements include everything that compiles the visual of a scene. Through outlining the *mise en scène*, I explain the purpose for certain elements and their existence within each scene to attribute to overall "real-ness," as outlined by Barthes (1957). Finally, each campaign section ends with the discussion of production elements. Here, I elaborate on how myth and semiotics shaped the implementation of production choices for each campaign.

The Process

In the beginning, I set out to create a Christmas campaign for Towne Square Jewelers. In our initial meetings, I worked with Molly and Elena (personal communication, August 22, 2019), identifying a sales event held prior to Christmas as a primary event to promote. However, through miscommunication or misunderstanding, the sales event concept fell through and I transitioned to promote Christmas itself as the event. With this idea in mind, the lead up to Christmas would be heavily promoted.

Although the event concept changed, I still chose a cross-platform campaign, including video, images, social media content, and images for the Towne Square billboards.

Initially, I set out to reference Towne Square Jewelers as being the "heart" of Charleston within the heart of Charleston. Through this, I initiated a campaign to take pictures of a model posing in various places around the Charleston area. Here, the overall concept involved Towne Square being the perfect place to buy a gift for all types of people. Thus, I organized several days of production with Towne Square, using co-owner Elena to model the jewelry and gifts the organization sells. In my transition to adjust to Christmas, I underestimated all of the moving pieces in this cross-platform campaign, as explained below.

On November 25, 2019, Elena and I set out to four different locations—Old Main, Charleston Lake, Bob's Bookstore, and Hager Tree Farm. After researching popular local brands and notable "Charleston" settings, I found these locations with positive brand capital to attach to the Towne Square brand. I chose each spot for its recognizability among local residents of Charleston. Here, Old Main would represent the scholar, Charleston Lake would represent the adventurer, Bob's Bookstore would represent the bookworm, and Hager Tree Farm would represent the decorator looking for the perfect Christmas tree. Additionally, by using these locations for backgrounds, the brand capital attached to each of these locations would be transferable to Towne Square. Through these locations and character types adorned in jewelry and holding gifts from Towne Square, the campaign would demonstrate Towne Square to be the perfect gift store for any and all people. The images would tell the story of after the reception of each gift from Towne Square and how each character type would use them in their lives as the bookworm,

adventurer, scholar, decorator, etc. Reference Appendix A, Tables A1 and A2 for the full

production schedule and Figures A1 through A16 for the initial campaign content.

However, after editing and review, I noted the content demonstrated a lack of

vision. In the cross-platform campaign, several moving parts led to a confused narrative.

Although I implemented the "heart of Charleston" concept, the character and narrative

structure were lacking. The campaign I had created lacked originality and the integration

of semiotics and myth. I quickly realized I had underestimated the production process and

learned accordingly. Though I underestimated the process, I learned from this mistake

and set out on a three-month campaign to allow for growth. Therefore, I made an

important decision, shifting the focus of this thesis to revolve around the holidays of

Christmas, New Year's, and, at first, Valentine's Day as events. By breaking the

campaign up over the course of three holidays, or events, I would allow myself time to

fully generate a nuanced approach to narrative and articulation, or the attachment of a

sign to another sign system, as they apply to event promotion. Inspirational pieces used as

reference for the decisions on perspective, narrative structure, and production style are

explained in detail below.

The idea of implementing a first-person narrative came to me after observing ads

from organizations like Google, Apple, and GoPro (Right Left Agency, 2018). Here, the

camera is placed in a first-person perspective, immersing the audience in the experience

of the characters. For example, GoPro (2011) advertises its devices through immersive

footage from the perspective of someone wearing a GoPro, a portable, wireless camera.

In their television ad, "Human Flight" (2011), the organization uses footage from one of

their HD GoPro cameras to film a group of skydivers. The concept presented is that, through GoPro, people can live and record these exciting experiences.

Through research from Right Left Agency (2018) and their partnership with USC Master of Science student, the first-person perspective is found to increase engagement among audiences. This study (2018), created Facebook advertisements using a fictional brand called "Savi Bar," an organic protein bar company. Here, the ads used identical content, only differing in the point of view (first-person vs. third-person) of the product photo. Findings demonstrated that the first-person point of view advertisement outperformed the third-person point of view advertisement in all variables measured, except for the immediate conversion rate (Right Left Agency, 2018). "Specifically, the first-person POV ad gained 9% higher clicks (185 vs. 170), and 43% higher total engagement (n=32 vs. n=14) compared to third-person" (Right Left Agency, 2018). Additionally, due to the higher engagement on the first-person perspective advertisement, Facebook's algorithm decreased the cost-per-click by day three of the campaign (Right Left Agency, 2018). With these statistics in mind, I decided to implement first-person perspective shots for my own campaign to replicate the success demonstrated through the Right Left Agency's study (2018).

However, application of the first-person perspective proved trickier than originally thought. The evidence of this fact can be found in the progress of my campaign sets from Christmas through Galentine's. In the initial campaign, implementing the "heart of Charleston" concept, I was hesitant to model Elena at all. As I moved to the three-month holiday campaigns and shifting to perspective images, I quickly realized there is a stark difference in how the director should model actors. For example, I needed to place

the actors' arm and elbow at an awkward angle, almost in line with their head, to ensure

the jewelry and gifts are as large in the frame as the actor (see Figure B1 and B2). Visual

composition grew in nuance as the campaigns continued. I became encouraged by my

experience, leading to a more comfortable approach to modeling actors. While in person

the models are positioned unnaturally, sometimes with their hands by their ears, the

images that resulted showed a more natural position through using the perspective angles

(see comparison in Figure B1 and Figure C10). Most images include a shoulder, side of

the head, and/or hand to demonstrate that the audience is physically seeing from the

perspective of one of the actors. Parts of the actor are included to demonstrate which

actor's perspective the audience is catching. Additionally, a problem I ran into involved

my height. Being five feet tall, I had most actors kneeling or squatting to capture the

image I needed. Therefore, most images are close-ups or show down to an actor's waist.

As I explored each holiday, I progressed in both production and editing. I began

with Christmas, following the narrative structure outlined by Hallmark (Larson, 2019)

and Fiske (1987), discussed in detail below. Production schedule and images for this

section can be found in Appendix B—Table B1 and Figures B1 through B12. The

production and editing for this section felt a bit rushed and utilized actors, scenes, and

products that I had readily available. These issues led to an overhaul in production

schedule and the inclusion of a wider range of actors. Additionally, after review of this

set, I implemented some changes in the following New Year's campaign, adding nuance

to the edits and overall narrative structure. Production schedule and content for this

section can be found in Appendix C—Table C1 and Figures C1 through C11.

Additionally, the narrative stills are included in a video, provided through access to the

Youtube link. Figures C1 through C11 include sample social media posts,

advertisements, and posters. Stills following the narrative structure were delivered to

Towne Square and are included in the video; however, they are not included in Appendix

C to avoid redundancy and reduce length. Similarly, Appendix D does not include stills

from the narrative, but I provided a link to access the stills in video format. With the final

set, I decided to promote Galentine's Day rather than Valentine's. Since Towne Square

already has success with Valentine's jewelry sales (E. Davis, personal communication,

January 19, 2020), I chose a more unique holiday that is on the rise in popularity since its

inception on *Parks and Recreation* (2009-2015). Since Galentine's is about women

celebrating women, I felt it the perfect event for advertising Towne Square's various gifts

outside of jewelry. In this final set, I achieved a more nuanced approach to the editing,

narrative structures, and production elements, as evident through the images in the video

as well as Appendix D, which includes the production schedule in Table D1 and content

in Figures D1 through D. Additionally, while this thesis focuses on narrative, at the

request of Towne Square, I included still images of products in each campaign as well.

　　　While this campaign heavily relies on media production and editing software

knowledge, a few acknowledgements should be made. My degree is in public relations,

and as part of this, I am required to have a vast knowledge of ways in which to reach and

communicate with the public. I also want to focus my career in event promotion. With

that in mind, I wanted to combine public outreach with event planning in a unique way,

through nuanced media narratives. A primary audience for this content can be found on

social media, another primary platform for public relations practitioners to fully

comprehend and expertly navigate (USC Center for Public Relations, 2019). Through this

idea that public relations practitioners must be well-versed in creative content (USC

Center for Public Relations, 2019), I set out to create media content with a well-structure

narrative to promote holidays as events. However, it is important to note that I do not

have a photography background. I used the skills I do have and my knowledge in Adobe

software to initiate this campaign and my growth through these applications is evident

throughout each campaign, specifically noting production elements and editing. For

example, the lighting and saturation of images became more clearly identifiable. I moved

from hesitant saturation and relying on the camera to adjust the lighting to acquiring a

special lighting unit and editing to include more depth in the coloration of images.

Although I do not have a background in photography, I created this campaign as a public

relations practitioner reaching audiences through creative content.

General Application

     For these holiday campaigns, I implemented narrative structure related to

television, as outlined by Fiske (1987). As explained previously, narrative demonstrates

sense and order, taking on character and setting into a sequence of events to reveal a

deeper meaning (Fiske, 1987). This same sentiment is echoed through the content created

for Towne Square Jewelers. Additionally, television structure follows a single character

or set of characters that the audience can relate to, as explained by Seiter (1992).

Similarly, the content for Towne Square follows various characters as they engage with

Towne Square gifts, demonstrating their lives before, during, and after the commodity.

     Televisual narrative structures, such as the aforementioned "Acts" of Hallmark

films were also implemented in these campaigns. Here, scenes are divided into important

sections of the narrative. These sections include scenarios like "a meet-cute in Act I,

before the first commercial, an 'almost kiss' in Act VII," (Larson, 2019). Concepts like

these, divided into acts, were replicated through later Christmas content. I replicated this

sequence through a "this, but then, which led to" storyline. The audience is presented

with the problem in Act I, the introduction of the solution in Act II, and the resolution

and display of fulfillment in Act III. For example, the Christmas campaign represented a

mother decorating alone and feeling unappreciated (this), until her husband and daughter

join her to demonstrate their appreciation through gifts from Towne Square (but then).

Finally, the audience observes the fulfillment achieved through these gifts and the

connection now established from the display of togetherness (which led to).

Not only did these campaigns replicate the successful narrative styles of

Hallmark, but they also included concepts from other promotional ad campaigns. Here, I

followed the successful styling of John Lewis (Manifest, 2018), Freshers Festival

(Eventbrite, 2018), and Bosscat Productions (Eventbrite, 2018). Although these

campaigns used different channels, I followed their direction in narrative and placing the

audience in the shoes of the characters presented. Thus, the idea of the perspective angle

for the overall campaign's visual style emerged. Here, the camera angle is positioned to

be in the perspective of other characters within the scene, viewing the action over the

shoulder of these characters. This perspective form of visual style immerses the audience

in the action and places them in the shoes of various characters involved in each scene

(Right Left Agency, 2018). Therefore, the perspective style implies interactivity and the

ability to exist within the world created through Towne Square and its possibilities.

In continuing with the concept of narrative, the goal of each campaign was to

narrativize each individual holiday. The idea of narrativizing holidays means that

character, setting, *mise en scène*, and production elements were all employed in creating a clearly structured story for audiences to follow along. Women are used as the focal point of these scenarios for their overwhelming interaction with Towne Square Jewelers as a primary audience (reference Appendix E). Overall, the narrative used in every holiday campaign involves a character feeling unappreciated until presented with a gift from Towne Square Jewelers, thus resolving their feelings and providing them with a sense of fulfillment and validation. Additionally, I applied the concepts of semiotics and myth through creating and employing the floating signification of relationship and the myths that tie those relationships together. Throughout these campaigns, the floating signification of relationships is used to tie Towne Square Jewelers brand identity with that of a gift store that can provide audiences for a gift to strengthen your relationship with others, not matter the type of relationship. Examples of this concept are explained in the following sections, divided by holiday campaign.

In broad strokes, these campaigns follow the "this, but then, which led to" narrative structure. For Christmas, the audience is presented with a mother decorating her home alone from the perspective of the mother. She is feeling unappreciated until her husband and daughter present her with gifts from Towne Square Jewelers, leading to a sense of fulfillment and feeling appreciated. Similarly, this structure is replicated through the New Year's campaign. Here, the audience is seeing from the perspective of a young woman preparing for a celebration, again, feeling lonely and unappreciated despite the festivities ahead. However, her boyfriend enters frame and presents her with a ring from Towne Square Jewelers, thus fulfilling her and granting her feelings of being appreciated and loved. Additionally, this narrative includes the perspective angles from friends and

the now fiancé as they gather to show appreciation for each other through the gifts they

give and receive. Finally, the Galentine's set follows various female friends as they enjoy

the Towne Square gifts they have received from one another. This set explores the "after"

of an event by demonstrating the women enjoying their gifts in their everyday lives with

one another. Therefore, each narrative becomes more nuanced as the campaign

progresses, each demonstrating a different aspect of the holiday as an event. The details

of narrative, character, *mise en scène*, and production elements are outlined below.

Christmas

Narrative Structure

For the Towne Square Jewelers' Christmas campaign, the narrative structure

follows a mother as she prepares the home for the holidays. She is alone as she carefully

decorates and places each stocking on the mantle and ornament on the tree (see Figures

B1 and B2). By only having one character in the scene, decorating alone, the audience

can sense her loneliness and the feeling of being unappreciated. Building on that idea of

loneliness, there are also several stockings hung on the mantle, hinting that there are

several members of the family, but the mother character is still decorating alone.

While she is decorating, her husband suddenly enters frame to present to her a

necklace (see Figure B3) to match her Pandora ring that is featured in previous images.

From here, the daughter character emerges to present her mother with other Pandora

bracelets and gifts (see Figures B4 and B5). The following frames demonstrate the

exchange of gifts in front of the Christmas tree. Elements of character, *mise en scène*, and

production used to encourage authenticity of this exchange will be explored at length

below.

Now with a sense of validation, gratitude, and appreciation, the mother then presents the daughter with gifts as well (see Figures B6 through B8). Thus, the commodity narrative is complete with everyone in the scene feeling validated and appreciated through giving and receiving Towne Square Jeweler gifts. By providing the audience with a narrative demonstrating the transformation Towne Square can provide through Christmas gifts, the audience then understands Towne Square to be the ideal place to shop, ensuring they experience this same transformation.

Character

The characters presented in this scene are a mother, father, and daughter. Myth is drawn on to imply the woman is married through the ring on her ring finger (see Figures B1 and B2). Additionally, as explained in narrative, the mantle is decorated with several stockings. These elements are used to demonstrate to the audience that the woman does have a husband and family to help but no one is around in the beginning.

Although some brands, such as Target and Wal-Mart use families in matching Christmas pajamas in magazines, the feeling generated is less than authentic. With this in mind, I emulated the films of *Elf* (2003) *Home Alone* (1990), and *Christmas Vacation* (1989) where families are dressed casually at home, often in mismatching outfits, creating authenticity in the characters and their relationship with one another. Each is dressed casually, in flannels and sweaters, to demonstrate a laid-back Christmas atmosphere that is often present in family interactions at home. When interacting with family, especially those close in relation like mother, father, and daughter, less emphasis is placed on appearance and more on the activities they do together.

Furthermore, myth is also drawn on in the use of the mother character to perform the decorating tasks. In Western culture, mothers are often seen as keepers of the household, performing decorative and cleaning duties. Therefore, the commodity narrative presented impacts audiences in a more authentic light for its practical replication of family dynamics.

Mise en scène

As the narrative progresses through each shot, elements of *mise en scène* can be seen to be carefully curated in creating authenticity for audiences. For this set, emphasis is placed on the small, intimate setting in front of the fireplace and Christmas tree. Here, articulation is used to associate the fully decorated mantle and tree with Christmas (see Figures B1 and B2). Through myth and semiotic theory application, audiences identify that the red and green colors of decorations and the evergreen tree directly connote Christmas. An additional level of perceived authenticity is created through the use of homemade ornaments. In families with children, such as the family in this scene, children often make ornaments at school. Parents will then decorate their Christmas trees with these hand-made creations. The use of these hand-made ornaments represents a feeling of nostalgia for the audience as well as evokes a sense of perceived authenticity in replicating their own mythic traditions through Christmas.

Additionally, Figures B4 through B8 are angled to include more *mise en scène* elements. The scene is expanded to include the tree and more of the characters in the scene. For example, Figures B5 and B6 show more of the tree to include its lights and ornaments, the red Christmas rug used to hide the tree stand, the gift bag the gifts are being pulled from, and even the soft, carpeted floor to demonstrate that the characters are

physically gathered together in a practical exchange of gifts close to where they are kept—under the tree.

Production Elements

The production elements of each holiday campaign follows the aforementioned perspective angle. For the Christmas set, the perspective comes from the mother and daughter. Myth is drawn on here to include the mother and daughter as most likely to enjoy receiving the jewelry used for the scene, with the understanding that women are the prime audience of Towne Square Jewelers. The lighting used for this set has a yellow hue to promote warmth, familiarity, and comfort (see Figures B1 through B8). In Figure B3, the audience observes the intimacy of darker lighting surrounding the husband and wife characters as he gives her the necklace by the tree. The only light visible in this image comes from the tree or highlights the jewelry box and necklace being presented. Figures B4 through B8 are angled for audiences to note a bit more about the background. Here, more *mise en scène* elements become visible and the room is a bit lighter. These images also have heavy emphasis on the yellow lighting mentioned earlier.

Additional shots of jewelry are used for promotional materials, lit in a more neutral hue with a slight blue tint (see Figures B9 through B13). These colors highlight the sparkle and shine of the jewelry and connect with the purple used in brand advertising. Here, myth is used to connote Christmas in the product shots through use of Christmas wrapping paper with snowflakes to tie in with winter as well as the decorative bows that are traditionally used for Christmas gifts. Therefore, the concepts of myth and floating signification are heavily used to tie the images together into a clear commodity narrative for Christmas.

As mentioned in previous sections, directing models did not come easily. I began with directing models to hold their hands out while having their elbows at 90-degree angles toward their waist to produce the perspective angle while keeping the jewelry or object in frame (see Figure B1). Though the modeling was on the same track with perspective angles, it didn't fully capture the object as closely as I desired. Therefore, I took notes from the way I directed models in this set to implement better direction and visual composition for the next set.

New Year's Eve

Narrative Structure

The narrative of the New Year's Eve campaign follows a young woman as she works hard to prepare for a New Year's Eve party. Similar to the Christmas campaign, the woman is preparing for the event alone. Here, we see the main character preparing food in the first few images, slicing bread and arranging desserts (reference video). Emphasis is placed on her left hand to demonstrate she does not have a ring. Again, the narrative follows a woman as she prepares for others to celebrate with; however, the fact that she is alone demonstrates a feeling of loneliness and being unappreciated by those around her (reference video for still images).

As she prepares the gift area, a man enters the frame and presents a ring box followed by the image of him presenting her with an engagement ring. The next images show the ring being placed on her hand, the sign of a successful proposal (reference video for still images). Following frames include the woman wearing the ring with close-ups of the ring that are also used for promotional ads (see Figures C4 and C10). From there, the narrative demonstrates the main character is full of joy and appreciation in such a way

that she feels compelled to then share her gifts with others, as shown through the preceding images.

We then see the main character present her now fiancé with a personalized gift set, including a flask, mixer, and shot glasses (reference Figures C9 and C10). From here, the narrative follows the woman as she gives a gift of earrings to her friend (reference video). The following images show the fiancé character present his friend with the gift of a whiskey glass with a convenient holder for a cigar. The narrative continues with the celebration as the group enjoys each other and the gifts (reference video).

The now fulfilled central female character celebrates with her friends and fiancé, cheering to the new year and their friendships (reference Figures C7, C8, and C11). Each character is then seen enjoying their new gifts throughout the celebration. The main idea presented through this commodity narrative is a flow of appreciation spiraling from one act of gift giving. Floating signification is also clearly applied through the attachment of relationship emphasized throughout the narrative. The floating signification of relationships presented emphasize romance and friendship. Romance is demonstrated through the proposal while friendship is shown through the other gift exchanges.

Character

The main character presented, as is in all three campaigns I created, is a young woman. Other characters included are the fiancé and two friends. The characters here symbolize youth by strategically using actors in their 20's. The characters are also enjoying drinks and food with one another, identifying to the audience that this group of friends is having a lively party to celebrate the new year.

Myth is drawn on to identify alcohol with a party scene, relating the alcohol to the thrills and fun of parties often associated with youth. In their qualitative study on alcohol in advertisements, Gunter et al. (2008) identified alcohol advertisements to focus on "images of adults having a good time when drinking and the association of alcohol with attractive people and situations to which young people might aspire" (p. 22). Additionally, the study (2008) found that these ads include a "narrative set in familiar environments that might resonate in terms of their relevance to young people" (p. 22). Furthermore, the study (Gunter et al., 2008) observed positive reactions from audiences to these promotional tactics. Therefore, alcohol was utilized to associate the characters with being young and attractive in a familiar scene of a party where they are enjoying themselves.

The audience is then able to clarify this particular party is slightly more formal due to the clothing worn by each character. For example, the main female character is wearing a nice dress rather than pajamas like in the Christmas scene. Since myth and tradition demonstrate New Year's parties to include more formal attire, the party scene then becomes more relatable and authentic.

Mise en scène

Several *mise en scène* elements are employed in this set to demonstrate the various relationships at play. To emphasize romance, the couple are placed close together with the intimate setting of a fireplace in frame. The men that are sharing a drink are placed near a pool table. The use of the pool table symbolizes games that are often played when drinking and celebrating with friends. The proximity of the actors also demonstrates the friendships' intimacy. The audience can identify the friends are close

due to their proximity with one another in frame. In addition to relationships being

highlighted, youth was also strategically emphasized through slight PhotoShop airbrush

techniques to add a slight glow to the characters' complexions. The concept of a party is

also demonstrated through alcohol-related gifts. The idea that the party is more formal is

effectively implied through wardrobe as well as the fancier earrings and engagement ring.

Additionally, *mise en scène* elements are followed to replicate the grand party in

The Great Gatsby (2013). Since this film takes place in the 1920's and this year's New

Year's Eve celebrated our entrance into the 2020's, *The Great Gatsby* (2013) was used as

inspiration. Here, the decadence attributed to this film's party scenes emphasizes gold,

glitter, alcohol, and up-scale attire. This decadence was replicated in this set through

attire, expensive alcohol, glassware, emphasis on darker hues on the editing side and for

the photo backgrounds, and even the type of jewelry and gifts that were given.

Everything reflects this idea of celebrating each other through indulgence in luxury.

Production Elements

Throughout this set, I followed a more strategic production schedule, as outlined

in Table C1. I used the last set, Christmas, to inform my decisions for the following sets.

For example, I learned to organize my actors better and outline their character through

more comprehensive explanations. This provided the actors with a clearer grasp on how

to perform the actions in each scene. Additionally, I felt more confident giving orders to

the actors. I was able to pose them in each frame, although sometimes awkwardly, to best

display the gifts and jewelry to audiences.

As these sets progressed, I became increasingly aware of my own authority in

directing. Although I was timid in the beginning, I focused on being an authoritative,

knowledgeable presence on set and channeling that into establishing better rapport with

my models. I made sure the models were comfortable, but also aware of the type of visual

composition I was looking to display. As noted in Figure C10, the models appear in

frame, but the central focus is placed on the gifts and jewelry. Though this may seem

more natural than the Christmas set, I had actually placed my models in more awkward

positions in closer proximity with one another and hands in line with their heads. While

anyone on set would see awkwardly close actors holding jewelry almost behind their

ears, the camera captured perfect depth while maintaining the jewelry as the most

important object in the scene.

Edits for the New Year's set include the use of yellow hues to add a warmth to the

images. Pinks were also included in the skin tones to ensure a youthful look. Some

promotional materials included backgrounds with a darker red tint (reference Figure

C10). The red color, using the concepts of semiotics theory and myth, symbolizes

romance and intimacy, and is used to match the wood engagement ring box included in

the image. Other edits for social media included darker purples to match the Towne

Square brand color scheme, as well as golds, silvers, and charcoal to promote a more

upscale, formal atmosphere within the party scene (see Figures C2 through C11).

Galentine's

Narrative Structure

For this set, I decided to employ a rising trend in holidays, Galentine's Day.

Created by *Parks and Recreation* (2009-2015), Galentine's Day focuses on women

celebrating women. To counter the emphasis on romance, show protagonist creates a day

for women to celebrate the friendships they have with other women. Some brands, such

as the clothing brands of ModCloth and UOI, have implemented a focus on Galentine's during February, pandering to their all-female target audience. However, the Galentine's holiday is still not heavily marketed. Thus, an opportunity is created for Towne Square to capitalize on this holiday, encouraging their targeted audience to turn to them as more than just a brand for couples, but also a brand for gifts for all types of relationships.

From here, the commodity narrative is created to follow a group of friends as they exchange gifts to demonstrate their appreciation for each woman and type of female companionship in their lives (see video for reference). Not only is appreciation shown through this exchange, but the emphasis is placed on the women enjoying these gifts in their everyday lives, interacting with one another. Specific narrative arcs follow: a woman presenting her busy coworker with gifts she can wear or use in the office; two women sneaking their Corkcicle wine mugs into the movie theater; two women on a walk with a dog by the Charleston lake when one gets her hands dirty and uses the others' ring cleaner to clean her engagement ring; a woman out getting her nails done when she presents her nail technician with a matching friendship bracelet; a hairdresser presented with a fun pen to use with client sales; and even two women exchanging matching necklaces, then finding outfits at a local boutique that best show off the necklaces. All narratives employed demonstrate the various types of relationships women have with one another and how they can validate those friendships through gifts from Towne Square Jewelers.

Narratives are also used for the posters created in Figures D1 through D5. For example, in Figure D1, images demonstrate friends that enjoy shopping together. The narrative through the four images shown depict two friends wearing matching Freida

Rothman necklaces from Towne Square Jewelers as they shop at Trueblood Collective to find outfits that show off these necklaces. Therefore, this narrative takes place after the gifts have already been given. Additionally, Figure D4 shows "adventurer" friends as they embark on a trip to Charleston Lake. Here, one friend gets her hands messy while playing with her dog. Luckily, the other friend has a "bling brush" from Towne Square that allows her to clean jewelry on-the-go. Here, Figure D4 also demonstrates the after-event effects of having gifts from Towne Square.

Character

The characters used for this set are all young women in their 20's. Again, this symbolizes youth to the audience through using younger actors. Towne Square Jewelers' audience can then place themselves in the shoes of these characters, either directly relating to the age, or through nostalgia for their own youth and wanting to reconnect to those same feelings associated with their youth. For example, if a woman in her late 50's sees this set, although she cannot directly relate to the woman's age, she can associate the youth of the character with her own friendships that she has carried with her from youth. She will then see Towne Square as a way to appreciate the friendship she is reminded of through the depiction represented in this set.

In addition to youth, various types of women and their relationships with one another are also emphasized. Some friendship dynamics used are walking or workout buddies (see Figure D4), coworkers (see Figure D2), avid movie-goers (see video), "friends in wine" (see video), and even the bonds formed through the relationships with hairdressers and nail technicians (see Figure D3) are all represented. The emphasis is

placed on the variety of friendships women have and their need to demonstrate

appreciation for each woman in their lives.

Mise en scène

To encourage perceived authenticity, special attention was paid to the *mise en scène* elements as they related to each scene. For example, the "adventurer" friends are wearing athletic wear and walking a dog. These practically apply to women that identify as adventurous, wearing more athletic clothing and tennis shoes, walking their dogs outside to stay active. Additionally, images that represent the relationship between those that work together are taken in an actual office. Here, the audience recognizes the binders, pens and papers, and swivel chair as recognizably office related. Furthermore, the characters in this scene are dressed in more formal attire to connote a business atmosphere. In the nail technician and hair stylist images, both locations include a salon. The images from the nail technician show a woman getting her nails done under a "nail light." Here, the technician is filing her clients' nails, something typical of a manicure. By observing actual actions that these types of women perform in their profession and everyday lives, the level of perceived authenticity, or "real-ness," increases, allowing for a greater connection to be made to audience members.

With the emphasis of this set placed on various types of friendships among women, multiple locations were employed to represent where these relationships take place. Some locations include a local salon, Charleston Lake, an office, the local movie theater, and a local boutique (see Table D1). Here, the emphasis is also placed on recognizable locations within Charleston. Located in Charleston, it is important that

audiences recognize Towne Square as heavily associated with the area they exist within. Therefore, the settings used are all recognizably local to Charleston.

Although I was no longer following the "heart of Charleston" campaign, I still wanted to incorporate some of the elements of the campaign into this set. Here, the use of recognizable locations, audiences will then associate the Towne Square brand as supporting local and more down-to-earth than other more formal boutiques like Kay Jewelers or Helzberg Diamonds. Implying this more perceivably authentic, relatable image allows audiences to then recognize the Towne Square brand as a place they can shop for various need rather than solely, as it is viewed now, a place for high-end jewelry. Additionally, associating the brand with other local businesses, like the boutique and salon, demonstrates unity and positive brand relationships.

Production Elements

Through this set, it is evident that I became more comfortable with my own directing. I handled models more confidently and placed them in various positions to achieve the visual composition desired for each shot. Evidenced in Figures D1 through D5, I focused more on depth of vision to demonstrate action in each shot. I also employed more props while still modeling each actor to draw the audience's attention to the Towne Square Jewelry and gifts.

As explained previously, I wanted to use this set to include various other businesses and locations within Charleston, attaching their brand capital with Towne Square's. To successfully use these locations, I had to adjust style and lighting accordingly. For example, Trueblood Collective has several windows that allow for natural lighting but become difficult to capture images with the glare of windows in the

background. Therefore, I relied on the clothing racks to block the glare. I even utilized

the mirror for some pictures. Still, the natural lighting was slightly darker, so I relied on

editing to lighten the images and increase overall image saturation.

Additionally, several phrases were employed in the production of the social media

graphics (see Figures D1 through D4). These include confidants, gal pals, adventurers,

and sisterfriends. Not only are these terms used in cards that Towne Square sells, but they

identify some of the many types of friendships women have with one another. The

inclusion of these phrases in the promotional material is strategic in allowing audiences

to identify Towne Square gifts as the only gifts that accurately represent these types of

relationships, whether through these cards or the personalized Corkcicle and jewelry.

For the production elements of this set, I kept in line with the Valentine's color

scheme of pinks and purples; however, I used pastel tints to each color, making them

softer and less romantic. Therefore, myth and floating signification were also used to

attach meaning to the colors used for this campaign. Since pinks, purples, and reds are

often associated with Valentine's, I still stayed within those same colors. However, as

identified through myth (Barthes, 1957), red is often deemed more romantic and is

directly associated with couples. So, for this set, that specific color was not included.

Additionally, purple is already the primary color for marketing Towne Square Jewelers,

so this color was heavily used in various tones and shades (see Figures D1 through D5).

Part V: Warrant

Scholars like Kent (2015) associate events as being one-shot campaigns that end when the event ends. However, this thesis aims to serialize events, generating concepts to last beyond the event itself. Through the application of floating signification and narrative, or myth, in serializing events, the event becomes more than just a standalone celebration—it now becomes evergreen content that connects directly to the brand and carries the concepts established from the event promotion through the brand long after the event has passed. Through floating signification and myth, the positive connotations associated with the event can now attach to the brand and exist long after the event has passed.

Additionally, the content becomes evergreen through its attachment with myth because myth itself is enduring. The evergreen content of serialized events is produced by using the same structure or story but switching the paradigmatic elements and establishing new signifiers. Evergreen content is best emulated through Hallmark films and their use of maintaining a repetitive story structure through "Acts" (Larson, 2019) while establishing new characters, setting, and various other paradigmatic elements. Therefore, as demonstrated through Hallmark (Larson, 2019) and this thesis, the same story structures can be applied to any holiday or event. In this case of this thesis, the idea presented is that of someone feeling unappreciated but knowing their good deeds will come back to them. Thus, the commodity narrative, introducing Towne Square Jewelers as the solution can be employed for any organization to result in their brand as the solution instead. The same structure is maintained, serializing the event or holiday, while only the paradigmatic elements change. The message is also evergreen in its ability to

continue every year for that same event or holiday, or even in following a titular character in between holidays or events.

While scholars are aware of communication theory and how they can be practically applied, public relations practitioners in organizations often avoid the complexities of theory. This thesis embodies the trend of two perceivably unrelated things in organizations—theory and application—and puts the two in conversation with one another. Often, organizations are aware of practices in event promotion while scholars are aware of theories and how they explain phenomenon. However, this thesis aims to connect the two, noting that, while theory and application may appear to be opposed, the two actually enrich one another. Theorists like Fiske (1987, 1990), Barthes (1957, 1970, 1978), and Seiter (1992) discuss the importance of floating signification through semiotics theory as well as narrative and myth. By then applying these concepts of floating signification and narrative, or myth, the event becomes serialized and the content evergreen.

According to scholars like Kent (2015) and Heath (1992, 2000, 2006), storytelling, or narrative, is considered a staple of public relations. As Heath (2000) argued, "Society has a narrative past that gives a sense of what is good about society and what needs change. Public relations adds values to the narrative of society as it carves out meaning and encourages others to adopt that meaning" (p. 85). From these ideas, it can be understood that public relations is key to the reciprocity of organizations creating meaning within the overall grand narratives in society at the same time that these organizations are understanding and adopting the grand narratives already at play. This thesis delves into the importance of commodity narrative-driven event branding and why

this concept can improve the overall success of a brand and its understanding of the role it plays in these societally influenced and organizationally influenced grand narratives.

Although Kent (2015) disapproves of "quick and easy" guides for something as complex as storytelling, there are still certain aspects of narrative structure that can be easily replicated for event branding, such as floating signification and myth. Through floating signification and myth, brands can create clear expectations of events for audiences and tie the positive associations of the event with the brand itself. For example, as used in the Christmas set, I employed the mythic associations of goodwill and uniting families at Christmas to tie into the commodity narrative of giving Towne Square Jewelers' gifts. Here, the characters feel a sense of appreciation through giving and receiving Christmas gifts from Towne Square. This floating signification of goodwill, established through application of semiotics theory, is then tied to the Towne Square brand itself.

Furthermore, even public relations professionals realize that "telling a compelling story involves creating convincing characters, utilizing enticing and enthralling plotlines, and understanding one's audience," (Kent, 2015, p. 484). Additionally, Kent (2015) notes that by including a recognizable story structure of beginning, middle, and end, audience will have a story that resonates with them. These concepts, identified as syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions combine to create a narrative, which can then be easily employed in creating promotional material for branded events.

Additionally, brands need promotional material that is not sale contingent. To effectively reach audiences, organizations must relate to them through these narratives and connections with myth and floating signification. The stories told should invite

audiences on a journey, providing a look at the before, during, and after commodity experiences. Therefore, narratives like those created for Galentine's and New Year's Eve, demonstrating Towne Square Jewelers gifts being actively used and worn are important to the overall understanding audiences have of the brand.

From here, the content must also be evergreen. This means that the content should not be created solely for a single sale event, never to be used again. Instead, the same concepts, such as the floating signification of relationship used in all three holiday campaigns should be utilized. Another example of an evergreen aspect is the use of perspective angles. Here, audiences place themselves in the shoes of various characters interacting within the scene. Although the specifics of the sale or event will change, there should still be key themes that tie into the brand identity and promotional content.

As public relations professionals, we are constantly looking for easily accessible ways to brand organizations and events in a timely manner. Because events are often short-lived or temporary, it is necessary to quickly identify a way to brand the event in a way that exists long after the event has passed. Therefore, serializing events and drawing on the same structure while switching out paradigmatic elements saves time while allowing for repeated association of brand with floating signifiers. For example, just because an organization has a Christmas sale event does not mean an audience will identify this organization as a place they should go for a perfect gift. Therefore, organizations must look to narratives to connect with audiences and compel them to identify these feelings of good-will connected to the myth of Christmas with the brand itself.

As Kent (2015) states, "Stories that resonate with people are difficult to argue with and can persist over an individual's lifetime if constructed properly" (p. 484). Some Christmas examples in film include *Love Actually*, *White Christmas*, and *It's a Wonderful Life*. The storylines exhibited in these films express a sense of "togetherness" and "holiday spirit" that persists through time. Because the themes present in these films resonate with audiences, their stories are often told in different contexts but always with the same Christmas myth of good-will and appreciating others. Therefore, concepts such as narrative, myth, semiotics theory, and floating signification are important in creating promotional materials that successfully convey the brand's identity and event expectations.

From the perspective of the consumer, Kee and Yazdanifard (2015) found that stakeholders value perceived transparency and are demanding more information from organizations. Thus, the demand for professionals that can effectively encode this information in appealing ways has increased. One of the ways organizations can turn to public relations professionals for content creation is through use of content marking. In their study, Kee and Yazdarnifard (2015) noted the public's emphasis on organizations' efforts to be ethical and honest, adding that content marketing "is all about informing and persuading the audience with solid content to raise awareness or change their perception about the brand" (p. 1061). Furthermore, better content can motivate and encourage customers to interact with the brand, purchasing goods or services (Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015). With these ideas in mind, public relations professionals must be able to create on-brand material that can increase audience reach and interactivity. The solution, then, is to create a commodity narrative for each event.

An example of these concepts being successfully employed in event construction can be found in the aforementioned events from Bosscat Productions and Freshers Festival. Here, Bosscat Productions utilized narrative for their one-day event teaching business owners how to attract media attention through focusing on building a story around the individual person and how the brand could help them (Eventbrite, 2018). At Freshers Festival's most recent event in Glasgow, the team created a video marketing campaign following the narrative of students encountering different activities at the festival, showcasing "what students should expect to experience at the fests" (Eventbrite, 2018, para. 14). Through their implementation of narrative in branding the event, Freshers Festival garnered over 10,000 in attendance, making the event successful. Both brands identified a need through a problem their audience was having. Then, the organization provided a solution in the event hosted and told this problem-solution narrative through their branding campaign for the event. By generating a narrative to the content produced leading up to the event, these organizations were able to create successful events.

In the modern world, content creation has never been more important. A recent study performed by the USC Center for Public Relations (2019) identified content creation as the most important area for growth in public relations, followed by social media. Specifically, the study (2019) also stated that businesses will continue to rely on public relations professionals to have knowledge and skills in video production and digital design. These fall under the scope of content creation. With this increased need for organizational content creation skills, there is now an increased need for public relations

professionals to understand how to create for their clients, directly tying into the importance of narrative-driven branding.

In addition to the concept that creating content for organizations will be of the utmost importance, USC (2019) also found that certain platforms will be favored over others. "YouTube and Instagram, whose popularity are based on photographs and videos, are projected to be the big winners in an era of decreasing attention span," (School for Communication and Journalism, 2019, p. 30). Researchers found that in the next five years, YouTube is expected to be the leading platform most important to enhancing the effectiveness of communications strategies at 48%, followed closely by Instagram at 46%. These findings demonstrate that creating content for platforms that include images and video media will be a necessary skill for public relations professionals to have.

The current trend in content creation is not more content, but better content due to an issue identified by Mark Schaefer as "massive media overload" (Kapoor, 2018). In an interview, Schaefer describes this problem as a wave that is making it "harder and more expensive to compete, that social sharing would decline, and that content marketing would not be viable for some companies due to the increasing cost to compete," (Kapoor, 2018). This issue signifies organizations' eagerness to be consistently engaged in all forms of social media, constantly producing quality content for consumers. Here, public relations professionals can help businesses understand content creation tying together the organizational brand through the importance of narrative structure and its association with articulation, established through semiotics theory, and myth.

In relating creative content and social media engagement back to event promotion, it is important to note why organizations use evens. While non-profit

organizations use events to reach their public in raising awareness or funds, for-profit organizations often align their sales with events and event campaigns. In a study of 242 brands in the Netherlands, "price promotion offered around a popular event generate[d] a stronger sales response than the same promotion at nonevent times" (Keller et al., 2019). Still, campaigning original events held by the brand itself can be daunting and end up lost among the various other promotional content. Therefore, in the interest of creating dynamic, shareable content for event campaigning in a timely manner, public relations practitioners can turn to the concepts of narrative and floating signification in serializing events.

Part VI: Future Directions

In my career, I would like to become an event coordinator, and part of that means setting up the correct expectations for the attendees. As illustrated through events like Freshers Festival (Eventbrite, 2018) and "Your Reason Why" (Eventbrite, 2018), success comes from methodical setup of event and brand expectations. When the audience can clearly see themselves at the event with clear ideas of what they will be doing and how the event will transform them, they are more likely to attend. Therefore, the lead up to the event is just as important, if not more important, than the event itself. With this in mind, I can use the techniques and applications I have learned through this thesis to create narratives for future event campaigns with more nuance and success.

Improvements

Although I am confident in the concepts established through this thesis, there are still improvements that can be made when looking to increase the reach of theoretical application. When talking with co-owner Elena after the completion of promotional content, she remarked on successful integration of brand, portraying Towne Square as more than a jewelry store and incorporating the concept of everyday luxuries; however, she desired more consistency in the image content to provide more cohesion in each campaign [personal communication, April 10, 2019]. Future directions look to create more cohesive content under the umbrella of a clearer brand identity with consistent coloration and font use.

Moving forward with implementing the commodity narrative to successfully brand event campaigns, there are some aspects that could be better developed to ensure success garnered from the promise of these campaign sets. With more time, a complete

overhaul of the Towne Square brand would have best benefitted the overall concepts at hand. Here, the brand itself is still identified as a jewelry store rather than a place for personalized gifts for all occasions. By creating a clearer brand identity, the branded sales events would thus garner more success.

Additionally, this campaign existed within the tools at hand and the channels allowed. Primary focus was placed on the channel, but future directions look to place emphasis on signification and message transfer. I also look to include more nuance in future event campaigns, with the introduction of better character and story development as well as more comprehensive video creation. Furthermore, I would want to fully implement a clearer emphasis on hue coloration and saturation within the photos. In general, this experience gave me a better understanding of the tools I can now use in various applications to clean up the content I create.

Another concept that could be included in the promotional material would explore the idea that promotional content asks a question that can only be answered through the event. I feel this concept especially important for non-profit organizations that seek to transform audiences, not through sales, but through experiences with the organization. Here, the promotional material would narrativize the event in a way that asks audiences a question, leading the audience to attend the event to find the answer. Although the expectations of the event might be clear, the transformation in question could be proposed in a way that leads audiences to desire going to the event that much more.

Furthermore, since brand and events are linked, the promotion for events would need to directly reflect the brand itself. Here, improvements could only be made with an organization receptive to change. However, implementing change within the event

promotion would directly reflect a change in the brand. Although this is no small feat, it requires an organization to have the tools, time, and commitment to changing their brand identity. With this in mind, organizations can find themselves constrained with organizational hierarchy. Therefore, future directions look to improve overall brand in line with the event promotional material.

A final addition to these concepts would be implementation. Although this was not the focus of the thesis, it would be a future direction for scholars and public relations practitioners. Here, the creative content I created would be implemented through publication on social media. With the amount I created, software like Hootsuite would be used to organize publications weeks ahead of time. Furthermore, the strategic publication timelines can influence the audience perception of the event as well, seeing the brand as prepared, excited, and consistently engaged.

Applications

As a public relations professional, I will carry with me these understandings of floating signification, and narrative and use them to implement successful branding campaigns for events. As evidenced throughout this thesis, narrative, through application of floating signification and myth, connect humans to each other. So, narrative and floating signification are the best tools to connect organizations and audiences. Here, organizations like Hallmark (Larson, 2019) have capitalized on outlining clear narratives to successfully connect with audiences, and their success can be replicated through application of narrative to various event promotions.

Additionally, as an event coordinator, I will apply the concepts of narrative and floating signification to serialize events. Through these concepts, the feelings and

concepts attached to the events will transfer to the brand and therefore exist long after the event has passed. I would also look to integrate promotional material directly with the events themselves. While this thesis focused on holidays as events in a more abstract sense, my career will focus on physical, tangible events that can carry promotional material into the events themselves. For example, the "Your Reason Why" campaign (Eventbrite, 2018) focused on building a story around the individual person and how Bosscat Productions could help them solve their problem attracting media brand attention by giving them the tools to DIY media. The campaign and Bosscat Productions (Eventbrite, 2018) provided the narrative of "red carpet rebels," encouraging "each attendee to share their own story… welcome[ing] them with a full red carpet production, including 'paparazzi' to have them feel engaged and like VIPs as they entered the door." Here, the organization identified a problem their target audience was having and presented the solution through their event. Furthermore, the campaign integrated promotional materials with the event itself. I look to perform similar event success through these same concepts in my career.

Although video was a marketing point for this campaign, primary focus was kept on the images used for social media, posters, billboards, etc. In the future, I would maintain the emphasis on images that can be used for marketing through various mediums. I think video could be used but only if there is a clear audience for it already present in the brand's target audience.

Not only would these concepts apply in for-profit organizations, but the non-profit sector as well. In my graduate career, I have had the privilege of performing research in the non-profit sector, more specifically for Champaign County's Humane Society.

Through my research, I discovered the humane society's social media engagement also relies on floating signification as it is applied in semiotics theory. Here, the non-profit uses social media to "sell" animals they hope to adopt out. Floating signification plays an important role in attaching human characteristics to these animals, such as dressing an iguana in a hat or a dog in a bow tie. Through the inclusion of clothing, audiences now attach their own interpretations of these items to the animals. For example, the dog now appears formal while the iguana is fun and relaxed.

The humane society also relies on narrative to tell complete stories of the benefits of the brand. For example, narrative is used to construct a complete story of transformation through the Champaign County Humane Society, starting with an animal in need of being adopted and ending with follow-ups on their successful adoption story. Here, audiences see evidence of the positive impact the organization has on the community and how they actively help animals in need. Therefore, audiences are now more likely to attend future events, donate, or even share and like posts on social media to increase the brand's overall engagement. These examples further prove that floating signification, narrative, and myth can then be attached to various organizational promotional materials.

I am both intrigued and inspired by event campaigns and their ability to connect brands with audiences. As a public relations professional, I seek to build mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. With this goal in mind, public relations practitioners need a way to easily and profoundly connect with their publics. Through this thesis, I have established that events are often a tool designed to do just that. However, public relations practitioners often have little resources and time to

properly engage in the setup of these events. Therefore, event expectations are

unfulfilled, as represented through the beginning segment on Towne Square Jewelers'

"Whiskey and Wishes" night. Still, this thesis proves that, through the application of

floating signification and narrative, or myth, content creators can then serialize events.

Through the creation of evergreen content, brands can connect concepts established

through floating signification to the brand itself and carry these ideas through various

stories as implemented through events and their promotion. Furthermore, social media

content promoting these events can be creative and dynamic using the right formulas of

floating signification and narrative, or myth, because the two are one in the same.

Throughout this thesis, I demonstrate that the lead up to an event is just as important, if

not more important, than the event itself, and can therefore serialize the event and create

a plethora of content for the brand.

References

Allport, G. W., & Postman, L. (1947). *Psychology of rumor.* New York: Henry Holt.

Barthes, R. (1957). *Mythologies*. New York: Hill & Wang. (Original work published
    1957).

Barthes, R. (1975). *S/Z*. (R. Miller, Trans.). New York: Hill & Wang. (Original work
    published 1970).

Barthes, R. (1978). The photographic message. In S. Heath (Trans.), Image-music-text.
    New York: Hill and Wang.

Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. London: Penguin.

Eventbrite. (2018). 7 event content marketing campaigns that created a buzz [Blog].
    Retrieved from https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/blog/content-campaigns-caused-a-
    buzz-ds00/

Ferrari, A. (2019). *Mise en scene: What the heck is it and why is it important?* Indie Film
    Hustle. https://indiefilmhustle.com/mise en scène/

Fisher, W. (1973). Reaffirmation and the subversion of the american dream. *Quarterly
    Journal of Speech, 59*, 160-167.

Fiske, J. (1987). *Television culture: Narrative.* New York, NY: Routledge Publishing
    Company.

Fiske, J. (1990). *Introduction to communication studies: Signification* (2nd ed.). New
    York, NY: Routledge Publishing Company.

Goldman, R. L., & Papson, S. (1996). *Sign wars: The cluttered landscape of advertising*
    (6th ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

GoPro. (2011). *GoPro HD: Human Flight- TV Commercial- You in HD* [Video].

Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swh_QwTZSk0

Gunter, B., Hansen, A., & Touri, M. (2008). *The representation and reception of*

meaning in alcohol advertising and young people's drinking. University of

Leicester. Retrieved April 9, 2020, from

https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/9b4b/a2bc7575a0b831c95d92e85991b8b2b74ca1

.pdf

Jensen, K. B. (1991). Humanistic scholarship as qualitative science: Contributions to

mass communication research. In K. B. Jensen & N. W. Jankowski (Eds.), *A*

handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass communication research (pp. 17–

43). London: Routledge.

Kapoor, N. (2018). Mark Schaefer Talks Content Shock, Marketing, and Clarifies the

Path Ahead. Retrieved from https://www.relevance.com/ironically-i-never-

regarded-content-shock-as-a-controversial-post-really-its-common-sense-mark-

schaefer-clarifies-the-path-ahead/

Kee, A. W., & Yazdanifard, R. (2015). The review of content marketing as a new trend in

marketing practices. *International Journal of Management, Accounting, and*

Economics, 2(9), 1055–1064.

Keller, W. I. Y., Deleersnyder, B., & Gedenk, K. (2019). Price Promotions and Popular

Events. *Journal of Marketing, 83*(1), 73–88. https://doi-

org.proxy1.library.eiu.edu/10.1177/0022242918812055

Koller, V. (2008). "The world in one city": Semiotic and cognitive aspects of city

branding. *Journal of Language & Politics*, *7*(3), 431–450.

Larsen, P. (1999). Textual analysis of fictional media content. In K. B. Jensen & N. W.

　　　Jankowski (Eds.), *A handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass*

　　　communication research (pp. 121–134). London: Routledge.

Larson, S. (2019). *How Hallmark took over cable television.* The New Yorker.

　　　https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/12/23/how-hallmark-took-over-

　　　cable-tv

Levi-Strauss, C. (1969). *The raw and the cooked.* New York: Harper Torchbooks.

Lynn, M. (2011). Segmenting and targeting your market: Strategies and limitations

　　　[Electronic version]. Retrieved 2019 from Cornell University, School of

　　　Hospitality Administration. http://scholarship.sha.cornell.edu/articles/243

Manning, P. K., & Cullum-Swan, B. (1994). Narrative, content and semiotic analysis. In

　　　N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand

　　　Oaks, CA: Sage.

ModCloth [@modcloth]. (n.d.). Posts [Instagram profile]. Retrieved April 10, 2019 from

　　　https://www.instagram.com/modcloth/

Moriarty, S. (2005). Visual semiotic theory. In K. Smith, S. Moriarty, G. Borbatsis, & K.

　　　Kinney (Eds.), *Handbook of visual communication: Theory, methods, and media*

　　　(pp. 227–241). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc

Page, J. T. (2006). Myth and Photography in Advertising: A Semiotic Analysis. *Visual*

　　　Communication Quarterly, *13*(2), 90–109. https://doi-

　　　org.proxy1.library.eiu.edu/10.1207/s15551407vcq1302_3

Right Left Agency. (2018). *POV and Advertising- A Study in Ad Imagery.* Retrieved from

　　　https://rightleftagency.com/pov-and-advertising/

Salvador, P. (2011). The myth of the natural in advertising. *Catalan Journal of*

    Communication & Cultural Studies, *3*(1), 79–93. https://doi-

    org.proxy1.library.eiu.edu/10.1386/cjcs.3.1.79_1

Seiter, E. (1992). Semiotics, structuralism, and television. *Channels of discourse,*

    reassembled, 31-66.

Schley, B., & Nichols, C. (2005). *Why Johnny can't brand: Rediscovering the lost art of*

    the big idea. Willowbrook, IL: Audio-Tech Business Book Summaries.

School for Communication and Journalism. (2019) Global Communications Report.

    https://annenberg.usc.edu/research/center-public-relations/global-

    communications-report

Towne Square Jewelers [@townesquarejewelers]. (n.d.). Posts [Instagram profile].

    Retrieved October 30, 2019, from

    https://www.instagram.com/townesquarejewelers/

UOI Boutique [@uoionline]. (n.d.). Posts [Instagram profile]. Retrieved April 10, 2019

    from https://www.instagram.com/uoionline/

Williamson, J. (1987). *Decoding advertisements*. London: Marion Boyars. (Original work

    published 1978)

Appendix A

Table A1

Location	Post Date	Mode
Hager Tree Farm	12/1	PKG 1- Video/pictures/banner/ads/posters/billboard
Bob's Bookstore	12/7	pictures
Charleston Lake	12/7	pictures
Old Main	12/12	pictures
Brickhouse Bar & Grill	12/12	PKG 2- Video/pictures/banner/ads/posters/billboard
Jackson Avenue Coffee	12/20	pictures
Bubble bath	12/20	pictures
Christmas Lights (Mattoon)	12/23	PKG 3- Video/pictures/banner/ads/posters/billboard

Table A2

Date	Time	Locations
Monday, November 25	12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.	Hager Tree Farm, Bob's Bookstore, Charleston Lake, Old Main
Friday, December 6	12: 00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.	Brickhouse, Jackson Avenue Coffee, bubble bath
Saturday, December 14	6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.	Christmas Lights (Mattoon)

Figure A1

Figure A2

Figure A3

Figure A4

Figure A5

Figure A6

Figure A7

Figure A8

Figure A9

Figure A10

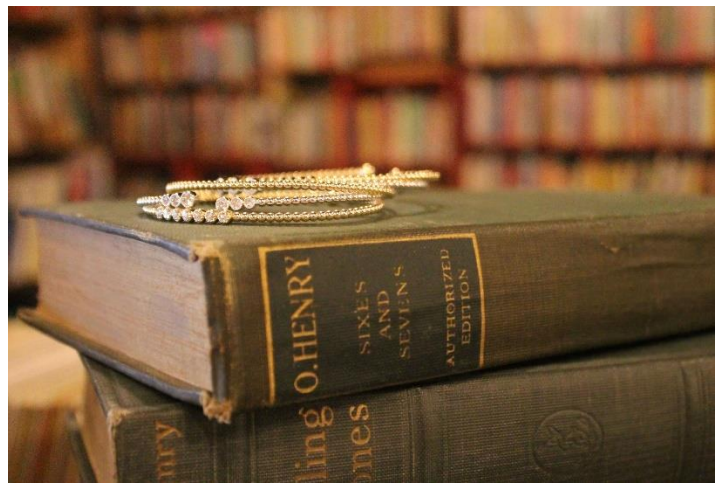Figure A11

Figure A12

Figure A13

Figure A14

Figure A15

Figure A16

Appendix B

Table B1

Date/Time	Location	Package
Friday, December 13	Wood Residence: Mantle, Christmas Tree (decorated)	Images, Ads
Saturday, December 14	Towne Square	Stills of Product

Figure B1

Figure B3

Figure B2

Figure B4

Figure B5

Figure B6

Figure B7

Figure B8

Figure B9

Figure B10

Figure B11

B13

Figure B12

Appendix C

Table C1

Location	Actors	Scene
Kitchen/Fireplace	Emma	Setting up for party; alone
Fireplace	Emma, Logan	Proposal, Gift exchange
Living Room	Emma, Payton	Gift exchange
Pool/Game Room	Emma, Logan, Payton, Nathan	Gift exchange, Celebration
Bar/Pool Table	N/A	Stills of Product

Video Link: https://youtu.be/E97jEaFOaLo

Figure C1

Figure C3

Figure C2

Figure C4

Figure C5

Figure C6

Figure C7

Figure C8

Figure C9
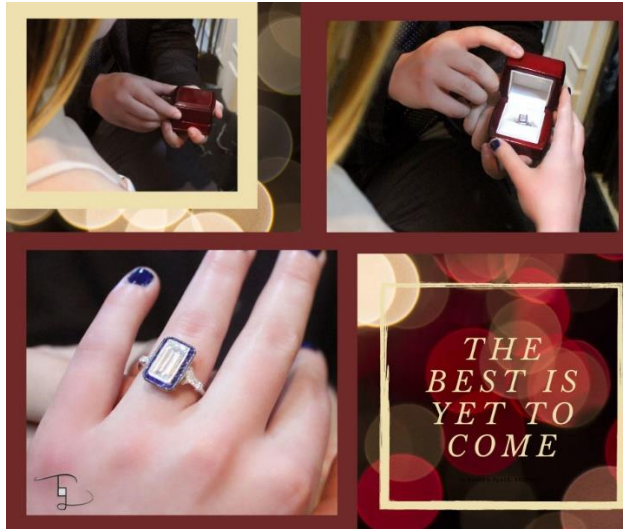
Figure C10

Figure C11

Appendix D

Table D1

Location/ Time	Actors	Scene
Charleston Lake/ 10:00 a.m.	Lacey, Missy	Lacey's ring gets dirty while playing with her dog, uses Missy's "on-the-go" ring cleaner
Office/ 10:30 a.m.	Lacey, Missy	Lacey is feeling overwhelmed with work when presented with a gift from co-worker Missy
You Look Marvelous Salon/ 11:30 a.m.	Shannon, Alysha	Nail Technician gift exchange/Hairdresser gift exchange
Trueblood Collective/ 1:00 p.m.	Missy, Payton	Shopping for Clothing to show off their matching necklaces
AMC Showplace 10/ 2:00 p.m.	Missy, Payton	"Partners in Wine"/Sneaking wine into the movie theater

Video Links:

https://youtu.be/-CqjpMqgV3g

https://youtu.be/lIR5Ts0cHRg
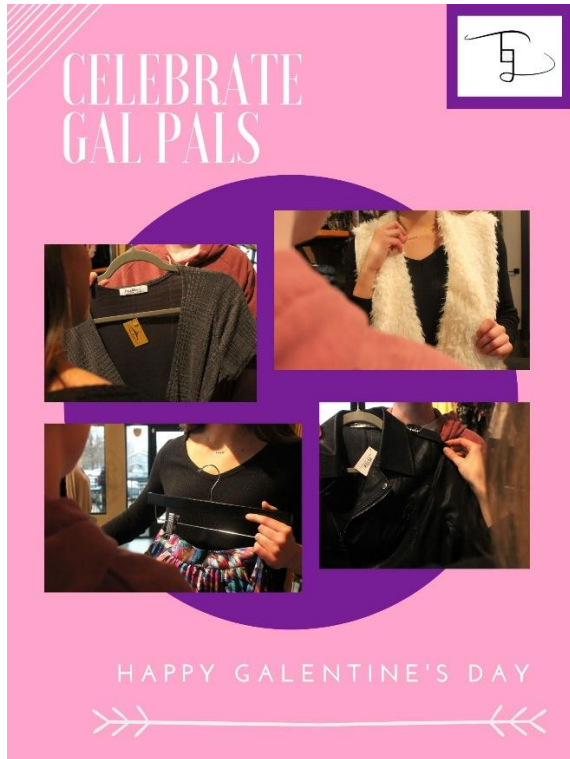
Figure D1

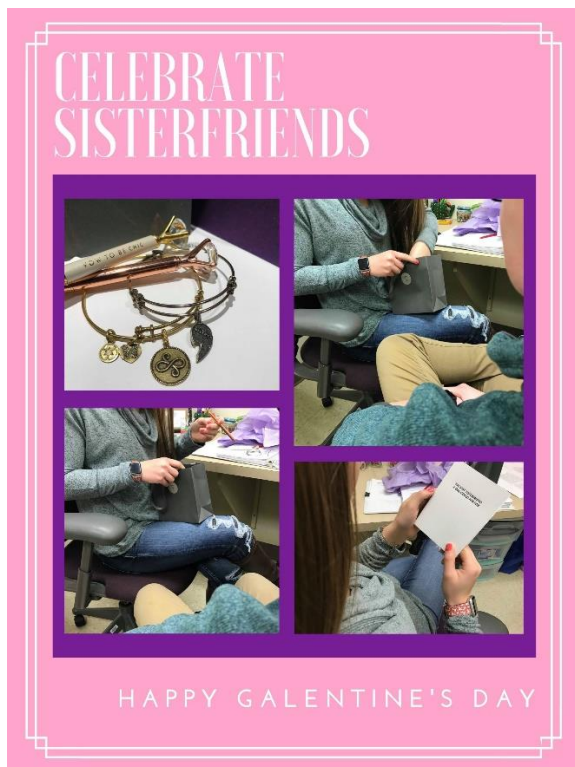

Figure D3

Figure D2

Figure D4

Figure D5

Figure D6

Figure D7

Figure D8

Figure D9

Figure D10

Appendix E

Brand Audit

All data pulled from websites the brand uses as well as personal interviews with owner and staff

Sites included: Facebook, Home Business Webpage, Instagram

Internal branding — brand values, mission and company culture

Values & Mission:

Since 1981, Towne Square Jewelers has been providing beautiful jewelry designs at a price you can afford. We have been a supportive member of the Charleston and Mattoon Communities, making memories year after year. This part of our family business is what we really enjoy, as our community is very important to us. Come in to Towne Square Jewelers today and discover the wonder of a lifetime (Facebook)

Since 1981, you've trusted us to help you make moments special. Through the years we've earned a reputation of providing you with the highest quality jewelry, affordable prices, and impeccable personal service. We know you have options. As a second-generation, family-owned business that has a strong reputation in the community, we offer things that big-box and internet jewelers can't—trust, expertise, and a laid-back, comfortable atmosphere. We also have some fun along the way. We host a variety of events throughout the year and we're always happy to offer a glass of wine or a craft beer while you shop. It definitely makes engagement ring shopping more relaxed and stressfree. No matter what the occasion or your budget we have something for you. In addition to our wide selection of exquisite jewelry from talented designers, we also offer one-of-akind pieces, custom design, engraving, repair services, and financing options.   Giving Back- Our customers and the community have supported our small business from the start. We have a strong commitment to the community and to show our appreciation we

contribute to many charities and organizations in the area. It's just one of the ways we say thank

you. (Business Webpage)

Since 1981, Towne Square Jewelers has been making memories with stunning jewelry

designs. (Instagram)

Culture:

The culture that is evident from in-person visits is genuine. There is a true warmth and

desire to help that can be felt from the moment you enter the store and are greeted by a staff

member. However, the storefront itself lacks focus. There is a mesh of visions, from upscale to

catch-all. The lack of brand focus leads to a lack of focus in the overall culture that is presented.

Additionally, the online presence promotes "upscale" but comes off as generic and sterile. The

social media posts are reflective of a more relaxed culture, which is something the owner and

staff reference a lot in their goals for the business.

2. External branding — business logo, print and online advertising and marketing materials,

public relations, website, social media presence, email marketing and content marketing

Logos are unfortunately a mix of fonts and designs. There is no clear, consistent logo that

is used for all media. Font changes as well. PR seems to do well. Online forums and social media

are well-monitored but lack creativity. There are videos, graphics, and images that seem to be

used for no other purpose than exposure. Some images are used multiple times, copied and

pasted into the next day's post. "Email blasts" seem to do well. The website itself is generic—

similar feel to any other online shopping site for jewelry.

Customer experience — sales process, customer support and customer service policies.

There are several options for payment plans and opportunities for free cleanings and

general meetings to discuss a problem or interest. There are several returning customers, but also

a large category of those that have never been or have only been once or twice to purchase a

specific brand/gift. Customer service policies are generally "we are here to help you." Because

this is not a large corporation, there is room to address very minute details in customer needs.

Target Market:

The target market of TSJ is unclear. In interviews, store owner and workers alike mention

wanting to advertise and garner the attention of "everyone,"

Brand Promise:

Although unclear, I believe the gist of the brand promise involves a transformation

through commodity. The brand promises a unique, personalized shopping experience in the

customer's quest for the perfect gift for a loved one. The brand also promises you will be more

knowledgeable in the world of jewelry after visiting.

Consistency and Voice:

Voice varies greatly. Social media voice is consistent across platforms but this does not

translate to the website. The website is sterile and generic while Facebook and Instagram tout a

laid-back atmosphere.

Business Website Review:

Generic and sterile. There is an emphasis on elegance and specific designers. Website

could be off-putting for its lack of warmth the way the business advertises itself on social media

and in person. However, the website fits the style of a majority of the storefront— focusing on

upscale and elegance.

Social Media Review:

Much more laid back. There is an emphasis on promotional events, giveaways, and making connections with stakeholders. There is still little interaction from others and posts are solely for promos. The lack of variety can be stifling, re-posting the exact same images and designs repeatedly leading up to an event.

Competitor Brands:

In the Area- Swanson Jewelers (Charleston), Kay Jewelers (Effingham IL and Terre Haute IN), JCPenny (Mattoon), Zales (Champaign IL and Terre Haute IN), Champaign Jewelers (Champaign), Helzburg Diamonds (Champaign), Pandora (Champaign)

International- Pandora (an affiliate of the brand), Kay Jewelers, Zales, Jared, Helzburg Diamonds

Direct Competition:

Swanson Jewelers- the only other jeweler in Charleston; brand focuses on informative pieces or specific items for sales/promos; no website; personalization/customization offered but no other "gifts" or engraved items unless you were to bring something in; focus in metalsmithing; family-owned

New Directions:

Something consistent in each values statement online is the idea that they have been in business since 1981 -Community, Family, Trust, Expertise, Laid-back, Comfortable, Relaxed - Promise: Personalization of experience and gift -Posts should be consistent in voice but not duplicates; Provide consistency throughout all platforms and websites as well as logos and graphics Promos should reflect the specific event within the context of the greater message provided by the brand

Interview Questions and Responses

Customer Survey: (women within Coles County, median age of 30, middle-class income) (Total:

16) MCA= Most Common Answer

1. Have you ever heard of this brand?

    MCA: yes

2. Have you ever used this brand?

    MCA: Yes. However, a majority also noted that this was a one-time deal.

3. What do you know about this brand?

    "They sell jewelry", "Small-town business", "Sell, appraise, fix, & clean

    jewelry", "locally/family owned" "Quality Jewelry, Options to customize, friendly staff"

    "Custom design, precision-made, personal pieces"

4. How would you describe this brand to others?

    MCA: Local place for jewelry; "Makes women happy"; "special, personalized",

    "professional, high-quality"

5. What problem does this brand solve for you?

    "I would probably go if I needed jewelry fixed" "close place for jewelry"

6. How does this brand make you feel?

    N/A; Unsure how it makes me feel; "love it!"

7. What words would you use to describe this brand?

    Expensive, Beautiful, Small-town, Clean, Nice, High-class, Great

8. Would you recommend this brand to your friends and family?

    "Yes", "I'm not sure since I've only been once", "Not sure", "I think so, but not

    from personal experience. Only because I know it exists as one of the few places in the

area that could offer the jewelry needs people may have but also because I think one of my friends used to work there unless he still does and I know he is charismatic and would help people out well f they had questions and requests", "I would recommend based on proximity", "absolutely!"

9. What does the brand's logo make you think of?

   "What's the logo?", "It's a diamond, right?", MCA: jewelry

10. How good is this brand's customer service?

   MCA: Unsure, little to no experience OR great customer service!

11. How could this brand improve customer service?

   MCA: Unsure, little to no experience to give advice on or positive experience so no suggestions to give

Employee Survey

1. How would you describe our brand?

   Laid back, Fun, Knowledgeable staff with the goal of helping you feel confident finding that perfect gift

2. What problem does our brand solve for customers?

   Offer personalization, one of the only places to offer appraisals, fix jewelry, help them feel better about big purchase and more comfortable with the jargon and brands involved

3. How do you deliver on our brand's promise?

   One-on-one consultations and speedy service

4. What one thing would you do to improve our brand?

   Consistency, clearer brand message and goals, clearer brand identity